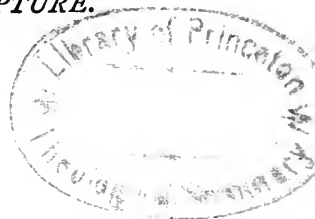


THE PEOPLE'S BIBLE:

DISCOURSES UPON HOLY SCRIPTURE.



BY

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"WEAVER STEPHEN," ETC.

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THE FIRST BOOK OF KINGS

(Continued).

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, it is our joy to know that though our sin be great thy grace is infinitely greater. Where sin abounds, grace doth much more abound, as where death abounds, life doth much more abound. This is thy method in thy universe, that life shall always be in excess of death, and that out of death itself shall come elements that shall tend to extend life. Thou movest marvellously: our eyes cannot follow the rapidity of thy movements, nor can our understanding bring within its judgment all thy methods and purposes. But we have seen enough to give us quietness and to deepen our childlike and loving trust. When the mystery is thickest and the cloud is densest, then we say, This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working; in his own due time he will turn these clouds into stars, and all his heaven will be bright with the shining of a great glory. Thou hast done so much in our life that we are able to say this with all the emphasis of unquestioning confidence.

Thou hast trained us when there was no hand to take hold of our little life; thou didst understand us when our prayer was but a dumb sign to our eager mother. Thou hast fed us with food convenient for us: when we have said there was no water, thou has caused the rocks to melt into streams. We have said, We shall die here, for there is no road beyond, and behold thou didst make a way for us in the mountains, and we walked by the feet of the great rocks which we expected to shut up our way. Thou hast dealt wonderfully with us; all thy mysteries are in our own life; we need not be startled or stunned by the mysteries in thy great book, for every one of them is repeated in the living book of our own experience. We have now learned wisdom enough to put ourselves absolutely into thy hands; we do not want any plan or purpose for to-morrow—we do not want to have any to-morrow in our possession or prospect at all. We would crowd our urgent life into the present trembling moment and make it the greatest crisis of our experience. Help us to work with both hands diligently; may we be good and faithful servants, using our talents, few or many, with all industry and with ever-growing zeal.

Thou knowest us altogether as a company of Christian worshippers. The old man is here, to whom life was once a dream; now it is a hope, for its life is not here, it is risen. The child is here who has no history, whose

life spreads out like a golden dream, a prospect of glee and laughter exceedingly; the patient heart-broken woman, the sorrowing mother, with a grief she cannot tell; the prodigal who has edged his way in here, hoping not to be seen by reason of the crowd—we are all here; speak to us, thou tender One, and let thy speaking, every tone of it, be a gentle gospel that shall bring light into dark hearts, that shall dry tears from eyes used to great weeping, that shall stimulate every one of us to a higher industry and rebuke us gently for the despondency which comes of our want of faith. If any soul is here in peculiar trouble with a distress it may not put into words, let the Lord himself heal the great wound, lest it end in death.

As for our sin, there stands in front of us the infinite cross, the great sacrifice, the complete atonement, the great transaction never to be explained but always to be felt. The Lord touch every heart with the redeeming blood, and the sin shall be found no more. Pity us, great Father; if we are very tired, take us into thine arms awhile till we get our breath again, and according to the necessity and the pain of every life, command thy gracious blessing to rest upon us all. Amen.

1 Kings xv. 22.

“They took away the stones of Ramah, and the timber thereof, wherewith Baasha had builded; and king Asa built with them Geba of Benjamin, and Mizpah.”

OLD MATERIAL FOR NEW BUILDINGS.

IN order to understand the text we shall have to remind ourselves of two or three historical circumstances. Baasha was king of Israel, Asa was the king of Judah. There was war between Baasha and Asa all their days. The king of Israel went up against Judah and built the strong fortress of Ramah, but the king of Judah strengthened himself by calling in, on the basis of an ancient treaty, the assistance of Benhadad, the king of Syria. Benhadad and Asa went up against the king of Israel and overthrew him and took his fortress called Ramah, and with the stones of that fortress two cities of Judah were built.

Surely there is a great lesson here by which all sensible men may profit! Asa did not beat the stones into powder and throw the powder away; nor did he burn the timber to ashes and scatter the hot dust upon the flying wind so that it never could be found again. He pursued a better plan—turned the old material to new uses, and said in effect, “A stone is a stone, a beam is a beam: there is no harm in the material

itself: it has been used against me, now it shall be used for me," and thus in the eloquent language of Bossuet, "with the fortresses of Samaria he built the cities of Judah." Thus the subject begins to reveal itself, and we see how, amid these ancient names, often unknown and sometimes uncouth, the very freshest lessons may be gathered. It needs no Old Mortality to carve these letters afresh, or dig the moss out of them. They are always beautiful with suggestion to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. May God give us both!

Is it not much the same as if a man should use the materials of his old self with which to build the structure of a new and nobler manhood? Suppose a man to have come over to what is expressively termed the Lord's side: we will ask, What have you done with the old material—is it to be left—is it to be utilised? Have you been so foolish as to leave all the old stuff in the enemy's hands? The stuff itself is not bad: it was only put to bad uses. We want you to bring away every stone and every beam, and with the old material to build a new palace. Once you built Ramah for the devil—now that Christ has taken you captive we want you to make an inquiry about the old stuff, that nothing be lost. Let us draw your portrait as you were in the old days. You were known for your energy: everybody used to be struck with your indomitableness: you were never tired; in the morning, in the evening, always the same. Yours was the planning head, yours was the inventive mind. "Shorten the programme!" said you; "I shall make a programme for you." Quick came the flashes of suggestion which instantly commended themselves to the judgment of those round about you. They used to call you the life and soul of the party. When you were not there, the jokes were few and flat, stale and unprofitable. The moment you came in, the sun seemed to rise, all the windows were ablaze with a new light, and the air trembled under the vibrations of a new and melodious voice. You were a grand devil's man—popular, clever, ingenious, bright, welcome everywhere. When you entered a company, the company always said, "Now we shall have an enlargement of the plan." Very good. You have come over to the Lord's side, what are you now? How much of the old material have you saved and

appropriated to better purposes? In some cases, we fear, the disguise is so complete that your own mother would not know you now. You have succeeded in burying every talent, powdering every stone, burning every beam—the old material is not found among the resources of your better life. Ramah has not become Mizpah. You were once musical: your song was always ready: the company turned to you and said, "Sing us a song," and without affectation you instantly went to your music and sang, to the delight and joy of everybody round about you. And now you scarcely mumble a hymn in church, much less sing. Ramah has not become Geba of Benjamin or Mizpah. You have left the music with the enemy instead of bringing it with you and sanctifying it, by a new baptism, to higher and diviner uses.

You were always the last to leave the public-house; the last to get up from the gaming-table—you tired out everybody. Where is your energy now? You cannot bear the night air, you are afraid of draughts in the church. You, the grand old devil's Ramah, that could bear the storms of a thousand years, battering with their utmost fury upon the bastions—you always report yourself now as "Not very well, thank you."

Ah, what a fall was there! We know the reason of it all. You did not go to Christ until you were so emaciated that there was nothing left of you. Probably you never would have come if your blood had not cooled, if your passion had not expired. You came blighted, withered, blasted, without one drop of living juice in your frame. No other man would have taken you in but the Son of God. Others would have despised such offerings, but he, Man of thorns, Man of wounds, the bleeding Man of the bursting, saving heart, he said, "The bruised reed will I not break: the smoking flax will I not quench." We see the repeated miracle of his redemption in you, a repetition of the infinite miracle of his infinite love. The reed was bruised in the devil's service. In ancient times they used to play music on the reed, and you played music till you bruised and broke the reed, and he who is the Master said, "I think I can put this together again for you. Wait." The smoking flax might be quenched, but he said, "No, I will wave it a little in the air."

That was the action of reviving the smouldering flax—waving it, shaking it, till the dying spark became a living flame. Perhaps, therefore, you are only under repair—you are only being shaken a little, and by-and-by—from the stones of the old Ramah shall be built the beautiful church of Geba and the palace of Mizpah.

What is true of the building up of the individual, is true also of the building up of the Church. It is recorded of one of the Wesleys that when he heard anybody singing a nice tune on the streets, he used to loiter about until he got the melody thoroughly into his head, and then he went away and set divine words to the prostituted music. He said, "The devil has all the best tunes." Persons looking at Wesley standing listening to the street singer, would say, "What, is he caught by the song?" and they might have attributed wrong motives to his standing there, but he was pulling down Ramah that he might build Geba of Benjamin and Mizpah. The tune that was used to carry evil sentiments or bad language was brought over to tell the world the great gospel. The tune that was used for evil purposes was sanctified to the utterance of such sentiments as—

Depth of mercy! can there be
 Mercy still reserved for me?
 Can my God his wrath forbear?
 Me, the chief of sinners spare?

That is what we call taking the forces of the enemy and building with the material the churches of the living God. If we were wise master-builders, we should make a point of finding a place for every stone we capture from the enemy. It is a mistake to let any stone be unused. The enemy will come at night and take it away and put it back in its old place.

We know there are some stones very rough and unshapely, but they ought to task our ingenuity and not excite our disgust. Where to find a place for this rude man: do not encounter him with dislike; accept him as a problem to be answered by the inventiveness which was so marvellously fertile in the days of your own hostility to Christ. The sooner you get the stones put into their places the better. Do not look much at a stone: **do not walk round about it frequently for the purpose of ob-**

servicing and surveying it, but as soon as possible put it to its best uses. In the olden times there used to be conversions. Men were turned to the Lord then with full purpose of heart. They declared themselves on the Lord's side. There are no conversions now. In the old, old time the minister used to preach for three hours, and then say he would have added more if time had permitted. Then they had conversions. Now we preach twenty minutes, and are applauded because we are so brief. Where is the result? Where are the turnings to God with full purpose of heart? Where is the crying out, sharp and piercing, like sudden agony, "Men, brethren, what shall we do?"

But let us try to tax our imagination sufficiently to suppose that there are conversions now. We are taking fortresses from the enemy now—what are we to do with the old material? Hitherto we have taken it and we have stowed it away in softly cushioned pews, and we have taken care to sit so near the ends of those pews as to prevent any more stones being carted into the same quarters. We have discouraged excitement and the age is cursed with indifference: we are all indifferent. This disease of indifference has settled upon our modern life, and now, 'tis only noble to be quiet: 'tis only grand to mumble so that no soul can hear us. We have entreated the old excitement to be quiet: we have implored it to burn its wit, to strangle its humour, to silence its music, and to nod assentingly to the pulpit twice every Sunday, and to be done with it. With the stones of Ramah we have built neither Geba nor Mizpah. I speak this to our common shame. If any man can answer me that the impeachment does not implicate him, I am only glad to be so far disabused and corrected as to my impressions.

Here is a man whom we have taken from the enemy who has a gift of music: what is he going to do with it in the Church? Let us employ him at once as a singing missionary; send him out to sing. He will find the voice, we find the words. Is it possible to sing the gospel? Verily so. In a recent walk I saw some little fellows about two feet and a half high—little bunches of papers on their arms, sitting on the steps and looking at one another so coyly and nicely, with unkempt hair, and their bare feet and their tattered garments—and there was

I, poor dumb priest, on my way to talk to the luxury of the age, and I felt the tears in my throat as I cursed myself. I would that some lady could have gone to those little fellows and have sung them some little hymn or sweet song. It would have been odd: it might have been useful. It would have created a laugh for the time being: it might have won a conquest. It would have been called ridiculous; in heaven it might have been termed sacrificial. What are you doing with the old material? I ask you for it, I claim it: I know the fire is upon it, and there are marks of evil fingers attaching to it, but every stone that has been taken from the enemy may become part of a palace—beautiful, because built for God.

Here is a man we have captured, who used to be quite famous for his humour. He was in very deed a wit. He saw the comical aspect of every question, he had a keen eye for the ludicrous, a happy tongue for the expression of all that he saw and felt. He is now in the church—what is he doing? Sleeping. The Church will not have him. The Church is wrong. We should make a modern Elijah of him, and he should taunt the priests of evil on their own ground and across their own altars, till they ran away for very shame. Such a man should have a function in the Church. We do not want his humour here, mayhap: let that be fully understood: but it is wanted somewhere in this heathen London. The Church has been unjust to laughter. It has left that stone in the devil's Ramah: it might have made a figure in God's Geba or Mizpah.

But is there not danger in employing such persons to do such work? Yes, there is danger in doing it; but, as we view the case, there is more danger in not doing it. We are too much afraid of danger. There was great danger in entrusting the revelation of Christianity to a few fishermen, ignorant and feeble in every aspect of social importance. We dare not have done it. We should hardly have trusted any one of those men to have posted a letter. But Jesus entrusted them with a letter for the universe. There was great danger in selecting as the patriarch of the Church a man who had cursed and sworn and denied his Lord. We should never have spoken to him more. Jesus, mighty Saviour, set him in the front; a supreme danger or a divine

philosophy. Clothe men with responsibilities if you would call up their supreme power to its best expression, its most solid and massive and dominating attitude. Give them to feel that you are afraid of them and suspecting them, and all the time adding them up to prove if they are correct, and you undo the very work you suppose yourself to be doing. Understand that the weak things are always, under divine uses, the strongest. It is the child that rules your house. You are a very stupendous person, no doubt, but the baby is more stupendous still. Is there not danger in these odd methods and irregular means? Yes, but Christianity is another word for danger; it does nothing according to the wisdom of orthodox prudence, it turns the world upside down, and those who are mightiest in its propagation are those upon whose foreheads the world has written most legibly—"Mad."

We want to know what has become of the old material. You were greater on the other side than you are on this. You made more of a figure, you created a deeper impression, you were better known as an actor than ever you have been known as a preacher—how is that? You were better known as a blasphemer than you are known as a suppliant—how is that? O that we could utilise all the old forces!

Jesus Christ works in the spirit of this text in building up his kingdom. He takes the stones from the enemy—to whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men but chosen of God and precious—they are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together, groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit. Jesus Christ will overthrow the fortress of the enemy, and take every stone and beam and timber away, and rear new edifices with them. Out of the ruins of Saul he will build Geba and Mizpah, called Paul; and Paul shall be as great a Christian as ever he was a Pharisee. There will be no disguise about the man, he will not change his identity; the intensity that made him a persecutor will make him an evangelist, the astuteness which made him famous in the

school of Gamaliel will make him famous in the higher school of Christ. The man who went out to persecute the Church of God will go out to his death with a nobler loyalty of composure, yea, will welcome it as one who is ready to depart.

Out of the ruins of Luther the monk, Christ will build Luther the Protestant reforming teacher. He will not make a less Luther. He will not say to him, "You must lay aside your commonness, your vulgarity of speech, your buffoonery; you must lay aside your music and your humour, and your love of all the movements of the times; and you must become a smaller man." He said, "I shall want all your humour, all your rude force, all your blunt expression"—for Luther would never have been the man he was in Europe but for that singular faculty—which is oftentimes known as vulgarity—the power of speaking expressively, the power of being graphic and vivid, the power of saying what the common people understand in their own language and with their own accent.

Out of the ruins of the drunkard Jesus Christ builds the apostle of temperance. Who can speak so well about drunkenness as the redeemed man? We have around us many conspicuous examples of this: such examples throw floods of light upon the meaning of this text. Out of the old ruins build the new palace, fetch all the old stuff away, every stone, every beam, every nail, and use all in the uprearing of the new sanctuary.

Jesus is building his great house, and some day men will say about the stones that are in it, "What are these, and whence came they?" and Jesus will answer with a pride of satisfaction flooding and flaming his soul, "Every stone that is there is precious to me: this is Ramah, rebuilt as Geba; this is the old fortress turned into the new sanctuary," and as he looks upon that palace, wide as the horizon, high as heaven, what wonder if, seeing the travail of his soul, he is satisfied?

All the old fortresses must come to one of two fates—they will be ground to powder, or they will be rebuilt in forms of infinite and indestructible beauty.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, why art thou so concerned that we should obey thee? Why dost thou not close thine hand upon us, and return us to the earth? Thou dost stoop down to us, and care for us as though we were of consequence to thee. The heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee. The angels thou dost charge with folly; the heavens are not clean in thy sight. Yet thou dost look down upon the children of men, and shed blood for them, thou dost call for them as loving hearts would call for those who are hungry, and offer them bread. Yea, thou dost seem to stop the universe in its way that some poor lost lamb may be gathered up again. The Son of man came, to seek and to save that which was lost. Why came he? We can be of no consequence to the Eternal. Surely we are but as insects in the sunbeam, living a moment, and quickly dying in the presence of him who made all time and who opens the year as he closes it without sign or token that any great event has occurred to himself. Thou dwellest in eternal time, thou art measured by the unending and unbeginning now. Yet thou dost care for us, thou dost pity us with tears; thine heart grieves over us, as if we could complete thy dominion and enhance thy joy. Like as a father pitieth his children, even so dost thou pity the sons of men. We know it. In no otherwise can we understand the providences which make up our lives. They are not judgments, they are not symbols and pledges of wrath; they are veiled angels, they are messengers of love, tenderness, and redemption. All things are greater than we suppose. When thou art feeding the one bird in the winter time, thou art feeding the whole universe the year round. If thou canst be interested in one of us, then art thou interested in all. The whole earth is thine; the Jew and the Gentile are thine; the uttermost part of the earth is not far from thee: the whole earth in all its points touches the eternal throne. Give us grace, mercy, and peace as a new year token. May we feel that the Lord is still amongst us—the fire that burns but does not consume: a presence that would cheer by suppressing itself rather than a fire that would flame out upon us, and terrify by judgment and penalty. Give us understanding of ourselves that we may have better understanding of others. Open thou our eyes that we may behold wondrous things out of thy law. The Lord be pitiful to us still with tenderness of mercy. The moment the mercy is withdrawn our life is extinguished. We live in mercy, we live in the pity of God; we are preserved by thine heart, else would we be crushed by thine hand. We love the Saviour. His name becomes dearer to us as the years rise and fall, and number themselves with the eternity gone. He is all in all. He is the root and the offspring of David, the bright and morning star. He is Alpha and Omega; and there is no escape from

the line of his love—high as heaven, deeper than any parts of the earth, stretching over every sea, so that the land and the water, and the family and the state, and the market-place and the cemetery, are all under his watch and care. Plant many a flower upon the grave; conceal it with flowers; may they spring so richly and so beautifully that the grave shall be rather a type of the resurrection than a sign of the conquering death. Do for us all we want; or take hold of our hands, and help us to do it ourselves, that we may be pleased for a moment, though never missing the consciousness that our hand is in the hand of God. God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—thou dost by these names stand far away from us; God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ—by this sweet name dost Thou come into every house, and touch every heart. Amen.

1 Kings xvi. 16.

“Zimri hath conspired, and hath also slain the king.”

ELAH, ZIMRI, AND ARZA.

THERE was once a king in Israel called Elah. He reigned over Israel in Tirzah two years. He had a servant called Zimri who was a captain of his chariots. Zimri was a born traitor. Treachery was in his very blood. In the case of Elah, Zimri had a marked advantage; for Elah was a drunken fool; he was in the habit of visiting the house of another of his servants, a steward called Arza, and there he had what drink he asked for; and he asked for a good deal, so much so that he was often drunk in his servant's house, and on one of these occasions, Zimri went in and killed him, and reigned in his stead. These are the facts which we have to deal with. Are they very ancient, or are they happening round about us every day? Is Elah dead? Is Zimri clean gone for ever? And is the house of the servant Arza closed, so that the master can drink no more with the steward?

Elah lives in every man who has great chances or opportunities in life, but allows them to slip away though one leak in the character. Elah was a king and the son of a king, so his openings in life were wide and splendid; but he loved strong drink, and through that leak in his character all that might have made him a man oozed away, and left him a king in nothing but the barren name. Strong drink will ruin any man. It is the supreme curse of England. I will say nothing now of the old,

but to the young I may speak a word. I care not, young man, how many and how brilliant in life your chances are, if you drink wine in the morning, as many young men in London do, you are as good as damned already. You think not, but that only shows the infinite deceitfulness of the enemy. He tells you, "Nothing of the kind; this is parson's twaddle; take your wine when you want it, and let it alone when you don't care for it." There is suppressed mockery in that high challenge. There is no soundness of health in it. Every drink leaves you weaker. Every emptied glass is another link added to the strong chain thrown upon your limbs. You take sherry in the morning, and it brightens and lightens you for the day, you think. Let me tell you what it does. It exhilarates you; it takes you out of yourself for a while; but it takes away the sources of your will, it throws a cloud over your brain, it blunts your moral criticism, it hastens you along a road that dips easily but surely into hell. The young man who drinks in the morning may be saved, for I dare not set limits to the mercy of God, but how he is to be saved it is impossible for me to say. The devil has hold of both his hands, his feet are upon a slippery incline, and how he is to get back again, I cannot tell. God help him! God save him!

What is true of this leak in a man's character is true of every other. Take indecision for example, or idleness, or love of company, or devotion to pleasure. Give me a young man with a king for a father, a throne for an inheritance, a kingdom for a field to cultivate, and let him be idle, or undecided, or pleasure-loving, and his doom is sealed. A great merchant once said to me of a certain man in his employment, "I would to-morrow give that man a thousand a year to begin with, if he could do one thing, and that is, hold his tongue, but he would no sooner get the appointment than he would go into an ale-house, and tell the whole company everything I am doing." There is the leak in the character, and it means ruin! It is astounding what one leak will do. I remember lowering a brass valve put into some water apparatus which had been fitted by one of the most skilful of plumbers; but when all was done, there was a faint thread of water running; the valve was taken to pieces, and re-fitted, and still the thread of water was there; and at last it was

found that in the very middle of the valve there was a sand hole, not larger than the point of a needle; but there it was, and no skill in mere plumbing could meet such a case; the valve must go back to the founder, be put through the fire once more, before it could be used. It is just the same with character. The leak is very small, but it is fatal. Night and day it runs. Sleeping and waking it runs. Summer and winter it runs. And no cistern, no reservoir can stand a perpetual leak.

Zimri still lives in all persons who take advantage of the weaknesses of others. Zimri knew that Elah was a drunkard, and he further knew that through his habit of drunkenness alone he could reach the king. On every other side of his character Elah may have been a strong man: acute, shrewd, farsighted; but when in drink, weak and foolish. And Zimri played his game accordingly. He said: "He goes to Arza's house after sun down; in half an hour after going in he will begin to fail under the effects of wine, then the worst wine will be brought out, then he will go mad under its poison, and then drowsy. I must get Arza out of the way; the fool will go on any errand I name, on promise of another horse; that is it." "And Zimri went in and smote him and killed him."

Zimri still lives. He took advantage of his master's weakness, and his progeny is numerous on the earth. They say of you, "He is fond of wine: give him as much as he will take, and then begin your plan;"—of you, "He is fond of flattery, praise him high, and you will get all you want;"—of you, "He will do anything for money; show him the golden sovereign, and you may lead him where you please." So the progeny of Zimri still lives! Some people trade on the weaknesses of others. They study them. They adapt themselves to them. They watch for striking time, and seldom miss the mark. How else could the net be always ready for the bird? How else the pit be always prepared for the unexpected and bewildered traveller? There is an infernal science in these things,—a devil's black art!

And does not Arza still live in those who find the means whereby men may conceal their evil habits and indulge their

unholy desires? They seem to say, "In my house you may do what you please. I shall not look at you. Come when you please; go when you like; I am nobody, if you like to call me so." My wonder is that any young man can keep his morals uncorrupted in a great city. Houses of destruction are open in every street. There is a public-house at every corner. I have watched working men in connection with the public-house until my heart has sickened. They hardly get their wages before they stumble into the place of ruin, their poor wives hanging about the streets in hope, in fear, in misery,—women whom they have cursed with their mocking love, and driven to the devil by their unholy and pestilent habits. And there the glittering houses stood ready to receive them! Trap-doors into perdition! And houses of divers other kinds stand open with invitations written upon them to young persons to go in and be ruined, lost, damned! How is a young man to keep himself even tolerably right in the midst of a state of things like this?

We may well ask, Do men like Zimri do all this mischief and escape? Are they allowed to work out their deadly plans, and is there none to avenge? We have an answer in the text. How long did Zimri reign in Tirzah? He got the throne by treachery, how long did he hold it? Here is the answer, and may we receive its deep meaning into our souls: The traitor reigned seven days! Short is the day of the wicked, and he is left without candle in the night time. The people heard that Zimri had conspired and slain the king, and they rose in anger and made Omri the captain of the host, king over Israel that day in the camp, and when the cowardly traitor heard this, he went into the palace of the king's house and burned the king's house over him with fire, and was roasted to death in the hot ashes! And so died Zimri the regicide, the coward, the traitor, a servant set on horseback and driven to hell by his own ambition. Judgment comes upon the wicked like a sudden storm, they get what they want and it kills them. They snatch the prize, and, lo! it turns to fire in their greedy grasp. They say, Doth God know? Is there one in heaven that considereth these things? May we not do this in the dark and feel ourselves acquitted in the morning?

How foolish, too, are the wicked! If they would devote their talents to some virtuous end they would attain honourable success, sweetened with a sense of honesty. They often have great talents, fine powers, large capacities, and if they gave themselves with ardour and energy to the pursuit of good ends they would outrun many and gain a prize worthy and lasting.

SELECTED NOTES.

Tirzah ("pleasantness"); an ancient royal city of the Canaanites, captured by Joshua (Josh. xii. 24). After its conquest it is not again mentioned in history till the time of Jeroboam, who appears to have chosen it as his principal residence. He was at least living there when his son Abijah died (1 Kings xiv. 17). From this period till the founding of Samaria by Omri (some fifty years) it continued to be the capital of the northern kingdom (xv. 21, 33). It was the scene of Elah's murder (xvi. 8), and there too Zimri the murderer, to escape the avenging sword of Omri, "burnt the king's house over him with fire, and died" (v. 18). The last notice of it in Scripture history is in connection with Menahem, who went from Tirzah to Samaria, "and smote Shallum, and reigned in his stead" (2 Kings xv. 14).

The geographical position of Tirzah has not been given by any ancient geographer. Eusebius and Jerome simply mention it as a city captured by Joshua. Brocardus, a writer of the thirteenth century, appears to have been the first to identify it. He says: "From Samaria it is three leagues eastward to the city of Thersa, which is situated on the high mountain." From that time until the visit of Dr. Robinson it remained unknown; but that acute geographer discovered it in the modern Tellúzah. "The place lies in a slightly and commanding position. It is surrounded by immense groves of olive trees, planted on all sides around; mostly young and thrifty trees. The town is of some size and tolerably well built. We saw no remains of antiquity, except a few sepulchral excavations and some cisterns." When compared with other sites in Palestine, the appropriateness of Solomon's figure will be perceived: "Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah" (Cant. v. 4).

Elah, son of Baasha, king of Israel. After a reign of two years (B.C. 930-929), he was assassinated while drunk, and all his kinsfolk and friends cut off by Zimri, "the captain of half his chariots." He was the last king of Baasha's line, and by this catastrophe the predictions of the prophet Jehu were accomplished (1 Kings xvi. 6-14).

Zimri.—In the twenty-sixth year of Asa, king of Judah, Elah, the son of Baasha, began to reign over Israel in Tirzah. After he had reigned two years, Zimri, the captain of half his chariots, conspired against him when he was in Tirzah, drunk, in the house of his steward. Zimri went in and smote and killed him, and reigned in his stead, about B.C. 928; and he slew all the house of Baasha so that no male was left. Zimri reigned only seven days in Tirzah. The people who were encamped at Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines, heard that Zimri had slain the king. They made Omri, the captain of the host, king over Israel in the camp. Omri besieged Tirzah and took it. Zimri, seeing that the city was taken, went into the king's palace, set it on fire, and perished in it for his sins in walking in the way of Jereboam, and for making Israel to sin (1 Kings xvi. 1-20; 2 Kings ix. 31).

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thine eye has been upon us from the beginning of the year until the end, the days have been bright with thy looking, the nights have been sacred by thy nearness. Thou hast beset us behind and before, and laid thine hand upon us, for wheresoever our eyes have looked, behold, we have seen the Lord. Heaven has been over us like a great banner—Jehovah-nissi. The whole time has been an opportunity for advancing to higher life. Every month has given us new openings into wider liberty, into higher stature of Soul. Thou hast not forsaken us one moment. We know not what thou dost yet intend us to do and to be—nor care we. We are thine. Put us here or there, as thou pleasest, where thou pleasest; if thy will be done, our peace is assured. We are all parts of one another. We forget this, and therefore are we filled with envy and rivalry, and our spirit is moved with bitterness and clamour. It is each man for himself—as if he were anything of himself and by himself. Thus do we create schism in thy body, thou Creator of man. We have spoiled the image because the eye has said, “I am not of the body”; and the ear has said, “I am not of the body”; and the foot has said, “I am not of the body”; and the hand has said, “I am not of the body.” So we are little entities, and each man is making his own god, his own heaven, and his own future—poor fool! in thy sight. Yet the years teach him no wisdom, and experience is wasted upon him like summer rains upon an ungrateful sand. Show us that we belong to one another, and all to thee: that man is one, that society is one, that in a great house there are vessels of gold and vessels of silver, vessels of honour and vessels of inferiority; but the roof is one, the enclosure is one, the ownership is one. In my father’s house are many mansions. Show us that the old and the young belong to the same family, and that we must make way for one another by ascension—leaving those who come behind to continue the fight and turn the war to conquest. Give us nobler thoughts, brighter conceptions, a sense of more delightful and vital fellowship with thyself. Then we shall have no pain, no fear, no dread of to-morrow, bring with it what it may; nor shall there be any more sea, or crying, or pain, or night, or death, but life shall be one loud triumph-song. This is what we are aiming at. This is our hope and aspiration. It is no child of ours. It is the birth of the Holy Ghost. It is the miraculous conception—that in the human mind there should be born an irrepressible and holy desire for God. The poor year we send back to thee, blessing thee that we have been able to render it back a day at a time. We dare not have given it back to thee as a whole, for even our arms would have shrunk from carrying so much corruption; but thou dost take it by instalments—a trifle now and then, a little day at the close of its own sin and labour, so that the pressure is

mitigated and the burden is felt to be less. But it is no less; it is all there—no sin lost, no crime turned paler for the keeping; but the whole iniquity—black, hideous, reeking as from a pit of pestilence. God be merciful unto us sinners. Now we see what the cross means; now we feel the need of the agony and the sacrifice—words we cannot interpret from the outside, but which come to us with infinite pathos when we feel what they were meant to signify. The Lord bless us, heal us, comfort us, and make our latter end brighter, grander than any day that has gone before. Then shall we feel the time, through the blessed Lord Jesus our Saviour, heighten itself into eternity. Amen.

1 Kings xvi. 21-23.

21. ¶ Then were the people of Israel divided into two parts [a division of a division]: half of the people followed Tibni the son of Ginath, to make him king; and half followed Omri.

22. But the people that followed Omri prevailed against the people that followed Tibni the son of Ginath [the contest between the two pretenders lasted four years; comp. vv. 15, 23 and 29]: so Tibni died ["Tibni's death exactly at this time can scarcely be supposed to have been natural—either he must have been slain in battle against Omri, or have fallen into his hands and have been put to death"], and Omri reigned.

23. In the thirty and first year of Asa king of Judah began Omri to reign over Israel, twelve years: six years reigned he in Tirzah [or, as given in "The Speaker's Commentary"—"So Tibni died, and Omri reigned in the thirty-first year of Asa, king of Judah. Omri reigned over Israel twelve years; six years reigned he in Tirzah; these six years are probably made up of the four years of contention with Tibni, and two years afterwards, during which enough of Samaria was built for the king to transfer his residence there"].

TIBNI AND OMRI.

OMRI bought the hill of Samaria, a place in the heart of the mountains of Israel, a little west of their watershed; politically it was more central than Shechem, and in a military point of view admirably calculated for defence. No further change was made in the seat of government. "Shechem and Tirzah were each changed and abandoned: but through all the later alterations of dynasty Samaria continued uninterruptedly to the very close of the independence, to be the capital of the northern kingdom." Omri bought the hill of Samaria from its owner, Shemer, for two talents of silver (equal to from five to eight hundred pounds of English money). Omri excelled all his predecessors in doing evil. To be the very prince of wicked

men seemed to be his ambition! After a life of supreme corruption he was buried in Samaria, and his son Ahab reigned in his stead. Ahab reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-and-two years. And Ahab excelled even his father Omri in doing evil! He not only repeated all that Omri did, but he took to wife Jezebel, and went and served Baal and worshipped him, and he made an altar for Baal, and a grove; and "did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him."

"Tibni died, and Omri reigned" (v. 22).

We have often been struck by the difference in the lot of men upon the earth; for example, as between the rich man and Lazarus, and between the great king and the poor wise man. The text brings these differences before us sharply,—“Tibni died, and Omri reigned.” A short explanatory story is needed here. When Zimri killed Elah, the people proclaimed Omri as king; but the proclamation was not unanimous; half of the people wanted Tibni, and half wanted Omri: the half that wanted Omri prevailed; so Tibni died, and Omri reigned. Our purpose is to show that both Tibni and Omri are still living, and that we may learn a good deal from their different lots in life.

Tibni and Omri are both living in the persons of those who divide public opinion respecting themselves. Is there any man living with whom everybody is satisfied? Take a Christian minister—any minister in this great London, and see how public opinion is divided about him. To one set of men he is the supreme human teacher; to another set of men he is almost unfit to be in the pulpit at all. Take a statesman; to one class he is the salvation of the kingdom, to another he is an empiric, a traitor, or in some degree a political rascal. Take any friend in social life; to one man he is an idol, to another he is a bore. There are great moral lessons coming out of these simple facts. These facts are not to be treated lightly. We are differently constituted, and no man is at liberty to set himself up for the judgment and condemnation of all. Especially ought this to be observed in the Church of Christ. Let us have our preferences by all means; this is simply inevitable; but do not let us run

down the preferences of other people. Love your teacher if he has done you good ; speak of him with warmest love ; but do not tell other people that their ministers are unworthy of honour, nor try to lure them away from the pastor of their choice. Some people are fond even of dry sermons, and an odd man here and there likes a long one. If you clamorously cry up one man against another you may forget that the best of men are only servants, and that the worshipful One and All-holy is in heaven. "It hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, that there are contentions among you ; every one saith, I am of Paul ; and I of Apollos ; and I of Cephas ; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided ? was Paul crucified for you ? or were ye baptised in the name of Paul ?" Society will always be divided about its leading men ; but let us insist that there may be difference without bitterness, and that you may make one man king without taking away the character and perhaps the life of his rival. Let us pray God to show us the best points in every man's character. Life is too short for slanderous criticism ; we have work enough to do without tearing one another to pieces ; he who debates much, is in danger of praying little ; and he who is keenest in censure may be most barren and reluctant in sympathy.

Tibni still lives in the man who comes very near being a king but just misses the throne. Half the people in the camp were in his favour. In some of the popular shouts you could hardly tell whether Tibni or Omri was the uppermost name. Now the one seemed to fill the whole wind and now the other. The men themselves did not know for certain which of them was to have the crown. Let us see if there be not a good deal of our own life in this apparently remote and uninteresting fact. Whatever you strive for most anxiously in life is the crown to you, because it is the thing you want beyond all others. Sometimes it is so near ! You feel as if you could put out your hand and take it ! And yet though so near, it is so far, like a star trembling in a pool. Great broad providences you can understand and in a measure account for, as for example that one man should be poor and another rich : you can make up your mind to accept such a distinction ; but when the prize you covet is actually at the door, within one step, just waiting for one word

of distinct claim, you are apt to think that Providence means you to have it, for you cannot imagine that a hairbreadth line can separate a king from a civilian, a destiny of happiness from a destiny of sorrow. Here we come upon the very first lines of Providence, and the finer the lines the subtler the temptation. We are tempted to step over some lines; it seems right that we should do so; we say we ought to take advantage of our good fortune, and if God has come so near he means us to take the one last step. It is just there that many a man suffers the supreme trial of his faith and the supreme agony of his sensibilities. The situation you would like above all others is just there; so is the high office in the State, in the Church, in the city; it seems to be let down from heaven on purpose for you, and yet you cannot take possession of it; a cloud keeps you back; a thin impalpable veil! May you not break through and seize the gleaming prize? No. It is where Providence is so near that we need to pray most. It is when people would take us and force us to be kings, that, in the strength of God, we should pass through them and betake ourselves to the wilderness until beyond all doubt we are sent for from heaven.

We have referred to the supreme trial of a man's sensibilities; let us explain our meaning. We often say of this man or that, How narrowly he escapes being a great man! There is only one thing wanting, one element, one force, one virtue,—one thing thou lackest, one thing is needful! And the man himself is tormented by a sense of greatness which is always nearing the point of royalty but never absolutely reaching it. The small man can be happy; the executive man can enjoy himself; but there is a man with a certain degree of power who cannot mingle with pigmies, who is not mighty enough for giants, who comes very near being a king, but misses the throne, and this man suffers agonies which he can never properly explain. He feels that the great poem which would give him literary immortality is breathing within him and around him, but the moment he puts pen to paper the inspiration ceases and will not harden into words. He has in him strange wild dreamings of power; he can write a book, he can found a new school of philosophy, he can illumine the whole horizon of theology, he can save the State; innumerable things he

attempts and completes in his dreams, but the day of execution never dawns! It is in such men that Tibni still lives; in disappointed hearts, in blighted hopes, in brilliant prospects overcast, in kingdoms made of cloud, in castles built in air.

Omri still lives in those who turn great powers and great openings to dishonourable and unholy uses. Omri got the throne. For twelve years he reigned in Israel, six of them in Tirzah. His rival died, and he was left in undisputed sovereignty. But his way was not honourable before the Lord. "Omri wrought evil in the eyes of the Lord, and did worse than all that were before him." Some providences seem to be altogether thrown away, and we stand aghast at the destruction, saying, "Why was this waste made?" Great talents are made to serve the devil; great voices of song are never heard in the sanctuary; noble powers of speech are dumb when the righteous cause has to be pleaded. It has sometimes seemed as if the rain had fallen on the wilderness and missed the garden that would have returned a flower for every drop. We say, If this man had owned the money it would have been well spent; if that man had been entrusted with the power, it would have been beneficially exercised; instead of that, the wicked man keeps the bank, and the mischievous man lays down the law. There must be a time of rectification. A mystery lies upon the whole scheme of life. Yet there is a shape in it which keeps me from being an atheist; there is a sorrow in it which moves my purest pity; there is a light in it which will not let my hope expire; there is a darkness upon it which makes it terrible; it is full of solemnity, full of grandeur, full of meaning! Its best explanation I find is Christ. If he could endure it, well may I. If he died for it, I must think it possible to be saved. Where he gave blood, I may give service. My hope is in his cross. "He shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied."

Application: (1) If we cannot be great we can be good;
(2) There is one throne which we need not miss.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thy grace is greater than our sin. Where sin abounds grace doth much more abound. Thou dost not only pardon, thou dost abundantly pardon, as a sea might swallow up a little stream. When we look at our sin we burn with shame, we stagger under a great burden which we cannot carry; but when we look at thy grace, at the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, behold, how wondrous it is, and how our hearts are constrained to right again, and how our whole life answers the mighty appeal of thy love. Thou wilt conquer sin: thou wilt destroy all the darkness,—yea, the sun itself shall be counted dark, and as for the moon, thou wilt drop it out of thy great creation as needed no more. The Lamb shall be the light of the new place, the face of God shall irradiate the heavens. Thou doest great things and marvellous; yea, thou dost overpower our imagining and make all our fancy foolish when we attempt to set forth before ourselves the wonders of thy doing. We would live in the spirit of this education: we would be moved by impulses arising from this contemplation of thy greatness. Then shall our life be ennobled, our whole being shall assume new proportions, our lowliest service shall be touched with a royal value, and all we say and do will have about it the breathing of the grandeur of eternity. We bless thee for any uplifting of mind, and especially for the elevation of soul which comes at the altar of the sanctuary in the overpowering presence of the dying Son of God. Here thou dost exalt our thought, and here thou dost give us softening of love and melting of heart so that our whole life runs out to thee, for thou alone art its beginning and its sufficiency. We pray for one another. Every heart, having spoken its own little prayer for its own little self, would think of the other now,—the dumb tongue that cannot pray, the hard heart that will not pray, the weary traveller who cannot find strength to pray. The Lord remember us every one, omit none from his blessing, but seek out that which is lost, find it, save it, and may every heart be touched with comfort, be enriched with new grace, and arise to new conceptions of Christian thought, and offer itself a new sacrifice on the altar of the cross. Dry our tears when we cannot count them. Give us lifting up of mind when the clouds are like a burden upon our head, and whisper to us some gentle word that shall be a singing gospel in the heart when no other voice can reach our weariness or heal our woe. We come with this prayer because of the authority and encouragement of Jesus Christ. He hath opened a door that is very wide, he hath uttered welcomes broader than our necessity, penetrating into the region of our pain and distress, and he hath offered us the hospitality of God, whereby our hunger and our thirst may be for ever appeased, and he has given unto us thy rest, which is an infinite calm.

Amen.

1 Kings xvii.**ELIJAH.**

ELIJAH means "Jehovah is my God."—There is often much in a name. It is a history, sometimes,—the summing up of generations; it is sometimes an inspiration, recalling memories that stir the soul to high daring. In Christ we are called to a new name. Have you yet received it? Behold, what manner of love hath the Father bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.

"Tishbite."—There are two places called Tishbi, one in Gilead and the other in Galilee. Elijah belonged to the former. Sometimes character is mysteriously and very deeply affected by country. Gilead was a wild and mountainous district, bordering on Arabia, and consequently half Arab in its customs. There was a wonderful similarity between the man and the region; stern, bleak, grand, majestic, and awful, were they both. John the Baptist seemed to bring the wilderness with him when he came into the city. Children born in luxury are apt to be themselves luxurious. Children born in slavery will hardly ever be free, though slavery has been abolished. To the end of life we carry the colour which first impressed itself on our vision.

"Elijah the Tishbite said unto Ahab."—All revelations seem to us to be sudden. Look at the suddenness of the appearance of Ahijah to Jeroboam, and look at the instance before us. The total apostasy of the ten tribes (Israel) was now almost accomplished, yet a faithful prophet of the Lord stands up in the degenerate land, and declares that Jehovah is his God, and in sacred solitariness protests against the abominations of Israel and her king. No mild man would have been equal to the occasion. God adapts his ministry to circumstances. He sends a nurse to the sick room; a soldier to the battle-field. The son of consolation and the son of thunder cannot change places. You are right when you say that the dew and the light and the soft breeze are God's; but you must not therefore suppose that the thunder and the hurricane and the floods belong to a meaner lord.

“As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand.”—We must realise very clearly the circumstances of the case before we can set a proper value on these words. To us they are but part of a general music. Our land is full of churches, and the wind of Christendom is charged with psalms. But in Ahab's wicked day—Ahab who did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him (v. 33)—the words meant something which it is hardly possible for us to realise.

Imagine the two men standing face to face: Ahab the dissolute king and Elijah the faithful prophet, and probably there is no finer picture in ancient history. Terrible indeed is the national crisis when king and prophet come into collision. There is not a combat between two men. Mark that very closely. It is **V** Right against Wrong, Faithfulness against Treachery, Purity against Corruption. Look at them, Ahab and Elijah, as they face one another!—Consider the boldness of the prophet. Religion is never to be ashamed of its own testimony. As we look at the scene, not wanting in the elements of the highest tragedy, we see (1) The value of one noble witness in the midst of public corruption and decay, and (2) The grandeur as well as necessity of a distinct personal profession of godliness. It is not enough to be godly, we must avow it in open conduct and articulate confession.

Let us now observe how Elijah proceeds to deal with Ahab.

“There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.”—Here is physical punishment for moral transgression. So it is; and that is exactly what a parent does when he uses the rod upon his child for falsehood. You can only punish people according to their nature. The garrotter can submit to any number of censures and lectures, but he dreads the cat-o'-nine-tails. Physical punishment for moral transgression is the law of society.—So the liar is thrown out of his situation; the ill-tempered child is whipped; the dishonourable man is expelled from social confidence.—With regard to the particular punishment denounced against Ahab it is to be remembered that drought is one of the punishments threatened by the law if

Israel forsook Jehovah and turned after other gods (Deut. xi. 17; Lev. xxvi. 18). The law would apply to England were there no praying men within our borders.—Ten righteous men still save a city.—Paul still saves the ship.—The interceding husbandman saves the barren tree.

This, then, was the brief communication which the prophet addressed to the king. God's threatenings are terrible in their conciseness. He leaves no room in a multitude of words for ambiguity and verbal wriggling: "the soul that sinneth it shall die;" "the wages of sin is death;" "there is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked." And as he can be concise in threatening, so he can be concise in promise,—“I will give you rest;” “I will give you living water;” “he that believeth shall be saved;” “ask, and it shall be given you.” Thus great things can be said in few words—“God is light;” “God is love;” “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved;” “Ye must be born again.”

“I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there.”—At the bidding of the word of the Lord, Elijah turned eastward and hid himself by the brook Cherith, a place nowhere else mentioned in the Bible, and “no name like it has as yet been discovered in Palestine.” It was a torrent-course facing the Jordan; “but whether it was one of those which seam Mount Ephraim, or of those on the opposite side of Jordan, in the prophet's own country, is uncertain.” But what is the meaning of the extraordinary expression—“I have commanded the ravens to feed thee”? By omitting the points, which are generally allowed to have no authority, the Hebrew letters may signify Arabians; then the passage would read, “I have commanded the Arabians to feed thee.” Or, if we retain the present pointing the word may be translated “merchants,” according to “The Speaker's Commentary.” But it is better to allow the word “ravens” to stand.* It implies a miracle; but the whole Bible is a miracle,

* “A vast deal of ingenuity has been devoted to explaining away Elijah's ‘ravens.’ The Hebrew word, רָבִיבִים, *Orebim*, has been interpreted as ‘Arabians,’ as ‘merchants,’ as inhabitants of some neighbouring town of *Orbo* or

and so is our own daily life, could we but see the inner movement and look beyond all symbols to the spiritual reality.

But Elijah's brook dried up. Prophets may be overtaken by the operation of their own prophecies. The great laws are impartial, yet wonderful is the scope within which exceptions may be established. This incident gives an instance in point.

"Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee."—This place is called Sarepta in the New Testament (Luke iv. 26). It lay upon the great public road which connected the two towns. A little village called Sarafend now occupies the situation. But how did it come about that Elijah was sent to a place so near the city of Jezebel's father? It has been suggested that it would be the last place that he would be suspected of having chosen as a retreat. When Elijah came to the gate of the city the widow woman was there gathering sticks, and he asked her for a little water in a vessel that he might drink; and as she was going to fetch it, he asked her to bring also a morsel of bread in her hand. But she had no bread! Not so much as a cake, only a handful of meal in a barrel and a little oil in a cruse. She was just going to dress this little food for herself and her son, "that we may eat it and die." But Elijah claimed it in the name of the Lord, and gave her in return the gracious promise, "The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth." We may here admire (imitate!) one of the finest instances of ancient faith. The woman was asked for all she had, and she gave it! But mark, she was put in possession of a promise. This is God's law; he gives the

Orbi [Jerome, quoted by Kennicott, 581. See these hypotheses brought together in Keil *ad loc.*]. By others Elijah has been held to have plundered a raven's nest—and this twice a day regularly for several months! There is no escape from the plain meaning of the words occurring as they do twice, in a passage otherwise displaying no tinge of the marvellous—or from the unanimity of all the Hebrew MSS., of all the ancient versions, and of Josephus." [This subject is exhausted in a dissertation entitled *Elias corvorum convictor* in the *Critici sacri*.]—Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible."

promise first, and then asks for the faith of man. It was so in the case of Abraham. It is so with ourselves to-day.

“And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail.”—This is the continual miracle of nature. This is the security of life. We are puzzled by it; but what of that? Are possibilities to be determined by our weakness or by God’s strength? We could have increased the flour had we sown the seed, reaped the grain, and called in the aid of the miller; now let us venture upon the supposition that Almighty God is able to do just a little more than we can do, and the whole difficulty is gone! The air wastes not, nor the light, nor the force of nature; what if God can touch points which happen to lie beyond the range of our short fingers? We must allow something for Deity.

And now sorrow fell upon the poor woman’s house; her only child died, and her heart was lacerated even to torment and agony. But the Lord was merciful. Elijah took the dead child away into a loft—the upper chamber, which was often the best part of an eastern house—and cried unto the Lord, and stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried again and again unto the Lord, and the child’s life returned. Then the glad mother hailed Elijah as a man, and one in whose mouth was the word of the Lord. It is thus that Christianity proves itself, even by its miracles and its ever-growing, ever-blessing wonders. It finds the lost, and gives life to the dead, and makes the wilderness blossom as the rose, and thus it constrains men to hail it as the great power of God. “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men to me.”

Elijah had put himself beyond the reach of Ahab, not because he feared him or distrusted the power of God in critical circumstances, but because God’s providence or government is a great scheme with innumerable sides, and requires time for its full disclosure and accomplishment. We are not to hasten the march of God. To everything there is a season. Everywhere we see this idea of time observed and honoured. Though there is famine in the land we cannot urge the seasons forward. The

child, too, must have years of growth, though his father be disabled and there be none to earn the household bread but himself. So in the case before us. Ahab must be wearied out with searching for Elijah. He must be made to see how fruitless may be the efforts even of a king. And at last when success does come, it must come not from his side at all.

Mark this as a real law in life. It is thus that God baffles and humbles men. He gives them to feel that all searching is useless when he has determined that they shall not succeed in their search. The thing they want may lie within their own shadow, but they cannot find it! It may be under their foot, yet practically it may be miles away! Is not this our own experience? And when success does come, it comes after pursuit has been given up; after we have done our utmost and have failed, then there is the very thing we wanted standing before us as if it had sprung up out of our path! There is quite a mocking spirit in the world. A spirit that watches us working and failing, and then says, What you have been seeking for is here! And in this very mockery there is often solid and useful teaching. It says, He that would save his life shall lose it, and he that would lose his life shall find it. We toil all night and take nothing, and then the Spirit says, Let down the net here, and lo! it is filled with fish. Thus God is always breaking our straight lines into curves, showing us that our arm is just an inch too short to reach the ripest fruits, and that we cannot run backwards except with humbling ungainliness and to the great risk of our limbs. Ahab searched everywhere for Elijah, and though he was a king he could not find the poor prophet who lodged with the still poorer widow. Whom God conceals are well hidden!

1 Kings xviii. 1-16.

¹And it came to pass after many days, that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth. And Elijah went to shew himself unto Ahab. And there was a sore famine in Samaria" (vv. 1, 2).

AHAB, OBADIAH, AND ELIJAH.

GOD is the time-keeper. He says, Now. We wonder we cannot go just when it is convenient to ourselves; we think we see the exact juncture when it would be right to go, but if we went just then a serpent would bite us on the road. We want to go to heaven, but God says, Not yet. We want to begin the battle, but God says, Wait. Think of waiting "many days" and doing nothing! But what if waiting be the best working? What if we can best do everything by simply doing nothing? There is a time to stand still and see the salvation of God.—Mark another thing in these verses: the Lord said Go, and Elijah went! Not, Elijah objected; Elijah reasoned; Elijah pointed out the difficulties; but simply Elijah went. That is the true ideal of life. Always be ready. Contrast with this the case of Jonah. Elijah had no fear of Ahab. He who fears God cannot fear man. If you go up to your duties in your own strength you will find them difficult; if you come down upon them from high communion with God you will find them easy.

