Miscellaneous Writings, Volume 4

C. H. Mackintosh

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The Call of God - Abraham and Lot

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Genesis 12.

C. H. Mackintosh.

In a day of such widely extended profession as the present, it is specially important that Christians should be deeply impressed with the necessity of realising personally the call of God, without which there can be no permanence or steadiness in the Christian course.

It is a comparatively easy thing to make a profession at a time when profession prevails; but it is never easy to walk by faith — it is never easy to give up present things, in the hope of "good things to come." Nothing but that mighty principle which the Apostle denominates "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11: 1), can ever enable a man to persevere in a course which in a world where all is wrong — all out of order, must be thorny and difficult. We must feel "persuaded" of something yet to come — something worth waiting for — something that will reward all the toil of a pilgrim's protracted course, ere we rise up out of the circumstances of nature and the world, to "run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12: 1).

All this is fully exemplified in Abraham, and the exemplification receives additional force from the contrast exhibited in the character of Lot and others who are introduced in the course of the narrative.

In Acts 7, we have the following words which bear directly upon the subject before us. "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he lived in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred, and come into the land that I shall show thee" (vers. 12). Here then we are presented with the first dawning of that light which attracted Abraham out of the darkness of "Ur, of the Chaldees," and which shining in upon his wearisome path, from time to time, gave fresh vigour to his soul, as he journeyed in quest of "that city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." "The God of glory" caused Abraham to see, in the light of His character, the true condition of things in Ur, and further, to believe, as some one has observed, a report concerning future glory and inheritance, and he therefore hesitates not, but instantly girds himself up for the journey.

However, upon a close comparison of the opening of Acts 7 with Genesis 12: 1, we get an important principle. From the time that God appeared unto Abraham, until he finally gets up into the land of Canaan, an event occurs involving much deep instruction to us. I allude to the death of Abraham's father, as we read in Acts 7, "From thence, when his father was dead, He removed him into this land wherein ye now dwell" (ver. 4). This will enable us to understand the force of the expression in Gen. 12, "The Lord had said unto Abram" etc. (ver. 1). From both these passages, it would plainly appear the movement made by Terah and his family, recorded in Gen. 10: 31, was the result of a revelation made by "the God of glory" to Abram, but it would not appear that Terah had received any such revelation from God. He is

presented to us rather as a hindrance to Abram than any thing else, for until he died, Abram did not come into the land of Canaan — his divinely appointed destination.

Now, this circumstance, trivial as it may seem to a cursory reader, confirms in the strongest manner the statement already advanced, namely, that unless the call of God — the revelation from "the God of glory" be personally realised, there can be no permanence or steadiness in the Christian course. Had Terah realised that call, he would neither have been a clog to Abram in his path of faith, nor yet would he have dropped off, like a mere child of nature, ere reaching the future land of promise. We get the same principle illustrated in Laban afterward in Gen. 24. Laban, as some one has well observed, was fully alive to the value of the gold and silver jewels which the servant of Abraham had brought with him, but he had not heart to value the report concerning future things, which dropped from his lips. In other words, he did not receive a revelation from "the God of glory," and as a consequence, he remained, as the same writer has observed, "a thorough man of the world."

In the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, we are taught the same truth. There were other persons with him when he was struck to the ground by the lustre of the glory of the Lord Jesus; these persons "saw indeed the light" — they witnessed many of the external circumstances which had arrested the furious zealot; but as he himself states, "they heard not the voice of Him that spake to me" (Acts 22: 9). Here is the grand point. The voice must speak "to me" — "the God of glory" must appear "to me," ere I can take the place of a pilgrim and stranger in the world, and perseveringly, "run the race that is set before me."

It is not national faith, nor family faith, but personal faith that will constitute us real witnesses for God in the world.

But when Abram was released from the clog which he had experienced in the person of his father, he was enabled to enter with vigour and decision upon the path of faith — a path which "flesh and blood" can never tread — a thorny path beset with difficulties from first to last, in which God alone can sustain the soul. "And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. And the Lord appeared unto Abram and said, "Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord who appeared unto him" (Gen. 12: 6-7). Here Abram at once takes his stand as a worshiper, in the face of "the Canaanite." The altar marks him as one who, having been delivered from the idols of Ur of the Chaldees, had been taught to bow before the altar of the one true God, "who made heaven and earth." In the following verse, we get the second grand feature in the character of the man of faith, namely, "the tent," denoting strangership in the world. "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise"(Heb. 11: 9).

We shall have occasion to notice more fully, as we proceed, these two important points in the life of Abraham, and shall therefore rest satisfied for the present with establishing the fact that the tent and the altar do most clearly present him to us as a stranger and a worshiper, and that as such, he was a man entirely separated from the course of this evil world.

Scarcely had Abram entered upon his course, when he had to encounter one of those difficulties which have a special tendency to test the genuineness of faith both as to its quality and its object. "And there was a famine in the land." The difficulty meets him in the very place into which the Lord had called him. Now, it is no easy matter when we perceive trial and sorrow, privation and difficulty awaiting us, while walking in "the strait and narrow way," still to persevere — still to pursue the onward path, and especially if we observe within our reach, as Abram did, an entire exemption from the particular trial under which we may be smarting. The men of this world "are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued as other men." This feeling is still further increased by the entire absence of every thing, as far as sight is concerned which could act as a confirmation of our hope. Abram had not so much as to set his foot upon — famine was raging around him on every side, save in Egypt. Could he only find himself there, he would be able to live in ease and abundance.

Here, however, the man of faith must pursue the path of simple obedience. God had said, "Get thee out of thy country unto a land that I will show thee." Abram may, it is true, afterward discover that obedience to this command will involve his abiding in a land where nothing but starvation, apparently, awaits him. But even though it should be so, God had not in any way qualified the command — No, the word was simple and definite: "Into a land that I will show thee." This should have been as true and as binding upon Abram when famine reigned around him, as when peace and abundance prevailed. Famine should not, therefore, have induced him to leave the land, neither should abundance have

induced him to remain. The influential words were, "I will show thee."

But Abram leaves this land — he succumbs, for the moment, to the heavy trial, and bends his footsteps down to Egypt, leaving behind him his tent and altar. There he obtained ease and luxury; he escaped, no doubt, the formidable trial under which he had suffered in the land of promise; but he lost, for the time being, his worship and strangership — things which should ever be dearest to the heart of a pilgrim.

There is nothing in Egypt for Abram to feed upon as a spiritual man; it might, and doubtless did, afford abundance for him as a natural man, but that was all. Egypt would give nothing to Abram unless he sacrificed his character both as a stranger and as a worshiper of God. It is needless to observe that it is exactly so at this very hour. There is plenty in the world upon which our old nature could feed most luxuriously. There are the rich delights "of the flesh and of the mind," and abundant means of gratifying the desires of the heart, but what of all these, if the enjoyment thereof leads, as it must necessarily do, right out of the path of faith — the path of simple obedience.

Here then is the question for the Christian: which shall I have, the gold and silver, the flocks and herds — the present ease and affluence of Egypt, or the tent and altar of "the land of promise"? Which shall I have: the carnal ease and delight of the world, or a peaceful holy walk with God here, and eternal blessedness and glory hereafter? We cannot have both, for, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

But, we may ask, why was it that Abram had to experience famine and trial in the land of promise? Why did he not find a home and plenty there? Simply because "the Canaanite and Perizzite dwelt then in the land" (Gen. 13: 7). The land had not as yet been fitted up to be the residence of God's redeemed ones. Abram's faith might have enabled him to penetrate through the long and dreary period which should intervene ere the promise could be consummated; but that very principle of faith it was that made him "a pilgrim and a stranger." He could wait for God's time, and until then remain without "so much as to set his foot on" (Acts 7: 5). So should it be now. The true man of faith cannot find a home in the earth because “the Canaanite” is there. By and by it will not be so, for, “all that offends” will be gathered out of the kingdom, and the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.(Rev 11: 15) and then righteousness shall prevail “from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth.”

Genesis 13

This beautiful chapter shows us the man of faith recovering himself, through the faithfulness and loving-kindness of God, who never allows such to wander far, or tarry long away. The gold and silver, the flocks and herds of Egypt, could not long prove a satisfying portion for Abram, while deprived of his tent and his altar, and he therefore once more, in the renewed energy of faith rises, as it were, from the dust of Egypt, and retraces his steps to the land of promise. Happy recovery! Certain evidence of a fixed and honest purpose to serve the Lord. "The ship may be tossed by the waves and the winds, but the magnet still points to the north."

But some expressions in the opening of this chapter confirm most fully a thought already expressed, namely, that Abram gained nothing, "as before God," by his visit to Egypt. Thus, for example, "Abram went on his journeys... unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, unto the place of the altar which he had made there at the first" (vers 3-4). The words "beginning," and "at the first," prove that Abram had made no progress while in Egypt, but that, while there, all his time was, as it were, lost. No doubt he learnt a wholesome lesson, and it is well when by our failures, we learn to distrust our own hearts, and dread the pernicious influence of the world Abram learnt that there could be no tent or altar in Egypt. It is only faith that can enable a man to raise an altar or erect a tent, but in Egypt all is sight and not faith, and hence, the moment Abram set his foot there he ceased to show forth the genuine fruits of faith — yea, the very principle which led him to leave the land of promise. Led him, at the same time, to relinquish his character as a stranger and a worshiper.

How forcibly are we here reminded of a proposal made long after this, by a king of Egypt, to Abraham's seed. "And Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, and said: Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land" (Ex. 8: 25). Thus, it would seem ever to have been the design of the enemy to get the people of God, the holy seed, to defile themselves by worshipping or sacrificing to God, in the world; i.e., to make their character, as worshipers of God, accord with that of men of the world — men holding a place in society where Christ is an outcast; thus, of course, declaring that there is no difference between the religion of the world and the religion of God

— a truly fearful delusion, calculated to lead many souls out of the way of truth and holiness.

It is most sad to hear, at times, those who surely ought to know better, in order, as they say, to manifest a liberal spirit, speaking of the religion of the world in all its multiplied forms, as if it were all right; or, as if it were a matter of total indifference whether we remained in communion with error or not. Oh, let us not be deceived! God's principle of separation is as strong and as binding today as it was in the days of Abram or Moses. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing," must hold good as long as the "unclean thing" exists; nor can any outward form alter the character — the true essential character of "the unclean thing" so as to make it "a clean thing."

Moses, then, was not liberal, in the above acceptation of the word, for he at once refused to countenance the religion of the world. "It is not meet so to do." Memorable words! Would that there were more amongst us who, when invited to countenance the religion of the world, would reply, "It is not meet so to do." Abram could not worship in Egypt, neither could his seed.

But Abram had more difficulties than one to encounter in his course. The path which every man of faith is called to tread lies between two dangerous extremes. One is the temptation to return to the world; the other, to strive with brethren by the way. Abram had just recovered himself from the effects of the former, and we have now to behold him buffeting the latter.

The moment Abram emerged from Egypt, he appeared in a special manner to move under a new responsibility, namely, responsibility to his brother to walk with him in

harmony. While in Egypt, this responsibility stood quite in the shade. The institutions — laws — habits — luxury and ease of Egypt, would in an eminent degree tend to do away with every such feeling. All these things would have had the effect of erecting barriers around each individual tending to prevent him from recognising the fact that he was his "brother's keeper." Nor is it otherwise now. So long as we continue in the world — the religious world, as it is termed — we shall find ourselves completely relieved from the difficult task of being our "brother's keeper." Those who advocate a continuance therein may deny this fact, but it is all in vain, for Scripture and experience alike demonstrate it. Abram and Lot did not strive in Egypt, and a religious establishment presents this attraction at least — and it is by no means a feeble one — it effectually prevents brotherly collision and, of course, where there is no collision there can be no strife — no dispute; where collision takes place, there must be either grace to enable us to walk in unity of mind, or strife and contention. But Egypt saps the very springs of grace by leading us out of a place of simple dependence upon the Lord, (for dependence ever genders grace and forbearance) and because she does so, she, at the same time, teaches us, or attempts at least to teach us, that we do not need grace, by leading us into a sphere in which responsibility to brethren is never realised; thus the need is not felt; weakness is mistaken for strength, folly for wisdom.

When the Christian at first starts on his course, he fondly dreams of nothing but perfection in his fellow Christians; but in this he soon finds himself mistaken, for we have all our infirmities, and as the apostle states,

"In many things we offend all." But why, we may ask, was there such a speedy development of infirmity upon their coming up out of Egypt? Because they were now called to walk in the power of a naked principle, without any of the props or barriers of Egypt. They were called to walk by faith, and "faith worketh by love."

Now "the Canaanite," etc., "was then in the land." This should have acted as a hindrance to any strife between "brethren," for the Canaanite cannot understand anything about the infirmities of believers, and he therefore puts all their failure down to some defect in the principle professed.

But in every strife between brethren, there must be fault somewhere. In the contention between Paul and Barnabas there was fault somewhere. Nor can we be at any loss to decide where it lay. Barnabas wished to take his relative with him, but this relative had before proved himself unfit, or at least unwilling, to "endure hardness," therefore it could not have been with a single eye to the Lord's work that Barnabas desired his company. The Lord Himself, too, at once takes Paul's side of the question by providing him with a dear son and fellow-labourer, in the person of Timothy, with whom he had "none like-minded."

So it is exactly in the case before us. We can have no hesitation in asserting that Lot was the man in error here. Lot does not appear to have fully got rid of the spirit of the world, and where there is this spirit predominating in any one he will ever find the path of faith too strait for him to walk in, and so it was, "They could not dwell together."

If, then, it be asked on what grounds one would pronounce Lot to have been in the wrong? The answer is, first, Lot's subsequent conduct; and, secondly, the Lords dealings with Abram, "after that Lot was separated from him."

What then did Lot do? "He lifted up his eyes." This is ever our mode of acting when not under the direct power of faith. Whenever we lift up our eyes without divine direction, we are sure to go wrong. I say, without divine direction, for we find the Lord afterwards directing Abram to lift up his eyes, but then that was totally different from Lot's act, which was simply the suggestion of mere human wisdom and foresight. Human wisdom and foresight, however, can never assist our progress as men of faith — no, quite the reverse; human wisdom will ever suggest things which, if acted upon, will lead us right athwart the path of a man of faith. Therefore Lot, in lifting up his eyes, could not penetrate beyond the "things that are seen and temporal." Such was the utmost bound of his range of vision. The things on which his eyes rested were those with which he had been conversant while in Egypt, as we read, "He beheld all the plain of Jordan that it was well watered everywhere... like the land of Egypt" (ver. 10). Here we observe that Lot had never been really detached in heart and affection from Egypt — he had never learnt the vanity and unsatisfactoriness of all her resources in the light of a better order of things — he had never contrasted her with that "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" — in a word, he "having put his hand to the plough," was now beginning "to look back," and thus to prove himself "unfit for the kingdom of heaven."

There is a striking notice of all this afforded in the opening verse of this chapter, "Abram went up out of Egypt and Lot with him." Here we get the secret of Lot's after instability. He appears to have gone up rather with Abram than with God, and the consequence was that, when he parted with Abram, he had nothing to lean upon. He had been hitherto moving under Abram's protection and guidance instead of being directly before the Lord, and therefore when he lost Abram he went astray.

Now then is the moment for Abram to "lift up his eyes," at the Lord's command, and oh, what a different range of vision was his! While Lot could not penetrate beyond the narrow limits of the present scene, Abram was enabled to survey the length and breadth of God's inheritance. He soars on the strong and rapid pinion of faith, and is, as it were, lost in the unbounded beneficence of God; while Lot, the man walking by sight, is well-nigh lost in the deep gulf of Sodom's corruption.

Let us then, ere we enter upon the next chapter, take a view of the different circumstances of these two men who had started together. "Lot lifted up his eyes," and the prospect on which they rested was, as might be expected, such as suited his natural desires, "well-watered plains," which, however fair in man's view, were nevertheless, in the sight of the Lord, filled with exceeding wickedness (cp. vers. 10 and 14). Abram, on the contrary, had allowed his eye to wander over the length and breadth of the promised inheritance — uninfluenced by all else, he viewed the portion which God was reserving for him and his seed, and took up his position accordingly.

Thus do we find Lot in the unhallowed region of Sodom; and Abram — the pilgrim and stranger, with his tent and altar — "in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron."

Genesis 14

Here we have a very minute account of a battle fought by "four kings with five," and we may ask, What connection had this strife between "the potsherds of the earth," with the history of the people of God? With Abram indeed none, in one sense, for he was outside it all. His tent marked him as a stranger to all these things — it marked him as one to whom the battle of "four kings with five" would be a matter of very trivial moment. And then his altar marked him as one whose pursuits were quite of another character, even a heavenly. His tent showed him to be a stranger on earth — his altar showed him to be at home in Heaven. Happy man! Happy pilgrim! who could thus from his high elevation, even the lofty watch-tower of faith, look down, as a passer-by, upon the battle fields of an evil world. It mattered not to Abram whether the laurel of victory were about to wreath the brow of the king of Sodom, or of Chedorlaomer, king of Elam; his portion was not in danger through their strife, because he had it in that place "where thieves do not break through and steal."

But, though it was the happy lot of Abram to have his being and his portion in a place where wars could have no influence, yet such was not the case with his more worldly-minded brother. His position was such as to place him in the midst of the strife, and consequently the issue of this battle could not fail to be of the deepest moment to him. If the child of God will stoop so low as to mix himself up with the world, he must calculate upon

being made a participator in its convulsions, and woe be to that man who shall have his portion in the world in that day (now fast approaching) when all things shall be shaken by the mighty hand of God in judgement.

I would here observe that what has ever made the history of nations and the movements of mighty kings and conquerors, matters of interest to the Holy Spirit, has been the connection of such things with the history of the people of God. Beyond this they possessed nothing of moment to Him. He could find no pleasure in dwelling upon the abstract history of man. The busy strife and tumult of nations — the fierce contests of ungodly tyrants grasping after power — the movements of armies, could not attract the notice of the Spirit of peace; nevertheless, when such things became, in the least degree, connected with the history of a "righteous soul," the Holy Ghost can be most minute in detailing the circumstances of a battle, as is observable in the case under consideration.

What then were the results of this contest to Lot? Ruin to him and his family. He was made prisoner and all his goods were taken (ver. 12). He had laid up treasure for himself upon earth, and the thieves had broken through; and thus, while Abram was above it all, in the power — the separating power of communion with God, he found himself a prisoner and a beggar. He had sown to the flesh, and of the flesh he must now "reap corruption."

But this was just the moment for Abram to show himself in the powerful activities of love. He had, as above observed, hitherto surveyed with calm indifference these movements of "kings and their armies," but the very same faith which had made him indifferent about the

strifes of men, made him quick to take cognisance of a brother in distress. Faith not only purifies the heart from worldly and carnal desires, but it also "works by love," as is powerfully shown in Abram's case, for "when Abram saw that his brother was taken captive he armed his trained servants," etc. (ver. 14).

Now, it is to be observed that it is in the hour of distress and difficulty that the relationship of brother gets the prominent place. In days of unruffled peace, Lot might be known to Abram as "his brother's son," but now he was in sorrow, and therefore the claims of brotherhood act, and act powerfully and effectually. True he had contended about a piece of land — he had turned aside from his venerable companion, and had taken up his abode at Sodom, but what of that? He was now in trouble, and therefore all is forgotten, but the fact that they were brethren.

We are now called to witness a deeply interesting scene. Abram himself is about to meet a temptation — a temptation at once repulsed indeed by the power of God in him, but nevertheless, a temptation. The king of Sodom was about to come forth to display his treasures before the eye of Abram, and he had by nature a heart to value those treasures.

That man knows not his own heart who could say that the world does not present many — very many attractions to the natural heart. There is a species of misanthropy which looks like elevation above the world, but which, after all, is not it. The cynic philosopher Diogenes, when he told Alexander to get out of his sunshine, was as proud and as worldly a man as Alexander himself. The only true and real way in which

to be separated from, and elevated above, the world, is by the knowledge of heavenly things, and Abram was led, through the mercy of God, into that knowledge.

But the victory obtained by Abram, was not owing to any power in himself. He had, as I have observed, a heart to value the things which the enemy had to give him; and, therefore, if he triumphed, it was through the operation of a power outside himself. In all this transaction, the One who had watched over His dear servant during the dark season of his sojourn in Egypt, and who, moreover, had, by that very sojourn, taught him a lesson as to the true character of the world, was now closely observing his ways, and making preparations for his relief; He was cognisant of the movements and designs of the enemy, from first to last, and He therefore prepares to supply a heavenly antidote to nullify his poison.

It is particularly worthy of observation that between the time at which the king of Sodom went forth to meet Abram, and that wherein he made the proposal to him with reference to "the persons and the goods," there is a remarkable character introduced, namely, Melchizedek. This stranger, commissioned by God, was on his way to fortify Abram's heart at the very moment when the enemy was on his way to attack (cp. ver. 17, 18, and 21). Now, why did not "the priest of the Most High God" come to meet Abram before? Because this was the very moment in which Abram most needed the strength which he had to bring. The enemy was about to display his gilded bait before the eye of the man of God, and therefore is Melchizedek at hand to display in his view the divine realities of the kingdom. He was about to feed and strengthen his soul with the "bread," and cheer him with the "wine," of the kingdom, in order that, "in the

strength of that meat" he might mount above the influence of all the allurements of the world. From all this we may learn that it is communion with the joys and glories of the kingdom that can alone cause the heart to reject the pollutions of the world.

Reader, upon what are you now feeding? What constitutes your habitual food? Is it "the bread and wine" which the Lord provides, or "the goods" of Sodom? Are your ears open to the pernicious suggestions of the King of Sodom, or to the heavenly communications of the King of Salem? The Lord grant that our hearts may ever choose that in which He delights.

But to proceed, Melchizedek leads Abram's soul into present communion with "THE MOST HIGH GOD, THE POSSESSOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH," and thus completes the wondrous contrast between "the King of Sodom" and "the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth" — "the goods of Sodom" and the extensive possessions of Heaven and earth. Blessed contrast, which faith ever draws! It is needless to say that Abram at once rejects the offer of the King of Sodom. The bread and wine, and the benediction of "the priest of the Most High God," had raised Abram to such a height that he could, in one comprehensive glance, take in the vast possessions of Heaven and earth, and further, look down from thence upon the despicable proposal of the King of Sodom and reject it. Melchizedek had just said, "the Most High God, the possessor of heaven and earth," and Abram had laid hold on these words and made use of them in his reply to the adversary. "I have lifted up my hand," said he, "to the Lord, the Most High God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from

a thread even to a shoe-latchet and that I will not take anything that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich" (vers. 22-23).

Abram appears to breathe the very atmosphere of the presence of Him "who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and meted out heaven with a span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance, in whose sight the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance. Behold! he taketh up the isles as a very little thing, and Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt-offering. All nations before Him are as nothing, and they are counted to Him as less than nothing and vanity" (Isa. 40: 12, 15-18).

And surely, we may say, it was only thus that Abram could triumph; and let no one who moves not, in some measure, in the same sphere, affect to despise the world — nothing can be more truly vain. There must be the experimental acquaintance with the better thing — the fondly cherished hope of "good things to come" — ere we can obtain full victory over present things, and our own worldly desires. "Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance" (Heb. 10: 34). If we are really waiting for the manifestation of the glory, we shall be found standing apart from everything which will be judged in that day: and it is written, "Yet once more, I shake not the earth only but also heaven; and this word, yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain" (Heb. 12: 26-27).

We have, in the last verse of our truly interesting chapter, a happy feature in the character of the true man of faith. Abram would not force others to walk according to his elevated standard. Although he might be able to reject, in the most unreserved manner, the offers of the king of Sodom, yet others might not be able to do so, and therefore he says, with regard to "Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre, let them take their portion." Our walk should ever be "according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Rom. 12: 3). We have seen, in our own day, many persons led, at the outset, to give up a variety of worldly things, and afterwards plunge still deeper into those things; and why? Because they acted through mere excitement or human influence, and were not able to say with Abram, "I have lift up my hand unto the Lord."

Genesis 15

In the opening verse of this chapter, we have a principle fraught with comfort and encouragement to us — a principle eminently calculated to call out into full exercise a spirit of true devotedness to the Lord. We observe here, the Lord's grace in acknowledging and accepting the sacrifice laid upon His altar — the willing offering of the devoted heart of His servant. Our God is never slow in owning such things, nor in rewarding them a hundredfold. Abram had just been manifesting a spirit of self-denial in refusing the attractive offers of the King of Sodom. He had refused to be enriched from such a source, and had taken "the Most High God" for his portion and his reward, therefore the Lord comes forth to confirm the soul of his servant with these words, "Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." "God is not unrighteous to forget the

work and labour of love" (Heb. 6: 10). A similar principle is presented to us in Genesis 13, where Abram is seen giving way to Lot, in the matter of choosing the land. Abram's whole anxiety in that matter was about the Lord's honour, as maintained in the harmonious walk of "brethren" before the "Canaanite and the Perizzite." "Let there be no strife," says he, "between me and thee... for we be brethren." Nor did Abram desire to suppress the strife, by exacting concessions from Lot. No; he was willing to concede everything himself — to surrender every claim — to sacrifice every advantage, provided the strife were suppressed. "Is not the whole land before thee?" Take what you please — possess yourself of the fairest spot in all the region round about. Here, as some one has observed, is the liberality — the unselfishness of faith. What was land to Abram in comparison with the Lord's glory? Nothing. He could give up anything, or everything, for that. How then does the Lord meet this self-sacrifice on the part of His servant? Just as He does in this chapter 15, by coming in, in the plenitude of His goodness, to make it up to him a hundredfold. "Lift up now thine eyes... for all the land which thou seest to thee will I give it, and to thy seed after thee" (Gen. 13: 14-15). How truly gracious it is of the Lord to enable His servant to make a sacrifice for Him, and then reward that sacrifice by a vast increase of blessing. Such are His ways — His ever adorable ways.

We are now called to trace in Abram the development of a feature which, in a special manner, demonstrates the high order of his communion with God. After all God's revelations and promises to him, his soul still breathes after an object without which all besides was defective. True, he had surveyed, with the eye of faith, the

promised inheritance. — the magnificent gift of divine benevolence: yet, notwithstanding all this, was there a great desideratum mighty blank. He sighed for a Son. A son alone could render complete, in Abram's estimation, all his previous privileges. "And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus. And Abram said, Behold to me thou hast given no seed: and lo, one born in my house is mine heir" (vers. 2-3). Now, we have, in tracing the path of this remarkable man, beheld him, at times, displaying some very noble features of character. His generosity — his high elevation of mind — his pilgrim-like habits — all these things denote a man of the very highest order; yet I hesitate not to say, that we find him, in the passage just quoted, exhibiting a temper of soul, more in harmony with the mind of Heaven than anything we have met hitherto. Abram desired to have his house enlivened by the cry of a child. He had been long enough conversant with the spirit of bondage breathed by "the steward of his house," but the titles of lord and master, though all very good in their place, could not satisfy the heart of Abram, for Abram had been taught of God, and God ever instructs His children in those things which He loves, and which He exhibits in His dealings with them. And I would just observe, in connection with this, that we see in the case of the prodigal in Luke 15, the development of a principle very much in connection with what we have been saying. He says, in the very midst of all his misery "I will arise and go unto my Father, and will say unto him, Father." Here we have a fine feature in the character of this poor wanderer. He had such a sense of the grace of him against whom he had sinned, that he

could yet say "Father," notwithstanding his long course of rebellion and folly.

But let us observe with what accuracy Abram lays hold of the great principle afterwards brought out by the Spirit in Romans 8. "If children, then heirs." Abram felt that sonship and heirship were inseparably connected, so much so, that without the former the latter could not be. This is the meaning of his question, "Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?" Abram rightly judges that to have "no seed" was to have no inheritance, for the word is, not if stewards or servants, then heirs, but "if children, then heirs" (Rom. 8: 17).

How very important it is that we should ever bear in mind, that all our present privileges and future prospects stand connected with our character as "sons." It may be all well and very valuable, in its right place, to realise our responsibility to act as "faithful and wise stewards," in the absence of our Master; still the most ample privileges — the highest enjoyments — the brightest glories, which belong to us through the grace and mercy of our God, stand intimately connected with our character and place as "sons" (cp. John 1: 12; Rom. 8: 14, 19; 1 John 3: 1-2; Eph. 1: 5; Eph. 5: 1; Heb. 12: 5).

In the vision presented to us in the close of our chapter, and which was granted to Abram as an answer to his question, "Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" we have a further illustration of the teaching of Romans 8. Abram is taught by the vision, that the inheritance was only to be reached through suffering — that the heirs must pass through the furnace, previous to their entering upon the enjoyment of that which God

was reserving for them; and I doubt not that, were we more deeply and experimentally taught in the divine life, we should more fully apprehend the moral fitness of such training. Suffering then, is not connected, in this chapter, with sonship, but with heirship; and so we are taught in Romans 8. "If children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together." Again, we must, "through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). The Lord Jesus Himself, likewise, stands as the great illustration of the principle upon which we are dwelling. He occupied the place and enjoyed the favour of a Son from before all worlds (Prov. 8), yet ere He could lay His hand upon the inheritance He must pass through suffering. He had a baptism to be baptised with, and was straitened (sunecomenos) until it was accomplished. So I also when He remembered that "a corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die," or else abide alone, His soul was "troubled." l Now, we are to "know Him in the fellowship of His sufferings," before we can know Him in l the fellowship of His glory; hence it is that; the palmed multitude mentioned in Revelation 7 had to pass through "great tribulation" (tes megales thlipseos) ere they reached their peaceful, heavenly home. Passages of Scripture might be multiplied in proof of this point, but I will merely refer to the following, viz. — Phil. 1: 29; 1 Thess. 3: 4; 2 Thess. 1: 5; 1 Tim. 4: 10; 2 Tim. 2: 12; 1 Peter 5: 10.

But, in this remarkable vision, there are two points which, as they appear prominently in the whole of Israel's after history, deserve to be particularly noticed. I allude to "the smoking furnace, and the burning lamp" (ver. 17). It has been well observed, by a recent

writer, that Israel's history might be summed up in these two words, "the furnace and the lamp." Egypt was a trying furnace to the seed of Abraham. There the fire burned fiercely, but it was soon followed by "the burning lamp" of God's own deliverance. The cry of the suffering seed had come up into the ears of Jehovah. He had heard their groanings and seen their afflictions, and had come down to display above their heads "the lamp" of salvation. "I am come down to deliver them," said He to Moses. Satan might take delight in kindling the furnace, and in adding to its intensity, but the blessed God, on the other hand, ever delighted in letting the rays of His lamp fall upon the dark path of His suffering heirs. So, when Jehovah had, in the faithfulness of His love, brought them into the land of Canaan, they again and again, kindled a furnace by their sins and iniquities; He, as frequently, raised up deliverers in the persons of the judges which were as so many lamps of deliverance to them. Further, when by their aggravated rebellion, they were plunged into the furnace kindled at Babylon, even there we observe the glimmerings of "the burning lamp," and finally it shone out for their full deliverance, in the decree of Cyrus.

Now, the Lord was constantly reminding the children of Israel of the above truth. He says to them, "But the Lord hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace" (Deut. 4: 20; 1 Kings 8: 51). Again, "Cursed be the man that obeyeth not the words of this covenant, which I commanded your fathers, in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace" (Jer. 11: 3-4).

Finally, we may ask, are the seed of Abraham now suffering in the furnace, or are they enjoying the lamp of

God? — for they must be experiencing either the one or the other — the furnace, assuredly. They are scattered over the face of the earth as a proverb and a byword, a reproach and a hissing among all the nations of the earth. Thus are they in the iron furnace. But, as it has ever been, "the burning lamp" will assuredly follow "the smoking furnace," for "all Israel shall be saved; as it is written there shall come out of Zion the Deliverer and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Isa. 59: 20; Rom. 11: 26).

Thus we see how that Israel's eventful history has all along stood connected with the smoking furnace and the burning lamp, here seen in vision by Abram. They are either presented to us in the furnace of affliction through their own sin, or enjoying the fruit - of God's salvation; and even at this moment when, as has been already observed, they are manifestly in the furnace, we can witness the fulfilment of God's promise, so often repeated, "And unto his son will I give on tribe, that David My servant may have a lamp [margin] always before Me in Jerusalem the city which I have chosen Me to put My name there" (1 Kings 11: 36; 1 Kings 15: 14; 2 King 8: 19; Psalm 132: 17). If it be asked where does this lamp shine now? Not on earth, for Jerusalem, the place of its earthly display, "trodden down of the Gentiles," but the eye of faith can behold it shining with undimmed lustre "in the true tabernacle," where it will continue to shine "until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in"; and then, when the furnace, seen in this chapter by Israel's great progenitor, shall have been heated to the very highest degree of intensity, when the blood of Israel's tribes shall flow like water round the walls of Jerusalem, even then, shall the blessed lamp

come forth from the place where it now shines, and cast its cheering rays upon the dark path of the oppressed and sorrowing remnant, bringing to mind those oft-illustrated words, "O ISRAEL, THOU HAST DESTROYED THYSELF; BUT IN ME IS THY HELP."

{I would refer the reader to the following Scriptures in confirmation of what has been above advanced on the subject of "the lamp." — Ex. 27: 20; 2 Sam. 22: 29; Ps. 119: 105; Prov. 6: 23; Prov. 13: 9; Isaiah 62: 1}

Genesis 16 - 17

These two chapters give us an account of Abram's effort to obtain the promised seed by harkening to the voice of his wife, also of God's mode of teaching him the unprofitableness of such an appeal to the mere energy of nature as that which his effort involved.

At the very opening of Abram's course we find his faith put to the test in the matter of the famine, but here we find him tried in quite another way, a way moreover, which involved a far higher exercise of faith and spiritual power. "His own body now dead and the deadness of Sarah's womb;" although, in the main, "he considered them not," must have acted upon his mind to a considerable extent.

Now, as is the case of the famine already alluded to, Egypt was at hand, holding out a refuge from anxiety as to present supply, so here, "an Egyptian maid" — one of those maid-servants, doubtless, which Abram had gotten during his sojourn in that evil place — was presented to him as a relief in the time of anxiety touching the promised seed. "Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai."

But why introduce the element of bondage into his house? Why did not Abram's mind shrink from the thought of "the bondwoman and her son" as much as it had shrunk from the thought of "the steward of his house"? Might not the question, "Lord, what wilt Thou give me," be asked in connection with one as well as the other? Surely it was as much opposed to the divine economy to grant the inheritance to the seed of "a bond-woman," as to a "servant." In either case it would be an allowance of the claims of nature, which cannot be.

The principles involved in this act of Abram's are fully laid open to us in the inspired commentary given in the Epistle to the Galatians. There we read, "Abram had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a free woman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh — but he of the free woman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the Mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all" (Gal. 4: 22-26).

The churches of Galatia had been led away from the simplicity and liberty of Christ and had returned to "the flesh." They were beginning to substitute religious ceremonies for the energies of the Spirit of Christ. Hence it is that the apostle, in the course of his reasoning with them on their unhappy movement, refers to the matter recorded in our chapters, and the way in which he expounds it to them renders it unnecessary to dwell longer upon it. This step of Abram's only “gendered to bondage;" it introduced an unhealthy and

an unhappy element into his house which, as we shall see when we proceed further with our subject, he had to expel ere he could reach the highest point of elevation in his course.

In Genesis 17 we have God's remedy presented to us, and most consolatory it is to observe how the Blessed One at once comes in order to lead back His servant to the simple yet difficult position of faith in Himself — simple, because therein we have but one object with which to be occupied — difficult, because therein we have to contend against the workings of "an evil heart of unbelief," leading us to "depart from the living God."

"And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram and said unto him, I AM THE ALMIGHTY GOD, walk before Me, and be thou perfect." Here was at once the effectual cure for all impatient anxiety. "I am Almighty" — I can quicken the dead — I can call those things that be not as though they were — I can, if needs be, raise up of stones, children unto you — no flesh shall glory in My presence. "I am Almighty, walk before Me and be thou perfect."

It is perhaps one of the finest principles with which the mind can be occupied, that our God desires that He may ever be learnt in the variety of His perfections, by the need of His people. We have already met a striking illustration of this important principle, in the matter of Abram's conflict with the king of Sodom, in Genesis 14. There, when Abram was tempted by the offers of the enemy, he found relief in the apprehension of God's character as "the Most High God, the possessor of heaven and earth." The character of the communion into which Melchizedek led the soul of Abram was suited to

the circumstances in which he stood. So is it exactly in this 17th chapter. Communion with God as "the Almighty" was the sole remedy for impatient anxiety as to the fulfilment of any promise.

Now, when once the Lord exhibits Himself in His character of "Almighty," there can be no obstacle whatsoever to the outflow of His grace; for, when almighty power and almighty grace combine in behalf of the sinner, faith may count upon a rich and an abundant harvest.

The promises, therefore, with which this chapter abounds are just such as we might have expected. "I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God" (Gen. 17: 6-8). Surely these are promises which almighty grace alone could utter, almighty power alone fulfil.

The above promises stand connected with "the covenant of circumcision — which is specially important as looked at in connection with Abram's effort to obtain the seed otherwise than by the operations of God's own hand. It would be profitable to dwell for a little upon the doctrine of this covenant of circumcision but my design in taking up this history, is not by any means to handle it in a doctrinal way, but rather to draw from it some of those valuable principles of a decidedly practical tendency

with which it so richly abounds; and therefore I pass rapidly over chapters 16 - 17, which contain a mine of precious doctrinal truth quite sufficient to occupy a separate treatise.

[I would observe here that the doctrine of the Epistle to Galatians stands intimately connected with Gen. 16 & Gen. 17. I might add, the important doctrine of Israel's future restoration. We also get the doctrine of justification by faith fully illustrated in Gen. 15.]

Ere closing my observations on this section of our narrative, I would add that it is faith alone which can enable one to listen, as Abraham here does, to the promises of Almighty God, and when faith listens, God will surely continue to speak. Abram here gets his name changed to Abraham, and the Lord unfolds to him the future greatness and number of his seed, while Abraham hearkens in the unquestioning silence of faith. But when the "Almighty God" goes on to say with reference to Sarai, "As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her; yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her" (vers. 15-16), he is at once overwhelmed by the pledges of such marvellous power and grace to be exercised towards him. They exceeded anything he had as yet known, and "Abraham fell on his face." This is very instructive. Abraham with his face in the dust, overcome by the plenitude of almighty power and grace! Surely, we may say, while dwelling upon such a Scripture as this, it is only faith that can rightly entertain the "Almighty God," it alone can give Him His due and proper place and honour Him as He should be honoured. When the Almighty displays Himself, self

must be excluded, hence we find that Abram is set aside in all this — Sarai is lost sight of — "the bondwoman and her son" are, for the moment put far out of view, and nothing is seen but "the Almighty God" in the sovereignty and fullness of His grace and power, and the faith that could lie prostrate in the dust, in silent adoration of such a display of the divine glories.

How different is this from the preceding chapter! There we find Abram hearkening to the suggestion of Sarai his wife, with regard to the bondwoman — here we find him hearkening to the voice of Jehovah, as Almighty, who is about to quicken the dead womb of Sarah, and to call those things that be not as though they were, that no flesh might glory in His presence. There it is Abram and Sarai without God — here it is God without Abram and Sarai. In a word, there it is flesh — here it is spirit — there it is sight — here it is faith. Wondrous contrast! Exactly similar to that afterwards displayed by the apostle to the churches of Galatia, when he sought to restore them from the sad influence of "the beggarly elements" of the flesh and the world, to the full liberty wherewith Christ had made them free.

Genesis 18 - 19

I class these two chapters together because, like those we have just been considering, they furnish us with a contrast — a contrast most marked and striking between the position occupied by Abraham in Genesis 18, and that occupied by Lot in Genesis 19.

The Lord Jesus when asked by Judas, not Iscariot, "How is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us and not unto the world?" replied, "If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come

unto him and make Our abode with him" (John 14: 23). Again, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3: 20). Now, Abraham furnishes us with an exceedingly happy exemplification of the Galatians stands intimately connected with Gen. 16 - 17, and n. We also get the doctrine of justification by faith fully illustrated truth stated in the above passages. "The Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and He sat in the tent door in the heat of the day" (Gen. 18: 1). Here we find Abraham again in the full exhibition of his stranger character. Mamre and the tent are associated in our minds with the day of his triumph over the king of Sodom. Abraham is still a stranger and a pilgrim "dwelling in tabernacles." The revelation made unto him by the Almighty God had not altered the tone of his character in this respect, but had rather imparted fresh vigour and energy thereto. A simple dependence upon the promise of the Almighty God was the most effectual means of maintaining him in his stranger condition.

Now, it is, in the very highest degree instructive to see the honour here put upon the character and condition of the stranger. Throughout the wide range of the world there was just one spot in which the Lord could accept the rites of hospitality and make Himself at home, and that was "in the tent of a pilgrim and stranger." The Lord would not honour the sumptuous halls and princely palaces of Egypt with His presence. No. All His sympathies and all His affections hung around the stranger of Mamre, who was the only one who, in the midst of an evil world could be induced to take God for his portion.

What a season of enjoyment it must have been to Abraham while those heavenly strangers sat with him and partook of the offerings of his generous heart. Mark how he calls forth into action all the energies of his house to do honour to his guests. He hastens from the tent to the field, and from the field to the tent again, and seems to lose sight of himself in his effort to make others happy.

Nor is it merely by partaking of Abraham's hospitality that the Lord gives expression to the high estimation in which He holds him He renews His promise to him with regard to the son — He opens up His counsels to him with reference to Sodom. "Shall I," says He "hide from Abraham that thing which I do seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgement; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him" (vers. 17-19).

Here Abraham is seen as "the friend of God." "The servant knoweth not what his lord doeth," but Abraham was made acquainted with what the Lord was about to do to Sodom, while Lot — the one who was so deeply interested in the solemn event — was left in profound ignorance about it.

How then does Abraham make use of his favoured position? Does he use it to strengthen more fully, and place on a firmer basis, the future interests of his house? Surely the natural heart would at once have prompted him to make such a use of his present advantage in the

matter of nearness to Jehovah. Does he use it thus? Nay. Abraham had learnt too much of the ways of God to act in a way savouring so much of the selfishness of a heartless world. But, even had he thought of such a thing, he had no need to utter a syllable on the subject, for "the Almighty God" had most amply satisfied his heart with regard to the everlasting interests of his house — He had fixed it upon such a foundation that an anxious thought would have evidenced a complete want of moral order in Abraham's soul. He therefore entertained not a thought about himself or his house, but like a genuine man of faith, he takes advantage of his place in the presence of God to intercede for a brother, whose worldliness had plunged him into the very midst of that place which was about to be given over to everlasting destruction. "And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" (ver. 23) "The righteous!" to whom can he allude? Can it be to the man who had so deliberately turned aside out of the path of faith to take up his abode at Sodom? Yes; he speaks of Lot — he calls him "righteous" — he speaks of him in the very same terms as the Spirit in the apostle afterward speaks of him when he calls him a "righteous soul." Abraham, therefore was taught of God when he could recognise in the man surrounded by all the pollution of Sodom "a righteous soul."

{Although I consider Lot the principal object in Abraham's mind while interceding before the Lord, I do not forget there is mention made of "fifty," etc.}

I doubt not it will be admitted by every one taught of God that the conduct of Abraham in this chapter, furnishes us with one of the most important results of a

holy and separated walk. We observe in it a man pleading with God in a most urgent strain for one who had turned his back upon him, and selected Sodom as the place of his abode. How completely must Abraham's soul have been lifted above "the things that are seen" when he could thus forget "the strife" and the departure, worldliness and evil of Lot, and plead for him still as "a righteous soul." If Abraham appears as "the friend of God" under other circumstances and other scenes, surely he is here seen as the child of God exhibiting most sweetly those principles which he had learnt in communion with his heavenly Father.

We shall now leave Abraham, for a little, enjoying his happy place before the Lord, while we contemplate the last sad scene in the life of one who seems to have valued the things of this life more highly than was consistent with the character of "a stranger and pilgrim" or "a righteous soul." From the time that the separation took place between Abraham and Lot, the former seems to have proceeded "from strength to strength;" while the latter, on the contrary, seems to have proceeded only downwards, from one stage of weakness to another, until we find him, at the close, making shipwreck of everything, and merely "escaping with his life." The loss of all his goods in the battle between the "four kings and five" does not seem to have had any effect upon the mind of Lot in the way of teaching him the evil or being mixed up with the world; yea, he seem to have become more deeply involved it worldliness after that event than he had been before; for, at the first, he merely "pitches this tent towards Sodom" (Gen. 13: 12); but now we find him sitting "in the gate" (Gen. 19: 1), which, as we know, was then the place of honour. When once a man has put

his hand to the plough if he begin to look back, we have been told by Him who cannot err, that "he is not fit for the kingdom of God." Nor is it possible to count upon the fearful lengths to which a man may go when once the world, in any one of its varied aspects, has taken possession of his heart, or when once he has begun to turn his back upon the people of God. The terrible declension spoken of in Hebrews 10, which stops not short of "trampling under foot the Son of God," has its beginning in the apparently simple act of "forsaking the assembling of ourselves together." How needful, therefore, it is that we should take heed to our ways, and watch the avenues of our hearts and minds, lest any evil thing should get dominion over us, which, however trivial in itself, might lead to the most appalling results.

Now, it strikes me, that we have in the circumstance presented to us in the opening of Genesis 19 the full evidence of Lot's fallen condition. The Lord Himself does not appear at all. He remains at a distance from the unholy place, and merely sends His angels to execute His commission upon the devoted city of Sodom. The angels, too, exhibit all the symptoms of distance and strangership — they refuse to go into Lot's house when invited, saying, "Nay, but we will abide in the street all night." True, they subsequently enter into his house; but, if they do so, it is not so much to enjoy refreshment as to counteract the sad effects of Lot's wrong circumstances. How different was the scene at Lot's house from that which they had so lately witnessed at the tent of the stranger of Mamre! The tumult of the men of Sodom — to whom, notwithstanding all their ungodly deeds and ungodly speeches, Lot applies the title of "brethren" — the evident embarrassment of Lot

at being discovered in such painful circumstances — the shocking proposal which he is constrained to make in order to screen his guests from the violence of the ungodly men of Sodom — the struggle at the door, and Lot's danger — all these things must have shocked the heavenly strangers, and stood in marked contrast with the holy peace and retirement of Abraham's tent, together with his own calm and dignified demeanour throughout the scene. Well might those angels have been astonished to find "a righteous soul" in such a place, when he could have enjoyed, in company with his separated brother, the peaceful and holy joys of his steady and consistent course.

But the time had now arrived for the pouring out of the cup of divine wrath upon Sodom. "The men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides?... bring them out of this place: for we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord; and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it" (vers. 12-13). The critical moment which the Lord Jesus, in the gospel, notes by the exceedingly solemn word "UNTIL," was now at hand for the careless inhabitants of Sodom, who dreamed not of any interruption to their "eating, and drinking, buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage." A moment's respite is allowed, during which Lot bears a message to his son-in-law, a testimony as to the rapidly approaching judgement; but, ah! what power could the testimony of one who had voluntarily come in and settled amongst them, have upon those who had lived and moved from their earliest infancy in the midst of the ungodly scene? How could Lot expect that his words would have any weight when his ways had so sadly contradicted them? He might now, with terrified

aspect and earnest entreaties, urge them to leave a place which he knew was doomed to everlasting destruction, but they could not forget the calm and deliberate way in which he had at first "pitched his tent toward Sodom," and finally taken his seat "in the gate;" hence, as might be expected, "he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law" (Gen. 19: 14). And how, so far as he was concerned, could it be otherwise? His sons-in-law might be, and doubtless were, responsible before God for the rejection of the testimony; but Lot could not, by any means, expect them to heed him much, indeed, we find that even he himself was tardy in departing from the place; for "while he lingered" — while his heart still went after some object or another that was dear to him — "the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand's of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful to him, and they brought him forth and set him without the city" (Gen. 19: 16). From this statement, it is manifest that, had not the men "laid hold of, and brought forth" Lot, he would, no doubt, have "lingered" on "until the fire of God's judgement had fallen upon him, and prevented even his "escaping with his life." But they "pulled him out of the fire," because "the Lord had mercy upon him."

But this escape of Lot's only served to put fresh honour upon Abraham, for we read that "when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow" (ver. 29). Thus, as Abraham's sword had delivered Lot in the time of the conquest of Sodom, his prayer delivered him in the time of its final overthrow, "for the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Nor does the

contrast between those two men stop here. There is yet another scene in which they stand at a great distance from each other as to the moral condition of their souls. "Abraham gat him up early in the morning, to the place where he stood before the Lord" (ver. 27). Here the man of faith, the holy pilgrim, once more raises his head amid the mighty scene of desolation. All was over with Sodom and its guilty inhabitants, "the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace." Sad spectacle! The din and bustle of that once stirring city was hushed; silence reigned around — the buying and selling — the eating and drinking — the marrying and giving in marriage — all the intercourse of social life had been awfully broken in upon. The solemn "UNTIL" had come at last — the only one in all that wicked place who, notwithstanding his failure, could be regarded as "the salt," had been removed — the measure of Sodom's iniquity had been filled up — the day of divine long-suffering closed, and nothing now met the eye of Abraham but misery and desolation throughout all the plain. How melancholy! And yet it was but a type of the far more terrible desolation which shall sweep across this guilty world when the Son of man makes His appearance, "when every eye shall see Him, and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn and wail because of Him."

Thus, "Abraham stood before the Lord" completely exempt from all the sad effects of the recent visitation, as far as he was personally concerned. His stranger condition which, in the days of Chedorlaomer, had enabled him to live outside of Sodom and all its circumstances, still kept him free, and was the means of his escape from Sodom's unutterable woe and misery.

Had Abraham, when solicited by the King of Sodom, mixed himself up with the things of Sodom, he would have been involved, in some measure, as was his brother Lot, in its overthrow. He himself would have been saved, but his work would have been burnt up. But Abraham was looking for "a city that hath foundations," and he knew at once that Sodom was not that city, and hence he would have nothing whatever to do with it. He would "hate even the garment spotted by the flesh" — he would "touch not the unclean thing," and now he was permitted to realise the blessed results of his conduct, for, while Lot had to retreat in confusion and sorrow to a cave in the mountains, his wife and all his possessions being lost, Abraham takes his stand, in all that blessed calmness and dignity which ever characterised him, in the presence of Jehovah, and from thence surveys the heart-rending scene.

But what of Lot? How did he end his course? "Oh, tell it not in Gath! publish it not in the streets of Askelon!" Well may we desire to throw a veil over the closing scene of the life of one who does not seem to have ever realised, as he should, the power of the call of God. He had always displayed a secret desire for the things of Egypt or those of Sodom His heart does not seem to have been thoroughly detached from the world, and therefore his course was always unsteady; from the time he separated himself from Abraham, he went from bad to worse — from one stage of evil to another, until at last the scene closes with the shocking transaction in the cave; the sad results of which were seen in the persons of Moab and Ammon, the enemies of the people of God.

Thus ended the course of Lot, whose history ought to be a solemn warning to all Christians who feel a tendency

to be carried away by the world. The history has not been left on record without a purpose. "Whatever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning," may we therefore learn from the above narrative, "not to lust after evil things," for, although "the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation," yet it is our place to keep as much out of the way of temptation as we can, and our prayer should ever be "lead us not into temptation." "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever" (1 John 2: 17)

Genesis 20 — Genesis 21

Lot has now passed off the scene — his sun has gone down amid thick clouds and a gloomy atmosphere; it now remains for us to pursue, for a few moments longer, the narrative of Abraham's ways, and God's dealings with him.

There was one point involved in Genesis 12 which I left untouched, knowing that it would come before us again in this place.

When Abraham went down into Egypt, he entered into a compact with Sarah his wife to conceal part of the truth, "Say, I pray thee," said he, "thou art my sister" (Gen. 12: 13). One evil ever leads to another. Abraham was moving in the wrong direction when he went down into Egypt for help, and therefore did not exhibit that refinement of conscience which would have told him of the moral unsoundness of this mental reservation. "Speak every man truth with his neighbour," being a divine principle, would always exercise an influence upon one walking in communion with God; but Abraham's desire to get out of present trial was an

evidence of failure in communion, and hence "his moral sense," as a recent writer has termed it, was not as keen or as elevated as it should have been. However, although the Lord plagued Pharaoh's house because of his having taken Sarah into it, and further, although Pharaoh rebukes Abraham for his acting in the matter, yet the latter says nothing whatever about the deliberate compact into which he had entered with his wife, to keep back part of the truth; he silently takes the rebuke and goes on his way, but the root of the evil remained still in his heart, ready to show itself at any time if circumstances should arise to draw it out.

Now, it is marvellous to behold Abraham coming up out of Egypt — building an altar and pitching a tent — exhibiting the noble generosity of faith — vanquishing Chedorlaomer and repulsing the temptation of the King of Sodom — urging his request for a son and heir, receiving the most gracious answer — on his face before God in the sense of His almighty grace and power — entertaining the heavenly strangers and interceding for his brother Lot. In a word, I say, it is marvellous to behold Abraham passing through such brilliant scenes, comprising a series of years, and, all the while, this moral point, in which he had erred at the very threshold of his course, remains unsettled in his heart. True, it did not develop itself during the period to which I have just referred, but why did it not? Because Abraham was not in circumstances to call it out, but there it was notwithstanding. The evil was not fully brought out — not confessed, not got rid of — and the proof of this is, that the moment he again finds himself in circumstances which could act upon his weak point, it is at once made manifest that the weak point is there. The temptation

through which he passed in the matter of the King of Sodom, was not by any means calculated to touch this peculiar point; nor was anything that occurred to him from the time he came up out of Egypt until he went down into Gerar, calculated to touch it, for had it been touched, it would no doubt have exhibited itself.

We never can know what is in our hearts until circumstances arise to draw it out. Peter did not imagine that he could deny his Lord, but when he got into circumstances which were calculated to act upon his peculiar weakness, he showed that the weakness was there.

It required the protracted period of forty years in the wilderness to teach the children of Israel "what was in their hearts" (Deut. 8: 2) and it is one of the grand results of the course of discipline through which each child of God passes, to lead him into a more profound knowledge of his own weakness and nothingness. "We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead" (2 Cor. 1: 9). The more we are growing in the sense of our infirmities, the more shall we see our need of clinging more closely to Christ — drawing more largely upon His grace, and entering more fully into the cleansing virtue and value of His atoning blood. The Christian, at the opening of his course, never knows his own heart; indeed, he could not bear the full knowledge of it; he would be overwhelmed thereby. "The Lord leads us not by the way of the Philistines lest we should see war," and so be plunged, in despair. But He graciously leads us by a circuitous route, in order that our apprehension of His grace may keep pace with our growing self-knowledge.

In Genesis 20, then, we find Abraham again, after the lapse of many years, falling into the old error, a suppression of truth, for which he has to suffer a rebuke from a mere man of the world. The man of the world, in this scene, seemed, for the moment, to possess a more refined moral sense than the man of God. "Said he not unto me," says he, "'She is my sister'! and she, even she herself said, 'He is my brother': in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this." But mark how God enters the scene for the purpose of vindicating His servant. He says to Abimelech, "Behold, thou art but a dead man." Yes, with all "the integrity of his heart and innocency of his hands" — with all his fine moral sense of right and wrong, he was "but a dead man," when it came to be a question, for one moment, between him and even an erring child of God. God, in His grace, was looking at His dear servant from quite a different point of view from that adopted by Abimelech. All that the latter could see in Abraham was a man guilty of a manifest piece of deception, but God saw more than that, and therefore He says to Abimelech, "Now therefore restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live." What dignity is here put upon Abraham! God himself vindicates him before the world! Not a syllable of reproof! — not a breath of disapprobation! — no, "he is a prophet and he shall pray for thee and thou shalt live." How truly consolatory it is for the poor, weak, and harassed believer to remember that His Father is ever viewing him through the medium of the Lord Jesus Christ. He sees nothing whatever upon His child but the excellency and perfectness of Jesus. Thus, while a man of the world may have to rebuke a child of God, as in the case before us, God declares that He values that

character which the believer has received from Him more than all the amiability, integrity, and innocency that nature can boast of.

{It has been observed that, if we look through a piece of stained glass, it will cast its peculiar hue upon everything at which we look; we may view the greatest variety of colours, yet do we see in all the shade of the medium through which we are looking. So it is with God. The Medium through which He views His people is Christ; hence, He sees not their various shades and imperfections, for all present to His eye the perfectness of the Lord Jesus. As He is, so are we.

“Beholders, many faults may find

But they can guess at Jesus mind, content, if written in His book.”}

This reminds us of the way in which the Lord vindicates the Baptist before the multitude, although He had sent a message to himself which must have exercised him deeply: "I say unto you, among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet then John the Baptist" (Luke 7: 28). Thus, whatever unfavourable aspect the child of God may wear in the world's view, God will ever show Himself the vindicator of such. "He suffered no man to do them wrong; yea, he reproved kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not mine anointed and do my prophets no harm" (1 Chr. 16: 21-22).

However, as was observed with regard to John the Baptist, the message sent from the Lord to His servant must have exercised his spirit deeply in secret, so is it in Abraham's case. Abraham must have felt deeply humbled in his soul at the thought of what had occurred, and the consciousness of the fact that God would not

enter into judgement with him about it would have augmented that feeling. When Abraham fell into the same error in Egypt we do not find that Pharaoh's reproof produced any manifest effect. He was not humbled by it to such a degree as to make a full confession of the whole thing. He takes his departure out of Egypt, but the root of evil remains in his heart, ready to shoot forth its pernicious branches again. Not so in Genesis 20; here we get at once at the root of the matter — Abraham opens up his whole hearts he confesses that from the very first moment of his course he had retained this thing in his heart which had twice betrayed him into an act, which, to say the least of it, would not bear the light. And as there is the full confession of the evil on his part, so is there the complete renunciation of it — he gets rid of it fully, root and branch. The leaven is put forth out of every corner of his heart, he hearkens to Abimelech's reproof and profits by it; it was God's instrument by which He brought out the matter, and delivered the soul of his servant from the power of evil.

But, in addition to the point upon which we have been dwelling, there was yet another question to be settled ere Abraham could reach the most elevated point of his course as a man of faith. The bondwoman and her son were yet in the house. He must put forth these from his house as he had put forth the evil from his heart. The house and the heart must be cleared out. In Genesis 21 we find matters brought to a crisis with regard to the bondwoman and her son, concerning whom we have heard comparatively nothing until now. The element of bondage had heretofore lain dormant in Abraham's house because not roused into action, by anything of an

opposite nature and tendency. But in the birth of Isaac — the son of the free woman — the child of promise — we see a new element introduced. The spirit of liberty and the spirit of bondage are thus brought into contact, and the struggle must issue in the expulsion of either one or the other. They cannot move on in harmony, for "how can two walk together except they be agreed."

Now we are invited by the apostle, in his Epistle to the Galatians, to behold in these two children, "the two covenants," the one gendering to bondage, the other to liberty; and further, to behold in them samples of the fleshly and spiritual seed of Abraham, the former, "born after the flesh," the latter, "born after the Spirit." Nor can anything be more marked than the line of demarcation between, not only the two covenants, but the two seeds. They are totally distinct the one from the other, and can never, by any operation, be brought to coalesce. Abraham was made to feel, and that painfully, this fact. "Cast out this and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac" (Gen. 21: 10). Here the natural result shows itself. The two elements could not mingle. As well might the north and the south winds be expected to blow in all their strength without exciting a convulsion in the elements.

But it was most painful work to Abraham to be obliged thus to thrust forth his son. "The thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son;" but it mattered not, he must be put out, for the son of a bondwoman could never inherit the promises made only to the spiritual seed. If Ishmael were to have been retained, it would have been an open allowance of the claims of the flesh. Abraham would have found

something "as pertaining to the flesh and would thus have had "whereof to glory." But no — all God's promises are to be made good to those who, like Isaac, are the children of promise, born after the Spirit, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1: 13). Ishmael was manifestly born "of the will of the flesh, and of the will of man," and "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." The flesh must therefore be set aside and kept under, no matter how "grievous" it may be to our hearts. The Christian will often find it grievous enough to keep down the old principle which ever lusts against the new, but the Lord gives spiritual power for the struggle so that "we are more than conquerors through Him that loves us."

But it is not my present purpose to pursue the doctrinal matter involved in this instructive history; were I to do so it would carry me far beyond the limits I have prescribed for myself in this little paper, the design of which is, as before observed, simply to direct attention to a few leading principles put forward in the narrative. I will therefore pass on to the next chapter which is the last of the section laid out for consideration.

Genesis 22

The circumstances through which Abraham passed in chapters 20 and 21 were most important indeed. An evil which had long been harboured in his heart had been put away; the bondwoman and her son, who had so long retained quiet possession of his house, were cast out, and he now stands forth as "a vessel sanctified and meet for the master's use, prepared unto every good work."

"And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt [or try] Abraham." Here Abraham is at once

introduced into a place of real dignity and honour. When God tries an individual it is a certain evidence of His confidence in him. We never read that "God did tempt Lot" — no, the goods of Sodom furnished a sufficiently strong temptation for Lot. The enemy laid a snare for him in the well-watered plains of Sodom which he seemed but too prone to fall into. Not so with Abraham. He lived more in the presence of God, and was, therefore less susceptible of the influence of that which had ensnared his erring brother.

Now, the test to which God submits Abraham — the furnace in which He tries him, marks at once a pure and genuine metal. Had Abraham's faith not been of the purest and most genuine character, he would assuredly have winced under the fiery ordeal through which we behold him passing in this beautiful chapter. When God promised Abraham a son, he believed the promise "and it was counted unto him for righteousness." "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God." But then, having received this son, having realised the truth of the promise, was there not a danger that he would rest in the gift instead of in the Giver? Was there not a danger that he would lean upon Isaac, in thinking upon the future seed and future inheritance, rather than upon God Himself who had promised him the seed? Surely there was; and God knew that, and therefore tries His servant in a way, more than anything, calculated to put him to the test as to the object on which his soul was resting. The grand inquiry put to Abraham's heart, in this wondrous transaction, was, "are you still walking before the Almighty God, the quickener of the dead?" God desired to know whether he could apprehend in

Him the One who was as able to raise up children from the ashes of his sacrificed son as from the dead womb of Sarah. In other words, God desired to prove that Abraham's faith reached forth, as some one has observed, to resurrection, for if it stopped short of this, he never would have responded to the startling command, "Take now, thy son, thine only son Isaac whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of" (Gen. 22: 2). But Abraham "staggered not." He at once responds to the call. God had asked for Isaac, and Isaac must be given, and that too without a breath of murmur. He could give up anything or everything so long as his eye rested upon "the Almighty God." And mark the point of view in which Abraham puts this journey of his to Mount Moriah, "I and the lad will go yonder and worship." Yes, it was an act of worship, for he was about to lay upon the altar of the Quickener of the dead the one in whom all God's promises centred. It was an act of worship — most elevated worship, for he was about to prove, in the sight of Heaven and hell, that no other object filled his soul but the Almighty God. Hence, what calmness! what self-possession! what pure devotion! what elevation of mind! what self-renunciation! He never falters throughout the scene. He saddles the ass, prepares the wood, and sets off to Mount Moriah, without giving expression to one anxious thought, although, as far as human eye could see, he was about to lose the object of his heart's most tender affection, yea, the one upon whom the future interests of his house, to all appearance, depended.

Abraham, however, showed most fully that his heart had found a nearer and dearer object than Isaac, dear as he

was; he showed also that his faith was resting upon another object altogether with reference to the future interests of his seed, and that he was as simply resting upon the promise of Almighty God after the birth of Isaac as before it.

Behold, then, this man of faith as he ascends the mount, taking with him his "well-beloved"! What a scene of breathless interest!

{It strikes me that we get, in Abraham's journey to Mount Moriah a remarkable type of the mysterious scene afterwards exhibited at Calvary, when God was really providing Himself a lamb. We can have no difficulty in losing sight of Herod and Pilate, the chief priests and scribes, the Pharisees and the multitude, and thus we have none remaining but the Father and the Son who, in company, ascend the Mount and carry out the gracious work of redemption in the unbroken solitude of that place.}

How must the angelic hosts have watched this illustrious father from stage to stage of his wondrous journey, until at last they beheld his hand stretched forth for the knife to slay his son — that son for which he had so long and ardently wished, and for which he had so steadily trusted God. Then again, what an opportunity for Satan to ply his fiery darts! What abundant room for such suggestions as the following, viz., "What will become of the promises of God with regard to the seed and the inheritance, if you thus sacrifice your only son? Beware that you are not led astray by some false revelation; or, if it be true that God has said so and so, doth not God know that, in the day you sacrifice your son, all your hopes will be blasted? Further, think of Sarah; what will

she do if she lose Isaac, after having induced you to expel from your house Ishmael?" All these suggestions, and many beside, the enemy might bring to bear upon the heart of Abraham. Nor would Abraham himself have been beyond the region of those thoughts and reasonings which, at such a time, would not fail to arise within him. What then was his answer to all such dark suggestions? RESURRECTION! "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called: ACCOUNTING THAT GOD WAS ABLE TO RAISE HIM UP, EVEN FROM THE DEAD; FROM WHENCE ALSO HE RECEIVED HIM IN A FIGURE" (Heb. 11: 17-19).

Resurrection is God's mighty remedy for all the mischief and ruin introduced by Satan; when once we arrive at this point, we have done with the power of Satan, the last exercise of which is seen in death. Satan cannot touch the life that has been received in resurrection, for the last exercise of his a power is seen in the grave of Christ; beyond that he can do nothing. Hence the security of Church's place; her "life is hidden with Christ in God." Blessed hiding place! May we rejoice in it more and more each day.

I will now draw this paper to a close. We have followed Abraham in his course, from Ur of the Chaldees up to the Mount Moriah — we have seen him resign, at the call of God, family and kindred, lands and possessions, worldly ease and prosperity; and lastly, we have seen him, in the power of faith, at the same call of God, ascend the solitary mount, for the purpose of laying "his only begotten" upon God's altar, and thus to declare that

he could give up everything and every one but God Himself — and that, being acquainted with the meaning of "THE ALMIGHTY" and "RESURRECTION," he cared not though he were called to look to the stones for the raising up of seed unto him.

On the other hand, we have followed Lot from Ur of the Chaldees also; but alas! his path was a far different one from that of his brother. He does not seem to have realised the power of the call of God in his own soul; he moved rather under Abraham's influence than under that of Jehovah; hence we find that, while Abraham was, at every step of his journey, letting go the world, Lot was doing the very reverse; he was grasping at the world in every shape and form, and he obtained that at which he was grasping, but what then? What of the end? Ah, that is the point. What of Lot's end? Instead of being a noble spectacle unto angels, and a pattern to all future generations of the faithful — of what faith can enable a man "to do and to suffer" for God — he was just the reverse; he was led away by the enemy of his soul, who ensnared him by means of the things of the world; he spent his days amid the uncleanness of Sodom, and the scene closes with the sad circumstances in the cave. All he did for God or his people was to beget the Ammonite and the Moabite, the enemies of both.

How wondrous then is that grace, which, speaking of the history of such an one, could say, "And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked; for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds" (2 Peter 2: 7-8).

The Life and Times of David - A

The Life and Times of David

— the life of faith.

C. H. Mackintosh.

Introduction

The steps which led to the setting up of a king in Israel are easily traced, and easily accounted for, by all who have studied with any attention the humbling history of the human heart, either as presented in themselves or in others.

In the opening chapters of First Samuel we are furnished with a most instructive and solemn picture of Israel's condition. The house of Elkanah is taken up by the sacred penman as a striking illustration of Israel after the flesh, and Israel after the Spirit. "He had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah; and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children."

Thus we have in the domestic circle of this Ephrathite the early scenes of Sarah and Hagar enacted over again. Hannah was the barren woman — and she was made to feel it deeply, for "her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the Lord had shut up her womb."

The barren woman is in Scripture the type of nature's ruined and helpless condition. There is no ability to do anything for God — no power to bring forth any fruit to Him; all is death and barrenness. Such is the real condition of every child of Adam. He can neither do

anything for God nor for himself, as regards his eternal destiny. He is emphatically "without strength"; he is "a dry tree," "a heath in the desert." Such is the lesson taught us by the barren woman.

However, the Lord caused His grace to abound over all Hannah's weakness and need, and put a song of praise into her mouth. He enabled her to say, "My horn is exalted in the Lord; my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in Thy salvation." It is the Lord's special province to make the barren woman rejoice. He alone can say, "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child; for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord" (Isa. 54: 1).

Hannah realized this, and widowed Israel will ere long realize it also, "for her Maker is her husband; the Lord of Hosts is His name; and her Redeemer the Holy One of Israel." The beautiful song of Hannah is the soul's thankful acknowledgement of God's actings in reference to Israel. "The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: He bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory." All this will be most fully exemplified in Israel in the latter day; and it is now exemplified in the person of every one who through grace is raised from his ruined condition in nature to blessedness and peace in Jesus.

The birth of Samuel filled up a great blank, not only in the heart of Hannah, but doubtless in the heart of every

faithful Israelite who sighed for the true interests of the Lord's house and the purity of the Lord's offering, both of which were alike disregarded and trampled upon by the unholy sons of Eli. In Hannah's desire for “a man child," we perceive not merely the development of the heart of a mother, but that of an Israelite. She had, no doubt, beheld and mourned over the ruin of everything connected with the temple of the Lord. The dimmed eye of Eli — the vile actings of Hophni and Phinehas — the fading lamp — the desecrated temple — the despised sacrifice — all conspired to tell Hannah that there was a real want, which want could alone be supplied by the precious gift of a man-child from the Lord. Hence she says to her husband, "I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the Lord, and there abide forever."

"Abide forever!" Nothing short of this could satisfy the longing soul of Hannah. It was not the mere matter of wiping away her own reproach that rendered Samuel so precious in her eyes. No! she longed to see "a faithful priest" standing before the Lord; and by faith her eye rested on one who was to abide there forever. Precious, elevating faith — that holy principle which lifts the soul above the depressing influence of things seen and temporal, into the light of things unseen and eternal!

In chapter 3 we have the prediction of the terrible downfall of Eli's house. "And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax 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. " This was very expressive — solemnly expressive. Eli's eyes "dim," and the Lord's

call to Samuel: in other words, Eli's house is passing away, and the faithful priest is about to enter upon the scene. Samuel runs to Eli, but, alas, all the latter could say was, “Lie down again." He had no message for the child. Hoary and dim, he could spend his time in sleep and darkness, while the Lord's voice was sounding so very near him. Solemn, most solemn warning!

Eli was a priest of the Lord, but he failed to walk watchfully, failed to order his house according to the testimonies of God, failed to restrain his sons; hence we see the sad end to which he came. "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 which 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 he restrained them not" (1 Sam. 3: 11-13)

"Whatsoever a man soweth," says the apostle, "that shall he also reap." How true is this in the history of every child of Adam! — how peculiarly true in the history of every child of God! According to our sowing shall be our reaping. So Eli was made to feel; and so shall the writer and the reader of this. There is much more of solemn, practical reality in this divine statement than many are apt to imagine. If we indulge in a wrong current of thought, if we adopt a wrong habit of conversation, if we pursue a wrong line of acting, we must inevitably reap the fruits of it sooner or later.* May this reflection lead us to more holy watchfulness in our ways; may we be more careful to "sow to the Spirit," that so, of the Spirit, we may "reap life everlasting"!

{*The statement in the text, I need hardly say, does not by any means interfere with the eternal stability of divine grace and the perfect acceptance of the believer in all the acceptableness of Christ before God. This is a great foundation truth. Christ is the believer's life, and Christ is his righteousness — the ground of his peace with God. He may lose the enjoyment of it, but the thing itself God has established upon an indestructible basis, and before ever it can be touched the fact of Christ's resurrection must be called in question, for clearly He could not be where He is if the believer's peace were not perfectly settled. In order to have perfect peace, I must know my perfect justification: and in order to know my perfect justification, I must know, by faith in God's Word, that Christ has made a perfect atonement. This is the divine order — perfect atonement as the ground of my perfect justification; and perfect justification as the ground of my perfect peace. God has joined those three together, and let not man's unbelieving heart put them asunder.

Hence, therefore, the statement in the text will not, I trust, be misunderstood or misapplied. The principle contained therein may be thus illustrated: If my child does wrong, he may injure himself and grieve and displease me; but he is my child all the while. The apostolic statement is as broad as possible — "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." He does not say whether it is a converted or an unconverted man, and therefore the passage should have its full application. It could not possibly touch the question of pure and absolute grace.}

In 1 Sam. 4 a humiliating picture of Israel's condition in connection with the declining house of Eli is presented.

"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." Here Israel was being made to realize the curse of a broken law. See Deut. 28: 25. They could not stand before their enemies, being weak and powerless by reason of their disobedience.

And observe the nature and ground of their confidence, in this their time of need and pressure: "And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us to-day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies." Alas, what a miserable ground of confidence! Not a word about the Lord Himself. They thought not of Him as the source of their strength; they made not Him their shield and buckler. No! they trusted in the ark; they vainly imagined that it could save them. How vain! How could it avail them aught when unaccompanied by the presence of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel? Impossible! But He was no longer there; He had been grieved away by their unconfessed and unjudged sin; nor could any symbol or ordinance ever supply His place.

However, Israel vainly imagined that the ark would do all for them; and great was their joy, though not well founded, when it made its appearance among them, accompanied, not by Jehovah, but by the wicked priests Hophni and Phinehas. "And when the ark of the

covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again." All this was very imposing; but, ah, it was hollow; their triumph was as baseless as it was unbecoming; they ought to have known themselves much better than to make such an empty display. Their shout of triumph harmonised badly with their low moral condition in the sight of God; and yet it will ever be found that those who know least of themselves set up the highest pretensions, and assume the highest position.

The Pharisee in the Gospel looked down with an air of proud indifference on the self-abased publican; he imagined himself very high up and the publican very low down in the scale; yet how different were God's thoughts about the two! Thus it is the broken and contrite heart will ever be the dwelling-place of God, who, blessed be His name, knows how to lift up and comfort every such heart as none else can do. Such is His peculiar work — the work in which He delights.

But the men of this world will always attach importance to high pretensions. They like them, and, generally speaking, give a high place in their thoughts to those who assume to be somewhat; while, on the other hand, they will seek to put the really self-abased man still lower. Thus, in the instructive scene before us in this chapter, the Philistines attached no small importance to the shout of the men of Israel. It was like themselves, and therefore they could apprehend and appreciate it.

"And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What meaneth the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews? And they understood that the

ark of the Lord was come into the camp. And the Philistines were afraid; for they said, God is come into the camp," etc. They naturally supposed that the shout of triumph was based on a reality: they saw not what was beneath the surface; they understood not the meaning of a defiled priesthood, a despised sacrifice, a desecrated temple. They beheld the outward symbol, and imagined that power accompanied it; hence their fear. How little did they know that their fear and Israel's triumph were alike groundless. "Be strong," said they, "and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants to the Hebrews, as they have been to you: quit yourselves like men, and fight."

Here was the resource of the Philistines — "quit yourselves like men." Israel could not do this. If prevented by sin from bringing the resources of God to bear upon their circumstances, they were weaker than other men; Israel's only hope was in God; and if God were not there, if it were a mere conflict between man and man, an Israelite was no match for a Philistine. The truth of this was most fully established on the occasion to which we are referring. "The Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten." How else could it be? Israel could but be smitten and fly when their shield and buckler, even God Himself, was not in their midst. They were smitten; the glory departed from them; the ark was taken: they were shorn of their strength; their shout of triumph was exchanged for the piercing cry of sorrow; their portion was defeat and shame; and the aged Eli, whom we may regard as the representative of the existing system of things, fell with that system, and was buried in its ruins.

1 Sam. 5 and 1 Sam. 6 embrace the period during which "Ichabod" was written upon the nation of Israel. During this time God ceased to act publicly for Israel, and the ark of His presence was carried about from city to city of the uncircumcised Philistines. This period is full of instruction. The ark of God amongst strangers, and Israel for the time being set aside, are circumstances which cannot fail to interest the mind and fix the attention of the intelligent and thoughtful student of Scripture.

"And the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it from Eben-ezer to Ashdod. When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon." Here we are presented with the sad and humiliating result of Israel's unfaithfulness. With what a careless hand and faithless heart had they kept the ark of God when it could ever be brought to find a lodging-place in the temple of Dragon! How deeply Israel had failed! They had let go everything; they had given up that which was most sacred, to be profaned and blasphemed by the uncircumcised.

And observe the house of Dagon was deemed sufficiently sacred for the ark of Jehovah, which belonged to the holiest of all. The shadow of Dagon was to be substituted for the wings of the cherubim and the beams of the divine glory. Such were the thoughts of the lords of the Philistines; but not so God's thoughts. Israel, on the one hand, had failed in defending the ark; they had failed to recognize the great truth that it should ever have been connected with the presence of God among them.

All this might be true, and moreover, the lords of the Philistines might presume to insult the sacred symbol of

the divine presence by impiously associating it with Dagon their god. In a word, the Israelites might prove faithless, and the Philistines profane, but the God of Israel must ever be true to Himself, ever true to His own holiness, and Dagon must fall prostrate before the ark of His presence. "And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the Lord. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again. And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold: only the stump of Dagon was left to him" (1 Sam. 5: 3-4)

Now we can hardly conceive anything more depressing and humiliating, to all appearances than the condition of things at this crisis in Israel's history. They beheld the ark snatched from their midst; they had proved themselves unfit and unable to occupy the place of God's witnesses in the view of the nations around them; and as to the grounds of triumph by the enemies of the truth, it was enough to say, "The ark is in the house of Dagon." This was truly terrible, when looked at from one point of view; but oh, how ineffably glorious when looked at from another! Israel had failed, and had let go everything that was sacred and precious; they had allowed the enemy to lay their honour in the dust, and trample on their glory; yet God was above all, beyond all; beneath all.

Here was the deep source of consolation to every faithful heart. Truly God was there, and showed Himself in wondrous power and glory. If Israel would not act in defence of God's truth, He must act Himself; and so He did. The lords of the Philistines had vanquished Israel;

but the gods of the Philistines must fall prostrate before that ark which of old had driven back the waters of Jordan. Here was divine triumph. In the darkness and solitude of the house of Dagon where there was no eye to see, no ear to hear — the God of Israel was acting in defence of those great principles of truth which His Israel had so failed to maintain. Dagon fell, and in his fall proclaimed the honour of the God of Israel. The darkness of the moment only afforded an opportunity for the divine glory to shine out with brilliancy. The scene was so thoroughly emptied of the creature that the Creator could show Himself in His own proper character. "Man's extremity was God's opportunity." His failure made room for the divine faithfulness. The Philistines had proved stronger than Israel; but Jehovah was stronger than Dagon.

Now all this is replete with instruction and encouragement at a time like the present, when the people of God are so sadly declining from that deep tone of devotedness and separation which ought to characterise them. We should bless the Lord for the full assurance of His faithfulness — "He cannot deny Himself"; "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His, and let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." Hence, in darkest times He will maintain His truth and raise up a witness for Himself, even though it should be in the house of Dagon. Christians may depart from God's principles, but the principles remain the same: their purity, their power, their heavenly virtue, are in no wise affected by the fickleness and inconsistency of faithless professors, and in the end truth will triumph.

However, the effort of the Philistines to keep the ark of God among them proved a complete failure. They could not make Dagon and Jehovah dwell together — how blasphemous the attempt! "What concord hath Christ with Belial?" None! The standard of God can never be lowered so as to accommodate itself to the principles which govern the men of this world; and the attempt to hold Christ with one hand and the world with the other must issue in shame and confusion of face. Yet how many are making that effort! How many are there who seem to make it the great question, how much of the world they can retain without sacrificing the name and privileges of Christians! This is a deadly evil, a fearful snare of Satan, and it may with strict propriety be denominated the most refined selfishness. It is bad enough for men to walk in the lawlessness and corruption of their own hearts; but to connect evil with the holy name of Christ is the climax of guilt.

"Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel.... Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not, and come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?" (Jer. 7: 3, 8-10) Again, we read, as one of the special characteristics of the last days, that men shall have "a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof."

The form suits the worldly heart, because it serves to keep the conscience at ease, while the heart enjoys the world in all its attractiveness. What a delusion! How needful the apostolic admonition, "From such turn away"! Satan's masterpiece is the amalgamation of

things apparently Christian with things decidedly unholy. He deceives more effectually by this scheme than any other, and we need more spiritual perception to detect it in consequence. The Lord grant us this, for He knows how much we need it.

1 Sam. 7. Passing over much that is valuable in chapters 5 and 6 we must dwell a little upon Israel's happy restoration, in connection with the ministry of "the faithful priest."

Israel had been allowed to mourn for many a day the absence of the ark; their spirits drooped under the withering influence of idolatry; and at length their affections began to go out after the Lord. But in this revival we learn how deeply they had been sunk in death. This is always the case.

When Jacob of old was called upon to go up to Bethel from amid the defilement of Shechem, he had but little idea of how he and his family had become entangled in the meshes of idolatry. But the call to "go up to Bethel" roused his dormant energies, quickened his conscience, and sharpened his moral perception. Hence he says to his household, "Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments." The very idea of Bethel, where God had appeared to him, exerted a reviving influence on the soul of Jacob; and he being revived himself was enabled to lead others also in fresh power.

Thus it is with Jacob's seed in this chapter. "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." We observe here what a downward course Israel had been pursuing in connection with the house of Eli. The first step in evil is to place confidence in a form apart from God; apart too from those principles which make the form valuable. The next step is to set up an idol. Hence we find Israel saying of the ark, "That it may save us." But now the word of the prophet is, "Put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you."

Reader, is there not a solemn admonition in all this for the professing Church? Truly there is. The present is pre-eminently a day of form without power. The spirit of cold and uninfluential formalism is moving upon the face of Christendom's troubled waters, and soon all will settle down in the deathlike calm of false profession, which will be broken in upon only by "the shout of the archangel and the trump of God."

However, the attitude assumed by Israel in 1 Sam. 7 forms a perfect contrast to the scene in 1 Sam. 4: "And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the Lord. And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the Lord" (an expression of their weak, helpless condition) "and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the Lord." This was real work, and we can say, God is here now. There is no confidence in a mere symbol or lifeless form; there is no empty pretension or vain assumption, no shout or baseless vaunting; all is deep and solemn reality. The earnest cry, the water poured out, the fast, the confession — all tell out the mighty change which had taken place in Israel's moral condition.

They now betake themselves to the faithful priest, and through him to the Lord Himself. They speak not now of fetching the ark. No; their word is, "Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that He will save us out of the hand of the Philistines. 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." Here was the source of Israel's power. The sucking-lamb — God's gracious providing in tender remembrance of their need — gave a new aspect to their circumstances; it was the turning-point in their history on this occasion.

And observe, the Philistines seem to have been in total ignorance of all that was going on between Jehovah and Israel. They doubtless imagined that, inasmuch as they heard no shout of triumph, the Israelites were, if possible, in a more impoverished condition than before. They do not make the earth to ring again, as in 1 Sam. 4; but ah, there was a silent work going on which a Philistine's eye could not see, nor a Philistine's heart appreciate! What could a Philistine know about the penitential cry, the water poured out, or the sucking-lamb offered up? Nothing.

The men of this world can only take cognisance of that which lies on the surface. The outward show, the pomp and glare, the assumption of strength and greatness in the flesh, are well understood by the world; but they know nothing of the reality of a soul exercised before God. And yet this latter is what the Christian should most earnestly seek after. An exercised soul is most precious in the sight of God; He can dwell with such at all times. Let us not assume to be anything, but simply take our proper place in the sight of God, and He will

surely be our spring of power and energy, according to the measure of our need.

"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." Such were the happy results of simple dependence upon the God of the armies of Israel: it was somewhat like the glorious display of Jehovah's power on the shores of the Red Sea.

"The Lord is a man of war" when His people need Him, and their faith can count on Him as their present help in time of need. Whenever Israel truly turned to Jehovah, He was ever ready to appear in their behalf; but the glory must be ad His own. Israel's shout of empty triumph must be hushed, in order that the voice of Jehovah may be distinctly heard. And how blessed to be silent, and let Jehovah speak! What power in His voice to bring peace to His people, and to strike terror into the hearts of His enemies! "Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name?"

1 Sam. 8. In this chapter we have a very marked step towards the setting up of a king in Israel. "And it came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel.... And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgement." Sad picture! How like man in every age! Man corrupts himself and all committed to him at the first opportunity. Moses and Joshua foresaw Israel's turning away after their departure (Deut. 31: 29; Joshua 23: 15-16); and Paul could say to the Ephesian elders: "I know that after my departure shall grievous

wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock." So here; Israel no sooner recovers from the effects of the immorality of Eli's sons than they are made to feel the direful effects of the avarice of Samuel's sons, and thus are they hurried along the path which ended in the rejection of Jehovah and the setting up of Saul.

"When Samuel was old, he made his sons judges." But this was a very different thing indeed from God's appointment. The faithfulness of Samuel was no guarantee for his sons; just as we find in the boasted theory of apostolic succession. What kind of successors have we seen? How far have they resembled their predecessors? Paul could say, "I have coveted no man's silver or gold": can the so-called successors say so? Samuel could say, "Behold, here I am: witness against me before the Lord, and before His anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith?" But alas, Samuel's sons and successors could not say this! To them "filthy lucre" was the leading spring of action.

Now we find in this chapter that Israel makes this evil of Samuel's sons the ostensible reason for asking a king. "Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like ad the nations." Fearful declension! Israel satisfied to come down to the level of the nations around! and all because Samuel was old and his sons covetous. The Lord is shut out. Had they looked up to Him, they would have had no reason for seeking to put themselves under the guardianship of a poor mortal like themselves.

But ah, the Lord's ability to guide and keep them was little thought of in all this scene! They cannot see beyond Samuel and his sons: if no help can be found from them, they must at once step down from their high elevation of having Jehovah as their King and make to themselves a human head like the nations around them. The attitude of faith and dependence on God is too difficult to be long maintained by the natural man. In 1 Sam. 7 God had been owned as their King, but now it is not so: God is shut out and a king is the all engrossing object. We shall soon see the sad result of all this.

1 Sam. 9 - 1 Sam. 13. These chapters furnish us with the character of Saul, together with his anointing and the opening of his rule. I shall not dwell upon it in this introduction, being merely desirous to call the reader's attention to the steps which led to the setting up of a king in Israel.

Saul was emphatically the man after Israel's heart: he had all that the flesh could desire — "a choice young man, and a goodly; and 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." This was all very imposing to those who could only look upon the outward appearance; but what lay beneath this attractive exterior! Saul's whole course is marked with selfishness and pride, under the cloak of humility. True, the Spirit came upon him as one set apart to be an office-bearer among the people of God;* but he was throughout a self-seeker, and he only used the name of God for his own ends, and the things of God as a pedestal on which to set forth his own glory.

{*My reader should accurately distinguish between the Holy Ghost coming upon people and the Holy Ghost dwelling and acting in them. The statement in 1 Sam. 10: 6 may present a difficulty to some minds. "The Spirit of the Lord will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man." This is not the Spirit producing the new birth, but merely fitting Saul to be an office-bearer. Were it regeneration, it would not merely be the Spirit coming upon, but acting in, a man. Saul the office-bearer and Saul the man are quite distinct, and this distinction must be maintained in reference to many of the characters both in the Old and New Testament Scriptures.

An all important difference is to be observed between the operations of the Spirit previous and subsequent to Christ's resurrection.}

The scene at Gilgal is truly characteristic, and develops much of Saul's principle of action. Impatient to wait for God's time, he "forces himself," and offers a burnt-offering, and has to hear from the lips of Samuel these solemn words: "Thou hast done foolishly; thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God which He commanded thee: for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought Him a man after His own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over His people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee."

This is just the sum of the matter, so far as Saul is concerned. "Thou hast done foolishly; thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord; thy kingdom shall not

continue." Solemn verities! Saul, the man after man's heart, is set aside, to make room for the man after God's heart. The children of Israel had abundant opportunity of testing the character of the man whom they had chosen to lead them forth, and fight their battles. The reed on which they had so earnestly desired to lean had broken, and was about to pierce their hand.

Man's king, alas, what was he? Set him in an emergency, and how does he carry himself? Bustling self-importance marks all his actings. No dignity, no holy confidence in God, no acting on the broad principles of truth. Self, self, and that, too, in the most solemn scenes, and while apparently acting for God and His people. Such was man's king.

1 Sam. 14. This beautiful chapter furnishes a striking contrast between the efficacy of Israel's expedient, and that of the old principle of simple faith in God. Saul sits beneath a pomegranate tree, in display of empty pomp without any real power; while Jonathan, acting in the spirit of faith, is made the happy instrument of working salvation for Israel. — Israel, in unbelief, had asked for a king to fight their battles, and doubtless they imagined that, when blessed with a king, no enemy could stand before them: but was it so? One word in 1 Sam. 13 gives the reply: "All the people followed him trembling." What a change! How different from the mighty host who, of old, had followed Joshua into the strongholds of Canaan! And yet they now had their longed-for king before them; but, God was not there, and hence their trembling.

Let man have the fairest, the most imposing ordinance, without the sense of God's presence, and he is weakness itself. Let him have the presence of God in power, and

nothing can resist him. Moses had, of old, done wonders with a simple rod in his hand; but now, Israel, with the man after their own heart full in their view, could do nought but tremble before their enemies. "All the people followed him trembling." How truly humiliating! "Nay; but we will have a king over us... that our king may judge us, and go out before us and fight our battles." Truly "it is better to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in princes." Jonathan proved this, most blessedly. He goes up against the Philistines in the power of that word, "There is no restraint with the Lord to save by many or by few." It was "the Lord" who filled his soul, and having Him, "many or few" made no difference. Faith does not reckon on circumstances, but on God.

And mark the change upon Israel the moment that faith begins to act amongst them. The trembling was transferred from Israel to the Philistines; "and there was a trembling in the host, in the field, and among all the people; the garrison and the spoilers, they also trembled; and the earth quaked; so it was a very great trembling." Israel's star was now decidedly in the ascendant, simply because Israel was acting upon the principle of faith. Jonathan looked not to his father Saul for deliverance, but to Jehovah; he knew that He was a man of war, and on Him he leaned for the deliverance of Israel in the day of trouble. Blessed dependence! None like it.

Human ordinances perish — human resources vanish away; but "they that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever." "It was a very great trembling," for God was putting His terror into their hearts, and filling Israel with joy and

triumph. Jonathan's faith was owned of God in the establishment of those who had previously fled from the field of conflict into the mountains. Thus it is ever; one can never walk in the power of faith without giving an impetus to others; and, on the other hand, one coward heart is sufficient to deter a great many. Moreover, unbelief always drives one from the field of service or conflict, while faith, as surely, leads one into it.

But what of Saul in all this? How did he co-operate with the man of faith? He was perfectly incapable of any such acting. He sat under the pomegranate tree, unable to inspire courage into the hearts of those who had chosen him to be their captain; and when he did venture to move, or rather to bustle forth, he could do nought but hinder the precious results of faith by his rashness and folly. But we must hasten on to the close of these introductory remarks.

1 Sam. 15 presents us with the final testing and setting aside of man's king. "Go, smite Amalek." This is the test which really made manifest the moral condition of Saul's heart. Had he been right before God, he would have executed God's judgement upon Amalek. But the issue proved that Saul had too much in common with Amalek to carry out the divine will in his destruction. What had Amalek done? "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt." In a word, Amalek stands before the spiritual mind as the first great obstacle to the progress of the redeemed from Egypt to Canaan; and we know what it is which fills a similar place in reference to those who now set out to follow the Lord Jesus.

Now, Saul had been just showing himself as a most decided obstacle in the way of the man of faith; indeed, his entire course was one of hostility to the principles of God. How, then, could he destroy Amalek? Impossible. "He spared Agag." Just so. Saul and Agag suited each other but too well, nor had he power to execute the judgement of God on this great enemy of His people. And mark the ignorance and self-complacency of this unhappy man. "And Samuel came to Saul; and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the Lord: I have performed the commandment of the Lord." Performed the commandment of the Lord, while Agag, king of the Amalekites, was yet alive! Oh, to what lengths of vain delusion will one go when not walking uprightly before God!

"What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in my ears?" Solemn, heart-searching inquiry! In vain is recourse had to the plausible matter of "sacrifice unto the Lord." Miserable resource for disobedient hearts! As if the Lord would accept a sacrifice from one walking in positive rebellion against His commandment. How many since Saul's day have sought to cover a disobedient spirit with the plausible mantle of "sacrifice unto the Lord." Samuel's answer to Saul is of universal application, viz.: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry." The Lord seeks not, offerings, but obedience: the subject heart and acquiescent spirit will glorify Him more than the cattle upon a thousand hills.

How important to have this great principle pressed home upon the conscience, when so many are cloaking all sorts of disobedience with the word, sacrifice, sacrifice! "To obey is better than sacrifice." It is far better to have the will in subjection to God than to load His altar with the costliest sacrifices. When the will is in subjection, everything else will take its due place; but for one whose will is in rebellion against God to talk of sacrificing to Him is nothing but deadly delusion. God looks not at the amount of the sacrifice, but at the spirit from which it springs. Moreover, it will be found that all who, in Saul's spirit, speak of sacrificing unto the Lord, have concealed — beneath some selfish object — some Agag or other — the best of the sheep — or something attractive to the flesh, which is more influential than the service or worship of the blessed God.

May all who read these pages seek to know the real blessedness of a will entirely subject to God, for in it will be found that blessed rest which the meek and lowly Jesus promised to all who were heavy laden — the rest which He Himself found in being able to say, "I thank Thee, O Father... for so it seemed good in Thy sight." God had desired Saul to destroy Amalek, but his heart desired to spare something which to him, at least, seemed good and desirable; he was ready to carry out the will of God in reference to all that was "vile and refuse," but he thought he might make some exceptions, as if the line of distinction between that which was "refuse" and that which was "good" was to be drawn by his judgement, and not by the unerring judgement of Him who looked at Amalek from a true point of view, and saw in Agag one who, with all his delicacy, would resist Israel as strongly as ever, and this was His ground of

controversy with Amalek, which Saul was unable to understand or appreciate.

The close of this chapter shows us, but too plainly, the current in which Saul's thoughts and desires were flowing. He had just heard the solemn appeal of Samuel, and the denunciations of God against him, concluded with these solemn words, "The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou." These stunning words had just fallen upon his ear; yet so full was he of self, that he could say, "Honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel."

This was Saul. "The people," said he, "spared what should have been destroyed" — it was their fault, but "honour me." Alas, what vanity! A heart steeped in iniquity seeking honour from his fellow-worms. Rejected of God as an office-bearer, he clings to the thought of human honour. It seems that, provided he could maintain his place in the estimation of his people, he cared but little what God thought of him. But he was rejected of God, and the kingdom torn from him; nor did it avail him much that Samuel turned again, and stood by, while Saul went through the form of worshipping the Lord, in order that he might not forfeit his place and influence amongst his people.

"Then said Samuel, Bring hither to me Agag, the king of the Amalekites; and Agag came unto him delicately. And Agag said, Surely the bitterness of death is past. And Samuel said, As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless, among women. And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal." Agag's delicacy could not deceive one who was taught of

God. How remarkable to find him hewing Agag in pieces at Gilgal! Gilgal was the place where the reproach of Egypt was rolled away from Israel; and, in tracing their history, we find it associated with much power over evil. Here it was, then, that this Amalekite came to his end by the hand of righteous Samuel.

This is most instructive. When the soul is blessed with the realization of its full deliverance from Egypt, by the power of death and resurrection, it is in the best position for obtaining victory over evil. Had Saul known anything of the spirit and principle of Gilgal, he would not have spared Agag. He was ready enough to go thither to "renew the kingdom," but by no means so to crush and set aside all that savoured of the flesh. But Samuel, acting in the energy of the Spirit of God, dealt with Agag according to the principles of truth; for it is written, "The Lord hath sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." The king of Israel ought to have known this.

Part 1 DAVID ANOINTED

We now come to our theme — our rich and varied theme — the life and times of David, king of Israel.

In looking through Scripture, we observe how wonderfully the blessed God has ever brought good out of evil. It was Israel's sin to reject their King, Jehovah, and seek to set up a man over them; and in that man, who first wielded the sceptre over them, they had learnt how vain was the help of man. The Lord was now about to bring blessing to His people out of all their evil and folly.

Saul had been set aside, in the government of God; he had been weighed in the balance, and found wanting,

his kingdom was to pass away from under his hand, and a man after God's own heart was about to be set upon the throne, to the glory of God, and the blessing of His people. "And the Lord said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel?"

These words let us into the secret of Samuel's sorrow in reference to Saul, during the long period of his separation from him. In the last verse of 1 Sam. 15 we read, "And Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death; nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul." This was natural. There was much that was affecting — deeply affecting to the heart in the melancholy fall of this unhappy man. He had once elicited from Israel the shout of "God save the king." Many an eye, full of enthusiasm, had doubtless rested upon "the choice young man and the goodly," and now all this was gone; Saul was rejected, and Samuel felt constrained to take a position of entire separation from him as one whom God had set aside.

This was the second office-bearer whom it had been Samuel's lot to see stripped of his robes of office; he had been the bearer of heavy tidings to Eli, at the opening of his career; and now, at the close of it, he was called upon to deliver, in the ear of Saul, the announcement of the judgement of Heaven against his course.

However, Samuel was called to enter into the thoughts of God in reference to Saul. "How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him?" Communion with God will ever lead us to acquiesce in His ways. Sentimentalism may weep over fallen greatness, but faith grasps the great truth that God's unerring counsel

shall stand, and He will do all His pleasure. Faith could not shed a tear over Agag, when hewed in pieces before the Lord, neither would it continue over a rejected Saul, because it ever flows in harmony with God, in His ways. But there is a wide difference between nature and faith; while the former sits down to weep, the latter arises and fills the horn with oil.

It is well to ponder this contrast. We are all too apt to be carried away by mere sentiment, which is often truly dangerous. Indeed, inasmuch as it is of nature, it must flow in a current different from the thoughts of the Spirit of God. Now, the most effectual remedy against the working of mere sentiment is a strong, deep, thorough, abiding conviction of the reality of the purpose of God. In the view of this, sentimentality withers and dies, while, on the other hand, faith lives and flourishes in the atmosphere of the purpose of God. This is impressively taught in the first verse of 1 Sam. 16: "How long wilt thou mourn?... Fill thy horn with oil, and go: I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided Me a king among his sons."

Yes; human sorrow must flow on until the heart finds repose in the rich resources of the blessed God. The varied blanks which human events leave in the heart can only be filled up by the power of faith in the precious word, "I have provided." This really settles everything. This dries the tear, alleviates the sorrow, fills the blank. The moment the spirit rests in the provision of God's love, there is a period put to all repinings. May we all know the power and varied application of this truth; may we know what it is to have our tears dried up, and our horn filled by the conviction of our Father's wise and merciful provision.

This is a rare blessing; it is difficult to get completely above the region of human thought and feeling. Even a Samuel is found replying to the divine command, and manifesting a slowness to run in the way of simple obedience. The Lord said, "Go;" but Samuel said, "How can I go?" Strange inquiry! yet how fully it develops the moral condition of the human heart. Samuel had been mourning for Saul, and now, when told to go and anoint one to fill his place, his reply is, "How can I?" Now we may be quite sure that faith never says this. There is no such word as "how" in the vocabulary of faith. No; the divine command no sooner marks out the path, than faith takes it up in willing obedience, not counting the difficulties.

However, the Lord, in tender mercy, meets His servant in his difficulty. "And the Lord said, Take a heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord." Thus with a full horn and a sacrifice he sets off to the city of David, where an obscure and unthought of youth tended a few sheep in the wilderness.

Amongst the sons of Jesse, there would seem to have been some very fair specimens of nature — some whom Samuel, if left to the exercise of his own judgement, would have fixed upon to succeed to the crown of Israel. "And it came to pass when they were come, that he looked upon Eliab, and said, Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him." But it was not so. Natural attraction had nothing to do with the Lord's election. He looks beneath the gilded surface of men and things, and judges according to His own unerring principles. We learn something of Eliab's haughty and self-sufficient spirit in 1 Sam. 17. But the Lord puts no confidence in the legs of a man, and thus Eliab was not His chosen vessel.

It is very remarkable to find Samuel so much and so often astray in this chapter. His mourning for Saul, his hesitation to go and anoint David, his mistake about Eliab, all shows how much astray he was as to the ways of God. How solemn is the Lord's word, "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." This is the great difference; the outward appearance," and "the heart." Even Samuel was well nigh snared by the former, had not the Lord graciously interfered to teach him the value of the latter. "Look not on his countenance." Memorable words!

"Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath the Lord chosen this. Then Jesse made Shammah to pass by. And he said, Neither hath the Lord chosen this. Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The Lord hath not chosen these." Thus the perfection, as it were, of nature passed before the prophet, but all in vain; nature could produce nought for God or His people.

And, what is still more remarkable, Jesse thought not of David in all this! The ruddy youth was in the solitude of the wilderness, with the sheep, and came not into mind in this review of nature's offspring But, ah, the eye of Jehovah was resting upon this despised youth, and beholding in him the one who was to stand in the line through which, according to the flesh, Christ should come, to occupy the throne of David, and rule over the house of Israel for ever. Truly "God seeth not as man seeth," for He "hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the

weak things of the world, to confound things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen — yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor. 1: 27-29).

If Eliab, or Shammah, or Abinadab, or any one of the "seven sons" of Jesse had had the anointing oil poured upon his head, flesh might have gloried in the presence of God; but the moment David — the forgotten David — appears on the scene, we recognize in him one who would give all the glory to Him who was about to put the sceptre into his hand. In a word, David stands before us as the marked type of the Lord Jesus, who, when He appeared amongst men, was despised, overlooked, and forgotten. And I may just add here, that we shall find, in ranging through David's instructive history, how strikingly he shadowed forth the true beloved of God.

"And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither. And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look at. And the Lord said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he." "There remaineth yet the youngest." Surely he could not be the elect one, thought Jesse. Man cannot understand the ways of God. The very instrument which God is about to make use of is overlooked or despised by man. "Arise, anoint him: for this is he," is God's perfect reply to the thoughts of Jesse and Samuel.

And how happy it is to note David's occupation. "Behold, he keepeth the sheep." This was afterwards referred to

by the Lord, when He said to David, "I took thee from the sheep-cote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel." Nothing can more sweetly illustrate God's thoughts of the kingly office than the work of a shepherd. Indeed, when it is not executed in the spirit of a shepherd, it fails of its end. King David fully entered into this, as may be seen in those touching words, "These sheep, what have they done?"

The people were the Lord's sheep, and he, as the Lord's shepherd, kept them on the mountains of Israel, just as he had kept his father's sheep in the retirement of Bethlehem. He did not alter his character when he came from the sheep-cote to the throne, and exchanged the crook for the sceptre. No; he was the shepherd still, and he felt himself responsible to protect the Lord's flock from the lions and bears which ever prowled around the fold.

The prophetic allusion to the true David is touching and beautiful. "Therefore will I save My flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle. And I will set up one shepherd over them, and He shall feed them, even My servant David; He shall feed them, and He shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it" (Ezek. 34: 22-24). Our Lord in John 10 presents Himself as the faithful and good Shepherd who loves and cares for His sheep; and, doubtless, in John 6, He had more or less reference to His shepherd character.

"And this is the Father's will which hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." This is a great

principle of truth. Independent of His own personal love for the sheep — so wonderfully attested in life and in death — the Lord Jesus, in the above memorable passage, presents Himself as one responsible — voluntarily so, no doubt — to the Father, to keep every member of the loved and valued flock through all the vicissitudes of this life, and present them in resurrection-glory, at the last day.

Such is the Shepherd to whom a Father's hand has committed us; and, oh, how has He provided for us for time and eternity, by placing us in such hands — the hands of an ever-living, ever-loving, all-powerful Shepherd, whose love many waters cannot quench; whose power no enemy can countervail; who holds in His hand the keys of death and hell, and who has established His claim to the guardianship of the flock, by laying down His life for it. Truly we may say, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." How can we want while Jesus feeds us? Impossible. Our foolish hearts may often desire to feed on noxious pasture, and our Shepherd may have to prove His gracious care by denying us the use of such, but one thing is certain, that those whom Jesus feeds shall not want any good thing.

There is something in the shepherd character which would seem to be much in harmony with the divine mind, inasmuch as we find the we find the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, all acting in that character. The twenty-third psalm may be primarily viewed as the experience of Christ delighting in the assurance of His Father's shepherd-care. Then, in John 10, we find the Son presented as the good Shepherd. Lastly, in Acts 20 and 1 Peter 5, we find the Holy Ghost acting in that blessed capacity, by raising up and gifting for the work

the subordinate shepherds. It is edifying to mark this. It is like our God to present Himself in the most endearing relationship, and that most calculated to win our confidence and draw out our affections. Blessed be His name forever! His ways are all perfect; there is none like Him.

I would just direct the reader's attention to the contrast between the circumstances in which Samuel found David, and those in which he found Saul. Remember that Saul was in pursuit of his father's asses, when he came in contact with Samuel. I do not interpret this fact, I merely refer to it. I believe it is expressive, in the way of evil, just as David's occupation, in the sheep-cote, was expressive of his future career, as the shepherd of Israel.* When we see David tending his father's sheep in the wilderness, overlooked, or thought little of in the circle of his brethren, we are led to look for something corresponding in his after-course; nor are we disappointed. Just so, when we see Saul in search of his father's asses, we are led to look for something corresponding in his character and habits afterwards.

Trifling circumstances often teach a great deal. David's affectionate and tender solicitude for the Lord's flock and forgetfulness of self, may all be traced in the circumstances in which he is introduced to our notice; and, on the other hand, Saul's ambitious, self-seeking spirit may be traced in the object of his pursuit when he came in contact with Samuel. However, I simply leave the suggestion with the reader to use as the Lord may lead him, only reminding him that nothing can be insignificant which the Spirit has recorded concerning men who appear throughout in such marked contrast,

and who each, in his way, occupied such an important place in the history of the people of God.