The governor of the house of Ahab was called Obadiah. The word Obadiah means "servant of Jehovah," and it would seem to have been a true description of the man, for we read that "Obadiah feared (or revered) the Lord greatly" (v. 3). In verses 3 to 16, we have the conversation between Elijah and Obadiah.

"And Ahab called Obadiah, which was the governor of his house. (Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly: For it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.) And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive; that we lose not all the beasts. So they divided the land between them to

pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself. And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, Art thou that my lord Elijah? And he answered him, I am: go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here. And he said, What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me? As the Lord thy God liveth, there is no nation nor kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee and when they said, He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not. And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here. And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of the Lord shall carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me: but I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth. Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the Lord, how I hid an hundred men of the Lord's prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water? And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here: and he shall slay me. And Elijah said, As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him today. So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah."

What are the general lessons as affecting Ahab, Obadiah, and Elijah? Some of them are these:—

1. It is possible for a man to be very bad in one direction and very tolerant in another. It was so in the case of Ahab. He was the worst of the kings of Israel, yet he kept a governor over his house who feared the Lord greatly.

2. The Lord causes the most wicked men to pay his religion the homage which is due to its excellence. A bad king employs a good governor! He who himself disobeys Jehovah yet engages a servant who fears the Lord greatly.—The thief likes an honest man for steward.—The blasphemer likes a godly teacher for his child.—The great speculator prefers an unspeculative man for book-keeper. It is thus that virtue has many unconscious votaries.

3. He who is the slave of idolatry becomes an easy prey to the power of cruel tempters. We do not know that Ahab was a cruel man, but we do know that Jezebel was a cruel woman, and Ahab was greatly influenced by his passionate and sanguinary wife. Ahab's provocation of the Lord (xvi. 33) may have been in the direction of idolatry alone: but to be wrong in your conception of worship is to expose yourself to every

possible attack of the enemy. To pray in the wrong direction is to be weak in every other.

4. Ahab was a speculative idolater, Jezebel was a practical persecutor; Ahab showed that speculative error is consistent with social toleration. You must distinguish between Ahab and Elijah in this matter. It was Jezebel who slew the prophets of the Lord (v. 13), and Ahab knew that his servant Obadiah had hidden fifty of these prophets in a cave, and yet Ahab kept Obadiah in his service.—Redeeming points do not restore the whole character.—“One swallow does not make a summer.”

5. In the same character may be met great faith and great doubt. Obadiah risked his life to save fifty of the prophets of the Lord, yet dare not risk it, without first receiving an oath, for the greatest prophet of all! This mixture we find in every human character. “How abject, how august is man!”

In Ahab, Obadiah, Elijah, and Jezebel, we see a fourfold type of human society; there is the speculator, the godly servant, the far-seeing prophet, the cruel persecutor. Society has got no further than this to-day. The Ahabs of the age are leading us away into speculation that ends in idolatry and in infinite provocation of the Lord; the Obadias of the age are still praying, and serving God, and saving even the worst households from the wrath of heaven; the Elijahs of the age are still hurling their divine thunders through the corrupt and stagnant air, and piercing with lightning shafts the gloomy and threatening future; and the Jezebels of the age are still narrow, bitter, indignant, vengeful, and sanguinary. O wondrous combination! So checked, so controlled, by invisible but benignant power. Speculative error has its counterpart in actual cruelty, and patient worship has its counterpart in daring service.

Application: (1) Be the servant of the Lord; (2) To-day, Christ calls for faithful testimony; (3) If we suffer with Christ we shall also reign with him.

1 Kings xviii. 17-40.

ELIJAH'S CHALLENGE.

WE have said that Ahab was a speculative idolater rather than a cruel persecutor. Jezebel acted the part of cruelty; Ahab acted the part of unbeliever and spiritual rebel generally. A proof of the probable correctness of this view is found in the incident before us. When Ahab met Elijah he did not show a spirit of cruelty. He said unto the prophet, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? He did not threaten him with the sword; he did not demand his immediate surrender and arrest; he seems rather to have looked upon Elijah with wonder, perhaps not unmixed with admiration of a figure so independent and audacious. The tone of Ahab's mind may be inferred from the kind of challenge which he accepted. It exactly suited his speculative genius. Elijah proposed a trial between himself and the idolatrous prophets, eight hundred and fifty in number, proposing that the god that answered by fire should be God. The idea instantly commended itself to Ahab as excellent. He liked the high and practical speculation. He was fond of intellectual combat, and he warmed at the notion of a holy fray. The man who could accept a notion of this kind was not cruel, or wild, or fond of human blood. Ahab was even wickedly religious; the more altars and groves the better,—yea, altar upon altar, until the pile reached to heaven, and grove after grove, until the line met itself again and formed a cordon round the world. If he had started from a right centre, Ahab would have been the foremost evangelist in the ancient Church.

Let us now look at the controversy itself.

This plan was proposed by the prophet of the Lord, and not by the servants of Baal. Truth addresses a perpetual challenge to all false religions and all wicked and incompetent workers. Its challenges have heightened and broadened in tone

from the first ages until now. Moses challenged the necromancers of Egypt, Elijah challenged the priests of Baal, Christ challenges the world. At first the challenge was more strictly physical, now it is intensely spiritual. What religion produces the highest and finest type of character? That is the challenging question! That sane men should prefer a display of physical power or skill to a spiritual contest is an illustration of the infancy and rudeness of their minds, not a proof of the best form of competition. Where, in Christian or in pagan lands, have we the finest men, the purest character, the most sensitive honour? Where are schools, hospitals, asylums, and charities of every kind most abundant? That Christian countries are disgraced by some of the foulest crimes possible in human life, may but show that their very foulness and atrocity never could have been so vividly seen and so cruelly felt but for the enlightenment and culture furnished by Christianity. In any other countries they would have been matters of course; in Christian lands their abomination is seen by the help of Christian light.

The appeal or challenge was forced upon the prophets of Baal; it was not spontaneously accepted by them. This should be made very clear, as it is a point apt to be overlooked. Perhaps the common impression is that Elijah challenged the prophets directly, standing face to face with them, without any medium of communication. Nothing of the kind. Elijah first challenged king Ahab, and he snatched eagerly at the sensational chance, little knowing what he was snatching at! Having spoken first to the king, Elijah spoke next to the people, demanding why they hesitated between two opinions, and insisting that they should make a choice between Jehovah and Baal. Then Elijah made his grand appeal to the people of Israel, and they answered and said, "It is well spoken;" then having secured the approval of the king and of the people, Elijah called upon the prophets to proceed to trial.

To-day Christianity appeals not to a few sectarian prophets, or a few bewildered speculators, nor to a few scientists who are wild with boy-like joy because they have found a bird's-nest, but have never seen the bird that built it; Christianity makes its appeal to the great, broad heart of human nature, to

the common sufferings of the race, to the indestructible sentiments of mankind—to the people first and the prophets next, and calls upon the people in all their multitudinousness to force their mumbling prophets to bring the mumble that chokes their throat to distinct and calculable articulation, and to compare the noise of charlatanism with the music of divine teaching. In Elijah's day the people said, "It is well spoken," and of Christ it is said, "The common people heard him gladly." Christianity speaks to sorrowing souls; not to the riddles which perplex a brain here and there, but to the agonies that strain and torture the universal heart.

Full opportunity has been given to men to show the worth of their idolatries and superstitions. In this controversy the prophets of Baal had the first chance. Elijah stood back that they might do their best. False religions cannot complain that they have not had field enough. And what has been the result? Invocation enough (v. 26), leaping enough upon the altar (v. 26), bleeding enough with knives and lancets (v. 28), time enough—even from the morning to the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice (v. 29), and no answer! "There was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded" (v. 29). It is precisely so with every false creed, every false science, every false prophet to-day. There is nothing to show! All effort ends in silence. Prodigious exertions finish in prodigious emptiness. Of every teacher, other than Christian, we ask: Where are the sinners whom you have released from the torment of remorse? Where are the mourners whose tears you have dried? Where are the graves on which you have planted the flower of a happy resurrection? Where are the answers of your gods, that we may examine them, test them, and see how they came out of the fire of daily trial? Millions of men praise Christ. Sinners will stand up thick as armies, filling the valleys, thronging the hills, declaring that in Christ they have found the joy of pardon. Mourners will declare that he has dried their tears. Souls that had no life will say with thankful joy that Christ rekindled their lamp when the fierce wind had blown it out. This is the strength and glory of Christianity—that living witnesses attest its power and proclaim its infinite sufficiency.

Every assault upon truth must bring mockery and death upon the assailants. Elijah mocked the prophets on Carmel and slew them at Kishon. Such is the inevitable fate of the Lord's enemies! It is right to address mocking challenges to the teachers of false doctrine, and it is right to slay them; not to slay them with the sword, but with argument, with consistency, with the zeal of inextinguishable consecration, with faith that cannot be impaired by the most insidious or the most rampant scepticism. It is the eternal necessity of things that men who oppose themselves to truth must either repent or perish.

The appeal comes to us with overwhelming force to-day. How long halt ye between two opinions? It cannot be that there is the slightest doubt as to the truth of Christianity. It cannot be that the understanding is in darkness. It cannot be that the argument is incomplete. It cannot be for want of open and positive and triumphant proof. It can only be because we love wickedness, and roll under our tongues the iniquity which intoxicates the senses and damns the soul.

SELECTED NOTE.

The Exact Site of the Carmel Contest.—Van de Velde gives a vivid delineation of the precise locality. He was, it is believed, the first traveller who identified the site of the "Burning."

"One can scarcely imagine a spot better adapted for the thousands of Israel to have stood drawn up on than the gentle slopes around. The rock shoots up in an almost perpendicular wall of more than two hundred feet in height on the side of the vale of Esdrelon. On this side, therefore, there was no room for the gazing multitude, but, on the other hand, this wall made it visible over the whole plain, and from all the surrounding heights, so that even those left behind, and who had not ascended Carmel, would still have been able to witness, at no great distance, the fire from heaven that descended on the altar. . . . Here we were certain the place *must* have been, for it is the only point of all Carmel where Elijah could have been so close to the brook Kishon as to take down thither the priests of Baal and slay them, return again to the mountain and pray for rain, all in the short space of the same afternoon. Nowhere does the Kishon run so close to Mount Carmel as just beneath *El-Mohhraka* (the place of the Burning). . . . Two hundred and fifty feet beneath the altar plateau is a vaulted and very abundant fountain. In such springs the water remains always cool, under the shade of a vaulted roof, and with no hot atmosphere to evaporate it. While all other fountains were dried up, I can well understand that there might have been found here that superabundance of water which Elijah poured so profusely over the altar."

1 Kings xviii. 30-46.

30. And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down.

31. And Elijah took 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 :

32. And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord : and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed.

33. And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood.

34. And he said, Do it the second time. And they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time. And they did it the third time.

35. And the water ran round about the altar ; and he filled the trench also with water.

36. And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word.

37. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and thou hast turned their heart back again.

38. Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.

39. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces : and they said, The Lord, he is the God ; the Lord, he is the God.

40. And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal ; let not one of them escape. And they took them : and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there.

41. ¶ And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink ; for there is a sound of abundance of rain.

42. So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel ; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees,

43. And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times.

44. And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there

ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not.

45. And it came to pass in the mean while, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel.

46. And the hand of the Lord was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

ELIJAH'S SACRIFICE.

WHEN the worshippers of Baal had tired themselves, and had awakened no response in reply to their vehement prayer, it became Elijah's turn to prove the Lord God of Israel. At his bidding all the people came near, and he proceeded to redeem his own side of the challenge.

"And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down" (v. 30). Let us recall the circumstances. Elijah is alone, religiously, upon Carmel; all the prophets of Baal were there, and all the prophets of the grove. Not only were they present, they were also highly excited. The day has gone against them. Whatever happened now could tell nothing in their favour. Ahab was there, in all probability. Great numbers of people were there. Unless Obadiah was there, not a man in all the host sympathised with Elijah. And yet the lonely prophet proceeded to build the altar of the Lord that was broken down. The altar of the Lord had been thrown down by the fury of the people, and Elijah put it together again stone by stone. The Lord could have answered without an altar, but why should human means be spared? The Lord could grow harvests for us, but why should we be spared the labour of tilling the ground? The very act of ploughing does us good; so does the act of coming to church; so does every effort that lies in the line of duty. Elijah would be stronger to pray from the fact that he had been engaged in building the altar. Prayer comes well after work. Why build an altar on a lonely mountain when it could be used only once, and then be done with for ever? Why not have built it in a city where it could have been used from year to year? It would be worth while to build the largest and costliest cathedral ever reared by human hands, if but one sinner were converted in it—one soul turned to Christ—and then the edifice

built of precious stones were thrown down, or unroofed that it might be haunted by the wind. God knows nothing of our poor miserly economies. He sets a soul in price against the universe!

"And Elijah took 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" (v. 31).—But the kingdom was divided, and one part was called Judah, and yet Elijah speaks of Israel as one. We know the meaning well. There are grand occasions in life in which all differences, divisions, schisms, alienations, are sunk, and the true union is realised and proclaimed. England and America are no longer nationally one; monarchy and republicanism are a long way from one another; but there may arise controversies in the history of the world when the vital element that makes all Anglo-Saxon peoples one will assert itself, and bring many voices and many testimonies into the unity and emphasis of one mighty thunder. Elijah looked at Israel in its oldest and best aspects. Chargeable with serious defalcation it certainly was, yet he knew that in erecting that trial-altar he touched every nerve in the heart of undivided Israel, and made every son of Jacob a helper in his prayer.

Having made his preparations complete, and the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice having come,—the westering sun glowing upon Carmel, and the hush of a solemn expectancy falling upon the chagrined and wonderstruck mob of false prophets and their dupes, Elijah came near the altar and said—"Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word; hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again" (vv. 36, 37).—Notice what elements combine in this wonderful prayer: (*a*) What a drawing together into one body again of all that was pathetic in God's relationship to the past,—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, names that were ornaments and histories; a battle in every accent, a victory in every syllable! (*b*) What a projection of the past upon the destiny of the future: we make too little of the past; we grasp a hair when we might seize a cable,—when we pray, a thousand years should crowd their sacred triumphs into our supplications;

all the holy dead should swell the voice of our tender cry and make it thunder in heaven as a mighty appeal: when you pray your mother prays, and her mother, and a long line of womanly intercessors. (c) What a wonderful power of concentration, of asking for one thing, of making the point clear. Do we always know what we are praying for? Do we ask for many things, without asking for one in particular? Are there not occasions on which life narrows itself into one want and into one demand? (d) What an example of simple and direct argument in prayer! We are to put the case as we see it. We see its under side or earthly aspect. God asks us to tell him what we see; to urge the case from our own point of view; and having done so, we are to leave it in his hands. Elijah did so, and this was the result:—

“Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench” (v. 38).—Regarding this as an answer to prayer let us see what there is to account for it—(a) A great occasion; the false prophets had been challenged; they were present to witness the result; a king and a nation had been appealed to. (b) A holy character; Elijah was not an experimentalist, not a speculator; he was a holy man tried and proved, and held in high esteem in heaven; it is constant holiness that flames out into exceptional and peculiar power. (c) A worthy object; it is for a distinct and indisputable revelation of God, and this revelation was required not so much for an intellectual as for a moral purpose, namely that the heart of the people might be turned back to God. Thus however sensational (to use a word that is often mis-applied) may have been the mere method of the answer, there are round about the whole incident reasons of the simplest and weightiest nature.

So much for the prayer for fire; it will be interesting to contrast with this the prayer of the same prophet for water. Elijah went up once more to the top of Carmel, and prayed unto the Lord for rain. The prayer for fire was answered at once; the prayer for water was not. By putting the two instances together we shall see how they explain one another, and what a striking argument for their common probability is established. Notice as

the fundamental fact that the prayer for fire was answered instantaneously, and that the prayer for water was not answered until it had been offered seven times.

1. There was an urgency in the one case which there was not in the other. The king was waiting ; so were the prophets ; so were the people ; it is an unprecedented crisis in the history of the nation. In the case of the rain, the prophet was alone ; no immediate expectancy on the part of the public was to be answered.

2. We are not to live in the unusual and the exciting, but in the ordinary and regular. It was good for Elijah himself to be taught that he was only a suppliant, not the Lord. God has always been sparing of his exceptional manifestations. Christ was sparing in his miracles : he never did them merely for the sake of doing them. Elijah was but human, and if he had always received the same instantaneous reply that was given in the case of the fire his very power in prayer might have become a temptation. It is in the nature of man to push his success towards disastrous ends.

3. No human imagination would have risked such a conjunction of immediateness and delay as is given in this chapter. Such a contrary act on the part of God is a simple impossibility to the imagination. It amounts to what is called, sometimes foolishly, a discrepancy or contradiction. Yet it is the very law of the mystery of our life ! We live it, but dare not imagine it ! Great honours are followed by great reverses to keep us sober. God will not bring his way within the sweep of our reckoning ; he will not admit us into his secret places ; we see part of his way ; a whisper of his method we may hear, but not the thunder of his power.

Out of this reasoning comes the high probability of the historical and literal truthfulness of the whole narrative. Literary completeness there is none. No attempt is made to satisfy the suggestions of fancy. All tricks of management, all skill in artistic disposal of incident is ignored, and truth is left to attest and vindicate its reality.

1 Kings xix.

ELIJAH AT HOREB.

WE have seen how Elijah treated the prophets of Baal; he laid them under arrest, brought them down to the brook Kishon and slew them there. It was the Old Testament way of expressing religious indignation. We do not read that the Lord had commanded this slaughter, nor are we informed that he approved it. Still, we may not blame Elijah, for we do not know under what inspiration he proceeded in making this onslaught. It is not so that false prophets are to be treated now. We have learned that error cannot be put down by force; and that even religion itself is not to be upheld by the infliction of pains and penalties on unbelievers.

Observe the action of Ahab as confirming the view we have taken of his character. We have regarded him as a man of speculation rather than as a man of action,—a kind of religious Hamlet. Instead of taking immediate vengeance upon Elijah, he went and told Jezebel! He turned it (as Hamlet would have done) into poetry, or into romance, for the hearing of Jezebel his wife. Observe carefully what he did. He told Jezebel all that Elijah had done; all about the challenge, the gathering of the prophets, the building of the altars, the useless cries of the Baalites, the prayer of Elijah, the sudden answer of fire, and the loud cry of the astounded people—"The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God." What effect had this narration upon Jezebel? None whatever. Her prejudices were too inveterate to be touched by such romance. She curled the lip of indignant scorn as her speculative Hamlet raved in poetic frenzy; but when Ahab turned from the purely religious and speculative side, and told how Elijah had "slain all the prophets with the sword," then Jezebel was stung to madness, and she sent a

messenger in hot haste to Elijah saying—"So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time." Now let us see what Elijah did:—

"And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there" (v. 3).

There is wonderful excitement in this verse. The action of Elijah is the action of a man who is suddenly stung, and who, feeling the maddening pain, springs to his feet, and runs with eager speed from the scene of danger. There is no deliberation in this movement. Elijah fled, as we should flee from fire. There is no consulting of personal dignity; no regard for appearances; he who confronted Ahab ran away from the threat of a priest's daughter and a king's wife, a woman in whom seemed to burn the fire and brimstone of perdition.

Elijah wanted to die, yet was unwilling to be murdered. There is all the difference between the two states of mind. To be taken away by the Lord is one thing, to consent to be killed is another. This request on the part of Elijah suggests: (1) The frailty of the greatest human strength; (2) The utter inability of human power to eradicate the corruption of the heart; (3) The superhuman grandeur of Christ in coming to do what could not be done by Moses, by Elijah, by Jonah.—Elijah did not die, except the temporary death of sleep. Gracious sleep!—"Tired nature's sweet restorer." "If he sleep, he shall do well." God "giveth his beloved sleep." In his sleep an angel touched him.* In our sleep we are somewhere between two worlds. We cannot tell where we are! It is a hint of the infinite. It is the beginning of immortality! Our hearing is then at its best—so is our seeing; we are close to God—close to liberty.

The angel came to Elijah, and made ready food for him, and bade him arise and eat. Elijah was about to wander in the desert forty days, and he needed strengthening. Elijah had his food before he entered the wilderness, Christ had it after he had

* As to the ministry of angels: see Gen. xviii. 2-16, xix. 1-22, xxviii. 12; Judg. vi. 11-21, xiii. 3-20.

been there forty days. An angel brought food to Elijah, the devil tempted Christ to make bread. Thus our experiences are realised in different ways. We begin at opposite points. But we all have, in some degree, and with various faculty, to struggle with the same difficulties, ponder the same problems, face the same mysteries, and press forward (if in earnest) towards "the mount of God."

Having arrived at Horeb, the prophet hid himself in a cave,—possibly in the cleft of the rock where Moses stood to see the intolerable splendour. (Exod. xxxiii. 22.) As he tarried there, the word of the Lord came to him in a vision during the night, saying, What doest thou here, Elijah? And to this inquiry the prophet answered:—

"I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away" (v. 10).

Was this cowardice? No. Was it want of faith? No. What was it, then? It was re-action. Remember the strain to which Elijah had been put. There are prayers which leave us weak. There are victories so complete as to touch the point of defeat. Elijah was not sure that he had done right in slaying the prophets. Was it because he had slain the prophets that God did not answer the prayer for rain as immediately as he had answered the prayer for fire? With a woman's instinct Jezebel had touched the only weak point in the whole case; before receiving her message he was accusing himself as to the slaughter; her message came just at the critical moment, and the word was too much for the strength that had been so strained.

Observe the marvellous working of divine providence, even here. Why does Jezebel send warning? Why does she delay for a whole day? Why not take instant revenge? It is thus that God puts his hook into the leviathan, and turns to confusion the counsel of the ungodly. He "restrains the wrath of man." "With every trial he makes a way of escape." He draws a line beyond which our weak fury cannot pass. Jezebel takes a day for perfecting her plans, and in that day Elijah escapes beyond the bounds of her power. God has made a way of escape for us,

did we but know it! A city of refuge—from temptation, fear, peril, sin—is at hand. Let us flee into it, and defy the pursuer!

"But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness [southward, beyond the territory of Judah], and came and sat down under a juniper tree [a species of broom which grows to a very large size]; and he requested for himself that he might die [as Moses did (Numb. xi. 15); as Jonah did (Jonah iv. 3)], and said: It is enough. Now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers [I am a mere weak man, and I can make nothing better of a perverse and irreclaimable world]" (v. 4).

In this answer Elijah does two things: (1) He exaggerates his own importance by his jealousy. The Lord is independent of the best of his servants; his kingdom is not a creation of ours. (2) He puts himself into a false position by his ignorance. He speaks of himself as the only living prophet, forgetting the hundred saved by Obadiah, and not knowing the resources of God.—Poor soul, he needed rest. He was strife-worn; the day of contest had strained him, and he needed the slumber which is re-creation. Surely the Lord will speak to him as a tired man. He will bow the heavens gently over the prophet's head, and attune his voice to the man's weariness.

"And he said, Go forth and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And behold the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?" (vv. 11-13).

Let us note: (1) The Lord's resources: Wind, thunder, fire, tempest, earthquake, pestilence,—terrible are the hosts of the Lord!

(2) The Lord's considerateness: He did not smite, or dazzle, or confound; he whispered as one would whisper to a child affrighted in sleep. "He tempers the wind to the shorn lamb." The Lord is very pitiful. "A bruised reed will he not break." "He knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust."

(3) The Lord's method of judgment: he makes the man who is judged state his own case in his own words. This is more severe than it may at first appear. The answer may be in some sort a self-justification, but the Lord turns it against the pleader and condemns him out of his own mouth.

But Elijah was not to die ignominiously. He was called to farther service, even to anoint kings and prophets! And he who supposed himself to be alone was to hear of seven thousand men—a symbolical number vaster than itself—a very army of soldiers mighty in the cause which Elijah was abandoning as forlorn!

SELECTED NOTE.

No incident, perhaps, has fastened itself more strongly on the memory and imagination of Christians than that recorded in this wonderful history; and we, through light thrown upon it by the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, can see further into its spiritual meaning than Elijah could.

The narrative, read by the help of the New Testament, tells us more than sensible impressions of mind, earthquake, and fire could, even when followed by "a still small voice"—"a sound of soft stillness," as the original signifies. Elijah was a prophet of truth, but of sternness and terror. He lived in a tempestuous atmosphere. Lightning seems to play around his temples, and his voice was as thunder. Fire consumed his very soul, as the fire brought down from heaven did his sacrifice on the altar, and the dust and water of the trench; and also the fifty threatening messengers of Samaria's king, as the prophet "sat on the top of the hill."

The preceding manifestations indicated wrath and punishment; but the inspired penman of the story had authority to say that the Lord was *not* in that wind, that earthquake, that fire; that he did not come to Elijah in a spirit, like that which he had shown before, but as "a sound of soft stillness"—a whisper, like an evening breeze—like an Æolian harp. "The acted parable," it has been said, "is in fact an anticipation of the evangelical rule—a condemnation of that "zeal" which Elijah had gloried in, a zeal exhibiting itself in fierce and terrible vengeance, and an exaltation and recommendation of that mild and gospel temper which beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

Yet it must be remembered that what is inappropriate at one time or place is needed at another. The Church wants Elijahs as well as Elishas, Boanerges as well as Barnabas, Luther as well as Melancthon. Nor should it be forgotten that, even after "the still small voice" suited to soothe a troubled soul, to quench the disappointment and murmuring of the disappointed servant of God, he had a message given of mingled tones. He was to anoint Elisha in his own room—a man of gentle mien after a son of thunder; but his own mission includes the anointing of an Hazael and a Jehu, both out of harmony with "a still small voice;" and room is left for a sweep of the sword of Hazael, and the sword of a Jehu.

We must take the Bible as we find it, and study the progress and development of revelation. God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in times past unto the fathers, by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son. "Hear ye him," said the voice on the Mount of Transfiguration, when Moses and Elijah had vanished, and the disciples saw Jesus only. "Hear ye him," not Moses and Elijah, whose revelations had prepared for, but had been swallowed up in, his. The great and strong wind which rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord, "the earthquake and the fire," were typical of much which Elijah had to do; but "the still small voice" is typical of the dispensation under which we live. And so, as it quells our fears and kindles our hopes, and sheds down upon us the calmest joys, like fine rain on the mown grass, it should also breathe on us its own loving spirit, and move us to the cultivation of a charity, such as Paul so exquisitely describes in his first letter to the Corinthians.—JOHN STROUGHTON, D.D.

PRAYER.

I **WILL** lift up mine eyes unto the hills, whence cometh my help; my help cometh from the Lord of hosts, which made heaven and earth. The tender mercies of the Lord are over all his work; his mercy endureth for ever. There is no place on all the earth on which his smile doth not alight. Thou fillest the earth with morning; thou blessest the land with the benediction of noonday; thou dost curtain the earth with darkness and give all its people rest. The Lord is gracious, full of compassion, most tender in pity; he weeps over the cities which reject him; he mingles his tears with those who shed their sorrow over the open grave. The Lord is good and pitiful, looking upon us through his tears, and showing mercy upon us, upon the scale of an infinite compassion. Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. Thou wilt not quench the smoking flax; thou wilt not break the bruised reed. Thou dost stoop to lift up the little child; thou art merciful beyond all our dreams of pity: God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life,—astounding love! marvellous beyond all imagining! We must die to know its meaning: we must read the entirety of its purpose in the cloudless light and everlasting time of heaven. Give us thy peace, thou peaceful One; make us quiet with the rest of God; drive away all torments, anxieties, and fears, that would trouble the depth of our tranquillity; let there be Sabbath in the heart—a holy eventide, with all its mystery of light, in the innermost recesses of the spirit. Hold thou thy cross before our eyes in the night-time, and let it be a light above the brightness of the sun at noonday, and all the while may our hearts gaze upon it, and beholding its meaning, our life shall take comfort and be young again, and strong with eternal energy. Let us enter into the meaning of thy peace; it is a peace which passeth understanding: no words can follow it with adequate expressiveness; it is the mystery of the universe. May we enter into it by the wide open door of Christ's priesthood and Christ's atonement. Amen.

1 Kings xx. 28.

"And there came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus said the Lord, Because the Syrians have said, The Lord is God of the hills, but he is not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the Lord."

THE UNIVERSAL GOD.

THIS was the profound mistake which the Syrian soldiers made. We fear that the whole world is making the same mistake. What, if on inquiry it should be proved that we have a partial religion, a religion useful here but useless there, an admirable contemplation for Sunday, but a grievous burden for Monday? What if we practically reverse the Syrian conception, and say that the Lord is God of the valleys but not God of the hills? That we want him in dark and dangerous places, but we can fight for ourselves in open places and on the tops of the breezy hills?

Is it an erroneous supposition that most of us have a God who is called in on special occasions, and that few of us live and move and have our being in a God that encloses and protects and trains to high purposes the whole life, body, soul, and spirit? Is ours a local or a universal God? Does he occupy the hills always, or the valleys alone, or does he fill all things with the fulness and silence of light?

There are those who confine him to the hills of speculation, but exclude him from the valleys of daily life. They are the intellectual patrons and flatterers of God. He is too great to be realised. He is the Supreme Thought, the Infinite Conception, the Unconditioned Absolute, and various other magnificent inanities. According to their view, he cannot be brought down to daily experience, or take any immediate part in the common progress of life. He is grand, but useless. He is glorious, but unapproachable. His sanctuary is on hills that cannot be climbed, or in clouds that cannot be entered; but he has no agency in the valleys.

Then there are those who recognise God in the valleys of trouble, but ignore him on the hills of strength and joy. They call him in professionally. He is kept for the hour of distress. They use religion as a night-bell which they can pull in times of exigency. He is sympathetic, pensive, helpful, but in the hour of progress and festival and conquest, he is neither needed nor called for. They are partially right, and in that very fact is their **great danger**. They make a convenience of God, and they can

quote Scripture for the sake of the uses to which they put him. It is true that God is the God of the valleys. When the life-road suddenly dips into steep and perilous places, when it turns sharply into thick jungles where wild beasts roar and cruel birds scream in the hot wind ; where it so narrows itself that only one can go forward at a time, and the kindest of strong friends must helplessly walk behind ; when it terminates in the deep grave, without a singing bird in the air or a waft of summer flowers in the bitter wind ; then God shines upon it mile by mile, and makes its end the starting point of an everlasting ascent. All this is true, but it is only part of the truth. God has to do as intimately with our prosperity as with our adversity. "The Lord God giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous; he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly." Our breath is in our nostrils, and our light is the daily gift of God. "The strength of the hills" is God's, and his are the munitions of rocks.

It is the very glory of religion in its most intelligent conception that it comprehends and blesses the *whole life*. From this fact it draws one of its most powerful defensive arguments. Sometimes upon reading an attack upon the Christian faith we feel that its power wholly depends upon its mistaken estimate of the case with which it deals. If life were a short straight line, beginning and ending at points which the eye can clearly see ; if it were an easy game which every mind can at once comprehend ; if it were a competition in business, or a race on an open road and upon equal terms, nothing would be easier than to show the positive needlessness of the whole apparatus which is called religious. In order to make any infidel theory even seem to be good we must narrow and dwarf and impoverish *the life* which it seeks to rule and direct. We must make that life a straight line ; we must ignore its mysteries, and exclude its future ; we must silence its most urgent and penetrating inquiries ; and having completed those acts of mutilation, it will be easy enough to invent a theory to meet its mean necessities.

What is this life for which any religion that is true has to provide ? It is no easy riddle. It is easy enough to invent a theory

or an outfit for *one* side of it ; but we want a doctrine that will involve and ennoble its entirety. What is this life ? What is its origin ? Look at the impulses which excite it ; add up into some nameable total the forces which operate upon it ; and bring under one law the ambitions which lure or goad it into its most daring activities. Here is a hunger which no bread can satisfy. Here is an imagination which conquers the visible and longs to penetrate the unseen. In the breast is an eager suppliant that will not be forbidden to pray. What are those wondrous trials which strain the life to cruelty, and say they have come for its purification ? Bar the gate never so surely, the black affliction will open it and come straight up to the house and enter its brightest rooms. Close the windows, yet the storm will batter upon them and pour its drenching floods upon the gladdest hearthstone. What is this life ? It can curse and pray ; it can descend to beasthood ; it can fit itself for heaven ; it can write poems in ink, build them in stone, paint them in colour : and it can drink away its genius and die in lunacy.

And what is the *hereafter* of this multiplied life ? Does it go out like a spark ? Does it perish like a dog ? Does it burst like a bubble ? Or does it go forward to new scenes, grow up into nobler power, study profounder questions, and culminate in the very holiness of God ? These are some of the questions which the life asks of itself. These are monologues. These are not questions suggested from the outside, they come up out of the very centre of the soul, and are the very soul itself translated into anxious but mocking words.

Thus that which is emphatically false of the true religion is emphatically true of every religion that is false. The false religion is God of the hills but not God of the valleys. The superficial theory is excellent in fine weather, but useless in foul. It is pleasant in prosperity, it is helpless in adversity. It can swell our laughter, it cannot dry our tears. This is the proof of the true religion—that it encompasses with infinite sufficiency the whole life, is equally strong at every point. It can run with the footmen ; it can keep pace with the horses ; and it can subdue into peace the swellings of Jordan.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD we bless thee for all good men, strong and wise, pure and tender; men who have despised money when the exchange was not to be wrought except by sacrifice of conviction. We bless thee for the men who have held by their vineyards because of their fathers' memories. We thank thee for all elevating sentiment, all noble impulse, all high enthusiasm. Thou thyself hast blessed it, and though for a moment it has been baffled and persecuted and vanquished, it has returned in fuller vitality, it has shone with nobler splendour. We thank thee for all men who have kept alive in the nations a sense of what is due to God. We bless thee for every hint of the existence of thy throne; and we thank thee, for the men of courage who in the night-time and in the storm, in the great darkness and the horrible tempest, have said with steady voice, The Lord reigneth. Enable us to hear all good voices, and to answer them gladly and gratefully. May we never be amongst those who will take down the flag in the presence of the enemy. The Lord grant unto all standard-bearers life, health, and increasing power, that they may be able to speak the right word at the right time and in the right tone, and thus keep men, who would waver because of mental and spiritual fickleness, steady and consistent. We thank thee for all high examples; for all the sweet music of home that makes us love the fireside as a sacred altar. We bless thee for all the influences which lift us upward; for all prayers addressed to thy great throne in the name of Christ, which give us hope in despair, and which are returned to us as cordial and balm and tonic in the day of weakness and fear. We thank thee for all good books, for all true teaching, for all friendly counsel tending in an upward and heavenly direction. May we be supported unto the end; at the very last may we be more than conquerors, having strength to spare, and able to enjoy the conquest which by thy grace we have won. We mourn our fickleness and inconstancy, and our hesitation in presence of evil. We have not always been strong men. Sometimes we have listened as if we intended to understand the evil one, instead of answering him with fire and smiting him with the thunder of God. We have done the things we ought not to have done, we have left undone the things we ought to have done; but, still, that we know this to be a fact, and that we acknowledge it contritely is itself the beginning of a new and gladsome hope. We thank thee for the great Christ of God, who never faltered, who hardened his face that he might go to Jerusalem, who knew that he was to be baptised with a baptism of blood, but turned not aside because of fear. We bless thee for his struggle in Gethsemane—a struggle which expressed its agony in great drops of blood; we thank thee for the Nevertheless with which he won the victory. We bless thee for that second prayer of his in which he enlarged the first, and in which he plucked the sword from heaven with which he

smote the foe. May we follow this blessed Christ, Emmanuel, Saviour of the world, who understood the mystery of blood, the power of sacrifice, and the glorious significance of the cross. He endured the cross, despising the shame; he was despised and rejected of men; but he never left the throne, or forswore his cause. O that we may follow him, and be like him, and repeat his life according to the measure of our capacity and the quality of our spirit. The Lord hear us, and astonish us with great replies! Amen.

1 Kings xxi.

NABOTH'S VINEYARD.

WE sometimes hear that Ahab was a covetous man: are we quite sure that the charge is just and that it can be substantiated? How could he be covetous? He proposed terms, saying, "Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money" (v. 2). The terms do not upon the face of them appear to be unreasonable or inapplicable. Surely this is not mere covetousness, if covetousness at all? The vineyard was close to the palace, and that fact was assigned as a reason for wishing to open negotiations concerning its transfer. But do we not sometimes too narrowly interpret the word covetousness? It is generally at least limited to money. When a man is fond of money, wishes to add to it, and is not scrupulous as to the means by which he seeks to enhance his fortune, we describe him as covetous. The term is perfectly applicable in such a case. But the term "covetous" may apply to a much larger set of circumstances, and describe quite another set of impulses and desires. We may even be covetous of personal appearance; we may be covetous of popular fame, such as is enjoyed by other men; we may be covetous in every direction which implies the gratification of our own wishes; and yet with regard to the mere matter of money we may be almost liberal. This is an astounding state of affairs. A man may be liberal with money, and yet covetous in many other directions. Sometimes when covetousness takes this other turn we describe it by the narrower word envy: we say we envy the personal appearance of some, we envy the greatness and the public standing of others. But under all this envy is covetousness. Envy is in a sense but a symptom: covetousness

is the vital and devouring disease. Under this interpretation of the term, therefore, it is not unfit or unjust to describe Ahab as a covetous man.

Look at his dissatisfaction with circumstances. He wishes to have "a garden of herbs." That is all! He is king of Israel in Samaria; but there is one little thing of which he has not yet possessed himself, and until he gets that into his hand he cannot rest well: there is a dream that troubles him, there is a nightmare that makes him afraid to lie down to sleep. Look at what he has: who can measure it? Who can run through the enumeration of his possessions? Who can take an exhaustive inventory of all the riches of the king of Israel? But there is one little corner that is not his, and he wants it, and until he can get it all the rest goes for nothing. The great Alexander could not rest in his palace at Babylon because he could not get ivy to grow in his garden. What was Babylon, or all Assyria, in view of the fact that this childish king could not cause ivy to grow in the palace gardens? Ahab lived in circumstances: he lived in the very narrowest kind of circumstances; as a little man, he lived in little things, and because those things were not all to his mind it was impossible for him to be restful or noble or really good. Once let the mind become dissatisfied with some trifling circumstance, and that fly spoils the whole pot of ointment. Once get the notion that the house is too small, and then morning, noon, and night you never see a picture that is in it, or acknowledge the comfort of one corner in all the little habitation: the one thing that is present in the mind throughout all the weary hours is that the house is too small. Once get the idea that the business is undignified, and you go to it late in the morning, and leave it early in the afternoon, and neglect it between times, and are ashamed to speak of it, and will not throw your whole heart and soul during business hours into its execution. Once get the notion that the neighbourhood is unfashionable, and it goes for nothing that the rooms are large and airy, that the garden is one of the best you ever had, that there is ample scope for a rich library, that all the neighbours are men of peculiar intelligence and goodness; all go for nothing, because the tempter has said, This neighbourhood is not a fashionable quarter of the town, and when people come to know that you are living here they will

lose confidence in you and respect for you. If we live in circumstances, we shall be the sport of events; we shall be without dignity, without calmness, without reality and solidity of character; let us, therefore, betake ourselves into inner thoughts, into spirituality of life, into the soul's true character, into the very sanctuary of God: there we shall have truth and light and peace; there the stormy wind cannot disturb us, and the great darkness is but an outside circumstance, for within there is the shining of the light of God.

Then notice in Ahab a childish servility to circumstances. "Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased . . . and he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread" (v. 4). Yet he was the king of Israel in Samaria! He actually had subjects under him. He was in reality a man who could give law, whose very look was a commandment, and the uplifting of his hand could move an army. Now we see him surely at his least. So we do, but not at his worst. All this must have an explanation. We cannot imagine that the man is so simply childish and foolish as this incident alone would describe him. Behind all this childishness there is an explanation. What is it? We find it in verse 25:—"But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up." That explains the whole mystery. The man had sold himself to the devil. And men are doing that self-same thing every day. If it were a transaction in the market-place—if the auctioneer were visibly interested in this affair, if he could call out in audible tones "so much is the price, and the man is about to take it;" people would shrink from the villanous transaction. But this is an affair which does not take place in the open market or in the open daylight. It is not conducted in words. If the men involved in such transactions could speak the words, the very speech of the words might break the spell and destroy the horrible infatuation. But the compact is made in darkness, in silence, in out-of-the-way places. It is an understanding unwritten, rather than an agreement in detail signed in the presence of witnesses. It is a mystery which the heart alone can understand, which even the preacher cannot explain in terms · but he can only throw himself upon his own conscious-

ness, and throw others upon their consciousness, and call for a united testimony to the fact that it is possible to sell one's very soul to evil. Now we understand king Ahab better. We thought him but little, frivolous of mind, childish and petty, without a man's worthy ambition; but now we see that all this was but symptomatic, an outward sign, pointing, when rightly followed, to an inward and mortal corruption.

Now let us look at the case of Naboth and the position which he occupied in this matter. Naboth possessed the vineyard Ahab is said to have coveted. Naboth said, "The Lord forbid" (v. 3). He made a religious question of it. Why did he invoke the Eternal Name, and stand back as if an offence had been offered to his faith? The terms were commercial, the terms were not unreasonable, the approach was courteous, the ground given for the approach was not an unnatural ground,—why did Naboth stand back as if his religion had been shocked? The answer is in Numbers xxxvi. 7:—"So shall not the inheritance of the children of Israel remove from tribe to tribe: for every one of the children of Israel shall keep himself to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers." So Naboth stood upon the law. In Ezekiel, we read:—"Moreover the prince shall not take of the people's inheritance by oppression, to thrust them out of their possession; but he shall give his sons inheritance out of his own possession: that my people be not scattered every man from his possession" (xlvi. 18). So Naboth was not answering haughtily or resentfully; he was answering solemnly and religiously. When money was offered for his fathers' inheritance, he spurned the offer. There are some things, blessed be God, we cannot pay for. When Ahab said, "I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it," he knew not of what he was speaking. There can be no better vineyard than the vineyard of the fathers; there can be no vineyard equal to the vineyard that is sown with history, planted with associations, solemnised and endeared by a thousand precious memories. There ought to be some things we cannot barter. Surely there ought to be some things we should never try to sell. Verily when we hear propositions made to us that money shall be given in exchange for certain things, our whole soul should rise in horror and indignation, and repel the approach of a barter which itself

expresses an infinite because a most spiritual injustice. So Naboth's position was strong, and Naboth had the courage to answer the king in these terms. Kings must submit to law. Kings ought to be the subjects of their own people. Ahab was taught that there was a man in Samaria who valued the inheritance which had been handed down to him. Have we no inheritance handed down to us—no book of revelation, no day of rest, no flag of liberty, no password of common trust? Do we inherit nothing? Did we make the age as it is, and is civilisation a creature of our own fashioning? And are we not bound to hand on to others what was handed to us intact and unpolluted? Let us live in a sacred past, and regard ourselves as trustees of many possessions, and only trustees, and bound to vindicate our trust, and have an ample acquittal at the last.

So Ahab lay down upon his bed, turned away his face, and would eat no bread. But there is a way of accomplishing mean desires. There is a way of obtaining what we want. Take heart! there is a way of possessing oneself of almost whatever one desires. There is always some Merlin who will bring every Uther-Pendragon what he longs to have; there is always some Lady Macbeth who will show the thane how to become king. There is always a way to be bad! The gate of hell stands wide open, or if apparently half-closed a touch will make it fly back, and the road is broad that leadeth to destruction. Jezebel said she would find the garden or vineyard for her husband. She taunted him—"Dost thou now govern"—throwing into the word "govern" a subtle and significant emphasis—"the kingdom of Israel? Arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite" (v. 7)—and any number of vineyards: come to table, and be to-day as yesterday. How will she proceed? She will be ceremoniously religious:—"Proclaim a fast"; O thou sweet, white, pure religion, thou hast been forced into strange uses! "Proclaim a fast": lengthen your faces: mimic solemnity: promise your hunger an early satisfaction, but look as if you were fasting. It is a sure sign of mischief when certain men become serious. The moment they appear to be religious the devil is just adding the last touch to the building which he has been putting up within their souls. When they talk long words—when they

speaking about responsibility, obligation, duty, conscience, compulsion of conviction, they are walking over tessellated pavement into the very jaws of hell. They do not mean their words; they do but use them: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." First of all, then, be ceremoniously religious, Jezebel; then trample down truth: "Set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king" (v. 10). Falsehood is always ready. A great black lie is always willing to be loosed and to be set going in the minds of men to pervert them and mislead them. It is always open to the bad heart to speak the untrue word. Nor is the untrue word always frankly and broadly spoken. If so, it could be answered in some cases. The false word is hardly spoken at all; it is uttered in a whisper; falsehood is made to use signs, gestures: even silence is made to bear witness to falsehood. Truly again we may say, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Tell a lie big enough about any man, and it will be difficult, if not impossible, to do away with the consequences of the false accusation. People will always be found to say, There must be something in it; it may not be just as rumour has it, but surely a statement of that kind never could have been invented; allowing a good deal for exaggeration, there must be something in it. Nor is it always possible to get even righteous men to purge their minds of that damnable sophism. Men who ought to stand up and say, "No, there is nothing in it," hang down their heads, and with a coward's gesture let the lie pass on. This is how men insult the Son of God, and crucify the Man of truth. They will not be thorough, bold, fearless, and make the enemy ashamed of himself for either having invented or repeated a falsehood. Nor may the man escape because he says he heard the lie. Tell him he may have heard it, but he is responsible for repeating it: he may have no control over the hearing, but the moment he repeats it, he adopts it, and renders himself amenable to the Eternal Righteousness. Make the very law into an instrument of injustice! Charge this man with blasphemy and treason, and then take him out and stone him, that he may die! Do not give him time to speak; do not ask for his defence; do not give him an opportunity of interrogating the

witnesses. But who would cross-examine two "sons of Belial"? Better almost to die than to taint the hands and eyes with the touch and look of such children of blackness!

"Then they carried him [Naboth] forth out of the city, and stoned him with stones, that he died" (v. 13). It is all over! Jezebel did this—Jezebel a woman, a king's wife, did this. ✓ High position goes for nothing when the heart is wrong. Great influence means great mischief when the soul is not in harmony with the spirit of righteousness. Is Naboth quite dead? Yes, he is dead. Take the vineyard—take possession of it instantly! Now grow herbs, and grow them plentifully. The vineyard is now at liberty—take it! "Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it" (v. 16). But who is this that looms in the distance? Is it Naboth? No. How comes this man to be here just now—ay, just now? How the end is marked off into points, and how does providence reveal itself at unexpected times and in ways unforeseen! Who is this? He looks stern. He has an eye of fire. His lips are shut as if they could never be opened. He does but *look!* Who is it? "Elijah the Tishbite." He has a message:—"Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? . . . Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine" (v. 19). A sad walk! Ahab went down to take possession of a vineyard, and a death-warrant was read to him! After all, it is safe to live in this universe: there is law in it, there is a genius of righteousness, there is a Force that moves onward towards noble issues. "And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord," and such and such judgment shall befall thee.

Ahab went out to take possession of a garden of herbs, and there he stands face to face with righteousness, face to face with honour, face to face with judgment. Now take the vineyard! He cannot! An hour since the sun shone upon it, and now it is black as if it were part of the midnight which has gathered in judgment. There is a success which is failure. We cannot take some prizes. Elijah will not allow us! When we see him we would that a way might

open under our feet that we might flee and escape the judgment of his silent look. If any man is about to take unholy prizes, let him remember that he will be met on the road by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of righteousness. If any man is attempting to scheme for some little addition to his position or fortune, in the heart of which scheme there is injustice, untruthfulness, covetousness, or a wrong spirit, let him know that he may even kill Naboth, but cannot enter into Naboth's vineyard.

What shall we do, then? Let us turn away from this evil spirit. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts." A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked. "Be content with such things as ye have." Having bread and water, let us be therewith content. "I have learned;" says the Apostle Paul, "in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." How long shall we live in circumstances, in mere external conditions? So long as we live in the present, we shall exhibit all the littlenesses of children without any of their simplicity and pureness. We are called to greater things—even to life in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the possession of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away: an amaranthine Paradise, for ever green, for ever unstained by sin. Crush beginnings of evil. Resist beginnings. Your heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of. If you want a little corner added to your estate, let the Lord find it for you, and it will be done in a way in which no man will be injured, but in which the spirit of righteousness will be honoured. If you have too much, he will take part of it away and give it to another. We have not learned of Christ, unless we can say, "Not my will, but thine, be done: give me little, or give me much, as it may please thee, only take not thy Holy Spirit from me; give me to feel that all I have I hold as steward, and to thy call I am alone amenable." He who lives in this way may not have much to show of an external kind that can be represented in arithmetical numerals, but he will have a soul peopled with angels, a mind full of bright thoughts, a heart living with sweet charities; and as for his outlook, surely he will be a man of expectations: in his thought here he will have the peace of God, and by-and-by will be "homed and heavened" in the very heart of his Father.

1 Kings xxii.

THE END OF AHAB.

THIS chapter is really a continuation of chapter xx. In the Septuagint version the twentieth chapter immediately precedes the twenty-second. The three years without war is a period which is reckoned from the peace which was so rashly made by Ahab with Ben-hadad (xx. 34). It is clear that Ben-hadad has recovered his independence, and is probably in a position of superiority; it is certain that he has not restored Ramoth-gilead as he had promised to do, and his re-constructed army seems to him to be now sufficient to encounter successfully the united hosts of Israel and Judah. In verse 42 of the same chapter we have seen how Ahab was rebuked for allowing the enemy to escape. It has been supposed that this conduct on the part of Ahab may have been due partly to compassion and partly to weakness. The judgment of the Lord was, however, expressed in the severest terms: "Because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people" (xx. 42). In verse 3 we see these words signally fulfilled: The king of Israel seems to have had a good cause when he said to his servants, "Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still, and take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria?" On this occasion Ahab entered into an alliance with Jehoshaphat king of Judah for the purpose of taking back the city which belonged to Israel. Jehoshaphat made a deferential as well as a friendly reply, but insisted upon the fulfilment of a religious condition. Jehoshaphat would make inquiry at the word of the Lord. Thereupon four hundred prophets were gathered together, and with one consent they advised that the attack should be made upon Ramoth-gilead. Surely this was enough to satisfy the

judgment and the conscience of the most religious man, yet Jehoshaphat was not content with the unanimous reply which four hundred prophets had returned. "There is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding." All external unanimity goes for nothing when the conscience itself dissents from the judgment which is pronounced. There is a verifying faculty which operates upon its own responsibility, and which cannot be overpowered by the clamour of multitudes who eagerly rush down paths that are forbidden. Even when imagination assents to the voice of the majority, and when ambition is delighted with the verdict of the prophets, there remains the terrible yet gracious authority of conscience. Through all the clamour that authority makes its way, and calmly distinguishes between right and wrong, and solemnly insists that right shall be done at all hazards and in view of all consequences. A vital lesson arises here to all who are anxious to know the right way under difficult circumstances. It is not enough to have great numbers of authorities on our side; so long as the conscience remains unsatisfied all other authorities are "trifles light as air." Jehoshaphat was, therefore, uneasy, notwithstanding the prophets had said, "Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king." He inquired, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might inquire of him? The word which Jehoshaphat used was the great word Jehovah. It was not enough for him to use a religious or sacred term, he must have the prophecy identified with the awful Name Jehovah, then it would come with final authority. The king of Israel knew that there was another man whose very name signified "Who is like Jehovah?" Ahab frankly declared that he hated Micaiah because he never prophesied good concerning him, but always evil.

Observe the madness of Ahab's policy, and note how often it is the policy which we ourselves are tempted to pursue. We suppose that if we do not consult the Bible we may take licence to do what seems good in our own eyes, and we imagine that by ignoring the Bible we have divested it of authority. We flatter ourselves that if we do not listen to an exposition of the divine word we shall be judged according to the light we have, forget-

ting the solemn law that it is not according to the light we have that we are to be judged, but according to the light we might have if we put ourselves in right relations to the opportunities created for us by divine providence. We know that if we go to hear a certain preacher he will insist upon "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come;" and, supposing that we already know everything that he will say, we turn away from him and listen to men who do not profoundly treat vital subjects, or press home upon the conscience the terrible judgments of God. What is this but closing our eyes to light, and supposing that darkness is safety? What is this ostrich policy, but one that ought to be condemned by our sense as well as shrunk from by our piety? Our duty under all critical circumstances is to go to the truth-teller, and to get at the reality of things at all costs. Where the truth-teller disturbs our peace and disappoints our ambition, we ought to learn that it is precisely at that point that we have to become self-rectifying. The truth-teller is only powerful in proportion as he tells the truth; officially, he is nothing; his power is simply the measure of his righteousness. But do not men love to be flattered, even in courses of evil? Is it not pleasant to go out to forbidden war amid the huzzahs of thoughtless and irresponsible multitudes? Jehoshaphat, however, was a just man, and, as such, he protested against the sin of the king of Israel, saying, "Let not the king say so." Jehoshaphat being so bent upon having a complete judgment of the case, Micaiah was sent for. The king of Israel wished to overawe the despised prophet by the pomp and circumstance under which he was introduced to the royal presence. "The king of Israel, and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah sat each on his throne, having put on their robes, in a void place in the entrance of the gate of Samaria;" and to increase the impressiveness of the occasion, all the prophets prophesied before the kings. A singular addition was made to the surroundings of the occasion which was intended to impress the imagination and stagger the courage of the despised Micaiah. A man bearing the name of Zedekiah (righteousness of Jehovah) made him horns of iron. The use of symbolical acts is quite common in biblical history. We have already seen Abijah engaged in an act of this kind: he "caught the new garment that was on him and rent it in twelve pieces: and said to Jeroboam,

Take thee ten pieces."* The enthusiasm of Zedekiah inflamed the other prophets to the highest point of excitement, and they shouted as with one voice, "Go up to Ramoth-gilead, and prosper: for the Lord shall deliver it into the king's hand." In this instance the prophets, overborne by the enthusiasm of Zedekiah, actually ventured to use the name of Jehovah which had not been used in the first instance. The excitement had passed the point of worship and had become more nearly resembling the frantic cry that was heard on Mount Carmel—"O Baal, hear us."

Is it possible that there can be found any solitary man who dare oppose such unanimous testimony and complete enthusiasm? The messenger who was sent to call Micaiah was evidently a man of considerate feeling who wished the prophet well. Seeing that the words of the prophets had all declared good unto the king with one mouth, the messenger wished that Micaiah should for once agree with the other prophets and please the king by leaving undisturbed their emphatic and unanimous counsel. Thus the voice of persuasion was brought to bear upon Micaiah, and that voice is always the most difficult to resist. The temptation thus addressed to Micaiah was thus double in force; on the one hand, there was the pomp and the terror of the king who had sold himself to do evil, and who would shrink from the infliction of no cruelty that would express his unreasoning and unlimited anger; on the other hand, there was the goodwill of the messenger who wished Micaiah to escape all danger and penalty, and for once to take the popular side. Micaiah's reply is simply sublime: "And Micaiah said, As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak" (v. 14). The humility of this answer is as conspicuous as its firmness. Its profound religiousness saves it from the charge of being defiant. Micaiah recognises himself merely in the position of a servant or medium who has nothing of his own to say, who is not called upon to invent an answer, or to play the clever man in the presence of the kings; he was simply as a trumpet through which God

* For other instances of symbolical representation: see Jer. xiii. 1, xix. 1, xxii. 2; Ezek. xii. 6, 7. The use of horns as symbols of victorious power may be seen in Numb. xxiii. 22; also in the blessing of Moses, Deut. xxxiii. 17, and in the song of Hannah, 1 Sam. ii. 1.

would blow his own blast, or a pillar on which God would inscribe his own message, or a voice which God would use for the declaration of his own will. It is unjust to attribute obstinacy or any form of self-will or self-worship to Micaiah. If he had consulted his natural inclination alone, he would have sought favour with the king, and the logical effect of his subsequent position would have been that Ahab would have endeavoured for ever to silence him by constituting him the prince and leader of the four hundred prophets. Micaiah said in effect, what was said centuries afterwards: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels." Micaiah lived in God, for God, and had nothing of his own to calculate or consider. Until preachers realise this same spiritual independence, they will be attempting to accommodate themselves to the spirit of the times, and even the strongest of them may be betrayed into connivances and compromises fatal to personal integrity and to the claims of truth.

Now came the critical moment. Now it was to be seen whether Micaiah was to be promoted to honour, or thrust away in contempt and wrath. It is easy to read of the recurrence of such moments, but difficult to realise them in their agony. Yet these are the moments which make history in its sublimest lines. It is not too much to say that there have been points of time at which if certain men had given way, the whole economy of the world would have been wrecked. The king addressed himself to the prophet, saying: "Shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we forbear?" The answer of Micaiah must have been a surprise to all who heard it, for he said, "Go, and prosper: for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king" (v. 15). This is an answer which cannot be understood in print. It was evident, however, that Ahab was in no doubt as to its meaning, for the tone of the prophet was a tone of almost contemptuous irony. If king Ahab had taken Micaiah's literal answer, he would have gone forth to the battle comforting himself with the thought that he was carrying out the will of heaven; but he knew in his own soul that Micaiah was not uttering that which expressed the reality of the case. With anger the king said unto him, "How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the Lord?" (v. 16). Then Micaiah

replied in symbolic language, the meaning of which was vividly clear to the mind of Ahab; for, turning to Jehoshaphat, he said, "Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil?" (v. 18). Thereupon Micaiah charged the whole band of prophets with being under the inspiration of a lying spirit, and thus he put a stigma upon and extracted from their judgment every particle of dignity and authority. But this was not to be borne, for Zedekiah went near and smote Micaiah on the cheek and taunted him as being the only prophet in Israel.* Micaiah had to bear the sarcasm conveyed in the angry inquiry, "Which way went the Spirit of the Lord from me to speak unto thee?" (v. 24). Micaiah like a true prophet leaves his judgment to the decision of time. He will not stoop to argue, or to exchange words either of anger or of controversy; he simply says that Zedekiah will one day see the meaning of the whole prophecy, and until that day controversy would be useless. Micaiah had to pay for his fearlessness: he was carried unto Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son, and was to be put in prison and fed with the bread of affliction and with the water of affliction until Ahab returned in peace. Micaiah thus disappears from history. Of his fate we know nothing; but there can be no difficulty in forecasting it a cruel death. Micaiah knew well the meaning of the king's message. It may be difficult for the commentator to explain the expression "bread of affliction, and water of affliction," but Micaiah knew the full meaning of the terms, and yet, whilst their cruel sound was in his ears, he looked at the king and said, "If thou return at all in peace, the Lord hath not spoken by me." Micaiah made also his appeal to the people, and thus committed himself to the verdict of history, saying, "Hearken, O people, every one of you" (v. 28). See whether it is not a moment to be proud of when Micaiah turns away in the custody of his persecutors, having delivered his soul with fearlessness that did not cower or blanch even at the sight of death in its most ghastly forms. Surely it is due to history to recognise the fact that

* The act of smiting on the cheek is sometimes the expression of contempt, as in Isaiah l. 6; Micah v. i; Matthew v. 39, and sometimes it expresses affected indignation at supposed blasphemy against God, or contempt for those who officially represent him; as for example, in John xviii. 22, 23.

there have been men who have not counted their lives dear unto themselves when they were called upon to testify for truth and goodness. The martyrs must never be forgotten. Dark will be the day in the history of any nation when the men who shed their blood that truth might be told and honour might be vindicated, are no longer held in remembrance. In vain do we bring forth from our hidden treasure the coins of ancient times, the robes worn in high antiquity by kings and priests, the rusty armour of warriors, if there is no longer in our heart the tenderest recollection of the men who wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, that they might save the torch of truth from extinction and the standard of honour from overthrow.

Away the kings have gone, and instead of relying upon the word of the Lord, or taking refuge in the sanctuary of great principles, they invent little tricks for the surprise and dismay of the enemy. The king of Israel disguised himself, and Jehoshaphat made himself as the king of Israel, but all their inventions came to nothing. A certain man drew a bow at a venture and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness. The poor king was fatally struck, he "was stayed up in his chariot against the Syrians, and died at even: and the blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot. . . . And one washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked up his blood; and they washed his armour; according unto the word of the Lord which he spake." So will perish all the enemies of the Lord. Differences of merely accidental detail there will always be, but no honour can mark the death of those who have gone contrary to the will of heaven, and taken counsel of their own imagination. How long shall the lesson of history be wasted upon us? How long will men delude themselves with the mad infatuation that they can fight against God and prosper? Horsemen and chariots are nothing, gold and silver are valueless, all the resources of civilisation are but an elaborate display of cobwebs: nothing can stand in the final conflict but truth, and right, and purity. These are the eternal bulwarks, to these are assured complete and unchangeable victory. If God be for us, who can be against us? and if God be

against us no matter what kings are for us, they shall be blown away of the wind as if contemptuously, and cast out as refuse which is of no value. My soul, be thou faithful to the voice of history nor tell lies to thyself, nor operate merely through imagination, ambition, or selfish calculation, for the end of this course is death: not heroic death, not death over which coming men and women will weep; but death that shall be associated with dishonour, a thing to be forgotten, an event that never can be named without bitterness and shame.

SELECTED NOTE.

The Books of the Kings.—This section of Jewish history originally formed only one book in the sacred writings. It was customary with the Jews to name the sacred books from the word or words with which they commenced; and, while this practice may have given rise to the designation, "Kings" (1 Kings i. 1), it is right to observe that the title is well fitted to indicate the character of these historic compositions.

The annals given in these sacred registers are necessarily brief; but they extend from the close of David's reign till the commonwealth was dissolved, a period of four hundred and twenty-seven years. Succinct as is the history contained in these books, there are some peculiarities in them which should not be overlooked, and from which not a little may be learned. There is not here a simple biography of the various kings that occupied the thrones of Judah and Israel, nor is there a mere detail of national movements and events, nor even a tabular register of ecclesiastical affairs. The throne, the state, and the church, are all exhibited in their mutual relations and bearings upon each other. Kings and people are held up to view as existing and acting under the immediate government of God; and hence the character of the ruler is always tested by the mode in which he adheres to the laws of the Almighty, and develops the moral excellences of the people. The notice of his accession to royal office is generally accompanied with an estimate of his conduct, and the standard to which he is likened or contrasted is either the character of David, of his own father, or of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, "who made Israel to sin." All the political events which are recorded, are brought forward chiefly to exhibit the influence of religion on national prosperity: and, in this way, to show how the divine King of Israel observed the conduct of his subjects, and rewarded their fidelity or avenged their wickedness with expressions of righteous indignation. And the affairs of the Church are all portrayed with the design of giving prominence to the same important truth. Idolatry in Israel was treason against their King; religious defection was open revolt; and every act of overt wickedness was an act of rebellion. Hence there is a constant comparing or contrasting of religious state and feeling with those of former times, and especially are the oracles of truth continually elevated as the perfect standard to which the thoughts and actions of all should all be conformed. The Mosaic promises and warnings are strikingly verified in the Books of Kings—for this object they were written; and to the manifestation of this the author has made his whole narrative conduce.

Much variety of opinion exists with reference to the author of these records, and the period of their composition. Jewish tradition ascribes the authorship of the treatise to Jeremiah the prophet; a supposition which is greatly strengthened by the similarity of style and idiom which is traceable between the language of the Books of Kings and that of Jeremiah.

THE SECOND BOOK OF KINGS.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, with thee is light and in thee is no darkness at all. Thou hast called upon us to be children of the light, and to walk in the day and not in the night, that we may show forth the glory of thy word and the meaning of thy kingdom. May we answer that great call in thine own strength; then shall men know that we are reflecting Christ's glory, and are not shining in a light of our own creation. We bless thee for thy word, the entrance of which giveth light. It is a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path; it shineth afar over our whole life, so that there is no dark place in all the days of man, if so be he put his trust in the living God, and walk only according to the living word. Thou hast set around us circumstances designed to teach us. Thou dost call upon us to read the book of providence, to turn over its pages carefully, and to consult all its records patiently and with an understanding mind. Thou hast also written round about us the wonderful writing of nature—a marvellous revelation, so grand, yet so simple; so infinite, yet in every detail of it intelligible and representative of such care and wisdom and love. Then thou hast written thy book which is addressed to our souls—the book of inspiration, the living Bible, the marvellous speech of God's own wisdom. Surely we shall read some of these writings of thine—the great providence, the splendid nature, the vital book. May we be found diligent students of one of these at least; then we shall proceed unto the other: for they are all connected, and belong to one another, and lead up to one another, and complete one another: may we begin where we can only begin reverently, thoughtfully, and hopefully and thus in due time may we become men of God thoroughly instructed in all good works, armed at every point against the tempter, having the Holy One dwelling in our hearts and making us holy, turning our whole life into a sacrifice, and setting before us a luring and welcoming destiny. Meanwhile, we need so much guidance and comfort and sympathy, for the way is dark, and the day is as nothing. Oh how rough is the path sometimes, and how dangerous! We hear voices in the wind which we interpret into threatening or cruelty or some kind of alarm, and we shrink back and are dismayed because there is no more strength in us. Sometimes we go out to seek water, and there is none, and our tongue faileth for thirst. Now we say, To-day will be th:

beginning of liberty; and, lo, it does but lengthen our chain and add to the weight which we are carrying. We need to be comforted, upheld, sustained, directed. How many angels do we need to minister unto us would we be heirs of salvation!—one to answer the great argument; another to dispel the frowning, sullen doubt; another to sing to us in the night-time of our heartlessness: but are not all thine angels ministering spirits, sent forth to minister, living to serve, and ordered by thee to nourish and cherish thy Church? We pray thee to be with us thyself—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; three in one, one in three. We feel our need of this tri-unity, for we ourselves are three in one—a great mystery of being: now full of pain and sorrow, and now almost angels for brightness and joy. Pardon our sin. Only God can forgive sin: but the blood of Jesus Christ thy Son was shed for sinners, and that blood availeth still. May we know the meaning of its application, may we feel its gracious virtue, and when the enemy would tell us that pardon is impossible, may we be told in our own consciousness to answer that he was a deceiver from the beginning. Help all men who need special favour. Sometimes they are all but in despair; sometimes the hand is half put out towards the poison or the steel: they say they cannot bear the pain and darkness any longer: they are mad with agony. O thou who didst make that marvellous instrument the human constitution, thou who knowest all its fashioning, all its limits, all its desires and passions, its susceptibilities, do thou undertake thyself cases which are beyond our strength and help. The Lord hear us at all times; specially when we beg for light and wisdom and forgiveness. Amen.

2 Kings i.

[NOTE.—*The annotations in this and the following chapters give the results of the best available criticism.*]

1. Then [And] Moab rebelled against Israel [reduced to vassalage by David] after the death of Ahab.

2. And Ahaziah fell down through a lattice in his upper chamber that was in Samaria, and was sick: and [by Jezebel's advice] he sent messengers, and said unto them, Go, enquire of Baal-zebub [Lord of flies] the god of Ekron whether I shall recover of this disease.

3. But [Now] the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say [speak] unto them, Is it not [omit "not"] because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go [are going] to enquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron?

4. Now therefore thus saith [hath said] the Lord, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die. And Elijah departed.

5. ¶ And when the messengers turned back unto him, he said unto them, Why [the "why" is emphatic] are ye now turned back?

6. And they said unto him, There came a man up to meet us, and said unto us, Go, turn again unto the king that sent you, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that thou

sendest [art sending] to enquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron ? therefore thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die.

7. And he said unto them, What manner of man was he which came up to meet you, and told you these words ?

8. And they answered him, He was an hairy man [literally, a lord of hair, a term which probably referred to his mantle], and girt with a girdle of leather [the leather was a sign of poverty. Ordinarily the girdle was of linen or cotton] about his loins. And he said, It is Elijah the Tishbite.

9. Then the king [with hostile intentions] sent unto him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him : and behold, he sat [was sitting] on the top of an hill [above Samaria. Some think Carmel]. And he [the captain] spake unto him, Thou man of God [man of the true God], the king hath said, Come down.

10. And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume [eat or devour] thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.

11. Again also he sent unto him another captain of fifty with his fifty. And he answered and said unto him, O man of God, thus hath the king said [commanded], Come down quickly.

12. And Elijah answered and said unto them, If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And the fire of God came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.

13. ¶ And he sent again a captain of the third fifty with his fifty. And the third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and besought [begged compassion of him] him, and said unto him, O man of God, I pray thee, let my life, and the life of these fifty thy servants, be precious in thy sight.

14. Behold, there came fire down from heaven, and burnt up the two captains of the former fifties with their fifties : therefore let my life now be precious in thy sight.

15. And the angel of the Lord said unto Elijah, Go down [from the mountain to the city] with him : be not afraid of him [the captain]. And he arose, and went down with him unto the king.

16. And he said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Forasmuch as thou hast sent messengers to enquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron, is it not because there is no God in Israel to enquire of his word ? therefore thou shalt not come down off [from] that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die.

17. ¶ So he died according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken. And Jehoram [some versions add "his brother"] reigned in his stead in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah ; because he had no son.

18. Now the rest of the [history] acts of Ahaziah which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel ?

FALSE RELIGIOUS APPEALS.

AHAZIAH, the man of whom this chapter speaks, was the son of Ahab and of Jezebel. He was badly born. Some allowance must be made for this fact in estimating his character. Again and again we have had occasion, and shall indeed often have, to remark upon the disadvantages of children born of wicked parents. It is not for us to lay down any final doctrine of responsibility; we must leave that in the hands of a just and gracious God. A terrible spectacle, however, it is to see a man whose father sold himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, who bound himself as for a price to show rebellion on the very floor of heaven. Ahaziah was a prince of evil,—a man who said he would defile the sanctuary, and commit his supreme sin within the shadow of the altar, and whose mother planned and all but personally executed the murder of Naboth. What can we expect from such a child of darkness? Who can gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Was he responsible for his own actions? Society is often hard on such men, not unreasonably or unnaturally. Yet society is often very gracious to such men, saying, with an instinctive piety and sense of justice, After all, such men are not to be personally blamed for their antecedents: they may indeed be open to some measure of suspicion, but even they must have their opportunity in life. Let us consider the case of Ahaziah and see how matters stand for our own instruction.

To understand the matter thoroughly we must go to 1 Kings xxii. 49:—"Then said Ahaziah the son of Ahab unto Jehoshaphat, Let my servants go with thy servants in the ships. But Jehoshaphat would not." Jehoshaphat was right when he acted upon his instinct. By-and-by he came to act upon a basis of calculation, and then a compact was entered into. But who dare set aside the voice of instinct—the very first voice that rises in the soul to make judgment and to give direction? Jehoshaphat, on hearing the proposal of the son of Ahab, said: No; I have known thy father too well: I am too familiarly acquainted with thy family history: thou shalt not send thy servants with mine.

It would be well for us if we could sometimes act more promptly upon our instincts. When we begin to reason and reckon and calculate, and especially when a little element of selfishness enters into all the consideration, we begin, though acting in the high name of reason, oftentimes to be foolish and to depart from the living and noble way. Is there not a spirit in man? Is there not a voice that instantly responds to circumstances and appeals? How is it that we cannot associate with some men? They darken the day; they make everything crooked which they touch; when they are not frivolous they are censorious; when they are not boisterous they are vulgar; they have no noble ideas, no holy passions, no sublime enthusiasms; their speech makes us little, impairs our own fortitude and whole quality. We shrink from them; we would not take a whole day's journey with them upon any consideration: they would spoil the summer: they would make noise when we wanted peace. They always take a low view of every case; they suspect every man, and they know exactly what he is going to be about; and they show their penetration by reading, often falsely, the man's motives. We shrink from such people by a marvellous gift which God has implanted in the enlightened consciousness of man. We decline all compact and partnership and association and sharing: for we would not share a bag with a thief, because surely he would leave us nothing but the bag. Blessed be God for this inward voice, this quick, flashing, lightning-like feeling, which tells us when there is an enemy in the air and when there is one approaching whose aim is only evil. It would have been well for Jehoshaphat if he had acted upon his instinct.

Ahaziah fell through the lattice, and in his helplessness he became religious. Man must have some God. Even atheism is a kind of religion. When a man recoils openly from what may be termed the public faith of his country, he seeks to apologise for his recoil, and to make up for his church absence by creating high obligations of another class: he plays the patriot; he plays the disciplinarian; he will be a Spartan in personal training and drill,—in some way he will try to make up for, or defend, the recoil of his soul from the old altar of his country. It is in their helplessness that we really know what men are

Do not listen to the frivolous and irresponsible chatter of men who, being in robust health, really know nothing about the aching, the sorrow, the pain, the need, and the agony of this awful human life. What does our helplessness suggest? Instantly we go out of ourselves to seek friendship, assistance, sympathy. Oh, would some gentle hand but touch my weariness! says the helpless one. All that being fairly and duly interpreted has a religious signification. The cry for friendship is but a subdued cry for God. Sometimes men will invent gods of their own. This is what was done practically by Ahaziah. Men will go out after novel deities. This is what is being done every day,—not under that name, but the mere name makes no difference in the purpose of the spirit. Say, new enjoyments, new entertainments, new programmes, new customs,—these being interpreted as to the heart of them mean new altars, new helpers, new gods. It is said of Shakespeare that he first exhausted worlds, and then invented new. That was right. It was but of the liberty of a poet so to do. But it is no part of the liberty of the soul. Necessity forbids it, because the true God cannot be exhausted. He is like his own nature, so far as we know it in the great creation; he is all things in one, gleaming and dazzling as noontide, soft and gentle as the balmy wind, strong as the great mountains and rocks, beautiful as the tiny fragrant flowers, musical as the birds that make the air melodious, awful as the gathered thunder which hovers above the earth as if in threatening. Who can exhaust nature? Who can exhaust nature's God? Still, the imagination of man is evil continually. He will invent new ways of enjoying himself. He will degrade religion into a mere form of interrogation. This is what Ahaziah did in this instance: "Go, enquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron whether I shall recover of this disease" (v. 2). All that we sometimes want of God is that he should be the great fortune-teller. If he will tell us how this transaction will turn out, how this speculation will fructify, how this illness will terminate, how this revolution will eventuate,—that is all we want with him; a question-answering God, a fortune-telling God; a God that will specially take care of us and nurse us into strength that we may spend that strength in reviling against his throne. We must cross-examine our religion. We must put

the knife right into it. We must not take it on trust and say languidly that all will issue rightly, if we will but enjoy ourselves according to our capacity and opportunity. We must search our faith, and try our own prayers before sending them to heaven, that we may not affront the great God by uttering pointless words and speeches that have everything in them but heart and meaning. How true it is that Ahaziah represents us all in making his religion into a mere form of question-asking; in other words, into a form of selfishness! Nothing can be so selfish as religion. Debased and misunderstood or corrupted religion is the most inveterate and pestilent selfishness imaginable. It is almost impossible for some natures to escape the taint of this selfishness. Even their desire for heaven is a desire for self-indulgence, for languid, dreamless, continual rest or peace. The idea of service, discipline, sacrifice, self-expenditure never enters into their conception of religion: hence their religion is irreligion—a lie—a blasphemy!

The messengers have now come. They have taken their speech from their king, and they are on the road to consult Baal-zebub the god of Ekron. But who is this who meets them, and who says, "Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to enquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron?" The men had said nothing about their errand: who is it that reads the heart night and day, to whom the darkness and the light are both alike, and from the fire of whose eye nothing is hid? How do we get the impression that when we have perfected our lie it is in some sense public property? We are sure the man we meet knows it. He looks as if he did. Who has told him? We have not mentioned a word about it, we have covered it up with all possible care, and yet the very first man we meet on the road looks at us as if he were looking through us and reading the whole lie in its black letters and in its deadly purport. Surely there is an angel of the Lord abroad in human life, reading what we are about, and so entering into other men as to make them look as if they knew our plan, and were all the while either smiling at our destined misfortune or frowning upon our palpable wickedness.

Elijah is an abrupt speaker. The "hairy man" and "girt with

a girdle of leather," did not study the scanning of his sentences. He struck with a battering-ram; his interrogations were spears that quivered in the heart; his looks were judgments. What an effect he produced upon these men; why did they not go past him and say, Keep thy speeches to thyself, thou hairy man, nor interfere with the king's messengers? We cannot do that. We know that some men are not to be turned away so. We may attempt to deceive, or evade, or disappoint them, but they have a magnetic and most marvellous influence upon us. Though they do not speak in the imperative mood they speak with imperative force. The men turned back like whipped children to tell the king what they had heard; and the king was surprised at their early return. God has still prophets and instructors of his own. There are still courageous men abroad—men who dare speak the word of judgment and condemnation; men who dare put in a word for the slave and for the man who is oppressed unreasonably. These courageous men are "hairy men, and girt with a girdle of leather," who want no invitation to the feast, who scorn the soft delights of parlour life; men to whom no favour can be shown, for they would rather sleep in the fissure of the rock than on the softest bed ever made by softest hands. Would God we had more such men! It is because we are exposed to the blandishments of society that sometimes we do not speak with full and final emphasis. But Elijah, a hairy man, with his coat of leather—henceforward the symbolical garment of the prophet—did not ask for a night's lodging, nor for a cup of cold water, not for a flattering paragraph in the forthcoming journal. He represented God, eternity, truth, and if men were offended by what he said he was willing to remit the issue to the arbitrament of God. But whilst Elijah is dead, God still has his witnesses in the form of remarkable events. They come and go, full of meaning, and leave behind them impressions which cannot easily be effaced. Nations are upheaved; harvests fail; the air is full of germs of disease; deaths occur suddenly, swiftly, numerously; the east wind blows week after week and month after month, so that no green thing can show itself, and no bud is hardy enough to break through and say—O thou bitter wind, I will live, though thou dost blow with all thy cold cruelty. So God keeps affairs in his own hands,

now and again interposing with some visitation, and then making men white with fear, and making dumb lips move in abject prayer. Then again there comes a time which may be characterised as a time of awakened conscience. The king cannot sleep. He asks that the book of the chronicles may be brought that he may look up events and see where the loop slipped, where the wrong entry was made, or where the minutes were not carried out in fulness and detail. Men hunt up their own commercial records and say, Was this justly done? Something tells me that sharp practice was indulged here: I cannot sleep: there is a thorn in the pillow; I feel it, I feel it in its length; I have not yet felt it in its sharpness, but I may at any moment lay my head on the very point of the thorn, so I had better arrange and re-adjust, and indeed extract the thorn, for it will become presently to me like a ghost, and I dare not go to bed at all: I cannot go out in the dark as I used to do: once I had no fear, but now to run through a short plantation only one hundred yards long, I dare not; if I hear a leaf stir, I think it is a thief or a burglar going to spring upon me: I hear creakings in the room at night; I hear scratchings on the window pane: I am sure there is something wrong. All this means that Elijah lives in some form or other, and will meet us, and confront us, and have it out with us. Blessed is he who first begins by falling down and saying—God be merciful to me a sinner!

Look at the conflict between Ahaziah and Elijah the Tishbite. Ahaziah is the king, and Elijah is only the prophet, and the king ought to have everything his own way *ex officio*. Now we shall see what metal Elijah is made of. He handled kings as if they were little children: he took them up, and set them down behind him, and said, Wait there until I return, and stir at your peril. The prophet should always be the uppermost man. Kings are nothing compared to teachers, seers,—men who hold the judgments of God on commission. The great men of the nation are the prophets, the teachers, the educators of thought, the inspirers of noble sacrificial enthusiasm. See how Elijah tramps among the kings. He has no favour to ask. If he were driven to ask for one morsel of bread, he would be Elijah no more. Ahaziah sends to him and says, "Come down." That word sounds very

commanding and imperative. Elijah says, "If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty" (v. 10). Look at the conflict and its parties:—on the one hand, petulance; on the other, dignity: on the one side, anger—fretful, fuming, petty anger; on the other, judgment—calm, sublime, comprehensive, final: on the one side, threats, little menaces, assurances of coming punishment; on the other, "fire." Nor is this a mere picture; it is a symbol, a type, an algebraic sign pointing to infinite circles, an index-finger showing the road that leads to death.

Look at the event from a Christian point of view. It is no longer a precedent. All this kind of action ceases in the Old Testament. The disciples were in some degree Old Testament men, and they said: Master, shall we call down fire from heaven to burn these people who have insulted and dishonoured thee? Elijah would have called down fire: may not we? Jesus answered them: "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of:" you do not understand the kingdom of God; you are taking the ages backward; you are not living along the line of spiritual evolution. Elijah called down fire rightly in his day, but his day is gone. In the Christian dispensation this method is replaced by a new spirit,—the spirit of love, the spirit of truth, the teaching spirit—it is consummated in a new method. What is the attitude towards the Ahaziah's and other rebels of to-day? It is one of persuasion, entreaty, proclamation, preaching—preaching the old "foolish" doctrine of the cross. That is all; a fire would be a readier method. If the preacher could punctuate his appeals with lightning-bolts he might make some progress,—within the moment, but not really. This is the method of Christ—a striving, persuading, entreating, teaching method,—very feeble-looking sometimes, and altogether fruitless in many instances, but it is his method. Is fire then done away with? Is there no more fire in the hand of God and in the judgment of heaven? The answer is, Fire is not done away with, but it is now reserved for a final appeal. Mark, violence is not withdrawn, but is suspended; it is not now active in the divine service, but not one spark is dead, not one flame has gone out.

The fire is kept back ; still "our God is a consuming fire ;" still the final word to the wicked will be, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Do not presume too far. The fire is not now handled as it used to be handled in Old Testament times, but still it is true that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." He will keep back the fire as long as he can—

Cries,—How shall I give thee up?
Lets the lifted thunder drop.

But the thunder is still there, the bolt is still available, and he would be no preacher anointed at the cross and inspired by the Holy Ghost who kept back the terrors of the Lord, or persuaded men that sin is a light and easy and unimportant action.

SELECTED NOTE.

"Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to enquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekrón?" (v. 3).—Ekron was one of the royal cities of the Philistines. Its situation is pointed out with considerable minuteness in Scripture. It is described as lying on the northern border of Philistia (Josh. xiii. 3), and of the territory allotted to Judah (xv. 11). It stood on the plain between Bethshemesh and Jabneel (*Id.*). Jerome locates it on the east of the road leading from Azotus (Ashdod) to Jamnia (Jabneel, *Oromast*, s.v. *Accaron*). From these notices we have no difficulty in identifying it with the modern village of Akir. Akir stands on the southern slope of a low bleak ridge or swell which separates the plain of Philistia from Sharon. It contains about fifty mud houses, and has not a vestige of antiquity except two large and deep wells, and some stone water-troughs. Wady Surar, which lies below it, and the great plain beyond, are rich and fertile; yet the higher ground around the village and northward has a barren aspect, and may perhaps have suggested the name *Ekron*, "wasteness"). The houses are built on the accumulated rubbish of past ages; and like their predecessors, if left desolate for a few years, they would crumble to dust. Ekron was within the territory of Judah; but was one of the cities allotted to Dan (Josh. xix. 43). The most interesting event in its history was the sending of the ark to Bethshemesh. A new cart was made, and two milch kine yoked to it, and then left to choose their own path; "and they took the straight way to the way of Bethshemesh;" the position of which can be seen in a gorge of the distant mountains eastward (1 Sam. v.). The deity worshipped at Ekron was called Baal-zebub; and we may conclude from the story of Ahaziah that his oracle had a great reputation even among the degenerate Israelites (2 Kings i.). The doom of Ekron was predicted by the prophets in connection with the other cities of Philistia; and Ekron is now "rooted up"—every trace of royalty, riches, and power is gone (Amos i. 8; Zeph. ii. 4). It appears, however, never to have been completely deserted. It was a large village in the days of Jerome; and also in the age of the crusades.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, how near thou art in thy heaven, yet how far ; near unto those whose trust is in thee and whose life is hid with Christ in God, who are branches of the true vine ; and far from those who do not know God nor love him nor care for his word and his law. Teach us that our life is in thy hand and not in our own, that there is an appointed time to man upon the earth, that the very hairs of our head are all numbered, that not a sparrow falleth to the ground without thee—teach us, therefore, that thou art round about us always, understanding our thoughts, looking into our motives, considering our desires, listening to our sighings and prayers. Thus may we live and move and have our being in God ; may God always be the nearest to us, always at hand and not afar off. Help us to consult thee in every movement of our life, to stand still and see the salvation of God, to look up unto the hills whence cometh our help, to take nothing into our own hands, to wait the disclosure of thy counsel and the indication of thy power, and to walk humbly but steadfastly and with persistence and loyalty in the way thou dost mark for our feet.

Thou hast led us wondrously ; behold, if we look back, our yesterdays are full of the fire of heaven. Thou hast led us by a way that was right, thou hast defended us from danger, seen and unseen, thou hast opened doors for us of which we had no key, thou hast sent an angel to throw back the gate and deliver from the prison. Glory and honour and praise and power be unto thy name, thou mighty Deliverer and Saviour of our souls. Now we are in thy house, and it is the gate of heaven : quiet us, fill us with thy peace, make us calm with thy restfulness, shed upon us the Spirit that is holy and eternal, and make the fire of the Lord abound in our hearts, and the wisdom that cometh down from heaven enlighten our understanding. May we feel that thy word is light and life and peace and comfort, the very beginning of heaven, the life of God in the soul, the first throb of our immortality.

May thy word come to us to-day from ancient time, as new as if but just spoken. May we know that thy word abideth for ever, that its accents and purposes and commandments and injunctions are not measurable by time—that it is the ever-spoken word, the ever commanding "Be" and fiat of Jehovah, our present and almighty sovereign. And thus may we come to it as the oldest book and the newest, old as thine own eternity, new as our present need. Thus may thy word be unto us meat and drink, manna in the wilderness, and water out of the rock, a great joy, a perpetual light and satisfaction. If so be we are tempted to think we have read all thy word, show us our mistake ; may the wonder of its revelations, the awful sudden-

ness of its surprises, be the outflaming of a fire we have never seen, from heaven—be the utterance of a new music, tender as our own sighing, loud as our own triumphing, surrounding us with all the grandeur and force of Almighty God. And if it enter into the heart of man to believe a lie, and to consider that he knows all that is written in thy book, and has fathomed the depths of infinitude and taken into his nostrils the whole breath of eternity, let him be rebuked even to his shame and confusion to-day, as hearing new tones and seeing new lights and being bowed down by undisclosed presences and unrevealed glory, so that he may say, The word of the Lord abideth for ever: it is the perpetual word, the everlasting testimony, and the incessant challenge to our minds.

O this wonderful life of ours, a truth, a lie, a reality, a delusion: something to be touched and yet never to be approached: here and yet there; luring us as if by mockery, and jeering our disappointment, and yet now and again opening up prospects and stretches of landscapes and visions of heaven and realities of being that astound the imagination and confound all attempts to explain it. O wondrous life—it is God in us, it is a spark of the essential fire. It is a voice from the eternal courts. O that we may be stewards of ourselves, that we may feel the responsibility of our own being, that we may find in Christ the only answer to our sin and the only consolation of our sorrow, the only interpretation of our discipline, our All and in all, to-day and yesterday and to-morrow and for ever the same, the eternal Christ, the eternal Judge.

If now and again we have been straying from thy way, even in our thinking—whilst our heart has been right, yet our thoughts have gone out to make new creations of our own—surely thou hast brought us back again, humbled and subdued and broken in pieces, that we might ask for the old way and inquire for the ancient path, and drink again out of the river of God which is full of water. Thou dost not chide us to our destruction, but to our conversion: wherein we have hewn out cisterns, broken cisterns, their brokenness has been thy best correction, the disappointment has been the interpretation of thy purpose, and we have made a sword for our own hurt, and cut ourselves in pieces before the Lord.

O that we may in future cling to thy testimony, be steadfast to thy word, firm and loyal to thy revelation, contented with what thou hast shown unto us and receiving it with all thankfulness and delight, and yet with all the hopefulness of fuller revelation. If it be thy will, oh continue our days a little longer, but make our life as useful as it is continuous; may every day bear some fruit which shall be the development of some new grace: the formation of character, the ennobling of principle, the outwidening and glory of our best purpose and highest aspiration. And when the day is done, the work all closed, it will be our fruition to hear thee say, Well done.

Console the grief-stricken, lift up those that be bowed down; if any be in special perplexity or have a cloud of unusual gloom, Lord, look upon such—do thou meet them in all the pain of their need and comfort them with the infinite grace of God. Show us how brief our life is and how vain if it be not rooted in Christ. Lead us along with new penitence, new contrition and broken-heartedness to the cross of the Lamb of God, the Saviour of all mankind. Amen.

2 Kings ii. 1-11.

1. And 'it came to pass, when the Lord would take up [when Jehovah caused Elijah to go up, or ascend] Elijah into heaven [as into heaven] by a whirlwind [in the storm] that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal [Gilgal in Ephraim].

2. And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Beth-el. And Elisha said unto him, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth [literally, "By the life of Jehovah and by the life of thy soul"], I will not leave thee. So they went down to Bethel.

3. And the sons of the prophets that were at Beth-el came forth to Elisha [who probably walked a little way before his master, to announce his approach], and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to-day ["to-day" is emphatic]? And he said, Yea, I know [rather, I, too, know] it; hold ye your peace [suggesting that the subject was painful both to him and his master].

4. And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho.

5. And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came [drew near] to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to-day? And he answered [said], Yea I know it; hold ye your peace.

6. And Elijah said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan. And he [Elisha] said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on.

7. And [Now] fifty men of the sons of the prophets went [had gone], and stood [taken their stand opposite]. They wished to see whether and how the companions would cross the stream at a point where there was no ford] to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan.

8. And Elijah took his mantle [his hairy 'addèrèth, which characterised him as a prophet], and wrapped it together [rolled it up], and smote the waters [a symbolical action like that of Moses smiting the rock, or stretching out his rod over the sea], and they were divided hither and thither [Exod. xiv. 16, 21, 22; Josh. iv. 22, seq.], so that [and] they two went over on dry ground.

9. ¶ And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee [as a dying father, Elijah might wish to bless his spiritual son ere his departure (Gen. xxvii. 4)]. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let [lit., and (i.e. well, then) let there fall, I pray thee, a portion of two in thy spirit, unto me] a double portion [The expression used in Deut. xxi. 17 of the share of the first-born son, who by the Mosaic law inherited two parts of his father's property] of thy spirit be upon me.

10. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing [Heb., Thou hast done hard in asking. To grant such a petition was not in Elijah's power, but in God's only]: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.

11. And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder, and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven [rather, Elijah went up in the storm heavenward, *or, perhaps* into the air. The words must not be taken in too literal a sense. The essential meaning of the passage is this, that God suddenly took Elijah to himself, amid a grand display of his power through the forces of nature].

THE TRANSLATION OF ELIJAH.

“WHEN the Lord would take up Elijah,”—*when*. There is a great doctrine of Providence there. The life of man is absolutely at the disposal of the Lord—that is the doctrine. One might suppose that man would have some choice as to when he would go. Not the least in the world. We might think that man would be permitted to stay a year or two longer—he might be engaged in finishing a work which would require that time to complete it. No. Well, says one, I have built the column, and the capital is nearly ready to put on : I shall have it done the day after to-morrow—cannot I stay until then ? No. “When the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven ;” not when Elijah would go, but when the Lord would take him. Is there not an appointed time unto man upon the earth ? Let us get out of the practical atheism of imagining that we have anything whatever to do with the length of our life. There is an appointed time to every man. It is true, that on account of our moral depravity we may make ways for ourselves, and determine in some sense our own time : we may be ready with our hands to do things that God has forbidden, but we are referring to the man who wants to be in God’s hands only, who says “Not my will, but thine, be done—I will go when thou pleasest—to-day, to-morrow, a year hence, or half a century to come—when thou pleasest.” God will know when he wants him, when he is ready to have him home, when the place is fully prepared for him—and then he will send for him.

God knows when our work is done ; sometimes we think it is done when it is not ; we wonder what more there is to do to it, it seems so trifling, as if it were not worth while doing, reminding us of what the great sculptor said to some one who wondered

that he was so long over his marble :—" I know I am doing but a few things that look like trifles, but trifles make perfection and perfection is no trifle." So with us : many a poor life we have seen seems to be doing nothing, and we wonder why it does not go forward into the eternal state. It seems to be just touching things here and there, and to be doing so with a very feeble finger, and yet there is a Purpose that works out our last refinement, waiting about us to-day with the culmination and perfecting of our character and belongings. We shall not be here a day too long if we put our life into God's keeping. We are not absorbed, we are taken up to heaven : we do not melt into infinite azure or tatter back into everlasting nothingness.

"When the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven."—What is heaven ? Critics cannot tell us : they have met in council and can make nothing of it. We must die to know. It hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive God's house. "In my Father's house are many mansions." How many ? We know not. What is their size ? We cannot tell. All these things we have represented by pearls and diamonds, and amethysts and onyxes—beautiful and expressive symbols, and then it is only a guess, half attempted. It is best so.

"When the Lord would take up Elijah"—that *when* is the doctrine of Providence over human life—"Elijah went with Elisha to Gilgal." What has that to do with us ? A great deal. There is much that is very beautiful and tender in sentiment there. Elijah said, "I will go and visit Gilgal, then I will go to Bethel, and then I will go to Jericho." The great father of the ministry of that day said that he would visit all the schools of the prophets : he would go round to the three great colleges of the prophets of Israel, and have his last look at the young folks, his last prayer with the students, his last burst of holy enthusiasm with the young men who were to succeed him, before he went up by whirlwind or otherwise into heaven. So he went to Gilgal and prayed with the young lads there who were studying the scrolls of Israel, and then to Bethel, and then to Jericho, and so all the tender feelings and recollections revived in his heart. Then he went to Jordan and on to the last scene.

There is something in this we know a little about. We visit places for the last time : we say nothing about why we are doing so, but we think we should like to see the old town, the old schoolhouse, the old mill, the old farm, the old churchyard. Why do impressions come to the mind without explaining themselves : why are we moved by sudden suggestions, the genesis of which we know nothing about, the metaphysics of which puzzle us exceedingly ? Yet we are so moved : we cannot tell why we take the journey for the last time, except that we should like to see the old scenes. Is there something coming upon the mind we cannot account for ? Thank God we cannot account for everything : if everything could be set down in tables and schedules, life would be much impoverished and weakened. Thank God for the surprises and revelations and mysteries of old things, that come near and go back, and peep and flash and darken. They are God in life, a divine element and force.

And so Elijah goes to Gilgal : it is set down here as if it meant nothing—on to Bethel and to Jericho, as if he were a restless kind of spirit, here and there, going on like some fussy old man who does not know where to rest. But there is plan here, purpose, scheme, Providence ; and so there is in our travel and in our movements.

“ By a whirlwind.”—There is a lesson here for us : and it is this. That the way of our going, as well as the time, is of the Lord's determination, and not of ours. “ When [that is, the time, the appointed time] the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind.” He appoints the time, he makes the way, and thou hast nothing to do with it, poor dying man. One says, “ I want to die on my birthday ;” and God says, “ No, perhaps the day after.” Another says : “ I want to die suddenly ;” and God replies, “ No, that is not the way : it is in the book, it is all written down in the book : you are to have a lingering death.” “ I should like to die lingeringly, but quietly,” says another man ; and God says, “ That is not the way in the book : suddenly a bolt shall strike thee : thou shalt go to bed well, and in the morning be in heaven, without pang or spasm or notice given to any one : they shall find thee sleeping on the pillow like a child at rest.” Another man says : “ I should like to die like a shock of corn fully

ripe ;" and God says, "No, thou shalt be cut down in the greenness of thy youth, in the immaturity of thy powers." There are others who would like to die in childhood—pass away before five, when the eyes are round wonders, and they know nowise of anything—when everything round about is mystery and puzzle and enchantment ; and God says, "No, you shall die at ninety : it is all focussed, all settled."

What have we to do, therefore ? God allows us to express our own wishes and wills, he allows us to say what we would like to have done, and trains us to say, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done." He sends for some in a beautiful chariot made of violets and snowdrops and crocuses, and these are the young folks that go up to heaven in the spring chariot : the vernal coach is sent for them, and they go away—so young ! They have just left school, just finished the last lesson, and shut it up, and said "Good-bye" to master and governess, and are supposed now to be ready for life ; and God says, "Now, come up ;" and they go up amid all the sweet modest spring flowers. And others go up in old age, feeling as if they had been forgotten on the earth, allowed to linger and loiter too long, as if God had forgotten them—some by long affliction, some by sudden call. We should look upon these as ways of the Lord : not haps and chances and accidents, but as appointments of heaven. If you will get into this way of thinking about Providence, life will be an offering unto the Lord, a perpetual sacrifice.

Elijah said unto Elisha, "I am going to Bethel, I am going to Jericho, I am going to Jordan." What is the lesson there ? That the close of a man's life is often known to himself and to others without the subject ever being mentioned directly in words. Ah, the little mockeries and cheateries we have amongst one another, the innocent frauds and the pious deceptions ! Well, well, he knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust.

Elijah did not say to Elisha, "I am going to die," or "I am going to heaven," but, "I am going to Bethel—stand there." And Elisha said, "No, no, I won't." Elisha did not say, "I know the meaning of this ;" no, but he says, "I will not leave thee." And Elijah said, "I am going to Jericho—stand there."

“No, no, I won’t do that: I shall not leave thee.” Why?—There was nothing said, except that he was going to Gilgal, to Bethel, to Jericho, to Jordan—was that all? We never tell the “all”: we always have something in reserve: we know that something is going to happen, and we put it into that form of words. You know what we say to one another in view of the great event: we say, “If anything should happen to me”—a form of words we understand. We do not seem to be able to say plainly and with frankness, “Now, if I should die next week——” No, but we say, “We do not know what may happen, and in the event of anything happening to me——” We do not like to mention the monster, and to point a long plain finger into the pit. so we say, “If anything should happen to me—in the event of anything happening to me—going to Gilgal, and to Bethel, and to Jericho, and to Jordan, and——” The rest is silence.

That is the way in the chamber of affliction. We say, “If the wind would only get round out of the east and into the south-west, perhaps we should get you up a little.” Never—and we know it. And our friend, unwilling to break our heart, says, “I have been thinking that if the weather were milder, I might perhaps be able to get out a little.” Never—and the suffering one knows it: not knows it as an arithmetical and prosaic thing that can be stated in words, but knows it impressionably and conjecturally, miles away from language—so that no lie is told; nothing of the sort, but a hope that is too remote to be real is expressed, and a kindness that wants to heal the suffering round about is uttered. Thus touch is not made to the quick; this man says he is going to Gilgal, and he knows he is going to heaven; he says he is going to Bethel, as if it were nothing—only going to pray with the young ones there. He says he is going to Jericho, as if he is going to stop there—he knows perfectly well he will only be there one night; he is a pilgrim with a staff in his hand and cannot linger. He says he is going to Jordan, and he knows perfectly well that he will never come back over Jordan, but all the time he never says anything about it.

So we let our friends down easily, and prepare them for great events by doing certain intermediate things. We seldom say

plainly, "I am going to heaven," but we say, "I am going to Jordan, to Jericho, to Bethel, to Gilgal"—or contrariwise, as the course may lie—and, thank heaven! there are some things that are to be gathered from tone and from look and from hint, that are not to be put into vulgar words. Are you ready in the interpretation of signs? Who wants (it may be right for the doctor) even the doctor to say roundly and bluntly out, "This is death"? No; the gentle man has learned some form of words that conveys the impression without exactly thrusting the rapier through the heart. So he can hint so clearly—too clearly!—he can indicate from remote points: he need not put it so as to be cruel, he may mention Gilgal and Bethel, and Jericho and Jordan—and we know the rest. And yet there be some people so blind, and so dull of hearing, and so inapt that things have to be thrust upon them as with blows and hammers and great thunders and noises. They have no quick eye, no quick hearing, they do not comprehend a thing readily, otherwise we should be sparing some of our friends a little more: we should see the rounding of the shoulder and the stooping of the gait, and the dimming of the eye and the enfeeblement of the hand that used to be strong: and we should hear that the voice had not its old silver ring, and pitch and music, and we should take steps accordingly without seeming to do so, without any ostentation of care: we should modify our behaviour and adapt our great strength to the on-coming weakness of those who are going from Gilgal to Bethel, to Jericho, to Jordan—to the eternal land.

"And it came to pass when the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went——" to pay these last visits. We know what is coming upon us without putting it into so many words. I wish we were gifted in the interpretation of silence. "And Elijah said unto Elisha"—the last must come—"Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee." What is the lesson here? That the cessation of our individual life should not put an end to our interest in those we are leaving behind. Have no faith in that man's Christianity who cares nothing for posterity, nothing for those who shall come after him, who says, "My day is done: I am going: the world must take care of itself." That is not in the Bible, not in God, not in

Christ. Elijah says, "Ask what I shall do for thee." Heaven is so near, yet he is still thinking about the earth : he is going to join the angels, and yet wanting to do something for the poor creatures yet to linger upon the earth for ten or twenty years. O bold man, bold, bold Elijah ! "Ask what I shall do for thee." Why, what could he do ? He had no money to leave, what could he do ? No estates to dispart and distribute, what could he do ? Can a poor man do something—can a man who has no will to make yet will a great deal ? It would seem so. "What can I do for thee, child, before going ?" I know what you can do : put out those poor bony hands and put them upon his head and say, "God bless the lad." That will do. "What can I do for thee ?" Leave me a blessing, leave me one of your old letters, let me have your old Bible : utter one more prayer for me, mention me in the last prayer, let the last sigh mean poor me—me—me. Aye, we can help one another in that way. "Ask what I shall do for thee." I like memorials, last letters, last words—the last time I saw him, the last time he spoke to me, the last time I heard him preach, the last time I gripped his hand, the last time we travelled together. I like this "last time" to be full of tender memories, and as we do not know when the last time may be, let every time have in it some grace of its own, some flower grown in Paradise.