One can only say, Blessed be the grace which took up one to be ruler over His people, who manifested those traits of character which were most blessedly adapted to his work. "Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward." Thus, then, David is fully before us as the Lord's anointed, and we have now to trace him in all his wanderings and vicissitudes, while rejected of man, and waiting for the kingdom.

Part 2 THE VALLEY OF ELAH

No sooner had the anointing oil of the Lord been poured upon David, than he was called forth from his retirement to stand before king Saul, now forsaken of God, and troubled with an evil spirit. This unhappy man needed the soothing notes of David's harp to dispel the horrid influence of that spirit which now haunted him from day to day. Wretched man! sad monument of the results of a self-seeking course!

David, however, did not hesitate to take his place as a servant, even in the house of one who was afterwards to prove his most bitter enemy. It was quite the same to him where he served or what he did; he would protect his father's flocks from lions and bears, or dispel an evil spirit from Saul. In fact, from the moment David's history opens, he is seen as a servant, ready for every kind of work, and the valley of Elah furnishes a most striking manifestation of his servant character.

Saul would seem to have had little idea of who it was that stood before him, and whose music refreshed his

troubled spirit; he knew not that he had in his presence the future king of Israel. "He loved him greatly; and he became his armour-bearer." The selfish Saul would gladly use the services of David in his need, though ready to shed his blood when he understood who and what he was.

But let us turn our thoughts to the deeply interesting scenes in the valley of Elah.

"Now the Philistines gathered together their armies to battle." Here now we come to something calculated to bring out the true character and worth of Saul and David, the man of form and the man of power. It is trial that brings out the reality of a man's resources. Saul had already been proved, for "all the people had followed him trembling," nor was he likely to prove a more soul-stirring leader on this occasion. A man forsaken of God, and plagued by an evil spirit, was but little adapted to lead on an army to battle, and still less to meet, single-handed, the powerful giant of Gath.

The struggle in the valley of Elah was rendered exceedingly peculiar by the challenge, on the part of Goliath, to decide the matter by single combat; it was the very method in which an individual might be signalised. It was not, as in ordinary cases, army against army, but it was a question of who, throughout all the host of Israel, would venture to stand before the terrific uncircumcised foe. In fact, it is plain that the blessed God was about to make manifest again to Israel that, as a people, they were utterly powerless, and that their only deliverance, as of old, was the arm of Jehovah, who was still ready to act in His wondrous character of "a man of war," whenever faith addressed Him as such.

For forty successive days did the Philistine draw near and present himself in the view of the unhappy Saul and his awe-struck army. And observe his bitter taunt — "Am not I a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul?" Alas! it was but too true; they had come down from their high elevation as servants to Jehovah to become mere servants to Saul. Samuel had forewarned them of all this — he had told them that they would become footmen, bakers, cooks, and confectioners to their self-chosen master; and all this, as their choice, instead of having the Lord God of Israel as their sole master and King. Nothing will teach man, however, save bitter experience; and the cutting taunts of Goliath would, no doubt, teach Israel afresh the real nature of their condition under the crushing rule of the Philistines. "Choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me," said the giant. How little did he know who was about to be his antagonist. He, in all his boasted fleshly strength, vainly imagined that no Israelite could stand before him.

And here we may inquire, what of Jonathan in all this scene? He who had acted in such simple faith and energy in 1 Sam. 14, why was he not now ready to go forth against this champion? I doubt not if we look particularly at his actings, we shall find that his faith was not of that simple, independent character which would carry a man through all kinds of difficulties. The defect in his faith appears in the words, if they say thus," etc. Faith never says “if"; it has to do only with God. When Jonathan said "There is no restraint to the Lord," he uttered a fine principle of truth, and one which should have carried him on without an "if." Had Jonathan's soul been reposing simply in the ability of God, he would not have sought for a sign. True, the Lord

graciously gave him the sign, just as He had given one to Gideon before, for He ever meets His servants in all their needs. However, Jonathan does not make his appearance in the valley of Elah; he had, it seems, done his work, and acted according to his measure; but, in the scene now before us, there was a demand for something far deeper than anything Jonathan had known.

But the Lord was secretly preparing an instrument for this new and more difficult work. And may we not say it is ever thus that the blessed God acts? He trains in secret those whom He is about to use in public. He makes His servants acquainted with Himself in the secret solemnity of His sanctuary, and causes His greatness to pass in review before them, that thus they may be able to look with a steady gaze at the difficulties of their path.

Thus it was with David. He had been alone with God while keeping the sheep in the wilderness; his soul had become filled with the thought of God's power; and now he makes his appearance in the valley of Elah, in all the simplicity and self-renouncing dignity of a man of faith. The emptiness of man had been fully proved by the forty days of Goliath's haughty boasting. Saul could avail nothing; Jesse's three eldest sons could avail nothing; yea, even Jonathan could avail nothing; all was lost, or seemed to be, when the stripling David entered the scene, clothed in the strength of Him who was about to lay in the dust the pomp and glory of the proud Philistine.

The words of Goliath were reported to David, and in them he at once recognized a blasphemous defiance of the living God. "Who," said he, "is this uncircumcised

Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God ?" David's faith recognized in the trembling host before him the army of the living God, and he at once made it a question between Jehovah and the Philistine.

This is most instructive: for no change of circumstances can ever rob the people of God of their dignity in the eye of faith. They may be brought low in the view of man, as in Israel's case on the present occasion, but faith ever recognises what God has imparted; and hence David, as he beheld his poor brethren fainting in the view of their terrible enemy, was enabled to acknowledge those with whom the living God had identified Himself, and who ought not therefore to be defied by an uncircumcised Philistine.

When faith is in exercise, it brings the soul into direct connection with the grace and faithfulness of God and His purposes toward His people. True, Israel had brought all this sorrow and humiliation upon themselves by their unfaithfulness; it was not of the Lord that they should quail in the presence of an enemy; it was the fruit of their own doing, and faith would ever apprehend and acknowledge this. Still, the question is, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine?"

This is the inquiry of faith. It was not the army of Saul that the man of faith beheld. No; it was the army of the living God — an army under the command of the same Captain that had led His hosts through the Red Sea, through the terrible wilderness, and through Jordan. Nothing less, nothing lower than this, could satisfy faith.

But then, how little are the judgement and the actings of faith understood or valued when things get low amongst the people of God! This is very apparent on every page

of Israel's history, and, we may say, on every page of the Church's history also. The path of simple, childlike faith is far removed from human sight; and if the Lord's people sink into a low, carnal state, they can never understand the principle of power in the soul of one really acting by faith. He will be misunderstood in various ways, and have wrong motives attributed to him; he will be accused of setting himself up, or acting wilfully, independently. All these things must be expected by one who stands in the breach, at a time when things are low. Through lack of faith in the majority, a man is left alone, and then, when he is led to act for God, he will be misinterpreted.

Thus it was in David's case. Not only was he left alone in the time of difficulty, but he had to endure the taunt of the flesh, administered by Eliab, his eldest brother. "And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thy heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle" (1 Sam. 17: 28). This was the judgement of Eliab, in reference to the actings of David. "And David said, What have I now done? Is there not a cause?"

David was borne onward by an energy quite unknown to Eliab, nor was he careful to enter upon a defence of his course to his haughty brother. Why had not Eliab acted himself for the defence of his brethren? Why had not Abinadab or Shammah acted? Because they were faithless; simply this. Not only had those three men remained powerless, but the whole congregation had remained terror-stricken in the presence of the enemy,

and now, when one appeared in their midst whom God was about to use marvellously, not one could understand him.

"And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine." Precious faith! no difficulty deters it — nothing stands in its way. What was the Philistine to David? Nothing. His tremendous height, his formidable armour, were mere circumstances; and faith never looks at circumstances, but looks straight to God. Had not David's soul been buoyed up by faith, he could not have uttered the words, "Thy servant will go"; for, harken to the words of him who ought to have been the first to face Israel's dreadful enemy: "And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine." What language for the king of Israel! What a contrast between the man of office and the man of power!

Surely Saul ought to have gone forth in the defence of the flock which had been entrusted to his care; but, ah! Saul cared not for Israel, unless so far as Israel was connected with himself, and hence his exposing his person on their behalf never, we may safely say, entered his selfish heart; and not only was he unable and unwilling to act himself, but would fain clog the energies of one who, even now, was putting forth the precious fruits of that divine principle implanted within him, and which was about to prove him so fit for the high office which the purpose of God had assigned to him, and to which His anointing oil had dedicated him.

"Thou art not able." True, but Jehovah was; and David was leaning simply upon the strength of His arm. His faith laid hold of the ability of Him who had appeared to

Joshua beneath the walls of Jericho, with a sword drawn in His hand, as "Captain of the host of the Lord." David felt that Israel had not ceased to be the Lord's host, though so far sunk from what they were in Joshua's day. No; they were still the army of the Lord, and the battle was just as much the Lord's battle as when the sun and the moon were arrested in their course in order that Joshua might execute the judgement of God upon the Canaanites. Simple faith in God sustained the spirit of David, though Eliab might accuse him of pride, and Saul might talk of his want of ability.

There is nothing that can possibly give such energy and persevering power as the consciousness of acting for God, and that God is acting with us. This removes every obstacle; it lifts the soul above all human influence, and brings it into the very region of power omnipotent. Let us only be fully assured that we are on the Lord's side, and that His hand is acting with us, and nothing can drive us from the path of service and testimony — conduct us whither it may. "I can do all things," said the apostle, "through Christ which strengtheneth me." And again, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." The very weakest saint can do all things through Christ. But if man's eye rests on this weak saint, it seems like presumption to talk of "doing all things."

Thus, when Saul looked upon David, and compared him with Goliath, he judged rightly when he said, "Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth." It was a comparison of flesh with flesh, and, as such, it was quite correct. To compare a stripling with a giant would leave little room for hesitation as to the

issue of the conflict; but he ought to have compared the strength of Goliath with that of the God of the armies of Israel. This was what David did.

"And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: and I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God." This was the argument of faith. The hand that had delivered from one difficulty would deliver from another. There is no "if in all this. David did not wait for a sign; he simply said, "Thy servant will go." David had felt the power of God's presence with him in secret before he came forth to present himself in public as the servant of God and of Israel.

As another has remarked, David had not boasted of his triumph over the lion and the bear; no one seemed to have heard of it before; nor would he probably have spoken of it, had it not been for the purpose of showing what a solid ground of confidence he had in reference to the great work on which he was about to enter He would fain show that it was not in his own strength he was going forth. So was it in the matter of Paul's rapture to the third Heaven: for fourteen years had that circumstance remained buried as a secret with the apostle, nor would he have divulged it, had not the carnal reasonings of the Corinthians compelled him to do so.

Now, both these cases are full of practical instruction for us. With the majority of us, alas, there is too great a readiness to talk of our doings, or, at least, to think much of them. The flesh is prone to glory in anything that might exalt self; and if the Lord, despite of the evil in us, has accomplished any little service by our instrumentality, how speedily is it communicated in a spirit of pride and self-complacency. It is all right to speak of the Lord's grace, and to have our hearts filled with thankful adoration because of it; but this is very different from boasting of things connected with self.

David, however, kept the secret of his triumph over the lion and the bear concealed in his own bosom, and did not bring it forth until the fitting occasion; nor does he, even then, speak of himself as having achieved aught, but he simply says, "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine." Precious, self-renouncing faith! — faith that counts on God for everything, and trusts the flesh in nothing — faith which brings God into every difficulty, and leads us, with deepest thankfulness, to hide self, and give Him all the glory. May our souls know more and more of this blessed faith.

But it frequently needs much spirituality to detect the vast difference between the language of faith and the language of mere commonplace and formal religiousness. Saul assumed the garb and phraseology of religiousness; we have already seen much of this in his history, and we see it in his interview with David. Mere religiousness and faith here are seen in marked contrast. When David had made the clear and unequivocal statement of faith in the presence and

power of Jehovah, Saul added, "Go, and the Lord be with thee." But, ah, how little did he know what was involved in having the Lord with him. He seemed to trust the Lord, but in reality he trusted his armour. Had he understood what he said, why think of putting on armour? "The Lord be with thee" was in Saul's mouth a mere commonplace: it really meant nothing, for he had no idea of David's going simply with the Lord.

It is well to dwell upon, and distinctly point out, the evil of this — the evil of using words which, so far as we are concerned, mean nothing, but which involve a trifling with the Lord's name and truth. How often do we speak of trusting the Lord, when, in reality, we are leaning on some circumstance, or set of circumstances. How often do we speak of living by the day, in simple dependence upon God, when, if we judged the positive condition of our souls before God, we should find that we were looking to some human or earthly source of supply. This is a sad evil, and should be most carefully watched against.

It was just what Saul exhibited, when, having made use of the apparently devout expression, "The Lord be with thee," he proceeded to "arm David with his armour, and he put a helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with a coat of mail." He had no other idea but that David was to fight in the usual way. No doubt, it was professedly in the name of the Lord; but he thought David ought to use means. But it happens that we frequently speak of using means and really shut out God; we profess to use means in dependence upon God, and, in reality, use the mere name of God in dependence upon the means. This is virtually, and according to the judgement of faith, to make a God of our means.

Whether had Saul more confidence, in the Lord or in the armour? In the armour, no doubt; and so with all who do not truly walk by faith; it is the means they lean upon, and not upon God.

Perceive how strikingly all this bears upon the title of this little book, viz.; "The Life of Faith." We can hardly dwell upon any point in our subject more important than that suggested by the interesting scene on which we are immediately dwelling. The man of means, and the man of faith, are really before us; and we can at once perceive how far the latter proceeds in the use of means. Means are to be used, no doubt, but only such means as are perfectly consistent with the full and blessed action of faith, and also with the untarnished glory of the God of all power and grace. Now David felt that Saul's armour and coat of mail were not such means, and he, therefore, refused them. Had he gone with them, the victory would not have been so manifestly the Lord's. But David had professed his faith in the Lord's deliverance, and not in human armour. True, means will be used; but let us take care that our means do not shut out God. {Faith, waits on God, allows Him to use what means soever He pleases. It does not ask Him to bless our means, but lets Him use His own.}

"And David girded his sword upon his armour, and he assayed to go; for he had not proved it. And David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them. And David put them off him." Happy deliverance from the trammels of human policy! It has been observed, and most truly so, that David's trial was not when he met the giant, in actual conflict, but when he was tempted to use Saul's armour. Had the enemy succeeded in inducing him to go with that, all was gone; but, through grace, he rejected it, and thus left himself

entirely in the Lord's hands, and we know what security he found there. This is faith. It leaves itself in God's hand.

{How often it happens that the child of God or the servant of Christ, harnessed with human devices for his work, finds himself burdened and hampered with these trammels to obedience and faith. Let them be shaken off, through grace, and the soul cast upon God finds at once the joy and liberty for the service and energy of faith. Ed.}

And may we not apply this with much profit to the case of a poor helpless sinner in reference to the forgiveness of his sins? I believe we may. Satan will tempt such an one to seek some addition to the finished work of Christ — something that will detract from the glory of the Son of God as the only Saviour of sinners. Now to such I would say, It matters not what you add to the work of Christ — you make it of no avail. If it might be permitted to add anything, surely circumcision would have been admitted, as being an ordinance of divine institution; yet the apostle says, "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace" (Gal. 5: 2-4).

In a word, then, we must have Christ alone; we want no more, we can do with no less. If our works are to be put in with Christ's, then He is not sufficient. We dishonour the sufficiency of His atonement if we seek to connect aught of our own with it, just as David would have dishonoured the Lord by going forth to meet the

Philistine champion in Saul's armour. Doubtless many a so-called prudent man would have condemned what seemed to him to be the rashness and foolhardiness of the stripling indeed, the more practised a man was in human warfare, the more likely would he have been to condemn the course adopted by the man of faith. But what of that? David knew in whom he had believed; he knew it was not rashness that was leading him on, but simple faith in God's willingness and ability to meet him in his need.

Few, perhaps, in Saul's army knew the weakness of David as realized by himself in that trying moment. Though all eyes were fastened upon him as one having much self-confidence, yet we know what it was that buoyed up his heart, and gave firmness to his step as he went forth to meet the terrible foe. We know that the power of God was there just as manifestly as when the waters of the sea were divided to make a way for the ransomed to pass over; and when faith brings the power of God into action, nothing can stand in the way for a moment.

Verse 40 shows us David's armour. "And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling was in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine." So, we see, David did use means; but what means! What contempt does David cast upon the ponderous armour of his enemy! How his sling must have contrasted with Goliath's spear like a weaver's beam! In fact, David could not have inflicted a deeper wound upon the Philistine's pride than by coming against him with such weapons. Goliath felt this. "Am I a dog?" said he. It mattered not, in the judgement

of faith, what he was, dog or giant; he was an enemy of the people of God, and David was meeting him with the weapons of faith.

“Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into my hand... that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands.

{For the important distinction between the expressions, "Lord" and "Gods — Jehovah and Elohim — see Notes on the Book of Genesis chap. 2.}

Here we have the true object of the man of faith, viz., that Israel and all the earth might have a glorious testimony to the power and presence of God in the midst of His people. If David had used Saul's armour it would not have been known that the Lord saved not by sword and spear — his warfare would just seem like any other; but the sling and the stone while giving little prominence to him that used it, gave the glory to Him from whom the victory came.

{It is interesting to observe David's address to Goliath. He does not say, "I come to thee with a sling and a stone. " No; but, “in the name of the Lord of hosts." With him, it is not the means, but "the Lord of Hosts" on which he fixes his eyes.}

Faith ever honours God, and God ever honours faith. David, as has been already remarked, put himself into the hands of God, and the happy result of so doing was

victory — full, glorious victory. "David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him; but there was no sword in the hand of David." Magnificent triumph! Precious fruit of simple faith in God! How should it encourage the heart to cast away from it every carnal confidence, and to cling to the only true source of power.

David was made the happy instrument of delivering his brethren from the galling and terrifying threats of the uncircumcised Philistine; he had come into their midst, from the retirement of a shepherd's life, unknown and despised, though the anointed king of Israel; he had gone forth single-handed to meet the enemy of the congregation; he had laid him prostrate, and made a show of him openly; and all this, be it remembered, as the servant of God, and the servant of Israel, and in the energy of a faith which circumstances could not shake. It was a wondrous deliverance, gained by a single blow — no manoeuvring of armies — no skill of generals — no prowess of soldiers. No; a stone from the brook, slung by a shepherd's hand, settled the whole matter. It was the victory of faith.

“And when the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled." How vain are those hopes which are based on the perishable resources of flesh, in its greatest apparent strength and energy! Who that saw the giant and the stripling about to engage in conflict, but would have trembled for the latter? Who would have thought that all the massy armour would come to nothing before a sling and a stone? Yet see the end. The champion of the Philistines fell, and with him all their fondly-cherished hopes. "And the men of Israel and of Judah arose, and shouted, and pursued the Philistines."

Yes: they might well shout, for God was manifestly gone out before them, to deliver them from the power of their enemies. He had been working powerfully by the hand of one whom they knew not, nor recognized, as their anointed king, but whose moral grace might well attract every heart.

But amidst the many thousands who beheld the victory, we read of one whose whole soul was drawn forth in ardent affection for the victor. The most thoughtless must have been struck with admiration of the victory; and, no doubt, it affected individuals differently. At such times, in a certain sense, "the thoughts of many hearts are revealed." Some would envy, some would admire; some would rest in the victory; some in the instrument; some would have their hearts drawn up to "the God of the armies of Israel" who had again come amongst them with a drawn sword in His hand. But there was one devoted heart who was powerfully attracted to the person of the conqueror, and this was Jonathan.

"And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (1 Sam. 18: 1.) No doubt Jonathan participated more fully in the joy of all in the triumph of David; but there was more than this in it; it was not merely the triumph, but the person of the triumphant one that drew out the deep and ardent affections of Jonathan's soul. Saul might selfishly seek to retain the valiant David about his person, not because of love for his person, but simply to magnify himself. Not so Jonathan; he loved David. David had removed a load from his spirit, and filled up a great blank in his heart.

The challenge of the giant had, as it was each day repeated, developed the poverty of Israel. The eye might have ranged up and down the ranks in search of one able to meet the urgent need, but in vain. As the giant's vaunting words fell on their ears, all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him, and were sore afraid." "All," yes; all fled, when they heard his words, and saw his size. Terrible was the blank, therefore, left in the heart on this solemn occasion; and when a beloved one appeared to fill up that blank, what wonder that Jonathan's whole soul was drawn out in genuine affection for that one. And be it remembered, that it was David himself, and not his work only, that touched Jonathan's heart. He admired his victory surely, but his person more. It is well to note this, and trace its striking application to the true David.

That we are warranted in making such application will, surely, not be questioned. The whole scene, from first to last, is too remarkable to admit of a question. In Goliath we behold the power of the enemy by which he held the soul in grievous bondage. From this power there was no means of deliverance within human reach. The challenge might be repeated from day to day — but all in vain. From age to age might the solemn verdict be heard throughout the myriads of Adam's fallen posterity, "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgement"; and the only response which man could yield was, like Israel's response in the valley of Elah, dismay — deep, deep dismay. "Through fear of death, all our lifetime subject to bondage." This was man's response. The need was felt — the void unfilled. The human heart yearned for something, and yearned in vain. The claims of justice could not be met — death and

judgement frowned in the distance, and man could only tremble at the prospect.

But blessed be the God of all grace, a deliverer has appeared — One mighty to save, the Son of God, the true David, the Anointed King of Israel and of all the earth. He has met the need, filled up the blank, satisfied the yearnings of the heart. But how? where? when? By His death on Calvary, in that terrible hour when all creation was made to feel the solemn reality of what was being transacted. Yes, the cross was the field where the battle was fought, and the victory won. There it was that the strong man had all his armour taken from him, and his house spoiled. There, justice had its utmost claims fully satisfied; there, the handwriting of ordinances, which was against us, was nailed to the tree. There, too, the curse of a broken law was forever obliterated by the blood of the Lamb, and the needs of a guilty conscience satisfied by the same.

"The precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot," settled everything for the believing soul. The poor trembling sinner may stand by and behold the conflict, and the glorious issue thereof, and behold all the power of the enemy laid low by one stroke of his glorious Deliverer, and feel the heavy burden rolled away from his struggling spirit. The tide of divine peace and joy may flow into his soul, and he may walk abroad in the full power of the emancipation purchased for him by the blood, and proclaimed to him in the gospel.

And shall not one thus delivered love the Person of the deliverer? — not merely the work, but the Person? Ah! how can it be otherwise? Who that has felt the real

depth of his need, and groaned beneath the burden of his sins, can fail to love and adore that gracious One who has satisfied the one and removed the other? The work of Jesus is infinitely precious; it meets the sinner's need, and introduces the soul into a position in which it can contemplate the Person of Christ. In a word, then, the work of the Saviour is for the sinner; the Person of the Saviour is for the saint: what He has done, is for the former; what He is, is for the latter.

But there may be a mere formal following of Christ while the heart is cold and remains unacquainted with His person. In the sixth chapter of John, we find a multitude of persons following the Lord Jesus merely on selfish grounds, and He is constrained to tell them so: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek Me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled." It was not for what He was they were seeking Him, but for mere carnal advantage; and hence, when He applies to their hearts the searching statement, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, there is no life in you," we read, "Many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him." Now, eating His flesh, and drinking His blood, is, in other words, the soul finding its food, its satisfaction, in the offering of Himself in sacrifice for us.

The whole Gospel of John is a development of the personal glory of the Incarnate Word who is presented to us as "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." Yet the natural heart could not receive Him thus, and therefore, "many went back, and walked no more with Him." The majority could not bear to have this truth pressed upon them. But harken to the testimony of one taught of God: "Peter answered and

said, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life; and we believe and are sure that Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Here we have the two things, viz.: what He had for them, what He was to them. He had eternal life to give, and He was the Son of the living God; by the former, the sinner is drawn to Him; by the latter, the saint is bound to Him. He not only meets all our necessities as sinners by His work, but also satisfies our affections and desires as saints by His Person.

This train of thought has been suggested by the deeply interesting and touching interview between David and Jonathan, when the conflict was over. The many thousands of Israel had raised the shout of triumph, and pursued the Philistines to reap the fruits of victory, while Jonathan was delighting himself in the person of the victor. "And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle." This was love, pure, simple, unaffected love — undivided occupation with an attractive object. Love strips itself for the sake of its object. David had forgotten himself and put his life in jeopardy for God and the congregation, and now Jonathan would forget himself for David.

Reader, let us remember that love to Jesus is the spring of true Christianity. Love to Jesus makes us strip ourselves; and, we may say, that to strip self to honour Jesus is the fairest fruit of the work of God in the soul.

Talk they of morals? O Thou bleeding Lamb,

The great morality is love to Thee.

Very different were the feelings with which Saul regarded the person and work of David. He had not learnt to forget himself and rejoice to see the work done by another. It is the work of grace to be able to do this. We all naturally like to be or to do something — to be looked at and thought of. Thus it was with Saul; he was a self-important man, and was, therefore, little able to bear the songs of the maids of Israel: "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." Saul could not brook the idea of being second. He forgot how he had trembled at the voice of Goliath; though cowardly he would fain be counted brave and valiant. "And Saul eyed David from that day and forward." Terrible eye! — the eye of envy and bitter jealousy.

{It requires a very simple heart and single eye to be able to rejoice as unfeignedly in the fruit of another's labours as in that of our own hands. Had the glory of God and the good of His people filled Sail's heart, he would not have spent a thought upon the question as to the numbers attributed to him or to David. Alas, he sought his own glory. This was the secret of his envy and jealousy. Oh, what sacred rest, what true elevation, what perfect quietness of spirit flows from self-renunciation, such self-renunciation as results from having the heart wholly occupied with Christ! When we are honestly seeking the promotion of Christ's glory we shall not be careful as to the instrument.}

We shall have the occasion to trace the development both of Jonathan's love and Saul's hatred, as we proceed in this work, and must now trace the man of faith through other scenes.

Part 3 THE CAVE OF ADULLAM

From amid the brilliant lustre of the valley of Elah, David passed into very different scenes in the household of Saul, where envious looks and heartless attempts upon his life were the only returns for the soothing notes of his harp, and the valiant exploits of his sling and his sword. Saul owed his continuance on the throne, under God, to David, yet the javelin was Saul's return. But the Lord in His mercy kept His dear servant, amid all the intricacies of his extremely difficult position. "David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the Lord was with him. Wherefore, when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him. But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them."

Thus was David, while anointed king of Israel, called upon to endure the hatred and reproach of the ruling power, though loved by all who were enabled to trace his moral worth. It was impossible that Saul and David could continue to dwell together; being of totally opposite principles, a separation must necessarily take place. David knew that he was anointed king, but Saul occupied the throne, and he was quite content to wait on God, and in meekness abide His time. Till then, the Spirit of Christ led him in the path of an exile. His way to the throne lay through multiplied sorrows and difficulties. He, like his blessed Master and antitype, was called to suffering first, and glory afterwards.

David would have served Saul to the end — he honoured him as "the Lord's anointed." If the moving of his finger would have set him on the throne, he would not have taken advantage of it. Of this we have the fullest evidence in his having twice saved Saul's life, when, to all appearance, the Lord had put him in his power. David

waited simply upon God. Here was his strength, his elevation — his entire dependence. He could say, "My soul wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from Him."

Hence we see that David was carried happily through all the snares and dangers of his path as a servant in the household and army of Saul. The Lord delivered him from every evil work, and preserved him unto that kingdom which He had prepared for him, and to which it was His purpose to raise him "after that he had suffered a while." David had, as it were, but just issued from the place of secret discipline and training, to appear in the battlefield, and, having accomplished his work there, he was called to take his place again on the form, to learn some deeper lessons in the school of Christ.

The Lord's lessons are often painful and difficult, because of the waywardness or indolence of our hearts; but every fresh lesson learned, every fresh principle imbibed, only fits us the more for all that is yet before us. Yet it is blessed to be the disciples of Christ, and to yield ourselves to His gracious discipline and training. The end will unfold to us the blessedness of such a place. Nor need we wait for the end; even now, the soul finds it most happy to be subject, in all things, to the Master. "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (Matt. 11: 28-30). There are, we may say, three rests spoken of in Scripture. First, is the rest which, as sinners, we find in the accomplished work of Christ. Secondly, the present rest, which, as saints, we find in being entirely subject to the will of God; this

is opposed to restlessness. Third by, the rest that remains for the people of God.

Now, David knew much of the blessedness of the second of these rests, inasmuch as he was entirely subject to the counsel and will of God, in reference to the kingdom. He was prepared to wait for God's time, being assured that it was the best and wisest time. He could say, My times are in Thy hand;

Father, I wish them there.

This subjection is truly desirable. It saves us from much anxiety of heart and restlessness. When we walk in the habitual conviction that God is making “all things to work together for our good," the spirit is most wonderfully tranquillised. We shall never set about planning for ourselves if we believe that God is planning for us; we shall be satisfied to leave all to Him. But alas, how often is it otherwise with us. How often do we vainly imagine that we can manage matters better than the blessed God. We may not say so in so many words; yet we virtually feel and act as if it were so. The Lord grant unto us a more subdued and confiding spirit. The supremacy of the will of God over that of the creature will characterise the millennial age; but the saint is called now to let the will of God rule him in all things.

It was this subjection of spirit that led David to give way in the matter of the kingdom, and to take his place in the lonely cave of Adullam. He left Saul, and the kingdom, and his own destinies in the hands of God, assured that all would yet be well. And, oh, how happy was it for him to find himself outside the unhealthy atmosphere of Saul's house, and from under the jealous glance of Saul's eye! He could breathe more freely in the

cave, however it might seem in man's view, than in the household of Saul. So will it ever be; the place of separation is the freest and the happiest. The Spirit of the Lord was departed from Saul, and this was faith's warrant for separation from his person, while, at the same time, there was the fullest subjection to his power as the king of Israel. The intelligent mind will have no difficulty in distinguishing between these two things. The separation and the subjection should both be complete.

{The New Testament teaches the Christian to be subject to the powers that be, but it never contemplates the idea of his being in the place of power. Hence, there are no directions for a Christian as a king or a magistrate, though there is ample guidance for a Christian as a husband, a father, a master, or a servant. This speaks volumes.}

But we must view Saul not only in a secular but also in a religious point of view; and it was in reference to the religious element in his personal character and official capacity, that there was the greatest need for distinct and decided separation. Saul had manifested throughout a desire to rule the conscience in religious matters; witness the scene in 1 Sam. 14, where, as we have seen, spiritual energy was cramped and hindered by Saul's religious rule. Now, when such rule is set up, there is no alternative but separation. When form without power prevails, the solemn word of the Holy Ghost is, "From such turn away." Faith never stops to inquire, Whither shall I "turn"? We are told what to turn away from, and we may be sure that, when we have yielded obedience to this, we shall be left at no loss as to the rest.

However, we shall see this principle in a much clearer light when we regard David in a typical point of view. In reality, David was forced into the place of separation, and thus, as one rejected of man, and anointed of God, we see him a type of Christ in His present rejection. David was, in principle, God's king, and as such experienced man's hostility, being driven into exile to avoid death. The cave of Adullam became the great gathering point for all who loved David and were wearied of the unrighteous rule of Saul. So long as David remained in the king's house, there was no call upon any one to separate; but the moment the rejected David took his place outside, no one could remain neutral; wherefore we read, "Every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men."

Here was, then, the line of distinction clearly marked. It was now David, or Saul. All who loved form, loved an empty name, a powerless office, continued to adhere to Saul; but all who were dissatisfied with these things, and loved the person of God's anointed king, flocked around him in the hold. The prophet, priest, and king were there — the thoughts and sympathies of God were there, and though the company assembled there must have presented a strange appearance to the carnal and the worldly, yet it was a company gathered round the person of David, and linked with his destinies. It was composed of men whose very condition seems to have driven them to David, but who were now deriving character and distinction from their nearness and devotedness to the person of the beloved. Away from Saul, away from all

that marked the day of his power, they could enjoy the sweetness of unhindered fellowship with the person of him who, though now rejected, was ere long to ascend the throne and wield the sceptre, to the glory of God and the joy of His people.

You may clearly perceive in David and his despised company a precious sample of the true David, and those who prefer companionship with Him to all the joys, the honours, and emoluments of earth. Those who had cast in their lot with David — what had they to do with the interests of Saul? They had found a new object, a new centre, and communion with God's anointed.

Nor was their place about the person of David dependent on, or connected with, what they had been. No; it mattered not what they had been; they were now the servants of David, and he was their captain. This gave them their character. They had cast in their lot with God's exile; their interest and his were identical. Happy company! Happy to escape from the rule and influence of Saul — still more happy to find themselves in companionship with God's anointed king. Their discontent, their distress, their debt, were all forgotten in their new circumstances. The grace of David was their present portion; the glory of David their future prospect.

Just so should it be with Christians now. Through grace, and the gentle leadings of the Father, we have found our way to Jesus — the anointed and rejected Jesus — now hidden with God. No doubt, we all had our respective features of character in the days of our guilt and folly — some discontented, some in distress, all in heavy debt to God — miserable, ruined, guilty, void of everything

which could recommend us to Christ: yet God has led us to the feet of His dear Son, where we have found pardon and peace through His precious blood: Jesus has removed our discontent, alleviated our distress, cancelled our debt, brought us near His beloved person.

What return are we making for all this grace? Are we gathering, in ardent affection, round the Captain of our salvation? Are we weaned from the state of things under Saul? Are we living as those who are waiting for the day when our David shall mount the throne? Are our affections set upon things above? "If ye then be risen with Christ," says the apostle, "seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory" (Col. 3: 1-4).

It is greatly to be feared that few really enter into the true nature and practical consequences of their position as associated with the crucified and risen Jesus — few really enter into the depth and meaning of our Lord's words, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world"; or of the Spirit's word, "The Sanctifier and the sanctified are all of one." The measure of the saint's separation from the world is nothing less than Christ's; i.e., the principle of it. Looked at practically, alas, it is quite another thing; but in principle there is no difference. It is of vast importance to enforce this principle. The actual standing, calling and hopes of the Church as so feebly apprehended.

Yet the feeblest believer in Christ is, in God's view, as separate from all belonging to earth as Jesus. It is not a

matter of attainment, but of our standing, through grace: not an object after which we must strive, but a point from which we must start. Many have been led astray by the idea that we must work up to a heavenly position by shaking off the things of earth. This is to begin at the wrong end. It is the same error, only in reference to another department of truth, as to assert that we must work up to a condition of justification, by mortifying the sins of the flesh. Now, we do not mortify self in order to be justified, but because we are justified; yea, dead and risen with Christ.

In like manner, we do not put away things of earth in order to become heavenly, but because we are so. Abram's calling was to leave kindred and go to Canaan; our calling is a heavenly one (of which Canaan was a type), and in proportion as we enter into it we will be separate from earth. But to make our standing the result of conduct, instead of conduct the result of standing, is a grievous error.

Ask a saint, really intelligent as to the heavenly calling, to give a reason for his standing apart from the present world: what will he reply? Will he tell you that he does so in order to become heavenly? Nay. Will he tell you that it is because the present world is under judgement? Nay. No doubt it is under judgement, but this is not the true ground of separation. What then? "We have died, and our life is hid with Christ in God." — "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." "Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling," etc. Here we have the grand reason for the saint's present separation from the world. It does not matter what the world is, be it good or bad; he is not of it, though in it, as the place of his daily toil, conflict, and discipline.

Christian! ponder well your heavenly calling — it is the only thing that will give full deliverance from the power and influence of worldliness. Men may seek abstraction from the world in various ways, but there is only one in which to attain separation from it. Again, men may seek to render themselves unearthly in various ways; there is only one way in which we can become really heavenly. Abstraction is not separation; nor is unearthliness to be mistaken for heavenliness. The monastic system illustrates very fully the distinction between these things. A sincere monk is unearthly, in a certain sense, but by no means heavenly; he is unnatural, but by no means spiritual; he is abstracted from the world, but by no means separated from it.

The Christian's heavenly calling is in virtue of what Christ is, and where He is. The heart instructed by the Holy Ghost as to the meaning of Heb. 2: 11, finds the reason and power of his deliverance from the principles, habits, pursuits, feelings, and tendencies of this present age. The Lord Jesus has taken His place on high as Head of the body, the Church; and the Holy Ghost has come down to lead all the foreknown and predestinated members of Christ into living fellowship with the living Head, now rejected from earth, and hidden with God. Hence in the gospel, as preached by Paul, the remission of sins is inseparably connected with the heavenly calling, inasmuch as he preached the unity of the one body on earth with its Head in Heaven. He preached justification, not merely as an abstract thing, but as the result of what the Church is, as one with Christ, who is now at the right hand of God, Head over all things to His Church, angels and principalities being made subject to Him. Paul preached remission of sins, no doubt, but he

preached it all with the fullness, depth, power, and energy which the doctrine of the Church imparts to it.

The Epistle to the Ephesians teaches us not only that God can forgive sinners, but far more than this: it unfolds to us the wondrous truth that believers are members of the body of Christ; "for we," says the apostle, "are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones." Again, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved); and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Again, "Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word. That He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." These passages present far more than mere remission of sins. To be the bride of the Lamb is a very much higher, very much more glorious thing than only to have our sins forgiven.

Yet 'tis not that we know the joy

Of cancell'd sin alone,

But, happier far, Thy saints are call'd

To share Thy glorious throne.

Just so, the blessed God has gone beyond all man's thoughts in His mode of dealing with the Church. He has called us, not only to walk here below in the full sense of His pardoning love, but also to know the love of Christ to His body, the Church, and the high and holy dignity of that Church, as seated in the heavenlies.

My reader may perhaps inquire what has the cave of Adullam to do with the Church's place in the heavens? It has to do with it only so far as it illustrates the present place of rejection into which Christ has entered, and which all must know who enjoy fellowship with Him. Of course, neither David nor his men knew anything about the heavenly calling as the Church now knows it. We may frequently discover in Old Testament Scriptures, foreshadowings of the heavenly calling, in the character, walk, and circumstances of certain prominent persons which are introduced to our notice.

But the heavenly calling, properly speaking, was not known until the Lord Jesus took His seat on high, and the Holy Ghost came down to baptize believers, Jew and Gentile, into one body; then the heavenly calling was developed in all its power and fullness. This truth was peculiarly committed to Paul; it was an essential part of the mystery committed to him, and was embodied in these words, "Why persecutest thou ME?" Saul was persecuting the saints, and the Lord Jesus appeared to him in heavenly glory, and told him that these saints were part of Himself — His members on earth. Henceforth this became Paul's great thesis; in it was involved the oneness of the Church with Christ, and therefore the heavenly calling of the Church.

Observe that all this was not merely an admission of the Gentile into the Jewish fold.* No, it was taking both Jew and Gentile out of their circumstances in nature, and setting them down in new circumstances — new to both. The work of the Cross was needful to break down the middle wall of partition, and to make of twain one new man, i.e., to make of Jew and Gentile a new heavenly man, separated from earth and its aims. The present

place of Christ in the heavens is connected with His rejection by Israel, during what is called the Church period, and serves to bring out still more distinctly the heavenly character of the Church of God. She belongs to Heaven, and is called to manifest on earth the living energy of the Holy Ghost who dwells in her.

{*I would say a word here, on the opening verses of John 10. The Lord Jesus presented Himself at the door of the Jewish fold, and having obtained entrance, called out His sheep that were therein, and then He says, "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one flock, and one Shepherd." It is strange that the translators should have rendered this "one fold," when the word fold actually occurs in the same verse. Nor is the distinction unimportant. A fold is an enclosure for the separation and safety of the sheep; hence the word is properly applied to the Jewish economy, Now, however, it is no longer a fold — an earthly arrangement — a penning up of sheep here below. But the heavenly Shepherd has called forth His Jewish sheep from the earthly fold, and His Gentile sheep from the dark mountains of this wide world, and made them one flock, giving them freedom, and committed them into the Father's hand. Thus we see the difference between the words "fold" and "flock."}

Thus, as David's men were withdrawn from all connection with Saul's system by virtue of their association with him, so all those who are led by the Spirit to know their oneness with the rejected Jesus, must feel themselves dissociated from present things, by reason of that blessed oneness with Him.

Hence, if you ask a heavenly man why he does not mix himself up with the plans and pursuits of this age, his reply will be, Because Christ is at the right hand of God, and I am identified with Him. He has been cast out by this world and I take my place with Him, apart therefore from its objects and pursuits. All who understand the true nature of the heavenly calling will walk in separation from the world; but those who do not, will just take their portion here, and live as others.

Many, alas, are satisfied with the mere knowledge of the forgiveness of sins, and never think of going further. They have passed through the Red Sea, it may be, but manifest no desire to cross the Jordan, and eat the old corn of the land of promise. Just as it was in the day of David's rejection; many, though Israelites, did not cast in their lot in rejection with him. It was one thing to be an Israelite; it was another thing to be with David in the hold. Even Jonathan was not there; he still adhered to the old system of things. Though loving David as his own soul, he lived and died in companionship with Saul. True, he ventured to speak for David, and sought his company when he could. He had stripped himself to clothe David; yet he did not cast in his lot with him. And, consequently, when the names and the deeds of David's worthies are heralded by the Holy Ghost, we look in vain for the name of the affectionate Jonathan; when the devoted companions of David's exile were mustering round his throne in the sunshine of his royal countenance, poor Jonathan was mingled with the dust, having ingloriously fallen, on mount Gilboa, by the hands of the uncircumcised Philistines!

Oh that all who profess to love the Lord Jesus Christ may seek a more decided identification with Him in this

the time of His rejection! The citizens have sent a message after Him, saying, "We will not have this man to reign over us"; and shall we go and associate ourselves with those citizens to forward their Christ-rejecting plans? God forbid. May our hearts be with Him where He is. May we know the hallowed fellowship of the cave of Adullam, where the Prophet, Priest, and King are to be found, embodied in the beloved Person of Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood.

We cannot walk with Saul and David at the same time. We cannot hold Christ and the world — we must take our choice. The Lord grant us grace to reject the evil and choose the good, remembering the solemn words of the apostle: "This is a faithful saying; for if we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us." This is the time of suffering, the time for enduring afflictions and hardness; we must wait for the time of rest and glory.

David's men were called, by reason of their association with him, to undergo much toil and fatigue, but love made all light and easy to them; and their names and exploits were recorded and faithfully remembered when David was at rest in his kingdom. None were forgotten. The twenty-third chapter of Second Samuel will furnish the reader with the precious catalogue, and will, no doubt, lead his mind onward to the time when the Lord Christ shall reward His faithful servants — those who from love to His person, and by the energy of His Spirit, have performed acts of service for Him in the time of His rejection. These acts may not be seen, known, or thought of by men; but Jesus knows them, and will publicly declare them from the throne of His glory. Who

would ever have known the acts of David's worthies if the Holy Ghost had not recorded them? Who would have known of the three who drew water from the well of Bethlehem? Who would have known of the slaying of a lion in a pit, in the time of snow?

Just so now: many a heart throbs with love to the Person of the Saviour, unknown to all; and many a hand may be stretched forth in service to Him, unobserved by human eye. It is sweet to think it is so, specially in an age of cold formality like the present — sweet to think of those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Some there are, alas, who are not only indifferent to His beloved Person, but who even go as far as to traduce Him — to rob Him of His dignity, and make Him little better than Elias, or one of the prophets. But we shall not dwell upon these; we have, thank God, a happier theme, and we shall, with His help, pursue it.

We shall think of those valued men who jeoparded their lives for the sake of their captain, and who, the instant he uttered his desire, were ready, at all cost, to gratify it. Love never pauses to calculate. It was quite sufficient for those worthies to know that David longed for a drink from the well of Bethlehem, and they procured it at any cost to themselves: "And these three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, that was by the gate, and took it and brought it to David: nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord."* Lovely scene! Sweet sample of what the Church ought to be! Loving not her life unto the death for Christ's sake.

{*There is something peculiarly touching and beautiful in the above scene, whether we contemplate the act of

the three mighty men in procuring the water for David, or David's act in pouring it out to the Lord. It is evident that David discerned, in an act of such uncommon devotedness, a sacrifice which none but the Lord Himself was worthy to receive. The odour of such a sacrifice was far too fragrant for him to interrupt it in its ascent to the throne of the God of Israel. Wherefore he, very properly and gracefully, allows it to pass him by, in order that it might go up to the One who alone was worthy to receive it, or able to appreciate it. All this reminds us, forcibly, of that beautiful compendium of Christian devotedness set forth in Phil. 2: 17, 18: "Yea, and if I be poured out upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all: for this cause do ye also joy and rejoice with me." In this passage, the apostle represents the Philippian saints in their character as priests, presenting a "sacrifice" and performing a priestly ministration to God and such was the intensity of his self — forgetting devotedness, that he could rejoice in his being poured out as a drink offering upon their sacrifice, so that all might ascend, in fragrant odour, to God. The Philippians laid a sacrifice on God's altar, and the apostle was poured out upon it, and all went up to God as an odour of sweet smell. It mattered not who put the sacrifice on the altar, or who was poured out thereupon, providing that God received what was acceptable to Him. This, truly is a divine model for Christian devotedness. Would that we had grace to form our ways according to it. There would, then, be far less of "my sayings," and "my doings," and "my goings."}

Oh that the Holy Ghost may kindle within us a flame of ardent love to the person of Jesus — may He unfold to

our souls more of the divine excellencies of His person, that we may know Him to be the fairest amongst ten thousand, and altogether lovely, and be able to say with a true worthy, "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" (Phil. 3: 8).

Part 4 NABAL AND ABIGAIL 1 Samuel 25

It is interesting to observe, as we pass from stage to stage of David's history, how different individuals were affected toward his person, and the consequent position assumed in reference to him. It required energy of faith to discern, in the despised outcast, the future king of Israel. In this chapter we are presented with two striking examples of persons thus variously affected in reference to David's person and career.

"There was a man in Maon, whose possessions were in Carmel; and the man was very great, and he had three thousand sheep, and a thousand goats; and he was shearing his sheep in Carmel. Now the name of the man was Nabal." This Nabal was an Israelite, and he appears in marked contrast with David, who, though anointed king of Israel, had not where to lay his head, but was a wanderer from mountain to mountain, and from cave to cave. Nabal was a selfish man, with no sympathy for David. If he had blessings, he had them for himself; if he was "great," he had no idea of sharing his greatness with any one else, and least of all with David and his companions.

And David heard in the wilderness that Nabal did shear his sheep. And David sent out ten young men, and David

said to the young men, Get you up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and greet him in my name," etc. David was in the wilderness; this was his place. Nabal was surrounded by all the comforts of life. The former owed all his sorrows and privations to what he was; the latter owed all his possessions and enjoyments to what he was.

Now, we generally find that where advantages are derived from religious distinction and profession, much selfishness exists. The profession of truth, if not connected with self-denial, will be connected with positive self-indulgence; and hence we may observe at the present day a determined spirit of worldliness connected with the very highest profession of truth. This is a grievous evil. The apostle was made to feel the anguish of it, even in his time. "Many," says he, "walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things" (Phil. 3: 18-19). Observe, they are the enemies of the Cross of Christ. They do not throw off any semblance of Christianity; far from it. "Many walk." This expression shows a measure of profession.

The persons here pictured would, doubtless, be much offended were any to refuse them the appellation of Christians; but then they do not want to take up the Cross; they desire not practical identification with a crucified Christ; whatever amount of professed Christianity can be had apart from all self-denial is welcome to them, but not one jot beyond this. "Their God is their belly, and they mind earthly things." Ah, how many must plead guilty to the charge of minding earthly things! It is easy to make a profession of the

religion of Christ, while Christ Himself is unknown, and the cross of Christ is hated. It is easy to take up the name of Jesus into the lips, and walk in self-indulgence and love of the world, which the human heart knows so well how to estimate. All this finds its full illustration in the person of the churlish Nabal, who having shut himself up in the midst of his luxuries and wealth, cared not for God's anointed, nor felt for him in the season of his painful exile and sojourn in the wilderness.

What was his reply to David's touching appeal? "Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now-a-days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not whence they be?" Here was the secret of this worldly man's estrangement of heart; he did not know him; had he known him, it would have been a very different matter: but he neither knew who he was nor whence he was; he did not know that he was railing on the Lord's anointed, and casting from him, in his selfish folly, the privilege of ministering to the need of the future king of Israel.

The moral of all this is deeply instructive. It demands the clear vision of faith to enable any one to discern the true glory of Christ, and cleave to Him in the time of His rejection. It is one thing to be a Christian, as people say, and another thing to confess Christ before men. Indeed, one can hardly find anything more selfish than that condition of heart which would lead us to take all that Jesus has to give, and yield Him nothing in return. "Provided I am saved, all the rest is unessential." This is the secret thought of many a heart, and if thrown into a

more honest form would be this, "If I am sure of salvation, it matters little about the glory of Christ."

This was just Nabal's mode of acting; he reaped all the advantage he could from David; but the moment David put in his claim for sympathy and aid, his worldly spirit developed itself. "One of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying, Behold, David sent messengers out of the wilderness, to salute our master; and he railed on them. But the men were very good unto us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we anything, as long as we were conversant with them when we were in the fields. They were a wall unto us both by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep." This was all very well. Nabal could well understand the value of David's protection, though he cared not for David's person. So long as David's men were a wall to his possessions, he would tolerate them; but when they would become a burden, they were rejected and railed upon.

Now, as might be expected, Nabal's acting was directly contrary to Scripture, as his spirit was decidedly contrary to the spirit of its divine Author. It is written in the fifteenth chapter of Deuteronomy, "If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren, within any of thy gates, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thy hand from thy poor brother; but thou shalt open thy hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the Lord against thee, and it be sin unto

thee." Precious grace! How like God. How unlike Nabal! Grace would keep the heart wide open to every object of need; whereas selfishness would close it against every applicant. Nabal ought to have obeyed the word, independently of his knowledge of David; but his selfishness was too deep a character to allow of his obedience to the Lord's word, or his love to the Lord's anointed.

However, Nabal's selfishness led to very important results; it led, in David's case, to the exhibition of much that was calculated to humble him in the presence of God. He is here seen to come down from the high elevation which usually characterised him, through the grace of God. No doubt, it was deeply trying to meet with such base ingratitude from one to whom he had been a wall of defence; it was galling, too, to be reproached on the very ground of those circumstances in which faithfulness had called him; to be accused of breaking away from his master at the very time that he was being hunted as a partridge through the mountains. All this was hard to bear, and, in the first ebullition of feeling, David gives expression to words which would not bear the examination of the sanctuary. "Gird ye on every man his sword," was not just the language which we should have expected from one who had hitherto walked in such a meek and gentle spirit. The Scripture just quoted presents the resource of the poor brother, viz.: to "cry unto the Lord," not to draw his sword for revenge.

Nabal's selfishness could never have been remedied by the sword of David, nor would faith ever have adopted such a course. We do not find David acting thus in reference to Saul; he left him entirely to God, and even

when induced to cut off the skirt of his robe, his heart smote him. Why did he not act thus toward Nabal? Because he was not in communion; he was off his guard, and the enemy took advantage of him. Nature will ever lead us to vindicate ourselves, and resent every injury. The heart will secretly murmur, "He had no right to treat me thus; I really cannot bear it, nor do I think I ought to do so." This may be so, but the man of faith at once rises above all such things; he sees God in everything; the jealousy of Saul, the folly of Nabal, all is looked at as coming from the hand of God, and met in the secret of His holy presence. The instrument is nothing to faith; God is in all. This gives real power to move on through all sorts of circumstances. If we do not trace God in everything, we shall be constantly ensnared.

We shall have occasion, as we proceed with our subject, to trace this principle more fully, and shall now turn to another character introduced to our notice in this instructive chapter. This is Abigail, the wife of Nabal, "a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance." A noble testimony, surely, and one which shows that grace can manifest itself in the most untoward circumstances. The house of the churlish Nabal must have been a withering scene to one like Abigail; but she waited on God, and, as we shall see, was not disappointed.

The case of this remarkable woman is full of encouragement and instruction to all who may find themselves, cramped and hindered by unavoidable connections and associations. To all such the history of Abigail simply says, Be patient, wait on God, do not suppose yourself void of all opportunity for testimony. The Lord may be much glorified by meek subjection, and

will, assuredly, give relief and victory in the end. True, some may have to reproach themselves for having formed such connections, or entered into such associations; but even so, if the folly and evil are really felt, confessed, and judged before God, and the soul brought into an attitude of thorough subduedness, the end will be blessing and peace.

In Abigail we see one who was actually used to correct no less a personage than David himself. It may be that her course, up to the time at which the sacred historian introduces her to our notice, had been marked by much that was painful and trying; indeed, it could hardly have been otherwise, associated with such an one as Nabal. Time, however, brought to light the grace that was in her. She had suffered in obscurity, and was now about to be raised to an unusually high elevation. Few had seen her patient service and testimony; but many beheld her exaltation. The burden which she had borne in secret was about to drop off before many witnesses. The preciousness of Abigail's service did not consist in her having saved Nabal from the sword of David, but in keeping David from drawing the sword at all.