"Ask what I shall do for thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me."—That man was fit to go to heaven—from our point of view. A double portion of thy spirit—the meaning being this : in ancient times, when property was given out, the eldest had a double portion, and the younger might share and share alike. Elisha said, "Let me be the eldest : we have been to all these schools, Gilgal, and Bethel, and Jericho, the three centres of education, we have seen all these sons of the prophets, and they have all wanted thee to bless them—now let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." Ask for wisdom, not for riches ; for a large heart, not for a large estate—seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Now, what is your supreme prayer ? What do you want your father, mother, friend, to leave you ? Let them leave you a good example, let

them leave you a noble testimony on behalf of the truth, let them leave you an unsullied character, and then they will leave you an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. If they were able to bequeath the stars, you could spend them all, and be a spendthrift, and a pauper at the last ; but if you have the wealth of their example, the pith of their character, the substance of their mind, the inmost and best qualities of their souls, that is an indestructible property. "Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." Now, Elijah said, "Thou hast asked a hard thing." That is right—always ask the hardest things : it would have been nothing to have given something outside of him—that is easily done. But "a double portion of thy spirit," as if he had asked for himself twice over, as if he who had sent him upon the earth would allow him to go into heaven and leave his spirit behind him. "Thou hast asked a hard thing : nevertheless——" O bless God for the neverthelesses in Scripture, for those rugged turnings on the road behind which you find all you want ! "Nevertheless—nevertheless—" what was that nevertheless ? Look at it—"If thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee ; but if not, it shall not be so." Is there any meaning in that ? Infinite meaning. Anything for to-day ? Most certainly. "If thou see me." But how could he see him if he did not watch ? Ah, that is the whole doctrine. Look, expect, watch : keep your eyes open, fixed, intense—look as if you wanted the blessing, and you will get it. That is the great law, that our power is in proportion to our insight : if a man can see well, he will have power ; if he cannot see, he will be artificial, and have no gigantic strength, no real might—an automaton moving upon wires invisible, but not a giant recruiting himself from within himself, because of the indwelling God that is in his heart.

"If thou see me." And Elisha said, "I will see thee, if it be possible ; I will keep my eye upon thee." And did God ever disappoint the eyes that were turned upwards ? Did he ever say, "The morning shall not shine upon those who look towards the east" ? Never. And so if you look into the perfect law of liberty—look into the Bible, you will find it always new, always a revelation, always something fresh—May bringing its own

flowers, June her own coronal ever, August its own largess of vine and wheat. "If thou see me." Is there any counterpart to that in the New Testament? There is: O wonderful counterpart—"If thou see me, thou shalt have it, if not, it shall not be so." "And he led them"—that greater he—"led them out as far as to Bethany." And he ascended, and they watched him and saw him, and a cloud received him up out of their sight. They watched, they saw, they returned to Jerusalem, and were endued with power from on high. That is God's law, that the watching man gets everything, the man who is nearest and looks keenest gets all and sees all—and it is right. The mountain gets the first gleam of the sun, and then the light gets down into the valleys by-and-by. Have you ever seen that beautiful sight of the mountain getting the first kiss, the first glance, the first visitation? It is a sight to make a man religious, to make him quiet with a quietness that is akin to prayer. The sun is nowhere visible in himself but a light is there, and I have seen that light brightening over the great snowy peaks, like camps of giants that have been sleeping there all night: and down yonder, night, dying night, lingering night, solemn night—fog and cloud and raw damp, and up there heaven. And then down, down, down—all these bits and beams and rays of light shooting into the fog and cloud, and chasing them away, and last of all the little town yonder waking up and saying, "It is morning." Morning? Poor little hamlet, it has been morning an hour or more up there. Aye, the mountains first and the chimneys a long way off; the high peaks first and then your little hamlets by-and-by.

And so—and so—these great rocks of God are watching men: Elisha was a watching spirit: those who see Christ taken up are endued with power from on high. Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; look, and ye shall see; knock, and it shall be opened. Sir Isaac Newton, was once asked why he was so much greater than other workers in his particular science. He said, "I do not know, except that I, perhaps, pay more attention than they do?" Just consider. What is attention? We think anybody can attend. Hardly a man in a hundred can attend to anything. Attention, the power of attention, keen,

interested, agonising, persistent, night-long, day-long attention, seems to be a gift of God. Attention—look, expect, watch, and if you do so, you will have a double portion of the Spirit; if not, it shall not be so. The sluggard gets nothing, the shut eyes see not the morning when it cometh, the slumberer's closed vision cannot see the first sparklings and scintillations of the coming day. Lord, open our eyes, that we may see!

SELECTED NOTE.

And here ends all the direct information which is vouchsafed to us of the life and work of this great prophet. Truly, he "stood up as a fire, and his word burnt as a lamp" (Ecclus. xlviii. 1). . . . The deep impression which Elijah had made on his nation only renders more remarkable the departure which the image conveyed by the later references to him evinces, from that so sharply presented in the records of his actual life. With the exception of the eulogiums contained in the catalogues of worthies in the book of Jesus the son of Sirach (xlviii.) and 1 Macc. ii. 58, and the passing allusion in Luke ix. 54, none of these later references allude to his works of destruction or of portent. They all set forth a very different side of his character to that brought out in the historical narrative. They speak of his being a man of like passions with ourselves (James v. 17); of his kindness to the widow of Sarepta (Luke iv. 25); of his "restoring all things" (Matt. xvii. 11); "turning the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just (Mal. iv. 5, 6; Luke i. 17). . . . It will be sufficient to call attention to the great differences which may exist between the popular and contemporary view of an eminent character, and the real settled judgment formed in the progress of time, when the excitement of his more brilliant but more evanescent deeds has passed away. Precious indeed are the scattered hints and faint touches which enable us thus to soften the harsh outlines or the discordant colouring of the earlier picture. In the present instance they are peculiarly so. That wild figure, that stern voice, those deeds of blood, which stand out in such startling relief from the pages of the old records of Elijah, are seen by us all silvered over with the "white and glistening" light of the Mountain of Transfiguration. When he last stood on the soil of his native Gilead [see the considerations adduced by Stanley (*S. and P.*) in favour of the mountain of the Transfiguration being on the east of Jordan], he was destitute, afflicted, tormented, wandering about "in sheep-skins and goat-skins, in deserts and mountains, and dens and caves of the earth." But these things have passed away into the distance, and with them has receded the fiery zeal, the destructive wrath, which accompanied them. Under that heavenly light they fall back into their proper proportions, and Ahab and Jezebel, Baal and Ashtaroth are forgotten, as we listen to the Prophet talking to our Lord—talking of that event which was to be the consummation of all that he had suffered and striven for—"talking of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem."

2 Kings ii. 12-25.

12. ¶ And Elisha saw it, and he cried [literally, Elisha was seeing, and he (emphatic) was shouting (comp. v. 10, "If thou see me taken away")], My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces [from top to bottom, in token of extreme sorrow].

13. He took up also the mantle of Elijah [the badge of the prophet's office was naturally transferred to his successor], that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan.

14. And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah? [has he left the earth with his prophet? The words are a sort of irony of faith], and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over.

15. And when the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest [hath alighted, *i.e.* settled, rested] on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him.

16. ¶ And they said unto him [after he had told them of the Assumption of Elijah], Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty [Heb., sons of strength] strong men; let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master: lest peradventure the Spirit of the Lord hath taken him up [comp. 1 Kings xviii. 12; Acts viii. 39, 40. The suggestion of the sons of the prophets is a good comment on vv. 11, 12. It shows that what is there told is certainly *not* that Elijah ascended a fiery chariot and rode visibly into heaven, as the popular notion is], and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley. And he said, Ye shall not send.

17. And when they urged him [Gen. xxxiii. 11] till he was [lit., unto being] ashamed, he said, Send. They sent therefore fifty men; and they sought three days, but found him not.

18. And when they came again to him (for he tarried [now he was abiding in] at Jericho), he said unto them, Did I not say [or, command] unto you, Go not?

19. ¶ And the men of the city [not "the sons of the prophets," but the citizens] said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this [the] city is pleasant [good; Deut. xxxiv. 3], as my lord seeth: but the water is naught [bad], and the ground barren [Heb., causing to miscarry].

20. And he said, Bring me a new cruse [vessel; either dish, bowl, or cup], and put salt therein. And they brought it to him.

21. And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land [the same word as in v. 19; lit., and making (or, multiplying) abortion].

22. So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake.

23. ¶ And he went up from thence unto Beth-el: and as he was going up by the way [the highway; the way *par excellence*], there came forth little children [young boys (or, lads)] out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head [baldness was a reproach (Isa. iii. 17, xv. 2)]: go up, thou bald head.

24. And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them [to avenge the honour of Jehovah, violated in his person. (Comp. Exod. xvi. 8; Acts v. 4)] in the name of the Lord. And there came forth [directly fulfilling the menace of Lev. xxvi. 21, *seq.*] two she-bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two [showing that the mob was considerable] children of them.

25. And he went from thence to mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria [where he had his permanent abode. (Comp. chap. vi. 32)].

ELISHA.

WHEN Elijah supposed that his work was done he was ordered by Jehovah to go up and return on his way to the wilderness of Damascus; and he who supposed that his ministry was concluded had yet to anoint Hazael to be king over Syria, and Jehu the son of Nimshi to be king over Israel (1 Kings xix. 15, 16). But the anointing of these kings was a comparatively insignificant circumstance, the great point of the commission we find in the conclusion of the sixteenth verse of the same chapter:—“And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room.” Probably it had not occurred to Elijah that he could have a successor. A very subtle indication is thus given of his approaching end; the Lord instead of telling him that he had many a year left to spend in holy service, gave him to understand that even he, mighty prophet though he was, could be dispensed with, and that a man of almost unknown name would be qualified by divine inspiration to take his room. We cannot imagine Elijah's feelings under these circumstances. If a great demonstration of regard had been made, on the part of the Lord God of Israel, because Elijah was weary, the prophet might have supposed himself to be of vital consequence to the divine economy; but to be told that Elisha, a man who was ploughing

the twelfth plough in the field whilst his eleven servants were ploughing beside him, would succeed to the high dignity was really to inflict in the most gracious way a very solemn humiliation upon a man who had become so self-conscious as practically to ignore the resources of the living God. Elisha was a man in what we should now term comfortable circumstances. As he was ploughing in his field of Abel-meholah ("the meadow dance"), Elijah drew near and threw over the ploughman his prophetic sheepskin mantle, and passed on in silence, leaving Elisha himself to interpret the graphic symbol. Elisha instantly comprehended the purpose, and running after Elijah he begged to be allowed to kiss his father and mother, after which he promised to follow the senior prophet. It is noteworthy that at this time Elisha must have been quite a young man,—an inference which may be fairly drawn from the fact that sixty years after this event he was still in the exercise of his prophetic office. It is a noticeable circumstance, which repeats itself even in our own day, that Elisha was in many respects the exact counterpart of Elijah. By choosing all kinds of character and capacity to represent the divine kingdom, God shows his infinite wisdom in a way which even the dullest understanding can hardly fail to appreciate. He is not dependent upon one particular aspect of genius, or one particular accent of eloquence; he calls whom he will to the prophetic office and the ministerial function, and it should be our part to accept his vocations, however much we may be surprised at the course which they take and at the social consequences which they involve. At the time in which Elijah and Elisha exercised their functions religion and morals had gone down to the lowest possible point in Israel. The very schools of the prophets had themselves felt the corrupting influence of the times. Ahab was able to gather four hundred false prophets at a time, the remarkable circumstance being that they were not prophets of Baal but false prophets of the Lord himself. It can hardly be matter of surprise, therefore, that a man of burning spirit, arising under such circumstances, should begin his ministry with displays of power which can hardly escape the charge of being stern or even violent.

This chapter introduces us to the beginning of Elisha's ministry. He had just seen Elijah ascend, and he felt that he was left alone

to carry on the great work which had been so wondrously conducted by a master-hand. In verse twelve we see how Elisha estimated the character and service of Elijah. He exclaims, "My father, my father:" he thus indicates the most serious loss which can befall human life; this is not altogether a cry of reverence, it is also a cry of orphanhood; in their brief intercourse one with the other, Elijah had naturally taken the paternal place, and Elisha as a very young man had felt the comforting influence exercised upon him by the mighty prophet. This is a cry of young sensibility: the almost child feels himself to be quite alone; he who an hour ago supposed that after all he might be able to continue the work of Elijah now felt how terrible was the void that was created by Elijah's absence. We do not know the bulk and value of some ministries until they are removed from us; we become familiar with them, and attach no particular significance to their exercise; we come to think we have some right in them, and that by some means or other they will always be present with us: when, however, the great removal does take place, and we look around for the familiar face, and expect to be touched by the familiar hand, and our expectations are disappointed, the natural cry is "My father, my father." These words, too, may fairly be construed as suggesting an aspect of Elijah's character which is generally overlooked. Probably it has hardly occurred to us to regard Elijah as a man of special tenderness: we think of him as a great comet, or as a flash of lightning, or as a mighty whirlwind, or under any figure that suggests grandeur, majesty, and force; but we have never associated with Elijah the notion of graciousness, tenderness, love, and that easy familiarity which constitutes the very soul of friendship. Now, however, by the ascription of his name we seem to know somewhat of the genial intercourse which passed between father and son—the senior prophet and the young apostle of God; and it is delightful to infer that that intercourse had been conducted on the one side paternally and on the other side filially. We do not know altogether what men are when we only see them in public life. The great parliamentary orator may be the simplest of all men when he is in the domestic circle. The great commander of armies, whose courage never quails, may have the heart of a woman when he stands in the presence of suffering childhood. It is important for all who

attempt to delineate the characters of public men to remember that they see only one aspect of those characters and are therefore not qualified to pronounce upon the whole man.

The next expression of Elisha is, "The chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof" (v. 12).—This is an apparently incoherent exclamation. When properly understood, however, it conveys a further tribute to the ministry which was exercised by the ascending prophet. The real meaning is: My father, my father, so much better than all chariots and horses,—in thy absence the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof, are useless; they were used by thee, and under thy conduct could be turned to good account, but now that thou art gone they do but mock our loneliness and make us feel still more bitterly our helpless condition. A greater question than, Where is Elijah? now occurred to the desolate young man. Instantly he seizes the reality of the occasion, and by exclaiming, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" he shows that he is not called to a merely official position, but that he is elected to represent the divine majesty upon earth. The young man thus begins well. There is nothing frivolous in his inquiry or in his interpretation of events. The very depth of his feeling gives us an index to the capacity of his mind. Rely upon it that he who can feel as Elisha did must have a mind equal in its proportions to the fine emotions which enlarge and ennoble his heart. Had the young man deported himself in a way which suggested self-sufficiency, his prophetic office would have been destroyed well-nigh before it was created. It is when we stand back in humility and in almost despair, and cry out in our desolateness, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" that we begin our work in the right spirit, and only then. In this whole ministry of righteousness and redemption there is no place for self-sufficiency. The apostle Paul said, "Our sufficiency is of God." The great inquiry, "Who is sufficient for these things?" keeps down human ambition and vanity, and prepares the heart for the utterance of prevailing prayer. The question which was thus propounded by Elisha is full of suggestion to ourselves. When we come to read the Bible we should not inquire so much Where is inspiration: but, Where is wisdom which can be applied to our own circumstances

and be made unto us as the very staff of life? We need not exclaim in considering the Christian ministry of our own day, Where are the miracles of the Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles? Our inquiry should be, Where are the healed men, the comforted hearts, the forgiven souls, the rejoicing spirits? Who cares to inquire into the mechanism of the organ when he can hear its music and be bowed down by its most solemn appeals?

“And when the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him” (v. 15).

There was no mistaking that spirit. Who can mistake the presence and influence of fire? Better that our spirit should be discovered than that our credentials should be examined. Of what avail is it that a man can produce a whole portfolio of testimonials, if nobody has discovered in him the presence and effect of the divine Spirit? This tribute is also to the credit of the sons of the prophets, for their judgment was vital and not accidental. There are men who will only regard providence as operating in one way or as operating in one form. These sons of the prophets did not belong to such an inferior class of judges. It is remarkable too, that the organic unity of the prophetic office is hereby recognised. The sons of the prophets do not treat Elisha as a novelty, a new sensation, or as representing a new point of departure; they unite the old with the new; though the man has changed, the spirit remains the same. This is what must be always regarded in reading Christian history and in watching the course of the Christian ministry. Old ministers depart, but when new men come they come with the old spirit and the old truth, or if they come with any other spirit or any other doctrine, they should, in the degree of the change, be suspected of being other than genuine successors of the prophets. From the beginning God has signalled ministers less by some outward badge than by an inward and spiritual power. “The Lord came down in a cloud, and spake unto him [Moses] and took of the spirit that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, that, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease.” “The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the

spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." And the apostle Peter recognises the same doctrine as continuing in the Christian Church, for he says, "The spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you." We are thus brought back to pentecostal days and pentecostal signs. The age will care little about names, offices, and ceremonial claims, but will set more and more store upon spiritual insight, spiritual sympathy, and the power of revealing the human heart to itself and applying divine remedies to human diseases.

"And they said unto him, Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men; let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master: lest peradventure the Spirit of the Lord hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley. And he said, Ye shall not send. And when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, Send. They sent therefore fifty men; and they sought three days, but found him not. And when they came again to him, (for he tarried at Jericho,) he said unto them, Did I not say unto you, Go not?" (vv. 16-18).

This proposal on the part of the young men must not be taken as an evidence of their scepticism, but as a proof of their determination to show that the case was from end to end thoroughly genuine in all its phases. They determined upon going out in quest of Elijah, if haply he might have hidden upon some mountain. They said, "Lest peradventure the Spirit of the Lord hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley." Elisha did not need any such demonstration of the reality of Elijah's ascension. Why? because Elisha himself saw the ascension, as we read in verse twelve, and he was therefore in the position of an eye-witness. Elisha insisted that the young men should not go, but they plied him with such importunity that at length he consented. A very beautiful expression occurs in verse 17—"They . . . found him not." All God's ways, so far as they are known to us, prove that when he has accomplished an end it is impossible to reverse it—to open a door which he has shut, or to shut a door which he has opened. When God takes away a man, who can find him? This is not only true of the man bodily, but of the man influentially. We have seen men removed who exercised a very baleful influence upon their age, and not only have they themselves been buried and put out of sight, but their whole influence has been utterly and externally

extirpated ; so to say, their roots have been torn up out of the earth and flung into the devouring fire, to be found no more for ever. But not to find Elijah suggests the great question whether something better than the merely personal Elijah cannot be found ? We can now find Elijah's spirit ; we can find Elijah's example ; we can, above all things, find Elijah's God. What, then, is it, that is really taken away from us when the great man dies ? Is it not his bodily presence only that is removed ? We remember him, we can recall his visage, we can reanimate his voice ; we know precisely what he would have done under given circumstances ; we can now sympathetically commune with him in prayer and study as we read and expound the holy oracles ; we know well how spotless and pure was his heroic character ;—all these memories and impressions are with us, not only as memories and impressions, but as amongst the most solid certainties of our life ; what, then, though we find him not in the body, the man, in the largest and best acceptation of the term, is with us always, even unto the end of the world.

“And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth : but the water is naught, and the ground barren. And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought it to him. And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters ; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land. So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake (vv. 19-22).

Elisha begins his ministry by doing good : that is to say, by healing the water that was diseased. This appeal to the prophet to do something for the city or Jericho was itself a tribute to the genuineness of the prophetic office as exercised by him. It is always beautiful to notice how great power is associated with the doing of good. What is it to be a prophet of any age if the age is not practically benefited by the exercise of the office ? The age does not want ornamental prophets, nominal prophets, official prophets ; the age is crying out for men who can give it bread, who can heal its water, who can mitigate its sorrows, who can destroy its oppressions. By this sign must all prophets live or die. It would have been a poor thing on the part of Elisha to have shown the mantle of his predecessor if he could not also

show his power. We are only in the apostolic succession as we are in the apostolic spirit. We may have all the relics which the apostles left behind, the cloak that was left at Troas, and the parchment, and the staff, and the vessels out of which they ate and drank : we may even have the scrolls which they used in reading the Holy Scriptures ; but all these things will constitute only a burden if we have not along with all other possessions the mighty and eternal Spirit of the living God, without whose energy even the apostles themselves were but common men. The apostles of the age must come to bless our home, to bless our bread, to sanctify our love, and give our whole life a new and better impulse : in the degree in which they do this they will never forfeit the respect of their contemporaries. Depraved as the world is, it comes in the long run to recognise with gratitude the men who do most for the alleviation of its distresses and the lessening of its burdens.

Elisha having cured the water, he went up from the depressed plain of Jericho to the top of the highland of Jordan, to the height of three thousand feet, that he might come unto Beth-el, which, alas ! became the chief stronghold of the calf-worship. The popular sentiment was debased to the lowest possible point ; even the little children were tainted with the awful disease of contempt for the greatest names and the greatest thoughts in Israel.

“ And he went up from thence unto Beth-el : and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head ; go up, thou bald head. And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them. And he went from thence to mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria ” (vv. 23-25).

This miracle has occasioned no little difficulty to those who read it only in the letter. It is not a narrow incident which can be regarded as a mere anecdote and treated as it were within the limits of its own four corners. We must understand the spirit of the age in which the incident occurred ; we must realise that the whole air was full of idolatry and blasphemy ; we must remember that the very church of Israel itself was deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, with hardly one spot of health on all the

altar from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot ; we must keep steadily before our minds the fact that the places which are mentioned in this incident had become as Sodom and Gomorrah, not perhaps in the physical and carnal sense, but in the still worse sense of spiritual alienation and spiritual contempt for everything associated with the name of the living God. When Elisha, therefore, wrought this deed of violence—this miracle of destruction—his action must be regarded as typically, and as strictly in keeping with the necessities of the occasion. Only this kind of miracle could have been understood by the people amongst whom it was worked, and who had an opportunity of feeling its effects either directly or incidentally. How often it happens that the first miracle is one which is marked peculiarly by a destructive energy ! This would seem to be the miracle which our own first zealous impulses would work, had they the power to express themselves in such a form. When the soul is alive with the purity of God, when the heart glows and burns with love, when the whole being is in vital sympathy with the purposes of the cross of Christ, the first and all but uncontrollable impulse is to destroy evil—not to reason with it, or make truce with it, or give it further treatment of any kind, but instantly and violently to crush it out of existence. This impulse will be trained to other uses in the school of Christ. Nothing could have been easier to the Son of God than to have destroyed his enemies ; he who raised the dead and quieted the sea could easily have put his hand upon his foes and crushed them so that they never could rise again. Not for this purpose, however, did he come into the world : “ The Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.” Jesus Christ thus undertakes the most difficult part of all. There is nothing so easy as to destroy ; there is nothing so difficult as to save. Who could not in one black night destroy the finest fabric ever raised by human hands ? Gunpowder would do it, dynamite would do it ;—but who could put up that fabric again in all its massiveness and beauty ? Let us always understand that Jesus Christ came to destroy the works of the devil and thus to destroy the devil himself. He would destroy sin ; he would save the sinner.

2 Kings iii.

1. Now Jehoram the son of Ahab began to reign [lit., reigned] over Israel in Samaria the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned twelve years.

2. And he wrought evil [did the evil in the eyes] in the sight of the Lord: but not like his father, and like his mother: for he put away [and he removed] the image [(Heb., "statue") pillar. Comp. 2 Chron. xxxiv. 4] of Baal that his father had made.

3. Nevertheless he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam [1 Kings xii. 28, seq., xvi. 2, 26] the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom ["from it"].

4. ¶ And Mesha ["deliverance, salvation"] king of Moab was a sheep-master, and rendered unto the king of Israel an hundred thousand lambs, and an hundred thousand rams, with the wool.

5. But [And] it came to pass, when Ahab was dead, that the king of Moab rebelled [refused payment of the annual tribute] against the king of Israel.

6. ¶ And king Jehoram went out of Samaria the same time [lit., in that day] and numbered [mustered, made a levy of] all Israel.

7. And he went and sent to Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, saying, The king of Moab hath rebelled against me; wilt thou go with me against Moab to battle [or, into Moab to the war]? And he [Jehoram] said, I will go up: I am as thou art, my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses.

8. And he said, Which way shall we go up? And he answered [said—*i.e.*, Jehoshaphat], The way through the wilderness of Edom [a vassal king appointed by Jehoshaphat (1 Kings xxii. 48)].

9. So the king of Israel went, and the king of Judah, and the king of Edom: and they fetched a compass of seven days' journey: and there was no water for the host, and for the cattle that followed them.

10. And the king of Israel said, Alas! that the Lord hath called these three kings together [omit "together"] to deliver them into the hand of Moab!

11. But [And] Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may enquire of the Lord by him [same question asked in 1 Kings xxii. 7]? And one of the king of Israel's servants answered and said, Here is Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah.

12. And Jehoshaphat said, The word of the Lord is with him. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him.

13. And Elisha said unto the king of Israel, What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father [*i.e.*, the Baal prophets (comp. 1 Kings

xviii. 19), and false prophets of Jehovah (1 Kings xxii. 6-11), Elisha's sarcasm indicates that the former had not been wholly rooted out] and to the prophets of thy mother. And the king of Israel said unto him, Nay [say not so, or, repel me not (comp. Ruth i. 13)]: for the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab.

14. And Elisha said, As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand [as a minister (comp. 1 Kings xvii. 1, xviii. 15)], surely, were it not that I regard the presence [lift the face (comp. Gen. xix. 21; xxxii. 21)] of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee.

15. But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him [in some MSS. "the Spirit of the Lord;" but comp. 1 Kings xviii. 46].

16. And he said, Thus saith the Lord, Make this valley full of ditches, [lit., pits (comp. Gen. xiv. 10)].

17. For thus saith the Lord, Ye shall not see wind [which in the East is the usual precursor of rain], neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts.

18. And this is but a light thing in the sight of the Lord: he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand.

19. And ye shall smite every fenced city, and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree [*i.e.*, fruit-bearing trees], and stop [Gen. xxvi. 15, 18] all wells of water, and mar [lit., make to grieve, Isa. xxiv. 4; Jer. xii. 4] every good piece of land with stones.

20. And it came to pass in the morning, when the meat-offering was offered, that, behold, there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water.

21. ¶ And when all the Moabites heard that the kings were come up to fight against them, they gathered [lit., had been summoned, called together (Judg. vii. 23)] all that were able to [lit., gird himself with a girdle] put on armour, and upward, and stood in the border.

22. And they rose up early in the morning, and the sun shone upon the water, and the Moabites saw the water on the other side as red as blood:

23. And they said, This is blood: the kings are surely slain [Heb., destroyed], and they have smitten one another: now therefore, Moab, to the spoil.

24. And when they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and smote the Moabites [who were unprepared for resistance], so that they fled before them: but [or, they smote in it, even smiting] they went forward smiting the Moabites, even in their country.

25. And they beat down the cities, and on every good piece of land cast every man his stone, and filled it; [all this as Elisha foretold (v. 19)] and they stopped all the wells of water, and felled all the good trees [Heb., until he left the stones thereof in Kir-haraseth]: only in Kir-haraseth left they the stones thereof; howbeit the slingers went about it [surrounded it], and smote it.

26. ¶ And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too sore for him, he took with him seven hundred men that drew swords, to break through even unto the king of Edom : but they could not.

27. Then [And] he took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall. And there was great indignation against Israel [or, and great wrath fell upon Israel] : and they departed from him, and returned to their own land.

JEHORAM AND MOAB.

JEHORAM undertakes an expedition against king Mesha, but in doing so he pays a tribute to the power of the king of Moab by allying with himself Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and also the king of Edom. A remarkable character is given of Jehoram. He was not an imitator of the evil of his father as to its precise form, but he had his own method of serving the devil. We should have thought that Ahab and Jezebel had exhausted all the arts of wickedness, but it turns out that Jehoram had found a way of his own of living an evil life. Warned by the untimely fate of his brother, which had fallen upon him expressly on account of his Baal-worship, Jehoram began his reign by an ostentatious abolition of the Phœnician state religion which his father had introduced. Jehoram went back to the olden times and re-established the worship of the calf, after the pattern which Jeroboam its founder had patronised. His doing so, however, he found to be quite compatible with a secret allowance that the people should practise their own form of worship. There is room in wickedness for the exercise of genius of a certain limited kind. The limitation is imposed by wickedness itself, for after all wickedness is made up of but few elements. Many persons suppose that if they do not sin according to the prevailing fashion they are not sinning at all. They imagine that by varying the form of the evil they have mitigated the evil itself. A good deal of virtue is supposed to consist in reprobating certain forms of vice. A man may be no drunkard, according to the usual acceptation of the term, and yet he may be in a continual state of intoxication. It is possible to shudder at what is usually known as persecution, and yet all the while to be beheading enemies and burning martyrs. Jehoram made a kind of trick of wickedness ; he knew how to give a twist to old

forms, or a turn to old ways, so as to escape part of their vulgarity and yet to retain all their iniquity. A most alarming thought it is to the really spiritual mind that men may become adepts in wickedness, experts in evil-doing, and may be able so to manage their corrupt designs as to deceive many observers by a mere change of surface or appearance. We do not amend the idolatry by altering the shape of the altar. We do not destroy the mischievous power of unbelief by throwing our scepticism into metaphysical phrases, and making verbal mysteries where we might have spiritual illumination. We are deceived by things simply because we ourselves live a superficial life and read only the history of appearances. What is the cure for all this manipulation of evil, this changing of complexion of form, and this consequent imagining that the age is improving because certain phenomena which used to be so patent are no longer discernible on the face of things? We come back to the sublime doctrine of regeneration, as the answer to the great inquiry, What is the cure for this heart-disease? "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." We may change either the language or the manners of wickedness, or the times and seasons for doing wicked things; we may decorate our wickedness with many beautiful colours, but so long as the heart itself is unchanged, decoration is useless; yea, worse than useless, for it is a vain attempt to make that look true which is false—an endeavour even to deceive Omniscience itself.

"And Mesha king of Moab was a sheepmaster, and rendered unto the king of Israel a hundred thousand lambs, and an hundred thousand rams, with the wool. But it came to pass, when Ahab was dead, that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel" (vv. 4, 5).

Enduring masteries are not of a physical kind. Ahab held Mesha simply by a strong arm, and the consequence was that as soon as Ahab was dead Mesha refused to render the tribute. This historical circumstance, limited so far as the mere letter is concerned, is full of significance to the Christian Church and to all Christian countries. Let us not call ourselves masters of positions or of men, simply because we happen to have the stronger arm. The dominion which is acquired by mere strength, and held by superior force, is an illusion wherever it is found. The men whom we may so hold may be hypocrites

enough to assume an acquiescent attitude, or even to display a complacent demeanour; they may even go so far as to appear to be grateful for the rule which they cannot set aside. But all such appearances are of necessity without reason, and therefore without continuance. They are always to be suspected. This would be so in the case of the Christian faith, had we the power of imposing even its nominal belief upon any nation. Suppose we say that any man not professing the Christian faith shall certainly be fined, imprisoned, or otherwise punished, it is easy to see that such a threat might in many instances bring about an appearance of acquiescence. But it must be, by the very necessity of the case, appearance only. Faith is a question of the individual judgment and of the individual heart, and cannot be controlled in any degree by external authority. Suppose we create a law making it penal to open places of business on the Sabbath day; looking upon all commercial houses whose business was suspended for a particular time, we might say, See how unanimously and happily the Sabbath day is observed in this country! But such would be an altogether superficial and mistaken judgment. The Sabbath day cannot be kept by law. If the Sabbath is not kept by the reason, and is not hailed with thankful delight by the very heart, it never can be kept at all. All shops may be closed, all places of amusement may suspend their entertainments, all toys may be put away from the nursery, all out-door enjoyments and avocations may be withdrawn for the time, but the people who have retired in apparent acceptance of these conditions, but not in heartfelt acquiescence with them, are breaking the Sabbath every moment they breathe. Here is a great law for the house, the church, and the nation. The head of the family who rules by mere dread or tyranny is not training an obedient household, he is preparing an outburst of sedition, which sooner or later must transpire, and when it occurs his ruin is certain. The same law applies in the matter of capital and labour. The man who only works that he may receive his wages never truly serves or makes his labour into a delight. The man who can threaten the labourer by withdrawal of pecuniary recognition never elicits from that labourer a response to duty, though he may insist upon a formal compliance with law. What a blessed mastery is that of Christ in this respect!

He reasons with men, he addresses the very highest form and quality of mind ; he sets before men the alternative courses of life, and beseeches them to accept the straitgate and the narrow way leading to repentance ; certainly he threatens, he denounces, he declares an awful issue for the wicked man, but it is not mere threatening or mere denunciation ; it is the solemn disclosure of a sequence which even Almighty God could not suspend and yet retain the integrity of his throne and the security of the universe. We must never accuse Jesus Christ of what is termed "threatening" : his denunciations are revelations, and not the expressions of merely angry feeling.

The way of the approach having been settled, the kings proceeded to fetch a compass of seven days' journey round by the south end of the Dead Sea. They little knew the difficulty that would arise in their way. We do not read that they made any religious enquiry at the outset of their journey, and therefore no responsibility could be charged upon God for the misadventure which occurred. The three kings seem to have consulted only with themselves, and to have resolved in their own counsel and strength upon their expedition against Mesha. What was the misadventure which occurred ? It is related in the ninth verse : — "And there was no water for the host, and for the cattle that followed them." Even kings are dependent upon nature. Think of three kings, who supposed themselves at least to be very mighty, and all their people, stopped in their career simply for want of water ; at how many points does God lay his hand upon us and say, Beyond this limit you cannot go without an acknowledgment of a power higher than your own ! Again and again we have seen this in many relations of life. For weeks together we go forward as if a high road had been prepared for us, and, lo ! in a moment we come to a place where our thirst reminds us that we want a well or a fountain, and looking round we discover that the whole land is barren, and that no spring invites us to its hospitality. Many men would deny God in religion if they could deny him or get rid of him altogether in nature. There are a thousand ways to church ! Even nature becomes a kind of sanctuary when we find it impossible to extract anything from it even by the exercise of our ripest

wisdom and completest strength. The barren harvest field is a far more likely place for prayer and supplication than is the field which is rich with the gold of mature wheat. We are more likely to turn an empty barn into a church than a full one. But it is thus through the body that God makes an assault upon the mind. Where there would be no consideration whatever of a religious kind, where circumstances were all favourable, there may be a kind of whimpering as of a coward's voice when the fig-tree does not blossom and when there is no herd in the stall.

A very pitiable and yet very instructive picture is this of three kings and their armies standing still merely for want of water. The so-called little things of life are often turned into not only things that are great but things that are vital. Blessed indeed would be the man who sees even in natural arrangements and daily providences a call to him to lift up his head towards the heavens, and ask great questions about being and duty and destiny. So we have the usual religious appeal: "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may enquire of the Lord by him?" (v. 11). We put off enquiring of the Lord until the very last, until our lips are so dry that they can hardly open to utter their long-deferred appeal. God has only to pursue what may be termed a negative course of providence in order to bring some men to their senses. The visitations of God may be described as either positive or negative: sometimes he comes in destructive tempests, in devastating epidemics, in cholera, small-pox, and other diseases which mow down the people in hundreds and thousands, and then a great cry goes up from the decimated nation, asking in the name of pity that the tremendous visitation may be withdrawn; sometimes, on the other hand, God adopts a kind of negative treatment of the nation, with a view to testing its quality and purpose,—it does not rain, the sun is hidden for many a day, the ground does not bring forth plentifully, the rivers are dried up. What is the consequence of all this negation? Extremes meet: the result of the negative amounts to the same as the result of the positive,—emptiness, suffering, desolation, death. There need not be any demonstration of anger on the part of God, as anger is usually understood: he has but to be indifferent to us, to let go his hold of us, to think of us no more, and this negative economy eventuates

in our ruin, as certainly as if the Lord had smitten us with swords from heaven, or sent a destroying angel visibly into our midst.

Elisha now assumes a new attitude, and one certainly not destitute of spiritual grandeur. Turning to the king of Israel, he said :

“What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother. And the king of Israel said unto him, Nay: for the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab” (v. 13).

Observe this address was made to the very king of Israel: it simply means that the God of Israel had nothing to do with the king of Israel, and yet Israel was understood to be a theocracy. The form was theocratic, but not the power. Think of a man bearing the name of God, and yet being godless: a temple deserted of its deity is undoubtedly a melancholy sight, but what shall be said of the man from whose heart the Spirit of the living God has departed? Elisha seems to have inherited the taunting spirit of his great predecessor:—“Get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother.” Who can say with how bitter a taunt the word “mother” was pronounced in this connection? The evil that men do goes on for many a day, not only to the end of their lifetime, but it lives after them. This is a taunt that is founded on reason. If men have been serving a god for seven years past, surely it cannot be unreasonable to refer them to that god in the time of their extremity? What is faith if it cannot be tested? What is the value of an altar if you cannot go to it and find lying upon it direct answers to your prayer? Is there anything meaner in all the history of cowardice than that a man should ignore the living God all his life, and then whiningly repent upon his death-bed? Why does he not go to the trusts to which he has committed himself, and say he will die in them as he has lived in them? Surely the cowardice of men should teach those who observe it something regarding the nature and uses of religious faith. The appeal of Elisha was perfectly fair. If the gods of Jehoram were worth anything, they could find water for him in the time of his necessity. Let them do it. If they will do it, then they will establish their claim to be regarded with reverence, and indeed honoured and worshipped. We must insist upon making the same appeal in our own day. If a man

will trust to his own strength, let him cling to it to the last, and when the strength has failed him, ask him, in a tone of noble indignation, "Where is now thy god?" If the Lord God of heaven and of earth cannot be subjected to the same test, then we must renounce him once for all. Still our cry must be—"The God that answereth by fire, let him be God." Men must be made to feel their irreligion. Jehoram did feel his in this instance, for he protested against the decision of Elisha. Throughout the course of Scripture men are referred to their gods, and are made to test the value of their religion, or the worthlessness of their irreligion. "Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation." "Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of at all by them?" What if God himself should resent the dishonour of being called upon as a last resort? Tempted, mocked, despised, through the course of a lifetime, will it be any wonder if at the end he should decline to receive the prayer of lips which have never blessed him? "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof." Nor has the Lord been merely an indifferent observer of all this wickedness, for during its continuance he has been pleading with the people to acknowledge him and accept his sovereignty and his grace. "I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts: therefore will I number you to the sword, and ye shall all bow down to the slaughter: because when I called, ye did not answer; when I spake, ye did not hear; but did evil before mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not." Possibly many a Jehoram may be acting under influences which he himself cannot explain, so much that he becomes a puzzle to his own mind, wondering how it is that he takes one road when he has decided upon another, and that he mistakes substances for shadows, and shadows for substances, so that his whole life is turned into a mocking bewilderment. The answer is given in Scripture—"I also will choose their delusions, and will bring

their fears upon them ; because when I called, none did answer ; when I spake, they did not hear : but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not." Nor is there any mere vengeance in all these declarations. Again we must insist that they are revelations rather than angry threatenings. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked ; but that the wicked turn from his way and live : turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways : for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" But they would not hear ; they stopped their ears, and resisted every appeal which was addressed to their reason—"Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear ; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the Lord of hosts."

Now we come to a better phase of this history, namely, to the saving element, which appears and reappears in the course of our changeful life. Elisha was not to be placated by the king of Israel. In his eyes a vile person was contemned. The king of Israel was but a poor frail thing in the presence of a man who lived with God and was commissioned to denounce the judgments of heaven against evil. But the world is not made up of Jehorams. Blessed be God, there are men of another type whose very presence saves society from judicial ruin. "And Elisha said, As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee" (v. 14). Now we know that the spirit of Elijah rested upon Elisha ! We seem to hear the very tones of the old master in the new disciple. Is it not always so in life—that it is one man who saves many : that the ten righteous men save the city, and that Paul saves all those who sail with him in the midst of the tempestuous sea ? Your house is saved because of your little child. Your whole estate is protected from ruin because your wife is a praying woman. Your life would be cut off to-morrow in shame and disgrace, were it not that you have entered upon an inheritance of prayers laid up for you by those who went before. Life thus becomes very sacred and very tender, and we know not to whom we are under the deepest obligations. Enough to know that somewhere there is a presence that saves us, there is an influence that guards our life, and that we owe absolutely nothing in the way of security or honour to bad kings or bad men of any name. Wherever is it

said, Because of the wickedness of this man society will be spared ; or, because of the unfaithfulness of that man the nation will be allowed to continue ? Nowhere is good influence attached to wicked policy. Everywhere wickedness goes down under judgment, and is thundered against mightily from heaven ; and everywhere God declares that all grace, favour, protection and security must be traced to the presence of some saving element in society. This is a social figure by which we work our way upward to the highest truths. The whole universe itself is saved because of the presence of the Son of God. He "ever liveth to make intercession for us." Whilst he lives our day of mercy will be continued. When he ascends from his mediatorial throne, the sun of grace is set to rise no more !

The remainder of the chapter is occupied with a prophecy of Elisha, and by a statement of the overthrow of the king of Moab. Nothing now could save Meshah. A strong delusion was sent upon him to believe a lie. When water came down by way of Edom, and the whole country was filled with it, the Moabites rose up early in the morning, and as the sun shone upon the water, the Moabites saw the water on the other side as red as blood. It looked so like blood that they declared it to be blood, and believing that the kings were slain who had come up against them, the Moabites advanced to the spoil. Alas ! they advanced to their ruin. "Therefore shall Moab howl for Moab ; every one shall howl : for the foundations of Kir-hareseth shall ye mourn ; surely they are stricken." "My bowels shall sound like an harp for Moab, and mine inward parts for Kir-harsh." The king of Moab saw that the battle was too sore for him. In his despair he took with him seven hundred men that drew swords, to break through even unto the king of Edom, but through the iron wall he could not force his way. In his madness he took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead, and flung him for a burnt offering upon the wall. But the Lord will not be pleased with thousands of rams or with ten thousands of rivers of oil, nor will he accept the firstborn for a man's transgression or the fruit of his body for the sin of his soul. Mark the fate of those who oppose God ; even to men who object to the name of God, the word *Destiny* may come with some force of appeal. Let us say, therefore,

in the language of fatalism, How awful a thing it is to attempt to oppose destiny! Who can fight it? who can smite it? who can take the measure of it? Behold, here we are at an utter loss; we are without sense or force or power of adequate treatment. The Christian man, however, objects to the word destiny, except it be associated with the name and providence of the living God; the Christian says, "Who can fight against God?" and again, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God;" and again, "On whomsoever this stone shall fall it shall grind him to powder." Pitiably at the last will be the spectacle presented by the wicked. They shall call upon the rocks and upon the hills to cover them, but the rocks and the hills will make no reply to their vain appeal. "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." "They shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth." "They shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us"—how long shall we insist upon opposing God—lifting up a puny arm against his omnipotence? Let us hear what shall befall us if we persist in this rebellion of spirit:—"When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you." "Howl ye; for the day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty. Therefore shall all hands be faint, and every man's heart shall melt: and they shall be afraid." Wise men should look out for these final troubles, and not delude themselves with the notion that all things will continue as they are to-day. "Who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap." "Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him." Let us turn aside from these terrific issues, and find refuge whilst we may. The door of mercy stands open; the throne of grace is yet accessible: "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little."

2 Kings iv.

1. Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen.

2. And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house? And she said, Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil.

3. Then he said, Go, borrow thee vessels abroad [from the outside] of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels; borrow not a few [do not scant or stint.]

4. And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut [and go in and shut (comp. Luke viii. 51, 54)] the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside [by the help of thy sons (vv. 5, 6)] that which is full.

5. So she went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought the vessels to her: and she poured out.

6. And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son [probably the eldest], Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed [stood—*i.e.*, halted, stopped].

7. Then she came [and she went in] and told the man of God. And he [Elisha] said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt: and live thou and thy children of the rest.

8. ¶ And [And it came to pass at that time, literally, during that day] it fell on a day, that Elisha passed [crossed over] to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained [Heb., laid hold on] him to eat bread. And so it was [it came to pass], that as oft as he passed by [crossed over, as above], he turned in [he would turn aside (Gen. xix. 2)] thither to eat bread.

9. And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually [at stated intervals, regularly].

10. Let us make a little chamber [a little upper chamber with walls (comp. 1 Kings xvii. 19)], I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed [the four things mentioned are the only essentials in oriental furnishing], and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither.

11. And [see v. 8] it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the [upper] chamber, and lay [down to rest] there.

12. And he said to Gehazi [valley of vision] his servant [his young man (Gen. xxii. 3)], Call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him [Gehazi].

13. And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care [literally, trembled all this trembling (comp. Luke x. 41)], what is to be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king [literally, is it to speak for thee to the king? showing what influence Elisha enjoyed at the time], or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among mine own people.

14. And he said [when Gehazi had reported the woman's reply], What then is to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily she hath no child [a misfortune and a reproach (comp. Gen. xxx. 23; 1 Sam. i. 6, 7; Luke i. 25; Deut. vii. 13, 14; Psalm cxxviii. 3, 4)], and her husband is old.

15. And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood [or, took her stand] in the door.

16. And he said, About this season [At this set time], according to the time of life [at the reviving time—*i.e.*, next spring], thou shalt [art about to] embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid.

17. And the woman conceived [comp. Gen. xxi. 2], and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said [promised] unto her, according to the time of life.

18. ¶ And when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers.

19. And he said unto his father, My head, my head. [The young man had a sunstroke. It was the hot season.] And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother.

20. And when he had taken [carried] him, and brought him [indoors] to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died.

21. And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out.

22. And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again.

23. And he said, Wherefore wilt thou go [art thou going] to him to-day? it is neither new moon, nor sabbath [comp. Amos viii. 5]. And she said, It shall be [omit "it shall be." Well=all right] well.

24. Then she saddled an ass, and said to her servant, Drive, and go forward; slack not thy riding for me [literally, restrain me not from riding], except I bid thee.

25. So she went and came unto the man of God to mount Carmel. And it came to pass, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi his servant, Behold, yonder is that Shunammite:

26. Run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child? And she answered, It is well.

27. And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the [she laid hold of (clasped) his] feet : but [and] Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, Let her alone ; for her soul is vexed within her : and the Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me.

28. Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord ? did I not say, Do not deceive me ?

29. Then he said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way : if thou meet any man, salute him not [enjoining haste. Comp. Luke x. 4] ; and if any salute thee, answer him not again : and lay my staff upon the face of the child.

30. And the mother of the child said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose, and followed her.

31. And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child ; but there was neither voice, nor hearing [Heb., attention. 1 Kings xviii. 29 ; Isaiah xxi. 7]. Wherefore he went again to meet him [And he came back to meet him (Elisha)], and told him, saying, The child is not awaked.

32. And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed.

33. He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain [himself and the body], and prayed unto the Lord.

34. And he went up, and lay upon the child [comp. 1 Kings xvii. 21, what is hinted at there, is here described], and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands : and he stretched himself upon the child [bowed himself (comp. 1 Kings xvii. 42)] ; and the flesh of the child waxed warm [the life of the Divine Spirit which was in Elisha, was miraculously imparted (comp. Gen. ii. 7)].

35. Then he returned [from off the bed] and walked in the house [Heb., once hither and once thither] to and fro [in the chamber ; showing his intense excitement, expecting the fulfilment of his prayer] ; and went up, and stretched himself upon him : and the child sneezed [a sign of returning inspiration (comp. Luke vii. 15)] seven times, and the child opened his eyes.

36. And he called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite. So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son.

37. Then she went in [And she came], and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground [in veneration for the prophet], and took up her son, and went out.

38. ¶ And Elisha came [Now Elisha had returned] again to Gilgal : and there was a dearth in the land ; and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him [as disciples before a master (comp. vi. 1 ; Ezek. viii. 1, xiv. 1 ; Acts xxii. 3)] ; and he said unto his servant [probably not Gehazi ; but one of the sons of the prophets. So in v. 43], Set on the great pot, and seethe pottage [Gen. xxv. 29] for the sons of the prophets.

39. And one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine [a running plant like a vine], and gathered thereof wild gourds [or, cucumbers of bitter taste] his lap full, and came and shred them into the pot of pottage ; for they knew them not.

40. So they poured out for the men to eat. And it came to pass, as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out, and said, O thou man of God, there is death in the pot [the bitter taste made them think of poison]. And they could not eat thereof.

41. But he said, Then bring meal. [Some commentators suppose that by mistake a poisonous (not merely a bitter) plant had been put into the pot, and the prophet neutralises the poison by means of an antidote whose natural properties could never have had that effect. The meal in this case corresponds with the salt in ii. 21.] And he cast it into the pot; and he said, Pour out for the people, that they may eat. And there was no harm [Heb., evil thing] in the pot.

42. ¶ And there came a man from Baal-shalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the first-fruits [comp. Numb. xviii. 13; Deut. xxiii. 4], twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof. And he [Elisha] said, Give unto the people [comp. Matt. xiv. 16], that they may eat.

43. And his servitor said, What, should I set this before an hundred men? [or, How am I to set? (comp. Matt. xiv. 33)]. He said again [And he said] Give the people, that they may eat: for thus saith the Lord, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof [Heb., eating and leaving! an exclamatory mode of speech].

44. So he set it before them, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the Lord.

CHRIST ANTICIPATED.

THIS chapter has been described as containing what may be termed Elisha's private miracles. The first of these relates to the multiplication of the widow's oil. The husband of this woman is brought before us as one who was a faithful worshipper of Jehovah, and on that fact the widow seems to base her appeal. This is in some respects wrong, and in other respects not unnatural. It was wrong in the sense that no one has a right to expect to be regarded as pious on any hereditary account. The woman inherited her husband's estate, bad as it was, but she did not inherit necessarily her husband's good character. The fact, however, that she referred to that character in its religious aspects showed that she expected some good result to accrue to herself from the faith of her companion. It appears that the law of debt was one of remarkable severity, alike in Athenian and Roman law and also in the law of Moses. The Mosaic law did not establish the custom of servitude for debt, but finding it established, adopted it, and graciously defined it by certain limits of its own. The Jewish law limited the

debtor's power of pledging within the bounds of a period of jubilee, as we have seen in Levit. xxv. 39-41. In the case represented by the widow the creditor had not claimed his right over her sons, but now that the father is dead the creditor claims the services of the sons, as he was by law entitled to do. "If thy brother that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee; thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bondservant:" The Mosaic law recognised rights on both sides. It might be gracious to forgive the debtor, but such forgiveness would constitute injustice towards the creditor. It is a poor law that looks upon one side only, and that is generous at the expense of justice, but a poorer law still that does not proceed upon the principle that justice culminates in generosity.