"Now David had said, Surely in vain have I kept all that this fellow hath in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that pertained unto him; and he hath requited me evil for good." This was terrible! And David was rashly taking himself out of the place of dependence — the only happy, the only holy place. Nor was it on behalf of the congregation of the Lord. No, it was to avenge himself on one who had treated him badly. Sad mistake! Happy was it for him, that there was an Abigail in the house of Nabal who was about to be used of God to keep him from answering a fool according to his folly.

This was just what the enemy desired. Nabal's selfishness was used by Satan to ensnare David, and Abigail was the Lord's instrument to deliver him.

It is well when the man of God can detect Satan's working; to be able so to do, he must be much in the presence of God, for there alone can he find light and spiritual power to enable him to cope with such a foe. When out of communion, the soul becomes distracted by looking at secondary causes, and subordinate agents, just as David was distracted by looking at Nabal. Had he paused to view the matter calmly before God, we should not have had such words as, "In vain have I kept all that this fellow hath in the wilderness"; he would have passed on, and left "this fellow" to himself. Faith imparts real dignity to the character, and superiority over the petty circumstances of this transient scene. Those who know themselves as pilgrims and strangers, will remember that the sorrows as well as the joys of this life are evanescent, and they will not be inordinately affected by either the one or the other. "Passing away," is written on everything; the man of faith must, therefore, look upwards and onward.

Now Abigail, by the grace of God, delivered David from the unhappy influence of the present, by leading his soul onward into the future: we learn this from her exquisite address to him. "And when Abigail saw David, she hasted, and lighted off the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and fell at his feet, and said, Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be; and let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak in thine audience, and hear the words of thine handmaid. Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal; for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his

name, and folly is with him: but I thine handmaid saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send. Now, therefore, my lord, as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, seeing the Lord hath withholden thee from coming to shed blood, and from avenging thyself with thine own hand, now let thine enemies and they that seek evil to my lord, be as Nabal... for the Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house; because my lord fighteth the battles of the Lord, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy days.

"Yet a man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul; but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God; and the souls of thine enemies, them shall He sling out, as out of the middle of a sling. And it shall come to pass, when the Lord shall have done to my lord according to ad the good that Be hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have appointed thee ruler over Israel, that this shall be not grief unto thee, nor offence of heart unto my lord, either that thou hast shed blood causeless, or that my lord hath avenged himself; but when the Lord shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thine handmaid."

We can hardly conceive anything more touching than this address; every point in it was calculated to touch the heart. She presents to him the evil of seeking to avenge himself; the weakness and folly of the object of his revenge, — she reminds him of his proper occupation, viz., "fighting the Lord's battles. This must have brought home to his heart the humiliating circumstances in which Abigail met him, even rushing on to fight his own battle.

However, perceive that the leading point in this address is the special reference to the future. "The Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house." "The soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God." "When the Lord shall have done to my lord," etc.; "and shall have appointed thee ruler over Israel." All these allusions to David's future blessing and glory were eminently calculated to withdraw his heart from his present grievance. The sure house, the bundle of life, and the kingdom, were far better than Nabal's flocks and herds; and in the view of these glories, David could well afford to leave him to his portion, and his portion to him.

To the heir of a kingdom, a few sheep could have but little attraction; and one who knew that he had the anointing oil of the Lord upon his head might easily bear to be called a runaway servant. All these things Abigail knew — knew as matters of faith. She knew David, and knew his high destinies. By faith she recognized in the despised outcast the future king of Israel. Nabal knew not David. He was a man of the world, swallowed up with present things. With him there was nothing more important, nothing more influential, than "my bread, my flesh, my shearers"; it was all self; there was no room for David or his claims. This might be expected from such an one; but surely it was not for David to go down from his elevation to grapple with a poor worldling about his perishable possessions. Ah, no; the kingdom should have filled his eye, and engaged his thoughts, and lifted his spirit above all lower influences.

Look at the Master Himself, as He stood at the bar of a poor worm — the creation of His own hand — how did He conduct Himself? Did He call upon His little band of

followers to gird on every man his sword? Did He say of the man who dared to sit as His judge, "In vain have I imparted unto this fellow all he is, and all he has?" No; He looked above and beyond Pilate, Herod, the chief priests, and scribes. He could say, "The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" This kept His spirit tranquil, while, at the same time, He could look forward into the future, and say, "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." Here was real power over present things. The millennial kingdom, with all its untold joys, with all its heights and depths of glory, glistened in the distance with everlasting light and brilliancy, and the eye of the Man of Sorrows rested upon it, in that dark hour when the scoffs and sneers, the taunts and reproaches of guilty sinners were falling upon His blessed person.

Dear Christian reader, this is our model; thus ought we to meet the trials and difficulties, the reproach, obloquy, and desertion of this present time. We should view ad in the light of "hereafter. " "Our light affliction," says an eminent sufferer, "which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Again, "But the God of all grace, who hath called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?" Yes; suffering must come first and glory afterwards; and any one who, by his own hand, would seek to take off the edge of present suffering and reproach, proves that the

kingdom is not filling the vision of his soul — that now is more influential with him than "hereafter."

How we ought to bless our God for having opened to us such a vista of glory in the ages to come! How it enables us to tread, with a buoyant step, our rugged path through the wilderness! How it lifts us above the things which engross the children of this world!

We're not of the world, which fadeth away,

We're not of the night, but children of day;

The chains that once bound us by Jesus are riven,

We're strangers on earth, and our home is in Heaven.

May we prove the sacred reality of this more, as we pass along through "this vale of tears." Truly the heart would sink and the spirit faint, were we not sustained by hope — even the hope of glory, which, thank God, maketh not ashamed, for the Spirit is the earnest of it in our hearts.

In pursuing the narrative of David and Abigail a little further, we have a still more striking example of the vast difference between the child of nature and the child of faith. Abigail returned from her interview with David, and found Nabal "very drunken; wherefore she told him nothing, less or more, until the morning light. But it came to pass in the morning, when the wine was gone out of Nabal, and his wife had told him these things, that his heart died within him, and he became as a stone. And it came to pass, about ten days after, that the Lord smote Nabal, that he died." What a sad picture of a man of the world ! Sunk in intoxication during the night, and when the morning dawned, struck with terror, pierced by the arrow of death.

How solemnly like the multitudes whom the enemy has succeeded, in every age, in alluring and intoxicating with the perishing joys of a world which lies under the curse of God, and awaits the fire of His judgement. "They that sleep, sleep in the night, and they that be drunken are drunken in the night;" but, ah! the morning is at hand, when the wine (apt symbol of this world's joy) shall have altogether evaporated — the feverish excitement in which Satan now involves the spirits of the men of this world shall have calmed down, and then comes the stern reality of an eternity of misery — unspeakable misery, in company with Satan and his angels.

Nabal did not even meet David face to face; yet the very thought of his avenging sword filled his soul with deadly fear. How much more terrible will it be to meet the gaze of a despised and rejected Jesus! Then the Abigails and the Nabals will find their respective places; those who had known and loved the true David, and those who had not. God, in His mercy, grant that my reader may be amongst the happy number of the former.

I would only observe, further, that the interesting narrative of this chapter gives us a striking picture of the Church and the world, as a whole; the one united to the king, and associated with Him in His glory; the other plunged in irretrievable ruin. "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness; looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth

righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent, that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (2 Peter 3: 11-14).

Such are the soul-stirring, momentous facts presented to us throughout the Book of God, in order to detach our hearts from present things, and bind them in genuine affection to those objects and prospects which stand connected with the person of the Son of God. Nor will aught else, save the deep and positive conviction of the reality of these things, produce such effects.

We know the intoxicating power of this world's schemes and operations; we know how the human heart is borne away, as upon the surface of a rapid current, when such things are presented: schemes of improvement, commercial operations, political movements — aye, and popular religious movements too all these things produce upon the human mind an effect similar to that produced by Nabal's wine, so that it is almost useless to announce the stern facts presented in the above solemn quotation. Still, they must be announced, must be reiterated, "and so much the more, as we see the day approaching." "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night." "All these things shall be dissolved." "The heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up." Such is the prospect presented to all who, like Nabal, surcharged with "surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life," have rejected the claims and appeals of Jesus.

The world is being prepared, with inconceivable rapidity, for the introduction of that one who, by the energy of Satan, will head up all its institutions, embody all its principles, concentrate all its energies. Let but the last elect one be gathered out, the last member be incorporated into the body of Christ by the quickening energy of the Holy Ghost, the last stone be set in its appointed places in the temple of God, and then shall the salt be removed, which now preserves the world from corruption; the barrier presented by the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church shall be taken out of the way, and then comes forth "the lawless one" on the stage of this world, "whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and destroy with the brightness of His coming. Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved."

Surely these things ought to check the career of the men of this world, and lead them, with solemnized minds, to "consider their latter end." "The long-suffering of our Lord is salvation." Precious word! Most precious! But let it not be abused; let it not be mistaken for "slackness. " The Lord waits to be gracious to sinners, not to connive at sin.

However, as has been already observed, it is almost useless to speak to men about the future who are wholly engrossed with the present.

Blessed be God, there are some who have ears to hear the testimony about the kindness and grace of Jesus, as well as about His coming judgement. Thus it was with

Abigail; she believed the truth about David, and acted accordingly; and all who believe the truth about Jesus will be found separating themselves diligently from this present world.

Part 5 ZIKLAG

In dwelling upon a history such as that now before us, which manifestly presents much failure and infirmity, it is well for us to keep in memory what we ourselves are, lest we be found pointing out the lapses of others in a spirit of self-complacency. The divine penman has set before us, with unflinching fidelity, all the imperfections of those whose history He records. His object is to present God to the soul in all the fullness and variety of His resources, and in all His competency to meet the helpless sinner in his very deepest need. He has not written the history of angels, but of men — men "of like passions with us"; and this is what makes Old Testament narratives so exceedingly instructive to us; we are presented with facts which speak to the heart; we are conducted through scenes and circumstances which unfold to us, with touching simplicity, the hidden springs of our nature, and also the hidden springs of grace.

We learn that man is the same in every age: in Eden, in Canaan, in the Church, in millennial glory, he is proved to be made of the same humbling materials; but we learn also, for our joy and encouragement, that God is the same — "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever" — "Patient, gracious, powerful, holy" — patient, to bear with our grievous and manifold provocations; gracious, to blot out our oft-repeated sins, and restore our wandering souls; powerful, to deliver us out of Satan's entangling snares, and from the energy of nature and

the world; holy, to execute judgement in His house, and to chasten His sons, that they may be partakers of His holiness. Such is the God with whom we have to do; and we see the wondrous unfoldings of His character in the deeply-interesting sketches with which the Old Testament history abounds, and in none, perhaps, more than in that now before us.

Few characters exhibit more variety of experience than David. He truly knew the depths and heights which mark the course of the man of faith. At one moment, we find him giving forth from his harp the most sublime strains; at another, pouring forth the sorrows of a defiled conscience and a wounded spirit. This variety of experience rendered David a fit subject for illustrating the varied grace of God. It is ever thus. The poor prodigal would never have known such high communion, had he not known the humiliating depths of the far country. The grace which decked him in the best robe would not have shone so brightly, had he not been clad in filthy rags.

God's grace is magnified by man's ruin; and the more keenly the ruin is felt, the more highly the grace is valued. The elder brother never got a kid that he might make merry with his friends; and why? Because he imagined he had earned it. "Lo," says he, "these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment." Vain man! How could he expect the ring, the robe, or the fatted calf? Had he obtained them, they would have been but the trappings of self-righteousness, and not the ornaments with which grace decks the believing sinner.

Thus was it with Saul and David. Saul never knew his need as David knew it, nor have we any record of such flagrant sins in his case; at least, what man would pronounce flagrant. Saul was the outwardly moral and religious man, but, withal, a self-righteous man; hence we have such expressions as these, "I have performed the commandment of the Lord" — "Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have gone the way which the Lord sent me." How could this man value grace? Impossible. A heart unbroken, a conscience unconvinced, can never enter into the meaning of the term Grace. How different was it with David! He felt his sins, groaned under them, confessed them, judged them, in the presence of God whose grace had blotted them all out for ever. There is a great difference between a man ignorant of his sins and walking in self-complacency, and one deeply conscious of his sins, yet happy in the full forgiveness of them.

The above train of thought introduces us to the circumstances connected with David in Ziklag of the Philistines — circumstances which fully manifest human infirmity and divine grace and mercy.

"And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul; there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines." This was David's second visit to the land of the Philistines. In 1 Sam. 21 we read, "And David arose and fled that day for fear of Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath." Here we find David really taking himself out of the hands of God, and putting himself into the hands of Achish. He leaves the place of dependence, and goes into the very midst of the enemies of God and of Israel. And, be it remarked, he has in his hand the very

sword of the Philistine champion. Nor is it to act in his true character as the servant of God; this would have been happy indeed; but no; he goes to act the madman, in the presence of those before whom he had so recently acted as the champion of Israel.

"The servants of Achish said unto him, Is not this David, the king of the land? Did they not sing one to another of him in dances, saying, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?" The Philistines recognized David's true character as "king of the land" — the slayer of ten thousands; they imagined that he could not possibly act otherwise than as their enemy. Little were they able to enter into the moral condition of his soul at that extraordinary stage of his history; little did they think that the slayer of Goliath had fled to them for protection from the hand of Saul. The world cannot understand the vicissitudes of the life of faith. Who that had seen David in the valley of Elah could ever suppose that he would so soon fear to avow with boldness the results of that faith with which God had endowed him? Who could have thought that with Goliath's sword in his hand he could tremble to avow himself the victor of Goliath? Yet so it was. "David laid up these words in his heart, and was sore afraid of Achish, the king of Gath. And he changed his behaviour before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard."

Thus must it ever be when a saint deserts the path of simple dependence upon God and strangership in the world. The "behaviour" must be "changed," the real character abandoned, and instead thereof a course is adopted which is marked by positive deceit before God and folly before the world. This is most sorrowful. A

saint should always maintain his dignity — the dignity which flows from the consciousness of the presence of God. But the moment faith gives way, the power of testimony is gone, and the man of faith is despised as a "madman."

When David "said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul," he forsook the only path of real power. Had he continued as a homeless wanderer through the mountains, he would never have presented such a melancholy picture in the view of the servants of Achish — he would never have been pronounced a madman. Achish would not have dared to call David by such a name in the valley of Elah! No, nor in the cave of Adullam; but, alas, David had put himself into the power of this stranger, and therefore he should either suffer for his past faithfulness, or give all up, and pretend to be a fool in their eyes. They rightly judged him to be the king of the land, but he, afraid of the consequences of maintaining such a high dignity, denied his kingship, and became a fool. How frequently may we trace the working of this same evil in the walk of Christians!

How frequently may we see a man who, by his past actings in the energy of the Spirit of God, has attained a very high position in the thoughts, not only of his brethren, but even of the children of this world, and yet, when such an one gets out of communion, he is really afraid to maintain his position; and, at the very moment when those without are looking only for an unbending and unqualified testimony against their ways, he changes his behaviour, and instead of being esteemed and reverenced, he is actually despised. We should most carefully guard against this; it can only be effectually avoided by walking in the full and blessed consciousness

of God's sufficiency. So long as we feel that God is sufficient for all our need, we are entirely independent of the world; if it be not thus with us, we shall just compromise the truth of God, and deny our real character as heavenly men.

How completely must David have lost the sense of God's sufficiency when he could say, "There is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines." Nothing better for a man of faith than to go back to the world for refuge! Strange confession! The confession of one who had allowed circumstances to come between his soul and God. When we slip off the narrow path of faith, we are liable to run into the wildest extremes; and nothing can more forcibly exhibit the contrast between one looking at God and one looking at circumstances, than David in the valley of Elah and David scrabbling on the doors of the Philistine king. The contrast is full of solemn instruction and warning. It is well calculated to teach us what we are, and how little the best of us can be depended upon.

Ah! my dear Christian reader, what are we? Poor, failing, stumbling creatures; prone, at every turn in our path, to wander into error and evil — prone to forsake the Rock of Ages, and lean upon the broken reeds of the world — prone to forsake the fountain of living waters, and hew out for ourselves broken cisterns that can hold no water. Truly we have need, deep need, to walk humbly, watchfully, and prayerfully, before our God — deep need to utter David's own prayer, continually, "Uphold me according unto Thy word, that I may live; and let me not be ashamed of my hope. Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe; and I will have respect unto Thy statutes continually." We need to have our feet made as hinds'

feet, so that we may walk on the high and slippery places through which our path lies. Nothing short of grace divine can enable us to pursue a course of steady devotedness: for, if left to ourselves, there is no extreme of evil into which we may not run. They alone are safe whom God keeps in the hollow of His hand.

Truly happy is it for us to have to do with one who is able to bear with us in all our waywardness, and able also to restore and revive our souls when faint and withering under the influence of the atmosphere of evil around us. God forbid that we should make any other use of what we may term the Ziklag portion of David's history, save to apply it to our own hearts before God, and use it as a matter of solemn and soul-searching warning; for though it may be said that there is a wide difference between the standing and privileges of David and those of the Church of God now, yet, in every age and dispensation, nature is the same; and we seriously wrong our own souls if we fail to learn a wholesome lesson from the falls of one so high up in the school of Christ as David. Dispensations differ, no doubt, in their great leading features; but there is a wonderful analogy in God's principles of discipline at all times, let the standing of His people differ as it may.

In following David, in his further sojourn in the land of the Philistines, we only find fresh cause of humiliation. He obtains the grant of Ziklag, where he sojourns for sixteen months, during which period, though free from all fear with respect to Saul, he was at a distance from God and from Israel. It is, in one sense, a very easy matter to get out of a place of trial; but then we get out of a place of blessing also. It would have been much happier for David to have remained in a position which

left him exposed to Saul, while, at the same time, he enjoyed the protection of the God of Israel, than to seek safety from the arm of the king of Gath. However, when the pressure of trial is upon us, the thought of relief is sweet, and we are in danger of seeking relief in our own way.

The enemy always has a by-road open to the man of faith. He had an Egypt for Abraham, and a Ziklag for David; and now he has the world, in all its varied forms, for us. "And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned." It is the opportunity to return that proves the genuine fixedness of purpose to go forward. The Lord leaves His people free, in order that they may "declare plainly that they seek a country." This is what glorifies God. It would avail nothing if we were to be compelled, as with bit and bridle, to go from earth to Heaven; but when, through grace, we voluntarily abandon the things of earth to seek those things which are above, this is to the glory of God, because it demonstrates that what He has to give is far more attractive than this present world.*

{*"He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation" (Ps. 107: 7). Grace not only leads forth from Egypt, but imparts the capacity and the desire to go to Canaan.}

David, however, accepted Ziklag, and instead of remaining as a homeless stranger in the cave of Adullam, he becomes a citizen in the land of the Philistines. Nor does he now act the madman, as before: no; he now acts the part of a positive deceiver. He wages war on the Geshurites and Gezrites, and tells a lie about

it, lest he should again lose his self-chosen place of protection. Yea, so far does he proceed in his unhappy course, that when Achish proposes to him to act as ally to the Philistines, his answer is, "Surely thou shalt know what thy servant can do.... And Achish said to David, Therefore will I make thee keeper of my head for ever.... Now the Philistines gathered together all their armies to Aphek; and the Israelites pitched by a fountain which is in Jezreel. And the lords of the Philistines passed on by hundreds and by thousands; but David and his men passed on in the rearward with Achish."

Here, then, we have a strange anomaly — a king of Israel about to be made keeper of the head of a Philistine, and about to draw the sword against the armies of the living God. Was ever anything like this? The slayer of Goliath, servant to a Philistine! Who could have looked for such a thing? Truly difficult is it for us to determine where all this would have ended, had David been left to the full results of his false position. But this could not be. God was graciously watching His poor wanderer, and had rich and manifold mercies in store for him, as well as some humbling lessons and painful exercises of soul.

The very lords of the Philistines were the instruments made use of by the Lord to deliver David from his strange position. They, judging from his past ways, could not be induced to trust him as an ally. "Is not this David, and how can we confide in him?" A Philistine could never rely upon a Hebrew for co-operation against Hebrews. In a word, the men of this world can never place full confidence in one who has once been decided for the truth of God. A saint who has got out of communion and gone back to the world, though he may

go to a great length, will never be regarded or confided in as one of themselves; he will be suspected, just as David was by the Philistines. "Make this fellow return, that he may go again to his place which thou hast appointed him, and let him not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he be an adversary to us."

They could give him a certain place amongst them, but when it became a question of war between them and Israel, they would not acknowledge him. And they were wise; for let David assume what character he might, be could be really nought else save an enemy to the Philistines. He might feign himself to be mad; he might pretend to make war upon the south of Judah; but when matters came to a positive issue, David could only act consistently with his true character, as the slayer of ten thousands of Philistines. The fact is, from first to last David was misunderstood; the Philistines did not know what it was that had sent him into their midst. There was far more in the apparent madman than they could fathom. They thought that he desired to be reconciled to his master, Saul, little imagining that they had before them one who was so soon to lay his hand upon the sceptre of Israel, and to make them feel the weight of his power.

However, the Lord would not allow David to appear in the field against Israel. He sent him back, or rather He led him aside, in order that He might deal with him in secret about his course. "So David and his men rose up early to depart in the morning, to return into the land of the Philistines.... And it came to pass, when David and his men were come to Ziklag, on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the south, and Ziklag, and smitten Ziklag, and burned it with fire; and had taken

the women captives that were therein. They slew not any, either great or small, but carried them away, and went on their way.

David is here made to feel the bitter result of his having sought to Achish for help in the day of his need. He had taken up his position amongst the uncircumcised, and must, therefore, be made a partaker of their wretchedness. Had he remained amongst the mountains of Judah, he would have escaped all this sorrow; his God would have been a wall of fire round about him. But he had fled to Ziklag to escape Saul; and then, as it were, at the very moment when Saul was falling on Mount Gilboa, David was weeping over the ruins of Ziklag. Surely it was not thus we should have expected to find David. "Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep.... And David was greatly distressed, for the people spake of stoning him."

In all this God was dealing with His dear child, not to crush him, but to bring him to a right sense of the course he had been pursuing amongst the Philistines. Surely when David beheld the smouldering ashes of Ziklag, and felt himself deprived of his wives, children, and all, he had a practical lesson as to the evil and sorrow of taking anything from the world. We can hardly picture to ourselves a condition more painful than that in which David found himself on his return to Ziklag. He had been, for a year and four months, pursuing a course which might have left him with an uneasy conscience toward God; he was cast off by those on whose protection he had thrown himself; his place of refuge was burned; his wives and property were gone; and

lastly, his companions, those who had followed him in all his wanderings, were threatening to stone him.

Thus was David sunk to the very lowest ebb, in every point of view; all creature streams were dried up; and not only so, but the enemy might effectually ply his fiery darts at such a moment — conscience might work, and memory call up the scenes of the past: his abandoning the place of dependence; his flight to Achish; his change of behaviour; his acting the madman; his telling a lie; his volunteering to fight against Israel, as the servant of the Philistines: all these things must have augmented, in no small degree, his anguish of soul.

But David was a man of faith after all, and, notwithstanding all, he knew the Lord, and His "boundless stores of grace." This was his joy and comfort in this exceedingly dark moment of his career. Had he not been able to roll his heavy burden over upon infinite grace, he must have given up in utter despair. He had never before been so tested. He had met the lion and the bear in the wilderness; he had met the giant of Gath in the valley of Elah; but he had never met such an overwhelming array of circumstances before. Yet God was sufficient, and David knew this. Hence we read, "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." Happy, well-founded encouragement! Happy the soul that knows it! Happy he who could rise from the very deepest depths of human misery, up to God, and His never failing resources! Faith knows God to be fully equal to all human need, human weakness, human failure, human sin. God is above all, beyond all, beneath all; and the heart that apprehends Him is lifted above all the trials and difficulties of the way.

There is no condition in which the Christian can find himself in which he may not count upon God. Is he crushed beneath the pressure of trial from external circumstances? Let him bring God's omnipotent power to bear upon these things. Is the heart oppressed by the burden of personal infirmity? — truly a heavy burden! Let him draw upon the exhaustless springs of Divine compassion and mercy. Is the soul filled with horror, by the sense of sin and guilt? Let him have recourse to the boundless grace of God, and the infinitely-precious blood of Christ. In a word, whatever be the burden, the trial, the sorrow, or the need, God is more than equal to all, and it is the province of faith to use Him. "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God" when everything around was dark and depressing.

May we know the true blessedness of this. To have to do with God is rest to the soul, and happiness and power. To disentangle our hearts from self and the things which surround us, and rise upward into the holy calmness of the Divine presence, imparts comfort and consolation beyond what one can utter. Satan's object is ever to hinder this. He would fain lead us to make present things the boundary of our soul's horizon; he would seek to surround us with a thick, dark, impenetrable cloud, so that we might not recognize our Father's countenance, and our Father's hand in our circumstances.

But faith pierces the cloud, and gets upward to God; it looks not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen: it endures, as seeing Him who is invisible; it can say to God, In darkest shades, if Thou appear, My dawning is begun;

Thou art my soul's bright morning star,

And Thou my rising sun.

The Life and Times of David - C

Truly David's return to Ziklag was a dark hour — one of his darkest; yet God appeared, and his dawning began. God appeared for his relief and restoration; He graciously removed the weight from his spirit; He burst the fetters, and let the prisoner go free. Such is the manner of God. He permits His children to taste the bitter fruit of their own ways, in order that they may return to Him, and realize they can only be truly happy in His gracious and holy presence. Ziklag may shelter for a time, but it will perish; and even while it lasts, must be purchased by the sacrifice of a good conscience toward God, and toward His people. A heavy price, surely, for a temporary relief from pressure! How much better to endure the pressure for a time!

But, blessed be our God, "all things work together for good to them that love Him." The death of the Philistine champion, and the sixteen months' sojourn in Ziklag; the cave of Adullam, and the house of Achish — all worked for David's good. The Lord makes the very failure of His children to yield them blessing, inasmuch as it leads them to seek more prayerful vigilance of spirit, and a closer walk with Him. If our stumbles teach us to lean more implicitly upon God, we shall still thank Him, however much we may have to be humbled at the remembrance of them. Humbling as David's Ziklag experience must have been to him, we may be sure he would not have been without it. It taught him more of the deep reality of God's grace and faithfulness; it enabled him to see, that when brought down to the very bottom of human things, he could find God there in all

the fullness of His grace. This was a valuable lesson, and it will be our place to learn from it also.

Are we able to lean on the Lord amid the ruin around us? Is He beyond every one and everything to our souls? Can we encourage ourselves in Him when all without and within seems directly against us? Is His name dear to us in this day of faithlessness and cold formality? Are we prepared to pursue the rest of our course through the desert in solitariness and desertion, if such should be needful? It may be, we have learnt to cease looking, in any way, to the children of this world; but are we prepared to lose the approval and confidence of our brethren? David's companions spake of stoning him; but the Lord was more to him than all; the Lord was "his refuge", do we know the power and comfort of this? The Lord grant that we may know it more.

Before closing of this chapter, I would call attention to the instructive scene between David and the young man who was servant to the Amalekite. I do not say that we are to regard it as a positive type; but we are certainly warranted in looking at it as a very striking illustration. An illustration of what? Let us see.

In order to appreciate the teaching of the Spirit in this Scripture (1 Sam. 30: 11-16) we must bear in mind the difference between Egypt and Amalek; the former is associated with Israel in the blessing of the latter day, "In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land; whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel Mine inheritance." Amalek, on the contrary, is thus spoken of, "The Lord hath sworn that the Lord will have

war with Amalek from generation to generation." An Egyptian, therefore, and an Amalekite stood in a very different relationship to Israel.

Now this young man was an Egyptian, servant to an Amalekite, and his master left him because he had fallen sick. This was the treatment he had received from his Amalekite master; he had abandoned him in the hour of his need, because he was no longer able to be of service to him. But his very ruin and wretchedness threw him upon the sympathies of David, who refreshed him and revived his spirit. He found him faint and weak from the effects of his former service, and having restored his spirit he inquired, "Canst thou bring me down to this company?" He here puts in his claim upon the service and devotedness of one who owed him everything under God; but the young man, though fully restored, was unable to act with David until possessed of the full assurance of life and liberty. "Swear unto me by God," said he, "that thou wilt neither kill me, nor deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will bring you down to this company." He could not serve David until fully assured of deliverance from the power of his old master.

All this is very striking as an illustration of the apostle's teaching in Romans 6. The believer needs to know his entire emancipation from the dominion of his old master, the flesh, before ever he can, with confidence, apply himself to the service of Christ. We have felt the bitterness of serving the flesh; as the apostle says, "What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death." It is impossible to walk in peace and liberty of heart until we know where death and resurrection have placed us. Until we know and believe that sin has no dominion over

us, we must, of necessity, be occupied about ourselves, for we shall be constantly discovering the working of indwelling corruption, and thus be filled with apprehension of being delivered over into the hands of our former oppressor. We may be very clear as to the theory of justification by faith; we may understand what it is to rest in the accomplished work of Christ in reference to sins that are past, and yet be so troubled about indwelling sin as to be quite hindered in our service to Christ and His Church.

The gospel of the grace of God, when entered into in its divine fullness, sets the soul at rest, not only as to the past, but also the present and the future. The Lord forgives all our sins, not some of them; and not only does He forgive sins, but also delivers from the power of sin, as we read in Roman 6 — "Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace." This is a truly precious truth for those who are daily harassed with the seeds of evil within. Though sin dwells, it shall not reign. And how is this deliverance accomplished! By death and resurrection. "He that has died is justified from sin" (RV). What claim has sin upon a dead man? None! Well, then, God looks upon the believer as dead — dead with Christ, and risen again; and his power to deny the working of sin consists in his reckoning himself to be what God tells him he is.

Thus, as David's oath set the young man's mind at rest, and enabled him to act with him against the Amalekites, so the word of Christ banishes fear and hesitation from the heart of the believer, and enables him, through the Spirit, to act against his former master — the flesh. Grace assures us that all our interests, for time and eternity, have been most fully provided for in the death

and resurrection of Christ, and gives us to see that our only business now is to live to the praise of Him who died for us, and rose again.

"Shall we continue in sin?" Could the young man in this Scripture have gone back again to his Amalekite master? Impossible. What fruit had he from his former service? Ruin and desertion. And what fruit had we? Death. The wages of sin is death. The world, the flesh, and the devil, can only lead us down to hell. Serve them how we may, death and destruction must be the end. Men may not see this; they may not wish to see it; yet it is not the less true. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgement." This is the appointment.

But Christ has borne all for the believer; death and judgement have passed away, and nothing remains but for the believer to accompany, in liberty and joy of heart, the true David against his enemies. Christ has done all for us, that we might act for Him in this the time of His rejection. He has suffered for us without the gate, and now calls upon us to go forth to Him, bearing His reproach. The believer does not act in order to get life, but because he has it. He starts on his Christian career with the full assurance of pardon and acceptance in the Beloved. Perfect justification is his starting-post, and glory the goal. "Whom He justified, them He also glorified."

It is well to be exceedingly simple in our apprehension of this great truth. Some imagine that we can never know that our sins are forgiven while here. Now, if we cannot know that our sins are forgiven, we cannot know that God's Word is true, and Christ's work perfect. Will

any one maintain this? If not, both rest on the same basis. The forgiveness of sins and the truth of God's Word are linked together in the precious gospel of Christ. Doubt the forgiveness of sins, and you call in question the truth of Christ's words, "It is finished" words uttered under the most solemn circumstances.

Yet we know how hard it is for the heart to repose with unquestioning simplicity on the truth of God, in reference to the perfect remission of sins through the blood of Christ. Our thoughts are too shallow and contracted to take in all the effulgence of divine grace. We are too full of legalism, too full of self. We vainly think that we must add something to what Christ has done, whether that something be in the shape of works, feelings, or experiences. All this must be set aside. Christ alone is the great foundation, the eternal rock, the tower of salvation. To add even circumcision would be to make Christ of none effect, to fall from grace, and to make ourselves debtors to keep the whole law, and thus to expose ourselves to curse and wrath. "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse."

May we cling to Christ, with a deeper sense of our own vileness and His perfectness. May we wrap ourselves up, as it were, in Him, while passing on through this cold and faithless world Part 6 THE RETURN OF THE ARK 2 Samuel 6 and 1 Chronicles 13 We are now called to follow David from the scenes of his exile to those of his government. Saul has passed off the stage of history, having met death by the hand of the Amalekite — one of that very nation which he had disobediently spared. Solemn warning! Jonathan, too, had fallen in company with his father, Saul, on Mount Gilboa, and David had given utterance to his sublime lament over both. David

had ever carried himself towards Saul with the fullest sense of his being the Lord's anointed; nor did he manifest anything bordering upon a spirit of exultation when informed of his death; on the contrary, he wept over him, and called on others to do the same.

Neither do we find anything like unbecoming haste to ascend the throne left vacant for him; he waited upon the Lord about it. "David inquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the Lord said unto him, Go up. and David said, Whither shall I go up? And He said, Unto Hebron." This was real dependence. Nature would have been eager to rush into the place of honour; but David waited on the Lord, and only moved as directed of Him. It was this confidence in and dependence upon God — delighting himself in Jehovah — that forms the peculiar loveliness of David's character, "the man after God's own heart." Happy would it have been for him had he continued thus to move on in child-like dependence.

But, alas; we have to trace far more of nature in David during the period of his elevation than during the period of His rejection. A time of peace and prosperity tends to develop and bring to maturity many seeds of evil which might be nipped and blighted by the keen blast of adversity. David found the kingdom more thorny and dangerous than the wilderness.

After his accession to the throne over all Israel, David's lovely desire, to have the ark of the Lord near himself in the city of Jerusalem, is followed by a great error. His desire was most commendable; the only question was, how was it to be done? The Word of God was exceedingly plain and distinct in reference to this

important matter; it pointed out a very simple and definite way of carrying the ark of the Lord of Hosts, even upon the shoulders of living men, who had been taken up and set aside for that purpose (See Num. 3 and Num. 8.)

When the Philistines sent the ark of Jehovah back to its own land and people, they knew nothing of this, and therefore devised a way of their own, which, as might be expected, was directly opposed to God's way, for “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Therefore, though the plan adopted by the Philistines was very decent and orderly, as men would say, yet it was not of God. The ministers of the house of Dagon were poorly qualified to arrange the order of the divine service. They thought a wooden cart would do as well as anything else; it might have answered for the service of Dagon, and they knew no difference. They had once trembled at the sight of the ark, but, through the unfaithfulness of Israel, it had lost its solemnity in their eyes; and though it had been most solemnly and impressively vindicated in their view by the destruction of their god, they understood not its deep significance, they knew not its wondrous contents; it was quite beyond them, and therefore they could devise nothing better than a mere lifeless ordinance for conveying it to its place.

But David ought to have known God's thoughts, and have acted upon them at the first; he should not have followed the thoughts and traditions of men in the service of God; he should have drawn his directions from the lucid lines of the book of the law. It is a terrible thing when the children of the kingdom form themselves after

the model of the men of the world, and tread in their footsteps. They never can do so without serious damage to their own souls, and at the sacrifice of God's truth and testimony.

The Philistines might construct a cart to carry the ark, and nothing whatever occur to show them the error of so doing; but God would not allow David so to act. And so now; the men of this world may put forth their canons, enact their laws, and decree their ceremonies in religion; but shall the children of God come down from their high position and privileges, as those who are guided by the Holy Ghost and the blessed Word of God, and suffer themselves to be guided and influenced by such things? They may do so, but they shall assuredly suffer loss.

David was made to learn his mistake by bitter experience, for "when they came unto the threshing floor of Chidon, Uzza put forth his hand to hold the ark; for the oxen stumbled." The weakness and inconsistency of the whole thing was here manifested. The Levites, the ministers of God, had borne the ark from Horeb to Jordan, and yet we have no record of any stumble. The shoulders of His servants was God's way; but the cart and oxen were man's way. And who would have thought that an Israelite would have deposited the ark of the God of Israel upon a wooden cart, to be drawn by oxen? Yet such is ever the sad effect of departing from the written Word to follow human traditions. "The oxen stumbled." The arrangement was "weak and beggarly," in the judgement of the Holy Ghost; and the Lord was only making this fully manifest. The ark should never have been in such a dishonouring position; oxen should never have been the bearers of such a burden.

"And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzza, and He smote him, because he put his hand to the ark; and there he died before God." Truly, "judgement must begin at the house of God." The Lord judged David for doing what the Philistines had done without notice. The nearer a man is to God, the more solemnly and speedily will he be judged for any evil. This need not afford any encouragement to the worldling, for, as the apostle says, "If judgement first begin at us, what shall the end be of those that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" If God judges His people, what shall become of the poor worldling! Though the Philistines escaped the judgement of God in the matter of the cart, they had to meet it in another way. God deals with all according to His own holy principles, and the breach upon Uzza was designed to restore David to a right apprehension of the mind of God in reference to the ark of His presence.

Yet it did not seem, at first, to produce the proper effect. "David was displeased because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzza: wherefore the name of the place is called Perez Uzza to this day. And David was afraid of God that day, saying, How shall I bring the ark of God home to me?" There is much deep instruction in this. David was doing a right thing in a wrong way, and when God executed judgement upon his way of acting, he despaired of doing the thing at all. This is a very common error.

We enter upon some right course of acting in a wrong way, or in a wrong spirit, which God cannot own; and then our spirit, or method of acting, is confounded with the service in which we were engaged. But we must ever

distinguish between what men do, and how they do it. It was right for David to bring up the ark; it was wrong to put it on an ox-cart. The Lord approved the former, but disapproved and judged the latter.

God will never suffer His children to persist in carrying on His work upon wrong principles. They may go on for a time with much apparent success, as "David and all Israel played before God with all their might, and with singing, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets." This was very imposing. It would have been a difficult matter for any one to raise an objection to the course of David in this proceeding. The king and all his captains were engaged in it; and the burst of music would have drowned any objection. But, ah, how soon was all this exultation checked! "The oxen stumbled" — "Uzza put forth his hand," vainly imagining that God would suffer the ark of His presence to fall to the ground. He who had maintained the dignity of that ark, even in the dark solitude of the house of Dagon, would surely preserve it from dishonour amid the mistakes and confusion of His people. It was a solemn thing to come near the ark of God — a solemn thing to approach that which was the special symbol of the Divine presence in the midst of His congregation.

It is a solemn thing to be the bearer of the name of Jesus, and the depositories of the truth connected with His holy person. We should all feel this solemnity more deeply than we do. We are too apt to regard it as a light thing to put our hand to the ark; but it is not; and those who attempt it will suffer for their error.

But, it may be asked, has anything been entrusted to the care and keeping of the Church answering to the ark? Yes; the Person of the Son of God answers to the ark of old. His divine and human nature answers to the gold and shittim wood of the ark. The materials of the ark typified His Person as the God-man; while the purposes of the ark and mercy-seat typified His work, whether in life or in death. The ark enclosed the tables of testimony; and the Son of God could say, in connection with the body prepared of God for Him, "Thy law is within My heart." (See Psalm 40.) Again, the mercy-seat spoke of peace and pardon, of mercy rejoicing against judgement, where the poor sinner meets God in peace; as the apostle says, "He [Christ] is a mercy-seat for our sins." And again, "Whom God hath set forth to be a mercy-seat." (The word used in Rom. 3 is precisely the same as that used in Exodus 25, viz., hilasteerion — propitiatory).

Thus we perceive what a marked type the ark of the covenant was of Him who magnified the law and made it honourable — even Jesus the Son of God, whose glorious person should be the special object of the saints' reverent and affectionate guardianship. And, just as Israel's moral power was ever connected with the right acknowledgment and preservation of the ark amongst them, so the Church's power will be found connected with her due maintenance of the doctrine, the great and all-important doctrine, of the Son. It is in vain that we exult in the work of our hands, and boast ourselves in our knowledge, our testimony, our assemblies, our gifts, our ministry, our anything: if we are not maintaining the honour of the Son, we are really worthless — we are merely walking in the sparks of our own kindling —

sparks which shall be speedily extinguished, when the Lord is obliged, in very faithfulness, to come in and make a breach upon us. "David was displeased" at the breach. It was a grievous check to all the joy and gladness of the occasion; but it was needful. A faithful eye detected the wrong moral condition of soul which was betrayed by the wooden cart; and the breach upon Uzza was designed as a corrective; and it proved an effectual one.

"David brought not the ark of God home to himself to the city of David, but carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom, the Gittite." This was David's loss; he forfeited much blessing and privilege by thus stopping short, for the ark of God could do nought but bless all who were rightly connected with it, though it was judgement to be connected with it otherwise, as in the men of Bethshemesh, and Uzza. It was a happy time for Obed-edom while the ark was in his house, for "the Lord blessed his house and all that he had." All the time that David was "afraid" and without the ark, Obed-edom was blessed" with the ark. True, things might not just look so cheering; the blessing, instead of being diffused through the whole nation, as it would have been had all been right, was confined to the immediate circle of him who had the ark in his house. Still the blessing, though contracted, was as real and positive, as pure and truthful, as if the whole nation had been enjoying it. It could not be otherwise, inasmuch as it was the result of the presence of the ark.

God will ever be true to His own principles, and will ever make those happy who walk in obedience; and as He blessed Obed-edom during the three months that the ark was in his house, though even king David was "afraid,"

so will He now bless those who seek to meet in truth and simplicity, in the name of Jesus. "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I." This is the great charter of our meeting. Where the presence of Christ is, there must be blessing. Weakness there may be, no doubt, and paucity, but still blessing and comfort because Jesus is there; and the more we feel our own weakness, emptiness, and nothingness, the more will His presence be prized and loved.

Christians should seek to know more of the presence of Christ in their meetings. We do not want sermons, power of eloquence, human intellect, or anything that merely comes from man; we want the presence of Jesus, without which all is cold, barren, and lifeless. But, oh the sweetness of realising the presence of the Master! Who can give expression to the preciousness known by those on whom the dew of the divine blessing falls? Blessed be God that any know it! Blessed be God that in this day, when the sad effects of human tradition are but too apparent in the Church, there is such a thing as the house of Obed-edom the Gittite, where the presence of the ark, and the consequent blessing of God, can be known and enjoyed! Let us prize this more and more, while shadowy and unsatisfying forms and ceremonies prevail around us.

We shall now dwell, for a little, upon God's gracious method of restoring the soul of His servant David. The life of faith* is little more than a series of falls and restorations, errors, and correction; displaying, on the one hand, the sad weakness of man, and on the other, the grace and power of God. This is abundantly exemplified in David.

{*Not exactly the "life of faith," but the life of saints. The conflict and trials so general in the people of God, while they testify to faith within, result from the flesh which, not having been kept under judgement, reasserts itself against the Spirit in the child of God. It is of this Gal. 5: 16-25 speaks. Were the "walk in the Spirit" a constant thing with us, the lust and warrings of the flesh would be kept under — kept in the place of death, where God has assigned the flesh. The apostle could say as to himself, "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be manifest in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor. 4: 10). Ed.}

There is a considerable difference in the way in which the return of the ark is recorded in Samuel and in Chronicles; in the one we have the simple statement of the facts; in the other, we have the moral training through which the soul of David passed during the time that he was afraid of God, or, in other words, during the time that he was labouring under the effects of his own mistake. In Samuel we read, "And it was told king David, saying, The Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God. So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom, into the city of David with gladness." David learned that so far from standing aloof from the ark through fear, it was really his privilege and blessing to be near it.

In 1 Chronicles 14, we find David in conflict with the Philistines, and obtaining victory over them. "David inquired of God, saying, Shall I go up against the Philistines? and wilt Thou deliver them into my hand? And the Lord said unto him, Go up; for I will deliver them into thy hand. So they came up to Baal-perazim;

and David smote them there. Then David said, God hath broken in upon mine enemies by my hand, like the breaking forth of waters: therefore they called the name of that place Baal-perazim (i.e., a place of breaches)." There is a very great difference between "a breach" and "a place of breaches."

God had made a breach upon Israel because of their error in reference to the ark; but as to the Philistines, it was not merely a breach made upon them, they were altogether in a place of breaches; and David might have learnt what a poor example he had followed when he, like them, made the cart to carry the ark. And he did learn his mistake, for in 1 Sam. 15 we read, "And David made him houses in the city of David, and prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched for it a tent. Then David said, None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites; for them hath the Lord chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto Him for ever." And again, addressing the chief of the fathers of the Levites, he says, "Sanctify yourselves, both ye and your brethren, that ye may bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel unto the place that I have prepared for it. For because ye did it not at the first, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought Him not after the due order."

Thus had David learned by the "breach" upon Uzza. He was brought to see that to follow in the current of man's thoughts was contrary to "the due order." None can teach like God. When David was wrong, God made a breach upon him by His own hand. He would not allow the Philistines to do this: on the contrary, He allows David to see them in a place of breaches, and enables him to smite them — to break in upon them, like the

breaking forth of waters. Thus God taught, and thus David learned, what was "the due order" — thus he learned, as it were, to remove the ark from the new cart, and place it upon the shoulders of the Levites, whom the Lord had chosen to minister unto Him for ever — thus he was taught to cast aside human traditions, and follow, in simplicity, the written Word of God, in which there was not a word about a cart and oxen to carry the ark. "None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites." This was very distinct. The entire mistake had risen from forgetfulness of the Word, and following the example of the uncircumcised, who had no capacity to understand the mind of God on any question, much less the solemn and important one of carrying the ark.

But in what a wonderfully gracious way did the Lord teach His servant! He taught him by victory over His enemies! Thus it is the Lord frequently leads His children into the apprehension of His mind, when they vainly seek to follow in the track of the men of this world. He shows them that they should not adopt such models. The breach taught David his mistake; the place of breaches taught him God's due order: by the former he learnt the folly of the cart and oxen; by the latter he learnt the value of the Levites, and the place which they held in the service of God. He would not allow His people to depart from His prescribed order with impunity. And the ark might have remained to the end in the house of Obed-edom, had David not learned to lay aside his own way of bringing it up, and take up God's way.

"So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel. And the children of the Levites bare the ark upon their

shoulders, with the staves thereon, as Moses commanded, according to the word of the Lord. " The Lord was glorified in all this, and He could therefore give real joy and gladness, strength and energy. There was no more stumbling of oxen — no more human effort to keep the ark from falling; the truth of God was dominant, and the power of God could act.

There can be no real power where truth is sacrificed. There may be the appearance of it, the assumption of it, but no reality. How can there be? God is the source of power, but He cannot associate Himself with what is at variance with His truth. Hence, although "David and all Israel played before God with all their might," there was no divine power. God's order was shut out by the human arrangement, and all ended in confusion and sorrow. How different is it in 1 Sam. 15. There is real joy — real power. "It came to pass, when God helped the Levites that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that they offered seven bullocks and seven rams. And David was clothed with a robe of fine linen, and all the Levites that bare the ark, and the singers, and Chenaniah the master of the song, with the singers."

In a word, this was a scene with which God could consistently connect Himself. He did not help the oxen; He did not help Uzza; the oxen had not borne the ark, of old, through the waters of Jordan; neither had they borne it round the walls of Jericho. No; it was on the shoulders of the Levites that God had put it, and His order is the only happy one. It may not always commend itself to human judgement; yet it will ever have the stamp of Divine approval, and this is abundantly sufficient for every faithful heart. David was enabled to bear the sneer of contempt from Michal, the daughter of

Saul, because he was acting before the Lord. Hear his fine reply to her reproach: "It was before the Lord, which chose me before thy father, and before all his house to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel; therefore will I play before the Lord. And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight." Precious determination! May it be ours, through grace. Base in our own eyes — happy in God. Humbled to the very dust in the sense of our own vileness — lifted up on high, in the sense of the grace and loving-kindness of our God.

The reader will remark that 1 Chronicles 16 is just the development of the spirit breathed in the above quotation. It is the hiding of self and the setting forth the character and ways of God. In short, it is a song of praise, which one has only to read to be refreshed thereby. I would only direct attention to the last verse, in which we will find the four great characteristics of the people of God fully set forth. "Save us, O God of our salvation, and gather us together, and deliver us from the heathen, that we may give thanks to Thy holy name, and glory in Thy praise." The Church of God is a saved company. Salvation is the basis of everything. We cannot answer to any of the other characteristics in this copious verse, until we know ourselves as saved by the grace of God, through the death and resurrection of Christ.

In the power of this salvation the Church is gathered by the energy of the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven. The true effect of the Spirit's operation will be to lead into fellowship all who submit to His leading. His order is not isolation, but blessed association and unity in the truth. But if there be ignorance as to salvation, our gathering together will not be to the glory of God, but

rather for the promotion of our own spiritual interests, as it is termed. Men frequently associate on religious grounds without the assurance of being perfectly saved by the precious blood of Christ. This is not the Spirit's mode of gathering, for He gathers to Christ on the glorious ground of what He has accomplished. Confessing Christ, as the Son of the living God, is the rock on which the Church is built. It is not agreement in religious views that constitutes church-fellowship, but the possession of a common life, in union with the Head in Heaven.

Now, the more this divine unity is realized, the more will we enter into the next characteristic presented to us, viz., separation: "and deliver us from the heathen." The Church is called out of the world, though called to witness for Christ in it. All within the Church is to be under the government of the Holy Ghost; all outside alas, is morally under the lordship of Satan, the prince of this world. This is what scripture teaches us about the Church. Hence when the apostle speaks about excommunicating an offender, he says. “deliver such an one to Satan” and again, “I have delivered such an one to Satan. Without the precincts of the church is a wide and dreary domain, over which Satan rules, like that desolate region into which the leper was thrust from the camp of Israel Finally, we have the Spirit of a worshipping people: "That we may give thanks to Thy holy name." This follows from all that we have been looking at. Salvation, association, separation, and worship are all connected together. The Church, breathing the atmosphere of God's salvation, is led by the Spirit into holy and happy fellowship, and thus being separated unto the Lord Jesus, without the camp,

presents the fruit of her lips to God, giving thanks to His name.

Part 7 DAVID'S HOUSE AND THE HOUSE OF GOD 2 Sam. 7 and 1 Chr. 29 There is nothing in which the narrowness of the human heart is so manifested as in its apprehensions of divine grace. Legalism is that to which we are most prone, because it gives self a place, and makes it something. Now this is the very thing which God will not allow. "No flesh shall glory in His presence," is a decree which can never be reversed. God must be all, fill all, and give all.

When the psalmist inquired, "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits?" the answer is "I will take the cup of salvation." The way to "render" to God is to "take" yet more largely from His bounteous hand. To be a thankful, unquestioning recipient of grace glorifies God far more than all we could render unto Him.

The gospel of God's grace comes to man as a ruined, guilty, helpless being. Hence God must be a great Actor in redemption. By His counsel alone it was planned; through His mercy alone it was accomplished in "the one offering of Jesus Christ once for all"; and by the Spirit's power alone is the sinner quickened into life and believes the glorious and peace-giving tidings of salvation.

Now, this stops man's mouth altogether as to his own righteousness. It excludes boasting, for we cannot boast of what we are but the unworthy recipients. How happy should all this make us! How happy it is to be the subjects of such grace — grace which blots out all our sins, sets the conscience at rest, and sanctifies all the

affections of the heart! Blessed forever be the Fountain from which this saving grace flows to guilty sinners!

2 Samuel 7 is full of instruction as to the great principle of grace. The Lord had done much for His servant David; He had raised him from the depth of obscurity to an exceedingly high elevation, and David felt this, and was disposed to look around him and survey the precious mercies which, in rich profusion, strewed his path.

"And it came to pass, when the king sat in his house, and the Lord had given him rest round about from all his enemies, that the king said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains." Observe, "David sat in his house. " He was surrounded by his own circumstances, and thought it needful to do something for God; but, again, he was in error as to his thoughts of building a house for Jehovah. The ark was within curtains, truly, because the time had not yet come for it to find a resting-place.

God had ever moved in the fullest sympathy with his people. When they were plunged in the furnace of Egyptian bondage, He was in the burning bush; when they were treading their long and dreary journey across the burning desert, His chariot travelled in company with them all the way. When they stood beneath the frowning walls of Jericho He was there as a man of war, with a drawn sword in His hand, to act for, and in sympathy with, them. Thus, at all times, God and His Israel were together. While they toiled, He toiled, and until they could rest, He would not rest. But David desired to build a house, and find a resting-place for

God, while there were both "enemies and evil occurrent."

This could not be. It was contrary to the thoughts and counsels of the God of Israel. "It came to pass that night, that the word of the Lord came unto Nathan, saying, Go and tell My servant David, Thus saith the Lord, Shalt thou build Me a house for Me to dwell in? — whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle." The Lord would not allow another sun to rise without correcting the error of His servant. He sets before him His own past actings toward Israel and toward himself; He reminds David that He had never sought a house or a rest for Himself, but had wandered up and down with His people in all their wanderings, and been afflicted in all their afflictions. "In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel whom I commanded to feed My people Israel, saying, Why build ye not Me a house of cedar?"