The way in which Elisha addresses himself to the circumstances of the case is very significant of the method of Jesus Christ. Elisha asked the woman, "What shall I do for thee?" Jesus often asked the same question of those who came to him for healing or relief—"What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?" Thus the petitioner is made a party to the case in no merely nominal sense, but in the sense of acquiring distinct responsibility of suggestion or advice. No doubt the prophet knew what the widow wanted, yet a good purpose was to be gained in causing her to state her case in her own words. This is how God himself proceeds in the matter of our own prayers. Our heavenly Father knoweth what things we have need of before we ask him; yet it has pleased him to make it part of our education to allow us to state our own necessities and argue our own pleas, leaving him to be sole judge when the case is laid before him. Elisha asked another question which Jesus Christ also put on some occasions. Elisha said, "Tell me, what hast thou in the house?" Jesus Christ asked the disciples what bread they had before he proceeded to satisfy the hunger of the multitude. It is God's plan to start with what we have. He will first take everything that is in our hand, and then proceed to his own work. Thus we become in a sense fellow-workers with God. If we supply the seed (which we only do in a secondary sense), God turns that seed into an abundant harvest. But he will not cause the harvest to grow until we have done all the duty of seed-sowing.

So we have certain preliminary duties to attend to ; as, for example, finding out the whole of our resources, placing these at the disposal of the master, beginning with a little as if it were a great amount, and gradually proceeding until we ourselves are surprised by the largeness and completeness of the miracle. Now Elisha proceeds to his work :—"Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels." This would have committed him to some degree of miraculous interposition, but this was not all he said ; he added to his instructions, "Borrow not a few" (v. 3). In Psalm lxxxi. 10. we read, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." It is God's joy, if we may so put it, to give large answers to the requests of men. Said Christ, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name : ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." Not a partial joy, and not the beginning of a joy, but a complete, overflowing, redundant joy. Then comes an instruction which compares strongly with what Jesus Christ himself stated with regard to our action in prayer. The woman was commanded to shut the door upon herself, and upon her sons, and to pour oil into all the vessels which she had borrowed, setting aside the vessels as they became full. "And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed" (v. 6). It was the vessels that were exhausted, not the hand of God that was emptied. A notable lesson this, that it is never God who fails but always man who comes to the end of his capacity. It was so in the case of the manna, as we have seen in Exodus xvi 18 :—"He that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack." The woman moved by gratitude came and told the man of God. This is recorded to the credit of the woman, but it could not be recorded to the credit of many who are now living ; that is to say, they receive mercies from God, hunger is satisfied, thirst is allayed, present appeals are answered, and yet no religious response is made. "There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger." This is the first of the domestic miracles performed by Elisha.

In verse 8 we find the beginning of another miracle of the domestic kind. A "great woman" in Shunem was kind to the

prophet and his servant. She made a little chamber for the prophet, and put therein a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick. Poor furniture it may have been indeed from a merely mercantile point of view, but being chosen by the spirit of love, and set up by the hand of care, the whole chamber glowed and shone as with a light from heaven. It has given a name to all the other rooms which have been set apart for the service of good men. To this day we call the room occupied by the pastor, or the evangelist, or the agent of any good cause, "the prophet's chamber." Elisha recognised the goodness of the woman and magnified her attention, describing what she had done in terms that might appear like extravagance, for he said, "Thou hast been careful for us with all this care" (v. 13). Now the prophet offered her some reward, asking whether she would be spoken for to the king or to the captain of the host. Elisha considered that he had influence at court, as indeed he might well have, because of his great character and his splendid service. But the woman had no such wish. She said she dwelt amongst her own people; she was in peace with all her neighbours; she was not ambitious; celebrity had no charms for her, and she could work more easily under love than under patronage. What she did she did independently, feeling that hospitality shown to a servant of the living God added to her greatness. She had indeed a reward in the very fact that the man honoured her house with his presence. "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward." The prophets of the Lord avail themselves of the courteous attentions and liberal hospitalities of those who are pleased to accord them. Even the Apostle Paul did not reject the obligations of love which were offered to him. He said, "I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God." Elisha promised that this woman should have a son; and in due time

"When the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers. And he said unto his father, My head, my head. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother. And when he had taken

him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died" (vv. 18-20).

Does not this seem like mockery on the part of God? The woman was offered a reward for her generous hospitality, and behold the reward was turned into a new trial. Is it not always so? Does not increase of life really mean increase of pain? Or is it not often true that the things we most desire are often turned most heavily against us, so that our comforts become our distresses, our advantages are transformed into our hindrances, and our very pre-eminence over men does but expose us the more openly to the roughest of the wind and the tempest? As increase of wisdom is increase of sorrow—because we say, How much there is yet to be known, and how small a portion of anything is really understood—so increase of life exposes but a greater surface to the darts of the enemy. The woman took a very motherly course. Suggestively, and as it were almost upbraidingly, she laid her dead son on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out. She would make her own statement to Elisha. She would come unto him on Mount Carmel and chide him because of his cruelty. She seized Elisha by the feet, and the prophet saw that her soul was vexed within her, and yet he knew nothing of the cause, for the Lord had hidden it from him, and told him not. Then she made her speech, full of a mother's eloquence, full of bitter upbraiding, saying, "Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me?" Elisha would send his servant to see what could be done, but the woman said, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." Here is a model of importunate prayer. Here, too, is the very ground of prayer. We have what may be termed a natural standing before God, because he hath made us and not we ourselves; and as for all we have, is it not his own special and direct gift? God would seem to allow us to establish the right of speaking to him on the very ground that what we have we have received from himself. There is nothing unreasonable in the theory and exercise of prayer as defined in Holy Scripture. Suppliants in all ages have felt that God would not forsake the work of his own hands. The prophet entered the chamber, and the child was restored to the grief-stricken mother.

2 Kings iv. 31.

“And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child, but——.”

PERSONAL POWER.

HERE is a remarkable thing in Bible history—nothing less than that a miracle should miscarry. Here is an attempt to work a miracle, which ends in failure. This is strange and most painful. Who knows what may fail next? The reading about miracles in the Bible is such easy reading, everything goes on so fluently and happily, that one is called up with great abruptness at an instance like the present. Is it without a parallel? Does it stand wholly alone? Are there any purposed miracles suddenly broken in failure? Does the staff ever come back without having done its work? We are bound to ask these sharp and serious questions. Do not let us hasten perfunctorily over the melancholy fact of our failure; let us face it and wisely consider it, and find out whether the blame be in Elisha, or Gehazi, or the staff, or whether God himself may be working out some mystery of wisdom in occasionally rebuking us in the use of means and instruments. Elisha was not a man likely to make vain experiments. He surely would not send a staff that would fail if he knew it. Surely this was not the first time the staff had been sent upon such an errand. Was Elisha an adventurer, an empiric, a man who wanted to do with a staff what can only be done by a life? We must insist upon putting these piercing inquiries because to heal the hurt slightly is but to postpone the pain. We had, therefore, better know with all frankness and simplicity exactly what the case is, for in faithfulness may be the beginning of success. Gehazi came back and said, in effect, “Here is the staff, but it has done no good. There is neither sight, nor hearing, nor sound of returning

voice ; the child is not awaked." There is the staff, unbroken, uninjured—the prophet's staff. Let him take it back again, and remember that the child is not awaked. Why was that staff useless ? A prophet's staff—yet not doing a prophet's work. Does the prophet's staff require a prophet's hand to use it ? There may be something in that suggestion. It is not every man who can wear the armour of Saul ; it may not be every man who can use the staff of Elisha. Let us, therefore, go into critical inquiry of a moral kind.

Who was this Gehazi ? An undeveloped hypocrite. Up to this moment he may have secured outwardly his master's confidence and regard, but we are more than one self. There were three or four different men in that Gehazi figure. There are three or four different men in each of us. Which man is it to whom we speak ; who is it that announces the hymn, that offers the prayer, that reads the Scriptures, that proclaims the word ? " Things are not what they seem." Gehazi was at this moment an undeveloped knave ; and what can he do with Elisha's staff, or with God's sunlight ? The bad man spoils whatever he touches. In the fall of man, everything with which man has to do must also fall. Virtue perished out of Elisha's staff ; it became in the grip of Gehazi but a common stick. There is law in that deterioration ; there is a whole philosophy in that mysterious depletion of virtue, and we ought to understand somewhat of its operation. Sin impoverishes everything. The universe is but a gigantic shell, gleaming with painted fire to the bad man. To him there are no flowers in the garden ; there may be some diversity of colour, but flowers as tabernacles in which God reveals himself, creations of the supreme power, there are none, there can be none. The bad man sees no beauty, hears no music, acknowledges no virtue, turns everything into a nature like his own. Therefore, beware of the bad man. Do not let him kiss your little child, he will stain the sweet mouth ; do not let him grip your hand, he will leave a mark behind which will be as a wound ; do not hold company with bad men. " My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." If they say, " Let us all have one purse, and enjoy ourselves in rattling and dashing gaiety," know that their purpose is the ruin of the soul.

There is nothing sacred to the bad man; what he touches he defiles. When we are wrong in our relation to God, we are wrong in relation to everything else. Let us consider that doctrine.

A man cannot go down in his highest religious nature without going down all round. Whatever his pretence of interest may be in things beautiful and musical, and pure and noble, it is only a skilful hypocrisy. When the fool says in his heart "There is no God," he also says in his heart "There is no beauty, there is no virtue, there is no purity, there is no soul." God is the inclusive term, and denial in relation to that term is negation in reference to everything that belongs to it—all music and beauty, all virtue and tenderness, all chivalry and self-sacrifice. You cannot be theologically wrong and yet morally and socially right. We know what it is to have done the evil deed, and then to have seen all the sunshine run away from the universe like a thing affrighted. The bad man draws a pall over the morning, he plucks the forbidden fruit, and his eyes are opened and he runs. Find him a cave where the sun is not, and you find him a resting-place for which his wicked heart is in quest. You cannot tell the lie, complete the hypocrisy, pluck the interdicted fruit, break all the commandments, and then look healthy in the face, and smile really the smile of the soul. You may distort your features, you may pucker up the lineaments of your face as if trying to make a smile; but the laughter of the soul, the joy of the spirit, the delight of a pure and happy heart are impossible to the bad man. Thus we may be coming nearer to the reason why the staff failed. The staff is good, the hand that wielded it was bad: there was no true sympathy or connection between the hand and the staff: it was only in the hand, it was not in the heart. There was a merely physical grasp, there was no moral hold of the symbol of prophetic presence and power. Gehazi had already stolen from Naaman, and already there had gone out from the court of heaven the decree which blanchéd him into a leper as white as snow.

Now, let us come home. We have an inspired book as our staff, our symbol, but are we inspired readers? An inspired book should have an inspired perusal: like should come to like. By

inspiration, on the human side, we mean a meek, reverent, contrite, and willing heart; a disposition unprejudiced, a holy, sacred burning desire to know God's will and to do it all. How stands the case now? You read the Bible and get nothing out of it. No; because you read it without corresponding inspiration on your part. Perhaps you read it merely as a lesson; perhaps you read it in haste; you did but skim the letter; you did not see into the inner, deep, sacred, and mysterious spirit; and therefore you came away, saying, "I have read the inspired book, but I find nothing in it." The text may be divine, but if the preacher be less than a true man the text will perish in his lips. No bad man can preach well. He may preach eloquently, learnedly, effectively. He may go very near to being a good preacher in the rigid sense of that term, but the bad man cannot preach well in God's sense and definition of the term. What can the bad man preach? Can he preach salvation by the blood of Christ?—he who knows not what it is to shed one drop of blood for any human creature, to suffer one pain of mind or body that some fellow-creature may be mitigated in the hour of agony supreme. What can he preach? Can he preach the great doctrine of sacrifice who has never lived it? Can he call to pureness who knows not where the angel lives? Can he speak nobly who never felt nobly? We contend, in view of the only possible answers to these inquiries, that no bad man can preach well, can use the staff with high spiritual efficacy, or can bring back tidings that will fill the heart of Christ with sweet contentment. Gehazi cannot represent Elisha; the bad man cannot represent the Son of God; the man who is self-seeking, is idolatrous, and cannot represent a cross every atom of which is a symbol and a type of self-renunciation.

Now, we will go further, and add that, as no bad man can preach well, no bad man can listen well. He is not listening to the truth. He may be listening to some voice which beats more or less pleasantly and fascinatingly upon the ear of his body, but he is not listening to the music of the truth, the sweet, inner strains of celestial melody, the stern voice of righteousness, the pleading tones of persuasion. His soul is not attentive. While in the house of God he may be, as to his affections and desires,

in the very den of thieves. It is possible that we may be listening and not hearing; we may assume attentiveness whilst our soul is playing truant and listening to other voices which we would not our dearest friends should hear. This may, perhaps, be a rebuke to some who are wont to say, "I may not be all I ought to be, but I know the truth when I hear it." We meet your assertion with a flat contradiction. If you are not a good man you do not know the truth when you hear it. You know certain phrases, expressions, and sentences: you know if the bells are chiming in regular order, but you only know the letter, not the spirit, and to you, on account of your viciousness, developed or undeveloped, is not given that spirit of power which sees the truth and feels the truth and hails the truth with acclaims of thankfulness when it is presented in some unaccustomed form.

We assert this with the greater breadth and emphasis, because there are certain persons who, being notoriously of the class of Gehazi, are sometimes consulted as to the orthodoxy of certain candidates for the pulpit. They come from their reeking feast, just to give a hint to the officers of the church as to the real soundness and orthodoxy of the young candidate, and they say, wiping their sensuous lips, "I may not be all I ought to be, but I know the truth when I hear it." No; no. The bad man does not know the truth when he hears it. He knows the words, the phrases, the accustomed and stereotyped sentences; but the truth,—what is that? High as heaven, wide as infinity, enduring as God, one as the firmament, separate as the stars. What is the truth? Know—"The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him;" "To this man will I look, to the man that is of a humble and contrite heart, and who trembleth at my word." There is no passage in all the revelation of God which says the bad man knows the truth. The bad man cannot guide you into truth; the bad man cannot be an excellent counsellor. We hear nothing about the bad man but thunders of denunciation, words of wrath, scathing, scorching words, which bid him keep off, and not spoil the holy altar of the sanctuary.

This may take from some of you your blank charter of criticism and right and title to say what is a good sermon and what is a bad sermon, what is orthodoxy and what is heterodoxy. If you are of a humble and contrite heart, trembling in God's house, and

saying, "Thy word is a lamp and a great light, and thy word, like thy commandment, is exceeding broad, and thy statutes are many; lead me into the mystery of thy truth and kingdom;" then you will be able to say, "The word was pure, the word was good; the word had unity, the palpitation of divinest life; the word, though feebly uttered, was none other than the word of God." "Except ye be converted, and become as little children," you cannot say what is the truth, and who are its proper preachers.

We are the stronger upon this point, because, in this service of endeavouring to raise dead men and bring men to Christ in Christ's own way, goodness is power. There is a tendency to depreciate goodness. Where is there a man who thinks that he is not entitled to pass a somewhat sneering sentence upon mere goodness? There is no "mere goodness." Goodness is not to be so qualified and limited. Goodness is, in this Christian service, power—ample, enduring, self-renewing power. Why we have sometimes heard talk after this fashion: "So-and-so may be a very good man, but he is a poor preacher;" "So-and-so, I have no doubt, is a good man," and with that card so blank, and signed only by your name, the man is sent out in the direction of social and ecclesiastical contempt. "He is only a good man;" "He may be very good;" "I dare say he is a good man." We strenuously protest against the use of that word "good," if it involve the very slightest sneer against the first qualification of a minister—namely, goodness of character, of intent, and purpose. Character is power; goodness will stand the flame; truth will stand when all things fail, and at the last we shall hear but two words characterising the minister of every grade and name who shall be admitted into his Lord's kingdom, and these two words are "good" and "faithful."

We have now to face a very subtle temptation—namely, the temptation to inquire, seeing that we have not succeeded in our ministry, whether the staff was good. When does Gehazi pierce himself and say, "The blame is in me"? What a temptation there is for him to look at the staff and say, "I may have got hold of the wrong symbol! This is really not Elisha's own staff. Had I possessed myself of the right staff certainly the child

would have been awakened when I laid it upon his face." It is so men reason about the Bible. They say, "Can the Bible be inspired when so many persons pay no attention to it? Is it the right Bible? How can it be? When it is read the people do not answer it with a great shout of acquiescence and gladness. How, then, can it be inspired? The Book itself must be the wrong book. We have not got hold of the right staff." When does the reader say, "The blame is mine: I am not in sympathy with the Bible: I am not subject to the same inspiration which indited the holy word: I am self-inspired; I am not inspired from above: I only read the letter; I do not breathe the sacred spirit"? Do you know that it is not every man who can read the Bible at all times? There are some portions of the Bible which we can only read occasionally. There are whole books in the Bible which do not give up their secret and mystery to us in every mental mood and every social condition. The self-idolatrous man, the Pharisee—cleansed well outside, and well-seeming altogether to the public eye, content with himself, counting the beads of his own virtue night and day, finding his only luxury in self-survey and contemplation—cannot read the fifty-first Psalm. He could pronounce the letters; but a very inferior creature could be taught to do that. Only the man whose heart has been broken on account of sin, who has seen its sinfulness, felt its plague, known it in all its abominableness, and tested his own helplessness in the matter, can read with right emphasis the penitential Psalm. He may punctuate it with sobs, he may interrupt his reading with tears and chokings: but it will be fine reading. There will be an unction in the broken rhetoric which cannot be acquired in the schools. The sob of feebleness will be mightier in heaven than the thunder of conscious power. Only he who knows what penitence is can read the words of penitence. The prosperous man—who has never had a day's real sorrow in his life; who lives in the temple of prosperity and in the home of ease; whose water is daily turned into wine; who touches dust and it becomes fine gold; who makes every bargain a success—cannot read the twenty-second Psalm, cannot understand the twenty-third Psalm, does not know the meaning of the fourteenth chapter of John. He calls such Psalms and chapters sentimental, soft, wanting in practicalness; he thinks he

can find something better in other literature. But let him be broken on the cross; let him just see once into the valley of the shadow of death; let him once know the meaning of the sandy wilderness, and the rocky desert, and the place where there are no pools of water; let once his heart be shattered in every hope, and the whole sky drape itself in appalling gloom; then let the Psalms be read and the chapter be uttered in his hearing, and he will say, "This is the music I love, this is the voice I needed, this is the tender strain: read on, and on, for ever; for there is comfort in every tone, there is inspiration in every word; this is the balm of Gilead, this is as my Father's house."

When the child is not awaked do not blame the staff; when the neighbourhood is unaware of your spiritual presence do not blame the neighbourhood or the word, but seriously say to yourself, "Am I Gehazi? Am I the wrong man with the right staff? Have I got the right book, but am myself the wrong reader? Is the blame in me? Search me, and try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and God be merciful to me a sinner." When there is more of such self-inquisition, and self-searching, and self-immolation, we shall awake to a nobler earnestness and give ourselves to a broader and deeper devotedness. Why did you take the staff? Was it only to see a miracle? Why did you turn preacher? Was it only to get a living? Why did you attach yourself to such and such a church? Was it merely that you might be counted orthodox? Can you say in your heart of hearts, "I would leave this ministry if I did not find bread in it. I would join another church if I should not lose social and ecclesiastical status. My limits chafe me, and I want some broader place, but dare not go forward, because I should leave behind me friends and patronage, personal and social ease and comfort"? If so, I will not pray that your church may be empty, and that your wages night by night may be the keenest disappointment. God will see to it that your teeth are broken with gravel-stones, and that the issue of your hypocrisy will be as a candle blown out, a name hated; when you are buried, it will not be in the sepulchre of the kings, and God will see that Gehazi does not play tricks with Elisha's staff; but he shall be unveiled, self-revealed, openly condemned, and die a leper without cure.

Now shall we change for one moment the point of view, and ask this question: Was not Elisha partly to blame in this matter? Did he send a staff when he ought to have gone himself? Did he seek a proxy? Did he say, "Spare me trouble; save my time; consider my convenience: Gehazi, take this staff, and run along and see what you can do with it"? We should instantly encounter the inquiry with a sharp and indignant denial, if we did not know that many men are practically doing the same thing. Does any man send a guinea when he ought to send a life? Does any man patronise Christ's Church when he ought to die to his own vanity, self-indulgence, and self-idolatry? Does any man endeavour to compound for self-immolation by sending other people to do his work? Jesus Christ gave—what? Himself. Body? Yes. "This is my body, broken for you." Blood? Yes. "This is my blood; eat ye all of this broken bread, drink ye all of this shed blood, this symbolic cup." He gave himself, and self-giving is the only true benefaction and donation. Let us not buy ourselves off by some gift of gold or silver. Such gifts we must give to be in the church at all; but they ought to represent sacrifice, denial, loss of enjoyment; they ought not to be mere asides, collateral incidents of which we take but small note. They ought to take bits out of us. We ought to be made to feel that part of ourselves has gone with every gift we gave.

No other man can do your work. There may be men as good as you, who can do their work better than you could do it; but no man can do your particular kind of work, no man can offer up your particular prayer. Every man has his own calling of God in this as in other matters. We do not all work in the same way. The good man to whom we have referred may not be what is termed a powerful, eloquent, or effective preacher, but he will speak healingly, lovingly, tenderly, and with sweet persuasiveness; and he will get hold of some who might be terrified by another style, and flee away from it, as men would seek to hide themselves from a threatening thunderstorm. No man can give away your tract; no other man can pay your visit to your sick friend. He knows you. A greater man would not be received. In some respects a better man would not be understood; but he knows you—every tone

in your voice, every motion of your hand within his, every look of your eye, every variation of your countenance, and a word from you has an effect which it would not have from any other living creature. Let every man, therefore, recognise his individual election and calling in this matter, and fulfil the same self-sacrificingly and gladly. Do not imagine that the failure is always attributable either to Elisha or to the staff, or even to Gehazi. There are some failures in the ministry of the word which are not to be spoken about as involving dishonesty on the part of the particular minister exercising it. Even Jesus Christ himself sometimes said, "The child is not awaked; there is no sound of voice; there is no sign of hearing." Christ could not do many mighty works because of unbelief. God tries us by our failures to see how faithful we really are. There is a temptation in success, and we need occasionally the empty church, the deserted pew, and the ineloquent time in the pulpit, to show us that this work is God's and not ours; that we have the treasure in earthen vessels, but the excellency of the power is of God and not of us.

And whilst there are failures attributable to the Gehazi spirit, and that may be attributable to the neglect of Elisha, there are other failures that have other explanations. My toiling brother, devoted minister, teacher with no harvest into which to thrust the sickle, messenger coming back again with the staff, saying, "The child is not awaked," do not let me afflict you with unjust reproaches. Sometimes all this experience occurs in the case of the best and noblest men. I merely put a case for inquiry. Do not spare the inquiry. Do not withhold your attention from it in all its aspects and merits; and if you can truly say, "I have done my utmost, God helping me; I have not spared myself; I have worked hard; I have been patient and hopeful, and here is the staff—the child is not awaked;" God will see to it that to-morrow you shall do a miracle that will bring back your joy, and seal the validity of your ministerial call. Take an example from the Shunammite herself. When Elisha said, "Take the staff, and run on before," she said, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, thou shalt go too." No staff for her. She wanted the presence of the living man, and she said she would not go without Elisha himself.

That was the right spirit. "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence." "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." We will wrestle here, not till dawn, but till mid-day, and round again to midnight. Throw me in this wrestling. It will be omnipotence conquering feebleness, and that is not a victory. Thou must win. Let my feebleness be my strength: let my poverty be my introduction; let my loving entreaty and desire be the guarantee of my prevalence. "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

A noted preacher was being waited for on the hills of Wales. The time had elapsed, the preacher was in the town, but was not on the hillside. The people were impatient, and the host of the preacher sent a messenger to tell him that the occasion was complete, and the people were ready and earnestly expecting him to come. The messenger went. The messenger came back again and said, "I do not know what is the matter, but the chamber door is locked. I heard voices within. I listened, and I heard the preacher say, 'I will not go, unless you go with me.' He is talking to some other man. He wants the other man to come, and unless that other man will come, he says he will not appear amongst us to-day. What is to be done?" The host understood the case. He said, "All will be well presently." And so it was. The closeted preacher unlocked the door, came out with an invisible companion, "one like unto the Son of man," and old Wales, accustomed to the noblest religious eloquence that ever fell from human lips, was never more deeply stirred and vitally thrilled than when that man spoke in the power of the other Man, and revealed the kingdom of God to an expectant and thankful people. Do not go without the other Man—the Man Christ Jesus. Do not go alone. Say, whenever you go to the pulpit, or class, or sick-chamber, or district for any kind of Christian work whatsoever, say, "I will not go alone," and if that desire be uttered heartily, lovingly, honestly, you shall not go alone. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost will go with you, and the prey shall be delivered into your hand, and you shall return more than conqueror through him that loved you.

2 Kings iv. 38-44.

38. ¶ And Elisha came again to Gilgal : and there was a dearth in the land ; and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him : and he said unto his servant, Set on the great pot, and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets.

39. And one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered thereof wild gourds his lap full, and came and shred them into the pot of pottage : for they knew them not.

40. So they poured out for the men to eat. And it came to pass, as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out, and said, O thou man of God, there is death in the pot. And they could not eat thereof.

41. But he said, Then bring meal. And he cast it into the pot ; and he said, Pour out for the people, that they may eat. And there was no harm in the pot.

THE BANE AND THE ANTIDOTE.

THERE was rest in the days of the early ministry, as we may see the from thirty-eighth verse. A very beautiful picture is given in that verse, and yet a very ghastly one ; the ghastliness being seen in the dearth or famine that was in the land, the seven years' dearth of which Elisha had prophesied ; and the beauty of it is seen in the simplicity with which service was rendered to the prophet and the sons of the prophets : "Set on the great pot, and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets." The picture is that of the prophet seated among his young disciples, and caring not only for their intellectual culture but for their bodily welfare. In this sense how beautifully Elisha succeeds to the fatherly office which Elijah had so strongly and nobly sustained : one of the prophets went out into the field to gather herbs. Let him that is greatest amongst you be your servant. There is nothing wrong whatever in any minister whose circumstances dictate such a course going out to do his own work, to attend to his own necessities, and to be his own servant. The young prophet who went out found a climbing

plant with tendrils, which was included by the Hebrews under the name of "a wild vine;" and he returned with his shawl full of gourds, and came and shred them into the pot of pottage. Nature grows poison as well as food. The sons of the prophets little knew the hurtful quality of the fruit that was being poured into the pot. In all things nature has its poisonous side as well as its sustaining and comforting aspect. The bane and antidote are both before us in nature. Death lies very near to life in the great open fields. Even our most natural passions lie but a single step from their destructive application. Can it be possible that a son of the prophets went out to gather food for a natural appetite, and came back with poison? This is what is being done every day. We may turn honest commerce into a means of felony. We may go into the market-place to buy food, and yet by some action we may perpetrate in connection with the purchase we may take all virtue out of the food and make it contribute to our worst qualities. Blessed are they who eat honest bread: everywhere the great law of trespass is written in nature. By putting poisons upon the earth so plentifully, what does the Lord say in effect but, Take care, be wise, examine your standing-ground, and do nothing foolishly? Thus nature is turned into a great training-school, within whose walls men are trained to sagacity and discrimination, so that they may know the right hand from the left, and the good from the bad, and thus may turn natural processes and customary daily duties into means of culture. What was the course adopted by the sons of the prophets when they found that they were taking poison in eating of the pottage? They instantly appealed to Elisha, saying, "O thou man of God, there is death in the pot." They did not attempt to work a miracle themselves. They recognised the prerogatives of seniority, and they indicated their own inferior or secondary position. It is not said that the man went out at Elisha's suggestion to gather herbs; probably, therefore, this incident may have been allowed simply for a correction of audacity or obtrusiveness. The man might be seeking to make up by natural processes what Elisha intended to carry out by a course of miraculous interposition. It is God's delight to rebuke and baffle human interference, and to beat off the hands that would support his ark, or help him in the completion of his miracles.

Sometimes the point at which human exertion ends is so fine as to be almost invisible, but we should remember that there is such a point, and be continually expecting to reach it, and be constantly praying that we may be saved from trespass or intrusion. The law of self-help is an admirable law within its own bounds, but when it is contributed towards the making-up of a process which God intends to be miraculous, it is then transformed into impiety.

“And there came a man from Baal-shalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof. And he said, Give unto the people, that they may eat. And his servitor said, What, should I set this before an hundred men? He said again, Give the people, that they may eat: for thus saith the Lord, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof. So he set it before them, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the Lord” (vv. 42-44).

Good fortune now seems to have befallen Elisha. Pious Israelites were now transferring to the prophets what had once been given to the Levitical priests: hence they brought to Elisha “bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof.” Surely this was a new thing to Elisha, and a great change from the mode of life which he had been latterly leading. He began life under very comfortable circumstances, probably being one of the richest men who had up to that time been called into the service of the Lord. He had, however, had his time of trial and suffering, but now the sun seemed to be shining upon him, and plenty seemed to be at his disposal. What did he do with his good fortune? It is remarkable that he did not selfishly appropriate it, but at once said, “Give unto the people, that they may eat.” Here again is a foreshadowing of the spirit and method of the Son of God. Whatever he had he held for the benefit of others. He was prepared to give away the five loaves and the few fishes to those who were in need. The servant said, “What, should I set this before an hundred men?” That is to say, how small it is for them; it is more than enough for thee, but how far would it go in satisfying the hunger of an hundred men? Elijah has been considered to be a type of John the Baptist, and in many respects Elisha has been seen to discover traits of character not unworthy of being regarded as typical of Jesus Christ; he was genial in life; he was constantly going about in the cities and villages;

his career was remarkable for the private or domestic miracles which he worked, and a singular healing virtue seemed to reside in his bodily frame: surely in all these respects he resembles more than any other prophet resembled him of whom Moses and the prophets did write! Whilst we dwell upon the types of the Coming One we are delighted with them, for they possess a subtle charm, and throw over the mind a fascination which cannot but contribute to the establishment of pious feeling and sacred anticipation; but when we look upon him whom they typified, then how poor do all symbols and emblems become. Then, how we exclaim in the language of the Queen of Sheba, "The half had not been told me!" Surely there are no adequate types of light. Sometimes men, looking upon a beautiful landscape on a grey day, have said that they could imagine what it would be when the sun was shining. But no man can imagine light. Wherever it comes, it comes with a gracious surprise, revealing beauties undreamed of, and showing aspects of the scene which may startle even those who are most familiar with the outline of the land. The colour is never the same for many moments consecutively, and when the colour changes the whole scene seems to undergo transformation. It is even so with the coming of the Son of man. Looking upon all his forerunners we say, we can now surely imagine what Christ will be when he comes. But, lo! when his sun arises with healing in his wings, we forget all the stars that shone before him, and they retire from the sky which they adorned, unable to continue longer, when the true light shineth which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

PRAYER.

God of our fathers be the God of their succeeding race. Let thy light and thy truth shine forth and establish themselves in the love and confidence of all mankind. Hide not thy face from us. In the hiding of thy face is darkness, and the keeping back of thy hand is death. Draw near unto us ! To our hearts daily do thou speak comfortably. Rebuke us not in thine anger, chide us not in thy displeasure, for the look of thy judgment will destroy us, and the breath of thine anger will carry us away. Our only hope is in thy love. Thy love we know best in Christ Jesus, the priest, the victim, the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world. In his love would we meet thee, it is thine own love, eternal, unchangeable, infinite. We would hide ourselves in it as in a sanctuary that cannot be violated. May we stand in the infinite enclosure, safe from every assault and every temptation. Thou knowest us every one. Thou art the father which seeth in secret. Thou knowest our innermost thought. There is not a word on our tongue that thou hast not weighed. There is not a thought in our heart that thine eyes have not penetrated. What shall we say unto thee, then, but God be merciful unto us sinners. We know the mystery of doubt. We know what it is to go away from God, and to endeavour to create for ourselves gardens in the bleak wilderness. We are ashamed of our inventions, we renounce our hypocrisies. We come with the frankness of contrition, owning all our sin, and asking thee whilst looking upon the Saviour's cross to pardon it with infinite forgiveness. Keep us every one during the few days we may have yet to live. Put within us the spirit of wisdom and of patience, and create in us that sacred expectation which expresses itself in filial prayer. Go with us the remainder of the journey. If there be long hills which we have yet to climb, the Lord help us to ascend every one of them in his own strength and grace. If the darkness should soon settle upon us, may we have a light in our hearts which no night can quench. Enable every man who has made a good vow, to keep it. Give answers of peace to those who have sought them in the name of Christ ; and give to every one of us such a conception of life as shall make us solemn yet cheerful ; sober because of the nearness of death, yet joyous because of our approaching immortality. " Jesus, refuge of my soul, let me to thy bosom flee." " Rock of ages cleft for me, let me find my rest in thee." Blind us to every other attraction, and fix our eyes on thine own fascination, thou Christ of God, fairest among ten thousand and lovely altogether. Amen.

2 Kings v. 1-19.

1. Now Naaman ["beauty"], captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man [Heb., lifted up, or accepted in countenance] with his master,

[lit., before his lord (comp. Gen. x. 9)] and honourable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance [victory] unto Syria; he was also a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper. [Lit., and the man was a brave warrior, stricken with leprosy. His leprosy need not have been so severe as to prevent him following his military duties.]

2. And the Syrians had gone out by companies [or, in troops], and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited [Heb., was before] on Naaman's wife.

3. And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him [then he would receive him back (comp. Numb. xii. 14, 15)] of his leprosy.

4. And one went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel.

5. And the king of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. And he departed, and took with him [Heb., in his hand] ten talents of silver [about £3,750 in our money. The shekel was about equal to 2s. 6d. of our money] and six thousand pieces of gold [six thousand gold shekels = about £13,500. The gold shekel was about equal to 45s. of our currency. The total amount appears too large; the figures are probably corrupt], and ten changes of raiment.

6. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy.

7. And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes [as if he had heard blasphemy (comp. Matt. xxvi. 65)] and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive [Deut. xxxii. 39; 1 Sam. ii. 6. Leprosy was a kind of living death (comp. Numb. xii. 12)], that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me.

8. ¶ And it was so, when Elisha the man of God had heard [he was at the time in Samaria (verse 3)] that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is [with stress on "there is"] a prophet in Israel.

9. So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood [stopped] at the door of the house of Elisha.

10. And Elisha sent a messenger [avoiding personal contact with a leper] unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan [Naaman was to understand that he was healed by the God of Israel, in answer to the prophet's prayer, (comp. v. 15)] seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.

11. But [And] Naaman was wroth [he thought he was being mocked], and went away, and said [I said to myself], Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike [wave his hand towards (comp. Isaiah x. 15, xi. 15)] his hand over the place, and recover the leper.

12. Are not Abana and Pharpar [the], rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.

13. And his servants came near [comp. Gen. xviii. 23], and spake unto him, and said, My father [implying respect and affection (comp. 1 Sam. xxiv. 11; vi. 21)], if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done [or wouldest thou not do] it? how much rather then, when he saith [hath said] to thee, Wash, and be clean [*i.e.*, thou shalt be clean]?

14. Then [And he went down] went he down, and dipped himself seven times [seven was significant of the divine covenant with Israel, and the cure depended on that covenant] in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

15. ¶ And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company [camp, host], and came [went into Elisha's house. Gratitude overcame awe and dread] and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel: now therefore [and now], I pray thee, take a blessing [accept a present from (Gen. xxxiii. 11)] of thy servant.

16. But [And] he said, As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. [Matt. x. 8 (compare Acts viii. 20). Elisha's conduct, so different to ordinary prophets (1 Sam. ix. 6-9), would favourably impress Naaman]. And he urged him to take it; but [and] he refused.

17. And Naaman said, Shall there not then [If not, let there be given, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth [he wished to worship the God of Israel on the soil of Israel, Jehovah's own land. (Comp. Exod. xx. 24; 1 Kings xviii. 38)]? for thy servant will henceforth offer [make] neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord.

18. In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship [to bow down] there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.

19. And he said unto him, Go in peace. So he departed from him a little way [Heb., a little piece of ground (Gen. xxxv. 16)].

THE DANGER OF PRECONCEPTIONS.

“**B**EHOLD, I thought, he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper” (v. 11.) Naaman had heard of a man who could cure his leprosy,—so he thought out how this would be accomplished. He made a plan in his own mind, as we see in the eleventh verse. Now that

thought before the thing happened was what is termed a preconception, and suggests our subject, namely, the mischievousness and absurdity of preconception in religious thinking. Religion must not be a discovery, but a revelation, if it is to have any depth of wisdom, any force of pathos, any riches of comfort—if it is to have the infiniteness of redemption which our sin and our necessity require. The great mistake that we have made is, that we thought we could find out a religion—we could make one. So we have set our inventiveness to work, and we have said, God must be thus and so. Man must have begun then and there. The connection between God and man must be of this and that nature and limitation. Thus, without the slightest authority beyond what may be involved in our own consciousness, we have constructed a plan of the universe, a method of government, a system of providence, and therefore anything that opposes our preconceptions encounters in all its fulness the action of a personal prejudice. Religion must surprise by showing the unexpected way of doing things. Religion is not a condition of our *à priori* thinking. The religion of the Bible never professes to meet us half-way, to do half the work if we will do the other half. It comes upon us like a light we never kindled, like a glory which extinguishes all the mean flames of our own lighting. Herein is its power, and herein is the disadvantage to which it exposes itself in the estimation of men who begin their intellectual life by inventing a religion which is not confirmed by the revelation contained in the Bible. What then are we to do? Were we wise men, and burningly in earnest about this matter, we should come with a mind totally unoccupied, without prejudice, without bias, without colour, and should humbly, reverently, and lovingly say, "What wilt thou have me to be and to do?" Instead of that we come with a prejudice seven-fold in thickness, and the first thing the Bible does is to rebuke our pride, and dash our religious imagination to the ground. Man does not like that. He would rather be flattered and commended, and it would be pleasant to him to hear the old prophets say: "Thou art a clever man, and thy astuteness must be most pleasing to God and his angels; thou hast found out the secret of the Almighty; by thine own right hand hast thou captured the prizes of heaven." Who would not be pleased by such commendation? But it is never

given. The Bible pours contempt upon the thought which preoccupies the mind, and has no blessing but for those who are poor in heart, meek, lowly, contrite, broken in spirit, child-like, who say with a tender loving reverence, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to be and to do?" "To this man will I look." How expectation is excited by that introduction. It is as if God's finger were stretched out, and pointing to a certain individual, and the eyes of the universe followed the pointing of the finger, and the ears of the universe listened while God gave this testimony concerning the specified man. Who is the man? "To this man will I look, who is of a broken and contrite spirit, and who trembleth at my word."

Let us apply this suggestion to two or three of the most vital religious inquiries. Apply it to the subject of Inspiration. Instead of coming to the Book without bias and prejudice, simply to hear what the Book has to say for itself, we come with what is termed a theory of inspiration. As if there could be any balance between the terms, as if in any degree or sense they could be equivalent to one another. Theory equal to inspiration—inspiration equal to theory. The word theory must be an offence to the word inspiration! Inspiration is madness, ecstasy, enthusiasm, the coronation of the soul, the mind in its widest, grandest illumination. How have the Naamans of the world treated the Bible? Thus: "Behold, I thought the Bible will be artistically arranged; it will move in such and such grooves and currents; the men will be so distinguished from all other men that there will be no mistaking them. They will never fall from their inspiration; they will not live on earth, they will not live in heaven, they will live somewhere midway between these places; they will not speak our language, or, if they do, it will be with a different accent. All the Book contains will have about it the fragrance of an upper and undiscovered paradise." Now open the Book. The Book is as nearly not that as it is possible for a book to be. What is the consequence? The Book is not inspired, because, forsooth, it does not answer our preconception of inspiration! Where does the Book say that it is inspired? Where does the Book lift itself up and say, "I am not written with the same ink as other books, beware how you touch me; I am inspired; my punctuation was settled by a special angel from

heaven, and all my words I have directly from the lips of the Eternal" ? The Book comes with an abruptness that startles us, and with a simplicity so simple that it actually bewilders us. The Book is so broadly human, and so graphically historical, taking note of great things and little things ; revealing much that we had no expectation of having revealed, and keeping back much that we expected would be revealed ; putting in its very centre some three thousand proverbs, terse sentences, utterances that might be graven upon rings, and might form signet mottoes by which to regulate our daily conduct. And the Book which has in its centre proverbs which a mere moralist might have written, has at its end an apocalypse which might dazzle the angels. What does Naaman say about the Book ? "Behold, I thought it would be all written in polysyllables ; I expected it would be all sublime, with an unprecedented sublimity too grand for our language, and would need a language of its own too superior for our atmosphere, and would need an air created for itself." And, behold, it is so simple, so graphic, so abrupt, so social. Fascinating as a romance, solemn as a day of judgment, rich in moral maxims, filled with dazzling and bewildering prophecy, and such an appeal to the religious imagination as never was addressed to it before. How is it that you have got so little out of the Bible ? Simply because you had a preconception about it which the Bible itself does not confirm, and therefore you have elected to follow your own prejudices, rather than to accept a possible revelation. What you have to do with the Bible is to read it straight through, without saying anything to anybody. You have not to dip into it just as you please, you have to begin at the beginning and read through to the final Amen. In doing so you have to be as fair to the Book as you would be to the meanest criminal that ever stood at the bar of justice. The counsel asks you in considering the evidence to banish all preconceptions, all prejudices, all theories, and to listen to the case without any bias or mental colour of your own. That plea we allow to be just. We ask for nothing more than that in considering the Bible. Do not come with your notions of inspiration, your "Behold, I thought," but come with a white mind, an unprejudiced understanding, and read the Book, not here and there, **but steadily on and on, page by page, historian, prophet,**

psalmist, evangelist, apostle, and that wondrous Speaker whose words were as the dew of the morning. When you have read the Book thus straight through, there is no reason why you should not form a distinct opinion about it. Nowhere will the Book take away your power of thought, reason, and judgment. It will rather challenge you at the last to say, "Who or what say ye that I am?"

The same suggestion has its application to the great question of Providence. Here, again, we lose much by the indulgence of preconception. Given God and man. God, almighty, all-wise, and man as we know him to be, to find out the course of human history. "Behold, I thought it would be thus. The good man will have a bountiful harvest every year. The praying man will see every day close upon a great victory of life. Honesty will be rewarded, vice will be put down, crushed, condemned by the universal voice. The true man will be king, and the untrue man will be hated and despised. Virtue will lift up her head, and vice will pray some seven-fold night to hide its intolerable ghastliness." That was your preconception, what is the reality? Sometimes the atheist has a better harvest than the man who prayed in the seedtime, and prayed every day until the autumn came. Sometimes the righteous man has not where to lay his head. Sometimes the true man is put down, and the false man is highly exalted. Sometimes the honest and honourable trader can hardly make both ends meet, and the man given to sharp practice and immoral speculation is a man who retires to affluence and dies in castle or in palace. Sometimes the good are condemned to pain, and sorrow, and loss, and sometimes the wicked have eyes that stand out with fatness, they are compassed about with chains of gold; they are not in trouble as other men. Our preconception is so different from this that we feel the violence of a tremendous shock, and possibly may turn and go away in a rage. Let us consider and be wise. What business have we to invent a theory of Providence? We cannot tell what a day may bring forth. We have already forgotten all the incidents of yesterday, to-morrow we are never sure of: we are of yesterday and know nothing. We cannot tell what is written upon the next page of the book until we turn it over. Who are we that we should invent

a theory of the Divine administration of the universe? What ought to be our mental attitude and moral mood? The Christian ought to stand still and say, "Lord, not my will, but thine, be done. What I know not now I shall know hereafter. I am but of yesterday and know nothing. Thou art from everlasting to everlasting, and thou knowest all the system of compensation which thou thyself hast established. In the long run thou wilt justify thy providence to man. I will, therefore, not preconceive or pre-judge, or invent, or suppose, or have any theory that will set itself between me and God. My theories have become idols which hide from me the true divinity. God give me strength to cast these idols to the moles and to the bats."

What applies to Inspiration and to Providence applies of course to the greater question of Redemption. We had thought that the plan of redemption would be this or that, and all our preconceptions fail to reach the agony of the cross, and the mystery of a sacrificial death. The sublimity of a battle won by weakness. We are lost in wonder. May we also be lost in love and praise! Many persons address themselves to a theory of redemption, in their anti-Christian arguments, who never approach the inner and vital question of redemption itself. We care nothing for any theory of redemption, as such, that was ever heard of. We believe all reasoning about redemption, with a view to find out the secret of the divine meaning, and to trace the mystery of moral law and claim, to be vain and worthless. You see the redemption once and the vision passes, you feel the mystery, and after that the life is transfigured and becomes itself a sacrifice. If the cross has got no further than your invention, your intellect, your range of scheming, and theorising, it is not a cross, it is but a Roman gallows. There is no theory of the heart. There is no theory of love. There is no theory of a mother's sacrifice for her ailing and dying child. You must feel it, know it by the heart, see it by some swift glance of a similar spirit, and after that you will have an understanding that cannot be put into words and phrases.

What, then, is the sum of the argument thus roughly outlined? It is this. Rid the mind of preconceptions. Do not go to church with some theory which the preacher has to

destroy before he can begin his work of construction. When we enter the sanctuary, we ought to enter it without prejudice against the place, against the book, or against the man who, for the time being, officiates in the name of Christ. We should be fair, and honest, and just, we should not be more righteous to a criminal than we are to an equal. We should enter God's house in this spirit: "Lord, show me thyself as thou wilt. Lord, teach me thy truth. Lord, show me what I ought to be and to do. My selfishness takes the form of religious inventiveness, this is the most subtle temptation of my life. Lord, help me to answer this temptation. I am not tempted to commit murder, or to tell great blasphemous lies to men, but I am tempted to form notions about thyself, and thy book, and thy providence; and my mind is like a chamber full of pegs upon which I have hung a hundred preconceptions, and there I am the victim of my own fancies. Thou hast to crush thy way through a crowd of idols to get at me. Lord, cleanse the chamber of my mind, banish all these idols and come in thyself, and by the shining of thy face I shall be able to identify thy deity." That is the prayer which ought to rise from every heart when we approach the worship of God and the consideration of his mysteries. As in the case of Naaman, so now. The surprise of Christian revelation is always in the direction of simplicity. Naaman had a programme, Elisha a command. Naaman had a ceremony, Elisha a revelation. Naaman required a whole sheet of paper on which to write out his elaborate scheme, Elisha rolled up his address into a military sentence, and delivered his order as a mightier soldier than Naaman.

Let us burn our theories, inventions, preconceptions, prejudices, and our forecasts about God, Providence, Inspiration, Redemption, and human destiny, and throw ourselves into the great arms, asking only to be and to do what God would have us be and do. Let us live the true, sweet child's life, and not be the victim of our own prejudices, nor the dupe of our own cleverness. May our prayer be, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? I am ready, by thy Spirit, to go, and stand, and fight, and wait, to suffer, to enjoy, to be rich, to be poor, to be known, to be unknown; not my will, but thine, be done." And at the last we shall say, "Thou hast done all things well."

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, how do they praise thee who stand in the unclouded light and sing thy name and do thy service evermore? We wonder, but we cannot tell. We long sometimes to be of their number even but for one moment, that we might return again and praise thee on earth as they do in heaven. How sweet their song, how undivided their thought, how complete their loyalty! Yet may we be growing up toward all this by the grace of thy Holy Spirit, becoming wiser, purer, tenderer, more like thyself at least in our love of holiness. Help us to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Save us from foolish and vain notions concerning thyself. Deliver us from the power of superstition, lest we forget how really to pray, and how truly to worship the threefold name. May we know thee as Father, King, mighty one, yet tenderer than a mother, more patient than a nurse who serves for love. We bless thee for all our mental illumination; we thank thee now, whereas once we were blind and could not see afar off; now we seem to know better what the meaning of life is, what are its capacities, and what is its destiny. We cannot tell how the idea grew in our mind, but it was a miracle of thine—that we know. We could now tell thy word, because we know what it is in pureness, in wisdom, in righteousness, and in the spirit of hopefulness, so that no man can now deceive us by saying, This is the word of God, when it is not. Behold, thou hast set thy witness in our hearts, which says to us, This is God's word, and that is a counterfeit gospel: reject it, for there is no blessing in it. This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working. Help us to read thy book with eyes which thou thyself hast opened, so that we may see not the letter only but the spirit, so that looking upon the letter we see within it chariots and horses of fire, living spirits, gracious angels; and may we yield ourselves to the whole spiritual ministry. Thus shall we show what it is to be in God, to live, and move, and have our being in him, by the loftiness of our judgment and the Christliness of our charity. May we hate sin, which is an abominable thing in thy sight. May we know that sin always means leprosy—leprosy for ever: but that in Jesus Christ there is a healing even for the leper in the sweet gospel we have heard. The Lord cleanse us, and we shall be clean. We would that we might be recovered of our spiritual leprosy, that we might be healed with the blood of sacrifice, the precious blood, which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel. We have heard of this gospel of blood, this salvation by atonement: what it all is we cannot tell, but we long to know; by faith we cast ourselves upon it; living or dying our cry shall be, Lord, we believe, help thou our unbelief. Amen.

2 Kings v. 20-27.

20. ¶ But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said [thought], Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but, as the Lord liveth, I will run [by the life of Jehovah, but I will run] after him, and take somewhat of him.

21. So Gehazi followed after Naaman. And when Naaman saw him running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him [an oriental mark of respect, literally, fell from off the chariot: denoting haste (Gen. xxiv. 64)], and said, Is all well?

22. And he said, All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now [this moment] there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments.

23. And Naaman said, Be content [Be willing, consent to take], take two talents. And he urged him, and bound [Deut. xiv. 25] two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants [gave them to two of his (Naaman's) young men]; and they bare them before him [Gehazi].

24. And when he came to the tower [perhaps a fortified hill, like the Ophel at Jerusalem, is to be understood (comp. 2 Chron. xxvii. 3)], he took them from their hand, and bestowed them in the house [laid them up carefully in the prophet's house]: and he let the men go, and they departed.

25. But he went in, and stood before [came forward to (2 Chron. vi. 12)] his master. And Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither [literally, Thy servant went not away hither or thither].

26. And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee [thus paraphrased in the Targum: "By the spirit of prophecy I was informed when the man turned"], when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive [comp. Eccles. iii. 2] money, and to receive garments, and olive-yards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and men-servants, and maid-servants?

27. The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave [or, cleave, *i.e.* let it cleave: imperative] unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. [If it be thought that the sentence is too strong, it should be remembered that the prophet is pronouncing the judgment of God (comp. Acts v.)]. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow [(comp. Exod. iv. 6; Numb. xii. 10)]. An outbreak of leprosy may follow upon extreme fright or mortification].

GEHAZI.

THE name Gehazi means "valley of vision," and is appropriate enough if we think of what Gehazi saw as to the nature of wickedness when the prophet opened his eyes. Let us note what points there are in this case which illustrate human life as

we now know it. In this way we shall test the moral accuracy of the story,—and that is all we are now principally concerned about.

Gehazi was “the servant of Elisha the man of God.” Surely then he would be a good man? Can a good man have a bad servant? Can the man of prayer, whose life is a continual breathing unto God of supreme desires after holiness, have a man in his company, looking on and watching him, and studying his character, who denies his very altar, and blasphemes against his God? Is it possible to live in a Christian house and yet not to be a Christian? Can we come so near as that, and yet be at an infinite distance from all that is pure and beautiful and true? If so, then we must look at appearances more carefully than we have been wont to do, for they may have been deceiving us all the time. Surely every good man’s children must be good; for they have had great spiritual advantages; they have indeed had some hereditary benefits denied to many others; their house has been a home, their home has been a church, and surely they must show by their whole spirit and tone of life that they are as their father as to all spiritual aspiration and positive excellence. Is it not so? If facts contradict that theory, then we must look at the theory again more carefully, or we must examine the facts more closely, because the whole science of Cause and Effect would seem to be upset by such contradictions. There is a metaphysical question here, as well as a question of fact. A good tree must bring forth good fruit; good men must have good children; good masters must have good servants; association in life must go for something. So we would say—*emphatically*, because we think reasonably. But facts are against such a fancy. What is possible in this human life? It is possible that a man may spend his days in building a church, and yet denying God. Does not the very touch of the stones help him to pray? No. He touches them roughly, he lays them mechanically, and he desecrates each of them with an oath. Is it possible that a man can be a builder of churches, and yet a destroyer of Christian doctrine and teaching generally? Yes. Let us come closer still, for the question is intensely interesting and may touch many: **it is possible for a man to print the Bible and**

yet not believe a word of it! On first hearing this shocking statement we revolt from it. We say it is possible for a man to handle type that is meant to represent the greatest revelation ever made to the human mind, without feeling that the very handling of the type is itself a kind of religious exercise. Yet men can debauch themselves in the act of printing the Bible; can use profane language whilst putting the Lord's Prayer in type; can set up the whole Gospel of John, without knowing that they are putting into visible representation the highest metaphysics, the finest spiritual thinking, the tenderest religious instruction. Let us come even closer: a man can preach the gospel and be a servant of the devil! Who, then, can be saved? It is well to ask the question. It is a burning inquiry; it is a spear-like interrogation. We would put it away from us if we dare. Now let this stand as our first lesson in the study of this remarkable incident, that Gehazi was the servant of Elisha the man of God, and was at the same time the servant of the devil. He was receiving wages from both masters. He was a living contradiction; and in being such he was most broadly human. He was not a monster; he was not a natural curiosity; he is not to be accounted for by quietly saying that he was an eccentric person: he represents the human heart, and by so much he brings against ourselves an infinite impeachment. It is in vain that we shake our skirts as if throwing off this man and all association with him and responsibility for him; this cannot be done: he anticipated ourselves; we repeat his wickedness. The iniquity is not in the accident, in the mere circumstances, or in the particular form; the iniquity is in the heart,—yea, is the very heart itself. Marvel not that Christ said, "Ye must be born again."

Gehazi did not understand the spirit of his master. He did not know what his master was doing. How is it that men can be so far separated from one another? How is it that a man cannot be understood in his own house, but be thought fanciful, fanatical, eccentric, phenomenally peculiar? How is it that a man may be living amongst men, and yet not be of them; may be in the world and yet above the world; may be speaking the very language of the time, and yet charging it with the meaning of eternity? See here the differences that still exist and must ever exist as between

one man and another : Elisha living the great spiritual life—the grand prayer-life and faith-life ; and Gehazi grubbing in the earth, seeking his contentment in the dust. These contrasts exist through all time, and are full of instruction. Blessed is he who observes the wise man and copies him ; looks upon the fool and turns away from him, if not with hatred yet with desire not to know his spirit. Gehazi had a method in his reasoning. Said he in effect : To spare a stranger, a man who may never be seen again ; to spare a beneficiary, a man who has taken away benefits in the right hand and in the left ; to spare a wealthy visitor, a man who could have given much without feeling he had given anything ; to spare a willing giver, a man who actually offered to give something, and who was surprised, if not offended, because his gift was declined ! there is no reason in my master's policy. It never occurred to Gehazi that a man could have bread to eat that the world knew not of. It never occurs to some men that others can live by faith, and work miracles of faith by the grace of God. Are there not minds that never had a noble thought ? It is almost impossible to conceive of the existence of such minds, but there they are ; they never went beyond their own limited location ; they never knew what suffering was on the other side of the wall of their own dwelling-place ; they were never eyes to the blind, or ears to the deaf, or feet to the lame ; they never surprised themselves by some noble thought of generosity ;—how, then, can they understand the prophets of the times ? Yet how noble a thing it is to have amongst us men who love the upper life, and who look upon the whole world from the very sanctuary of God, and who say, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth, but a man's life consists of his faith, and love and charity." We cannot tell how much the prophets are doing to refine their age, to give a new view to all human duty, to inspire those who otherwise would fail for lack of courage. We cannot tell where the answers to prayer fall, or how those answers are given, but we feel that there is at work in society a mystic influence, a strange, ghostly, spectral action, which keeps things together, and now and again puts Sabbath day right in the midst of the vulgar time. Think of these things : There are facts of a high and special kind, as well as what we commonly call facts, which are often but appearances

and dramatic illusions. What about the secret ministry, the unnameable spiritual action, the holy, elevating, restraining influence? What is that hand which will write upon palace walls words of judgment and keep the world from plunging into darkness infinite? Surely God is in this place, and I knew it not: this—wherever it be, garden or wilderness—is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven.

Gehazi prostituted an inventive and energetic mind. He had his plan:—"My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets; give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments" (v. 22). The case was admirably stated. It was stated too with just that urgency which increases the likelihood of that which is declared. Elisha spent his time amongst the sons of the prophets; they all looked to him as a father, as he himself had looked to Elijah; he was the young man's friend, the young minister's asylum; they all knew gracious, gentle, Christ-like Elisha—the anti-type of the Messiah; and what more likely than that two of them in the course of their journeying should have called upon Elisha unexpectedly? It was a free, gracious life the old ministers lived. They seemed to have rights in one another. If any one of them had a loaf, that loaf belonged to the whole fraternity. If one of them, better off than another, had a house or part of a house, any of the sons of the prophets passing by could go and lodge there. It was a gracious masonry; it was a true brotherhood. Then the moderateness of the statement also added to its probability: "Give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments:" they are on the road, they cannot tell what is going to happen; how long the next stage may be they do not yet calculate, and if they could have this contribution all would be well. Do not suppose that wicked men are intellectually fools. They can state a case with great clearness and much graphic force. "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." Would God they were children of light! How acute they are! How rapid in thinking power! How inventive and fertile in mind! They would make the Church a success; they would turn it to

broader uses ; they would rebuke the narrowness of our thinking, yea, they would put us into inferior positions, and taking the natural lead they would conduct the Church to fuller realisations of the Lord's purpose concerning his dominion over all men. We have no hesitation in saying that the men of the world in most cases overmatch the men of the Church in matters of strong thinking regarding practical subjects and practical ministries and uses. We who are in the Church are afraid : we want to be let alone ; not for the world would we be suspected of even dreaming of anything unusual ; we would have our very dreams patterns of neatness, things that might be published in the shop windows, and looked upon without affronting the faintest sensibility on the part of the beholders. But the Gehazis, if they were converted, they would be men of energy, dash, courage, fire ; we should hear of them and of their work. If one might pray at all regarding others, who would not pray that many who are in the Church might be out of it, so far as activity of leadership, inspiration, and enthusiasm are concerned ? What excellent people they might make where there was nothing to do ! and how gratefully they would receive wages for doing it ! But who would not desire that many a journalist, many a merchant, many a man who is outside the Church might be brought into it, because with his brains, with his mental fire, with his soldier-like audacity and gracious violence, he would make the age know that he was alive ? But whilst we thus credit such men with high intellectual sense, we are bound to look at the moral character which they but too frequently represent. Gehazi was no model man in a moral sense. His invention was a lie ; his cleverness was but an aspect of depravity ; his very genius made him memorable for wickedness.

But Gehazi was successful. He took the two talents of silver in the two bags, with the two changes of garments ; he brought them to the tower, and bestowed them in the house ; then he sat down—a successful man ! Now all is well : lust is satisfied, wealth is laid up ; now the fitness of things has been consulted, and harmony has been established between debtor and creditor, and Justice nods because Justice has been appeased. Were

the test to end with the twenty-fourth verse we should describe Gehazi as a man who had set an example to all coming after him who wished to turn life into a success. Who had been wronged? Naaman pursues his journey all the happier for thinking he has done something in return for the great benefit which has been conferred upon him. He is certainly more pleased than otherwise. The man of God has at last been turned, he thinks, into directions indicated by common-sense. All that has happened is in the way of business; nothing that is not customary has been done. Gehazi is satisfied, and Elisha knows nothing about it. The servant should have something even if the master would take nothing. It is the trick of our own day! The servant is always at the door with his rheumatic hand ready to take anything that may be put into it. We leave nothing with the master; it would be an insult to him. So far the case looks natural, simple, and complete; and we have said Elisha knows nothing about it. Why will men trifle with prophets? Why will men play with fire? When will men know that what is done in secret shall be published on the housetops; when will men know that there can be nothing confidential that is wicked? Observe Gehazi going in to his master as usual, and look at his face: not a sign upon it of anything having been done that is wrong. Look at his hands: large, white, innocent-looking hands that never doubled their fingers upon things that did not belong to them. Look at Elisha: fixing his eyes calmly upon Gehazi, he says, "Whence comest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither;" the meaning being that he was on the premises all the time; always within call; the lifting-up of a finger would have brought him. Then came the speech of judgment, delivered in a low tone, but every word was heard—the beginning of the word and the end of the word, and the last word was like a sting of righteousness. "Went not mine heart with thee?" Oh that heart! The good man knows when wickedness has been done: the Christ knows when he enters into the congregation whether there is a man in it with a withered hand; he says, There is a cripple somewhere in this audience. He feels it. "Went not mine heart with thee?" Was I not present at the interview? Did I not hear every syllable that was said on the one side and on the other? Did I

not look at thee when thou didst tell the black, flat, daring lie? "Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants?" Has the age come to this? Is this a correct interpretation of the time and of the destiny that is set before men?

Then the infliction of the judgment: "The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever" (v. 27). Thou hast touched the silver, thou didst not know that it was contagious and held the leprosy; thou didst bring in the two changes of garments, not knowing that the germs of the disease were folded up with the cloth: put on the coat—it will scorch thee: "He went out from his presence a leper as white as snow." A splendid conception is this silent departure. Not a word said, not a protest uttered; the judgment was felt to be just: "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness;" "These shall go away into everlasting punishment." Oh the hush, the solemn silence! The judgment seemed to begin with the sound of trumpets and the rending of things that apparently could not be shaken; at the end there is simply a going away, a silent motion, a conviction that the sentence is right. See Gehazi as he goes out of Elisha's presence, and regard him as a specimen of those who having been judged on the last day will—depart! Men should consider the price they really pay for their success. Do not imagine that men can do whatever they please, and nothing come of it. Every action we perform takes out of us part of ourselves. Some actions take our whole soul with them, and leave us poor indeed. Yes, the house is very large, the garden is very fruitful, the situation is very pleasant, the windows look to the south and to the west, birds are singing on the sunny roof, roses and woodbine are climbing up the south windows, and the bargain was monetarily very cheap; but, oh! it was wrenched from honest hands, it was purloined, it was taken over in the dark; the man who signed it away was half-blinded before he attached his signature to the fatal document. Will the house stand long? Will the sun not be ashamed of it? Will the roses bloom? Will the woodbine curl its long fingers round the window-posts, and feel quite happy there? No!

there is a worm at the root, there is a blight on every leaf; no sooner will the roses and the woodbine know that a felon lives there than they will retire from the scene, and the sun which blessed will now blister with judicial fire. "A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked." If any of us have gotten anything by false accusation, by sharp practice, by infernal skill and energy of mind, better pour it back again, and stand away from it, and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Better for a man that he should cut off his right hand and enter into life maimed than having two hands be cast into outer darkness. Was not the leprosy a severe punishment for such a sin? What do you mean by "such a sin"? What was the sin? Think of it! The prophet was falsified, religion was debased, God's mercies were turned into merchandise, the Holy Ghost blasphemed, and to all the Gentile world was sent the evil tidings that whatever Israel did it did for gain. The punishment was a great one, but just. At the last the most wicked men amongst us being adjudged to everlasting punishment cannot reply: for a voice within says, The time is not too long!

SELECTED NOTE.

The grateful Syrian would gladly have pressed upon Elisha gifts of high value, but the holy man resolutely refused to take anything, lest the glory redounding to God from this great act, should in any degree be obscured. His servant Gehazi was less scrupulous, and hastened with a lie in his mouth, to ask in his master's name, for a portion of that which Elisha had refused. The illustrious Syrian no sooner saw the man running after his chariot, than he alighted to meet him, and happy to relieve himself in some degree under the sense of overwhelming obligation, he sent him back with more than he ventured to ask. Nothing more is known of Naaman.

We afterwards find Gehazi recounting to King Joram the great deeds of Elisha, and, in the providence of God it so happened that when he was relating the restoration to life of the Shunammite's son, the very woman with her son appeared before the king to claim her house and lands, which had been usurped, while she had been absent abroad during the recent famine. Struck by the coincidence, the king immediately granted her application (2 Kings viii. 1-6). As lepers were compelled to live apart outside the towns, and were not allowed to come too near to uninfected persons, some difficulty has arisen with respect to Gehazi's interview with the king. Several answers occur. The interview may have taken place outside the town, in a garden or garden-house; and the king may have kept Gehazi at a distance, with the usual precautions which custom dictated. Some even suppose that the incident is misplaced, and actually occurred before Gehazi was smitten with leprosy. Others hasten to the opposite conclusion, and allege the probability that the leper had then repented of his crime, and had been restored to health by his master.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou art doing wonders every day: open our eyes that we may see. The miracles have not ceased, but our power of seeing seems to have expired. Lord, our prayer is that we might receive our sight. We are blind, and cannot see afar off, because of our sin; take thou away our sin, and we shall see. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. We bless thee for the wonders of our life, as well as for things that are usual, coming and going every day, yet all of them speaking of thy care and love and tenderness: but the great event is thine, the special circumstance, the exciting incident, the tumults that rise and fall because of thine influence;—behold, all these are signs in the midst of the age, only the age cannot see them or read them aright, because of selfishness and worldly-mindedness and vanity and idolatry. If we loved thee more we should see thee more. If any man love me, I will manifest myself unto him, said the Son of God. Blessed Christ, thou didst come not to our genius and cleverness and learning, but to our love, our simplicity, our need, our brokenheartedness. To this man—said the high, the lofty one, that inhabiteth eternity—will I look, to the man that is of a humble and contrite heart, and who trembleth at my word. May we be enabled to supply the happy conditions under which thou wilt visit our hearts; then thy coming-in shall be like the dawn of a summer day, and all that is within us will rejoice, as flowers are glad when blessed by the sunlight. We thank thee for thy holy book, thy sacred altar, the place of common and public prayer, and the ground on which the rich and the poor alike can meet to call thee Father, and to lift up their eyes with a common expectation to the all-blessing and all-giving heavens. We will say of such places and such times, These are the miracles of God: these are the creations of love: these are the outcoming of the spirit of the cross of Christ. We would grow in wisdom; in understanding we would be men; in all things evil we would be as children, having no understanding of them or liking for them. We would be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. We pray for solidity of character, massiveness of manhood,—the great and complete nature which finds its rest in God's own peace, and its heaven in God's continual smile. Help us to live that we may grow, and so to grow that we may come to perfectness of being in Christ Jesus. He died for us. We remember his going unto death; we see him bearing his cross; we watch him as he is nailed to the accursed tree; we see the Son of God in his last agony; we wonder why the uplifted cross, why the cry of pain and orphanhood, why the darkness and all the wonders that accompanied the crucifixion; when, lo! we see written in the darkness, as with stars set in their places by the hand

divine: God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. This is the explanation of all: it satisfies the imagination; it comforts the heart; it appeases the conscience; it reconciles the whole nature unto God. Now we say, God forbid that we should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now we exclaim, We are crucified with him; yet each can say—"Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." This is our highest joy; out of this comes the music of light; out of this comes the hope of heaven. We pray for one another. May our hearts be touched by all circumstances that are pathetic; may our hands instantly move to the help of those who have no helper; may it be our joy to add to the joy of others. Inspire all noble men who care for the poor and the lost, the destitute and the lonely; comfort them and sustain them in their ministry of love, and grant them great success. Now let thy word open itself to us, and become an old word yet a new message. May we reverence it as coming up from eternity, and apply it as addressed to our immediate necessities. Take away all prejudice from the mind, all darkness from the understanding, all stubbornness from the heart, and let thy word have free course and be glorified, and as it sounds in our hearing may we say, This is the music of eternity, this is the message of the most high God. And to the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost,—the one in three, the three in one; the great mystery of being, the great mystery of love, be the praises of all the worlds throughout the universe, throughout unending time. Amen.

2 Kings vi. 1-23.

1. And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell [where we sit before thee] with thee is too strait for us [their numbers had increased (comp. iv. 43)].

2. Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam [the Jordan valley was well-wooded], and let us make a place there, where we may dwell. And he answered, Go ye.

3. And one said, Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants [to superintend; to help in case of difficulty]. And he answered, I will go.

4. So he went with them. And when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood [timber].

5. But as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell [Heb., and as for the iron, it fell] into the water: and he cried, and said, Alas [my lord, Elisha], master! for it was borrowed.

6. And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither: and the iron did swim.

7. Therefore [And he said] said he, Take it up to thee. And he put out his hand, and took it.

8. ¶ Then the king of Syria warred [Now the king of Syria (Aram) was warring, *i.e.* continually] against Israel, and took counsel [comp. 2 Chron.

xx. 21] with his servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp [or, encamping].

9. And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass [pass over, across, or through] not such a [this] place: for thither [there] the Syrians are come [coming] down.

10. And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned [Ezek. iii. 19; 2 Chron. xix. 10] him of, and saved himself [was wary; on his guard] there, not once nor twice.

11. Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled [literally, storm-tost] for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not shew me which of us is for the king of Israel?

12. And one of his servants said, None [Nay], my lord, O king: but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel [all] the words that thou speakest in thy bed-chamber.

13. ¶ And he said, Go and spy where he is that I may send and fetch [take] him. And it was told him, saying, Behold, he is in Dothan.

14. Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host [of infantry; not an army, but a company]: and they came by night [so as to surprise], and compassed the city about.

15. And when the servant of the man of God was risen early [comp., for the Hebrew construction, Ps. cxxvii. 2; Isa. v. 11; Hos. vi. 4], and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do?

16. And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them [comp. Numb. xiv. 9; Ps. iii. 6].

17. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw [just as Elisha's had been opened (ii. 10, 12). (Comp. also Numb. xxii. 31)], and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire [literally, horses and chariots, *to wit*, fire (Gen. xv. 17; Exod. iii. 2, xiii. 21, seq., xix. 16, seq.; Isa. xxix. 6, xxx. 30, 33, xxxiii. 14)] round about Elisha.

18. And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed [mentally, as he approached his foes] unto the Lord, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness [a dazing effect, with mental bewilderment]. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.

19. ¶ And Elisha said unto them, This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring [lead] you to the man whom ye seek [an irony]. But he led [guided] them to Samaria.

20. And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said, Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. And the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw; and, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria.

21. And the king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them, My father [comp. ii. 12, viii. 9 ("Thy son Benhadad"), xiii. 14], shall I smite them? shall I smite them [or, May I smite, may I smite, my father? How eager was the king to slay his powerless enemies! He asks the prophet's permission (comp. iv. 7)].

22. And he answered, Thou shalt [or, must] not smite them: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master.

23. And he [the king of Israel] prepared great provision [a great feast] for them: and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel.

ELISHA AND THE YOUNG PROPHETS.

WE see in the opening of this chapter some of the simple and happy relations which existed between the elder and the younger prophets. Is it not possible to revive some of these relations? Look at the case: "And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us" (v. 1). Put into modern language the statement amounts to this: "Our college is getting too small, we want more room; let us, therefore, consider this practical question, and see what can be done." Elisha did not live with the young men. That, perhaps, was rather a happy than an unhappy circumstance, though a very beautiful picture could be drawn concerning domestic collegiate life. A college or a school with the teachers and students all living together must, one would surely say, be a little heaven upon earth. What can be, ideally, more perfect than the old prophet surrounded by all the younger prophets, eating and living together, having a common room, and a common hostelry, or a common home? What can be, imaginatively, more taking, more pathetic and satisfactory? Without pronouncing a judgment upon that inquiry, it is enough to be so far just to the text as to say that Elisha did not adopt that system of collegiate life. He went round about from place to place; he visited the schools of the prophets in the various localities; and now, when he came to this place, the young men said: "We have not room enough; we must consider our circumstances, and endeavour to enlarge our accommodation."

What did they propose? It is well now and again to hear what young men have to suggest. It is useful to listen to young politicians in national crises, that we may hear how they would treat the patient. It is desirable that young voices should mingle

with old voices in the common council. Now it is the turn of the young men to speak. What will they propose to Elisha? The answer is given in the second verse: "Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make a place there where we may dwell." The city was not situated exactly upon the Jordan, but upon a stream a little way from it, which flowed directly into that great river; and now the young men proposed to get a little nearer to the main stream, for the district of it was called The Valley of Palms. Palestine was notably destitute of trees, but in this particular locality timber was to be got. So the young men made the proposition to Elisha. What does the proposition amount to? It amounts to something which in this day might horrify a good many of the successors of Elisha. The young men said: "Let us go and cut down our own timber, and enlarge our college with our own hands." Did they propose that the question should be "reported upon"—that it should be brought under the attention first of the general committee, then be referred to a sub-committee being bound to report to the general committee, and the general committee being unable to attend, or to constitute a quorum, and so go on to forget the whole business? The young men said: "We want room: let us make it; we want a larger college: let us build it." Why not adopt the same principle to-day? There is nothing so easy as to send round an appeal for a contribution and never get any reply to it. We, wanting to be missionaries, should go by the next boat; wanting to preach the gospel to the heathen, we should say: "When does the ship start?" and being unable to pay the fare, we should work our passage. And when people ask us what we are doing, and whether we have lost our senses, we should say: "Yes; if we be beside ourselves, it is unto God." Then an impression might be made upon those who look on. They would say; "Surely these men are in earnest; be they right, or be they wrong: be they fanatical or sober-minded, their earnestness burns in them like a fire, and such men can neither be put back nor kept down." Without wishing, however, to modernise the details of this incident, which, owing to our civilisation, would be impossible, it is enough to remember that, in the early days of collegiate and school life, the scholars were prepared to do something towards

helping themselves. They did not send for builders from Jerusalem, or even from the city of Jericho; they undertook the work at their own impulse and at their own charges. There is a line of beauty even in the proposition of the young men. They desired Elisha's permission. They said in effect, "Father, may we go?" They were enthusiastic, but they were under discipline; they had fire enough, but they responded to the touch of the master; they were ready, not only to go, but to run, and yet they would not stir a foot until Elisha said, "Go ye." What then did they do? "And one said [to Elisha], Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants" (v. 3). They were stronger when the elder man was with them. Sometimes the eye is the best master. It often happens that the man who is standing in the harvest field resting upon his rake, a picture of dignity and ease, is doing more than if he were sweltering himself by cutting down corn with his own sickle: his eye is doing the work, his presence is exerting an immeasurable and happy influence upon the whole field. Elisha was not asked to go and fell the timber, but to be with the young men whilst they did the hard work; and, becoming young again himself, as old men do become young when associated with young life, he instantly said: "I will go: the work is a common work; it belongs to me as well as to you; it belongs to all Israel, in so far as all Israel is true to the living God; come, let us go in one band: union is strength." Now they went, the old and the young together. Why would they not go alone? Perhaps they were reminded of what happened when once they did go alone. Elisha ordered that food should be prepared, and when the seething pot was on, one of the young men went out and gathered something and threw it into the pot, and nearly poisoned the whole college. What wonder if some of them, remembering this, said: "No more going out alone, if you please; we once took the case into our own hands, and do you not remember how many of us fell sick, and how we cried to Elisha, 'Master, father, there is death in the pot!' and how he kindly took a handful of meal, sprinkled it into the vessel, and restored its healthfulness? The pot was relieved of all the disease which it contained, and the meal happily proceeded." We should remember our blunders, and learn from them. We are always safer in the com-

pany of the old and wise than when we are in our own society. Happy is the man who takes counsel with his elder neighbours, and who can sometimes renounce himself and say to wise men: "Such and such are my circumstances; now, what would you advise me to do?"

Elisha and the young men have now gone down to the Jordan. Elisha felled no tree; but he did his own particular kind of work. What that particular kind of work was will further appear as the narrative proceeds.

The Syrian king could not rest. In his heart he hated or feared the king and the hosts of Israel. There was chronic war between Israel and Syria. The king of Syria said: "I will fix my camp in such and such a place;" and the ninth verse thus reads: "And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place, for thither the Syrians are come down." There is a ministry of warning. Men may not go themselves to battle, and yet they may be controlling the fortunes of war. We need statesmen, spiritual interpreters, religious teachers, men of thought and men of prayer; and they may be doing more practical work than is being done by those who are engaged in the physical work of leading armies and commanding military hosts. This is what Elisha did. He felled no tree; he wielded no sword; and yet, alike in the building of the college and in the direction of the war, his was the supreme mind. The prophet saved the king. This must always be the case. The great man of the nation is the man who can think most profoundly and most comprehensively. The architect is a greater man than the builder. The prophet is a greater man than the king. He reads more; he sees further; he grasps a larger field. He is master of metaphysical principles: and metaphysical principles alone endure: they wear the clothes of the present time; they adopt the form of the passing generation, but they go on from age to age, themselves always the same, their adaptations being addressed to the immediate necessities of the people. We have been told that "justice is not an intermittent apparition." That is perfectly true in one sense; but justice is often a deferred creditor, and

sometimes that may be done to-morrow which cannot be justly done to-day. The prophet sees all this; he looks ahead; he has a larger horizon than is accessible to the vision of other men. So let it stand, an eternal lesson, that the greatest men in any nation are the men who can think most, pray best, feel most deeply, and penetrate the metaphysics and the inmost reality of politics and of civilisation.

Spiritual power is not only useful in one direction; it is alarming in another. When the king of Syria felt himself baffled, all his plans thrown into uncontrollable bewilderment, his heart was sore troubled. It is the Immeasurable that frightens men. It is the Unknown Quantity that troubles all their calculations, and gives them to feel that after they have completed their arithmetic their conclusion is a lie. What was in the air? Whose was this ghostly presence that was upsetting Ben-hadad's well-laid schemes? What was it, or who, that always went before him, and that made his proposals abortive, and turned all his policies into mocking nothings? Had there been any man who was visible and measurable, that man could have been dealt with. There is always a quantity equal to any quantity that is known. What is wanting in one way can be made up in another; as, for example, what is wanting in number may be made up in quality. As one great leader said in ancient history, when his soldiers were saying they were too few for the battle, "How many do you count me for?" That touched the fire of the army, and inspired the soldiers with confidence. But when the element that troubles the heart is not visible, not measurable, when it is here, there, round about, above, below, spectral, something in the wind, then even Ben-hadad, with his footmen and horsemen and chariots, cannot come at the awful thing. It is a presence without a shape, an influence without a magnitude. Now, this spectral ministry has never been wanting in human history. There is always something which even statesmen cannot calculate upon. There is not only a spirit in man, there is a spirit in the universe, there is a spirit in wide civilisation. Is it a spirit of justice? Is it a spirit of criticism? Is it a spirit of holiness? There it is, however, whatever it be; and we must take that into account when we lay our plans. **The**

rich man made a map of his estate, drew it in beautiful and vivid and graphic lines, and when it was all done, he said: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, be merry; thy fortune is assured." "But"—then the voice not human was heard—"but God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." Then the one thing, as we have often had occasion to say, which the rich man had forgotten in his calculations was God; in other words, was everything; or, in other terms still, was the only thing worth remembering, and ought to have been the first thing in the opening line of the calculation. Consult your own life, and say what it is that upsets your plan. You left the door open, purposing to return presently; and behold, when you do go back the door is shut from the inside—locked, bolted; the wood is turned to iron, and there is no admission for you! Who did this? Lift up your voice; cry aloud; demand in emphatic tones: "Who did it?" and the dumb universe will not even grant you the reply of an echo. How is this? Surely "things are not what they seem." Surely there is a Throne above all other thrones; a Power higher than all known might. The Christian gives the answer—a sure, strong, happy answer: "The Lord reigneth: he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth."

Now the matter was revealed to the king, and he took means to remove the spectral influence. He made this arrangement: "Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him;" and when he knew that Elisha was in Dothan the king sent "thither horses and chariots and a great host." What unconscious tributes bad men pay to good influences! Men do not know wholly what they are doing. Why, this was but a poor prophet, wearing a hairy robe that had descended to him; he was no king; he had no sword, he had no horse: he was but a man of prayer. How did Ben-hadad propose to capture him? The king sent "horses and chariots and a great host" to take a man whose sword was the word of God, whose helmet was the defence of the Most High, whose breast-plate was Righteousness! Here are three arms of the Syrian service—footmen, horsemen, chariots; and remember that these were all employed

to bring one poor man to the king's presence! Might not Elisha have said before Antigonus uttered it, "How many do you count me for?" He might well have taunted the king of Syria, saying: "Why all this ado? Would not one soldier have been enough to take one prophet? He might have come on foot; a horse was not necessary, and certainly not a sword; one soldier might surely have arrested me." But bad men unconsciously pay tribute to good men. They say, in effect, "Elisha is only one, but a stubborn one; only one tree, but his roots seem to have spread themselves through the earth, and to have taken hold of the entire scheme of things; he is only one, yet, strangely, he is many in one." And this, indeed, was the interpretation given by Elisha, for he said: "They that be with us are more than they that be with them." Who can tell how many angels are round about the praying-man? How is it that when the arresting hand is laid upon some men it becomes softened, the muscles relax, and have no more pith in them, and the men come back to say: "Never man spake like this man; arrest him we cannot"? This is a tribute paid to the Christian religion. Men have passed parliamentary statutes against it, but the religion of the cross has outlived the statutes—has seen them grow into yellow letters, has observed them being cancelled, or otherwise passing into obsolescence. Who can hinder the progress of the divine kingdom? Who can stay the chariot of God, saying: "No further shalt thou proceed"? Remember, Christian men, that you do not stand in your units only. You are not simply ones and twos. Not by arithmetic is your force or influence to be measured. You are the mediums through which the Spirit of the living God operates upon the age. Give him a noble outlet. Give him a free way through your heart, and say: "Make use of me, thou living Christ, so that I may be the means of occasioning immeasurable good to the age in which I live." Blessed are they whose defences are spiritual. Rich are they who are rich in faith, heirs for ever, never to be cut off by any law of parliament, who, through Christ, inherit the kingdom that is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.

We are now brought to a very striking point in the incident. The servant of Elisha came back, saying: "Alas, my master!

how shall we do? I have been up early, and behold a host compasses the city, both with horses and chariots." Then Elisha said; "Lord, open his eyes: let this young man see; at present he can only look upon appearances which are not realities. The universe is within the universe. The Bible is within the Bible. The man is within the man. This servant of mine sees only the outer circle, the rim or rind of things,—Lord, show him the reality; let him see, and then he will be at peace." There is a view of sight; there is a view of faith. The worldly man goes by what his bodily eyes notice or discern; the spiritually-minded man walks by faith, not by sight. The telescope does not create the stars; the telescope only reveals them, or enables the eye to see them. If, then, a telescope can do this, shall we deny to that spiritual power within us called Faith the power which we ascribe to a mechanical instrument which our own hands have fashioned? Look upon a given object—say you take a piece of glass, two inches square; look upon it, and say: Is there anything upon that glass? And looking with the naked eye, the sharpest man would say: "No, that glass is perfectly free from blot or stain, or flaw, or inscription of any kind whatsoever." Now put that same two-inch square of glass under a microscope; and look through the microscope. What is upon it? A portrait, or a long writing—say the Lord's Prayer upon a speck not discernible by the naked eye. If, then, we ascribe such wonderful powers to a glass which we ourselves have determined as to its size and relation to other glasses, shall we deny to a certain spiritual faculty the power of seeing that which cannot be discriminated by unaided reason? By all the pressure of analogy, by all the reasoning of inference, we insist that, if such wonderful things can be done mechanically, things at least equally wonderful can be done by forces that are spiritual. The sun does not make the landscape; the sun only shows it. A man may stand upon a high hill on a dull, gray day and say: "I can imagine what this would be when the sun was shining." But no man can imagine light. It stands as a sacred mystery in our life that the sun never comes within the lines of imagination. The sunlight is a continual surprise, even to the eyes that have most reverently and lovingly studied it. When the sun looks upon the landscape there are new colours, new

distances, new forms ; a whole work is wrought upon the landscape which can only be described by the word " wizardry." So it is with the Bible, the great work of the living God. Look at it with the natural vision, and you may discover in it particular beauties. You may say : " The poetry is noble ; the English is pure ; and the moral sentiment of the book is not without a certain elevation." But the book wants no such reluctant or impoverished compliments. Let the soul be touched by the Spirit that wrote the book ; let the eyes be anointed by the living God ; and then the Bible is like a landscape shone upon by the noonday's cloudless sun. Then the reverent reader says : " The half had not been told me ; up to this time I have been as one blind, but now I see ;" and evermore the opened eyes are fascinated by the disclosed beauties of revelation, and to the end the observer reads with heightening delight and with still more glowing thankfulness.

Elisha took his own way with the Syrian army, and here occurs a point worthy of special note. When the Lord smote the people with blindness according to the word of Elisha, " Elisha said unto them, This is not the way, neither is this the city : follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. But he led them to Samaria." What ! Then did the man of God resort to a false strategy ? This is a very serious case indeed, and has occasioned a good deal of difficulty. Nor need we wonder, for in *The Speaker's Commentary* we find such words as these : " Untruth has been held by all moralists to be justifiable towards a public enemy. Where we have a right to kill, much more have we a right to deceive by stratagem." When words like these occur in a Christian Commentary, no wonder that infidelity should seize upon the annotation as a prize, or use it as a weapon. No such comment can we adopt in perusing this portion of sacred Scripture. It cannot be justifiable to treat a public enemy by untruth or deception. We have no right to kill, and therefore we have no right to deceive by stratagem. This is not the way to recommend the word of the living God. The incident must be taken in its totality. The reader must not arrest the progress of the narrative by stopping here or there to ask a question ; he must see the incident in its completeness, and, seeing it, he will have reason further to glorify God for the pure

morality of the book and the noble spirit of the record. Elisha might well so far follow his illustrious predecessor as to use the weapon of irony or taunting in dealing with the Lord's enemies. Elijah said to the prophets of Baal: "Cry aloud: for he is a god." As well might we stop there and say: "By Elijah's own testimony deity was ascribed to Baal." We forget the irony of the tone; we forget that Elijah was mocking the debased prophets. So Elisha might say: "This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek." There was a taunt in the tone; there was sarcasm in the emphasis. Nor is the verse to be read in its unity; it is to be read as part and parcel of a whole narrative. Now what became of all this so-called deception and stratagem? When the people were come into Samaria, Elisha said, "Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see." He prayed first that their sight might be taken away. That seemed to be cruel. Now he prays that their sight may be given to them again. "And, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria. And the king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them, My father," as if he had become a convert. The son of Ahab and the son of Jezebel said to Elisha: "My father"—a reluctant and hypocritical compliment, for Jehoram could be neither reverent nor true. But, said he, observing the prize that was before him: "Shall I smite them? shall I smite them?"—a Hebraism equal to "Smiting, shall I smite?"—an equivalent of "Blessing, I will bless thee, and multiplying, I will multiply thee." So Jehoram said: "Shall I smiting, smite them?" And the prophet said: "No." Now let us hear what this man can say who has been judged guilty of untruth and of stratagem? And the prophet said, "Thou shalt not smite them: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow?" equal to: "If you yourself have won the victory then you can smite; but you did not take these men, and therefore you shall not smite them: what you have taken by your own sword and spear may be your lawful prize in war: but here is a capture with which you have had nothing to do." What, then, is to be done? Hear Elisha: "Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master." And so great provision was prepared; "and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master." We

might even excuse a strategic act in order to secure such a conclusion.

What was the effect? "The bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel." This is the true revenge. This is the great miracle. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." "Love your enemies" is the great Christian maxim. Here is Christ operating in Elisha; here is the pre-incarnate Son of God; here is the Gospel in the Old Testament. Let us use our enemies in the same way. If, for a little time, we seem to practise upon them that which brings them into our power, let us see to it, that when they are in our hands they shall feel that, however desirable it may be to have a giant's strength, it is tyrannous to use it. Having got them into our power, let them hear how we can pray; let them observe how liberal we can be; let them carry back to the land of Syria the news that the kings of Israel are merciful kings, and the prophets of Israel are men of great, glowing, noble hearts. In this way by our benefactions we preach without words. In this way we comment upon the Spirit of the Cross—which is the Spirit of Love!

SELECTED NOTE.

Does the king of Syria devise well-concerted schemes for the destruction of Israel? God inspires Elisha to detect and lay them open to Jehoram. Benhadad, on hearing that it was he that thus caused his hostile movements to be frustrated, sent an armed band to Dothan in order to bring him bound to Damascus. The prophet's servant, on seeing the host of the enemy which invested Dothan, was much alarmed; but by the prayer of Elisha God reveals to him the mighty company of angels which were set for their defence. Regardless of consequences, the prophet went forth to meet the hostile band: and having again prayed, God so blinded them that they could not recognise the object of their search. The prophet then promised to lead them to where they might see him with the natural eye. Trusting to his guidance, they followed on till they reached the centre of Samaria, when, the optical illusion being removed, Elisha stands in his recognised form before them! Who can tell their confusion and alarm at this moment? The king is for putting them all to death; but, through the interposition of him whom they had just before sought to destroy, they were honourably dismissed to their own country (b.c. 892). But a year had scarcely elapsed from this time when Benhadad, unmindful of Israel's kindness and forbearance, invests Samaria and reduces its inhabitants to such a state of starvation that an *ass's head*, a proscribed animal by the Levitical law, was sold for *fourscore pieces of silver*, and the fourth part of a cab—a quart or three pints—of dove's dung for five pieces of silver.

2 Kings vi. 24-33; vii.

24. ¶ And it came to pass after [afterwards] this, that Ben-hadad [Ben-hadad II., who had besieged Samaria in the reign of Ahab (1 Kings xx. 1.)], king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria.

25. And there was [there arose: in consequence of the siege] a great famine in Samaria: and, behold, they besieged [were besieging] it, until an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces [eighty shekels = about £10. Ass's flesh would not be ordinarily eaten, and the head would be the cheapest part. When Hannibal besieged Casalinum, Pliny states that a mouse was sold for 200 denarii (£6 5s.)], of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung [probably denotes some kind of common vegetable produce] for five pieces of silver [five shekels in silver = about 12s. 6d.].

26. And as the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall, there cried a woman unto him, saying, Help, my lord, O king.

27. And he said, If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? out of the barn-floor [Jehovah alone is the giver of corn and wine (comp. Hosea ix. 2; ii. 8, 9)] or out of the wine-press?

28. And the king said [compare these facts with Deut. xxviii. 56, *seq.*; 1 Sam. iv. 10; Ezek. v. 10] unto her, What aileth thee? And she answered, This woman said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him to-day, and we will eat my son to-morrow.

29. So we boiled my son, and did eat him: and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him: and she hath hid her son [perhaps to save him (comp. 1 Kings iii. 26)].

30. ¶ And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes: and he passed [now he was passing] by upon the wall, and the people looked [saw], and, behold, he had sackcloth [the sackcloth was. "The sackcloth," *i.e.*, the garb of penitence and woe (1 Kings xxi. 27)], within upon his flesh [comp. Isa. xx. 2, 3].

31. Then he [the king] said, God do so and more also to me [literally, so may God do to me, and so may he add (comp. Ruth i. 17; 1 Sam. iii. 17; 1 Kings ii. 23)], if the head of Elisha [the king's horror is succeeded by indignation (comp. with the oath, 1 Kings xix. 2)] the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day.

32. But Elisha sat in his house, and the elders sat with him; and the king sent a man [to behold the prophet] from before him: but ere the messenger came to him, he said to the elders [Elisha foreknew what was about to happen (comp. chap. v. 26)], See ye how this son of a murderer [referring to Ahab's murder of Naboth (1 Kings xxi. 19)] hath sent to take

away mine head? look, when the messenger cometh, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door [literally, press him back with the door]; is not the sound of his master's feet behind him?

33. And while he yet talked with them, behold, the messenger came [was coming] down unto him: and he [the king] said, Behold, this evil is of the Lord; what should I wait for the Lord any longer?

Chapter vii.

1. Then [And] Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord, To-morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour [Gen. xviii. 6] be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley [Judg. vii. 13] for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.

2. Then a lord [adjutant or aide-de-camp (comp. 2 Sam. xxiii. 8; 1 Kings ix. 22; 1 Chron. xi. 11)] on whose hand [comp. chap. v. 18] the king leaned [was leaning], answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be? And he said, Behold [thou art about (destined) to see], thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.

3. ¶ And there were four leprous men [literally, and four men were lepers] at the entering in of the gate [and so outside of the city (comp. Lev. xiii. 46; Numb. v. 2, 3)]: and they said one to another, Why sit we [Why are we abiding] here until we die?

4. If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto [*i.e.*, desert, go over to] the host of the Syrians; if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die.

5. And they arose up in the twilight [at nightfall, see v. 9, 12], to go unto the camp of the Syrians: and when they were come to the uttermost part [outskirts or verge] of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there.

6. For [Now] the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites [comp. 1 Kings ix. 20, x. 29], and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us.

7. Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life [1 Kings xix. 3].

8. And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and did eat, and drink, and carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid it; and came again, and entered into another tent, and carried thence also, and went and hid it.

9. Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us [Heb., we shall find punishment]: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household.

10. So they came and called unto the porter of the city: and they told them saying, We came to the camp of the Syrians, and, behold there was no man there, neither voice of man, but [the] horses tied, and [the] asses tied [*i.e.*, tethered and feeding], and the tents as they were.

11. And he called the porters; and they told it to the king's house within.

12. ¶ And the king arose in the night, and said unto his servants, I will now shew you what the Syrians have done to us. They know that we be hungry; therefore are they gone out of the camp to hide themselves in the field, saying, When they come out of the city, we shall catch them alive, and get into the city.

13. And one of his servants answered and said, Let some take, I pray thee, five [an indefinite small number (comp. Lev. xxvi. 8; Isa. xxx. 17)] of the horses that remain, which are left in the city (behold, they are as all the multitude of Israel that are left in it: behold, I say, they are even as all the multitude of the Israelites that are consumed:), and let us send and see.

14. They took therefore two chariot [chariots of] horses; and the king sent after the host of the Syrians, saying, Go and see.

15. And they went after them unto [in the direction of the] Jordan: and, lo, all the way was full of garments and vessels, which the Syrians had cast away in their haste. [Comp. 1 Sam. xiii. 6; Ps. xlviii. 6, civ. 7.] And the messengers returned, and told the king.

16. And the people went out, and spoiled the tents [camp] of the Syrians. So [And it came to pass] a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord.

17. ¶ And [Now] the king [had] appointed the lord [the adjutant] on whose hand he leaned to have the charge of the gate: and the people trode upon him [trampled him down] in the gate, and he died, as the man of God had said [spake], who spake when the king came down to him.

18. And it came to pass as the man of God had spoken to the king, saying, Two measures of barley for a shekel, and a measure of fine flour for a shekel, shall be to-morrow about this time in the gate of Samaria:

19. And that lord [the adjutant] answered the man of God, and said, Now [And], behold, if the Lord should make windows in heaven, might such a thing be [literally, might it happen according to this word]? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.

20. And so it fell out unto him: for the people trode upon him in the gate and he died.

THE FAMINE IN SAMARIA.

TO understand the greatness of the miracle which is here recorded we must make ourselves familiar with the awful circumstances in which Samaria was placed during what is termed in the twenty-fifth verse of the sixth chapter, "a great famine." Ben-hadad had come up against Samaria with all his host, and Samaria presently was the scene of the most lamentable

destitution. The ass was accounted unclean in the ritual, and would not therefore be eaten except as a last resort. Nor does the humiliation end there, for, according to the best authorities, the head of the ass would be its worst and cheapest part. The fourth part of a cab of dove's dung reminds us that, according to the rabbinical writers, the cab was the smallest of all the dry measures in use amongst the Jews. According to Josephus, the cab was about equal to two quarts, and therefore the fourth part of it would be about a pint. The circumstances were more lamentable still. Two women said to one another that they would on successive days each boil a son, that the child might be eaten to stay the pangs of hunger. This tragedy, and all the experience which belongs to it, was not overlooked in the earlier books of Scripture, and it is looked back upon from some of the later books. In Lev. xxvi. 29: "Ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat." In Deut. xxviii. 53, 56, 57 we read: "And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the Lord thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee: . . . The tender and delicate woman among you, which would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil toward the husband of her bosom, and toward her son, and toward her daughter, and toward her young one that cometh out from between her feet, and toward her children which she shall bear: for she shall eat them for want of all things secretly in the siege and straitness, wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in thy gates." Then proceeding to the Book of Lamentations (iv. 10) we read, "The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children: they were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of my people." In Ezekiel the picture is, if possible, still blacker: "The fathers shall eat the sons in the midst of thee, and the sons shall eat their fathers" (v. 10). Keeping all these circumstances steadfastly in view, we may see to what an extremity the power of the prophet was brought. Would it be possible even for heaven itself to intervene in conditions so tremendous and humanly unmanageable? Was it possible for one cloud to be added to the infinite darkness which settled over the doomed city?

Here we see the true value of bread. We are so familiar with the food which is necessary to sustain our daily life that we simply expect it morning by morning, and because of our familiarity with it we cease to account it at its proper value. As we have already seen, God has only to withdraw some most common mercies in order to visit us with the most painful judgments. He need not strike a stroke, nor utter one word of anger; he has simply to stay his hand,—that is, to forbear from opening it,—and all living things will perish out of his sight. Whilst it would be legitimate to found upon this circumstance an exhortation to thrift and economy, and the desirableness of forming just estimates of the blessings which make up our daily experience, we may leave this aspect of the question to call attention to the possibility of our undervaluing those spiritual and intellectual benefactions by which our best life is sustained. It is nothing to the people of Christian countries to have Bibles, teachers, Sabbaths, churches, and what is termed the machinery of ecclesiastical being; but let these be withdrawn, then we shall know in their absence what estimate to put upon them. Let it be impossible for sorrow to find its way to a single psalm; let affliction be left destitute in the hour of its keenest agony, not having one word of biblical direction or sympathy; let the Sabbath day be divested of its sacred traditions and become one of the common days of the week, so that men shall not know it from any other day because of the labour and toil with which it is charged; and as the result of this deprivation many men would doubtless come to form another estimate of the value of religious privileges than that which they have already formed. It is a sad reflection that men can become so familiar with the light as hardly to set any value upon it. How few care to observe the rising of the sun, or the going down of the same! Why? because these are daily occurrences. If these phenomena transpired but once a year the populations of the earth would be all alive with expectation; but, because they occur so regularly, what man cares for them more than they are cared for by the beasts of the field? We need preachers and teachers who will constantly call our attention to what are known as the common-places of life. All this craving for new sensations, high intellectual excitements, and fascinations and entrancements of every kind, is to be deprecated;

there is no abiding life in them; when we come to know the reality of things we shall be less displeased with men who insist upon the necessity of bread and water and the common and familiar blessings of life. Jesus Christ set less store by his miracles than any man who observed them. He knew that miracles could not constitute a great and lasting life; they had their uses, illustrative and instructive, but the thing toward which they pointed, the simple duty, the eternal law, the sequential blessing arising out of the course of obedience,—this was the thing on which Jesus himself set the greatest value. So it ought to be when we read the Bible. As children, we are fascinated by its stories, by its wonderful colouring, its continual action, its astounding tragedies; as we advance in life we change our point of observation and our standard of values, and at the end we ask for the profound doctrine, the calm benediction, the tranquillising thought, the holy encouragement towards trust in God and higher uses of life's fleeting privileges.

In the twenty-eighth verse we see how a greater law may include and override a lesser law. The words are: "This woman said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him to-day, and we will eat my son to-morrow." This was a violation of everything that we know under the name of natural law. Every instinct recoiled, every affection of the heart shrank back in dismay and horror. Affection, trust, love, sympathy, care,—these words would seem to mark the course of natural law as between parent and child: but here we have a condition of life in which this law is overridden by a greater law—namely, the law of self-preservation. We are to infer that the children were infants of the youngest years. "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget." In this case, however, there was no mere forgetfulness, certainly there was no want of maternal feeling: the women were under the pressure of the tyranny of hunger, and it was not as if their abstinence from the act of sacrifice would have saved the young ones alive, for death was staring the whole city in the face, and young and old must go down under its ghastly progress. There have been heroic instances in which the law of self-preservation has given way

before the law of natural love. The superiority of the one law over the other is often determined by circumstances. Where the children must of necessity have died, and where there was nothing but death before the parents, it would seem as if the law of self-preservation overcame the law of natural affection in one instance at least. This system of the relative value of laws is one deserving of close study, because it affects all human life—social, political, and spiritual. The instance with which we are most familiar is that of the law astronomical as related to the law geographical and agricultural. The earth itself is full of laws, it is a network of operations constituting themselves into a continual demonstration of high forces and subtle ministries of every kind; yet the great astronomical law takes up the whole earth in its course and causes it to revolve, and to keep in its place, and to receive blessings from other stars, and not one single law that is in operation in the earth itself touches for a moment in any arrestive or destructive sense the great astronomical government. The law of righteousness overrides in many instances the laws of prudence. The law which may be described by the term “an eternal life” sets aside all the considerations of the lower laws of social usage and social obedience. It is right that men should obey the magistrate and the judge, and should generally accept the law of the land, but circumstances may arise in which men will be compelled to say, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to obey men rather than God, judge ye.” When we, therefore, speak about law we must be careful to take it in its largest acceptation and relationships, and not to bind it down to one local or partial standard. It is perfectly right to obey the king, and yet in a larger sense it may be perfectly right to disobey him. Things must be kept in their proper spheres, and estimated according to the law of special consequences and responsibilities. In this way the Christian apostles were always guided in their self-sacrificing and dangerous course. The servant was to obey his master, but it was to be “in the Lord;” the child was to obey the parent, but it was with the same condition; and so throughout the whole system of Christian discipline there would seem to be a series of graded laws, one rising above another until the sovereign law of all was reached, and the voice of God expressed through an enlightened conscience was to direct the

life-mind in all the intricate and contending claims of social and political requirements.