What lovely, what soul-stirring grace breathes in these words! The blessed God came down to be a traveller with His travelling people. He would set His foot on the sand of the desert, because Israel was there He caused His glory to dwell beneath a covering of badgers' skins, because His redeemed ones were in militant circumstances. Jehovah sought not a house of cedar; it was not for that He had come down to visit His people in the hour of their affliction in Egypt; He had come down to give, not to take; to dispense and minister to His people, not to exact from then. True, when the people had put themselves under a covenant of works, at Mount

Horeb, God had to test them by a ministration which was characterised by the words "do" and "give;" but had they only walked in the power of God's original covenant with Abraham, they would never have heard such words uttered in connection with the terrific thunders of Mount Sinai.

When God came down to redeem them out of the hand of Pharaoh, and out of the house of bondage; when He bore them on eagles' wings, and brought them unto Himself; when He made a way through the sea for His ransomed to pass over, and overwhelmed the hosts of Egypt in the depths; when He showered down manna from Heaven, and caused the refreshing stream to gush from the rock; when He took His place in the pillar of fire by night, and the pillar of cloud by day, to guide them through the trackless desert; when He did all these things for them, and many more, surely it was not on the ground of anything they could give or do; but simply on the ground of His own everlasting love, and the covenant of grace made with Abraham. Yes, this was the ground of His acting toward them. What they did was to reject His grace; trample on His laws; despise His warnings; refuse His mercies; stone His prophets; crucify His Son; resist His Spirit! Such were their actings, from the beginning, the bitter fruits of which they are now reaping, and shall reap, until they are brought, humbly and thankfully, to bow to His covenant of grace.

By bringing all these past ways of God in review before David, the Lord taught David his mistake in seeking to build Him a house. "Shalt thou build Me a house? whereas.... Now, therefore, so shalt thou say to My servant David, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I took thee

from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel: and I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great that are in the earth. Moreover, I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime, and as since the time that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the Lord telleth thee that He will make thee a house."

David is here taught that his own history, like that of his people, was to be a history of grace from first to last. He is conducted, in thought, from the sheep-cote to the throne, and from the throne into the ages of the future, and sees the whole course marked by the actings of sovereign grace. Grace had taken him up; grace had set him on the throne; grace had subdued his enemies; grace was to bear him onward; grace was to build up his throne and his house to all generations. It was all grace.

David might justly feel that the Lord had done much for him: the house of cedar was a great thing for the shepherd of Bethlehem; but what was it when compared with the future? What was all that God had done, compared with what He would do? "When thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." Thus we see, that it was not merely his own short span of forty years that was to be

characterised by such actings of grace; his house too was spoken of "for a great while to come," even forever.

To whom, think you, are we directed in all these promises made to David? Are we to regard them as fully actualised in the reign of Solomon? Surely not. Glorious as was the reign of that monarch, it by no means corresponded to the bright picture presented to David. It was, in one sense, but a passing moment, during which a bright gleam of sunshine flashed across Israel's horizon; for hardly are we conducted to the lofty pinnacle on which Solomon was elevated, when the chilling words fall on the ear, "But Solomon loved many strange women, " etc. Hardly has the cup of exquisite delight been raised to the lips than it is dashed to the ground, and the disappointed heart cries out, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity and vexation of spirit."

The book of Ecclesiastes will tell us how far short the reign of Solomon came of actualising the magnificent promises made to David in this seventh chapter of 2 Samuel. In that book we trace the yearnings of a heart that felt an aching void, and was ranging through creation's wide domain in search of a satisfying object, but ranged in vain. We must, therefore, look beyond the reign of Solomon to a greater than he, even to Him of whom the Spirit in Zacharias speaks in that fine prophecy in Luke 1, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath visited and redeemed His people, and hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David; as He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began; that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; to perform the mercy promised

to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He sware to our father Abraham."

Again, in the angel's address to Mary, "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David; and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end." Here the heart can repose without a single check. There is no doubt, no hesitation, no interruption, no exception. We feel that we have beneath our feet a solid rock, the Rock of Ages, and that we are not, like the writer of Ecclesiastes, constrained to lament the absence of an object capable of filling our hearts, and satisfying our desires; but rather, as some one has observed, like the bride in Canticles, to confess our entire lack of capacity to enjoy the glorious object presented to us, who is the "fairest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely."

"Of His kingdom there shall be no end." The foundations of His throne are laid in the deep recesses of eternity; the stamp of immortality is upon His sceptre, and of incorruptibility upon His crown. There shall be no Jeroboam then, to seize upon ten parts of the kingdom; it shall be one undivided whole forever, beneath the peaceful sway of Him who is "meek and lowly in heart."

Such are God's promises to the house of His servant David. Well might the astonished recipient of such mercies, when speaking of all that had been done for him, exclaim, "And this was yet a small thing in Thy sight, O Lord God." What was the past when compared with the future! Grace shone in the past, but glory

glistened in the future. "The Lord will give grace and glory." Grace lays the foundation; glory garnishes the super-structure. This is true of all; it is true, in an eminent degree, of the Church, as we learn from the Epistle to the Ephesians.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ; according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love... to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved... that in the dispensation of the fullness of times... we should be to the praise of His glory." And again, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved), and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come, He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."

Here we have grace and glory set forth most blessedly: grace securing, on immutable principles, the full forgiveness of sins through the precious blood of Christ, and full acceptance in His beloved Person; glory in the distance, gilding with its immortal beams the ages to come. Thus it is that the Word of God addresses itself to two great principles in the soul of the believer, viz., faith and hope. Faith reposes upon the past; hope anticipates the future; faith leans upon God's work already accomplished; hope looks forward with earnest desire to His actings yet to be developed. This puts the Christian into a deeply interesting position; it shuts him up to God

in everything. As to the past, he leans on the Cross; as to the present, he is sustained and comforted by Christ's priesthood and promises; and as to the future, he "rejoices in hope of the glory of God."

But let us inquire what was the effect produced upon David by all this burst of grace and glory on his spirit? One thing is certain, it effectually corrected his mistake in seeking, as another has said, to exchange the sword for the trowel. It made him really feel his own thorough littleness, and the greatness of God in His counsels and actings. "Then went king David in, and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God?"

It is impossible to convey, in human language, the deep experience of David's soul, as expressed in his attitude and inquiry on this occasion. First, as to his attitude, "he sat." This gives us the idea of the most complete repose in God, without a single intervening cloud. There is no doubt, no suspicion, no hesitancy. God, as the almighty and gracious Actor, filled his soul's vision, and hence, to have entertained a doubt would be calling in question either God's willingness or ability to do all that He had said. How could he doubt? Impossible! The record of the past furnished too many substantial arguments in proof of both the will and ability of God to admit of a doubt on the subject.

And truly blessed it is thus to realize our place before the Lord — to allow the heart to dwell upon His wondrous ways of grace — to sit in His presence in the full, unclouded sense of His pardoning love. True, it is hard to understand why it should be so — why He should set His love on creatures such as we. Yet so it is; and we have only to believe and rejoice.

But observe his inquiry, "Who am I?' Here we have the hiding of self. David felt that God was all, and self nothing, when he sat before the Lord. He no longer speaks of his actings, his house of cedar, his plan of building a house, etc. No; he expatiates on the actings of God, and his own little doings sink into their proper nothingness in his estimation. The Lord had said, "Shalt thou build Me a house?" And again, "The Lord telleth thee that He will make thee a house." In other words, the Lord taught David that He should be superior in everything, and that He could not, therefore, be anticipated in building a house. This might seem an easy lesson; but all who know anything of their own proud, self-righteous hearts, know that it was far otherwise. Abraham, David, Job, Paul, and Peter experienced the difficulty of hiding self and exalting God. This is, in fact, the most difficult lesson for a man to learn; for our whole being since the fall is set upon the very opposite, viz., the exaltation of self, and the setting aside of God.

It is needless to adduce any proofs of this; Scripture and experience alike demonstrate the fact that man seeks to be somewhat; and this cannot be attempted without setting aside the claims of God. Grace, however, reverses the matter, and makes man nothing, and God everything. "Is this the manner of man?" No, indeed, it is not the manner or law of man, but it is the manner of God. Man's manner is to set himself up, to rejoice in the works of his own hands, to walk in the sparks of his own kindling; God's manner, on the contrary, is to turn man away from himself, to teach him to look upon his own righteousness as filthy rags, to loathe and abhor himself, and repent in dust and ashes, and cling to Christ, as the shipwrecked mariner clings to the rock.

Thus was it with David when he sat before the Lord, and, losing sight of himself, allowed his soul to go out in holy adoration of God and His ways. This is true worship, and is the very reverse of human religiousness. The former is the acknowledgment of God by the energy of faith; the latter is the setting up of man in the spirit of legalism. No doubt, David would have appeared, to many, a more devoted man when seeking to build a house for the Lord than when sitting in His presence. In the one case, he was trying to do something; in the other, he was apparently doing nothing. Like the two sisters at Bethany, of whom one would seem, in the judgement of nature, to have been doing all the work, and the other to have been sitting idle. How different are God's thoughts! David sitting before the Lord was in a right position, rather than seeking to build.

It must, however, be observed, that while grace leads us away from our own actings, it does not hinder real acting for God. Far otherwise. It only hinders self-importance. It does not abolish service; it only puts it in its right place. Hence, when David learnt that he was not the man, nor his the time to lay aside the sword and take up the trowel, how readily did he acquiesce! How readily did he draw forth his sword from its scabbard, and take his place once more on the field of battle! How ready was he to be the militant servant to the end, and allow the curtain to drop upon him as builder! How ready was he to retire, and allow another to do the work!

In 2 Sam. 8 we find David smiting, slaying, taking, and thus earning for himself a still more extensive fame as a man of war, and proving how effectually he had learnt the Lord's lesson. Thus will it ever be with all who have

learned in the school of God. It matters little what the character of service may be, whether building the house, or subduing the foes of the Lord. The true servant is ready for anything. David came forth from amid the holy repose of the Lord's house to fight the Lord's battles, in order that he might clear the ground for another to lay the foundation of that house, which his heart had so fondly desired to build. Thus David was the servant throughout. In the sheepfold, in the valley of Elah, in the house of Saul, on the throne of Israel, he maintained the character of a servant.

But we must pass to other scenes, in order to learn other and deeper principles in reference to David's connection with the house of God. He had to learn, in a remarkable manner, where the foundation of the Lord's house was to be laid. Let the reader turn to 1 Chronicles 21 and read it. It is parallel with 2 Samuel 24, and furnishes the account of David's fall in numbering the people. He became proud of his hosts, or rather the Lord's hosts, which he would fain regard as his. He desired to count his resources, and, alas! he had to learn the emptiness thereof: the sword of the destroying angel mowed down seventy thousand of his boasted numbers, and brought home to his conscience, in terrible solemnity, his grievous sin in attempting to number the Lord's people.

However, it had the effect of eliciting much of the sweet, self-renouncing grace that was in David. Hear his touching words, as he exposes his own bosom to the stroke of judgement: "And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done? Let Thy hand, I pray

thee, O Lord my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on Thy people, that they should be plagued." This was precious grace. He learned to say, "Thy people," and was ready to stand between them and the foe.

But there was mercy in the midst of wrath. By the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, the angel of judgement sheathed his sword. "Then the angel of the Lord commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar unto the Lord in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite." Here, then, was the place where mercy triumphed, and caused her voice to be heard above the roar of judgement. Here the blood of the victim flowed, and here the foundation of the Lord's house was laid.

At that time, when David saw that the Lord had answered him in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there. For the tabernacle of the Lord, which Moses made in the wilderness, and the altar of the burnt-offering, were at that season in the high place at Gibeon: but David could not go before it to inquire of God: for he was afraid, because of the sword of the angel of the Lord. Then David said, This is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of the burnt-offering for Israel. And David commanded to gather together the strangers that were in the land of Israel: and he set masons to hew wrought stones to build the house of God."

Blessed discovery! Thus impressively and solemnly, and effectually, was David taught the place where the Lord's house should be built, and its deep significance! The Lord knows how to lead His people, and to instruct them

in the deep secrets of His mind. He taught His servant David by the instrumentality of judgement first, and mercy afterwards, and thus led him to the place and its meaning where He would have His temple built. It was by his necessities he learnt about the temple to God, and he went forth to make preparation for it as one who had learnt God's character by his own deep failure.

"This is the house of the Lord God" — the place where mercy rejoiced against judgement — the place where the blood of the victim flowed — the place where David had his sin blotted out. This was very different from going to build on the ground of his dwelling in a house of cedar, as in 2 Samuel 7. Instead of saying, "Lo, I dwell in a house of cedar," he might say, "Lo, I am a poor, pardoned sinner." It is one thing to act on the ground of what we are; and quite another thing to act on the ground of what God is. The house of God must ever be the witness of His mercy, and this holds good whether we look at the temple of old or the Church now. Both show forth the triumph of mercy over judgement.

At the cross we behold the stroke of justice falling upon the spotless Victim, and then the Holy Ghost came down to gather men around the person of Him who was raised from the dead. Just as David began to gather the hewed stones, and the materials for the joinings of the house, the moment the place of the foundation was settled. The Church is the temple of the living God, of which Christ is the chief corner stone. The materials for this building were all provided, and the place of its foundation purchased, in the season of Christ's trouble; for David represents Christ in His sufferings, as Solomon represents Him in His glory. David was the man of war; Solomon, the man of rest. David had to grapple with

enemies; Solomon was able to say, "There is neither enemy nor evil occurrent." Thus do these two kings shadow forth Him who, by His cross and passion, made ample provision for the building of the temple which shall be manifested in divine order and perfectness in the day of His coming glory.

David proved, in the end, that though his thoughts as to the time of building the house needed to be corrected, his affection for the house itself was not the less fervent. He says, at the close, "Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God, the gold for things to be made of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and the brass for things of brass, the iron for things of iron, and wood for things of wood: onyx-stones, and stones to be set, glistening stones and of divers colours, and all manner of precious stones, and marble stones in abundance" (1 Chr. 29: 2).

{In 2 Samuel 24: 24, we read, "So David bought the threshing-floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver." And in 1 Chr. 21: 25, we read, "So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight." In Samuel, only the "threshing-floor and the oxen" for sacrifice at the time of the plague are mentioned; while in Chronicles "the place" — the whole temple hill — seems to be comprehended.}

Thus does grace put service into its proper place, and not only so, but imparts an energy to it which ill-timed service can never exhibit. David had learnt lessons when he sat in the Lord's presence, and when he stood on the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, which wonderfully fitted him for making the needed preparations for the temple. He could now say, "I have prepared with all my

might." And again, "Because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of my own proper good, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house, even three thousand talents of gold," etc. His strength and affection were both devoted to a work which was to be brought to maturity by another.

Grace enables a man to hide himself and make God his object. When David's eye rested on the glittering pile which his devoted heart had raised, he was able to say, "Of Thine own have we given Thee." "Blessed be Thou, Lord God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is Thine; Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and Thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of Thee, and Thou reignest over all; and in Thy hand is power and might, and in Thy hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now, therefore, our God, we thank Thee, and praise Thy glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee. For we are strangers before Thee, and sojourners, as were all our Fathers; our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding. O Lord our God, all this store that we have prepared to build Thee a house for Thy holy name, cometh of Thy hand, and is all Thine own."

"Who am I?" What a question! David was nothing, and God was all and in all. If ever he had entertained the thought that he could offer anything to God, he entertained it no longer. It was all the Lord's, and He, in

His grace, had allowed them to offer it all. Man can never make God his debtor, though he is ever seeking to do so. The fiftieth psalm, the first of Isaiah, and the seventeenth of Acts, all prove that the unceasing effort of man whether Jew or Gentile, is to give something to God; but it is a vain effort. The reply to man, thus endeavouring to make God his debtor, is, "If I were hungry, I would not tell thee." God must be the giver, man the receiver. "Who," says the apostle, "hath first given to Him?"

The Lord will graciously take from those who are taught to say, "Of Thine own have we given Thee," but eternity will declare God to be the great first Giver. Blessed that it should be so! Blessed for the poor, guilty, broken-hearted sinner, to recognize in God the giver of all — of life, pardon, peace, holiness, everlasting glory! Happy was it for David, as he drew near the end of his chequered career, to hide both himself and his offerings behind the rich abundance of divine grace! Happy for him to know, as he handed the plan of the temple to Solomon, his son, that it should ever be the monument of God's triumphant mercy! The house was, in due time, to rise in magnificence and splendour from its foundation; the effulgence of divine glory was yet to fill it from end to end; yet would it never be forgotten that it stood on that sacred spot where the devastating progress of judgement had been stayed by the hand of sovereign mercy, acting in connection with the blood of a spotless victim.

And in passing from the temple of Solomon to that which in the latter day shall arise in the midst of God's beloved people, how fully may we trace the development of the same heavenly principles! Still more, when we pass from

the earthly to the heavenly temple, may we behold the glorious triumph of mercy over every barrier; yea, rather, the glorious harmony effected between mercy and truth, righteousness and peace. From amid the brightness of millennial glory, shall Israel below, and the Church above, look backward to the cross as the place where justice sheathed its sword, and the Hand of mercy began to erect that superstructure which shall shine, with everlasting light and glory, to the praise and honour of God, the blessed Giver of all.

Part 8 THE CONSPIRACY

We are again called to follow David into the valley of humiliation — a deep valley indeed where grievous sin and its bitter fruits are fully seen. It is really wonderful to trace the chequered path of this remarkable man. No sooner has the hand of love restored his soul, and set his feet again upon the rock, than he is plunged into the depths of corruption. We have just seen his error in reference to the house of God graciously corrected, and we are now to behold him led captive in the chains of natural desire. Such, alas, is man — a poor, halting, stumbling creature, needing at every moment the fullest exercise of divine grace and forbearance.

The history of the most obscure believer will be found to exhibit, though on a smaller scale, all the roughnesses, inequalities, and inconsistencies observable in David's course. Indeed, it is this that renders the narrative of his life and times so peculiarly, so touchingly interesting to us.

Where is the heart that has not been assailed by the power of unbelief, like David when he fled for refuge to the king of Gath? or by mistaken notions in reference to

the Lord's service, like David when he sought to build a house for God, before the time? or by emotions of self-complacency and pride, like David when he sought to number the people? or by the vile lustings of nature, like David in the matter of Uriah the Hittite? If there be such a heart, it will find but little interest in tracing the ways of David. But I trust my reader has not such a heart, for wherever there is a human heart there is also the susceptibility of all that I have been enumerating, and, therefore, the grace that could meet David must be precious to every heart that knows its own plague.

The section of our history on which we are now entering is an extensive one, embracing many important principles of Christian experience and divine dealing. The facts of the case are, doubtless, familiar, but it will be profitable to look closely at them. David's sin led to Absalom's conspiracy. "And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem" (2 Sam. 11: 1). David, instead of being out at the head of his army, exercising himself in the hardships and fatigues of war, was quietly reposing at home. This was giving the enemy a manifest advantage over him. The moment a man absents himself from his post of duty, or retires from the place of conflict, he renders himself weak. He has taken off the harness, and will, undoubtedly, be pierced by the arrow of the enemy.

While at work for the Lord, be the work what it may, nature is kept under pressure; but when at ease, nature begins to work, and feel the action and influence of external things. We should seriously ponder this. Satan

will ever find mischief for idle hearts, as well as idle hands. David was made to feel this. Had he been at Rabbah with his army, his eye would not have rested upon an object calculated to act upon the corrupt principle within; but the very act of tarrying at home afforded an opening for the enemy to come in upon him.

It is well to be ever on the watch, for we have a watchful enemy. "Be sober, be vigilant," says the apostle, "because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." Satan watches his opportunity, and when he finds a soul unoccupied with his proper service, he will surely seek to involve him in evil. It is, therefore, safe and healthful to be diligently engaged in service — service flowing out of communion with God, for we are thus in an attitude of positive hostility to the enemy; but if we are not acting in hostility, he will use us as instruments for his own ends. When David failed in energy as the captain of the hosts of Israel, he became the slave of lust. Sad picture! Solemn, most solemn warning for our souls!

The believer is the subject either of the energy of the Spirit, or the energy of the flesh; if he fails in the former, the latter will most assuredly predominate, and then he becomes an easy prey to the enemy. Thus it was with David. "At the time when kings go forth to battle" he was at rest in his house, and Satan presented a bait which proved too much for his poor heart. He fell — grievously, shamefully fell! Nor was his fall now a mere mistake. No; he fell into a deep pit of moral evil, of vile corruption, and his fall utters the solemn admonition, "Keep under the body." Nature must be judged, or we shall make shipwreck.

And mark the fearful lengths to which David was carried in the commission of evil. Having sacrificed his character to indulge nature, he endeavours to make Uriah a cloak to screen him from the public eye. His reputation must be maintained at all cost. He tries kindness, but in vain; he makes the wronged and dishonoured Uriah drunk, but to no purpose; at last, he murders him by the sword of the children of Ammon. How dreadful!

Did David really think that all was over when Uriah was out of the way? Did he forget that the eyes of the Lord were resting upon him in his evil course? It would seem that his conscience was hardened on this occasion, and not susceptible of conviction as we should expect. Had it been so, he would assuredly have faltered and hesitated ere he added the sin of murder to that of adultery, he would have mourned under the sharp reproof of Uriah — only the sharper because perfectly unintentional — when he said, "The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are encamped in the open fields: shall I then go into my house?" What a rebuke to David! The Lord and His people were in the open fields, conflicting with the uncircumcised foes of Israel, but David was at home enjoying the ease and indulging the desires of nature.

Surely we may say, there was a time when David would not have been found reclining on his couch when the hosts of the Lord were warring with the enemy; there was a time when he would not have exposed a faithful servant to the assault of the enemy in order to save his own reputation. Such, however, is man — the best of men. When pride swells the heart, or lust dims the eye, who shall attempt to draw a limit to human depravity?

Who shall define the fearful lengths to which even a David can go, when out of communion? Blessed for ever be the God of all grace, who has ever proved Himself equal to all the demands of His wayward children! Who but God could deal with even one saint for a single stage of his history? When we remember His perfect estimate of the odiousness of sin, His perfect grace toward the sinner must fill the soul with adoring gratitude!

The Lord must maintain His holiness, however He may deal with the sinner; and hence, in David's case, we find Him denouncing the most solemn judgement upon his house because of his sin. Nathan is sent to him in order to lead his conscience into the immediate presence of the holiness of God. This is the proper place for conscience to find itself. When not there, it will find various expedients, subterfuges, and various cloaks. David said, when told of the success of his diabolical scheme in reference to Uriah, "Thus shalt thou say to Joab, Let not this thing displease thee, for the sword devoureth one as well as another." Thus did he think to hush up the whole matter. He vainly imagined that, when Uriah was out of the way, all would be well.

But, ah, there was an Eye that could penetrate through all this covering which David's insensibility has cast over his heart and conscience. "The sword devoureth one as well as another," no doubt, and war has its vicissitudes; but this would not satisfy the holiness of God. No; the whole matter must be exposed — the dreadful meshes of evil in which Satan had entangled the feet of his victim must all be disentangled, the holiness of God's house must be maintained at all cost, His name and truth fully vindicated, and His servant scourged in the view of the whole congregation — yea, "in the sight of the sun." It

might seem, in man's judgement, to be wiser to hide from public view the chastisement of one who stood so high, but such is not God's mode; He will prove to every spectator that He has no fellowship with evil, by the judgement which He executes in the midst of His people. Nothing could avail to wipe off the stain which had been cast upon the truth of God but the public judgement of the transgressor. The men of the world may go on for the present, and sin with a high hand; but those who stand in association with the name of the Lord, must keep themselves pure or else be judged.

However, David would seem to have been most wonderfully insensible in this whole transaction. Even when Nathan's touching parable had set before him the blackness of his conduct, he, though roused to indignation at the selfish conduct of the rich man, never took it to himself. "And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die." Thus did he pronounce judgement upon himself unconsciously; he felt not his own sin as yet; perhaps he would have proceeded to find out and punish the offender, had not the prophet's word proved to be the very arrow of the Almighty to pierce his obtuse conscience. "Thou art the man."

Tremendous discovery! The sin was traced to its source, and David stood as a conscience-smitten, broken-hearted sinner in the presence of God. There is no more effort to screen himself, or maintain his reputation. "I have sinned against the Lord," is the acknowledgment which flows forth from his wounded spirit. His soul was subdued by the power of the truth, and Psalm 51 was his penitential utterance, as he lay prostrate in the dust, in

the deep sense of his own personal vileness before the Lord. "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving-kindness; according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions." Here was David's well-known, oft-tried resource. He brings his heavy burden and lays it down beside the loving-kindness and tender mercy of God — the only place in which his harassed spirit could find repose. He felt his sin to be so heinous that nothing but the mercy of God could avail to blot it out. There, however, he found a "vast abyss" which could "swallow up" all his evil, and give him profound peace in the view of his own wretchedness.

Nor was it merely to be forgiven his sins that David desired; this he needed, no doubt, but he needed more; he needed to be inwardly cleansed from the defiling power of sin itself. "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." The apostle says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." To be cleansed from unrighteousness is more than to be forgiven our sins; and David desired the latter, as well as the former. Both are made to depend on the confession of our sins.

It is a much more difficult thing to confess our sin, than to ask for forgiveness. Really to confess before God the sin which we have committed, is a much more humbling thing than to ask for pardon in a general way. It is an easy thing to ask the Lord for pardon; but it is in vain unless we confess our sins; and then, observe, it is a matter of simple faith to know that sins are forgiven us. The word is, "If we confess"; David confessed his sin.

"I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight; that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest." This was true conviction. There was no attempt at palliation; no laying blame on circumstances; no looking at individuals. It is simply "I" and "Thee"; I a sinner, and Thou the God of truth. "Let God be true, and every man a liar." The secret of true restoration consists in taking our real place, as sinners, in the light of the truth of God. This is the apostle's teaching in the third of Romans. The truth of God is there set up as the great standard by which man's condition is to be tested.

The effect of this is to bring the sinner down to the very bottom, as it were, of his moral and practical condition in the sight of God; it strips him of everything, and lays his inmost soul bare before a holiness which will not tolerate the least speck of sin in its presence. But when thus brought down into the dust of self-abasement and genuine confession, what do we find? We find God, in the solitariness and sovereignty of His grace, working out a perfect righteousness for the guilty and silenced sinner.

Here we find truth and grace presented to us in this most important section of inspiration. Truth breaks the heart, grace binds it up; that stops the mouth, this opens it; stops it, that it may no longer boast of human merit; opens it, that it may show forth the praise and honour of the God of all grace.

David travelled in spirit through the truth afterwards set forth in Romans 3. He, too, was led down into the profound depths of his nature. "Behold," he says, "I was

shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Here he looks down to the very lowest point of depression. Man's original — shaper in sin! What good could ever flow from such a thing? Nothing! It is irrecoverable.

And then observe the contrast: "Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts." God demands truth. What could David do therefore but confess what he does? for that was the truth concerning himself. What could now meet the need of such a man? Nothing but the precious blood of Christ. "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." In other words, David throws himself as a helpless sinner into the arms of redeeming love. Happy resting-place! God alone can purge a sinner, and make him fit for His own presence. "Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice."

God must do all — purge his conscience, open his ear again to the notes of joy and gladness, open his mouth to tell transgressors of His ways of love and mercy, create a clean heart within him, restore to him the joy of His salvation, uphold him by His free Spirit, deliver him from blood-guiltiness. In short, when Nathan's words fell with divine power upon David's heart, he cast the crushing weight of his burden upon infinite grace, (exercised through the precious blood of atonement) and thus was brought humbly to rejoice in a perfect settlement of the question which his sin had raised between his conscience and God. Grace gained a glorious triumph; and David retired from the field, scarred indeed, and sorely wounded, yet with a deepened experience of what God was, and what grace had done for his soul.

Still, David's sin produced its own bitter fruits in due time. This must ever be so. Grace does not set aside that solemn word of the apostle, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Grace may pardon the individual, but the results of sin will assuredly appear, even though the sinner may enjoy the deepest and sweetest experiences of divine love and restoring grace, while actually under the rod. We shall see this abundantly exemplified in David. He was, as we know, fully, blessedly, divinely pardoned, washed, and restored; nevertheless he had to harken to the solemn denunciation, "Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from thy house; because thou hast despised Me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife."

Observe, "Thou hast despised Me." David had sought to hide his sin from public view by putting Uriah out of the way, forgetting the all-seeing eye of Jehovah, and forgetting, too, the honour of His holy name. Had he remembered the Lord at the moment when nature was causing her voice to be heard within, he would not have fallen into the snare. The sense of God's presence is the great preservative from evil; but how often are we more influenced by the presence of our fellow-man than we are by the presence of God. "I have set the Lord always before me; because He is on my right hand, I shall not be moved." If we fail to realize God's presence as a preservative against evil, we shall be made to feel it as a judgement because of it.

"The sword shall never depart from thy house." Contrast this with the glorious promises made to David in 2 Samuel 7, and yet it is the same voice that falls on the ear in the denunciation and in the promise, though in a

tone so awfully different: in the latter, grace; in the former, holiness is heard. "Because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child that is born unto thee shall surely die." The death of the child, however, was but the first sound of the tornado of judgement about to burst upon David's house. He might fast, pray, humble himself, and lie prostrate in the dust, but the child must die; judgement must take its course, the consuming fire burn up every particle of the material submitted to its action.

The sword of man "devours one as well as another"; but the sword of God falls on the head of the offender. Things must be made manifest; the stream may flow for a time under ground, but sooner or later it will break out. We may go on for years in a course of secret evil, in the cultivation of some unholy principle, in the indulgence of some unholy lust, in the gratification of some unholy temper or feeling, but the smouldering flame must ultimately break forth, and show us the real character of our actings. This is a truly solemnising reflection. We cannot hide things from God, nor cause Him to think that our wrong ways are all right. We may try to reason ourselves into such a thought; we may persuade our hearts by plausible arguments that such and such things are right, good, or lawful; but "God is not mocked: whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

Yet what grace shines out in this, as in every scene of David's remarkable career. Bathsheba becomes the mother of Solomon, who occupied the throne of Israel in its most glorious period, and who also stands in that privileged line through which, according to the flesh, Christ came! This is truly divine! It is altogether worthy

of God. The darkest scene in David's life becomes, under the hand of God, the means of richest blessings — divine grace is reflected on a dark background. Thus did the eater yield meat, and the strong, sweetness. We know how this principle characterises all the ways of God with His people. He judges their evil, surely, but pardons their sin, and makes their very failures the channel through which, after humiliation and self-judgement, grace flows to them. Blessed forever be the God of all grace, who pardons our sins, restores our souls, bears with our many infirmities, and finally causes us to triumph through Him that loves us!

How must David have felt ever after, as his eye rested upon his Solomon, "the man of rest" his Jedidiah, "the beloved of the Lord"! He would remember his own humiliating fall; he would remember God's adorable grace. And, is it not just thus with ourselves? What is our history day by day, but a history of falls and restorations, of ups and downs? Nothing more; and thank God for the assurance that "Grace all the work shall crown through everlasting days."

At the close of this twelfth chapter (2 Sam. 12), we find David again in conflict with the enemy — his proper place. "And David gathered all the people together, and went to Rabbah, and fought against it and took it.... And he brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick-kiln; and thus did he to all the cities of the children of Ammon. So David and all the people returned to Jerusalem."

And now begins the heavy tale of David's woes, the fulfilment of the prophet's denunciation, that the sword should never depart from his house. 2 Samuel 13 records two of the most diabolical acts that ever stained a family circle. Amnon, the son of David, offers dishonour to the sister of Absalom, and Absalom murders Amnon, and then flees to Geshur, where he remains three years. David allows him to return, contrary to the positive command of the law. Even had he been but a manslayer, he should have remained in a city of refuge; but he was a murderer, and, with his murder upon him, he is received back again upon natural grounds — no confession, no judgement, no atonement.

"The king kissed Absalom." Yes, the king kissed the murderer, instead of allowing the law of the God of Israel to take its course. What then? "It came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him." This was the next step. David's inordinate tenderness only paved the way for Absalom's open rebellion. Terrible warning! Deal tenderly with evil, and it will assuredly rise to a head, and crush you in the end. On the other hand, meet evil in the name of the Lord, and your victory is sure Sport not with the serpent, but at once crush it beneath your foot. Plain, unflinching decision is, after all, the safest and happiest path. It may be trying at first, but the end is peaceful.

But observe how Absalom works. He begins by creating a want in the hearts of the men of Israel. "And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate: and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgement, then Absalom called

unto him, and said, Of what city art thou?... See thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee. Absalom said, moreover, Oh, that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice. And it was so that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand and kissed him.... So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel." The enemy's way is first to create a want, to produce a blank, and then proceed to fill it up with something, or some one, of his own providing. Those whose hearts were fully satisfied with David had no room for Absalom.

This is a fine principle when applied to our hearts in reference to Christ. If we are filled with Him we have no room for aught beside. It is only when Satan succeeds in creating a want in our hearts that he introduces something of his own. When we are able in truth to say, "The Lord is my portion," we are safe from the influence of Satan's attractive baits. The Lord keep us in the happy and holy enjoyment of Himself, that so we may be able to say with one of old, "I try to lay up all my good things in Christ, and then a little of the creature goes a great way."

However, Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel. He came in by flatteries, and usurped David's place in their thoughts and affections. He was a comely person, well adapted to captivate the multitude. "In all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him." But his beauty and his flattery had no effect upon those who were near the person of David. When the messenger came, saying,

"The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom," it became manifest who were for David.

"And David said unto all his servants that were with him at Jerusalem, Arise, and let us flee.... And the king's servants said unto the king, Behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my lord the king shall appoint....And the king went forth, and all the people after him, and tarried in a place that was far off. And all his servants passed on beside him, and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the Gittites, six hundred men which came after him from Gath, passed on before the king.... And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over; the king also himself passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over, toward the way of the wilderness."

Thus were there many hearts who loved David too well to be drawn away by the ensnaring influence of Absalom. Those who had been with David in the days of his exile were near his beloved person in this day of his deep sorrow. "And David went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered; and he went barefoot; and all the people that were with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up."

This is a deeply touching scene. David's grace shines out more during this conspiracy than at any period of his life. And not only does David's grace appear in a striking point of view, but the genuine devotedness of his dear people also. When we behold a loving band of followers thronging round the weeping, the barefooted David, our hearts are far more deeply touched than when we see

them thronging round his throne. We are more thoroughly convinced that his person, and not his office, was the centre of attraction. David had nothing to offer his followers now save fellowship in his rejection; yet was there a charm about him, to those who knew his person, that bound them to him at all times. They could weep with him, as well as conquer with him. Hear the language of a genuine lover of David: "And Ittai answered the king, and said, As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be." Life or death; he would be in companionship with David.

In looking through these chapters, there is nothing that so strikes us as David's beautiful subjection of spirit. When Zadok would bring the ark in his weeping train, he says, "Carry back the ark of God into the city; if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again, and show me both it, and His habitation; but if He thus say, I have no delight in thee, behold, here am I, let Him do to me as seemeth good unto Him."

When the insulting Benjamite, Shimei, came forth to curse and cast stones at him, and Abishai desired permission to take off his head, his answer is, "What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so?" In short, he meekly bows his head to the dispensation of God. He felt, no doubt, that he was only reaping the fruit of his sin, and he accepted it. He saw God in every circumstance, and owned Him with a subdued and reverent spirit. To him it was not Shimei, but the Lord. Abishai saw only the man, and desired to

deal with him accordingly; like Peter afterwards, when he sought to defend his beloved Master from the band of murderers sent to arrest Him. Both Peter and Abishai were living upon the surface, and looking at secondary causes. The Lord Jesus was living in the most profound subjection to the Father. "The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" This gave Him power over anything. He looked beyond the instrument to God — beyond the cup to the hand which had filled it. It mattered not whether it were Judas, Herod, Caiaphas, or Pilate; He could say in all, "the cup which My Father hath given Me to drink."

Thus, too, was David, in his measure, lifted above subordinate agents. He looked right up to God, and with unshod feet, and covered head, he bowed before Him. "The Lord hath said unto him, Curse David." This was enough.

Now, there are, perhaps, few things in which we so much fail as in apprehending the presence of God, and His dealing with our souls in every circumstance of daily life. We are constantly ensnared by looking at secondary causes; we do not realize God in everything. Hence Satan gets the victory over us. Were we more alive to the fact that there is not an event which happens to us, from morning to night, in which the voice of God may not be heard, the hand of God seen, with what a holy atmosphere would it surround us! Men and things would then be received as so many agents and instruments in our Father's hand; so many ingredients in our Father's cup.

Thus would our minds be solemnized, our spirits calmed, our hearts subdued. Then we shall not say with Abishai,

"Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head." Nor shall we, with Peter, draw the sword of natural excitement. How far below their respective masters were both these affectionate though mistaken men! How must the sound of Peter's sword have grated on his Master's ear, and offended His spirit! And how must Abishai's words have grieved the meek and submitting David! Could David defend himself while God was dealing with his soul in a manner so solemn and impressive? Surely not. He dare not take himself out of the hands of the Lord. He was His, for life or death — as a king or an exile. Blessed subjection!

But, as has been already remarked, the record of this conspiracy not only exhibits David's subjection to God, but also the devotedness of David's friends to his person, whether mistaken or otherwise. His mighty men are seen thronging round him on his right hand and his left, and sharing with him the insults and execrations of Shimei. They had been with him in the hold, with him on the throne, with him in the field, and they are now with him in his humiliation.

Now Shobi and Barzillai come forth to minister to him and his men with princely liberality. In short, the thoughts of many hearts were revealed in the season of David's sorrow. It was manifest who loved David for his own sake; and, no doubt, he returned to his house and his throne with a fuller and deeper confidence in the genuine affection of those around him.

There is, however, one character introduced to our notice, upon which we must dwell for a little. I allude to Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan.

Hardly had David taken his seat on the throne, when he gave utterance to those memorably gracious words, "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God unto him?" "The house of Saul!" "The kindness of God!" What words! Saul had been his most implacable enemy; yet, being now on the throne, the brilliancy of his position, and the fullness of divine grace, enabled him to sink in oblivion the acts of the past, and to manifest, not merely the kindness of David, but the kindness of God.

Now, the kindness of God is marked by this special characteristic, exercised toward His enemies. "If, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son," etc. Such was the kindness which David desired to show to a member of the house of Saul. "Now, when Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence.... And David said unto him, Fear not, for I will surely show thee kindness... and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually. And he bowed himself, and said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look on such a dead dog as I am?" Here, then, is a lovely specimen of the kindness of God, and here, too, we are presented with the ground of Mephibosheth's devotedness to David. Though having no more claim upon him than an enemy, or a dead dog, yet is he taken up in grace, and set down at the king's table.

But Mephibosheth had a faithless servant, who, to promote his own ends, misrepresented him to the king. The opening verses of chapter 16 will furnish the reader with an account of Ziba's actings. He pretends kindness to David, and blackens the character of Mephibosheth, in order to get possession of his lands. He takes

advantage of his master's weakness of body to deceive and malign him. What a picture!

The truth, however, came to light, and the wronged one was fully vindicated. On David's return, when all the trouble was over, and Absalom perished from the scene, "Mephibosheth, the son of Saul, came down to meet the king, and had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until he came again in peace."

Such is the Spirit's testimony to this faithful man. While David was away, Mephibosheth was a mourner: true picture of what the saint ought to be now, during the period of his Master's absence. Fellowship with an absent Lord imparts a tone of thorough separation to the Christian character. The question is not at all what a Christian may, or may not do. No; an affectionate heart will suggest the true course to be adopted by all those who are looking for the king's return. What a truly divine spring of action does the absence of Jesus furnish! "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above." Ask the spiritual man, why does he abstain from things which he might enjoy? His answer is, Jesus is absent. This is the highest motive.

We do not want the rules of a cold and barren formalism to regulate our ways; but we want a more fervent affection for the person of Christ, and a more lively desire for His speedy return. We, like Mephibosheth, have experienced the kindness of God — precious kindness! We have been taken up from the depths of our ruin, and set among the princes of God's people. Should we not, therefore, love our Master? should we not desire to see His face? should we not regulate our present

conduct by constant reference to Him? Would that we were more like Mephibosheth. But we are all too well disposed to minister to our odious nature — too ready to walk in the unchecked enjoyment of the things of this life — its riches, its honours, its comforts, its refinements, its elegancies, and the more so because we imagine we can do all these things without forfeiting our title to the name and privileges of Christians. Vain, detestable selfishness! Selfishness, which shall be put to the blush in the day of Christ's appearing.

Had Ziba's account of Mephibosheth been true, how could the latter have replied to David when he said, "Wherefore wentest thou not with me, Mephibosheth?" But he was able to answer, "My lord, O king, my servant deceived me; for thy servant said, I will saddle me an ass, that I may ride thereon, and go to the king; because thy servant is lame. And he hath slandered thy servant unto my lord the king; but my lord the king is an angel of God; do, therefore, what is good in thine eyes. For all of my father's house were but dead men before my lord the king; yet didst thou set thy servant among them that did eat at thine own table. What right, therefore, have I yet to cry any more unto the king?" Here was simple integrity of heart. Unaffected devotedness must develop itself.

The contrast between Ziba and Mephibosheth is truly striking. The former was seeking for the inheritance; the later only desired to be near the king. Hence, when David said, "Why speakest thou any more of thy matters? I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land," Mephibosheth at once proved the direction in which his thoughts and desires were flowing; "Yea," said he, "let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come

again in peace unto his own house." His heart was engaged about David, not about the "matters." How could he stand on a footing with Ziba? How could he divide the land with such an one? Impossible! The king had returned; this was enough for him. To be near to him was better far than all the inheritance of the house of Saul. "Let him take all." Nearness to the person of the king so filled, so satisfied the heart of Mephibosheth, that he could, without any difficulty, give up all that for which Ziba had so diligently acted the deceiver and the slanderer.

Just so will it be with those who love the name and person of the Son of God. The prospect of His loved appearing will deaden their affections for the things of this world. With them it will not be a question of lawfulness or unlawfulness: such terms are far too cold for an affectionate heart. The very fact of their looking out for the morning, will, of necessity, turn their hearts away from all beside; just as gazing intently at any special object necessarily turns one away from everything else.

If Christians realized more the power of our blessed hope, how they would walk above and apart from the world. The enemy is well aware of this, and hence he has laboured hard to reduce this hope to the level of speculative doctrine — a peculiar tenet, possessing little or no practical power to attract the heart. That section of inspiration, too, which specially unfolds the events connected with the coming of Christ, he has succeeded in involving in almost total neglect. The book of Revelation has, until very recently, been regarded as a book of such profound and inextricable mystery, that few, if any, could approach it. And even since the

attention of Christians has been more particularly directed to its study, he has introduced and built up such conflicting systems — has set forward such jarring interpretations, that simple minds are well-nigh scared away from a subject which seems, in their judgement, to be inseparably connected with mysticism and confusion.

Now there is just one grand remedy for all this evil, viz., a genuine love of the appearing of Jesus. Those who are waiting for that will not dispute much about the mode of it. Indeed, we may set it down as a fixed principle, that in proportion as affection becomes dead, will the spirit of controversy prevail.

All this is very simply and very strikingly illustrated in the narrative of Mephibosheth. He felt that he owed everything to David; that he had been saved from ruin, and raised to dignity. Hence, when David's place was occupied by a usurper, Mephibosheth's whole appearance and manner proved that he had no sympathy with the existing state of things; he was estranged from it all, and only sighed for the return of him whose kindness had made him all he was. His interests, his destinies, his hopes, were all bound up with David, and nothing but his return could make him happy.

Oh, that it were thus with us! Would that we really entered more into our true character, as strangers and pilgrims, in the midst of a scene where Satan rules. The time is coming when our beloved King shall be brought back, amid the affectionate acclamations of His people, when the usurper shall be hurled from his throne, and every enemy crushed beneath the footstool of our glorious Immanuel. The Absaloms, the Ahithophels, the

Shimeis, shall find their proper place; and, on the other hand, all who, like Mephibosheth, have mourned the absent David, shall have all the desires of their longing hearts abundantly satisfied. "How long, O Lord?" May this be our cry, as we eagerly look for the earliest sound of His chariot wheels. The way is long, rough, and painful; the night dark and depressing; but the word is, "Be patient, brethren." "He that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him."

Into the further details of Absalom's conspiracy I do not now mean to enter. He met the end his deeds merited, though a father's heart might grieve and a father's tears flow for him. Moreover, his history may justly be viewed as a type of that great prophetic character, who, as Daniel informs us, "shall obtain the kingdom by flatteries." This, however, and many other points full of interest, I shall leave the reader to deduce from the sacred text for himself, praying the Lord to make the study of His own Word refreshing and edifying, in this day of darkness and confusion. Never was there a time when Christians needed more to give themselves to the prayerful study of Scripture. Conflicting opinions and judgments, strange notions and baseless theories are abroad, and the simple mind knows not whither to turn. Blessed be God, His Word is before us in all its lucid simplicity, and in it we have the eternal fountain of truth, the immutable standard by which everything must be judged; all, therefore, that we need is a mind fully subject to its teaching. "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light."

Part 9 THE SONG AND LAST WORDS 2 Sam. 22.

The twenty-second chapter of 2 Samuel contains David's magnificent song, and is parallel with Psalm 18. It is the utterance of the Spirit of Christ in David, connected with His triumph over death, through the mighty energy of the power of God (Eph. 1: 19). In it, as the inspired heading teaches us, David presents his praise to God for deliverance from the hand of all his enemies, and the hand of Saul particularly. He thankfully recounts the glorious actings of God on his behalf, yet in such language as at once leads us from David and all his conflicts, to that terrible conflict which raged around the grave of Jesus, when all the powers of darkness were ranged, in fierce array, against God. Tremendous was the scene! Never before, and never since, was such a battle fought, or such a victory gained, whether we look at the contending powers, or the consequences resulting. Heaven on the one side, and hell on the other. Such were the contending powers.

And as to the consequences resulting, who shall recount them? The glory of God and of His Christ, in the first place; the salvation of the Church; the restoration and blessing of Israel's tribes; and the full deliverance of creation's wide domain from the lordship of Satan, the curse of God, and the thraldom of corruption. Such were some of the results. Fierce, therefore, was the struggle of the great enemy of God and man at the cross and at the grave of Christ; violent were the efforts of the strong man to prevent his armour from being taken, and his house from being spoiled, but all in vain; Jesus triumphed. "When the waves of death compassed me, the floods of ungodly men made me afraid; the sorrows of hell compassed me about; the snares of death prevented me; in my distress I called upon the Lord, and

cried to my God: and He did hear my voice out of His temple, and my cry did enter into His ears."

Here was apparent weakness, but real power. The apparently vanquished one became the victor. "Jesus was crucified in weakness, but He liveth by the power of God." Having shed His blood as the victim for sin, He left Himself in the hands of the Father, who, by the eternal Spirit, brought Him again from the dead. He resisted not, but suffered Himself to be trampled upon, and thus crushed the power of the enemy. Satan, by man's agency, nailed Him to the cross, laid Him in the grave, and set a seal upon Him, that He might not rise; but He came up out of the horrible pit, and out of the miry clay, "having spoiled principalities and powers." He went down into the very heart of the enemy's dominion, only that He might make a show of him openly.

From ver. 8-20, we have the interference of Jehovah on the part of His righteous servant, set forth in language sublime and powerful beyond expression. The imagery used by the inspired Psalmist is of the most solemn and impressive character, "The earth shook and trembled; the fountains of heaven moved and shook, because He was wroth.... He bowed the heavens also, and came down; and darkness was under His feet. And He rode upon a cherub and did fly; and He was seen upon the wings of the wind. And He made darkness pavilions round about Him, dark waters and thick clouds of the skies.... The Lord thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered His voice. And He sent out arrows, and scattered them; lightning, and discomfited them. And the channels of the sea appeared, the foundations of the world were discovered, at the rebuking of the Lord, at

the blast of the breath of His nostrils. He sent from above, He took me; He drew me out of many waters."

What language is here! Where shall we find anything to equal it? The wrath of the Omnipotent, the thunder of His power, the convulsion of creation's entire framework, the artillery of Heaven — all these ideas, so glowingly set forward here, outstrip all human imagination The grave of Christ was the centre round which the battle raged in all its fierceness, for there lay the Prince of life. Satan did his utmost; he brought all the power of hell to bear, all "the power of darkness," but he could not hold his captive, because all the claims of justice had been met. The Lord Jesus triumphed over Satan, death, and hell, in strict conformity with the claims of righteousness This is the sinner's joy, the sinner's peace. It would avail nothing to be told that God over all, blessed for ever, had vanquished Satan, a creature of His own creation. But to be told that He, as man's representative, as the sinner's substitute, as the Church's surety, gained the victory, this, when believed, gives the soul ineffable peace; and this is just what the gospel tells us — this is the message which it conveys to the sinner's ear. The apostle tells us that "He [Christ] was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification." Having taken upon Himself our sins, and gone down into the grave under the weight of them, resurrection was necessary as the divine proof of His accomplished work. The Holy Ghost, in the gospel, presents Him as risen, ascended, and seated at God's right hand in the heavens, and thus dispels from the believer's heart every doubt, every fear, every hesitation. "The Lord is risen indeed"; and His precious blood is new and living wine.

The great argument of the apostle in 1 Cor. 15 is based upon this subject. The forgiveness of sins is proved by the resurrection of Christ. "If Christ be not raised, ye are yet in your sins." And, as a consequence, if Christ be raised, ye are not in your sins. Hence resurrection and forgiveness stand or fall together. Recognize Christ risen, and you recognize sin forgiven. "But now," says the triumphant reasoner, "is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept." This settles all. The moment you take your eye off a risen Christ, you lose the full, deep, divine, peace-giving sense of the forgiveness of sins. The richest fund of experience — the widest range of intelligence will not do as a ground of confidence. Nothing, in short, but Jesus risen.

From ver. 21-25, we have the ground of Jehovah's interference on behalf of His servant. These verses prove that in this entire song we have a greater than David. David could not say, "The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath He recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all His judgments were before me; and as for His statutes, I did not depart from them. I was also upright before Him, and have kept myself from mine iniquity. Therefore the Lord hath recompensed me according to my righteousness; according to my cleanness in His eyesight." How different is this language from that of Psalm 51, on which we have already dwelt. There it is, "Have mercy upon me, according to Thy loving kindness; according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies." this was suitable language for a fallen sinner, as David felt himself to be. He dare not speak of his righteousness, which was as

filthy rags; and as to his recompense, he felt that the lake of fire was all that he could, in justice, claim, on the ground of what he was.

Hence, therefore, the language of our chapter is the language of Christ, who alone could use it. He, blessed be His name, could speak of His righteousness, His uprightness, and the cleanness of His hands. And here we see the wondrous grace that shines in redemption. The righteous One took the place of the guilty. "He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we night be made the righteousness of God in Him." Here is the sinner's resting-place. Here he beholds the spotless victim nailed to the accursed tree, for him; here he beholds a full redemption flowing from the perfect work of the Lamb of God; here, too, he may behold Jehovah interfering on behalf of his glorious and gracious representative, and, as a consequence, on his behalf; and that, moreover, on strictly righteous grounds. What deep peace this gives to the sin-burdened heart! Deep, ineffable, divine peace!

David's song closes with a fine allusion to the glories of the latter day, which imparts to it a character of completeness and enlarged compass particularly edifying. "Strangers shall submit themselves unto me.' "I will give thanks unto Thee among the heathen," etc. Thus are we conducted along a wondrous path, commencing at the cross, and ending in the kingdom. The One who lay in the grave is to sit on the throne; the hand that was pierced with the nail shall wield the sceptre; and the brow that was dishonoured with a crown of thorns shall be wreathed with a diadem of glory. And never will the top-stone be laid on the superstructure which redeeming love has begun to

erect, until the crucified Jesus of Nazareth shall ascend the throne of David, and rule over the house of Jacob. Then shall the glories of redemption be truly celebrated in Heaven and on earth because the Redeemer shall be exalted and the redeemed rendered perfectly and eternally happy.

In David's last words, as in the history of other servants of God, we see how they all found in God their unfailing portion, and a sure refuge. Thus was it with him whose history we have been dwelling upon. Through his whole career, David had learned that divine grace alone could meet his need; and, at the close, he gives full expression to this. Whether we look at his "song," or his "last words," the great prominent subject is one and the same, viz., the sufficiency of divine grace.

However, David's last words derive point and energy from the knowledge of God's requirements, in reference to the character of a ruler. "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." This is God's standard. Nothing less will do; and where amongst the ranks of human rulers shall we find any to come up to it? We may travel down the entire catalogue of those who have occupied the thrones of this world, and not find so much as one who could answer to the great characteristics set forth in the above comprehensive verse. He "must be just," and "rule in the fear of God."

Psalm 82 furnishes us with the divine challenge of all those who have been set in places of authority. "God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; He judgeth among the gods." What does He find? Justice and the fear of His name? Ah! no; far from it. "How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked?"

Such is man. "They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are out of course." What, then, is the resource in view of such a humiliating state of things? "Arise, O God, judge the earth; for Thou shalt inherit all nations." The Lord Jesus is here presented as the one alone competent to fill the throne according to the thoughts of God, and Psalm 72 gives us a lovely sketch of what His government will be.