From this incident we see the utter worthlessness of money under special circumstances. As the king of Israel was passing by on the wall of Samaria, "there cried a woman unto him, saying, Help, my lord, O king. And he said, If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee? out of the barnfloor, or out of the winepress?" (vi. 26, 27). The king meant that both the barnfloor and the winepress were empty, and that therefore it was impossible for him, even though king of Israel, to help the woman in the bitterness of her hunger. The king of Israel might have money enough, jewels and precious stones of every kind in abundance: the palace was still standing, the crown still remained, furniture of the most sumptuous kind made the palace rich, but what of all this when there was no bread? This brings us back to what we may call again the law of commonplace. Money in itself is of no value. The whole value of money is in what it can buy, and all that can be bought is utterly useless if bread be not at the very foundation of the purchase. Let us consider this well, for it has an important bearing upon our spiritual life. There are men who have not failed to tell us that without health all other possessions are but so many burdens. Why do they stop at health? Health is impossible without bread. Jesus Christ, therefore, described himself as the bread of life and the water of life: he took his stand upon that which is initial and essential. Civilisation creates its luxuries and refinements and decorations of every sort, and seeks to tempt the appetite by many a condiment or stimulant, but under all lies the sweet and healthful word—"bread." Hence the beauty of the image that Jesus Christ is the bread of life; he is not a mere luxury: he is not something that the rich alone can purchase; his ministry belongs to the very essence of life, and is a ministry without which life is impossible. Of what avail is it that a man shall have a million of gold in his possession, if there is no corn to buy, if there is no water to be purchased? The bread and water are the things which the world cannot do without. The world can well dispense with every luxury of food and wine, but the great world itself with all its wealth would perish in a month but for the presence of bread

and water. A consideration of this kind leads us to estimate anew, as we have already said, the value of things that are apparently simple and with which we have become so familiar as almost to be unaware of their presence. Think of a king placed in an utter extremity simply for want of bread! think of a whole city dying in the midst of gold and silver because there is nothing to be eaten! Is all this possible with regard to the body, and is there no analogy between such circumstances and the possible destitution of the soul? Is it to be thought credible that some things are absolutely essential to the maintenance of the body, and that the soul is absolutely independent of all elements and substances? Holy Scripture maintains a totally different attitude; its declaration is that only by the word of the Lord can the soul be sustained and can life enjoy all that is meant by upward and continual progress. Not by dogmas of a learned kind, not by impenetrable metaphysics, not by intellectual luxuries, not by subtle poetisings and transcendentalisms, but by the simple living word of the Lord Jesus Christ is the soul sustained and kept in soundness of health. When we set up a similar contention on behalf of bread and water men instantly concede that the argument is cogent, but when the argument is transferred to spiritual life and all its necessities there may be some reluctance in accepting the conclusion that only by the word of the Lord can the soul be maintained. It is possible for a similar picture to that which is in the text to be drawn respecting the relations and conditions of the soul. Imagine a soul placed in the midst of a large and invaluable library: let it be the Alexandrian or the Bodleian: let it be filled with works of science, philosophy, history; let it represent the very highest intellectual efforts ever made by the mind of man; yet if there be not found in that library that which is of the nature of a divine revelation—something which immediately and vitally connects the soul with the living God—the soul cannot live even in the centre of such surroundings, but will gradually droop, and decay, and finally die. Men shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Let us be careful, then, whilst we are crying out for the highest thinking, applauding the sublimest endeavours of the human mind, that we estimate at their right value those truths, doctrines, and facts

which, according to their own quality, partake of the nature of bread and water.

Another point relates to the blind vengeance which was taken by the king of Israel. When the king heard the words of the woman "he rent his clothes," and he exclaimed, "God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day" (vi. 30, 31). It would appear that Jehoram had secretly clothed himself with sackcloth, and some have supposed that this action was a superstitious deference to the God of Israel: his hope being that God, seeing him clothed with sackcloth, would turn away his anger. In Jehoram we see how possible it is for a man to be clothed with sackcloth, and yet to be destitute of the spirit of humiliation and contrition. He was dressed as a saint, but in his heart there burned the spirit of selfishness. "Rend your heart and not your garments" is the great and vital cry of Truth. When Jehoram said, "God do so and more also to me," he quoted almost the very words of Jezebel when she sought the life of Elijah. Beheading was not an ordinary Jewish punishment. Commentators tell us that the law did not sanction it, but they add that in Assyria, Babylonia, and generally through the East it was the most common form of capital punishment. It has been thought that Jezebel probably introduced it into Samaria, together with other foreign customs. But why should Elisha be punished on account of the sufferings caused by the siege of Samaria? Simply because of the blindness of human vengeance. How truly blind that vengeance is! Jehoram thought that if he killed the prophet he would destroy the prophecy! How mad is man! Here we find the king of Israel acting the most puerile and ridiculous part. Men are driven under the blindness of their vengeance to do things upon which they do not consult their reason, for Reason would instantly pronounce them to be absurd. There are men in all Christian countries who, when they see afflictions of various kinds, are not indisposed to charge them upon the Christian sanctuary, and who imagine that if all Christian institutions were destroyed all human suffering would be ended. What is the fact of the case? It is that Christian institutions do but represent, they do not create the law of providence and judgment. They recognise the existence of that law; they show

how human life is to be related to it; they point out its highest disciplinary uses; they insist that resistance amounts to nothing but disappointment and ruin; and they call for that intelligent, simple, loving obedience, which turns the very sternness of law into its own security, and makes righteousness less a law than a beatitude. We see in this instance how the spirit of Jehoram was not to be trusted, when in this very chapter he addressed Elisha under the words "my father," saying, "My father, shall I smite them—shall I smite them?" (vi. 21). We supposed when Jehoram recognised a father in Elisha, he was about to forsake his idolatrous thought and practice; but now that we see him when he is left to himself he returns to his old nature: truly he was still son of Ahab and Jezebel. The calmness of Elisha under the circumstances was becoming his dignity and his prophetic function. Elisha was sitting in his house; there was no sign of panic or foolish excitement in the prophet. The elders of the city sat with him, having probably addressed him for the purpose of securing his advice or assistance. Many men, as we have often seen, have been driven by imminent peril to acknowledge the power of Jehovah and to beg favour of his prophets. Elisha described Jehoram as the "son of a murderer," namely, of Ahab, the murderer of Naboth and of the prophets of the Lord, for though Jezebel literally and technically slew them, yet Ahab was the king, and was responsible for the deeds of his infatuated and vengeful wife. It is supposed that Elisha said: Lean against the door, a door that opened inwards, and push against this messenger of the king if he tries to enter. The man who was attempting to come into the presence of the prophet was no doubt the executioner sent by Jehoram. When the king rushed into the presence of the prophet he is supposed to have spoken thus: Behold this evil! this siege, with all its horrors, is from Jehovah, from Jehovah whose prophet thou art: why should I wait for Jehovah, temporise with him, keep, as it were, on terms with him by suffering thee to live, any longer? What hast thou to say in arrest of judgment? For the moment it would appear as if Jehoram had the upper hand of the prophet. But to the king's amazement Elisha answered, "Hear ye the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord, To-morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and

two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria" (vii. 1). [The seventh chapter should be regarded as part of the sixth chapter; chapter six should have ended with verse twenty-three, then the seventh chapter would have commenced with what is now verse twenty-four of chapter six.] This is Elisha's reply to the king's challenge in verse thirty-three of chapter six. The king said, Why should I wait any longer for the Lord? and the answer was that to-morrow by the same time in the day the famine would cease and food would be even cheaper than usual. A measure of fine flour was probably equal to about a peck and a half, English measure, and this was to be sold for something like two shillings and eightpence halfpenny of our money, and about three pecks of barley was to be sold for the same amount. The gates of Eastern towns were the favourite places for the despatch of various kinds of business. Elisha prophesied that the corn market at the gate of Samaria would present a busy scene on the following day. This was the view which the prophet took of the circumstances, and it is made the more remarkable by the contrast which is set up by the speech of the lord or captain on whose hand the king leaned. The captain said, "Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" The word "windows" might be rendered "sluices." The meaning of the speech is that if Jehovah were to open sluices in heaven, and to pour down corn as he poured down rain in the time of the deluge, even then it would be impossible that there could be such an abundance as the prophet had predicted. This was the view of the unspiritual mind. To him that believeth all things are possible. There must be a point at which it is made evident even to the senses that what is impossible with men is possible with God. God indeed often waits until we have come to the point we mark "impossible," and at that point he takes up our case, and shows the riches of his power as well as the tenderness of his grace. Deliverance is always near when human help has been reduced to its extremity. There is a proverb to the effect that it is always darkest before the dawn. What if it be God's delight to train us in this way to faith and patience and hope? What if he stand by, saying, They still think they have resources in their own hands: let the very last drop out of their possession, and when they lift up empty

hands to heaven and cry, saying, Our resources are utterly exhausted, then I will open the windows of heaven, and save them in the bitterness of their despair. It would sometimes seem as if God would have no connection with us in the way of co-operation and help so long as we supposed we could do anything for ourselves. Whilst this has its bodily and limited meanings, it has its spiritual and boundless signification in relation to the salvation of the soul. Throughout the New Testament we are taught that so long as a man supposes he can do anything for his own redemption, he is not permitted to see the cross of Christ in its true significance and power; when man renounces himself, saying with a broken heart that he can no longer do anything towards his own redemption: when he cries in orphan-like helplessness for the pity and mercy of God, then great revelations of love are made to him, and the true meaning of the cross is disclosed to his self-distrustful heart.

The circumstances of life are often rendered the more critical and trying because of the lessons with which history furnishes us to the effect that deliverance is always really near. God is never absent from his universe. Wherever God is, he is known as the hearer and the answerer of prayer, the Father of his children, and the Ruler of all forces. At the same time as a mere matter of fact he does allow his children to be stripped, smitten, impoverished, overthrown, and we are entitled to infer that all this disastrous visitation is absolutely necessary for the thorough expurgation, training, and final purifying of the spirit of man. It is by a study of such depleting, and as they appear to us ruinous circumstances, that we come to see really what was meant by human apostasy. We do not know how far man has gone from God until we measure the line of his return from his father. The outgoing seemed to be but a step, but the coming back to God's sanctuary and smile would seem to require the days of a lifetime, and to be only fully completed when man draws his last breath on earth. It seemed but a little thing that man should disobey once, and that for what may be termed a first offence he should be expelled from all the security and joy of paradise. But what if the supposed smallness of the offence be attributable to our narrowness of judgment, and what if the real offence is to be measured by the infinite difficulty which is

found by every soul in returning to the forgiveness and peace of God ?

Coming to the sixth verse of the seventh chapter, we may see the divine use of delusions. God was now about to work out the deliverance of Samaria. Instead of striking the Syrian camp with a sword, or thundering upon it from the clouds, he "made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians to come upon us." God had sent them strong delusions that they should believe a lie. We are reminded of the words in Job—"A dreadful sound is in his ears: in prosperity the destroyer shall come upon him" (xv. 21). It was only a "noise" which the Syrian hosts heard. To what great uses can God turn little things! The spirit of fear is always accessible to the spirit of judgment. God is continually operating upon the spirit of fear with a view to showing man how frail he is and how dependent he is upon the sovereign power. Even anxiety may have its spiritual uses in the training of the soul. We fear to-morrow; we fear the effect of the coming sentence; we fear the result of certain conflicts which are impending; we fear the severity of men whose goodwill it is important to secure: thus the spirit of fear is continually at work within us; when that spirit leads us to larger and completer prayer it is serving a high purpose, but when it drives us in the direction of distrust and atheism it is perverted, and men must accept the responsibility of its corruption. In itself it was meant to serve a high spiritual end, but as abused by man it is made to destroy the integrity and peace of the soul. What a pitiable picture is seen by those who occupy the spiritual stand-point when all the host of Syria is driven away before this immeasurable noise! "Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life" (vii. 7). Yet it was only a noise! We have called the noise immeasurable, and that is the very point of its energy. If the Syrians had known how the noise was made, or had known that it was only a noise, not a man would have stirred from the camp; but a noise is intangible, ubiquitous in some instances, wholly

immeasurable; it may be the approach of an army, it may be the beginning of a judgment, it may indicate that the clouds of heaven are coming down in judgment. No man can tell what the noise means, and simply because it is an unknown quantity it is a quantity that is feared most. "The wicked flee when no man pursueth"—"Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will make thee a terror to thyself, and to all thy friends"—"Terrors shall make him afraid on every side, and shall drive him to his feet." Let any man look back upon his life, and see in how many instances he has been moved by fear, how he has been driven before the spirit of apprehension, and been pursued by the spectre of anxiety; and how, when he has had full time to consider the matter, he has discovered that he had been mistaking shadows for substances,—and spiritual voices for determined physical opposition. A wonderful life is this of ours,—so sensitive, so easily moved, so proud of its intellectual energy, and yet so humiliated by its intellectual blindness! "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God;" but those who have looked at life in its length and breadth, and have seen it in its ever-changing colour, and have heard it in its ever-varying tone, know that it does not begin and end in itself, but is like a little earth over which there rises an infinite and ruling firmament.

The case of the lepers shows us what use God often makes of what are termed the accidents of life. Four leprous men were at the entering in of the gate, and they reasoned with one another, "Why sit we here until we die?" They then put the alternative before their minds, and they determined to go into the camp of the Syrians: "and when they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there." Then arose the incident which led to the deliverance of Samaria and the realisation of the prophet's word. There are no accidents in life. The little things of life are the hinges upon which great doors swing: the very hairs of your head are all numbered. We wonder why we walked down this side of the street, and not the other; why we went upon a certain day to a certain place: and behold all these apparently petty circumstances are worked up into the great ministry and issue of life. There are no trifles in the divine economy: not a sparrow falleth to the ground without your Father. Let us rest in this great and solemn doctrine, and

not be driven about by every wind, not having standing-ground, or root, or place of growth in all the earth. The Lord besets us behind and before, and lays his hand upon us; the God of heaven knows our downsitting and our uprising, our going out and our coming in, and there is not a word upon our tongue, there is not a thought in our heart, but the Lord knoweth it altogether. This is the distinct teaching of Jesus Christ, and this is the blessed message of his comforting gospel. We have before us two policies: we can either suppose that life is the sport of every wind, a chapter of unconnected accidents, a number of unrelated and incomplete incidents; or, on the other hand, we can look upon life as a plan, an economy, with a divine and beneficent purpose underlying the whole of it; and under this latter conception we shall be led to prayer, to religious trust, and to religious expectation; we shall expect to meet the Lord at every turn in life, and expectation will often become its own fulfilment. Where two or three are gathered together in Christ's name, there is Christ himself: and where the thoughts of man within him concur in expecting the living God, God himself will draw near, and satisfy the expectation of the trustful and the holy.

The prophecy of Elisha was fulfilled: "A measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord" (vii. 16); and the man on whom the king leaned was appointed to have charge of the gate, and the people trode upon him, and he died, as the man of God said, who spake when the king came down to him (vii. 16, 17). In this comparatively trifling event we see the end of the whole economy of nature as we know it. Tragical facts have overpowered us, have indeed almost blinded us as to the possibility of spiritual presences being in the universe, and we have said deliverance is impossible, and out of all this chaos God himself could scarcely bring order. Looking upon the nations of the earth with their moral darkness, their barbarities, idolatries, cruelties, superstitions; observing how men hate one another, and delight in the shedding of blood; studying the whole map and plan of wickedness all but infinite, we have again and again said, though the Lord should open the windows of heaven—though the Lord should come in all his great might, yet surely this chaos could not be brought into order and peace even by the

voice of Omnipotence. Looking upon the cross of Jesus Christ as the medium of the salvation of the world, we have not wondered that men should account it foolishness. There seems to be no proportion between the cause and the effect, the means and the end. To the last, men passing by the cross shall wag their heads, and say to him who expires upon it, If thou be the king or Saviour of the world, save thyself, and come down. We are quite aware that the scoffer has an ample ground for mockery, if attention be limited by visible boundaries. It is not surprising that gibbers should taunt believers, and that the prophets of Baal should turn round upon the Elijahs of the world, and in their turn enjoy the use of ironical appeal, saying, Cry aloud to your Christ, for he is king of the Jews; cry mightily to his God in heaven, for he has espoused him as his father; pray on still,—perhaps if you are not answered in the morning, you may be answered at night; cry lustily with growing energy to the supposed God of the heavens, and let him come out in reply if he can! We must submit to the taunt for the present. In our impatience we desire a manifest and decisive answer, yet all things proceed calmly as they were from the beginning. But our faith has been sustained by a doctrine corresponding to the prophecy,—namely, the Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness: for a thousand years are in his sight as one day, and one day as a thousand years. We are the victims of miscalculated time. We do not know the meaning of to-day or to-morrow:—my soul, wait thou upon God; yea, wait patiently for him, and comfort thyself with the truth that things are not what they seem: that immediately after human extremity there arises a light in heaven, and that in the mid-day of despair angels are sent with special messages from God. The promise to which God is committed is a promise that the whole earth shall see his glory, that all men shall be called to a feast of fat things and of wine on the lees well refined; and though lords and captains and mighty men are declaring the impossibility of such a festival, yet it may be that even to-morrow about this time the world shall find itself sitting at the table of the Lord, eating and drinking abundantly at the Lord's invitation. The Lord will suddenly come to his temple: a nation shall be born in a day. In this faith we live—in this great trust we toil.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him. If we feared thee more we should know more of the mysteries of thy wisdom and of thy love. The revelation is with God, but the sight is not with us : we have not the prepared heart, the obedient will, the pureness of spirit needful to receive all the light we might enjoy. Our sins have kept good things from us ; our iniquities have been as a cloud darkening the sun, so that we who might have sat in the rays of the morning and enjoyed the immediate presence of God are often left in dreariness and loneliness, not knowing the right hand from the left, persecuted by our own perplexities, vexed and exasperated by all the occurrences of time. We might have sat with Christ upon his throne, judging tribes and nations ; we might have had eyes that wander through eternity : but our sins have befooled us, and impoverished us, and left us on the earth when we might have been enjoying our citizenship in heaven. Oh, this weary sin, this constant visitor of darkness, this misleader of the soul ! It promises liberty, and yet leads us into bondage ; it says the morning draweth nigh even at the time when the darkness is deepening ; it holds out its prize, and whispers its flatteries, and flaunts before us its coloured seductions, and we yield and go astray, and play the fool, and lose our souls. Yet we have heard of thy goodness to sinful men ; this word has been sounded in our ears : Herein is love : while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. We are amazed. Our hearts are first struck with unbelief. May that unbelief not deepen into disbelief, but rise gradually like a dawning day into the zenith of perfect and triumphant faith. Marvelous are thy works, passing all knowledge ; far away they stretch in their meaning and blessing, baffling imagination. Thou art able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. Thou knowest what we need—pardon, release from the grasp of the enemy, liberty such as is enjoyed by the sons of God ; we need to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, that we may withstand the enemy when he is strong, and forbid the seducer when his appeal is most eloquent. The Lord help us in these things. Spare us yet a while that we may recover our spirits which have been led captive by the devil at his will, and may we at last, after a long calm eventide, mingle with those who are above, pure with thy purity, and strong because of thine eternity. Amen.

2 Kings viii. 1-15.

1. Then spake [now Elisha had spoken] Elisha unto the woman, whose son he had restored to life, saying, Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn : for the Lord hath called for a [to the] famine ; and it shall also come upon [and, moreover, it cometh into] the land seven years [not to be understood literally].

2. And the woman arose, and did after the saying of the man of God : and she went with her household, and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years.

3. And it came to pass at the seven years' end, that the woman returned out of the land of the Philistines : and she went forth to cry unto the king for her house and for her land [literally, with regard to her house, etc.].

4. And the king talked with [was speaking unto] Gehazi [he was not yet a leper (v. 27)] the servant of the man of God, saying, Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done.

5. And it came to pass, as he was telling the king how he had restored a dead body [the dead] to life, that, behold, the woman, whose son he had restored to life, cried [was crying] to the king for her house and for her land. And Gehazi said, My lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life.

6. And when the king asked the woman, she told him [related to him, *i.e.*, the story]. So the king appointed unto her a certain officer, saying, Restore all that was her's, and all the fruits [revenues, produce in kind] of the field since the day that she left the land, even until now.

7. ¶ And Elisha came to Damascus ; and Ben-hadad the king of Syria was sick ; and it was told him, saying, The man of God is come hither.

8. And the king said unto Hazael, Take a present in thine hand [comp. Numb. xxii. 7 ; 1 Sam. ix. 7 ; 2 Kings v. 5 ; 1 Kings xiv. 3], and go, meet the man of God, and enquire of the Lord by him [literally, from with him], saying, Shall I recover of this disease [comp. i. 2] ?

9. So Hazael went to meet him, and took a present [in his hand] with him [in money (comp. v. 5)], even of every [kind of] good thing of Damascus, forty camels' burden, and came and stood before him, and said, Thy son Ben-hadad [comp. xiii. 14, v. 13, iv. 12, vi. 21. "Father" was a respectful mode of addressing the prophet] king of Syria hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I recover of this disease ?

10. And Elisha said unto him, Go say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover [thou wilt certainly live] : howbeit the Lord hath shewed me that he shall surely die.

11. And he settled his countenance stedfastly [literally, and he (Elisha) made his face stand, and set (it upon Hazael)], until he was ashamed [disconcerted] : and the man of God wept.

12. And Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord ? And he answered, Because I know the evil thou wilt do unto the children of Israel [fulfilled in chap. x. 32, 33, xiii. 3, 4. The cruelties here enumerated were common in the warfare of that age (comp. Amos i. 3, 4, 13 ; Hosea x. 14, xiii. 16 ; chap. xv. 16)] : their strong-holds wilt thou set on fire [literally, send into the fire (Judg. i. 8.)] and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash [in pieces] their children, and rip up their women with child.

13. And Hazael said, But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing ? [(thou canst not mean it ;) for what is the dog thy servant that he should do, etc. The exaggerated humility of his language betrays the hypocrite]. And Elisha answered, The Lord hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria.

14. So he departed from Elisha, and came to his master; who said to him, What said Elisha to thee? And he answered, He told me that thou shouldest surely recover [thou wilt certainly live].

15. And it came to pass on the morrow, that he [Hazael] took a thick cloth [quilt or coverlet] and dipped it in water, and spread it on his face, so that he died [Josephus says Hazael strangled his master with a mosquito net]: and Hazael reigned in his stead.

ELISHA AND HAZAEL.

A DIFFICULTY will be found as to the king's conversation with Gehazi, who has just been driven out, according to the narrative, from the presence of the prophet "a leper as white as snow." We follow the criticism, however, which does not regard the narrative as in strict chronological order. We have here a gathering up of invaluable historical memoranda, each one of which may be fully relied upon as to accuracy, but we are not to understand that the events occurred in immediately successive days. It is in this way that we overcome the difficulty of the conversation which is reported in the fourth verse.

"The Lord hath called for a famine." (v. 1.)—What is the meaning of that expression? Simply, the Lord hath produced it—ordered it; it is part of his providence. "God said, Let there be light: and there was light." A wonderful thing is this we find in the whole Bible—God calling for circumstances as if they were creatures which could hear him, and respond to his call; as if famine and plenty, pestilence and scourge of every name, were so many personalities, all standing back in the clouds: and God said, Famine, forward! and immediately the famine came and took away the bread of the people; but then next door to famine stands plenty, and God says to abundance, Forward! and the earth laughs in harvest; the table is abundantly spread, and every living thing is satisfied. Take Ezekiel (xxxvi. 29), as presenting the pleasant side of this call by the voice divine: "I call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you." Hear how the divine voice rolls through all this sphere of revelation. If we proceed to Rom. iv. 17, we find in the last clause of the verse words often overlooked: "God . . . calleth those things which be not as though they were." God is

always creating, calling something out of nothing, amazing the ages by new flashes of glory, unexpected disclosures of grace. Calling for a famine is a frequent expression. We find it, for example, in the Psalms, "Moreover he called for a famine upon the land : he brake the whole staff of bread" (cv. 16) ; and we find it in so out-of-the-way corner as the prophecy of Haggai, " And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands" (i. 11). The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof. So there are men who still believe that plague, and pestilence, and short harvest, and things evil that are of a material kind, have a subtle and often immeasurable relation to a divine thought, to a new disclosure of divine providence ; that all these things round about us are used as instruments in the chastening, and education, and sanctification of the human race. We cannot be laughed out of this citadel. Sometimes we have half left it under the joke of the giber, because we had no answer to the mocker's laugh ; but presently we began to see how things are related, how mysteriously earth belongs to heaven, and how the simplest, meanest flower that grows draws its life-blood from the sun ; then we have returned into the sanctuary, and said, Be the mysteries dark as they may, and all but innumerable, there is a comfort in this doctrine that there is in none other—and not a quieting comfort after the nature of a soporific, but an encouraging, stimulating, rousing comfort, that lifts our prayer into a nobler elevation, and sharpens our voice by the introduction of a new accent. So we abide in this Christian faith, and await the explanation which God has promised.

This call for a famine was made known by Elisha unto the woman whose son he had restored to life. There are people who have intimations of coming events. Account for it as we may, one man does see farther than another. We may content ourselves by saying, This is due to intellectual capacity ; this prescience is a mere freak of talent or of genius ; it is one of the phenomena not yet brought within the reach of any recognised law. We may talk nonsense of that kind to ourselves in our

lowest moods, but again the spirit is suddenly lifted to the right point of observation, and we come to this solemn fact: "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." We cannot tell on grounds philosophical or merely rational how we did what has saved us from a thousand troubles. How did the idea occur to us that if we introduced such and such a line into our covenant it would be better? At the time nothing seemed less likely than that such a line would be either needed or operative; and now we find that the insertion of that one line has been to us liberty, perhaps wealth, perhaps comfort. The prophetic spirit has never been withdrawn from the world, but the prophetic spirit has always been punished by the world. The prophets have always had to sleep outside, and get the hairy garment where they could for the covering of their bare shoulders. The world hates to live the future within a day, when that future is declared by a prophetic voice, which not only announces comforts but pronounces judgments. In the way of anxiety the world will live any number of days at a time; in the spirit of apprehension some men are living seven years ahead of themselves at this moment: but not in the prophetic sense of anticipation, which sees a great reconcilment of all contradictions, the uplifting of clouds from covered mountains, and the incoming and downpouring of heaven's radiant morning that shall clothe all things with the glory of God. We cannot, therefore, tell how it is that some men have intimations of what is coming, and how those intimations are passed on even to the humblest class of the population.

Hearing this word, "The woman arose, and did after the saying of the man of God: and she went with her household, and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years" (v. 2). Here is a wonderful fact—that there should be plenty in Philistia, and nothing in the land which we call promised and holy. This is a circumstance not easily to be understood, that the enemy should have abundance, and that those who are supposed to have special relations to the divine throne should be left empty-handed. There was always plenty in the low-lying land or valley inhabited by these Philistines; or, if they had not plenty of themselves, they could easily import it by sea from

Egypt. Behold, the Philistines had the best of it! They have to-day, if the terms "the best of it" are to be measured by wheat, and oil, and wine, and gold. We should not be surprised, if these standards be erected, if the "world," as we understand that word, should be in a superior condition of comfort to those who are spiritually-minded and whose house is in heaven. How long shall we be learning the lesson that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth"? how long also in learning that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God? When shall we be made to understand that this world is but a beginning, a symbol, an alphabetical hint of a great literature to us yet unpublished and unknown? Until Christians learn that lesson they will often be chafed and exasperated by appearances which seem to point in the direction that worldly-mindedness or worldly-wisdom furnishes the true security and reward of life. When they seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, the world will believe that they are at least consistent with their faith, even though that faith be found at last to be a delusion. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

The famine is now over. "The woman returned out of the land of the Philistines: and she went forth to cry unto the king for her house and for her land" (v. 3). Immediate access to the king was permitted in Oriental countries; so we read in 2 Sam. xiv. 4: "And when the woman of Tekoah spake to the king, she fell on her face to the ground, and did obeisance, and said, Help, O king;" and in 1 Kings iii. 16: "Then came there two women, that were harlots, unto the king, and stood before him;" and in 2 Kings vi. 26: "And as the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall, there cried a woman unto him, saying, Help, my lord, O king." That is a remarkable circumstance that the people should be permitted to speak to the king. It is so in a limited sense now: but in a sense so limited as to be painful to those who care for it. The king should hear the sufferer himself if he would understand the petition. The written petition the king might read in his own tone, and the king might be in an evil humour or in a frivolous mood; he might hasten over the lines

as if they contained nothing; but when the petitioner stands before the king, and says, "Help, O lord, the king," the king is in a position to know by the very voice how far the person addressing him is animated by a spirit of profound and rational earnestness. What is impossible under many human conditions is possible as between the soul and God. When shall we learn this fact, accept it, and rest in it? Then should we know the meaning of the words, "Pray without ceasing;" "Wait on the Lord;" "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him." Let your own voice be heard in heaven. Do not pray by proxy. Go, hasten to the King and say, Help, O King of heaven! God be merciful to me a sinner! Let every soul, in the priesthood of Christ, plead its own case—point to the void that makes its heart so empty. Let every sinner state his own circumstances, and pray, if not in his own words—for he may have no gift of words—yet in his own tone. By the tone God judges. Your words may be made of gold, your sentences built up with stars, and yet be but a fabric made by the hand; but the tone comes from the heart, and interprets the spirit's need, and impresses the infinite ear of the listening God.

We have not spared the kings of Israel or of Judah up to this point. Now an opportunity is afforded to remark upon the good qualities of one whom we have condemned in no measured terms. The king asked the woman what she wanted, she told him, and the king at once "appointed unto her a certain officer, saying, Restore all that was her's, and all the fruits of the field since the day that she left the land, even until now" (v. 6). The king was bad, but there was this good feature in his case, and it ought to be pointed out. But remember that the hand may be the hand of an assassin though there gleams upon it a diamond of the first water. The king of Israel generously responded to the poor woman's cry. Let that be set down to his credit. We do but repel men if we do not recognise whatever may even seem to be good about them. If there is one spot of light in all the dark cloud, look at it as if it were of infinite value. Encouragement may help some men towards piety.

Elisha discovers the old form of his character when he pro-

ceeds to Damascus. Note his boldness. We have seen how he baffled the king, how the king sent after him, and could not find him. The king might as well have sent after the wind, commanding the charioteer to bring it back. Who can seize a spirit? Who can arrest a soul? Who can engage a thought? Elisha had been identified with a retreat of which Syria could only think with humiliation. The Syrians heard a "noise," and away they ran, as if a flock of sheep had seen a wolf descending on the fold. It was but a "noise." Who can measure a noise? Who knows what it means? Is it the tramp of an army? Is it the descent of a cloud filled with spirits? Is it an intimation of the day of judgment? What does it represent? The king of Syria knew not, and we have already reminded ourselves that "the wicked flee when no man pursueth." But Elisha is very bold. He will go down into the king's own country. Why? Because he has a message. You cannot have a missionary until you have a gospel. You may have a man who will run an errand for you on certain specified terms, and the man will be very particular to have the bond fulfilled. But the man of God will go anywhere, everywhere, at any time. What makes this Elisha so bold? The message that burns within him makes him courageous. It is the truth that makes heroes. Given a conviction that seizes the whole soul, and it will burn its way out into language. Why have we such dainty preaching; such accommodations to human infirmity and social circumstances? Because our message is a recitation; because it begins and ends within mechanical boundaries; because it admits of formulation and of criticism: whereas the real message of God—the outgoing of the soul in truth and judgment—defies criticism; is not above it or below it, but away from it, in infinitely higher spheres, unpolluted, undebased by the pedantry of men who have a trick of seeing flaws, but no genius for the understanding of entireties and perfect harmonies. We shall have men hesitating about going to small settlements and to heathen countries, and to undertaking very difficult work, just in proportion as they have no message. Given the right message, and all things fall down before it.

When the king heard that the man of God had come, he

addressed a message to him and sent all manner of temptations to the prophet—rich robes, precious metals, the luscious wines of Helbon, the drink of the Persian kings, the soft white wool of the Antilibanus, the damask coverings of couches, a procession of forty camels' burden—all to be offered to Elisha. Now Elisha was above all these things,—we may not be. Shame upon those who report how many carriages stand at their church-doors! Shame upon shame to those who wearing a prophet's mantle of their own manufacture, have to ask what is the congregation before they can deliver their message! How independent were these men of old! You could never do them any favour. They had no "expectations." What the Lord teacheth me, that will I surely say, though I go home to my salary, which consists of two figures—bread of affliction, and water of affliction; it is a poor income, but I must deliver God's message. The times die for want of that heroic spirit.

The prophet looked upon Hazael—fixed those wondrous eyes upon him; and the tears came and ran down his furrowed cheeks. "And Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord? And he [Elisha] answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child" (v. 12). And the prophet cried for the sufferings of Israel. Sometimes the answer of Hazael is read as though he himself were shocked. He was not shocked. He gloried in the prophecy. Read the thirteenth verse thus: But what, thy servant only a dog—is it possible that he, so mean, can do this great thing? He gloried in his wickedness. When he heard of this cruelty he was like a man who heard his native tongue in a far-off land. Elisha told no lie to Hazael when he said; "Go, say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit the Lord hath shewed me that he shall surely die": equal to—Go, and perform your trick, tell your customary lies, flatter the dying man that he is better to-day than he was yesterday; but know this, he is to die, and all the physicians in Syria cannot heal the king. What wonder that Elisha wept? Who would not weep if he could see what is coming upon his country? Whose heart

would not pour out itself in blood to know what is yet to be done in the land of his birth or the country of his adoption? If the men of long ago could have seen how civilisation would be turned into an engine of oppression, how the whole land would groan under the burden of drunkeries, and breweries, and houses of hell of every name; if they could have seen how the truth would be sold in the market-place, and how there would be no further need of martyrdom, surely they would have died the violent death of grief. The heart can only be read in the sanctuary. You cannot read it through journalism, or criticism, or political comment, or combinations of any kind which exclude the divine element; to know what Hazael will do, let Elisha read him. The journalist never could have read him; he might have called him long-headed, intrepid, sagacious, a statesman; but the prophet said, "Their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child:" thy course is a course of havoc. It is only in the sanctuary that we know what things really are. When the pulpit becomes a very tower of God, a very fort of heaven, then the preacher will be able to say, as no other man can say, what the heart is, and what the heart will do under circumstances yet to be revealed. But whence has the preacher this power? He has it as a divine gift. Then did God know the world before he sent his Son to save it? It was because he knew it that he loved it and pitied it. Whilst we were yet sinners Christ died for us. He did not catch us on the return, seeing that we were about to amend, gathering ourselves up for a supreme effort at amelioration; it was not then that Christ died for us, but whilst we were yet sinners, whilst both hands were outstretched in rebellion, and then thrown down to cruelty, and then put out in cupidity and oppression and wrong of every form. When the heart had gone astray, then Christ died for us! Amazing love—pity infinite! We have heard of this famine in the land of Israel: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord." O pitiful One, take our bread, our cattle, destroy our fields, burn our forests; but take not thy Holy Spirit from us!

2 Kings viii. 16-29.

16. ¶ And in the fifth year of Joram the son of Ahab king of Israel, Jehoshaphat being then king of Judah, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah began to reign.

17. Thirty and two years old was he when he began to reign; and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem.

18. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab: for the daughter of Ahab was his wife: and he did evil in the sight of the Lord.

19. Yet the Lord would not destroy Judah for David his servant's sake, as he promised him to give him alway a light [Heb., candle or lamp], and to his children.

20. ¶ In his days Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah, and made a king over themselves.

21. So Joram went over to Zair, and all the chariots with him: and he rose by night, and smote the Edomites which compassed him about, and the captains of the chariots: and the people fled into their tents.

22. Yet Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah unto this day. Then Libnah revolted at the same time.

23. And the rest of the acts [or history (2 Chron. xxi. 1-11)] of Joram, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?

24. And Joram slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David [but not in the royal tombs (comp. 2 Chron. xxii. 1-6)]: and Ahaziah his son reigned in his stead.

25. ¶ In the twelfth year of Joram the son of Ahab king of Israel did Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah begin to reign.

26. Two and twenty years old was Ahaziah [called Jehoahaz (2 Chron. xxi. 17)] when he began to reign; and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Athaliah, the daughter of Omri king of Israel.

27. And he walked in the way of the house of Ahab, and did evil in the sight of the Lord, as did the house of Ahab: for he was the son-in-law of the house of Ahab.

28. ¶ And he went with Joram the son of Ahab to the war against Hazael king of Syria in Ramoth-gilead; and the Syrians wounded [smote] Joram.

29. And king Joram went back to be healed in Jezreel [the seat of the court at this time (comp. x. 11, 13)] of the wounds [Heb., wherewith the Syrians had wounded] which the Syrians had given him at Ramah, when he fought against Hazael king of Syria. And Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to see Joram the son of Ahab in Jezreel, because he was sick [wounded].

JEHORAM KING OF JUDAH.

THESE verses should be compared with the twenty-first chapter of the Second Book of Chronicles. The name Joram is an obvious contraction of Jehoram. Joram and Jehoram were almost interchangeable terms. The king of Israel is called Joram, and the king of Judah Jehoram. In another place Joram is the name of the king of Judah. In two other places both kings are called Jehoram.

Jehoram "walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab,"—in other words, as the house of Ahab acted; Jehoram as son-in-law of Ahab and Jezebel gave his patronage to the worship of the Tyrian Baal. Jehoram had examples enough before him of the fate which had befallen idolatrous worship, and yet, turning his eye backward upon all the ruins which had been created by divine anger, he pursued his evil way as if the Lord had approved the house of Ahab and its idolatry rather than manifested his judgments upon them. Rational men may well ask themselves how it is that history is lost upon some minds; they look backward and see that from the beginning sin has always been followed by punishment, and punishment has in many cases been carried as far as death itself; yet in view of all the suffering, and in full sight of the innumerable graves dug by the hand of justice, they continue the same policy without one particle of alteration. One would have supposed that, looking at the history of the kings of Israel, Jehoram would have said: I see now exactly what to avoid; and to see what to avoid is to begin to see what to cultivate and establish: it is perfectly evident that the worship of Baal is doomed, or that wherever it is set up divine anger instantly and severely attests the displeasure of God; it must be my care, therefore, to destroy every trace of idolatry, and do my utmost to build up faith in the true God. This would have been called reflective and philosophical on the part of the king, and indeed anything opposed to this course of reasoning would appear to be marked by incredible fatuity: the contrary, however, is the exact fact: with all the evidences of divine displeasure around him Jehoram continued in the worship of Baal,

or in some other form of idolatry which might appeal to the popular imagination or gratify the desires of his own corrupt fancy. It is easy for moralists to condemn this neglect of history, and to point out to those who, having neglected it, come into suffering and loss, that they ought to have been wise before the event; but the very same thing is done even by the moralists who criticise the course of Jehoram and his predecessors. This is the sin of every age, and it should be looked at clearly and acknowledged frankly, because until we do bring ourselves into vital relation to it our reasoning will be founded on false bases and will hasten itself to false conclusions. All history is teaching us that the wages of sin is death, that the way of transgressors is hard, that though hand join in hand the wicked shall not go unpunished, that the face of the Lord is as a flint against evil-doers; and yet with this plainest of all lessons written on the very face of history men are doing to-day as their predecessors did centuries ago, and will probably continue to repeat the folly and the wickedness until the end of time. Surely this is as curious a puzzle as any that occurs in all the annals of human history. It would seem indeed to be more than a puzzle; to be, in fact, indicative of a suicidal disposition on the part of the actor: it would not be tolerated in any other department of life: if a man had known that a hundred of his ancestors were killed by drinking a certain liquid, and he himself put that liquid to his lips, the iniquity of his suicide would be aggravated by the knowledge of what had occurred in the records of his family. How many murders, then, may he be said to accomplish who murders himself as to his moral nature and spiritual cultivation? He does not do it in ignorance. All history is surrounding him with its evidence, and doing its utmost to secure his attention, and he himself is not unwilling to acknowledge that the testimony of history is uniform and absolute, yet some immeasurable force within him drives him with infinite fury to the repetition of every sin and the defiance of every judgment.

What was the reason of all this patronage and support of idolatry? Jehoram had an excellent father, and if anything was to be expected from the operation of the law of hereditary dis-

positions, it would be that Jehoram would be of the same quality as Jehoshaphat. Some curious and energetic influence must have been at work to throw back all hereditary quality and convert the man into a totally different nature. What was that influence? An expression in the eighteenth verse explains its nature and its scope—"for the daughter of Ahab was his wife." Whenever we find the name of Ahab we find the presence of evil. Ahab lived again in his daughter, though Jehoshaphat did not repeat himself in his son. "The evil that men do lives after them." Jehoram was under home influence; is not home influence the most potent of all? It is a daily influence; it begins with the early morning and continues all the day through; it does not assume aggressive attitudes or excite suspicion by tumult and defiance of temper; it is noisy or quiet, persistent or reluctant, energetic or languid, according to the peculiar circumstances of the family history: at this moment a word too energetically spoken might defeat its own object; at another moment a languid reference might be more than a vehement appeal; on other occasions anger, fury, clamour may bring to a point a long process of suggestion and education. This is the mystery of home-life. The plotter waits for opportunities, creates them, puts them in the way of his victim, measures distances, regulates the method of approaches; the plotter studies his prey, watches him with an evil eye, remembers all his words, weighs them, calculates all their unspoken meanings, and at the right moment interposes his own influence. Wicked men in this respect are often models to good men. The enemy of souls never rests. "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour;" nor is he always a lion: sometimes he is as a serpent, and sometimes even as an angel of light: but his evil policy never hesitates; when he blesses it is that he may curse; when he leads his victim into the light it is that he may have the greater influence over him to persuade him into the darkness. Is it of no consequence with whom we live our daily life? Is the married relation one that expresses mere taste or momentary pleasure? Are not the companionships of life its true sources of tuition and inspiration? A man who is in happy fellowship at home may overget some of the worst hereditary infirmities

and disabilities, and may be encouraged into attainments of self-discipline and virtue which under other circumstances would be simply impossible. The conversion of the world it would seem, must begin at home. We must have happier married relations, fuller domestic confidence, riper household trust and sympathy; out of all this daily education under happy influences there may come a kind of character rich in its own quality and beneficent in its influence upon society.

Jehoram had provoked the Lord, yet so pitiful is the God of heaven that he spared Judah for David his servant's sake, as he promised to give David alway a light. But Jehoram was nevertheless severely punished for his wickedness. In his days Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah and made a king over themselves. Libnah revolted at the same time. Thus the peace of the kingdom was broken up, and Jehoram was made indirectly to suffer for the sin of idolatry. How quietly the twenty-third verse reads, "And the rest of the acts of Joram, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?" It would seem as if the bad king had simply fallen asleep like a tired child. But let us inquire further into the method of the king's death. We find the particulars in the Second Book of Chronicles:

"Moreover he made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit fornication, and compelled Judah thereto. And there came a writing to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus saith the Lord God of David thy father, Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah, but hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring, like to the whoredoms of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father's house, which were better than thyself: behold, with a great plague will the Lord smite thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy goods: and thou shalt have great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness day by day. Moreover the Lord stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines, and of the Arabians, that were near the Ethiopians: and they came up into Judah, and brake into it, and carried away all the substance that was found in the king's house, and his sons also, and his wives; so that there was never a son left him, save Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons. And after all this the Lord smote him in his bowels with an incurable disease. And it came to pass, that in process of time, after the end of two years, his bowels fell out by reason of his sickness: so he died of sore diseases. And his people made no burning for him, like the burning of his fathers" (xxi. 11-19).

This is the end! Who would choose it? Elijah in his extreme age sent a written prophecy to Jehoram.* Terrible are the charges which prophets of God drive home upon the heart of wicked men! Jehovah not only smote with a great smiting the people and the sons of Jehoram, but he sent upon the king himself a most awful disease. We read that Jehoram died of sore

* It must have been shortly after the death of Ahaziah that Elijah made a communication with the southern kingdom. It is the only one of which any record remains, and its mention is the first and last time that the name of the prophet appears in the Books of Chronicles. Mainly devoted, as these books are, to the affairs of Judah, this is not surprising. The alliance between his enemy Ahab and Jehoshaphat cannot have been unknown to the prophet, and it must have made him regard the proceedings of the kings of Judah with more than ordinary interest. When, therefore, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat, who had married the daughter of Ahab, began "to walk in the ways of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab, and to do that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah," Elijah sent him a letter ["a writing"] denouncing his evil doings, and predicting his death (2 Chr. xxi. 12-15). This letter has been considered as a great difficulty, on the ground that Elijah's removal must have taken place before the death of Jehoshaphat (from the terms of the mention of Elisha in 2 Kings iii. 11), and, therefore, before the accession of Joram to the throne of Judah. But admitting that Elijah had been translated before the expedition of Jehoshaphat against Moab, it does not follow that Joram was not at that time, and before his father's death, king of Judah, Jehoshaphat occupying himself during the last six or seven years of his life in going about the kingdom (2 Chr. xix. 4-11), and in conducting some important wars, amongst others that in question against Moab, while Joram was concerned with the more central affairs of the government (2 Kings iii. 7, etc). That Joram began to reign during the lifetime of his father Jehoshaphat is stated in 2 Kings viii. 16. According to one record (2 Kings i. 17), which immediately precedes the account of Elijah's last acts on earth, Joram was actually on the throne of Judah at the time of Elijah's interview with Ahaziah; and though this is modified by the statements of other places (2 Kings iii. 1, viii. 16), yet it is not invalidated, and the conclusion is almost inevitable, as stated above, that Joram ascended the throne some years before the death of his father. In its contents the letter bears a strong resemblance to the speeches of Elijah, while in the details of style it is very peculiar, and quite different from the narrative in which it is imbedded. [The ancient Jewish commentators get over the apparent difficulty by saying that the letter was written and sent after Elijah's translation. Others believe that it was the production of Elisha, for whose name that of Elijah had been substituted by copyists. The first of these requires no answer. To the second, the severity of its tone, as above noticed, is a sufficient reply. Josephus (*Ant. ix. 5, § 2*) says that the letter was sent while Elijah was still on the earth.] *SMITH'S Dictionary of the Bible.*

diseases, and the "people made no burning for him," that is, the usual honours of a sovereign were withheld in this particular case. He died in contempt and neglect. He departed without being desired; in other words, he departed without regret, or died unregretted. He was indeed not refused burial in the city of David, but his body was not laid in the sepulchres of the kings. Thus, sooner or later, wickedness finds out a man, and brands him with dishonour. If under other conditions wickedness is carried to the grave amid great pomp and circumstance, it is only that the dishonour may be found in some other quarter, in the hatred of good men, and in the bitter recriminations of those who have been wronged. Set it down as a sure doctrine, that wherever a bad man is buried, dishonour attaches to his whole name, and contempt withers every flower that may be planted upon his grave. The words "but not in the sepulchres of the kings" may receive a larger interpretation than the technical one which belongs to this immediate circumstance. Men are buried in the sepulchres of the kings when their lives are full of beneficence, when their names are the symbols of noble charity, large-minded justice, heroic fortitude, tender sympathy for others; their burying-place is not a merely topographical point; their relation to the hearts that knew them, their place in the memory of those who lived with them, the tears which are shed over the recollection of their good deeds, the void which has been created by their removal, all these constitute the royalty of their interment. Let us so live that there will be no "but" in the designation of our last resting-place; be that resting-place where it may, in the sea, in the wilderness, in the choice garden, in a cemetery emulous in beauty with paradise itself, it shall indeed be the sepulchre of the kings. We need be under no concern respecting our burial: our one solicitude should relate to the method of our life. Let us follow the true worship, fear God and keep his commandments, practise the pure religion and undefiled commended by Jesus Christ; let us cling to the cross of the Saviour, and look to his omnipotent priesthood for our salvation, and leave all questions of burial, without troubling ourselves concerning them. God will know where our bodies repose, and send his angels to watch those who sleep in Jesus.

2 Kings ix.

1. And Elisha the prophet called one of the children of the prophets, and said unto him, Gird up thy loins, and take this box [phial] of oil in thine hand, and go to Ramoth-gilead :

2. And when thou comest thither, look out there Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi, and go in [into Jehu's house] and make him arise up from among his brethren, and carry him [literally, cause him to enter. The object was secrecy] to an inner chamber [Heb., chamber in a chamber].

3. Then [And] take the box of oil, and pour it on his head, and say, Thus saith the Lord, I have anointed thee king over [unto] Israel. Then [and] open the door, and flee, and tarry not.

4. ¶ So the young man, even the young man the prophet, went to Ramoth-gilead.

5. And when he came, behold, the captains of the host were sitting ; and he said, I have an errand to thee. O captain. And Jehu said, Unto which of all us ? And he said, To thee, O captain.

6. And he [Jehu] arose, and went into the house ; and he poured the oil on his head, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I have anointed thee king over the people of the Lord, even over Israel.

7. And thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master, that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets [see 1 Kings xviii. 4, 13], and the blood of all the servants of the Lord, at the hand of Jezebel.

8. For [And] the whole house of Ahab shall [I will cause to] perish and I will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel.

9. And I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha [see 1 Kings xiv. 10, xvi. 3, 4] the son of Ahijah :

10. And the dogs shall eat Jezebel [literally, and Jezebel the dogs shall eat (comp. Elisha's threat, 1 Kings xxi. 23)], in the portion of Jezreel, and there shall be none to bury her. And he opened the door, and fled.

11. ¶ Then Jehu came forth to the servants of his lord : and one said unto him, Is all well ? wherefore came this mad fellow [or this inspired one, in a tone of ridicule (comp. Hosea ix. 7)] to thee ? And he said unto them, Ye [emphasis on Ye] know the man, and his communication.

12. And they said, It is false ; tell us now. And he said Thus and thus spake he to me, saying, Thus saith the Lord, I have anointed thee king over Israel.

13. Then they hasted [the quick action shows a strong feeling against Joram in the army, and enthusiasm for Jehu], and took every man his garment, and put it under him on the top of the stairs, and blew with trumpets, saying, Jehu is king.

14. So Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi conspired against Joram (Now Joram had kept Ramoth-gilead, he and all Israel, because of [against] Hazael king of Syria).

15. But king Joram was returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the Syrians had given him, when he fought with Hazael king of Syria.) And Jehu said, If it be your minds, then let none go forth [Heb., let no escaper go] nor escape out of the city to go to tell it in Jezreel.

16. So Jehu rode in a chariot, and went to Jezreel; for Joram lay [was lying, his wounds were not yet quite healed] there. And Ahaziah king of Judah was come down to see Joram.

17. And there stood a watchman [literally, and the watchman was standing] on the tower in Jezreel, and he spied the company of Jehu as he came, and said, I see a company. And Joram said, Take an horseman, and send to meet them, and let him say, Is it peace [What is the news]?

18. So there went one on horseback, to meet him, and said, Thus saith the king, Is it peace? And Jehu said, What hast thou to do with peace? turn thee behind me. And the watchman told, saying, The messenger came to them, but he cometh not again.

19. Then he sent out a second on horseback [literally, and he sent a second rider of a horse], which came to them, and said, Thus saith the king, Is it peace? And Jehu answered, What hast thou to do with peace? turn thee behind me.

20. And the watchman told, saying, He came even unto them, and cometh not again: and the driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi; for he driveth furiously [*i.e.*, the foremost charioteer so drives].

21. And Joram said, Make ready [bind the horses to the chariot]. And his chariot was made ready [literally, and one bound his chariot]. And Joram king of Israel and Ahaziah king of Judah went out, each in his chariot, and they went out against [to meet] Jehu, and met him in the portion of Naboth [Naboth's vineyard, which now formed part of the pleasure ground of the palace (see 1 Kings xxi. 16)] the Jezreelite.

22. And it came to pass, when Joram saw Jehu, that he said, Is it peace Jehu? [Is all well at the seat of war?] And he answered, What peace, so long as the whoredoms [in a spiritual sense: idolatries] of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts [sorceries; the use of spells and charms common among Semitic idolatries (comp. the prohibitions in the Law: Exod. xxii. 18; Deut. xviii. 10, 11)] are so many?