"He shall judge Thy people with righteousness, and Thy poor with judgement." "He shall judge the poor of the people, He shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor." "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass; as showers that water the earth." In short, the entire psalm must be read as a sample of the millennial kingdom of the Son of Man, and the reader will perceive how entirely David's last words harmonise with the spirit of it. "And He shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springeth out of the earth by clear shining after rain."

Truly refreshing and soul-reviving is this! And how does the heart rejoice to turn away from the dark and dreary scene through which we are passing, to contemplate a morning without clouds. The "morning without a cloud" is not now. How could it be? How could a fallen race, a groaning world, enjoy a cloudless sky? Impossible, until the atoning efficacy of the Cross shall have been applied to all, and the whole creation shall have entered into its full repose beneath the shadow of Immanuel's wings. Bright and happy prospect!

But it has been remarked, that no human office-bearer ever came up to the divine standard, as set forth in David's last words. David himself felt this. "My house is not so with God." Such was his humble, soul-subduing sense of what he was. We have already seen how fully, how deeply, how unaffectedly, he entered into the vast distance between what he was personally and the divine requirement, when he exclaimed, I was born in sin"; "Thou desirest truth in the inward parts." His experience was the same when he looked at himself officially. "My house is not so with God." Neither as a man nor as a king was he what he ought to be. And hence it was that grace was so precious to his heart. He looked into the mirror of God's perfect law, and saw therein his own deformity; he then turned round and looked at God's "covenant, ordered in all things and sure," and here he rested with unquestioning simplicity.

Though David's house was not ordered in all things, yet God's covenant was, and David could therefore say, "This is all my salvation, and all my desire." He had learnt to look away from himself and his house straight to God, and His everlasting covenant of grace. And, we may say, that just as his apprehension of his own personal and official nothingness was deep and real, would his sense of what grace had done for him be deep and real also. The view of what God was had humbled him; the view of what God was had lifted him up. It was his joy, as he travelled to the end of all human things, to find his resting-place in the blessed covenant of his God, in which he found embodied, and eternally secured, all his salvation and all his desire.

How blessed it is to find thus our all in God! not merely to use Him as one who makes up our deficiency, but our

all; to use Him as one who supersedes every one and everything in our estimation. This is what we want. God must be set above all, not merely in reference to the forgiveness of sins but also in reference to our every necessity. “I am God, and there is none else. LOOK UNTO ME. Many who trust God for salvation, nevertheless, fail much in the minute details of life; and yet God is glorified in being made the depositary of all our cares, and the bearer of all our burdens. There is nothing too small as not to be brought to Him, and nothing so small as not to be more than a match for our capacity, did we but enter into the sense of our nothingness.

But we find another element in 2 Sam. 23, an element, too, which might seem introduced rather abruptly: I allude to the record of David's mighty men. This has been already alluded to; but it is interesting to notice it in connection with God's covenant.

There were two things to cheer and comfort David's heart, viz., the faithfulness of God, and the devotedness of his servants. And, in looking at the close of Paul's course, we find that he had the same springs of comfort and encouragement. In the Second Epistle to Timothy, he glances at the condition of things around him; he sees the "great house," which assuredly was "not so with God" as He required it; he sees all that were in Asia turned away from him; he sees Hymeneus and Philetus teaching false doctrine, and overturning the faith of some; he sees Alexander the coppersmith doing much mischief; he sees many with itching ears, heaping to themselves teachers, and turning away from the truth to fables; he sees the perilous times setting in with fearful

rapidity: in a word, he sees the whole fabric, humanly speaking, going to pieces.

But he, like David, rested in the assurance that "the foundation of God standeth sure," and he was also cheered by the individual devotedness of some who, like mighty men, through the grace of God were standing faithful amid the wreck. He remembered the faith of a Timothy, the love of an Onesiphorus; and, moreover, he was cheered by the fact that in darkest times there would be a company of faithful ones who would call on the Lord out of a pure heart. These latter he exhorts Timothy to follow, having purged himself from the dishonourable vessels of the great house.

Thus was it with David. He could count his worthies, and record their deeds. Though his own house was not what it ought to be, and though "the sons of Belial" were around him, yet he could speak of an Adino, a Dodo, and a Shammah, men who had hazarded their lives for him, and had signalised their names by deeds of prowess against the uncircumcised.

Thank God, He will never leave Himself without a witness; He will always have a people devoted to His cause in the world. Did we not know and believe this, at a time like the present our hearts might indeed sink within us. A few years have wrought a mighty change in the sphere of action of many Christians. Things are not as they once were amongst us, and we may with truth say, "Our house is not so with God." Many of us have, it may be, been disappointed; we looked for much, and, alas, it has come to little — oh, how little! We have found that we were just like others, or, if we differed in aught, it was in our making a higher profession, and, as a

consequence, incurring higher responsibilities, and exhibiting greater inconsistencies. We thought we were somewhat, but we grievously erred, and are now learning our error. The Lord grant that we may learn it rightly, learn it thoroughly — in the dust, in His presence, that we may lift our heads proudly no more, but walk in the abiding sense of our own emptiness. The Lord's address to Laodicea must be remembered, and we may ponder it with profit. Because thou sayest I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. I counsel thee to buy of me gold, tried in the fire that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve that thou mayest see.

If our past experience leads us to cling more simply to Jesus, we shall have reason to bless the Lord for it all; and, as it is, we cannot but feel it to be a special mercy to be delivered from every false ground of confidence. If we were seeking to build up a system, it is well to be delivered from its influence and to be brought to adhere simply to the Word and Spirit of God, which are the appointed companions of the Church's path through the wilderness.

Nor are we, either, void of the sweet encouragement to be derived from the devotedness of one or another here and there. There are many who are proving their affection for the person of Christ, and the high estimation in which they hold the doctrine of the Church. This is a great mercy. The enemy, though he has done much mischief, has it not all his own way. There are those who are ready to spend their strength and

energy in the defence of the gospel. May the Lord add to their number — may He also add to the vigour of their testimony; and, finally, may He make us increasingly thankful for His grace in having set before us, in His Word, the true position and path of His servants, and those principles which can alone sustain us in the midst of strife and confusion.

David had thought to do much in his day, and was sincere in the thought; but he had to learn that the will of God concerning him was that he should "serve his generation." We, too, must learn this — we must learn that a humble mind, a devoted heart, a tender conscience, an honest purpose, are far more precious in the sight of God than mere outward services, however showy and attractive. "To obey is better than sacrifice; and to harken than the fat of rams." Salutary words, these, for a day of religiousness, like the present, wherein divine principle is so loosely held.

The Lord keep us faithful to the end, so that whether like those who have gone before us, we fall asleep in Jesus, or be caught up to meet Him in the air, we "may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless." Meanwhile, let us rejoice in the apostle's word to his son Timothy — "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His;" and, "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

The Life and Times of Josiah

The Life and Times of Josiah.

2 Chronicles 34 - 35.

C. H. Mackintosh.

Two thousand four hundred years have rolled away since king Josiah lived and reigned; but his history is pregnant with instruction, which can never lose its freshness or its power. The moment at which he ascended the throne of his fathers was one of peculiar gloom and heaviness. The tide of corruption, swollen by many a tributary stream, had risen to the highest point; and the sword of judgement, long held back in divine patience and long suffering, was about to fall in terrible severity upon the city of David. The brilliant reign of Hezekiah had been followed by a long and dreary period of fifty-five years under the sway of his son Manasseh; and albeit the rod of correction had proved effectual in leading this great sinner to repentance and amendment, yet no sooner had the sceptre fallen from his hand than it was seized by his godless and impenitent son Amon, who "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, as did Manasseh his father: for Amon sacrificed unto all the carved images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them; and humbled not himself before the Lord, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself: but Amon trespassed more and more. And his servants conspired against him, and slew him in his own house.... And the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his stead" (2 Chr. 33: 22-25).

Thus, then, Josiah, a child of eight years, found himself on the throne of David, surrounded by the accumulated evils and errors of his father and his grandfather — yea, by forms of corruption which had been introduced by no less a personage than Solomon himself. If the reader will just turn for a moment to 2 Kings 23, he will find a marvellous picture of the condition of things at the opening of Josiah's history. There were "idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places, in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem; those also that burned incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven."

Reader, ponder this! Only think of kings of Judah, successors of David, ordaining priests to burn incense to Baal! Bear in mind too that each of these kings of Judah was responsible to "write him a copy of the book of the law," which he was to keep by him, and in which he was to "read all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law, and those statutes to do them" (See Deut. 17: 18-19). Alas! how sadly had they departed from "all the words of the law," when they could actually set about ordaining priests to burn incense to false gods!

But further, there were "horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun," and that, moreover, "at the entering in of the house of the Lord," and "chariots of the sun," and "high places which Solomon the king of Israel had builded for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon."

All this is most solemn, and worthy of the serious consideration of the Christian reader. We certainly ought not to pass it over as a mere fragment of ancient history. It is not as though we were reading the historic records of Babylon, of Persia, of Greece, or of Rome. We should not marvel at the kings of those nations burning incense to Baal, ordaining idolatrous priests, and worshipping the host of heaven; but when we see kings of Judah, the sons and successors of David, children of Abraham, men who had access to the book of the law of God, and who were responsible to make that book the subject of their profound and constant study — when we see such men falling under the power of dark and debasing superstition, it sounds in our ears a warning voice, to which we cannot with impunity refuse to give heed. We should bear in mind that all these things have been written for our learning; and although it may be said that we are not in danger of being led to burn incense to Baal, or to worship the host of heaven, yet we may be assured we have need to attend to the admonitions and warnings with which the Holy Ghost has furnished us in the history of God's ancient people. "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10: 11). These words of the inspired apostle, though directly referring to the actings of Israel in the wilderness, may nevertheless apply to the entire history of that people — a history fraught with the deepest instruction from first to last.

But how are we to account for all those gross and terrible evils into which Solomon and his successors were drawn? What was their origin? Neglect of the Word of God. This was the source of all the mischief and all

the sorrow. Let professing Christians remember this; let the whole Church of God remember it. The neglect of the Holy Scriptures was the fruitful source of all those errors and corruptions which blot the page of Israel's history, and which brought down upon them many heavy strokes of Jehovah's governmental rod. "Concerning the works of men, by the word of Thy lips, I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer" (Ps. 17: 4). "From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect (artios), throughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3: 15-17).

In these two precious quotations we have the Word of God presented in its twofold virtue; it not only perfectly preserves us from evil, but perfectly furnishes us unto all good, it keeps us from the paths of the destroyer, and guides us in the ways of God.

How important, then, is the study — the diligent, earnest, prayerful study of Holy Scripture! How needful to cultivate a spirit of reverential submission, in all things, to the authority of the Word of God! Mark how continually and how earnestly this was impressed upon the ancient people of God. How often were such accents as the following sounded in their ears! — "Now therefore harken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it, that ye may keep the commandments of

the Lord your God which I command you.... Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep, therefore, and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all the statutes, and say, Surely, this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon Him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life; but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons" (Deut. 4: 1-9).

Let it be carefully noticed here, that "wisdom and understanding" consist simply in having the commandments of God treasured in the heart. This, moreover, was to be the basis of Israel's moral greatness, in view of the nations around them. It was not the learning of the schools of Egypt, or of the Chaldeans. No; it was the knowledge of the Word of God, and attention thereto — the spirit of implicit obedience in all things to the holy statutes and judgments of the Lord their God. This was Israel's wisdom; this their true and real greatness; this their impregnable bulwark against every foe — their moral safeguard against every evil.

And does not the self-same thing hold good with respect to God's people at the present moment? Is not obedience to the Word of God our wisdom, our safeguard, and the foundation of all true moral greatness? Assuredly. Our

wisdom is to obey. The obedient soul is wise, safe, happy, and fruitful. As it was, so it is. If we study the history of David and his successors, we shall find (without so much as a single exception) that those who yielded obedience to the commandments of God were safe, happy, prosperous, and influential. And so it will ever be. Obedience will always yield its own precious and fragrant fruits — not that its fruits should be our motive for rendering obedience; we are called to be obedient, irrespective of everything.

Now it is obvious that in order to be obedient to the Word of God, we must be acquainted with it, and in order to be acquainted with it, we must carefully study it. And how should we study it? With an earnest desire to understand its contents, with profound reverence for its authority, and with an honest purpose to obey its dictates, cost what it may. If we have grace to study Scripture in some small degree after this fashion, we may expect to grow in knowledge and wisdom.

But alas! there is a fearful amount of ignorance of Scripture in the professing church. We are deeply impressed with a sense of this; and we may as well, at this point, just tell the reader that our main object in calling his attention to the subject of "Josiah and his times" is to wake up in his soul an intense desire after a closer acquaintance with God's holy Word, and a more entire bowing down of his whole moral being — heart, conscience, and understanding — to that perfect standard.

We feel the commanding importance of this subject, and we must discharge what we believe to be a sacred duty to the souls of our readers and to the truth of God. The

powers of darkness are abroad. The enemy is succeeding to an appalling extent in drawing hearts after various forms of error and evil, in casting dust in the eyes of God's people, and in blinding the minds of men. True we have not got Ashtoreth, Chemosh, and Milcom; but we have ritualism, infidelity, spiritualism, etc. We have not to cry against burning incense to Baal, and worshipping the host of heaven, but we have something far more ensnaring and dangerous. We have the ritualist, with his sensuous and attractive rites and ceremonies; we have the rationalist, with his learned and plausible reasonings — we have the spiritualist, with his boasted converse with the spirits of the departed — and what multitude of other delusions and insidious attacks upon the truth!

We doubt if the minds of Christians generally are alive to the real character and extent of these formidable influences. There are at this moment millions of souls throughout the length and breadth of the professing Church who are building their hopes for eternity upon the sandy foundation of ordinances, rites, and ceremonies. There is a very marked return to the traditions of the fathers, as they are called; an intense longing after those things which gratify the senses — music, painting, architecture, vestments, lights, incense — all the appliances, in short, of a gorgeous and sensuous religion. The theology, the worship, and the discipline of the various churches of the Reformation are found insufficient to meet the religious cravings of the people. They are too severely simple to satisfy hearts that long for something tangible on which to lean for support and comfort — something to feed the senses, and fan the flame of devotion.

Hence the strong tendency of the religious mind in the direction of what is called ritualism. If the soul has not got hold of the truth, if there is not the living link with Christ, if the supreme authority of Holy Scripture be not set up in the heart, there is no safeguard against the powerful and fascinating influences of ceremonial religiousness. The most potent efforts of mere intellectualism, eloquence, logic, all the varied charms of literature, are found to be utterly insufficient to hold that class of minds to which we are now referring. They must have the forms and offices of religion; to these they will flock; around these they will gather; on these they will build.

It is painfully interesting to mark the efforts put forth in various quarters to act upon the masses and keep the people together. It is very evident to the thoughtful Christian that those who put forth such efforts must be sadly deficient in that profound faith in the power of the Word of God and of the cross of Christ which swayed the heart of the apostle Paul. They cannot be fully aware of the solemn fact that Satan's grand object is to keep souls in ignorance of divine revelation, to hide from them the glory of the cross and of the person of Christ. For this end he is using ritualism, rationalism, and spiritualism now, just as he used Ashtoreth, Chemosh, and Milcom in the days of Josiah. "There is nothing new under the sun." The devil has ever hated the truth of God, and he will leave no stone unturned to keep it from acting on the heart of man. Hence it is that he has rites and ceremonies for one man, the powers of reason for another; and when men tire of both, and begin to sigh for something satisfying, he leads them into converse and communion with the spirits of the departed. By all

alike are souls led away from the Holy Scriptures, and from the blessed Saviour which those Scriptures reveal.

It is solemn and affecting beyond expression to think of all this, and not less so to contemplate the lethargy and indifference of those who profess to have the truth. We do not stop to inquire what it is that ministers to this lethargic state of many professors. That is not our object. We desire, by the grace of God, to see them thoroughly roused out of it, and to this end it is that we call their attention to the influences that are abroad, and to the only divine safeguard against them. We cannot but feel deeply for our children, growing up in such an atmosphere as that which at present surrounds us, and which will become yet darker and darker. We long to see more earnestness on the part of Christians in seeking to store the minds of the young with the precious and soul-saving knowledge of the Word of God. The child Josiah, and the child Timothy, should incite us to greater diligence in the instruction of the young, whether in the bosom of the family, in the Sunday school, or in any way we can reach them. It will not do for us to fold our arms, and say, "When God's time comes, our children will be converted; and till then, our efforts are useless." This is a fatal mistake. "God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11). He blesses our prayerful efforts in the instruction of our children. And further, who can estimate the blessing of being early led in the right way — of having the character formed amid holy influences, and the mind stored with what is true and pure and lovely? On the other hand, who will undertake to set forth the evil consequences of allowing our children to grow up in ignorance of divine things? Who can portray the evils of a polluted imagination — of a

mind stored with vanity, folly, and falsehood — of a heart familiarised from infancy with scenes of moral degradation? We do not hesitate to say that Christians incur very heavy and awful responsibility in allowing the enemy to preoccupy the minds of their children at the very period when they are most plastic and susceptible.

True, there must be the quickening power of the Holy Ghost. It is as true of the children of Christians as of any other that they "must be born again." We all understand this. But does this fact touch the question of our responsibility in reference to our children? Is it to cripple our energies or hinder our earnest efforts? Assuredly not. We are called upon by every argument, divine and human, to shield our precious little ones from every evil influence, and to train them in that which is holy and good. And not only should we so act in respect to our own children, but also in respect to the thousands around us, who are like sheep having no shepherd, and who may each say, alas, with too much truth, "No man careth for my soul."

May the foregoing pages be used by God's Spirit to act powerfully on the hearts of all who may read them, that so there may be a real awakening to a sense of our high and holy responsibilities to the souls around, and a shaking off of that terrible deadness and coldness over which we all have to mourn.

PART 2

In studying the history of Josiah and his times, we learn one special and priceless lesson, namely, the value and authority of the Word of God. It would be utterly impossible for human language to set forth the vast importance of such a lesson — a lesson for every age, for

every clime, for every condition — for the individual believer and for the whole Church of God. The supreme authority of Holy Scripture should be deeply impressed on every heart. It is the only safeguard against the many forms of error and evil which abound on every hand. Human writings, no doubt, have their value; they may interest the mind as a reference, but they are perfectly worthless as authority.

We need to remember this. There is a strong tendency in the human mind to lean upon human authority. Hence it has come to pass that millions throughout the professing Church have virtually been deprived altogether of the Word of God, from the fact that they have lived and died under the delusion that they could not know it to be the Word of God apart from human authority. Now this is in reality, throwing the Word of God overboard. If that Word is of no avail without man's authority, then, we maintain, it is not God's Word at all. It does not matter, in the smallest degree, what the authority is, the effect is the same. God's Word is declared to be insufficient without something of man to give the certainty that it is God that is speaking.

This is a most dangerous error, and its root lies far deeper in the heart than many of us are aware. It has often been said to us, when quoting passages of Scripture, "How do you know that that is the Word of God?" What is the point of such a question? Plainly to overthrow the authority of the Word. The heart that could suggest such an inquiry does not want to be governed by Holy Scripture at all. The will is concerned. Here lies the deep secret. There is the consciousness that the Word condemns something that the heart wants

to hold and cherish, and hence the effort to set the Word aside altogether.

But how are we to know that the book which we call the Bible is the Word of God? We reply, It carries its own credentials with it. It bears its own evidence upon every page, in every paragraph, in every line. True, it is only by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, the divine Author of the book, that the evidence can be weighed and the credentials appreciated. But we do not want man's voice to accredit God's book; or, if we do, we are most assuredly on infidel ground as regards divine revelation. If God cannot speak directly to the heart — if He cannot give the assurance that it is He Himself who speaks, then where are we? whither shall we turn? If God cannot make Himself heard and understood, can man do it better? — can he improve upon God? Can man's voice give us more certainty? Can the authority of the Church, the decrees of general councils, the judgement of the fathers, the opinion of the doctors, give us more certainty than God Himself? If so, we are just as completely at sea — just as thoroughly in the dark as though God had not spoken at all. Of course, if God has not spoken, we are completely in the dark; but if He has spoken, and yet we cannot know His voice without man's authority to accredit it, where lies the difference? Is it not plain that if God in His great mercy has given us a revelation, it must be sufficient of itself; and on the other hand that any revelation which is not sufficient of itself cannot possibly be divine? And further, is it not equally plain that if we cannot believe what God says because He says it, we have no safer ground to go upon when man presumes to affix his accrediting seal?

Let us not be misunderstood. What we insist upon is this: the all-sufficiency of a divine revelation apart from and above all human writings — ancient, medieval, or modern. We value human writings; we value sound criticism; we value profound and accurate scholarship; we value the light of true science and philosophy; we value the testimony of pious travellers who have sought to throw light upon the sacred text; we value all those books that open up to us the intensely interesting subject of biblical antiquities; in short, we value everything that tends to aid us in the study of the Holy Scriptures: but after all, we return with deeper emphasis to our assertion as to the all-sufficiency and supremacy of the Word of God. That Word must be received on its own divine authority, without any human recommendation, or else it is not the Word of God to us. We believe that God can give us the certainty in our own souls that the Holy Scriptures are, in very deed, His own Word. If He does not give it, no man can; and if He does, no man need. Thus the inspired apostle says to his son Timothy, "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of knowing of whom thou hast learned; and that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3: 14-15).

How did Timothy know that the Holy Scriptures were the Word of God? He knew it by divine teaching. He knew of whom he had learned. Here lay the secret. There was a living link between his soul and God, and he recognized in Scripture the very voice of God. Thus it must ever be. It will not do merely to be convinced in the intellect, by human arguments, human evidences,

and human apologies, that the Bible is the Word of God; we must know its power in the heart and on the conscience by divine teaching; and when this is the case, we shall no more need human proofs of the divinity of the book than we need a rushlight at noonday to prove that the sun is shining. We shall then believe what God says because He says it, and not because man accredits it, nor because we feel it. "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." He did not want to go to the Chaldeans, or to the Egyptians, in order to find out from them if what he had heard was in reality the Word of God. No; he knew whom he had believed, and this gave him holy stability. He could say, beyond all question, "God has established a link between my soul and Himself, by means of His Word, which no power of earth or hell can ever snap." This is the true ground for every believer — man, woman, or child, in all ages and under all circumstances. This was the ground for Abraham and Josiah, for Luke and Theophilus, for Paul and Timothy; and it must be the ground for the writer and the reader of these words, else we shall never be able to stand against the rising tide of infidelity, which is sweeping away the very foundations on which thousands of professors are reposing.

However, we may well inquire, can a merely national profession, a hereditary faith, an educational creed, sustain the soul in the presence of an audacious scepticism that reasons about everything and believes nothing? Impossible! We must be able to stand before the sceptic, the rationalist, and the infidel, and say, in all the calmness and dignity of a divinely wrought faith, "I know whom I have believed." Then we shall be little moved by such books as, "The Phases of Faith," "Essays

and Reviews," "Broken Lights," "Ecce Homo," or "Colenso." They will be no more to us than gnats in the sunshine. They cannot hide from our souls the heavenly beams of our Father's revelation. God has spoken, and His voice reaches the heart. It makes itself heard above the din and confusion of this world, and all the strife and controversy of professing Christians. It gives rest and peace, strength and fixedness, to the believing heart and mind. The opinions of men may perplex and confound. We may not be able to thread our way through the labyrinths of human systems of theology; but God's voice speaks in Holy Scripture — speaks to the heart — speaks to me. This is life and peace. It is all I want. Human writings may now go for what they are worth, seeing I have all I want in the ever-flowing fountain of inspiration — the peerless, precious volume of my God.

But let us now turn to Josiah, and see how ill that we have been dwelling upon finds its illustration in his life and times.

"Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign" (2 Chr. 34: 1). This tells a tale as to the condition and ways of God's people. Josiah's father had been murdered by his own servants, after a brief and evil reign of two years, in the twenty-fourth year of his age. Such things ought not to have been. They were the sad fruit of sin and folly — the humiliating proofs of Judah's departure from Jehovah. But God was above all; and although we should not have expected ever to find a child of eight years of age on the throne of David, yet that child could find his sure resource in the God of his fathers: so that in this case, as in all others, "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." The very fact of Josiah's youth and inexperience only afforded an occasion for the

display of divine grace, and the setting forth of the value and the power of the Word of God.

This pious child was placed in a position of peculiar difficulty and temptation. He was surrounded by errors in various forms and of long standing; but "he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined neither to the right hand nor to the left. For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father: and in the twelfth year began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images."

This was a good beginning. It is a great matter, while the heart is yet tender, to have it impressed with the fear of the Lord. It preserves it from a host of evils and errors. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," and it taught this pious youth to know what was "right," and to adhere to it with unswerving fixedness of purpose. There is great force and value in the expression, "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord." It was not that which was right in his own eyes, nor yet in the eyes of the people, nor in the eyes of those that had gone before him; but simply what was right in the sight of the Lord. This is the solid foundation of all right action. Until the fear of the Lord gets its true place in the heart, there can be nothing right, nothing wise, nothing holy. How can there be, if indeed that fear is the beginning of wisdom? We may do many things through the fear of man, many things through force of habit, through surrounding influences; but never can we do what is really right in the sight of the Lord until our hearts are brought to understand the fear of His holy name. This is

the grand regulating principle. It imparts seriousness, earnestness, and reality — rare and admirable qualities! It is an effectual safeguard against levity and vanity. A man, or a child, who habitually walks in the fear of God is always earnest and sincere, always free from trifling and affectation, from assumption and bombast, life has a purpose, the heart has an object, and this gives intensity to the whole course and character.

But further, we read of Josiah that "he walked in the ways of David his father, and declined neither to the right hand nor to the left. "What a testimony for the Holy Ghost to bear concerning a young man! How we do long for this plain decision! It is invaluable at all times, but especially in a day of laxity and latitudinarianism — of wise liberality and spurious charity like the present. It imparts great peace of mind. A vacillating man is never peaceful; he is always tossed to and fro. "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." He tries to please everybody, and in the end pleases nobody. The decided man, on the contrary, is he who feels he has "to please but One." This gives unity and fixedness to the life and character. It is an immense relief to be thoroughly done with men-pleasing and eye-service — to be able to fix the eye upon the Master alone, and go on with Him through evil report and through good report. True, we may be misunderstood and misrepresented; but that is a very small matter indeed; our great business is to walk in the divinely appointed path, "declining neither to the right hand nor to the left." We are convinced that plain decision is the only thing for the servant of Christ at the present moment; for so surely as the devil finds us wavering, he will bring every engine into play in order to drive us completely off the

plain and narrow path. May God's Spirit work more mightily in our souls, and give us increased ability to say, "My heart is fixed, O God; my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise."

We shall now proceed to consider the great work which Josiah was raised up to accomplish; but ere doing so, we must ask the reader to notice particularly the words already referred to, namely, "In the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father." Here, we may rest assured, lay the true basis of all Josiah's valuable service. He began by seeking after God. Let young Christians ponder this deeply. Hundreds, we fear, have made shipwreck by rushing prematurely into work. They have become occupied and engrossed with their service before the heart was rightly established in the fear and love of God. This is a very serious error indeed, and we have met numbers, within the last few years, who have fallen into it. We should ever remember that those whom God uses much in public He trains in secret; and further, that all His most honoured servants have been more occupied with their Master than with their work. It is not that we undervalue work; by no means; but we do find that all those who have been signally owned of God, and who have pursued a long and steady course of service and Christian testimony, have begun with much deep and earnest heart-work, in the secret of the divine presence. And on the other hand, we have noticed that when men have rushed prematurely into public work — when they began to teach before they had begun to learn, they have speedily broken down and gone back.

It is well to remember this. God's plants are deeply rooted, and often slow of growth. Josiah "began to seek

God" four years before he began his public work. There was in his case a firm ground-work of genuine personal piety, on which to erect the superstructure of active service. This was most needful. He had a great work to do. "High places and groves, carved images and molten images," abounded on all hands, and called for no ordinary faithfulness and decision. Where were these to be had? In the divine treasury, and there alone. Josiah was but a child, and many of those who had introduced the false worship were men of years and experience. But he set himself to seek the Lord. He found his resource in the God of his father David. He betook himself to the fountain-head of all wisdom and power, and there gathered up strength wherewith to gird himself for what lay before him.

This, we repeat, was most needful; it was absolutely indispensable. The accumulated rubbish of ages and generations lay before him, One after another of his predecessors had added to the pile; and notwithstanding the reformation effected in the days of Hezekiah, it would seem as though all had to be done over again. Harken to the following appalling catalogue of evils and errors: "In the twelfth year, Josiah began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images. And they break down the altars of Baalim in his presence; and the images that were on high above them he cut down; and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images, he brake in pieces, and made dust of them, and strewed it upon the graves of them that had sacrificed unto them. And he burnt the bones of the priests upon their altars, and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem. And so did he in the cities of Manasseh and Ephraim and

Simeon, even unto Naphtali, with their mattocks round about. And when he had broken down the altars and the groves, and had beaten the graven images into powder, and cut down all the idols throughout all the land of Israel, he returned to Jerusalem."

See also the narrative given in 2 Kings 23, where we have a much more detailed list of the abominations with which this devoted servant of God had to grapple. We do not quote any further. Enough has been given to show the fearful lengths to which even the people of God may go when once they turn aside, in the smallest measure, from the authority of Holy Scripture. We feel that this is one special lesson to be learned from the deeply interesting history of this best of Judah's kings, and we fondly trust it may be learned effectually. It is indeed a grand and all-important lesson. The moment a man departs, the breadth of a hair, from Scripture, there is no accounting for the monstrous extravagance into which he may rush. We may feel disposed to marvel how such a man as Solomon could ever be led to "build high places for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon." But then we can easily see how that having in the first place disobeyed the Word of his Lord in going to those nations for wives, he easily enough fell into the deeper error of adopting their worship.

But, Christian reader, let us remember that all the mischief, all the corruption and confusion, all the shame and dishonour, all the reproach and blasphemy, had its origin in the neglect of the Word of God. We cannot possibly ponder this fact too deeply. It is solemn, impressive, and admonitory beyond expression. It has

ever been a special design of Satan to lead God's people away from Scripture. He will use anything and everything for this end — tradition, the church so-called, expediency, human reason, popular opinion, reputation and influence, character, position, and usefulness — all those he will use in order to get the heart and conscience away from that one golden sentence — that divine, eternal motto, "IT IS WRITTEN." All that enormous pile of error which our devoted young monarch was enabled to "grind into dust, and beat into powder" — all, all had its origin in the gross neglect of this most precious sentence. It mattered little to Josiah that all these things could boast of antiquity, and the authority of the fathers of the Jewish nation. Neither was he moved by the thought that these altars and high places, these groves and images, might be regarded as proofs of largeness of heart, breadth of mind, and a liberality of spirit that spurned all narrowness, bigotry, and intolerance — that would not be confined within the narrow bounds of Jewish prejudice, but could travel forth through the wide, wide world, and embrace all in a circle of charity and brotherhood. None of these things, we are persuaded, moved him. If they were not based upon "Thus saith the Lord," he had but one thing to do with them, and that was to "beat them into powder."

Part 3

The various periods in the life of Josiah are very strongly marked. "In the eighth year of his reign, he began to seek after the God of David his father"; "in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem"; and "in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah

the son of Joahaz the recorder, to repair the house of the Lord his God."

Now in all this we can mark that progress which ever results from a real purpose of heart to serve the Lord. "The path of the just is as a shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Such was the path of Josiah; and such, too, may be the path of the reader, if only he is influenced by the same earnest purpose. It does not matter what the circumstances may be. We may be surrounded by the most hostile influences, as Josiah was in his day; but a devoted heart, an earnest spirit, a fixed purpose, will, through grace, lift us above all, and enable us to press forward from stage to stage of the path of true discipleship.

If we study the first twelve chapters of the book of Jeremiah, we shall be able to form some idea of the condition of things in the days of Josiah. There we meet with such passages as the following: "I will utter My judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken Me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands. Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them." "Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the Lord, and with your children's children will I plead. For pass over the isles of Chittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing. Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but My people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit." So also in the opening of Jeremiah 3, we find the most terrible imagery used to set forth the base conduct of "backsliding Israel and

treacherous Judah." Harken to the following glowing language in Jeremiah 4: "Thy way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee; this is thy wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reacheth unto thy heart. My bowels! my bowels! I am pained at my very heart; my heart maketh a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. Destruction upon destruction is cried; for the whole land is spoiled: suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment. How long shall I see the standard, and hear the sound of the trumpet? For My people are foolish, they have not known Me; they are sottish children, and they have none understanding: they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge. I beheld the earth, and lo, it was without form and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the Lord, and by His fierce anger."

What vivid language! The whole scene seems, in the vision of the prophet, reduced to primaeval chaos and darkness. In short, nothing could be more gloomy than the aspect here presented. The whole of these opening chapters should be carefully studied, if we would form a correct judgement of the times in which Josiah's lot was cast. They were evidently times characterised by deep seated and wide-spread corruptions, in every shape and form. High and low, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, prophets, priests, and people — all presented an appalling picture of hollowness, deceit, and heartless

wickedness, which could only be faithfully portrayed by an inspired pen.

But why dwell upon this? Why multiply quotations in proof of the low moral condition of Israel and Judah in the days of king Josiah? Mainly to show that, no matter what may be our surroundings, we can individually serve the Lord, if only there be the purpose of heart to do so. Indeed, it is in the very darkest times that the light of true devotedness shines forth most brightly. It is thrown into relief by the surrounding gloom. The very circumstances which indolence and unfaithfulness would use as a plea for yielding to the current will only furnish a devoted spirit with a plea for making head against it. If Josiah had looked around him, what would he have seen? treachery, deceit, corruption, and violence. Such was the state of public morals. And what of religion? Errors and evils in every imaginable shape. Some of these were hoary with age. They had been instituted by Solomon and left standing by Hezekiah. Their foundations had been laid amid the splendours of the reign of Israel's wisest and wealthiest monarch, and the most pious and devoted of Josiah's predecessors had left them as they found them.

Who, then, was Josiah, that he should presume to overturn such venerable institutions? What right had he, a mere youth, raw and inexperienced, to set himself in opposition to men so far beyond him in wisdom, intelligence, and mature judgement? Why not leave things as he found them? Why not allow the current to flow peacefully on through those channels which had conducted it for ages and generations? Disruptions are hazardous. There is always great risk in disturbing old prejudices.

These and a thousand kindred questions might doubtless have exercised the heart of Josiah; but the answer was simple, direct, clear and conclusive. It was not the judgement of Josiah against the judgement of his predecessors, but it was the judgement of God against all. This is a most weighty principle for every child of God and every servant of Christ. Without it, we can never make head against the tide of evil which is flowing around us. It was this principle which sustained Luther in the terrible conflict which he had to wage with the whole of Christendom. He too, like Josiah, had to lay the axe to the root of old prejudices, and shake the very foundation of opinions and doctrines which had held almost universal sway in the Church for over a thousand years. How was this to be done? Was it by setting up the judgement of Martin Luther against the judgement of popes and cardinals, councils and colleges, bishops and doctors? Assuredly not. This would never have brought about the Reformation. It was not Luther versus Christendom, but Holy Scripture versus Error.

Reader, ponder this! We feel it is a grand and all important lesson for this moment, as it surely was for the days of Luther and for the days of Josiah. we long to see the supremacy of Holy Scripture — the paramount authority of the Word of God — the absolute sovereignty of divine revelation reverently owned throughout the length and breadth of the Church of God. We are convinced that the enemy is diligently seeking, in all quarters and by all means, to undermine the authority of the Word, and to weaken its hold upon the human conscience. And it is because we feel this that we seek to raise, again and again, a note of solemn warning, as also to set forth, according to our ability, the vital

importance of submitting, in all things, to the inspired testimony — the voice of God in Scripture. It is not sufficient to render a merely formal assent to that popular statement, "The Bible, and the Bible alone, is the religion of Protestants." We want more than this We want to be, in all things, absolutely governed by the authority of Scripture — not by our fellow-mortal's interpretation of Scripture, but by Scripture itself. We want to have the conscience in a condition to yield, at all times, a true response to the teachings of the divine Word.

This is what we have so vividly illustrated in the life and times of Josiah, and particularly in the transactions of the eighteenth year of his reign, to which we shall now call the reader's attention. This year was one of the most memorable, not only in the history of Josiah, but in the annals of Israel. It was signalised by two great facts, namely, the discovery of the book of the law and the celebration of the feast of the Passover. Stupendous facts! — facts which have left their impress upon this most interesting period, and rendered it pre-eminently fruitful in instruction to the people of God in all ages.

It is worthy of note that the discovery of the book of the law was made during the progress of Josiah's reformatory measures. It affords one of the ten thousand proofs of that great practical principle that "to him that hath shall more be given"; and again, "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine."

"Now in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, to repair the house

of the Lord his God. And when they came to Hilkiah the priest, they delivered the money that was brought into the house of God.... And when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the Lord, Hilkiah the priest found a book of the law of the Lord given by Moses. And Hilkiah the priest answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord. And Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan. And Shaphan carried the book to the king.... And Shaphan read it before the king. And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes" (2 Chr. 34:8-19).

Here we have a tender conscience bowing under the action of the Word of God. This was one special charm in the character of Josiah. He was, in truth, a man of a humble and contrite spirit, who trembled at the Word of God. Would that we all knew more of this! It is a most valuable feature of the Christian character. We certainly do need to feel much more deeply the weight, authority, and seriousness of Scripture. Josiah had no question whatever in his mind as to the genuineness and authenticity of the words which Shaphan had read in his hearing. We do not read of his asking, "How am I to know that this is the Word of God?" No; he trembled at it; he bowed before it; he was smitten down under it; he rent his garments. He did not presume to sit in judgement upon the Word of God, but, as was meet and right, he allowed the Word to judge him.

Thus it should ever be. If man is to judge Scripture, then Scripture is not the Word of God at all; but if Scripture is in very truth the Word of God, then it must judge man. And so it is and so it does. Scripture is the Word of God, and it judges man thoroughly. It lays bare the very roots

of his nature — it opens up the foundations of his moral being. It holds up before him the only faithful mirror in which he can see himself perfectly reflected. This is the reason why man does not like Scripture — cannot bear it — seeks to set it aside — delights to pick holes in it — dares to sit in judgement upon it. It is not so in reference to Other books. Men do not trouble themselves so much to discover and point out Flaws and Discrepancies in Homer or Herodotus, Aristotle or Shakespeare. No; but Scripture judges them — judges their ways, their lusts. hence the enmity of the natural mind to that most precious and marvellous Book, which, as we have already remarked, carries its own credentials with it to every divinely prepared heart. There is a power in Scripture which must bear down all before it. All must bow down under it, sooner or later. "The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His Sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4: 12-13).

Josiah found it to be even so. The Word of God pierced him through and through. "And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes. And the king commanded Hilkiah, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Abdon the son of Micah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the kings, saying, Go inquire of the Lord for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found; for great is the wrath of the Lord

that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do after all that is written in this book." What a striking contrast between Josiah, with contrite heart, exercised conscience, and rent garments, bowing down under the mighty action of the Word of God, and our modern sceptics and infidels, who, with appalling audacity, dare to sit in judgement upon that very same Word. Oh that men would be wise in time, and bow their hearts and consciences in reverent submission to the Word of the living God before that great and terrible day of the Lord in the which they shall be compelled to bow, amid "weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth."

God's Word shall stand forever, and it is utterly vain for man to set himself up in opposition to it, or seek by his reasonings and sceptical speculations lo find out errors and contradictions in it. "Forever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven." "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away." "The word of the Lord endureth forever." Of what possible use is it, therefore, for man to resist the Word of God? He can gain nothing; but oh! what may he lose? If man could prove the Bible false, what should he gain? but if it be true after all, what does he lose? A serious inquiry! May it have its weight with any reader whose mind is at all under the influence of rationalistic or infidel notions.

We shall now proceed with our history.

"And Hilkiah and they that the king had appointed went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem, in the college;) and they spake to her to that effect." At the opening of this paper

we referred to the fact of a child of eight years old being on the throne of David as indicative of the condition of things amongst the people of God. Here, too, we are arrested by the fact that the prophetic office was filled by a woman. It surely tells a tale. Things were low; but the grace of God was unfailing and abundant, and Josiah was so thoroughly broken down that he was prepared to receive the communication of the mind of God through whatever channel it might reach him. This was morally lovely. It might, to nature's view, seem very humiliating for a king of Judah to have recourse to a woman for counsel; but then that woman was the depository of the mind of God, and this was quite enough for a humble and a contrite spirit like Josiah's. He had thus far proved that his one grand desire was to know and do the will of God, and hence it mattered not by what vehicle the voice of God was conveyed to his ear, he was prepared to hear and obey.

Christian reader, let us consider this. We may rest assured that herein lies the true secret of divine guidance. "The meek will He guide in judgement, and the meek will He teach His way" (Ps. 25: 9). Were there more of this blessed spirit of meekness among us, there would be less confusion, less controversy, less striving about words to no profit. If we were all meek, we should all be divinely guided and divinely taught, and thus we should see eye to eye; we should be of one mind, and speak the same thing, and avoid much sad and humbling division and heart-burning.

See what a full answer the meek and contrite Josiah received from Huldah the prophetess — an answer both as to his people and as to himself. "And she answered them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Tell ye the man

that sent you to me, Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah. Because they have forsaken Me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore My wrath shall be poured out upon this place, and shall not be quenched."

All this was but the solemn reiteration and establishment of what had already fallen upon the open and attentive ear of the king of Judah; but then it came with fresh force, emphasis, and interest, as a direct personal communication to himself It came enforced and enhanced by that earnest sentence, "Tell ye the man that sent you to me."

But there was more than this. There was a gracious message directly concerning Josiah himself. "And as for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, so shall ye say unto him, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel concerning the words which thou hast heard: Because thy heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God when thou heardest His words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before Me, and didst rend thy clothes and weep before Me; I have even heard thee also, saith the Lord. Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace, neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place and upon the inhabitants of the same. So they brought the king word again" (2 Chr. 34: 23-28).

All this is full of instruction and encouragement for us in this dark and evil day. It teaches us the immense value,

in the divine estimation Of deep personal exercise of soul and contrition of heart. Josiah might have deemed the case hopeless — that nothing could avert the mighty tide of wrath and judgement which was about to roll over the city of Jerusalem and the land of Israel — that any movement of his must prove utterly unavailing — that the divine purpose was settled — the decree gone forth, and that, in short, he had only to stand by and let things take their course. But Josiah did not reason thus. No; he bowed before the divine testimony. He humbled himself, rent his clothes, and wept. God took knowledge of this. Josiah's penitential tears were precious to Jehovah, and though the appalling judgement had to take its course, yet the penitent escaped. And not only did he himself escape, but he became the honoured instrument in the Lord's hand of delivering others also. He did not abandon himself to the influence of a pernicious fatalism, but in brokenness of spirit and earnestness of heart he cast himself upon God, confessing his own sins and the sins of his people And then, when assured of his own personal deliverance, he set himself to seek the deliverance of his brethren also. This is a fine moral lesson for the heart. May we learn it thoroughly.

Part 4

It is deeply interesting and instructive to mark the actings of Josiah when his heart and conscience had been brought under the powerful influence of the Word of God. He not only bowed down under that Word himself, but he sought to lead others to bow likewise. This must ever be the case where the work is real. It is impossible for a man to feel the weight and solemnity of truth and not seek to bring others under its action. No

doubt a quantity of truth may be held in the intellect — held superficially — held in a merely speculative, notional way; but this will have no practical effect; it does not tell upon the heart and conscience after a divine, living fashion; it does not affect the life and character And inasmuch as it does not affect our own souls, neither will our mode of presenting it be very likely to act with much power upon others. True, God is sovereign, and He may use His own Word even when spoken by one who has never really felt its influence; but we are speaking now of what may properly and naturally be looked for; and we may rest assured that the best way in which to make others feel deeply is to feel deeply ourselves.

Take any truth you please. Take, for example, the glorious truth of the Lord's coming How is a man most likely to affect his hearers by the presentation of this truth? Unquestionably by being deeply affected himself. If the heart be under the power of that solemn word, "the Lord is at hand" — if this fact be realized in all its solemnity as to the world, and in its sweet attractiveness as to the believer individually and the Church collectively, then it will assuredly be presented in a way calculated to move the hearts of the hearers. It is easy to see when a man feels what he is saying. There may be a very clear and clever exposition of the doctrine of the second advent, and of all the collateral truths; but if it be cold and heartless, it will fall powerless on the ears of the audience. In order to speak to hearts, on any subject, the heart of the speaker must feel it. What was it that gave such power to Whitefield's discourses? It was not the depth or the range of truth contained in them, as is manifest to any intelligent reader. No. The

secret of their mighty efficacy lay in the fact that the speaker felt what he was saying. Whitefield wept over the people, and no marvel if the people wept under Whitefield. He must be a hardened wretch indeed who can sit unmoved under a preacher who is shedding tears for his soul's salvation.

Let us not be misunderstood. We do not mean to say that anything in a preacher's manner can of itself convert a soul. Tears cannot quicken earnestness cannot regenerate. It is "not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord." It is only by the powerful action of the Word and Spirit of God that any soul can be born again. All this we fully believe, and would ever bear in mind but at the same time, we as fully believe and would also bear in mind that God blesses earnest preaching and souls are moved by it. We have far too much mechanical preaching — too much routine work — too much of what may justly be called going through a service. We want more earnestness, more depth of feeling, more intensity, more power to weep over the souls of men, a more influential and abiding sense of the awful doom of impenitent sinners, the value of an immortal soul, and the solemn realities of the eternal world. We are told that the famous Garrick was once asked by a bishop how it was that he produced far more powerful results by his fiction than the bishop could by preaching truth. The reply of the actor is full of force. "My lord," said he, "the reason is obvious: I speak fiction as though it were truth, whereas you speak truth as though it were fiction."

Alas! it is much to be feared that too many of us speak truth in the same way, and hence the little result. We are persuaded that earnest, faithful preaching is one of the

special wants of this our day. There are a few here and there, thank God, who seem to feel what they are at — who stand before their audience as those who consider themselves as channels of communication between God and their fellows — men who are really bent on their work — bent, not merely on preaching and teaching, but on saving and blessing souls. The grand business of the evangelist is to bring the soul and Christ together; the business of the teacher and pastor is to keep them together. True it is, most blessedly true, that God is glorified and Jesus Christ magnified by the unfolding of truth, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear; but is this fact to be allowed to interfere, in the smallest degree, with the ardent desire for results in reference to souls? We do not for a moment believe it. The preacher should look for results, and should not be satisfied without them. He should no more think of being satisfied to go on without results than the husbandman thinks of going on from year to year without a crop. Some preachers there are who only succeed in preaching their hearers away, and then they content themselves by saying, "We are a sweet savour to God." Now, we believe this is a great mistake, and a fatal delusion. What we want is to live before God for the results of our work — to wait upon Him — to agonise in prayer for souls — to throw all our energies into the work — to preach as though the whole thing depended upon us, although knowing full well that we can do just nothing, and that our words must prove as the morning cloud if not fastened as a nail in a sure place by the Master of assemblies. We are convinced that, in the divine order of things, the earnest workman must have the fruit of his labour; and that according to his faith, so shall it be. There may be exceptions, but as a general

rule, we may rest assured that a faithful preacher, will, sooner or later, reap fruit.

We have been drawn into the foregoing line of thought while contemplating the interesting scene in the life of Josiah presented to us at the close of 2 Chronicles 34. It will be profitable for us to dwell upon it. Josiah was a man thoroughly in earnest. He felt the power of truth in his own soul, and he could not rest satisfied until he gathered the people around him, in order that the light which had shone upon him might shine upon them likewise. He did not, he could not, rest in the fact that he was to be gathered to his grave in peace — that his eyes were not to see the evil that was coming upon Jerusalem — that he was to escape the appalling tide of judgement which was about to roll over the land. No, he thought of others, he felt for the people around him; and inasmuch as his own personal escape stood connected with and based upon his true penitence and humiliation under the mighty hand of God, so he would seek, by the action of that Word which had wrought so powerfully in his own heart, to lead others to like penitence and humiliation.

"Then the king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. And the king went up into the house of the Lord, and all the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests, and the Levites, and all the people, great and small and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of the Lord. And the king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the Lord to walk after the Lord, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and his statutes with all his heart and with all his soul, to perform the words of the

covenant which are written in this book. And he caused all that were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. And Josiah took away all the abominations out of all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel, and made all that were present in Israel to serve, even to serve the Lord their God. And all his days they departed not from following the Lord, the God of their fathers."

There is a fine moral lesson in all this for us — yea, many lessons to which we, with all our light, knowledge, and privilege, may well sit down. What first of all strikes us at this moment is the fact that Josiah felt his responsibility to those around him. He did not put his light under a bushel, but rather allowed it to shine for the full benefit and blessing of others. This is all the more striking, inasmuch as that great practical truth of the unity of all believers in one body was not known to Josiah, because not revealed by God. The doctrine contained in that one brief sentence, "There is one body and one Spirit," was not made known until long after the times of Josiah, even when Christ the risen Head had taken His seat at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens.

But although this truth was "hid in God," nevertheless there was the unity of the nation of Israel. There was a national unity, though there was not the unity of a body; and this unity was always recognized by the faithful, whatever might be the outward condition of the people. The twelve loaves on the table of show-bread in the sanctuary were the divine type of the perfect unity and yet the perfect distinctness of the twelve tribes. The

reader can see this in Leviticus 24. It is full of interest, and should be deeply pondered by every student of Scripture and every earnest lover of the ways of God. During the dark and silent watches of the night, the seven lamps of the golden candlestick threw their light upon the twelve loaves ranged by the hand of the high-priest according to the commandment of God upon the pure table. Significant figure!

It was on this grand truth that Elijah the Tishbite took his stand, when on Mount Carmel he built an altar "with twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying, “Israel shall be thy name" (1 Kings 18). To this same truth Hezekiah had regard when he commanded "that the burnt-offering and the sin-offering should be made for all Israel" (2 Chr. 29: 24). Paul, in his day referred to this precious truth, when in the presence of king Agrippa he spoke of "our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night" (Acts 26: 7).

Now, if any one of those men of faith had been asked, "Where are the twelve tribes?" could he have given an answer? could he have pointed them out? Assuredly he could; but not to sight — not to man's view, for the nation was divided — its unity was broken. In the days of Elijah and Hezekiah there were the ten tribes and the two; and in the days of Paul, the ten tribes were scattered abroad, and only a remnant of the two in the land of Palestine, under the dominion of Daniel's fourth beast. What then? Was the truth of God made of none effect by Israel's outward condition? Far be the thought! "Our twelve tribes" must never be given up. The unity of the nation is a grand reality to faith. It is as true at this moment as when Joshua pitched the twelve stones at

Gilgal. The Word of our God shall stand forever. Not one jot or tittle of aught that He has spoken shall ever pass away.

Change and decay may mark the history of human affairs, death and desolation may sweep like a withering blast over earth's fairest scenes, but Jehovah will make good His every word, and Israel's twelve tribes shall yet enjoy the promised land, in all its length, breadth and fullness. No power of earth or hell shall be able to hinder this blessed consummation. And why? What makes us so sure? How can we speak with such absolute certainty? Simply because the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. We may be more sure that Israel's tribes shall yet enjoy their fair inheritance in Palestine than that the house Of Tudor once held sway in England. The former we believe on the testimony of God, who cannot lie; the latter on the testimony of erring man.

It is of the utmost importance that the reader should be clear as to this, not only because of its special bearing upon Israel and the land of Canaan, but also because it affects the integrity of Scripture as a whole. There is a loose mode of handling the Word of God, which is at once dishonouring to Him and injurious to us. Passages which apply distinctly and exclusively to Jerusalem and to Israel are made to apply to the spread of the gospel and the extension of the Christian Church. This, to say the least of it, is taking a very unwarrantable liberty with divine revelation. Our God can surely say what He means, and as surely He means what He says; hence, when He speaks of Israel and Jerusalem, He does not mean the Church; and when He speaks of the Church, He does not mean Israel or Jerusalem.

Expositors and students of Scripture should ponder this. Let no one suppose that it is merely a question of prophetic interpretation. It is far more than this. It is a question of the integrity, value, and power of the Word of God. If we allow ourselves to be loose and careless in reference to one class of Scriptures, we are likely to be loose and careless as to another, and then our sense of the weight and authority of all Scripture will be sadly enfeebled.

But we must return to Josiah, and see how he recognized, according to his measure, the great principle on which we have been dwelling. He certainly proved no exception to the general rule, namely, that all the pious kings of Judah had regard to the unity of the nation of Israel, and never suffered their thoughts, their sympathies, or their operations to be confined within any narrower range than "our twelve tribes." The twelve loaves on the pure table were ever before the eye of God and ever before the eye of faith. Nor was this a mere speculation — a non-practical dogma — a dead letter. No; it was in every case a great practical, influential truth. "Josiah took away all the abominations out of all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel." This was acting in the fullest harmony with his pious predecessor, Hezekiah, who commanded that the burnt-offering and the sin offering should be made for all Israel.

And now, Christian reader, mark the application of all this to your own souls at this present moment. Do you heartily believe, upon divine authority, in the doctrine of the unity of the body of Christ? Do you believe that there is such a body on this earth now, united to its divine and living Head in Heaven by the Holy Ghost? Do you hold

this great truth from God Himself, upon the authority of Holy Scripture? Do you, in one word, hold as a cardinal and fundamental truth of the New Testament the indissoluble unity of the Church of God? Do not turn round and ask, "Where is this to be seen?" This is the question which unbelief must ever put, as the eye rests upon Christendom's numberless sects and parties, and to which faith replies, as the eye rests upon that imperishable sentence, "There is one body and one Spirit." Mark the words! — "There is" It does not say there was at one time and there shall be again "one body." Neither does it say that such a thing exists in Heaven. No; but it says, "There is one body and one Spirit" now on this earth. Can this truth be touched by the condition of things in the professing Church? Has God's Word ceased to be true because man has ceased to be faithful? Will any one undertake to say that the unity of the body was only a truth for apostolic times, and that it has no application now, seeing that there is no exhibition of it?

Reader, we solemnly warn you to beware how you admit into your heart a sentiment so entirely infidel as this. Rest assured it is the fruit of positive unbelief in God's Word. No doubt, appearances argue against this truth; but what truth is it against which appearances do not argue? And say, is it on appearances that faith ever builds? Did Elijah build on appearances when he erected his altar of twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob? Did king Hezekiah build on appearances when he issued that fine commandment that the burnt-offering and the sin-offering should be made for all Israel? Did Josiah build on appearances when he carried his reformatory operations into all the

countries that pertained to the children of Israel? Surely not. They built upon the faithful Word of the God of Israel. That Word was true whether Israel's tribes were scattered or united. If God's truth is to be affected by outward appearances, or by the actings of men, then where are we? or what are we to believe? The fact is, there is hardly a truth in the entire compass of divine revelation to which we could with calm confidence commit our souls if we suffer ourselves to be affected by outward appearances.

No; reader, the only ground on which we can believe anything is this one eternal clause, "It is written"! Do you not admit this? Does not your whole soul bow down to it? Do you not hold it to be a principle entirely vital? We believe you do, as a Christian, hold, admit, and reverently believe this. Well, then, it is written, "There is one body and one Spirit" (Eph. 4). This is as clearly revealed in Scripture as that "we are justified by faith," or any other truth. Do outward appearances affect the saving, fundamental doctrine of justification by faith? Are we to call in question this precious truth because there is so little exhibition of its purifying power in the lives of believers? Who could admit such a fatal principle as this? What a complete upturning of all the foundations of our faith is necessarily involved in the admission of this most mischievous line of reasoning! We believe because it is written in the Word, not because it is exhibited in the world. Doubtless it ought to be exhibited, and it is our sin and shame that it is not. To this we shall afterward refer more fully; but we must insist upon the proper ground of belief, namely, divine revelation; and when this is clearly seen and fully admitted, it applies as distinctly to the doctrine of the

unity of the body as it does to the doctrine of justification by faith.

Part 5

We feel it to be of real moment to insist upon this principle, namely, that the only ground on which we can believe any doctrine is its being revealed in the divine Word. It is thus we believe all the great truths of Christianity. We know nothing and can believe nothing of what is spiritual, heavenly, or divine, save as we find it revealed in the Word of God. How do I know I am a sinner? Because Scripture hath declared that "all have sinned." No doubt I feel that I am a sinner; but I do not believe because I feel, but I feel because I believe, and I believe because God has spoken. Faith rests upon divine revelation, not on human feelings or human reasonings. "It is written" is quite sufficient for faith. It can do with nothing less, but it asks nothing more. God speaks: faith believes. Yes, it believes simply because God speaks. It does not judge God's Word by outward appearances, but it judges outward appearances by the Word of God.

Thus it is in reference to all the cardinal truths of the Christian religion, such as the Trinity, the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, His atonement, His priesthood, His advent, the doctrine of original sin, of justification, judgement to come, eternal punishment. We believe these grand and solemn truths, not on the ground of feeling, of reason, or of outward appearances, but simply on the ground of divine revelation.

Hence, then, if it be asked, On what ground do we believe in the doctrine of the unity of the body? we reply, Upon the self-same ground that we believe the doctrine of the Trinity, the deity of Christ, and the atonement. We

believe it because it is revealed in sundry places in the New Testament. Thus, for example, in 1 Cor. 12 we read, "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." Again, "God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked that there should be no schism in the body.... Now, ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."

Here we have distinctly laid down the perfect and indissoluble unity of the Church Of God, the body of Christ, on precisely the same authority as any other truth commonly received amongst us; so that there is just as much ground for calling in question the Deity of Christ as there is for calling in question the unity of the body. The one is as true as the other; and both are divinely revealed. We believe that Jesus Christ is God over all, blessed forever, because Scripture tells us so; we believe that there is one body because Scripture tells us so. We do not reason in the one case, but believe and bow; nor should we reason in the other case, but believe and bow. "There is one body and one Spirit."

Now, we must bear in mind that this truth of the unity of the body is not a mere abstraction — a barren speculation — a powerless dogma. It is a practical, formative, influential truth, in the light of which we are called to walk, to judge ourselves and all around us. It was so with the faithful in Israel of old. The unity of the nation was a real thing to them, and not a mere theory to be taken up or laid down at pleasure. It was a great

formative, powerful truth. The nation was one in God's thoughts; and if it was not manifestly so, the faithful had only to take the place of self-judgement, brokenness of spirit, and contrition of heart. Witness the case of Hezekiah, Josiah, Daniel, Nehemiah, and Ezra. It never once occurred to these faithful men that they were to give up the truth of Israel's unity because Israel had failed to maintain it. They did not measure the truth of God by the actings of men; but they judged the actings of men, and themselves likewise, by the truth of God. This was the only true way to act. If the manifested unity of Israel was marred through man's sin and folly, the true hearted members of the congregation owned and mourned over the sin, confessed it as their own, and looked to God. Nor was this all. They felt their responsibility to act on the truth of God whatever might be the outward condition of things.

This, we repeat, was the meaning of Elijah's altar of twelve stones, erected in the face of Jezebel's eight hundred false prophets, and despite the division of the nation in man's view (1 Kings 18). This, too, was the meaning of Hezekiah's letters sent to all Israel" to invite them to "come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, to keep the Passover unto the Lord God of Israel." Nothing can be more touching than the spirit and style of these letters. "Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and He will return to the remnant of you that are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria. And be not ye like your fathers and like your brethren, which trespassed against the Lord God of their fathers, who therefore gave them up to desolation, as ye see. Now, be ye not stiff necked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the Lord,

and enter into His sanctuary, which He hath sanctified forever; and serve the Lord your God, that the fierceness of His wrath may turn away from you. For if ye turn again unto the Lord, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land; for the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away His face from you" (2 Chr. 30: 6-9).

What was all this but simple faith acting on the grand, eternal, immutable truth of the unity of the nation of Israel? The nation was one in the purpose of God, and Hezekiah looked at it from the divine standpoint, as faith ever does, and he acted accordingly. "So the posts passed from city to city, through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, even unto Zebulun; but they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them." This was very sad, but it is only what we must expect. The actings of faith are sure to call forth the scorn and contempt of those who are not up to the standard of God's thoughts. Doubtless these men of Ephraim and Manasseh regarded Hezekiah's message as a piece of presumption or wild extravagance. Perhaps the great truth that was acting with such power on his soul, forming his character and ruling his conduct, was in their judgement a myth, or at best a valueless theory — a thing of the past — an institution of bygone ages, having no present application. But faith is never moved by the thoughts of men, and therefore Hezekiah went on with his work and God owned and blessed him. He could afford to be laughed at and turned into ridicule, while he beheld divers of Asher and Manasseh and Zebulun humbling themselves and coming to Jerusalem. Hezekiah and all who thus humbled themselves under the mighty hand of

God reaped a rich harvest of blessing, while the mockers and scorners were left in the barrenness and deadness with which their own unbelief had surrounded them.

Mark the force of those words of Hezekiah, "If ye turn again unto the Lord, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive." Does not this approach very near to that precious truth of the New Testament times, that we are members one of another, and that the conduct of one member affects all the rest? Unbelief might raise the question as to how this could possibly be — as to how the actings of one could possibly affect others far away; yet so it was in Israel, and so it is now in the Church of God.

Witness the case of Achan, in Joshua 7. There, one man sinned; and, so far as the narrative informs us, the whole congregation was ignorant of the fact; and yet we read that "the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing." And again, "Israel hath sinned." How could this be? Simply because the nation was one, and God dwelt among them. This, plainly, was the ground of a double responsibility, namely, a responsibility to God, and a responsibility to the whole assembly and to each member in particular. It was utterly impossible for any one member of the congregation to shake off this high and holy responsibility. A person living at Dan might feel disposed to question how his conduct could affect a man living at Beersheba; yet such was the fact, and the ground of this fact lay in the eternal truth of Israel's indissoluble unity and Jehovah's dwelling in the midst of His redeemed assembly. (See Exodus 15: 2, and the many passages which speak of God's dwelling in the midst of Israel.)

We do not attempt even to quote the numerous Scriptures which speak of God's presence in the congregation of Israel — His dwelling in their midst. But we would call the attention of the reader to the all-important fact that those Scriptures begin with Exodus 15. It was when Israel stood, as a fully redeemed people, on Canaan's side of the Red Sea that they were able to say, "The Lord is my strength and my song, and He is become my salvation: He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation." Redemption formed the ground of God's dwelling among His people, and His presence in their midst secured their perfect unity. Hence no one member of the congregation could view himself as an isolated independent atom. Each one was called to view himself as part of a whole, and to view his conduct in reference to all those who, like himself, formed part of that whole.

Now, reason could never grasp a truth like this. It lay entirely beyond the ken of the most powerful human intellect. Faith alone could receive it and act upon it, and it is of the deepest interest to see that the faithful in Israel ever recognized it and acted upon it. Why did Hezekiah send letters to "all Israel"? Why did he expose himself to scorn and ridicule in so doing? Why did he command that "the burnt-offering and the sin-offering should be made for all Israel"? Why did Josiah carry his reformatory operations into all "the countries that pertained to the children of Israel"? Because those men of God recognized the divine truth of Israel's unity, and they did not think of throwing this grand reality overboard because so few saw it or sought to carry it out. "The people shall dwell alone;" and "I, the Lord, will dwell among the children of Israel." These imperishable

truths shine, like most precious gems of heavenly lustre, all along the page of Old Testament Scripture; and we invariably find that, just in proportion as any one was living near to God — near to the living and ever-gushing fountain of life and light and love — just in proportion as he entered into the thoughts, purposes, sympathies, and counsels of the God of Israel, did he apprehend and seek to carry out that which God had declared to be true of His people, though His people had proved so untrue to Him.

And now, Christian reader, we would ask you a very plain and pointed question, which is this: Do you not recognize in the unity of the Jewish nation the foreshadowing of a higher unity now existing in that one body of which Christ is the Head? We trust you do. We fondly hope that your whole moral being bows down with reverent submission, to the mighty truth, "There is one body." But then we can well imagine that you feel yourself not a little perplexed and confounded when you cast your eye around you through the length and breadth of the professing Church, in search of any positive expression of this unity. You see Christians scattered and divided — you see innumerable sects and parties; and what perhaps puzzles you most of all, you see those who profess to believe and act upon the truth of the unity of the body divided amongst themselves, and presenting anything but a spectacle of unity and harmony. All this, we confess, is very perplexing to one who looks at it from a merely human standpoint. We are not the least surprised at people being stumbled and hindered by these things. Still the foundation of God standeth sure. His truth is perfectly indestructible; and if we gaze with admiration upon the faithful worthies of

a bygone age who believed and confessed the unity of Israel when there was not a trace of that unity visible to mortal eyes, why should we not heartily believe and diligently carry out the higher unity of the one body? "There is one body and one Spirit," and herein lies the basis of our responsibility to one another and to God. Are we to surrender this all-important truth because Christians are scattered and divided? God forbid. It is as real and as precious as ever, and it ought to be as formative and as influential. We are bound to act upon the truth of God, irrespective of consequences, and utterly regardless of outward appearances. It is not for us to say, as so many do, "The case is hopeless: everything has gone to pieces. It is impossible to carry out the truth of God amid the heaps of rubbish which lie around us. The unity of the body was a thing of the past; it may be a thing of the future, but it cannot be a thing of the present. The idea of unity must be abandoned as thoroughly utopian, it cannot be maintained in the face of Christendom's numberless sects and parties. Nothing remains now but for each one to look to the Lord for himself, and to do the best he can, in his own individual sphere, and according to the dictates of his own conscience and judgement."

Such is, in substance, the language of hundreds of the true people of God; and as is their language, so is their practical career. But we must speak plainly, and we have no hesitation in saying that this language savours of sheer unbelief in that great cardinal verity of the unity of the body; and, moreover, that we have just as much warrant for rejecting the precious doctrine of Christ's deity, of His perfect humanity, or of His vicarious sacrifice, as we have for rejecting the truth of the

perfect unity of His body, inasmuch as this latter rests upon precisely the same foundation as the former, namely, the eternal truth of God — the absolute statement of Holy Scripture. What right have we to set aside any one truth of divine revelation? What authority have we to single out any special truth from the Word of God and say that it no longer applies? We are bound to receive all truth, and to submit our souls to its authority. It is a dangerous thing to admit for a moment the idea that any one truth of God is to be set aside, on the plea that it cannot be carried out. It is sufficient for us that it is revealed in the Holy Scriptures: we have only to believe and to obey. Does Scripture declare that there is "one body"? Assuredly it does. This is enough. We are responsible to maintain this truth, cost what it may; we can accept nothing else — nothing less — nothing different. We are bound, by the allegiance which we owe to Christ the Head, to testify, practically, against everything that militates against the truth of the indissoluble unity of the Church of God, and to seek earnestly and constantly a faithful expression of that unity.

True, we shall have to contend with false unity on the one hand and false individuality on the other; but we have only to hold fast and confess the truth of God, looking to Him, in humility of mind and earnest purpose of heart, and He will sustain us in the path, let the difficulties be what they may. No doubt there are difficulties in the way — grave difficulties, such as we in our own strength cannot cope with. The very fact that we are told to "endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" is sufficient to prove that there are difficulties in the way; but the grace of our Lord Jesus

Christ is amply sufficient for all the demands that may be made upon us in seeking to act upon this most precious truth.

In contemplating the present condition of the professing Church we may discern two very distinct classes. In the first place, there are those who are seeking unity on false grounds; and secondly, those who are seeking it on the ground laid down in the New Testament. This latter is distinctly a spiritual, living, divine unity, and stands out in vivid contrast with all the forms of unity which man has attempted, whether it be national, ecclesiastical, ceremonial, or doctrinal. The Church of God is not a nation, not an ecclesiastical or political system. It is a body united to its divine Head in Heaven, by the presence of the Holy Ghost. This is what it was, and this is what it is. "There is one body and one Spirit." This remains unalterably true. It holds good now just as much as when the inspired apostle penned Ephesians 4. Hence anything that tends to interfere with or mar this truth must be wrong, and we are bound to stand apart from it and testify against it. To seek to unite Christians on any other ground than the unity of the body is manifestly opposed to the revealed mind of God. It may seem very attractive, very desirable, very reasonable, right, and expedient; but it is contrary to God, and this should be enough for us. God's Word speaks only of the unity of the body and the unity of the Spirit. It recognises no other unity: neither should we.

The Church of God is one, though consisting of many members. It is not local, or geographical; it is corporate. All the members have a double responsibility; they are responsible to the Head, and they are responsible to one another. It is utterly impossible to ignore this

responsibility. Men may seek to shirk it; they may deny it; they may assert their individual rights, and act according to their own reason, judgement, or will; but they cannot get rid of the responsibility founded upon the fact of the one compact body. They have to do with the Head in Heaven and with the members on earth. They stand in this double relationship — they were incorporated thereinto by the Holy Ghost, and to deny It is to deny their very spiritual existence. It is founded in life, formed by the Spirit, and taught and maintained in the Holy Scriptures. There is no such thing as independency. Christians cannot view themselves as mere individuals — as isolated atoms. "We are members one of another." This is as true as that we are "justified by faith." No doubt there is a sense in which we are individual: we are individual in our repentance; individual in our faith; individual in our justification; individual in our walk with God and in our service to Christ; individual in our rewards for service, for each one shall get a white stone and a new name engraved thereon known only to himself. All this is quite true, but it in no wise touches the other grand practical truth of our union with the Head above and with each and all of the members below.

And we would here call attention to two very distinct lines of truth flowing out of two distinct titles of our blessed Lord, namely, Headship and Lordship. He is Head of His body the Church, and He is Lord of all, Lord of each. Now, when we think of Christ as Lord, we are reminded of our individual responsibility to Him, in the wide range of service to which He, in His sovereignty, has graciously called us. Our reference must be to Him in all things. All our actings, all our movements, all our

arrangements, must be placed under the commanding influence of that weighty sentence (often, alas! lightly spoken and penned), "If the Lord will." And, moreover, no one has any right to thrust himself between the conscience of a servant and the commandment of his Lord. All this is divinely true, and of the very highest importance. The Lordship of Christ is a truth the value of which cannot possibly be over-estimated.

But we must bear in mind that Christ is Head as well as Lord; He is Head of a body, as well as Lord of individuals. These things must not be confounded. We are not to hold the truth of Christ's Lordship in such a way as to interfere with the truth of His Head ship. If we merely think of Christ as Lord and ourselves as individuals responsible to Him, then we shall ignore His Headship, and lose sight of our responsibility to every member of that body of which He is Head. We must jealously watch against this. We cannot look at ourselves as isolated, independent atoms; if we think of Christ as Head, then we must think of all His members, and this opens up a wide range of practical truth. We have holy duties to discharge to our fellow-members, as well as to our Lord and Master; and we may rest assured that no one walking in communion with Christ can ever lose sight of the grand fact of his relationship to every member of His body. Such an one will ever remember that his walk and ways exert an influence upon Christians living at the other side of the globe. This is a wondrous mystery, but it is divinely true. "If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it" (1 Cor. 12: 26). You cannot reduce the body of Christ to a matter of locality: the body is one, and we are called to maintain this practically in every possible way, and to bear a

decided testimony against everything which tends to hinder the expression of the perfect unity of the body, whether it be false unity or false individuality. The enemy is seeking to associate Christians on a false ground, and gather them around a false centre; or, if he cannot do this, he will send them adrift upon the wide and tumultuous ocean of a desultory individualism. We are thoroughly persuaded, before God, that the only safeguard against both these false and dangerous extremes is divinely wrought faith in the grand foundation truth of the unity of the body of Christ.

Part 6

It may here be proper to inquire what is the suited attitude of the Christian in view of the grand foundation-truth of the unity of the body. That it is a truth distinctly laid down in the New Testament cannot possibly be questioned. If any reader of these pages be not fully established in the knowledge and hearty belief of this truth, let him prayerfully study 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, Ephesians 2 and 4, Colossians 2 and 3. He will find the doctrine referred to in a practical way in the opening of Romans 12; though it is not the design of the Holy Ghost in that magnificent Epistle to give us a full unfolding of the truth respecting the Church. What we have to look for there is rather the soul's relationship with God through the death and resurrection of Christ. We might pass through the first eleven chapters of Romans and not know that there is such a thing as the Church of God, the body of Christ; and when we reach Romans 12, the doctrine of the one body is assumed, but not dwelt upon.

There is, then, "one body" actually existing on this earth, formed by the "one Spirit," and united to the living Head in Heaven. This truth cannot be gainsaid. Some may not see it; some may find it very hard to receive it, in view of the present condition of things; but nevertheless it remains a divinely established truth that "there is one body," and the question is, how are we individually affected by this truth? It is as impossible to shake off the responsibility involved therein as it is to set aside the truth itself. If there is a body of which we are members, then do we, in every truth, stand in a holy relationship to every member of that body on earth, as well as to the Head in Heaven; and this relationship, like every other, has its characteristic affections, privileges, and responsibilities.

And be it remembered, we are not speaking now of the question of association with any special company of Christians, but of the whole body of Christ upon earth. No doubt each company of Christians, wherever assembled, should be but the local expression of the whole body. It should be so gathered and so ordered, on the authority of the Word, and by the power of the Holy Ghost, as that all Christ's members who are walking in truth and holiness might happily find their place there. If an assembly be not thus gathered and thus ordered, it is not on the ground of the unity of the body at all. If there be anything, no matter what, in order, discipline, doctrine, or practice, which would prove a barrier to the presence of any of Christ's members whose faith and practice are according to the Word of God, then is the unity of the body practically denied. We are solemnly responsible to own the truth of the unity of the body. We should so meet that all the members of Christ's body

might, simply as such, sit down with us and exercise whatever gift the Head of the Church has bestowed upon them. The body is one. Its members are scattered over the whole earth. Distance is nothing: locality nothing. It may be New Zealand, London, Paris, or Edinburgh: it matters not. A member of the body in one place is a member of the body everywhere for there is but "one body and one Spirit." It is the Spirit who forms the body, and links the members with the Head and with one another. Hence, a Christian coming from New Zealand to London ought to expect to find an assembly so gathered as to be a faithful expression of the unity of the body, to which he might attach himself; and furthermore, any such Christian ought to find his place in the bosom of that assembly, provided always there be nothing in doctrine or walk to forbid his hearty reception.

Such is the divine order, as laid down in 1 Cor. 12 and 14; Eph. 2 and 4, and assumed in Rom. 12. Indeed, we cannot study the New Testament and not see this blessed truth. We find in various cities and towns saints gathered by the Holy Ghost in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; as, for example, at Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, and Thessalonica. These were not independent, isolated, fragmentary assemblies, but parts of the one body, so that a member of the Church in one place was a member of the Church everywhere. Doubtless, each assembly, as guided by the one Spirit, and under the one Lord, acted in all local matters, such as receiving to communion, or putting away any wicked person from their midst; meeting the wants of their poor, and such like; but we may be quite assured that the act of the assembly at Corinth would be

recognized by all other assemblies, so that if any one was separated from communion there, he would, if known, be refused in all other places; otherwise it would be a plain denial of the unity of the body. We have no reason to suppose that the assembly at Corinth communicated or conferred with any other assembly previous to the putting away of "the wicked person" in 1 Corinthians 5, but we are bound to believe that that act would be duly recognized and sanctioned by every assembly upon the earth, and that any assembly knowingly receiving the excommunicated man would have cast a slur upon the assembly at Corinth, and practically denied the unity of the body.

This we believe to be the plain teaching of the New Testament Scriptures — this, the doctrine which any simple, true-hearted student of these Scriptures would gather up. That the Church has failed to carry out this precious truth is, alas! painfully true; and that we are all participators in this failure is equally true. The thought of this should humble us deeply before God. Not one can throw a stone at another, for we are all verily guilty in this matter. Let not the reader suppose for a single moment that our object in these pages is to set up anything like high ecclesiastical pretensions, or to afford countenance to hollow assumption, in the face of manifest sin and failure. God forbid! we say with our very heart of hearts. We believe that there is a most urgent call upon all God's people to humble themselves in the dust on account of our sad departure from the truth so plainly laid down in the Word of God.

Thus it was with the pious and devoted king Josiah, whose life and times have suggested this entire line of thought. He found the book of the law, and discovered in

its sacred pages an order of things wholly different from what he saw around him. How did he act? Did he content himself by saying, "The case is hopeless: the nation is too far gone: ruin has set in, and it is utterly vain to think of aiming at the divine standard; we must only let things stand, and do the best we can"? Nay, reader, such was not Josiah's language or mode of action; but he humbled himself before God, and called upon others to do the same. And not only so, but he sought to carry out the truth of God. He aimed at the very loftiest standard, and the consequence was, that "from the days of Samuel the prophet, there was no Passover like to Josiah's kept in Israel; neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a Passover."

Such was the result of faithful reference and adherence to the Word of God, and thus it will ever be, for "God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Look at the actings of the remnant that returned from Babylon the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. What did they do? They set up the altar of God; they built the temple, and repaired the walls of Jerusalem. In other words, they occupied themselves with the true worship of the God of Israel, and with the grand centre or gathering-point of His people. This was right. It is what faith always does, regardless of circumstances. If the remnant had looked at circumstances, they could not have acted. They were a poor contemptible handful of people, under the dominion of the uncircumcised Gentiles. They were surrounded by active enemies on all sides, who, instigated by the enemy of God, of His city, of His people, left nothing undone to hinder them in their blessed work. These enemies ridiculed them, and said, "What do these feeble Jews? Will they fortify

themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?" Nor was this all; not only had they to contend with powerful foes without, there was also internal weakness, for "Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish, so that we are not able to build the wall" (Neh. 4). All this was very depressing. It was very different from the brilliant and palmy days of Solomon. His burden-bearers were many and strong, and there was no rubbish covering the great stones and costly with which he built the house of God, nor any contemptuous foe to sneer at his work. And yet, for all that, there were features attaching to the work of Ezra and Nehemiah which are not to be found in the days of Solomon. Their very feebleness, the piles of rubbish which lay before them, the proud and insulting enemies who surrounded them — all these things conspired to add a peculiar halo of glory to their work. They built and prospered, and God was glorified, and He declared in their ears these cheering words: "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of Hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of Hosts" (Hag. 2: 9).

It is of importance, in connection with the subject that has been engaging our attention, that the reader should carefully study the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, Haggai and Zechariah. They are full of most blessed instruction, comfort, and encouragement in a day like the present. Many, nowadays, it may be, are disposed to smile at the bare mention of such a subject as the unity of the body; but let them ask themselves, Is it the smile of calm confidence, or the sneer or unbelief? One thing is

certain, the devil as cordially hates the doctrine of the unity of the body as he hates any other doctrine of divine revelation, and he will as assuredly seek to hinder any attempt to carry it out as he sought to hinder the rebuilding of Jerusalem in the days of Nehemiah. But let us not be discouraged. It is enough for us that we find in God's Word the precious truth of the one body. Let us bring the light of this to bear upon the present condition of the professing Church, and see what it will reveal to our eyes. It will most assuredly put us on our faces in the dust before our God because of our ways; but at the same time, it will lift our hearts up to the contemplation of the divine standard. It will so enlighten and elevate our souls as to render us thoroughly dissatisfied with everything that does not present some expression, however feeble, of the unity of the body of Christ. It is wholly impossible that any one can drink into his soul the truth of the one body and rest satisfied with any thing short of the practical recognition thereof. True, he must make up his mind to bear the brunt of the enemy's opposition. He will meet a Sanballat here, and a Rehum there, but faith can say, Is God for me? I fear not, though all against me rise;

When I call on Christ my Saviour the host of evil flies.

There is ample encouragement for our souls in the Word of God. If we look at Josiah, just before the captivity, what do we see? A man simply taking the Word as his guide — judging himself and all around by its light — rejecting all that was contrary to it, and seeking, with earnest purpose of heart, to carry out what he found written there. And what was the result? The most blessed Passover that had been celebrated since the days of Samuel.

Again, if we look at Daniel, during the captivity, what do we see? A man acting simply on the truth of God and praying toward Jerusalem, though death stared him in the face as the consequence of his act. What was the result? A glorious testimony to the God of Israel, and the destruction of Daniel's enemies.

Finally, if we look at the remnant, after the captivity, what do we see? Men, in the face of appalling difficulties, rebuilding that city which was, and shall be, God's earthly centre. And what was the result? The joyous celebration of the feast of tabernacles, which had not been known since the days of Joshua the son of Nun.

Now, if we take any of the above interesting cases, and inquire as to the effect of their looking at surrounding circumstances, what answer shall we get? Take Daniel, for instance. Why did he open his window toward Jerusalem? Why look toward a city of ruins? Why call attention to a spot which only bore testimony to Israel's sin and shame? Would it not be better to let the name of Jerusalem sink into oblivion? Ah? we can guess at Daniel's reply to all such inquiries. Men might smile at him too, and deem him a visionary enthusiast; but he knew what he was doing. His heart was occupied with God's centre, the city of David, the grand gathering-point for Israel's twelve tribes. Was he to give up God's truth because of outward circumstances? Surely not. He could not consent to lower the standard even the breadth of a hair. He would weep, and pray, and fast, and chasten his soul before God, but never lower the standard. Was he going to give up God's thoughts about Zion because Israel had proved unfaithful? Not he. Daniel knew better than this. His eye was fixed on God's eternal truth, and hence, though he was in the dust

because of his own sins and his people's, yet the divine banner floated above his head, in its unfading glory.

Just so now dear Christian reader, we are called to fix the gaze of faith upon the imperishable truth of the one body; and not only to gaze upon it, but seek to carry it out in our feeble measure. This should be our one definite and constant aim. We should ever and only seek the expression of the unity of the body. We are not to ask, "How can this be?" Faith never says, "How?" in the presence of divine revelation; it believes and acts. We are not to surrender the truth of God on the plea that we cannot carry it out. The truth is revealed, and we are called to bow to it. We are not called to form the unity of the body. Very many seem to think that this unity is a something which they themselves are to set up or form in some way or another. This is a mistake. The unity exists. It is the result of the presence of the Holy Ghost in the body, and we have to recognize it, and walk in the light of it. This will give great definiteness to our course. It is always immensely important to have a distinct object before the heart, and to work with direct reference thereto. Look at Paul, that most devoted of workmen. What was his aim? — for what did he work? Hear the answer in his own words: "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the Church: whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the

hope of glory: whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus; whereunto I also labour, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily" (Col. 1: 24-29).

Now, this was a great deal more than the mere conversion of souls, precious as that is, most surely. Paul preached the gospel with a direct view to the body of Christ; and this is the pattern for all evangelists. We should not rest in the mere fact that souls are quickened; we should keep before our minds their incorporation, by the one Spirit, into the one body. This would effectually preserve us from sect-making — from preaching to Swell the ranks of a party — from seeking to get persons to join this that or the other denomination. We should know nothing whatever but the one body, because we find nothing else in the New Testament. If this be lost sight of, the evangelist will not know what to do with souls when they are converted. A man may be used in the conversion of hundreds — a most precious work indeed — precious beyond all expression; and if he does not see the unity of the body, he must be at sea as to their further course. This is very serious, both as to himself and them, and also as to the testimony for Christ.

May God's Spirit lead all Christians to see this great truth in all its bearings. We have but glanced at it, in connection with our theme; but it demands much serious attention at the present moment. It may be that some of our readers are disposed to find fault with what they may deem a long digression from the subject of "Life and Times of Josiah"; but in truth it should not be looked on as a digression, but as a line of truth flowing

naturally out of that subject — a line, too, which cannot possibly be overestimated.

Part 7

In closing our remarks on "The Life and Times of Josiah," we shall in few words advert, first, to the fact of his celebration of the Passover; and secondly, to the solemn close of his history. Our sketch of this truly interesting period would unquestionably be incomplete were these things omitted.

And first, then, as to the fact — so full of interest and encouragement — that at the very close of Israel's history there should be one of the brightest moments that Israel had ever known. What does this teach us? It very manifestly teaches us that in darkest times it is the privilege of the faithful soul to act on divine principles and to enjoy divine privileges. We look upon this as a most weighty fact for all ages, but specially weighty at the present moment. If we did nothing more by writing our papers on Josiah than to impress this great fact on the mind of the Christian reader, we should consider that we had not written in vain. If Josiah had been influenced by the spirit and principle which, alas! seem to actuate so many in this our day, he never could have attempted to celebrate the Passover at all. He would have folded his arms and said, "It is useless to think of maintaining any longer our great national institutions. It can only be regarded as a piece of presumption to attempt the celebration of that ordinance which was designed to set forth Israel's deliverance from judgement by the blood of the lamb, when Israel's unity is broken, and its national glory faded and gone."

But Josiah did not reason like this; he simply acted upon the truth of God. He studied the Scriptures, and rejected what was wrong and did what was right. "Moreover, Josiah kept a Passover unto the Lord in Jerusalem; and they killed the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month" (2 Chr. 35: 1). This was taking higher ground than Hezekiah had taken, inasmuch as he kept his Passover "on the fourteenth day of the second month" (2 Chr. 30: 15). In so doing, Hezekiah was, as we know, availing himself of the provision which grace had made for cases of defilement (see Num. 9: 9-11). The divine order, however, had fixed "the first month" as the proper period, and to this order Josiah was enabled to conform. In short, he took the very highest ground, according to the truth of God, while lying low under the deep sense of personal and national failure. This is ever the way of faith.

"And he set the priests in their charges, and encouraged them to the service of the house of the Lord, and said unto the Levites that taught all Israel, which were holy unto the Lord, Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel, did build: it shall not be a burden on your shoulders; serve now the Lord your God, and His people Israel. And prepare yourselves by the houses of your fathers, after your courses, according to the writing of David king of Israel, and according to the writing of Solomon his son, and stand in the holy place, according to the divisions of the families of the fathers of your brethren the people, and after the division of the families of the Levites. So kill the Passover, and sanctify yourselves, and prepare your brethren, that they may do according to the word of the Lord by the hand of Moses. "

Here we have Josiah taking the loftiest ground and acting on the highest authority. The most cursory reader cannot fail to be arrested, as he scans the lines just quoted from the inspired record, by the names of "Solomon," "David," "Moses," "all Israel," and above all, by the expression — so full of dignity, weight, and power — "That they may do according to the word of the Lord." Most memorable words! May they sink down into our ears and into our hearts. Josiah felt it to be his high and holy privilege to conform to the divine standard, notwithstanding all the errors and evils which had crept in from age to age. God's truth must stand forever. Faith owns and acts on this precious fact, and reaps accordingly. Nothing can be more lovely than the scene enacted on the occasion to which we are now referring. Josiah's strict adherence to the Word of the Lord is not more to be admired than his large-hearted devotedness and liberality. "He gave to the people of the flock, lambs and kids, all for the Passover-offerings, for all that were present, to the number of thirty thousand, and three thousand bullocks: these were of the king's substance. And his princes gave willingly unto the people, to the priests, and to the Levites.... So the service was prepared, and the priests stood in their place, and the Levites in their courses, according to the king's commandment.... And the singers, the sons of Asaph, were in their place, according to the commandment of David, and Asaph, and Heman, and Jeduthun the king's seer; and the porters waited at every gate; they might not depart from their service; for their brethren the Levites prepared for them. So all the service of the Lord was prepared the same day, to keep the Passover, and to offer burnt-offerings upon the altar of the Lord, according to the commandment of king Josiah. And the

children of Israel that were present kept the Passover at that time, and the feast of unleavened bread seven days. And there was no Passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a Passover as Josiah kept, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel that were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah was this Passover kept."

What a picture! King, princes, priests, Levites, singers, porters, all Israel, Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem — all gathered together — all in their true place and at their appointed work, "according to the word of the Lord" — and all this "in the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah," when the entire Jewish polity was on the very eve of dissolution. Surely this must speak to the heart of the thoughtful reader. It tells its own impressive tale, and teaches its own peculiar lesson. It tells us that no age, no circumstances, no influence, can ever change the truth of God or dim the vision of faith. "The word of the Lord endureth forever," and faith grasps that Word and holds it fast in the face of everything. It is the privilege of the believing soul to have to do with God and His eternal truth; and, moreover, it is the duty of such an one to aim at the very loftiest standard of action, and to be satisfied with nothing lower. Unbelief will draw a plea from the condition of things around to lower the standard, to relax the grasp, to slacken the pace, to lower the tone. Faith says "No!" — emphatically and decidedly, "No!" Let us bow our heads in shame and sorrow on account of our sin and failure, but keep the standard up. The failure is ours: the standard is God's. Josiah wept and rent his

clothes, but he did not surrender the truth of God. He felt and owned that he and his brethren and his fathers had sinned, but that was no reason why he should not celebrate the Passover according to the divine order. It was as imperative upon him to do right as it was upon Solomon, David, or Moses. It is our business to obey the Word of the Lord, and we shall assuredly be blessed in our deed. This is one grand lesson to be drawn from the life and times of Josiah, and it is undoubtedly a seasonable lesson for our own times. May we learn it thoroughly. May we learn to adhere with holy decision to the ground on which the truth of God has set us, and to occupy that ground with a larger measure of true devotedness to Christ and His cause.

Most gladly would we linger over the brilliant and soul-stirring scene presented in the opening verses of 2 Chronicles 35, but we must bring this paper to an end, and we shall merely glance very rapidly at the solemn and admonitory close of Josiah's history. It stands in sad and painful contrast with all the rest of his most interesting career, and sounds in our ears a note of warning to which we are bound to give our most serious attention. We shall do little more than quote the passage, and then leave the reader to reflect upon it, prayerfully and humbly, in the presence of God.

"After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Charchemish by Euphrates; and Josiah went out against him. But he sent ambassadors to him, saying, What have I to do with thee, thou king of Judah? I come not against thee this day, but against the house wherewith I have war; for God commanded me to make haste: forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me, that He

destroy thee not. Nevertheless, Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself, that he might fight with him, and harkened not to the words of Necho from the mouth of God and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo. And the archers shot at king Josiah; and the king said to his servants, Have me away, for I am sore wounded. His servants therefore took him out of that chariot and put him in the second chariot that he had; and they brought him to Jerusalem: and he died, and was buried in one of the sepulchres of his fathers. And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah" (2 Chr. 35: 20-25).

All this is very sad and humbling. We do not wish to dwell upon it further than is absolutely needful for the purpose of instruction and admonition. The Holy Spirit does not expatiate, but He has recorded it for our learning. It is ever His way to give us men as they were — to write the history of their "deeds, first and last" good and bad — one as well as another. He tells us of Josiah's piety at the "first," and of his wilfulness at the "last." He shows us that so long as Josiah walked in the light of divine revelation, his path was illuminated by the bright beams of the divine countenance; but the moment he attempted to act for himself — to walk by the light of his own eyes — to travel off the straight and narrow way of simple obedience, that moment dark and heavy clouds gathered around him, and the course that had opened in sunshine ended in gloom. Josiah went against Necho without any command from God — yea, he went in direct opposition to words spoken "from the mouth of God." He meddled with strife that belonged not to him and he reaped the consequences.

“He disguised himself." Why do this, if he was conscious of acting for God? Why wear a mask, if treading the divinely appointed pathway? Alas! Josiah failed in this, and in his failure he teaches us a salutary lesson. May we profit by it. May we learn more than ever to seek a divine warrant for all we do, and to do nothing without it. We can count on God to the fullest extent if we are walking in His way, but we have no security whatever if we attempt to travel off the divinely appointed line. Josiah had no command to fight at Megiddo, and hence he could not count on divine protection. "He disguised himself," but that did not shield him from the enemy's arrow. "The archers shot him" — they gave him his death wound, and he fell, amid the tears and lamentations of a people to whom he had endeared himself by a life of genuine piety and earnest devotedness.

May we have grace to imitate him in his piety and devotedness, and to guard against his wilfulness. It is a serious thing for a child of God to persist in doing his own will. Josiah went to Megiddo when he ought to have tarried at Jerusalem, and the archers shot him, and he died; Jonah went to Tarshish when he ought to have gone to Nineveh, and he was flung into the deep: Paul persisted in going to Jerusalem though the Spirit told him not, and he fell into the hands of the Romans. Now, all these were true, earnest, devoted servants of God; but they failed in these things; and though God overruled their failure for blessing, yet they had to reap the fruit of their failure, for "our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12: 29).

The History of the Tribe of Levi

The History of the Tribe of Levi.

C. H. Mackintosh.

THE TRIBE OF LEVI ARRANGED ACCORDING TO THEIR FAMILIES

Name Meaning

First Class

Gershon A stranger, or exile

Lael Dedicated, or belonging to God

Eliasaph God hath added

Shimei Hearing, Renowned

Libni For edification, White

Second Class

Kohath Congregation, Assembly

Hebron Association, communion

Amram Exalted people, of the exalted One

Izhar Oil

Uzziel The strength of God

Third Class

Merari Bitterness or sorrow

Mahli Sick, Pardon or a harp, sickly

Mushi Yielding, one who has found a refuge, forsaking

Abihail Father of strength

Zuriel My rock is God

There are few exercises more profitable for the Christian than that of reflecting upon the character of God as unfolded in the history of the saints and fathers of ancient times recorded in the Scriptures of the Old Testament: and indeed this might be expected from the very nature of the subject, which is such that, whatever be its extent, it unfolds principles to us which stand intimately connected with all that is important for us to know or be established in. Thus, whether we get the dealings of God on a limited scale, as with any one of the fathers personally, or more widely extended, as with the seed of Israel afterwards, it is nevertheless the same lesson we are called upon to learn, namely, God and man. Now, this is what should enhance exceedingly the value of the Old Testament to the Christian; almost the great body of its teaching is of the above character: and not only so, but it also (as looked at in this point of view) guards effectually against the mere exercise of imagination; for when we consider the history of any man or people, it is not necessary that we should decide positively what is shadowed out therein;* It is enough for us to see that we have before us a more or less extensive development of the character and actings of God and man; and this, without ever descending beneath the surface of Scripture, cannot fail of being instructive and edifying to the soul.

{*In many of the Old Testament narratives, however, the instruction is so manifestly typical that even the most cautious reader, if at all familiar with Scripture, cannot refuse to look at it in that point of view.}

But, of all the histories of the Old Testament embodying instruction of the above character, I believe there are few more copious, deep and varied than that which is

about to engage our attention. If the narrative of a soul taken up by sovereign and eternal grace from the pit of corruption and deep depravity, carried through the various stages which grace and truth had enacted for sinful man, until at last he is set down in the very sanctuary of God and established in the enjoyment of the covenant of life and peace forever; if, I say, such a narrative would possess charms and present attractions to us, then does the history of Levi abound in this. It is only a matter of astonishment that a history fraught with such rich and varied instruction has not occupied more of the thoughts of those luminaries of the Church whose writings have been a source of comfort and instruction to all who have been taught to value the truth of God.

Yet, much as I see in the history of Levi, and much as I admire what I do see, I could not think of directing the reader's thoughts to the subject without informing him that I purpose doing little more than to bring before his mind in a connected way the various Scriptures which treat of this most interesting question; however, these Scriptures are so plain and striking that no one who is at all familiar with Scripture truths can fail to enter into them. Now, as I purpose, with the Lord's blessing and grace, to follow the history of Levi through all the Scriptures in which it is brought before us, I will commence with his birth, as recorded in Genesis 29: 34; "And she [Leah] conceived again, and bare a son: and said, Now this time will my husband be joined unto me, because I have borne him three sons: therefore was his name called Levi" (that is, "joined").

Here, then, we are presented with the birth and name of this most remarkable character — a name of wondrous significance as looked at in connection with his after

history, whether in nature's wild and lawless extravagance, in which we find him "joined" with his brother in the perpetration of a deed of blood and murder (Gen. 34), or in the day when he was called to drink deeply and largely of the cup of God's electing grace, when " joined" with Aaron in "the work of the tabernacle" (Num. 8).

Genesis 34: 25-26: "And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males. And they slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house and went out."

As the Spirit of God in Jacob has furnished us with a striking commentary on the above piece of cruelty, we will consider the Scripture in which the commentary is given, namely, Genesis 49: 5-7: "Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel; I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel."

We have here a truly humbling view of human nature as looked at in the light of the holiness of God. It is as if the Lord would say to us, Look here! behold a man clothed in nature's blackest garb, and presenting nature's most forbidding aspect. Examine him closely, in order that you, seeing what man is when stripped of all that false clothing which ignorance or vain self-righteousness

would put upon him, may know the rich aboundings of My grace, which can avail to lift even such a one into the loftiest heights of communion — heights which human conception would utterly fail to mount, but which My grace, through the blood of the cross, can make available to the very chief of sinners.

In reading such a description as that which the above passage presents to us, how needful it is for the sinner to bear in mind that it is not only in the light of God's holiness that he is called to look at himself, but also in the light of His grace. When this is learned he needs not be afraid to penetrate deeply into the dark recesses of his heart's corruption; for if God in grace fill the scene, the sinner (so far as his own righteousness is concerned) must necessarily be out of the scene; and then it is no longer a question of what we think about sin, but how God will deal with it in grace, and that is simply to put it away forever — yea, to bury it forever in the waters of His forgetfulness: thus it will be placing our sin side by side with God 's grace; which is what the gospel invites us to do, and which, moreover, is the only way to arrive at a proper settlement of the question of sin. On the other hand, where this saving principle is not known — not believed — the sinner will undoubtedly seek to make the load of his guilt as light as possible, in order that he may have as little to do as he may. This will ever lead to the most unutterable and intolerable bondage; or if not to this, to that which is much worse, even to detestable religious pride, which is of all things most truly abominable in the sight of God.

Reader, if you have not as yet got the question of sin settled between your conscience and God, ponder, I do beseech you, what I have now stated; for to know this

principle in spirit is life eternal. Christ has, once for all, borne sin's deepest curse in His own body on the tree, and now even Levi can lift up his head for although he be by nature only conversant with "instruments of cruelty," things which must have kept God forever at a distance from "his secret and his assembly;" although he be by nature cruel, fierce, self-willed, scattered, and divided, yet God can, in the exercise of His mercy, make him conversant with "the instruments of the tabernacle," bring him into the enjoyment of the covenant of life and peace, in union with the great head of the priestly family, and, in the power of this blessed union, cause him to have his "lights and perfections with his Holy One" (Deut. 33: 8; Mal 2: 4-5). However, we must not anticipate the teaching of passages which are yet to come under our notice; I will therefore close my remarks on this part of our subject by requesting my reader to compare attentively the character of Levi, as above recorded, with that which the Apostle Paul, quoting from the Psalms, has given of man generally whether Jew or Gentile: "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips, whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: their FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD: destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3: 10-18).

Exodus 32: 25-29 — "And when Moses saw that the people were naked; (for Aaron had made them naked

unto their shame among their enemies:) then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men. For Moses had said, Consecrate yourselves to-day to the Lord, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother; that He may bestow upon you a blessing this day."

Here a new scene opens to us, and we are called to witness the dawning of a new day upon Levi; a day, moreover, which may justly lead us to anticipate great things. It is true we get him here likewise with his sword by his side, but, oh, for what a different purpose, and in what a different cause! It is not now in anger and self-will slaying a man, but in holy jealousy and care for the honour of the Lord God of Israel, and in simple obedience to His command; and although this; may, and will, lead to the very cutting off of a brother, a son, or a friend, Levi cares not; for the word is, "Consecrate yourselves to the Lord, that He may bestow upon you a blessing." This was enough for Levi; and although by nature he was vile and utterly unfit either for the fellowship or service of God, yet is he nor the foremost in jealous vindication of His holy name and worship against those who would seek to "turn their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass." Nor is Levi now seen "joined" with his brother Simeon — no he

might join in league with him in the days of his wickedness for the perpetration of deeds of blood; but here, as I before observed, we get the opening of a new scene and therefore he is seen "joined" with the Lord and His servant Moses for the execution of righteous judgement upon idolatry.

And henceforth, in following the footsteps of Levi, we shall find that, instead of being "swift to shed blood," they are to be "swift in following the movements of the cloud, and, "swift" in performing the service of the tabernacle.

It would, of course, be quite foreign to our subject to dwell upon the sad and humbling scene that called out the above act of service on the part of Levi Suffice it to say that it was, as we know, on the part of Aaron and the camp, a ceasing to exercise faith in the fact that Moses was alive in the presence of God for them. The consequence of which was an entire forgetfulness of the mighty Hand and stretched out Arm that had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, and of their present position in the wilderness; hence, as might be expected, "the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." May the Lord preserve us from like forgetfulness; and, seeing "those things were written for our admonition," may we be truly admonished thereby not to "lust after evil things."

We shall now pass on to the next Scripture, where we get the Lord's own thoughts upon the above act of service, namely, Deuteronomy 33: 8-11: "And of Levi he [Moses] said, Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy Holy One, whom thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah;

who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed Thy word and kept Thy covenant. They shall teach Jacob Thy judgements, and Israel Thy law; they shall put incense before Thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon Thine altar. Bless, Lord, his substance, and accept l the work of his hands: smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again."

In this passage we have real Levite service brought before us in the words, "who said unto his father and mother, I have not seen him," etc. The true and decided servant of God will ever have to experience something of this; indeed, the measure thereof will just be in proportion to the faithfulness and power of his walk: "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God"; therefore every heir of that kingdom must show himself in '' readiness to deny all the claims which "flesh and blood" would make on him, whether in himself or in others. Most happily does the address to "the queen," in Ps. 45, connect itself with this point: "Harken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget e also thine own people and thy father's house; so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty for He is thy Lord, and worship thou Him" (vers. 10-11).

We have all to watch against a tendency to be influenced by the claims of flesh and blood, in our testimony for Christ. He Himself has said on this subject that "no man having put his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9: 62). And, as some one has observed, it was upon this point that the prophet Elisha's character seemed a little defective, for when

Elijah cast his mantle over him, or, in other words, when he had put upon him the high honour of making him a prophet of the Lord God, Elisha's heart seemed to yearn after home, and he said, "Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee" (1 Kings 19: 20). Now this was most natural, and, as some would say, amiable and affectionate; but, oh, amiability and natural affection have often hindered people from entering as they should into the Lord's service; and although it is one of the marks of the latter-day apostasy to be "without natural affection," yet does Moses, in the above-cited passage, ask the Lord to bless Levi, because "he said unto his father and his mother, I have not seen him, neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children." How grossly inconsistent would it have been for Levi to have said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother," when called to enter upon the Lord's work; and not less so is it for us to allow the claims of "flesh and blood" to interfere with our true-hearted Levite service to our God, who has done so much for us.

But let us carefully observe the blessed consequences of this decision of character on the part of Levi. These are, first, "They shall teach Jacob Thy judgements, and Israel Thy law." Secondly, "They shall put incense before Thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon Thine altar." Thirdly, "Bless his substance." Fourthly, "Accept the work of his hands." Fifthly, "Smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again." All these fruits are distinct, and yet intimately connected, as springing from the same source, namely, sample, devoted and uncompromising obedience to the Lord. As to the first of these fruits, how true it is that it is only the man who himself endeavours

to walk in power before God that can speak with effect to the hearts and consciences of others; nothing else will do — nothing else will tell, either upon the hearts or in the lives of Christians. There may be, and, alas, is much of mere systematic teaching and preaching of things which the mere intellect may have received, and which, by a natural fluency of language, we may be able to give out; but all such teaching is vain, and had much better be avoided in the sight of God. True, it might often give to our public assemblies an appearance of barrenness and poverty which our poor, proud hearts could ill brook; but would it not be far better to keep silence than to substitute mere carnal effort for the blessed energy of the Holy Spirit?

True ministry, however, the ministry of the Spirit, will always commend itself to the heart and conscience. We can always know the source from which a man is drawing who speaks in "the words which the Holy Ghost teacheth," and with the ability which God giveth; and while we should ever pray to be delivered from the mere effort of man's intellect to handle the truth of God amongst us, we should diligently cultivate that power to teach which stands connected, as in Levi's case, with the denial of the claims of flesh and blood, and with entire devotedness to the Lord's service.

In the second consequence above referred to we have a very elevated point: "They shall put incense before Thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon Thine altar." This is worship. We put incense before God when we are enabled, in the power of communion, to present in His presence the sweet odour of Christ in His person and work. This is our proper occupation as members of the chosen and separated tribe.

But it is particularly instructive to look at both the above mentioned consequences in connection; i.e., the Levites in ministry to their brethren, and the Levites in worship before God: it was as acceptable in the sight of God, and as divine an exercise of his functions, for a Levite to instruct his brethren as it was for him to burn incense before God. This is very important. We should never separate these two things. If we do not see that it is the same Spirit who must qualify us to speak for God as to speak to Him, there is a manifest want of moral order in our souls. If we could keep this principle clearly before our minds, it would be a most effectual means of maintaining amongst us the true dignity and solemnity of ministry in the Word: having lost sight of it has been productive of very sad consequences. If we imagine for a moment that we can teach Jacob by any other power or ability than that by which we put incense before God, or if we imagine that one is not as acceptable before God as the other, we are not soundly instructed upon one of the most important points of truth; for, as some one has observed, "Let us look at this point illustrated in the personal ministry of Christ, and we shall no longer say that teaching by the Holy Ghost is inferior to praise by the same, for surely the apostleship of Christ when He came from God was as sweet in its savour to God as His priesthood when He went to God to minister to Him in that office. The candlestick in the holy place which diffused the light of life — God's blessed name — was as valuable, at least in His view, as the altar in the same place, which presented the perfume of praise, whether of Christ personally, or of His body the church, for in both do we not equally see Christ."

We now come to speak of the third point, namely, "Bless, Lord, his substance." This is just what we might have expected; an increase of blessing will ever be the result of real true-hearted devotedness to Christ. "Every branch in Me that beareth fruit He purgeth, that it may bring forth more fruit;" "The diligent soul shall be made fat;" and "To him that hath shall more be given." Levi had exhibited much diligence of soul in the Lord's service — he had shown himself in readiness to vindicate His name in strong and decided opposition to every mere human thought and affection; and now the Lord will show Levi that He is not unrighteous to forget his work and labour of love, "for He will bless his substance." We find the Apostle Paul bringing forward the same principle to his son Timothy when he tells him to "meditate on these things; give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear to all Here he connects the "profiting" with the "giving himself wholly": this will ever be the case; and if we would experience more than we do the meaning and power of the words, "Bless, Lord, his substance," we must first endeavour to enter into the meaning of what goes before, namely, "who said to his father and to his mother, I have not known him," etc. "Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life" (Matt. 19: 29).

Not less striking is the connection between what has just been stated and our fourth point, namely, "Accept the work of his hands." This I conceive to be a point of the greatest importance to us, and one which involves a question upon which we frequently display much want of

intelligence. We often find it difficult to reconcile the idea of salvation through free grace with that of an increase of blessing and power for walking in obedience; and yet we find the two things constantly maintained in Scripture; thus we read, "He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me; and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him." And, again, "If a man love Me, he will keep My words; and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him and make Our abode with him" (John 14: 21, 23).

This is very clear and decided upon the subject: we see here that the manifestation of the Son is made to depend on our keeping the commandments of Christ. Grace takes up a sinner and leads him into the knowledge of the full forgiveness of his sins through faith in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ: but all this is simply a means to an end: it is, in a word, to set him down in a position of responsibility to Christ, which position he by nature could never have sustained, because "the carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." If, then, a man be put into a place of responsibility It is clear that the more faithfully and diligently he maintains that place, the more enlarged will be his communion.

A father may have two children, the one obedient, the other the very reverse; now, they are both his children; neither the obedience of the one nor the disobedience of the other can interfere in the least with the relationship existing between them; but can we have a question as to which of them would enjoy most of the father's presence and affection? Surely not; a father likes to be obeyed, and will love the obedient child. There may be

extraordinary cases where, from a warped judgement or a blind and unmeaning partiality, the disobedient, lawless son may have more of the heart of the parent than the other; but this is not so with God: His judgement is clear and unerring: He can accurately distinguish between the one that honours Him and the one that despises Him: the former "He will honour," the latter He will "lightly esteem." The Lord does not ask a sinner dead in trespasses and sins to serve Him, for all such a one could do would be polluted with sin — his very prayers are polluted — his meditations are polluted — his acts of benevolence are polluted; in a word, he is all polluted, from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, and therefore can do nothing acceptable in the sight of God. But the Lord quickens those that are dead in trespasses and sins, and then teaches them to “walk worthy of Him as dear children," and to be fruitful in every good word and work, to the praise of His name: and when we do this He graciously condescends to "accept the work of our hands." But not only does Scripture abound with precepts which confirm what has been above stated, it also affords numerous examples and illustrations of the same; thus, for instance, the case of Abraham and Lot, in the opening of the book of Genesis. These were both servants of God, but yet how differently they walked! one loved God; the other loved the well-watered plains of Sodom: and the consequence was, that while the Lord Himself could meet with Abraham, and sup with him, and, moreover, unfold to him His counsels with reference to Sodom, He merely sends angels to Sodom, and we can plainly perceive in their manner toward Lot their marked disapproval of his circumstances, for when he invites them into his house,

they reply, "Nay, but we will abide in the street all night."

This is plain: the angels of the Lord would rather abide all night in the streets of guilty Sodom than go in to a child of His who was not walking in obedience; nor does the fact that they afterwards consented to go in at all interfere with the point which I am seeking to establish; no, their answer speaks volumes of the most solemn and practical instruction to us; they enter into Lot's house, it is true; but if they do, it is only to counteract the sad effects of Lot's sin. May we, then, seek, by prayer and communion with God, to keep ourselves in the path of obedience, so that we may prove in our soul's happy experience the meaning of the prayer in our text, "Accept the work of his hands."

We have now arrived at the fifth and last point in this branch of our subject, namely, "Smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again." This is properly the last point, when there shall be neither "adversary nor evil occurrent " we shall rest from our labour and conflict, and enter into possession of that upon which hope now feeds; therefore, when it can be said of our enemies "that they rise not again," we shall be happy indeed.

However, there is much of practical value in this point in the connection in which it stands here, i.e., as a consequence of obedience; there is nothing that gives the soul such marvellous power over enemies as an obedient, holy walk. Christ has conquered the devil, the death and hell, and He has moreover crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts, and therefore when a soul believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, he is introduced at

once into a place where he has Satan, the world, and the flesh under his feet; and it is as he walks in the power of resurrection life, that he can at all maintain this, his blessed ground. But alas! how often does it happen that instead of having all these our enemies under our feet, we are found under their feet, to the gross dishonour of our Lord, and the sorrow and debility of our own souls, and why, but because we walk not in simple obedience.

Every step we take in real obedience to Christ is, so far, a victory gained over the flesh, and the devil; and every fresh victory ministers fresh power for the conflict which follows; thus we grow. And on the other hand, every battle lost only serves to weaken us, while it gives power to our enemies to attack us again. Thus we see that the man whose heart is truly devoted to the Lord will have power to teach — power to worship; he will increase in substance, for Christ causes those that love Him "to inherit substance" (Prov. 8). He will enjoy more of God's favour and of the light of His countenance, for "them that honour Me I will honour"; and, finally, he will have enlarged power over all enemies. All these are the fruits of that true Levite devotedness which will enable a man to say "to his father, and to his mother, I have not seen him"; or, in other words, those fruits can only be enjoyed by one who is ready to "leave all and follow Christ." This being the case, then, we can have little difficulty in accounting for the poverty in gifts of ministry — the poverty in worship — the meagreness of growth — the many interruptions in the enjoyment of divine favour — the almost total lack of power over enemies of which we have all to complain. Many seek to satisfy themselves by saying that we cannot expect the same power in gifts and worship now as that which fell to the lot of the

saints in the apostolic day, and this, of course, we are not going to deny; but then, the question is, Have we as much power and freshness in these things as we might have? I believe we have not — and why? Is not Levi's God our God? Yes, He is, blessed be His name, and the same everlasting and abundant fountain of blessing as ever He was, but we, alas, are far behind in the matter of Levi's true devotedness; and this is the root of it all, for it remains unalterably true that "to him that hath shall more be given," and "we cannot serve two masters." This is true — solemn — and practical.

We are now called to consider a Scripture which will unfold to us at once the wondrous secret of how a sinner so degraded as Levi could hold a place of such elevation and nearness to God as that which he afterwards Occupied. There is nothing in a sinner by nature with which God could hold any intercourse; therefore, if ever He brings any one into a place of blessing and high communion, He does so in pure grace, and thus excludes "boasting" altogether, for "no flesh shall glory in His presence." Those who look upon it as presumption in a sinner to speak of holding a place of such nearness to God, seem to lose sight of this completely. It could never be pride that would lead any one into a place where he would be broken to pieces, and be shown that he was altogether corrupt and worthless; if God were to elevate flesh, and bring flesh into a place of nearness to Himself, then indeed there would be some force in the objection on the ground of presumption; but God does no such thing: the flesh is so far gone in ruin that it cannot be improved, and therefore God declares in the Cross His mind about the flesh, namely, that it is a condemned thing; but He, by the same Cross, gives the poor sinner

life, and in the power of that life, and not in the power of life in the flesh, He brings the sinner into His presence and sets him down at His table; so that it is not the presumption of a poor prodigal that assigns the place which he is to occupy, but the grace and boundless loving kindness of the father: thus, God says to Noah, "The end of all flesh is come before Me," and what then? "Make thee an ark of gopher wood" — and in that ark is Noah raised up beyond the region of judgement, and a judged world, into a place of undisturbed communion. Now, we shall find the very same principles developed in God's dealings with Levi, in the Scripture which is about to engage our attention. I shall first consider their cleansing; and secondly, their position and service. First, their cleansing as recorded in Numbers 8: 5-14:

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them. And thus shalt thou do unto them, to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purifying upon them, and let them shave all their flesh, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean. Then let them take a young bullock with his meat offering, even fine flour mingled with oil; and another young bullock shalt thou take for a sin offering. And thou shalt bring the Levites before the tabernacle of the congregation: and thou shalt gather the whole assembly of the children of Israel together: and thou shalt bring the Levites before the Lord: and the children of Israel shall put their hands upon the Levites: and Aaron shall offer the Levites before the Lord for an offering of the children of Israel, that they may execute the service of the Lord. And the Levites shall lay their hands upon the heads of the bullocks: and thou shalt offer the one for a sin offering,

and the other for a burnt offering, unto the Lord, to make an atonement for the Levites. And thou shalt set the Levites before Aaron, and before his sons, and offer them for an offering unto the Lord. Thus shalt thou separate the Levites from among the children of Israel: and the Levites shall be Mine."

This passage furnishes us with a very rich and blessed branch of our interesting subject. We were enabled to see, in looking at Levi by nature, that such was his character that God would have no fellowship with him whatever, and that, so far as Levi was concerned, he should abide forever in his own habitation, in company with the "instruments of cruelty" which were therein. But God will not leave him there, and therefore God must Himself provide the remedy — God Himself must cleanse this self-willed, cruel and fierce man. And here we are invited to recall a thought which occurred to the mind in the opening of this paper, viz., that man's sin must ever be brought into the presence of God's grace. Levi had nothing else to look to; his sin was such as to preclude every thought of human remedy; the law condemned Levi's nature; and God had pronounced him unfit for His presence. And what, then, had Levi to do? Could he set himself with heart and soul to keep the law? Impossible: the law had not only condemned his works, but pronounced the curse of God upon his very nature. The law said, "Thou shalt do no murder" and having said this, it added, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them." But Levi had murder in his nature, therefore Levi's nature was cursed.

What, then, could Levi do? Might he not cast himself over upon the mercy of God with the hope that He would

deal lightly with his sins? No; by no means: God had given forth His solemn and unalterable decree, "O my soul, come not thou into their secret"; God could not come into a habitation wherein were "instruments of cruelty."

Thus, then, Levi was completely shut up without a single means of escape; the law nailed him down to this one point, "Answer my demands." And all that Levi had towards the discharge of these demands was, "anger, fierceness, murder, self-will, cruelty," etc.: poor resources, alas! Nor would the law of God enter into any composition with the sinner; it should have "the uttermost farthing," or else the word was, "cursed art thou." Therefore Levi, as a man alive in the flesh, or, in other words, Levi, as seeking to get life through the law, was judged, condemned, and set aside, and it only remained for him to take thus the place of one dead, in order that God might in grace quicken him into new life, which God was ready and willing to do, and which, as we shall see, He graciously did, according to His own marvellous thoughts, and in His own way.

{The reader will, of course, bear in mind that what is stated the believer now knows in reality through the Holy Ghost.}

Levi, then, had just to see himself as one that was, in God's account, dead, as we read "for they [i.e., the Levites] are wholly given unto Me from among the children of Israel; instead of such as open every womb, even instead of the first-born of all the children of Israel, have I taken them unto Me: for all the first-born of the children of Israel are Mine both man and beast: on the day that I smote every first-born in the land of Egypt, I

sanctified them for Myself; and I have taken the Levites for all the first-born of the children of Israel" (Num. 8: 16-18).

The Lord passed through the land of Egypt with the sword of justice unsheathed, to smite all the first-born, nor would Israel's first-born have escaped, had not the sword fallen upon the neck of the spotless victim and thus, as some one has beautifully observed, "There was death in every house, not only in the houses of the Egyptians, but also in those of the Israelites: in the former, it was the death of Egypt's first-born; in the latter, the death of God's LAMB."

The Levites, then, were taken instead of those upon whom the sword of the destroying about Levi in this paper is to be regarded as typical of that which angel should have fallen; or, in other words, the Levites were, typically a dead and risen people, and thus were no longer looked at in the circumstances of nature, but of new life through grace, in which they were placed by God Himself. And here let me observe that this is the path which every sinner must travel if he would know experimentally anything of Levi's after history. There is no other way in which to escape from the judgement of the law on the one hand, or from the horrid workings of indwelling corruption on the other, than simply to see ourselves "dead" to both, and "alive unto God through Jesus Christ." "How shall we," says the apostle, "that are dead to sin live any longer therein? Know ye not that so many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death; that, like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6: 2-4).

And, again, "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that ye should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God" (Rom. 7: 4). But not only are death and resurrection the only possible means by which a sinner can escape the condemnation of the law and the tyrannical sway of sin, they are also the only means by which he can acceptably serve God. The flesh, or carnal mind, cannot serve God, for it is not subject to His law, neither indeed can be; therefore we infer that the sources of that life by which we can serve God are not to be found in the flesh, but only in union with the Lord Jesus in resurrection. "If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered" (John 15: 6). Consequently, when God would bring Levi into a place of nearness and service to Himself, He shows him to us as passing through those circumstances which, in the clearest manner, illustrate death and resurrection; for they are taken instead of those that were as dead, but who escaped. through the death of the lamb: and then having thus passed through the circumstances of death, they are told in chap. 8 to "put off the old man and put on the new" for that is the meaning of the "washing of water,'' and "shaving of the flesh," etc. This is in full keeping with what the apostle states to his son Titus: "For we ourselves also were sometime foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He shed on us

abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Titus 3: 3-6).

But in order that we may have a clearer and more comprehensive view of the ground upon which the Levites stood before God, I would refer, in as brief and concise a manner as I can, to the offerings connected with their consecration: these were the burnt offering, the meat offering, and the sin offering; all, as we shall see, showing out the Lord Jesus Christ in His varied aspects.* And first, the burnt offering: the principles unfolded in this offering are brought out in the first chapter of Leviticus, where we read, "If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord" (ver. 3).

{*It may be well just to observe here that in considering the offerings above referred to I have merely looked at them with reference to the question of Levi's history}

Here, then, is something real for the soul to feed on and rejoice in. We have in the burnt offering the Lord Jesus Christ, in all His fullness and perfections, as offering Himself "without spot to God," and also as accepted before God for us. In this He was found to be "a male without blemish"; so much so, that the One in whose sight the very heavens are not clean, could say, "In whom I am well pleased": and again, "Mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth."

But further, this unblemished offering presents Himself voluntarily at the door of the tabernacle. "No man," says the Lord Jesus, speaking of His life, "taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself: I have power to lay it down,

and I have power to take it again: this commandment have I received of My Father." And truly, in tracing the way of the blessed Jesus through this defiled world, we can recognise this feature of the burnt offering in a very striking manner. From first to last His course was marked with all the steadiness and divine uninterrupted calmness of true devotedness to God. The billows of dark and fierce temptation might roll and toss themselves with a range and fury which would have crushed one less than God. The devil might stir up all his deadly malice against Him; man might display all his enmity — enmity which could only be outdone by the eternal friendship of this devoted One. His disciples, moreover, may refuse to "watch with Him one hour." Death may arm himself with all his ghastly terrors, and pour out a cup mixed with hell's bitterest ingredients; and further, display his deadly sting in all its infernal keenness and power to wound. The grave may conjure up all its unutterable horrors to make one grand struggle for “victory," but all in vain. The answer of this unblemished voluntary offering to all these was, "My meat and My drink is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work." He had His eye upon one object, and that was "the joy that was set before Him." He looked forward to the moment when He would be able to draw forth from the inexhaustible treasuries of eternal love the rich and princely fruits of His hard-bought victory, and pour them forth in divine profusion upon the "travail of His soul"; even the Church, which He loved, and purchased with His own precious blood. He eagerly anticipated "the morning without clouds," when, surrounded by the myriads of His ransomed brethren, He will sound forth in everlasting strains the mighty answer to all the foul aspersions of the enemy as to the

love of God toward the sinner. All these attractions, I say, He had before Him, and therefore He marched onward in the greatness of His strength; He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." Lord Jesus Christ, invigorate our poor cold hearts to sound forth the eternal honours of Thine adorable name; and may our lives be more and more the decided evidence of our hearts — love to Thee, for "Thou alone art worthy!" All this is surely most blessed for us; but, blessed as it is, it is not all; there are other strokes from the pencil of the Divine Artist, calculated, in the highest degree, to captivate our spiritual tastes, yea, more, to feed our souls. "He shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him, to make atonement for him" (ver. 4). Here, then, is grace! Levi, the self-willed, cruel, fierce, and blood-shedding Levi, is accepted in all the perfectness and acceptableness of this "unblemished male" before God: whatever of excellency, whatever of value, whatever of purity, God beheld in this offering, that did He likewise behold in Levi as "accepted in the offering." Thus, look at Levi apart from the offering, and you will find him such that God could not come into his assembly: but look at him as in the offering, and you find him, through grace, as pure and as perfect as the offering itself. Nothing could surpass this most excellent grace. The grace that could take up a sinner from such a pit of corruption as that in which Levi lay grovelling, and lead him into such high elevation, deserves the highest note of praise; and, blessed be God, it shall, ere long, have it from all who, like Levi, have felt its sacred power.

However, we must not enter too minutely into the detail of this burnt offering, and there are just two points

further to which I will refer. The first is presented to us in ver. 6: "And he shall flay the burnt offering, and cut it into his pieces." Here we see at once to what a process of strict, jealous and uncompromising scrutiny the Lord Jesus exposed Himself in offering Himself before God. It was not enough that the animal should be APPARENTLY "without blemish," for the skin, or outward surface, might look very well, and at the same time the offering be not at all fit for God's altar; therefore the outward surface must be removed, in order that this offering may be examined in all its sinews, joints and veins, and thus be found, as to the springs of action, the structure of his frame, and the source and channels of the life that animated him, a perfectly unblemished offering. But further, "he shall cut it into his pieces," i.e., take the offering asunder, and examine its various parts, in order that it may not only form a perfect whole, but that each distinct joint may be found perfect. Thus, in whatever aspect we look at the Lord Jesus, we get divine perfection. He could say to God, "Thou hast tried Me, and shalt find nothing;" and God could answer, "I am well pleased." He could say of the devil, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me;" and the devil could reply, "I know Thee, who thou art, the Holy One of God." He could say to men, "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" and man could answer, "Truly this was a righteous man." Thus, I say, our divine burnt offering, who voluntarily presented Himself at God's altar, and there poured forth His most precious blood, was found, in every feature and in every aspect, pure and perfect in the very highest sense of the word, and confessed so by heaven, earth, and hell.

{We may also observe, in the act of cutting the offering into his pieces, this important truth, that in whatever relationship of life we contemplate the Lord Jesus, we find the same unsullied perfection whether we consider Him as a public or as a private character, in one position or another, all is alike. Not so with man — here there must be failure in one way or another. If a man is a good public character, he may be the very plague of the family circle, and vice versa. And, surely, in all this we learn the glorious truth which shall shortly be owned by all created intelligences, that "He alone is worthy."}

All, therefore, having been found pure, and fit for God's altar, it becomes the happy place of Aaron's sons to send up before God the sweet savour of this most acceptable offering, as we read: "And the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire upon the altar, and lay the wood in order upon the altar, and lay the wood in order upon the fire. And the priests, Aaron's sons, shall lay the parts, the head and the fat, in order upon the wood that is on the fire which is upon the altar. But his inwards and his legs shall he wash in water: and the priest shall burn all on the altar, to be a burnt sacrifice an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the Lord" (vers. 7-9).

The fat of the offering was God's peculiar part; no one could with impunity touch that; yea, the punishment for so doing was the same as for eating blood; i.e., it was as wrong and as daringly presumptuous for a man to intrude upon God's portion of the offering as it was for him to assume life in his own right, which latter was an open denial of the state of death and ruin in which he was by reason of sin. God, then, I say, claimed the fat. He alone could feed upon the inward excellency and peerless perfections of Jesus, just as in the case of the

unmeasured ointment in Exodus 30, where we see, as well as in the above cited passage, that the infinite mind of God could alone appreciate the infinite value of Christ. But we find the head burnt in connection with the fat, showing us, I suppose, that both the hidden energies of the Lord Jesus and the seat of His understanding were equally suited to be a sweet savour unto God. Lastly, the inwards and legs were washed and burned upon the altar, showing us that the secret thoughts, purposes and counsels of the Lord Jesus, as well as the outward development of these in His walk, were perfectly pure and fit for the altar: and, in connection with this last point, one cannot help dwelling with comfort upon the marvellous contrast between the Lord Jesus and His poor people. How often may our outward walk, typified by "the legs," appear quite right in the eye of man, when, at the same time, perhaps, in the eye of God, our "inwards" may be full of gross impurity. But it is well for us that such was not the case with our great Head: in Him all was alike, for all was pure. May our hearts enter more and more fully, under the teaching of the Spirit, into the intrinsic excellency of the Lord Jesus; and may we be enabled daily, standing at the altar before God, to send up in His presence the savour of all this!

As to the meat offering, we need not enter minutely into it. It was composed, as we know, of that which sprang from the earth, and such as aptly shadowed out "the Man Christ Jesus, the frankincense thereon marking the entire devotedness of all the actings of Christ's human nature to God His Father. Nothing was done by Him to meet man's eye, or man's approbation; nothing was done to produce mere effect; no, all was directly before God.

Whether we trace the footsteps of the Lord Jesus, while, for thirty years, He was subject to His parents at home; or while, for three years, He was engaged in public ministry amongst the Jews — all was alike: all showed forth the pure frankincense that marked Him, in all things, as God's peculiar and devoted servant. We may observe further that this meat offering was baked with oil, and anointed with oil; thus showing forth, I suppose, the incarnate Son of God, who was first "conceived of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 1: 20), and then "anointed with the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 3: 16; Acts 10: 38).

We now come to speak of the sin offering, and may the Lord graciously refresh our spirits while dwelling for a little on the blessed principles unfolded therein. The sin offering is brought before us in Leviticus 4, from whence we may select one case for our present purpose. "If the priest that is anointed do sin according to the sin of the people, then let him bring for his sin which he hath sinned a young bullock without blemish unto the Lord for a sin offering. And he shall bring the bullock unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord, and shall lay his hand upon the bullock's head and kill the bullock before the Lord" (vers. 3-4).

The reader will, no doubt, observe a marked difference between the above passage and that in which the burnt offering was referred to; and the difference so far mainly consists in this, that in the last cited passage the words "voluntary will" are not found, and this was quite to be looked for. In the burnt offering we were enabled to recognise the Lord Jesus Christ offering Himself voluntarily before God, in which aspect of His blessed work He could say, "No man taketh it [My life] from Me, I lay it down of Myself." In other words, He offered

Himself "of His own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord." But in the sin offering it is quite different: "He shall be brought" and "He shall be killed", i.e., instead of coming, He shall be brought; and instead of laying down His life of Himself, His life shall be taken from Him. These, I say, are important distinctions, and such as arise from the very nature of the two offerings. In the burnt offering the Lord Jesus is seen offering Himself in all the unblemished perfectness which belonged to Him; and in this His soul had great delight, because He was presenting that before God which was so acceptable to Him. But in the sin offering the Lord Jesus is seen standing in connection with that which His pure and spotless soul must have deeply abhorred and keenly resented — abhorred and resented, indeed, in a way of which we cannot form the faintest idea. He is seen, in a word, as standing in connection with sin: yea, more, as "made sin" (2 Cor. 5: 21). Thus it was that the prophet, through the Spirit, viewed Him when he said, "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53: 5-6).

Now I believe that by looking at the two offerings in connection we get a very deep and wondrous view of sin's dark and dreadful enormity in the sight of God: for sin in this point of view appears sinful just according to the measure of Christ's perfectness in God's account. If in the burnt offering we were enabled to see that such was the beauty and excellency of Christ that His whole

man could go up before God as a sweet savour, and that God could "find nothing in Him" but perfection, as a necessary consequence then we must see in the sin offering the blackness and heinousness of sin, which could oblige God to hide His face from "His elect, in whom His soul delighted."

This brings us to the next point connected with the sin offering, viz., "He shall lay his hand upon the bullock's head" (ver. 4). Here we have at once the secret of the deep and profound mystery of the three hours' darkness.

It was before observed that God had to hide His face from the Lord Jesus on the cross, but how are we to account for such a mysterious circumstance? Simply by the a words, "he (the sinner) shall lay his hand upon the bullock's head." If, in contemplating the burnt offering, we were struck by the fact that all the perfectness of the offering was communicated to the "fierce and cruel" Levi, so here we are called upon to adore the grace that devised the wondrous plan whereby that could be effected, which was by imputing to the offering all the sin and defilement of Levi, and dealing with the sin of Levi in the person of the sin offering, in order that Levi himself might be dealt with in the person of the burnt offering.

And all this, be it observed, is conveyed to us in the action of "the laying on of hands." This action was performed in both cases; i.e., Levi laid his hands on the head of the burnt-offering, and Levi laid his hands on the head of the sin offering. As to the act, it was the same in each case; but oh, how different the results! they were, in a word, as different as life and death, Heaven and hell, sin and holiness. In fact, we cannot conceive a

wider contrast than that which is observable in the results of this action, to all appearance the same in each case. We may, perhaps, be able to form some idea of it by considering that the act of imposition of hands was at once the imputation of sin to one "who knew no sin," but was "holy, harmless, undefiled," and whose very nature abhorred all sin. And, on the other hand, it was the imputation of perfect righteousness to one who was by nature "a cruel, fierce, and self-willed murderer"* Furthermore, the act of all worlds dwelt in the bosom of the Father to travel far away into the cold and barren regions of death and darkness, where the genial and life-giving rays of His Father's countenance, which He alone could truly appreciate, had never penetrated; and standing upon the confines of which, He cried "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me!" and again, when these gloomy regions, with their ten thousand unutterable horrors, burst upon His spotless soul, "My God, My God WHY HAST THOU forsaken Me?"

{*I would observe here that in speaking of "the imputation of righteousness," I by no means desire to be understood as giving any countenance to the prevailing theory of "the imputed righteousness of Christ." Of this expression, so much in use in the theology of the present day, it would be sufficient to say that it is nowhere to be found in the oracles of God. I read of "the righteousness of God" (Rom. 3 passim), and, moreover, of the imputation of righteousness (Rom. 4: 11), but never of "the righteousness of Christ." It is true, we read of the Lord Jesus being "made of God unto us righteousness" (Jer. 23: 6), but these, passages do not support the above theory. I would further add that the moral effect of this idea will be found to be decidedly

pernicious because it of necessity supposes the believer as standing apart from the Lord Jesus, whereas the doctrine of Scripture is that the believer is "made the righteousness of God IN HIM " (2 Cor. 5: 21). And again, "we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 5: 20).}

And, on the other hand, it enabled the one who dwelt in "the habitations of cruelty," into whose "assembly" God could not come, to stand in the very blaze of the light of God's throne These considerations, I say, may perhaps assist our conceptions in some measure upon this astounding truth. Now, he apostle states the same truth in the didactic language of the New Testament when he says, "He [God] hath made Him to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5: 21). That is, He hath made the One whose perfectness is seen in the burnt offering to be judged as sin, and treated as such in the sin offering in order that we, who deserved the treatment of the sin offering, might be created as accepted in the burnt offering.

I would also observe here that there is much force and value in the word "made" it shows out most fully that righteousness was just as foreign to the nature of man as sin was to the nature of Christ. Man had no righteousness of his own, or in other words, he knew no righteousness, and therefore he had to be "made" righteousness. Christ "knew no sin," and therefore had to be "made sin" in order that we might be made righteousness, even "the righteousness of God in Him." But further, we learn from the passage to which we are referring that the Lord Jesus having been "made sin for us," is not more real, not more true, not more palpable, than that the believer is "made righteousness in Him."

If there be any truth or reality in the record concerning the cross and passion of the Lord Jesus, then, it is plain that the moment a soul acts in faith upon Christ in His death and resurrection, that moment he is accepted in all the acceptableness of Christ. His consciousness of this is, of course, quite another question: a truth and the realisation of a truth are quite distinct.

The measure of our realisation will be in proportion to the measure of our communion with God. If we are satisfied to move at a cold and heartless distance from God, our consciousness of the power and value of any truth will, as a consequence, be meagre and shallow: while, therefore, it is not to be forgotten that the root and source of all life and communion is the truth stated in the passage to which we are alluding, it is manifest that the more we walk in communion with Him who gives us the life, the more shall we enjoy both Himself and the life which He gives. Dear Christian reader, let us pray that the cross and passion of the Lord Jesus may sink so deeply into our hearts that we may have on the one hand such a view of the loathsomeness of sin as shall lead us to abhor it with a holy abhorrence "all the days of our life," and on the other hand such a view of the amazing love of God as shall constrain us "to live not unto ourselves but unto Him who died for us and rose again."

Thus, then, we see that the laying on of hands shows forth nothing less than a change of places on the part of the sinner and the Saviour. The sinner was out of the favour of God: "O my soul, come not thou into their habitation." The Saviour was in the favour of God, "daily His delight," dwelling in His bosom from before all worlds. But the amazing plan of redemption shows us

the Saviour out of the favour of God, and God forsaking Him, while at the same time a condemned malefactor is brought at once into the very presence of a loving and pardoning God. Amazing, deep, inconceivable, eternal love! unfathomable wisdom! love which soars far aloft above the most gigantic conception! wisdom which has written everlasting contempt upon all the power and base designs of the great enemy of God and man! For, ere Levi could be introduced into the enjoyment of the "covenant of life and peace" (Mal. 2: 5), a spotless Victim must stand the shock of the king of terrors and all his thunders. But who is this Victim? We ask not, "Who is this King of glory?" but Who is this Victim? The answer to this question it is which gives to the plan of redemption its grandest and most divine characteristic. The Victim was none less than the Son of God Himself! Yes! here was love, here was wisdom. The Son of God had to stoop because man had exalted himself. And surely we may say, If God had not entered upon the work, all, all were lost, and that forever. No mere mortal could have entered into that dark scene where sin was being atoned for; no one but the Son of God could have sustained the weight which, in the garden and on the cross, rested on the shoulders of the "One that was mighty." And here we might refer to the Lord's language to His disciples when He was about to enter into conflict with the adversary: "Hereafter I will not talk much with you; for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me" (John 14: 30). Why could He not "talk much with them"? Because He was just going to enter upon the work of atonement, in which they could do nothing, because the prince of this world, had he come, would have had plenty in them, but then, the moment He, as it were, in spirit passes through that sorrowful

hour, He says, "Arise, let us go hence"; i.e., although we could not move a single step in the achievement of the victory, yet we could enjoy the fruits of it; and not only so, but display the fruits of it in a life of service and fruit-bearing to God, which forms the subject of teaching in the next chapter.

Here, then, is what gives peace to the awakened conscience of the sinner. God Himself has done the work. God has triumphed over all man's wickedness and rebellion, and now every soul who feels his need of pardon and peace can draw near in faith and holy confidence and reap the fruits of this wondrous triumph of grace and mercy.

And now, dear reader, if you have not as yet made these wondrous fruits your own; if you have not as yet cast the whole burden of your sins on God's eternal love as seen in the cross, I ask you, Why do you stand aloof? Why do you doubt? Perhaps you feel the hardness of your heart, perhaps you are ready to say that you feel yourself even now unmoved by the contemplation of all the deep sorrow endured by the Son of God. Well, what of that? If it be a question of your guilt, you may go much farther than even this, for in that hour of which we have been speaking you stood unmoved, looked on with cold and heartless indifference, while all creation owned the wondrous fact. Yea, more, you yourself crucified the incarnate God, you spat in His face, and plunged your spear into His side. Do you shrink back and say, "Oh, not so bad!" I say it was the act of the human heart; and if you have a human heart, it was your act. But the Scriptures at once decide this point, for it is written, "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). This passage, I say, proves that all the world were representatively around the cross. But why insist on this? Simply to show forth the riches of the grace of God, which can only be seen in all its effulgent lustre in the cross; and therein it is seen mounting far above all man's sin and malignant rebellion; for when man, in the fiendish pride of his heart, could plunge his; spear into the side of incarnate Deity, God's cry was — BLOOD! and through that blood "remission of sins, beginning at Jerusalem." A Thus, where sin abounded, grace did much more abound," and "grace REIGNS through righteousness by Jesus Christ our Lord."

Enough, I trust, has been said to show the grounds upon which the Levites stood before God. These grounds were free and eternal grace — grace exercised toward them through the blood, which is the only channel through which grace can flow. Man has been found to be utterly ruined before God, and therefore it rust be a question either of salvation through free grace, or eternal damnation; for by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh living be justified." But then, while man is by nature utterly unfit to render anything like an acceptable righteousness or service to God, yet, when God gives us new life through grace, He, of course, looks for the development of that life. In other words, grace brings the soul into circumstances of responsibility and service, and it is as we meet those circumstances that Gad is glorified in us and our souls grow in the knowledge of God. Thus it was in the case of the leper: up to a certain point in his history had nothing to do, the priest was the sole actor But when the priest had done his part; when, by virtue of the blood which

had been shed, he had pronounced him "clean," the leper had then to begin to "wash himself" (Lev. 14: 8). Now we shall find that the history of Levi develops all these principles most fully.

We have hitherto been engaged with Levi's condition and character by nature and also the wondrous remedy devised by grace to meet him in his lost estate, and not only to save him from that estate but also to raise him up to an elevation which could never have entered into the heart of man, even into the very tabernacle of God. We shall now, with God's blessing and grace, proceed to examine that high elevation to which we have referred, and also the service which it involved, as put before us in Numbers 3:

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him. And they shall keep his charge, and the charge of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of the congregation, to do the service of the tabernacle. And they shall keep all the instruments of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the charge of the children of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle. And thou shalt give the Levites unto Aaron, and to his sons: they are wholly given unto him out of the children of Israel" (verse 5-9).

Here, then, God's marvellous purposes of grace toward Levi fully open before us, and truly marvellous they are indeed. We see that the sacrifices were but a means to an end; but both the means and the end were in every way worthy of each other. The means were, in one word, "death and resurrection," and all included therein. The end was, nearness to God, and all included therein.

Looking at Levi by nature, there could not be any point farther removed from God than that at which he stood; but grace in exercise, through the blood, could lift him up out of that ruin in which he stood, and "bring him nigh," yea, bring him into association with the great head of the priestly family, there to serve in the tabernacle. Thus, we read, "You hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.... But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved), and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2: 1-6). And again, "But now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometime were afar off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (ver. 13).

When nature is left free to work, it will ever go as far away from God as it can. This is true since the day when man said "I heard Thy voice, and I was afraid and I hid myself" (Gen. 3: 10). But when grace is left free and sovereign to work, it will ever bring the soul "nigh." Thus it was with Levi. He was by nature "black as the tents of Kedar"; by grace, "comely as the curtains of Solomon": by nature he was "joined" in a covenant of murder; by grace "joined" in a covenant of "life and peace." The former, because he was "fierce and cruel'; the latter, because he feared and was afraid of the Lord's name. (Cp. Gen. 49: 6-7; Mal. 2: 5). Furthermore, Levi was by nature conversant with the "instruments of cruelty"; by grace, with "the instruments of God's

tabernacle: by nature God could not come into Levi's assembly; by grace, Levi is brought into God's assembly: by nature "his feet were swift to shed blood ". by grace, swift to follow the movements of the cloud through the desert, in real, patient service to God. In a word, Levi had become a "new creature," and "old things had passed away," and therefore he was no longer to "live unto himself," but unto Him who had done such marvellous things for him in grace.

I would further observe, on the last cited passage, that the Levies are, in the first place, declared to be God's property, and then they are " WHOLLY GIVEN UNTO AARON. "Thus we read: "Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me, and they have kept Thy word" (John 17: 6). And again, "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me" (John 6: 37).

I would now look a little into the detail of their service, in which, I doubt not, we shall find much to edify and refresh us.

We find that although the whole tribe of Levi were, as to standing, "joined with Aaron," yet, as to service, they were divided into classes. "All had not the same office;" and this is what we might have expected, for, although in the matter of life and standing they were all on a level, yet, in the development of that life, and in the manifestation of the power of that standing, they would, no doubt, display different measures; and not only so, but there would also be seen an assignment to each of distinct position and line of service, which would serve to distinguish him from his brethren in a very marked and decided manner. And here I would observe that I know of nothing connected with the walk and service of

the Christian which demands more attention than this point to which I am now alluding, viz., unity in the matter of life and standing, and at the same time the greatest variety in the manifestation of character and in the line of service. A due attention to this important point would save us from much of that "unwise" comparing of ourselves and our service with the persons and services of others, which is most unholy, and, as a consequence, most unhealthy.* And not only would it lead thus to beneficial results in a negative point of view, it would also have a most happy effect in producing and cultivating originality and uniqueness of Christian character. But while there was this diversity in the line of service amongst the Levites, it is also to be remembered that there was manifested unity. The Levites were one people, and seen as such; they were "joined" with Aaron in the work of the tabernacle; moreover, THEY HAD ONE STANDARD, round which they all rallied, and that was "the tabernacle of the congregation," the well known type of Christ in His character and offices. And, indeed, this was one of the ends which God had in view in calling out the Levites by His grace from amongst the people of Israel; it was that they should stand in marked association with Aaron and his sons, and in that association bear the tabernacle and all pertaining thereto on their shoulders, through the barren wilderness around.**

{*It is worthy the serious attention of the Christian reader who may desire the unity of the Church, that the tribe of Levi in the desert was a truly striking example of what may be termed "unity in diversity." Gershon was in one sense totally different from Merari, and Merari was totally different from Kohath; and yet Gershon, Merari

and Kohath were one: they should not, therefore, contend about their service, because they were one; nor yet would it have been right to confound their services, because they were totally different. Thus, attention to unity would have saved them from contention, and attention to diversity would have saved them from confusion. In a word, all things could only be "done decently and in order" by a due attention to the fact of there being "unity in diversity."}

{**I say "one of the ends," for we should ever remember that the grand object before the divine mind in redemption is to show in the ages to come His kindness towards us through Christ Jesus; and this object will be secured even though our poor puny services had never been heard of.}

God did not call out the Levites merely that they might escape the sad effects of God's absence from their assembly; or, in other words, God had more than their blessing and security in view in His dealings with them. He designed that they should serve in the tabernacle, and thus be to His praise and glory. We shall, however, I trust, see this principle upon which I am dwelling in a clearer and stronger point of view as we proceed in our subject.

We find that Levi had three sons, viz., "Gershon, and Kohath, and Merari" (Num. 3: 17). These formed the heads of the three classes alluded to, and we shall find that the nature of the service of each was such as of necessity to impart that tone of character signified by their very name. Thus: "Of Gershon was the family of the Libnites and the family of the Shimites: these are the families of the Gershonites. And the chief of the house of

the father of the Gershonites shall be Eliasaph, the son of Lael. And the charge of the sons of Gershon in the tabernacle of the congregation shall be the tabernacle and the tent, the covering thereof, and the hanging for the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the hangings of the court, and the curtain for the door of the court, which is by the tabernacle, and by the altar round about, and the cords of it for all the service thereof" (ver. 21-26).

Here was Gershon's work, to carry through the waste and howling wilderness the tabernacle and its coverings. This was indeed true Levite service, but it was most blessed service, and its antitype in the Church now is what we should much seek after, because it is that which alone puts the Christian into his right place in the world, i.e., the place of a stranger. There could be but little attractiveness in the rams' skins and badgers' skins; but, little as there was, it was, nevertheless, the high privilege of the Gershonite to take them all up and bear them cheerfully on his shoulders across the trackless sands. What, then, are we to understand by the covering of the tabernacle? I believe, in a word, it shadowed out the character of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was that which would meet the eye. There might be, and were, other services among the Levites of a very blessed nature, but surely it was most elevated service to carry through the desert that which so strikingly prefigured the character of Christ.

This is what makes the saint "a stranger" (as the name Gershon imports) in the world. If we are walking in the manifestation of the character of the Lord Jesus, and in so doing realise our place as in the wilderness, we may rest assured it will Impart a very decided tone of

strangership to our character in the world. And oh, would that we knew much more of this. The Church has laid down the rams' skins and badgers' skins, and with them the Gershonite character: in other words, the Church has ceased to walk in the footsteps of her rejected Lord and Master, and the consequence has been that instead of being the wearied and worn stranger, as she should be, treading the parched and sterile desert, with the burden on the shoulders, she has settled herself down in the green places of the world and made herself at home. But there was another feature of the stranger character shadowed out in the curtain, viz., anticipation. This was most blessed God dwelling in curtains showed plainly that neither God nor the ark of His strength had found a resting-place, but were journeying on towards "a rest that remained."

And how could there be a rest in the desert? There were no rivers and brooks there — no old corn there — no milk and honey there. True, the smitten rock sent forth its refreshing streams to meet their need, and Heaven sent down their daily bread; but all this was not Canaan. They were still in the desert, eating wilderness food and drinking wilderness water, and it was Gershon's holy privilege to carry upon his shoulders that which in the fullest manner expressed all this, viz., THE CURTAIN. "Thus saith the Lord, Shalt thou build Me an house for Me to dwell in? Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle" (2 Sam. 7: 5-6). Here, too, we have sadly failed. The Church grew weary of the curtain, and wished to build a house before the time; she grew weary

of "walking in a tent," and earnestly desired to "dwell in a house."

And truly we have all to watch and pray against this disposition to grow weary of our Gershonite character. There Is nothing so trying to nature as continual labour in a state of expectancy; our hearts love rest and fruition, and therefore nothing but the continual remembrance that "our sufficiency is of God" can at all sustain us in our Gershon or stranger condition.

Let us therefore remember that we bear on our shoulder the curtains, and have beneath our feet the sand of the desert, above our heads the pillar of cloud, and before us "the land of rest" clothed in never-withering green, and, both as a stimulus and a warning, let us remember that "He that endureth to the end THE SAME shall be saved."

{It would surely be of all importance in this day, when so many are declining from the narrow path of obedience to the written Word, and entering upon the wide and bewildering field of human tradition, to bear in mind that the Levite, when carrying the tabernacle through the desert, found no support nor guide from beneath: no, the grace in which he stood was his sole support, and the pillar above his sole guide. It would have been miserable indeed had he been left to find a guide in the footmarks on the sand, which would change at every wind that blew But all the sand did for him was to add to his labour and toil while he endeavoured to follow the heavenly guide above his head.}

We shall next consider the Merarite feature of character; for, although the family of Merari does not stand next in order in the chapter, yet there is a

kindredness of spirit, as it were arising out of the very nature of their service, that would link them together in the mind. But, not only is there this intimate connection between the services of these two classes of Levites, which would lead us to link them together thus, the Lord Himself presents them to us in marked unity of service, for we read, "And the Kohathites set forward bearing the sanctuary; and the other (i.e., the Gershonites and the Merarites) did set up the tabernacle against they came" (Num. 10: 21). Here, then, we see that it was the great business of these two families to pass onward through the desert in holy companionship, bearing with them, wherever they went, "the tabernacle," and, moreover, the tabernacle as looked at in its character of outward manifestation or testimony; which would, as a matter of course, put those who carried it thus into a place of very laborious discipleship. "And under the custody and charge of the sons of Merari shall be the boards of the tabernacle, and the bars thereof, and the pillars thereof, and the sockets thereof, and all the vessels thereof, and all that serveth thereto, and the pillars of the court round about, and their sockets, and their pins, and their cords" (Num. 3: 36-37). Here, then, was what Merari had to do: he had to take his place here or there, according to the movement of the cloud, and set up the boards of the tabernacle in their sockets of silver — and all this, be it remembered, upon the sand of the desert.

{It has been well observed that in the tabernacle God was seen bringing all His glory into immediate connection with the sand of the desert: and when the high priest went into the holy place, he found himself in the very presence of that glory, with his feet upon the

sand of the desert likewise. In the temple, however, this was not the case, for the floor of the house was overlaid with gold (1 Kings 6: 30).

So is it with the Christian now he has not as yet his feet upon the "pure gold" of the heavenly city, but his deepest and most abiding knowledge of God is that which he obtains in connection with his sorrow, toil and conflict in the wilderness.}

Could anything be more opposed to another than the nature of all that Merari had to set up was to the waste and howling wilderness around? What could be more unlike than silver and barren sand? But Merari might not shrink from all this; no, his language was, when he had arrived at a spot in the desert at which the cloud halted, "I am come to set up the patterns of things in heaven in the very midst of all the desolation and misery of the wilderness around." All this was most laborious, and would, no doubt, impart to the character of Merari a tone of sadness or sorrow which was at once expressed in his name, which means "sorrow."

And surely the antitype of all this in the Church now will fully confirm what has been stated about the character of Merari. Let any one take his stand firmly and decidedly in the world for Christ — let him penetrate into those places where "the world' is really seen in its vigour — let him oppose himself, firm as a rock, to the deep and rapid tide of worldliness, and there let him begin to set up "the sockets of silver," and, rest assured of it, he will find such a course attended with very much sorrow and bitterness of soul; in a word, he will realise it to be a path in which the cross is to be taken up "daily," and not only taken up, but borne. Now, if any further

proof were needed of the above interpretation, we have a most striking one in the fact that there are but very few of the laborious Merarite character to be found; and why is this? Simply because the exhibition of such a character will ever be attended with very much labour and sorrow to nature, and nature loves ease, and therefore human nature never could be a Merarite; nothing will make us true Merarites but deep communion with Him who was "THE MAN OF SORROWS."

There is something in the service of Gershon from which one does not shrink so much as from that of Merari. For what had Gershon to do? He had to place the curtains and badgers' skins over the boards which had been already set up by his laborious and sorrowful brother. And just so now: if a laborious servant of God has gone to a place where hitherto the world and Satan have reigned supreme, and there raised a testimony for Christ, it will be comparatively easy for another to go and walk on in the simple manifestation of Christian character, which would of itself put him into the place of "a stranger."

But, although nature may assume the character of a misanthropist, yet nothing but grace can make us Merarites, and the true Merarite is the true philanthropist, because he introduces that which alone can bless; and the very fact that a Merarite should have to take a place of sorrow is a most convincing proof that the world is an evil place. There was no need of a Merarite in Canaan, nor a Gershonite either: for the Merarite was happy there, and the Gershonite at home. But the world is not the Levite's home, and therefore if any will carry the curtains, he must be a stranger; and if

any will carry the sockets and boards, he must be a man of sorrow; for when He who was a true Gershonite and a true Merarite came into the world He was emphatically the Man of sorrows, who had not where to lay His head.

However, if the Gershonite and the Merarite had to occupy a place in which they endured not a little of "the burden and heat of the day," yet the Lord graciously met them in that with a very rich reward, for "He is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love," and therefore, if they had to labour and toil amongst their brethren, they were blessedly ministered to by their brethren. Thus we read concerning the offerings of the princes: "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Take it of them, that they may be to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation; and thou shalt give them unto the Levites, to every man according to his service. And Moses took the wagons and the oxen and gave them unto the Levites. Two wagons and four oxen he gave unto the sons of Gershon, according to their service. And four wagons and eight oxen he gave unto the sons of Merari according unto their service, under the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest. But unto the sons of Kohath he gave none, because the service of the sanctuary belonging unto them was that they should bear upon their shoulders" (Num. 7: 4-9).

Here we see that the service of Gershon and Merari was that which met the rich and blessed ministrations of their brethren. Grace had filled the hearts and affections of the princes, and not only filled but overflowed them, and in its overflow it was designed to refresh the spirits of the homeless Gershonite and sorrowful Merarite: on the other hand, the Kohathites had no part in these ministrations; and why? Because their service, as we

shall see presently, was in itself a rich reward indeed. We see the very same doctrine taught in the case of the Levites generally, as contrasted with the priests, in chap. 18, where we read: "And the Lord spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel" (ver. 20).

On the other hand, He says of the Levites, "Behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation."

And again, "Ye shall eat it in every place, ye and your households, for it is your reward for your service in the tabernacle of the congregation" (ver. 21, 31).

Aaron occupied a position so truly elevated that any inheritance in the way of earthly things would have been to him most degrading; whereas the Levites (looked at in one aspect) had not this high standing, but had much hard labour; and consequently, while Aaron's very place and service was "his reward," the Levites had to get a tenth for "their reward."

We come now to consider the third and last division of the Levites, viz., the Kohathites, of whom we read, "The families of the sons of Kohath shall pitch on the side of the tabernacle southward. And the chief of the house of the father of the families of the Kohathites shall be Elizaphan the son of Uzziel. And their charge shall be the ark, and the table, and the candlestick, and the altars, and the vessels of the sanctuary wherewith they minister, and the hanging, and all the service thereof" (Num. 3: 29-31). We can now have no difficulty in understanding why it was that Kohath had no share in

the ministrations of the princes. Gershon and Merari might need wagons and oxen to carry the boards, etc., but not Kohath; his charge was too precious to be committed to any or aught but himself, and therefore it was his high and honoured place to carry all upon his shoulders. What a privilege, for example, to be allowed to carry the ark, the table, or the golden candlestick! And would it not have argued an entire absence of ability to appreciate his elevated calling if he had sought for the assistance of oxen in his holy service? What, then, we ask, would have been the effect produced upon the character of Kohath by this his service? Would it not have imparted a very elevated tone thereto? Surely it would. What can be more elevated, at least as far as development of character in the world is concerned, than the display of that congregational spirit which is expressed in the name of Kohath? Should not Christians be found rebuking, by a real union in everything, man's oft-repeated attempt at forming associations for various purposes? And how can they effect that if it be not by gathering more closely around their common centre, Christ, in all the blessed fullness and variety of that Name? a foulness and variety typified by the varied furniture of the tabernacle, some of the most precious parts of which were designed to be borne on the shoulders of this favoured division of the tribe of Levi.

And surely we may safely assert that what would lead the saints now into more of the congregational spirit is just communion with Him whom the ark and table shadowed forth. If we were more conversant with Christ as the ark, covering in this scene of death, and, moreover, with the table of showbread, whereon stood the food of the priests — if, I say, we knew more of

Christ in these blessed aspects of His character — we should not be as we are, a proverb and a byword by reason of our gross disunion. But, alas, as the Church grew weary of the curtains and the boards, and laid aside her Gershonite and Merarite character, so has she laid aside her Kohathite character, because she has ceased to carry the ark and the table upon her shoulder, and cast those precious pearls which were, through the grace of God, her peculiar property, to the swine, and thus has she lost her elevated character and position in the world.

Thus, let us review those three grand features of character shown forth in the tribe of Levi.

Strangership. "Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not." "Here we have no abiding city." "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul."

Sorrow in the world. "In the world ye shall have tribulation." "If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." "After that ye have suffered awhile, make you perfect" — "ye have need of patience" — "ye yourselves know that ye are appointed thereunto." "If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him." "These are they that came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Union. "That they all may be one." "He should gather together in one the children of God that are scattered abroad." "That He might reconcile both unto God in one

body by the cross." And here, again, I would request of my reader to bear in mind that, while there was this beautiful diversity in the character and line of service of the Levites, yet they were one people, and that manifestly — they were one in life, one in standing, one in calling, one in inheritance; and so should it be with Christians now. We are not to expect uniformity of opinion on every point, nor yet are we to look for a perfect correspondence in the line of service and development of life; but then the saints should be seen as one people — one in worship,* one in labour, one in object, one in sympathy; in a word, one in everything that belongs to them in common as the people of God.

{*I say, one in worship and I would press this point, because at the present day it seems to be a thought in the minds of many that there may be unity in service and at the same time the greatest diversity in worship I would appeal to the spiritual mind of the Christian reader, and I would ask him, Can this really be? What should we say to a family who would unite, or appear to do so, for the purpose of carrying on their father's work, but who could not, by reason Of division, meet around their fathers table? Could such unity satisfy a father who loved his children}

How sadly out of order it would have been for a Levite to call upon one of the uncircumcised of the nations around to assist him in carrying any part of the tabernacle! and yet we hear Christians now justifying and insisting upon the propriety of conduct not less disorderly, viz., calling upon the openly unconverted and profane to put their hands to the Lord's work. Thus we see that the Levites have become scattered, and have forsaken their posts. The Gershonite has refused to carry the curtains

because he has become weary of the stranger condition; the Merarite has laid down the boards and sockets because he grew weary of bearing the cross, and the Kohathite has degraded his high and holy office by making it the common property of those who have not authority from God to put their hands thereunto. Thus the name of God is blasphemed among the heathen by us, and we do not "sigh and cry for the abominations" thus practised, but lift up our heads in proud indifference as if it all were right and as if the camp of God were moving onward in all heavenly order, under the guidance of the cloud, communicated by the silver trumpets. "My brethren, these things ought not so to be." May we walk more humbly before our God, and, while we mourn over the sad fact that "Overturn, overturn, overturn" has been written by the finger of God upon all human arrangements, let us remember that it is only "until He come whose right it is," and then all shall be set right forever, for God, in all things, shall be fully glorified through Jesus Christ.

Thus dear reader, have we followed Levi in his course; and oh, what a marvellous course has it been! a course, every step of which displays the visible marks of sovereign grace abounding over man's sin — grace, which led God to stoop from His throne in the heavens to visit "the habitations of cruelty," in order to lift a poor perishing sinner from thence, and bring him, through the purging power of the blood, into a place of marvellous blessing indeed, even into the very tabernacle of God, there to be employed about the instruments of God's house. We have found Levi to have been indeed the one who "was dead and is alive again, who was lost and is found."

May we, then, adore the grace that could do such mighty acts! and if we have felt in our hearts the operations of the same grace in delivering us from the death and darkness of Egypt, may we remember that its effects should be to constrain us to live, not unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us and rose again. We are now in the wilderness, where we are called to carry the tabernacle. May we cheerfully move onward, "declaring plainly that we seek a country," and anxiously look out the "the rest that remains."