23. And Joram turned his hands [turned his horses round (comp. 1 Kings xxii. 34)], and fled, and said to Ahaziah, There is treachery [literally, guile, or fraud], O Ahaziah.

24. And Jehu drew [filled his hand with] a bow with his full strength, and smote Jehoram between his arms, and the arrow went out at his [or,

came out from his] heart, and he sunk [bowed : see Isa. xlvi. 1] down in his chariot.

25. Then said Jehu [And he said] to Bidkar ["son of stabbing"] his captain, Take up, and cast him in the portion of the field of Naboth the Jezreelite : for remember how that, when I and thou rode together after Ahab his father, the Lord laid this burden upon him ;

26. Surely I have seen yesterday the blood [bloods : plural ; implying death by violence : Gen iv. 10] of Naboth, and the blood of his sons, saith the Lord ; and I will requite thee in this plat [or, portion], saith the Lord. Now therefore take and cast him into the plat [portion] of ground, according to the word of the Lord.

27. ¶ But when Ahaziah the king of Judah saw this, he fled by the way of the garden house. And Jehu followed after him, and said, Smite him also in the chariot. And they did so at the going up to Gur, which is by Ibleam. And he fled to Megiddo, and died there.

28. And his servants carried him [literally, made him ride] in a chariot to Jerusalem, and buried him in his [own] sepulchre [which he had in his lifetime prepared, according to the custom of antiquity] with his fathers in the city of David.

29. And in the eleventh year of Joram the son of Ahab began Ahaziah to reign over Judah.

30. ¶ And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it : and she painted her face [Heb., put her eyes in painting], and tired [adorned] her head, and looked out at a [the] window.

31. And as Jehu entered in at the gate, she said, Had Zimri peace, who slew his master ?

32. And he lifted up his face to the window, and said, Who is on my side ? who ? And there looked out to him two or three eunuchs [or chamberlains].

33. And he said, Throw her down. So they threw her down : and some of her blood was sprinkled on [spirited on to] the wall, and on the horses : and he trode her under foot [he drove over her fallen body].

34. And when he was come in, he did eat and drink [then he could remember that even Jezebel was of royal rank, and perhaps a touch of remorse may be discerned in the mandate for her burial], and said, Go, see now [look, I pray after] this cursed woman [Jehu was thinking of the curse pronounced on Jezebel of the prophet Elijah (see next verse)], and bury her : for she is a king's daughter [comp. 1 Kings xvi. 31].

35. And they went to bury her : but they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her [the] hands.

36. Wherefore they came again, and told him. And he said, This is the word of the Lord [see 1 Kings xxi. 23, where this oracle of Elijah is given] which he spake by [Heb., by the hand of] his servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, In the portion of Jezreel shall [the] dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel :

37. And the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung [comp. Ps. lxxxiii. 10] upon the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel ; so that they shall not say, This is Jezebel.

Chapter x.

1. And Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria. And Jehu wrote letters, and sent to Samaria, unto the rulers of Jezreel, to the elders, and to [nourishers] them that brought up Ahab's children, saying,

2. Now as soon as this letter cometh to you, seeing your master's sons are with you, and there are with you chariots and horses, a fenced city [fenced cities. There is a tone of mocking irony in Jehu's challenge to the nobles of Samaria, who were probably as luxurious and cowardly as in the days of Amos a few years later (Amos iii. 12, vi. 3-6)] also, and armour ;

3. Look even out the best and meekest of your master's sons, and set him on his father's throne, and fight for your master's house.

4. But they were exceedingly afraid [feared mightily (comp. Gen vii. 19)], and said, Behold, two kings stood not before him : how then shall we stand ?

5. And he that was over the house [the major domo] ; and he that was over the city [the prefect or governor], the elders also, and the bringers up of the children, sent to Jehu, saying, We are thy servants, and will do all that thou shalt bid us ; we will not make any king : do thou that which is good in thine eyes.

6. Then he wrote a letter the second time [a second letter] to them, saying, If ye be mine, and if ye will hearken unto my voice, take ye the heads of the men your master's sons, and come [bring] to me to Jezreel by to-morrow this time [Jehu is urgent : time is all-important]. Now the king's sons, being seventy persons [not, perhaps, to be taken as exact : seventy being a favourite round number] were with the great men of the city, which brought them up.

7. And it came to pass, when the letter came to them, that they took the king's sons, and slew [butchered or slaughtered] seventy persons, and put their heads in baskets, and sent him them to Jezreel.

8. ¶ And there came a messenger [literally, and the messenger came in. Josephus says Jehu was giving a banquet] and told him, saying, They have brought the heads of the king's sons. And he said, Lay ye them in two heaps at the entering in of the gate until the morning.

9. And it came to pass in the morning, that he went out, and stood [took his place, *i.e.*, sat as judge in the palace gateway], and said to all the people, Ye be righteous ["are ye righteous?" implying that Jehu wished to make the people guilty of the massacre of the princes, while owning his own murder of the king] : behold, I conspired against my master, and slew him : but who slew all these ?

10. Know now that there shall fall unto the earth nothing of the word of the Lord, which the Lord spake concerning the house of Ahab : for the Lord hath done that which he spake by his servant Elijah.

11. So [And] Jehu slew all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel [the seat of the court], and all his great men [high officials who owed their exaltation to him], and his kinsfolks [his friends : literally his known ones], and his priests, until he left him none remaining [no survivor].

12. ¶ And he arose and departed, and came to Samaria. And as he was at the shearing-house in the way,

13. Jehu met with the brethren of Ahaziah king of Judah [*i.e.*, Ahaziah's kinsmen. His brothers, in the strict sense of the word, were slain by a troop of Arabs in the lifetime of his father Jehoram (2 Chron. xxi. 17, xxii. 1)] and said, Who are ye? And they answered, We are the brethren of Ahaziah; and we go [have come] down to salute the children of the king and the children of the queen.

14. And he said, Take them alive [perhaps they made some show of resistance]. And they took them alive, and slew them at the pit of the shearing-house, even two and forty men [perhaps a definite for an indefinite number, curiously parallel with ii. 24]; neither left he any of them.

15. And when he was departed thence, he lighted on [found] Jehonadab the son of Rechab [comp. Jer. xxxv. 6-11 and 1 Chron. ii. 55] coming to meet him: and he saluted [blessed] him, and said to him, Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart? And Jehonadab answered, It is. If it be, give me thine hand [a token of amity; a pledge of good faith. Striking hands sealed a compact]. And he gave him his hand; and he took him up to him into the chariot.

16. And he said, Come with me, and see [look on at] my zeal for the Lord. So they [he] made him ride in his chariot.

17. And when he came to Samaria, he slew all that remained unto Ahab in Samaria, till he had destroyed him, according to the saying of the Lord, which he spake to Elijah.

18. ¶ And Jehu gathered all the people together, and said unto them, Ahab served Baal a little; but Jehu shall serve him much.

19. Now therefore call unto me all the prophets of Baal, all his servants, and all his priests; let none be wanting: for I have a great sacrifice to do to Baal; whosoever shall be wanting, he shall not live. But Jehu did it in subtilty [or, in guile, treacherously], to the intent that he might destroy the worshippers of Baal.

20. And Jehu said, Proclaim a solemn assembly [sanctify a solemn meeting (Isa. i. 13)] for Baal. And they proclaimed it.

21. And Jehu sent through all Israel: and all the worshippers of Baal came, so that there was not a man left that came not. And they came into the house of Baal; and the house of Baal was full [or so full that they stood mouth to mouth] from one end to another.

22. And he said unto him that was over the vestry [chests], Bring forth vestments for all the worshippers of Baal. And he brought them forth [the] vestments.

23. And Jehu went, and Jehonadab the son of Rechab, into the house of Baal, and said unto the worshippers of Baal, Search, and look that there be here with you none of the servants of the Lord [worshippers of Jehovah], but the worshippers of Baal only.

24. And when [omit "when"] they went in to offer sacrifices and burnt-offerings, Jehu appointed fourscore men without, and said, If any of the men

whom I have brought into your hands escape, he that letteth him go, his life shall be for the life of him.

25. And it came to pass, as soon as he had made an end of offering [for the massacre Jehu chose the moment when all the assembly was absorbed in worship] the burnt-offering, that Jehu said to the guard and to the captains, Go in, and slay them; let none come forth. And they smote them with the edge of the sword; and the guard and the captains cast them out [threw the dead bodies out of the temple], and went to the city of the house of Baal.

26. And they brought forth the images [the pillars; which were of wood and had a sacred significance (Hosea iii. 4). Idolatrous pillars were commanded to be destroyed (Exod. xxiii. 24). Most critics think that pillars to Jehovah were allowable till the time of Hezekiah or Josiah (Deut. xvi. 21, 22)] out of the house of Baal, and burned them.

27. And they brake down the image of Baal [pillar], and brake down the house of Baal, and made it a draught house [by way of utter desecration, (comp. Ezek. vi. 11; Dan. ii. 5)] unto this day.

28. Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel.

29. ¶ Howbeit from the sins of Jeroboam [comp. 1 Kings xii. 28, seq.; xv. 26, 30, 34], the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them, to wit, the golden calves that were in Beth-el, and that were in Dan.

30. And the Lord said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation [the fulfilment of this oracle is noticed in xv. 12 (comp. Exod. xx. 5)] shall sit on the throne of Israel.

31. But Jehu took no heed [Now Jehu had not been careful] to walk in the law [the Mosaic law which forbids the use of images such as calves] of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart; for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin.

32. ¶ In those days the Lord began [through Hazael and the Syrians (comp. Isa. vii. 17, 20; x. 5, 6)] to cut Israel short; and Hazael smote them in all the coast of Israel.

33. From Jordan [Heb., toward the rising of the sun] eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites, and the Reubenites, and the Manassites, from Arzer, which is by the river Arnon, even Gilead and Bashan.

34. ¶ Now the rest of the acts of Jehu, and all that he did, and all his might [comp. xx. 20; 1 Kings xv. 23. The LXX. adds "and the conspiracies which he conspired"], are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

35. And Jehu slept with his fathers: and they buried him in Samaria. And Jehoahaz his son reigned in his stead.

36. And the time that Jehu reigned over Israel in Samaria was twenty and eight years.

JEHU.

WHILST Jehoram was lying ill of his wounds, Elisha had called one of the children of the prophets and sent him upon a special mission to Ramoth-gilead. It has been conjectured that this messenger was the Jonah who is mentioned in chapter xiv. 25. Jehu was left in supreme command of the forces at Jehoram's departure. Nothing is known of Jehu's origin. From the first, however, it is evident that he was called to special functions. He was one of the men who had been foreseen by Elijah the prophet under the divine inspiration. We have seen (1 Kings xix. 15) that Elijah was ordered to return to the wilderness of Damascus, and in the course of his progress he was to anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi to be king over Israel. Whether any communication had been made to Jehu himself we know not, yet it is not improbable, as we may infer from the way in which he answered the appeal when it was addressed to him by the messenger of Elisha. All the circumstances of the communication are full of dramatic colour and impressiveness. The young man was to take a phial of oil and pour it upon Jehu's head, and say, "Thus saith the Lord, I have anointed thee king over Israel," and instantly he was to open the door and flee from the presence of the new monarch. A tremendous charge was delivered to Jehu by the young man:—

"And thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master, that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord, at the hand of Jezebel. For the whole house of Ahab shall perish : . . . and I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah : and the dogs shall eat Jezebel in the portion of Jezreel, and there shall be none to bury her" (ix. 7-10).

Having delivered this message, the young man "opened the door, and fled," as if pursued by fire. We know not whether to pity Jehu under the delivery of this charge or not. The Lord must have many servants in his household, and some of them are entrusted with hard work. If we could choose our places in the divine economy, who would not elect to be a minister of sympathy, consolation, and tenderness to broken hearts? Who would be willing to go forth to fight the battle and endure the trail

and hardship of military service? Above all, who would be willing to accept the ministry of shedding blood and cleansing the world of evil by putting to death all evil-doers. We must recognise the diversity of function in the Christian Church, and in every department of human life. Few men could do what Jehu did, but where the special qualification is given the special service is demanded. It is pitiful criticism that stands back and shudders at the career of Jehu; it is wanting in large-mindedness and in completeness of view: the Lord's work is many-sided, and all kinds of men as to intellectual energy and moral daring and even physical capability are required to complete the ministry of God. To-day one man is gifted with the power of intercession, another with the talent of controversy, another with the genius of exposition, another with the supreme gift of consolation; one minister must tarry at home and work close to the fireside at which he was brought up; in another is the spirit of travel and adventure, and he must brave all the dangers of enterprise and hasten to the ends of the earth that he may tell others what he knows of the gospel of Christ. We must recognise this diversity, and the unity which it constitutes: otherwise we shall take but a partial view of the many-sided ministry which Jesus Christ came to establish, and to which he has promised his continual inspiration.

When Jehu came forth he was taunted by the servants of his Lord; they called the young man "mad." From their manner Jehu began to wonder whether the whole affair had not been planned by themselves with a view to befooling him by the excitement of his ambition. He said to them in effect: Ye know the man, and his communication in this matter is one of your own arranging; you think to make a fool of me, and through the intoxication of my vanity to lead me to my ruin. But they denied the impeachment, and their tone so changed that Jehu reposed confidence in them, and told them what the man had said. Instantly on hearing the message they hastened, took every man his garment or coat, and put it under Jehu on the top of the stairs, which they constituted a kind of temporary throne, and then with loud blasts of the trumpet cried, "Jehu is king." Thus Jehu was suddenly called to royalty, and all its responsibilities. Men should be prepared for the sudden calls of providence.

“What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.” If we had higher expectations of the divine coming, and were ourselves persuaded of the possession of capacities for the doing of a large work in the kingdom of God, those very expectations might to a large degree fulfil themselves. There is a noble and holy ambition. We shall know whether it is noble and holy by ascertaining whether we are prepared for danger, loss, suffering, as well as for any possible external honour. Merely to expect a throne for the sake of enjoying its luxuries is not the kind of expectation now referred to. We should be looking out for larger opportunities of usefulness, even creating occasions for self-sacrifice, and preparing ourselves by reading, thought, culture of every kind, and the continual exercise of all faculties, for the incoming of a large message and the appointment to an extended rulership. We must not cultivate mere expectation, but express our expectation by our industry, devotion, and invincible resoluteness in all holy aggression and progress. We cannot but be struck by the obedience of Jehu to the heavenly call. There was no hesitation. We show ourselves to be yet under bondage when we hesitate regarding the calls which God addresses to us. We linger, we wish to return and bid those farewell who are in our father’s house; we have sundry things to adjust and determine before we can go, we secretly hope that in the meantime occurrences may transpire which will change the line of our destiny; by all this we mar the simplicity and purity of obedience, and discover a spirit that is not fit to be trusted with great functions and responsibilities in the divine economy. Jehu was determined to make complete work of his mission. Not one was to escape or go forth out of the city to tell what he was about to do to those who were in Jezreel. Springing into his chariot, and calling for a detachment of cavalry, he set out upon his journey of some sixty or seventy miles: we see him almost flying down from Ramoth, which was about three thousand feet above the sea level; swiftly he crosses the Jordan; then turning to the north he fled over the spurs of Ephraim; then he darted up the Valley of Trembling, made famous in the day of Gideon; and finally he came to the plain of Esdraelon, where was Jezreel. Jehoram was unaware of the approach of Jehu. One messenger after another was sent out to make inquiry, but the messengers were ordered behind; and Jehu dashed

forward until he and the king met at the vineyard of Naboth. The king asked what news was being brought, was it news of peace or of war; and Jehu cried, "What peace can there be so long as the idolatrous whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?" Jehu thus referred to fundamental wrongs: instead of trifling with details he went straight to the fountain-head, and by the delivery of a profoundly religious message he excited the alarm of those who heard him. Jehoram was weak and feeble and sought to flee, but Jehu drew a bow with his full strength and smote between his arms, and the arrow went out at the king's heart, and he sank down in his chariot. Then Jehu ordered his captain, or squire, to take up and cast him into the portion of the field of Naboth the Jezreelite, that the word of the Lord might be fulfilled. When Ahaziah the king of Judah saw this he himself attempted to flee, but Jehu followed Ahaziah, saying, "Smite him also in the chariot," and after a hot pursuit he was struck at the declivity of Gur, where Ahaziah's chariot would be forced to slacken its speed. Then came the most tragical of all the acts. No sooner was Jehu come to Jezreel than Jezebel, now old and withered, heard of it, and her blood tingled at the news. She was not one who was easily deterred. According to the custom of Oriental ladies she painted her eyebrows and lashes with a pigment composed of antimony and zinc.* The intention of the dark border was to throw the eye into relief and make it appear larger. She adorned her head with a tire, or a head-dress, and putting on her royal apparel she looked out at a window, designing to impress Jehu with her majestic appearance. As Jehu looked up to the window he exclaimed, "Who is on my side?" and he ordered the two or three eunuchs who looked out to throw down the painted woman. Jehu knew that the cruel queen was intensely hated by the palace officials. The two or three eunuchs who had been accustomed to crouch before her in servile dread now saw that Jehu was in the ascendant, and in obedience to the demand of the regicide they threw her out of the window. Such has ever been the policy of sycophants, the rats of court, who only linger there with a view of seeing how much they can appropriate or destroy. No sooner was Jezebel thrown down than some of her blood was

* See Selected Note, p. 216.

sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses, and she was trodden under foot. Here again we see the end of wickedness. For a time there is escape, but in the long run there is ruin. It is hard for men to kick against the pricks. How long will men continue to band themselves against the Lord and against his Anointed? How long will foolish builders imagine that they can rear a tower which will reach unto heaven? "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree: yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not; yea, I sought him, but he could not be found." Look at Jezebel, and learn the fate of the wicked. No such fate in a merely physical sense may await iniquitous men now, but all these intermediate punishments simply point to the last great penalty,—“The wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment.” We can pity Jezebel as her flesh was eaten by the dogs, and her carcase was made as dung on the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel: and we almost shudder with horror as we think that she was to be so torn to pieces that none should be able to say, This is Jezebel; but all this is wasted sentiment, unless we reason from it towards spiritual conclusions. We are so much the victims of our senses that we can pity with great compassion men who are smitten with bodily disease, or are torn limb from limb in consequence of some wicked deed; but it seems impossible for us to rise to the conception of the terrible penalty which is to fall upon the soul for violating God's commandments and defying God's power. We cannot too frequently say, Be the fate of the wicked what it may as to mere details, it must be a fate unspeakably awful: for “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

Instead of being appeased by the fate of Jezebel, Jehu sends out a decree that the whole family of Ahab shall be massacred that the kinsmen of Ahaziah and the Baal-worshippers shall be extirpated from the face of the earth. He takes a new point of departure when he challenges the sons of Ahab, saying, “Look even out the best and meetest of your master's sons, and set him on his father's throne, and fight for your master's house” (x. 3). All this was a declaration of warlike intention on the part of Jehu. But Jehu's character as a soldier was too well known to permit the rulers of Jezreel and the elders

to entertain the thought of encountering him in open battle. So they returned for their reply: "We are thy servants, and will do all that thou shalt bid us; we will not make any king: do thou that which is good in thine eyes." Then Jehu set up a test of their obedience. He did indeed impose upon them hard work. He said, "If ye be mine, and if ye will hearken unto my voice, take ye the heads of the men your master's sons, and come to me to Jezreel by to-morrow this time." The word was enough. The heads of seventy men were put into baskets, and sent to Jehu at Jezreel. Jehu pronounced the men who had beheaded the sons of Ahab guiltless in respect of their deaths, because what they had done had been done judicially under royal command. Some suppose that Jehu wished to make them guilty of the massacre of the princes, whilst he himself had but murdered one king. On the whole, however, it is better to consider that Jehu exculpates the men who had executed his command. The slaughter of the priests is perhaps one of the most dramatic incidents in all this portion of biblical history. Jehu proceeded by way of strategy. It is impossible to justify the spirit of the policy of Jehu in this matter. He said he would serve Baal "much." It has been supposed that he was thinking of his intended holocaust of human victims, but, whatever his thoughts, it is impossible to deny that the impression he produced was that he himself was about to become a worshipper of Baal. This reading is imported into the narrative in these words, "But Jehu did it in subtilty, to the intent that he might destroy the worshippers of Baal" (x. 19).

Now a solemn assembly for Baal was proclaimed. From all Israel the devotees of Baal came, so that there was not left a man that came not. The house of Baal was full from one end to the other. And they were clothed with appropriate vestments. Jehu was particular that not one worshipper of Jehovah should be in the assembly, but those of Baal only. When the worshippers went in to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings Jehu appointed fourscore men without, and said, "If any of the men whom I have brought into your hands escape, he that letteth him go, his life shall be for the life of him." Then came the moment of massacre: "And they smote them with the

edge of the sword ; and the guard and the captains cast them out, and went to the city of the house of Baal." Jehu's guards having completed their bloody work in the court of the temple, hastened up the steps into the sanctuary itself, which, like the temple of Solomon, was made after the pattern of a fortress. The images of Baal were brought forth out of the house of Baal and burned ; the image of Baal was broken down, and his house was broken down, and the whole scene was utterly dishonoured and desecrated. " Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel " (v. 28). But the way was wrong. Perhaps for the period within which the destruction took place it was the only ministry that was possible. The incident, however, must stand in historical isolation, being utterly useless as a lesson or guide for our imitation. We are called upon to destroy Baal out of Israel, but not with sword, or staff, or implement of war. " The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong-holds of Satan." Jehu did his rough-and-ready work, a work, as we have said, adapted to the barbaric conditions under which he reigned, but there must be no Jehu in the Christian Church, except in point of energy, decision, obedience, and single-mindedness of purpose. A Christian persecution is a contradiction in terms. When Christians see evil, they are not to assail it with weapons of war ; they are to preach against it, argue against it, pray about it, bring all possible moral force to bear upon it, but in no case is physical persecution to accompany the propagation of Christianity. Not only so : any destruction that is accomplished by physical means is a merely temporary destruction. There is in reality nothing in it. When progress of a Christian kind is reported it must not be tainted by the presence of physical severity. We cannot silence evil speakers by merely closing their mouths ; so long as we can hold those mouths there may indeed be silence, but not until the spirit has been changed, not until the very heart has been converted and born again, can the evil-doer be silenced, and his mouth be dispossessed of wicked speeches and filled with words of honesty and pureness. Jehu himself was not a good man ; " from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them." For reasons of state policy Jehu maintained the worship of Bethel and Dan.

"But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin." He had done homage to Jehovah by extirpating the foreign Baal-worship, but he patronised and actively supported the irregular mode of worshipping Jehovah established by Jeroboam as the state religion of the northern kingdom. He attempted to serve God and mammon. Religion was to him but a political instrument. He was willing to accommodate the sentiment of the people, to purchase peace at any price. He did the particular kind of work which was assigned to him, a work of destruction and blood; perhaps he alone of all the people of his time could have accomplished this task; but Jehu must stand in history as a warning rather than as an example.

SELECTED NOTE.

Painting the eyes, or rather the eyelids, is more than once alluded to in Scripture, although this scarcely appears in the Authorised Version, as our translators, unaware of the custom, usually render "eye" by "face," although "eye" is still preserved in the margin. So Jezebel "painted her eyes," literally, "put her eyes in paint," before she showed herself publicly (2 Kings ix. 30). This action is forcibly expressed by Jeremiah (iv. 30)—"though thou rentest thine eyes with painting." Ezekiel (xxiii. 40) also represents this as a part of high dress—"For whom thou didst wash thyself, *paintedst thy eyes*, and deckedst thyself with ornaments." The custom is also, very possibly, alluded to in Prov. vi. 25—"Lust not after her beauty in thine heart, neither let her take thee *with her eyelids*." It certainly is the general impression in Western Asia that this embellishment adds much to the languishing expression and seducement of the eyes, although Europeans find some difficulty in appreciating the beauty which the Orientals find in this adornment.

The process is thus described by Mr Lane in his work on the "Modern Egyptians:":—"The eyes, with very few exceptions, are black, large, and of a long almond form, with long and beautiful lashes and an exquisitely soft, bewitching expression; eyes more beautiful can hardly be conceived; their charming effect is much heightened by the concealment of the other features (however pleasing the latter may be), and is rendered still more striking by a practice universal among the females of the higher and middle classes, and very common among those of the lower orders, which is that of blackening the edge of the eyelids, both above and below the eyes, with a black powder called *kohhl*. . . . The *kohhl* is applied with a small probe, of wood, ivory, or silver, tapering towards the end, but blunt; this is moistened, sometimes with rose-water, then dipped in the powder, and drawn along the edges of the eyelids; it is called *mir'wed*; and the glass vessel in which the *kohhl* is kept, *mookhol'ah*.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, our prayer is that we may live worthily before thee, serving thee day and night according to thy will, and showing forth out of a pure and noble life thy truth and thy grace as revealed in Jesus Christ. It is in the name so sweet, so dear, the one great good name we now come before thee. Our prayer is to be lifted up into thy likeness, to be set amongst thine angels for purity and strength, yet never to forget that we are men of the earth, the children of time, redeemed with the great price of the blood of Christ. We desire to set ourselves to thy service with our whole heart, and with both our hands; nothing would we do reluctantly or of compulsion, but everything with the ease of love, with the gladness of a true heart's loyalty—then shall we never be weary, in our soul there shall be no faintness. We bless thee for thy tender care. When other love has wasted, thy love has but begun: when other patience has been exhausted, then has thy long-suffering been multiplied toward us. This is thy gift in Christ, this is the grace of the very cross itself, this is the applied blood of atonement; we bless thee for it, we are made strong by it, and because of thy grace and thy strength our life shall be delivered from the enemy.

We humbly pray thee to meet us in thine house; when the burden is great thou canst lift the load, at least for a while, and if thou wilt not lessen the burden thou wilt increase the strength, for thine heart is set towards the children of men to do them good and not evil, all the days of their life. We put our cases into thine hands, thou knowest all that is special in them, and all that is urgent: how poor we are, how weak, how blind and stumbling and how ill-advised in our counsels, and how unsuccessful in our labour. All our life is laid out before thee in infinite plainness; according to its woe, and sin, and sore, and bitterness, do thou come to it and give us all to know the joy of divine redemption. Amen.

2 Kings xi.

1. And when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw [as to the evil influence of Athaliah on her husband Jehoram, see chap. viii. 18, 26, 27. By her ambition and her cruelty she shows herself a worthy daughter of Jezebel] that her son [Ahaziah (chap. ix. 27)] was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal [Heb., seed of the kingdom].

2. But Jehosheba, the daughter of king Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king's sons which were slain [which were to be put to death]; and they hid him, even him and his nurse, in the bed-chamber from Athaliah, so that he was not slain.

3. And he was with her hid in the house of the Lord six years. And Athaliah did reign [was reigning] over the land.

4. ¶ And the seventh year [when perhaps discontent at Athaliah's tyranny had reached a climax] Jehoiada [the high priest (v. 9)] sent and fetched the rulers over hundreds, with the captains and the guard [the centurions of the Carians and the couriers: the officers commanding the royal guard], and brought them to him into the house of the Lord, and made a covenant with them, and took an oath of them in the house of the Lord, and shewed them the king's son.

5. And he commanded them, saying, This is the thing that ye shall do. A third part of you that enter in on the sabbath shall even be keepers of the watch of the king's house;

6. And a third part shall be at the gate of Sur; and a third part at the gate behind the guard: so shall ye keep the watch of the house, that it be not broken down.

7. And two parts of all you that go forth on the sabbath, even they shall keep the watch of the house of the Lord about the king.

8. And ye shall compass the king round about [they were to form two lines, between which the king might walk safely from the temple to the palace], every man with his weapons in his hand: and he that cometh within the ranges [ranks], let him be slain; and be ye with the king as he goeth out and as he cometh in.

9. And the captains over the hundreds [vv. 4, 10] did according to all things that Jehoiada the priests [had] commanded: and they took every man his men that were to come in on the sabbath, with them that should go out on the sabbath, and came to Jehoiada the priest.

10. And to the captains over hundreds did the priest give king David's spears and shields, that were in the temple of the Lord.

11. And the guard [literally, the couriers; not therefore the Levites] stood, every man with his weapons in his hands, round about the king, from the right corner [side] of the temple to the left corner of the temple, along by [at] the altar and the temple.

12. And he brought forth the king's son, and put the crown upon him, and gave him the testimony: and they made him king and anointed him; and they clapped their hands, and said, God save the king [Heb., Let the king live. Lit., *Vivat rex* (1 Kings i. 25)].

13. ¶ And when Athaliah heard the noise of the guard and of the people, she came to the people into the temple of the Lord [evidently the palace was hard by the temple].

14. And when she looked [having entered the court, the whole scene met her astonished gaze], behold, the king stood by a pillar [the king was standing on the stand (comp. chap. xxiii. 3)], as the manner was [according to the custom on such occasions], and the princes and the trumpeters [the sacred trumpets or clarions blown on solemn occasions by the priests (comp. chap. xii. 14; Numb. x. 2; 1 Chron. xv. 24)] by the king, and all the people of the land rejoiced, and blew with trumpets; and Athaliah rent her clothes, and cried, Treason, Treason [literally, Conspiracy].

15. But Jehoiada the priest commanded the captains of the hundreds, the officers of the host, and said unto them, Have her forth without the ranges [cause her to go out' between the ranks]: and him that followeth her [*i.e.* whoever shows any sympathy with her, or attempts to take her part] kill with the sword. For the priest had said, Let her not be slain in the house of the Lord.

16. And they laid hands on her; and she went by the way by the which the horses came into the king's house [she entered the palace by way of the entry of the horses. Athaliah was conducted to the royal stables which adjoined the palace, and there put to death]: and there was she slain.

17. ¶ And Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people, that they should be the Lord's people [comp. Deut. iv. 20; Exod. xix. 5, 6]; between the king also and the people [for the protection of their mutual rights (comp. 1 Sam. x. 25)].

18. And all the people of the land went into the house of Baal, and brake it down; his altars and his images [or, its (the temple's) altars . . . its images] brake they in pieces thoroughly, and slew Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars. And the priests appointed officers [Heb., offices] over the house of the Lord.

19. And he took the rulers over hundreds, and the captains, and the guard, and all the people of the land; and they brought down the king from the house of the Lord, and came by the way of the gate of the guard to the king's house. And he sat on the throne of the kings [and they seated him on the throne].

20. And all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was in quiet: and they slew Athaliah [and Athaliah they had slain; an emphatic recurrence to the real climax of the story (v. 16), by way of conclusion] with the sword beside the king's house.

21. Seven years old was Jehoash when he began to reign.

ATHALIAH.

ATHALIAH was a king's daughter, and a king's wife. She had a son whose name was Ahaziah, but as he was an invalid, he did not occupy the throne longer than about twelve months. As soon as his mother saw that he was dead a fierce and most murderous passion seized her heart. She resolved to be queen herself. In order to carry out this nefarious purpose she slew all the seed royal, so that there being no successor to the throne, she herself ascended it and reigned as queen. It is very wonderful that some of the most cruel and startling things in the world have been done by women. One called Laodice poisoned her six sons one by one, that she might be Empress of Constantinople. Another, ironically named Irene, took the eyes out of her own boy, that he might be incapable of empire, and

that she might reign alone. These things were done in the ancient time: is any of the cruelty of heart left still? The accident may be changed—what about the passion and purpose of the heart? Let every one answer the question individually.

Athaliah made her heap of corpses and laughed in her mad heart, saying that now she was queen. But always some Fleance escapes the murderer's clutch. In that heap of corpses there was an infant boy, hardly twelve months old—he was spared: the sword had not taken his little life, but the queen knew not that the child Joash had escaped. He was taken and with his nurse was hidden in the temple, and there he was trained by the good priest Jehoiada for some six years. All the while the queen was reigning and doing evil. The little boy was saved by his aunt Jehosheba, and when six years had passed and the boy was seven years of age, being twelve months old when he was snatched from impending ruin, Jehoiada called the rulers together and all the chief and mighty men of Israel, and he revealed the secret to them, and he disposed them in military order and with military precision around the young king, and he brought the crown and put it on his head, and he gave him the testimony or Book of Leviticus, and having gone through all this ceremonial process, the young king stood upright by the pillar of inauguration in the temple, and all that great throng clapped their hands and said "God save the king!" and again "God save the king!" and louder the shout rang till the queen heard it in her house which was not far off. The nearer the church, the farther from God, as has been wittily said. She hastened to the sacred place to know the reason of this hilarious tumult, and when the case was made clear to her, she shrieked and cried "Treason, treason!" and the voice had no echo in the hearts of men. Not a soul fluttered, not a heart started up in royal defence—the woman, the evil daughter of an evil mother, was taken out by the way by the which the horses came into the king's house, and the sword she had thrust into the throat of others drank her own blood. In an event of this kind there must be some great lessons for all time. These are not merely momentary ebullitions of wrath or malice: they have history in them, they are red with the common blood of the whole race.

Very few men stand out in ancient history with so fair and honourable a fame as good Jehoshaphat. It is like a tonic, intellectual and spiritual, to read his vivid history. He was a grand king, long-headed, good-hearted, honest and healthy in purpose of doing wondrous things for his kingdom and for the chosen of God. But is there not a weak point in every man? Does not the strongest man stoop? Does not great Homer sometimes nod? Jehoshaphat had this weakness, that he hankered after some kind of connection with the wicked house of Ahab. He had a son, whose name was Jehoram or Joram, and he wanted his son married. He must look round for royal blood: explain it as we may—no man has explained it fully yet—Jehoshaphat wanted to be connected with the evil house of Ahab. To that house he looked for a wife for his son Jehoram. His son married Athaliah, and Athaliah brought into the kingdom the idolatrousness of Ahab and the fierce blood-thirstiness of Jezebel. That was the root of the mischief. Some roots lie a long time before they begin to germinate. There may be roots in our lives which will take ten years or forty years to develop, but the root will bring forth according to its kind. Let us take care what roots we plant in our life, what connections we form.

Jehoram, the son of good Jehoshaphat, walked in the evil ways of the kings of Israel, and he wrought that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. For—mark the reason given by the inspired historian—Jehoram did that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord, for “he had the daughter of Ahab to wife”! What secrets were indicated by that one reason! What a whole volume of tragedy is wrapped up in that brief sentence! The responsibility seems to a large extent transferred from him and placed upon his wife, who was a subtler thinker, a more desperate character, with a larger brain and a firmer will, with more accent and force of personality. Jehoram played the evil trick, repeated the foul habit, went in the wrong direction, bowed down to forbidden altars, for—he had the daughter of Ahab to wife. She lured him, the seduction was hers, she won the conquest: when he would have bowed the knee to the God of heaven, she laughed at him and mocked him into Baal-worship—he fell as a victim into her industrious and cruel hands.

“Be not unequally yoked together:” do not look upon marriage lightly; do not suppose that it is a game for the passing day, a flash and gone, a hilarious excitement, a wine-bibbing, a passing round of kind salutations, then dying away like a trembling echo. Beware what connections you form, and do not suppose that the laws of God can be set aside with impunity. Get out of your heads the infinite mistake that you can do as you like and escape the operation of divine law. Deliver yourselves from the cruel delusion that you can sow tares and reap wheat. Be not deceived: God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. Our family life explains our public attitude and influence. What we are at home we are really abroad. Wives, do not destroy your husbands: when they would do good, help them; when they propose to give to the cause of charity, suggest that the donation be doubled, not divided; when they would help in any good and noble work, give them sympathy, and prayer, and blessing. We never knew a man yet of any enduring public power that was not made by his wife, and we never knew a public yet that fully appreciated the value of that ministry. It is secret; it is at home; it does not show, it is not chalked on a black-board, it is not gilded on a high ceiling, it is silent—but vital. We have seen a man go down in his church life, and we have wondered why, and it was his wife, the daughter of Ahab, who was degrading him, narrowing him and dwarfing him in his thinking and sympathy. We have seen a man go up in his public influence, and we have found that it was his wife who was encouraging him, helping him, telling him that he was on the right way, and wishing him good luck in the name of the Lord. See to it that your home is right: have a beautiful home—morally and religiously; a sacred house, a sanctuary where joy is the singing angel, and then, when you come abroad into the market-place, into the pulpit or into parliament, or into trading and commerce, or into any of the social relations of life, you will bring with you all the inspiration that comes from a home that blooms like a garden or glows like a summer sun.

Do not suppose that the divine purpose can be set aside by Athaliahs or Irenes or Laodices, or any false, furious, or des-

perate characters of any kind. The Lord promised David that he should always have a candle in Jerusalem. The light was very low sometimes, it was reduced to a spark in young Joash, but it was God's candle, and Athaliah's wild breath could not blow out that light. The word of the Lord abideth for ever. Our confidence in the final reclamation of the world from the grip of evil is not in the eloquence of tongues, nor in the vividness of prophecy, nor in the dauntlessness of courage—but it is in the written and sealed oath of the Almighty Maker and Redeemer of his own universe.

Observe a very strong peculiarity in human nature, as shown in the conduct of Athaliah. She went into the temple and saw the young Joash with a crown upon his head and she shrieked out, "Treason, treason!" Poor innocent Athaliah! who would not pity so gentle a dove, with a breast of feathers and a cruel dart rankling in it. Sweet woman, gentle loving creature, injured queen—her hands were perfectly clean; she was the victim of a cruel stratagem; she was outwitted by heads longer than hers; she, poor unsuspecting soul, had been brought into this condition, and all she could do was to cry in injured helplessness, "Treason, treason!"

How moral we become under some circumstances! How very righteous we stand up to be under certain provocations! Who could but pity poor Athaliah, who had nursed her grandchildren with a wolf's care? We do this very self-same thing very often in our own lives. Where is the man who does not suppose that he has a right to do wrong? But let other people do wrong, and then hear him. Given a religious sect of any name whatsoever, that has the domination of any neighbourhood, and the probability is that that religious sect will use its supremacy somewhat mischievously in certain circumstances. It will not let anybody who opposes its tenets have an acre of ground in that neighbourhood, nor will it allow any sect that opposes its principles to build a church there. No, it takes a righteous view of the circumstances; it will not trifle with its responsibilities; it can allow no encroachment; it is charged with the spirit of stewardship, and must be faithful to its sacred

obligations. So it cants and whines, whatever its name be : if it be the name we bear religiously so much the worse. We speak of no particular sect, or of any sect that may be placed in such peculiar circumstances as to claim the domination and supremacy in any neighbourhood. Now let any member of that sect leave that particular locality and go to live under a different set of circumstances, and apply for a furlong of ground, or for a house that he may occupy as tenant ; then let it be found that his religious convictions are a bar to his entrance upon the enjoyment of local properties and liberties, he will call "Persecution, persecution !" How well it befits his lips. The very man who in one district persecuted to the death those who opposed him removes to another locality where a screw is applied to his own joints, and he cries out, "Persecution—persecution !" It is Athaliah's old trick, and will have Athaliah's poor reward.

See how the cry of the wicked is unheeded. She was a woman, and by so much had a claim upon the sympathy of the strong. No man's heart went out towards her in loyal reverence. With what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged. With what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again. "As I have done," said a sufferer of old, "to others, so the Lord hath requited me." Though hand join in hand, yet the wicked shall not go unpunished. If you are treating any of your family, your wife or husband or child, with base cruelty, it will surely come home to you some other day. If you are kind, gentle, true, honest, the wheel will turn in your favour. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Forget not to send a portion to the hungry, and extend a hand to the helpless—these are investments that cannot go down ; their value increases with the ages. "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord ; and that which he hath given will he pay him again." A voice will be heard saying, "Is there any left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake ?" And some day you will receive great rewards and special honours because of your father's generosity to a former generation. Fathers, you are laying up treasures for children that you know nothing about. You think all you are laying up for your children

is to be measured in pounds, shillings, and pence—you are doing kindnesses and rendering services that will come up twenty years hence and longer, and your children will then sit down at tables which you are spreading now.

Jehoash, or Joash, as the name was shortened, was trained in the temple, under the good Jehoiada. He was blessed in his aunt—for it was his aunt that took him, the daughter of Ahab, but not by the mother of Athaliah—and Joash did good all the days of Jehoiada the priest. See the influence of a noble life, see how religion may help royalty, and how that which is morally true lifts up patriotism to a higher level. No country is sound at heart, through and through good, and likely to endure, that draws not the inspiration of its patriotism from the loftiness and purity of its religion.

All these tragedies are making the earth reek with abomination to-day. Athaliah lives in a vigorous progeny. The times are drunk with iniquity, our streets are the hunting-grounds of all manner of vice, the earth is furious against the Lord, and righteousness is as a bruised angel, trampled and insulted in the highways of the world. Do not decorate the ghastly tomb, and call it the abode of life; let us look at the wild tragedies that are about us on every hand openly in the face, and ask how the deadly mischief can be counteracted. O temple of the Lord, temple of the Lord, search thyself with the candle of heaven, and see if there be aught in thee that keeps up the history of the world's base Athaliahs.

The great question to be raised and answered by the Christian expositor is this—How is this mischief to be cured? It is not to be cured by Associations reading papers to one another at stated times in the year; it is not to be cured by clever ecclesiastical organisations, by multiplying bishops and ministers and Christian agencies, merely as such. How then is it to be cured? It took God to answer that question. He and he only could find the reply to a question accented with fire, and made urgent with blood. What is the divine answer? There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved, but that of Jesus Christ the Son of God. "This is a faithful saying, and

worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," and he said in one of his tenderest discourses, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." "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." Except a man be born of the laver of regeneration—which laver is filled with blood—and of the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

This is the answer, poignant, tragical, sublime, tender. Who art thou, poor plasterer, running up and down the world's broken walls, and daubing them with untempered mortar? Who art thou, crying "Peace, peace," when there is no peace? Who art thou with an inch of gilt, seeking to decorate the world's death? The message must be vital, the gospel must be one of blood—"the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin," and not until we realise the grandeur of that doctrine shall we rouse ourselves from playing at philanthropy, and become inflamed and inspired with the desire to save the world.

Athaliah still lives—the connection with the house of Ahab still has evil results: evil-doers will turn round and complain of being badly used when their turn comes, the merciless will meet with no real mercy, the pitiless will have to confront the sword of their own cruelty, and amid all the world's sin and woe and death there is but one hope, and its name is—The Cross of Christ.

SELECTED NOTE.

"*And the captains over the hundreds did according to all things that Jehoiada [known by Jehovah] the priest commanded*" (v. 9).—Several persons of this name are mentioned in the Old Testament, of whom the one most deserving notice is he who was high priest in the times of Ahaziah and Athaliah. He is only known from the part which he took in recovering the throne of Judah for the young Joash, who had been saved by his wife Jehoshebah from the massacre by which Athaliah sought to exterminate the royal line of David. Jehoiada manifested much decision and forecast on this occasion; and he used for good the great power which devolved upon him during the minority of the young king, and the influence which he continued to enjoy as long as he lived. The value of this influence is shown by the misconduct and the disorders of the kingdom after his death. He died in B.C. 834, at the age of 130, and his remains were honoured with a place in the sepulchre of the kings at Jerusalem.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou dost give us our bread day by day, and our thought, our light, and our revelation. Thou dost keep us in continual dependence upon thyself. This is well. We know it now to be so. Once we were like a bullock under the yoke, and we chafed under the discipline of heaven : but now we know we are under divine care and guidance, that the spirit of providence is a spirit of education and progress. Even affliction is meant for our chastening and sanctification ; our loss is intended to be the beginning of our gain. We see things now as we never saw them before : a man that is called Jesus anointed our eyes, and we see. Of this we are certain. We now contradict all the things we said in our own wisdom. They were but superficial ; they did not take in the whole horizon ; they were mere conjectures : but now we have brought the power of an endless life to bear upon the concerns of the passing time. This is the miracle which Christ has wrought in our heart. We read time in the light of eternity ; we look upon earth through the light of heaven ; we measure affliction by the purpose of God. We have changed all our standards and measures and methods of looking at things, so that now we see brightness where we saw nothing but gloom ; the wilderness rejoices and stony places are beautiful with flowers. This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working. This is the daily miracle. We now know the power of the Spirit within ourselves. As to thine energy in things that are round about us, as to the miraculous displays of thine almightiness, we know nothing ; we cannot tell why they have ceased to attract our vision, but we feel the inward miracle, the spiritual marvel, the personal surprise. Our prejudices are destroyed, our view is enlarged and brightened, our charity has displaced our censoriousness, and now we live a beautiful life—a life of aspiration and love and sacrifice in which there is joy : this also is the miracle of God. What we shall yet do who can tell but thyself ? We may even yet live to forgive our worst enemy ; thou mayest even now spare us to clasp hands with him whose heel has been lifted up against us ; we may yet make room for the prodigal whom we have forsworn for ever ; we may yet kill the fatted calf for the man whose name at this moment we dare not mention. We cannot tell what thou hast in store for us. The most iron heart may be melted, the most stubborn will may yield to the persuasion of thy grace, and we may yet be glad with a new joy, and invested with an everlasting liberty. Thou hast many things to say unto us, but we are not able to bear them now ; when we are a little older and wiser and stronger, then thou wilt speak the secret word, and it will come to us as a revelation self-testifying, and we shall open our hearts and receive it and give it glad

welcome. In the meantime, keep us quiet, patient, restful : may we know the meaning of waiting for God as well as waiting upon him ; give us that long-enduring patience which is quite sure that the door will be opened at last, and that the angel of God will come with sweet messages to our heart. Thou knowest our estate, what trouble we are in, what fear darkens upon us, what a cold cloud now and again crosses the line of our life ; thou wilt have pity upon us ; thy mercy shall be tender, thy kindness shall be loving, and thy coming to us shall be a miracle of redemption. Oh that we were wise—really, spiritually, largely, wise ; then fear would be killed within us, and hope would light her lamp, and show us all the way, and then thy Spirit would dwell with us, and we should be without apprehension. Could we measure things aright, we should change all our verdicts. Save us from all sophism, all fallacy in practical reasoning, and may we do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God, during all coming worlds in this grace of thine. Then it shall be well with us ; the eventide shall be a period of rest, and the morning shall call us to service in which there is no weariness. We have been taught these prayers by Jesus Christ our Saviour. He died for us. He has told us all we know of thyself, and of thy purposes ; and behold thy name is love, thy purpose is goodness, the intent of thine heart towards this whole creation is an intent of redemption and blessing. Thus saith thy Son, the Son of man, the Saviour of the world. Help us to receive his cross, the mystery of his sacrifice, and all the blessings of his priesthood, and make us rich with promise, and rich with possession, so that the time that now is may be brightened by the time that is to come, and the time that is to come may not lure us from the work which has now to be done. Put a blessing into every heart ; shed a new light upon the way of every life ; and at last bring us in thine own way to the great Zion on high, the sweet home, the abiding sanctuary, where the labour is delight, where the service is song, where the light never declines. Amen.

2 Kings xiii.

1. In the three and twentieth year of Joash the son of Ahaziah king of Judah Jehoahaz the son of Jehu began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned seventeen years.

2. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, and followed [walked after] the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin ; he departed not therefrom.

3. ¶ And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he delivered them into the hand of Hazael [comp. chap. x. 32, *seq.*] king of Syria, and into the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael, all their days [all the days. An indefinite designation of a long period of disaster].

4. And Jehoahaz besought [literally, stroked the face of. A metaphor which occurs in Exod. xxxii. 11 ; 1 Kings xiii. 6] the Lord, and the Lord hearkened unto him : for he saw the oppression [comp. Exod. iii. 7 ; Deut. xxvi. 7] of Israel, because the king of Syria oppressed them.

5. (And the Lord gave Israel a saviour [Jeroboam II., the grandson of Jehoahaz, a vigorous and successful sovereign, of whom it is said that

Jehovah "saved" Israel by his hand, chap. xiv. 27], so that they went out from under the hand [referring to the oppressive supremacy of Syria] of the Syrians: and the children of Israel dwelt in their tents [in the open country] as beforetime.

6. Nevertheless they departed not from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, who made Israel sin, but [he] walked therein [therein they walked. It is the conduct of the nation that is being described]: and there remained [stood] the grove also in Samaria.)

7. Neither did he leave of the people to Jehoahaz but fifty horsemen, and ten chariots [the destruction of these particular kinds of forces was equivalent to complete disarmament and rendered further resistance hopeless], and ten thousand footmen; for the king of Syria had destroyed them, and had made them like the dust by threshing [Israel was down-trodden by the conqueror (comp. 2 Sam. xxii. 43; Isaiah x. 6)].

8. ¶ Now the rest of the acts of Jehoahaz, and all that he did, and his might [prowess], are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

9. And Jehoahaz slept with his fathers [or lay down (*i.e.*, to sleep) like his fathers. The same phrase is used even of Amaziah, who came to a violent end (chap. xiv. 22)]; and they buried him in Samaria: and Joash his son reigned in his stead.

10. ¶ In the thirty and seventh year of Joash king of Judah began Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned sixteen years.

11. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord; he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin: but he walked therein.

12. And the rest [this is repeated (chap. xiv. 15, 16)], of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, and his might wherewith he fought against Amaziah [see the account of chap. xiv. 8, *seq.*] king of Judah, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

13. And Joash slept with his fathers; and Jeroboam sat upon his throne: and Joash was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel.

14. ¶ Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died [he was to die]. And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him [to his house], and wept over his face [as he lay on the bed], and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.

15. And Elisha said unto him, Take bow and arrows. And he took unto him bow and arrows.

16. And he said to the king of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow [Heb., make thine hand to ride]. And he put his hand upon it: and Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands [so as to invest the act of shooting with a prophetic character].

17. And he said, Open the window [lattice] eastward. And he opened it. Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he said, The arrow of the Lord's deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek [Josh. xiii. 4; 1 Kings xx. 26]. The scene of

former defeats was to become that of triumph], till thou have consumed them.

18. And he said, Take the arrows [*i.e.*, the bundle of arrows]. And he took them. And he said unto the king of Israel, Smite upon the ground. And he smote thrice [three being a sacred number] and stayed.

19. And the man of God was wroth with him [because his present want of zeal augured a like deficiency in prosecuting a war hereafter. The natural irritability of a sick man may have also had something to do with it], and said, Thou shouldst have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it; whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice.

20. ¶ And Elisha died, and they buried him. And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year.

21. And it came to pass, as they [a party of Israelites. The story is told with vivid definiteness] were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band [the troop] of men; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha [comp. Mark xvi. 3, 4. In this case the tomb was more easily opened, as the action was obviously done in haste]: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet.

22. ¶ But Hazael king of Syria oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz.

23. And the Lord was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect [turned] unto them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast he them from his presence as yet.

24. So Hazael king of Syria died; and Ben-hadad [Ben-hadad III. The name Ben-hadad, does not, of course, signify any connection with the dynasty overthrown by Hazael. It was a divine title] his son reigned in his stead.

25. And Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz [returned and] took again out of the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael the cities, which he had taken out of the hand of Jehoahaz his father by [in the] war. Three times did Joash beat [smite] him, and recovered the cities of Israel.

THE DYING PROPHET.

THIS chapter opens with an account of the wicked reign of Jehoahaz the son of Jehu, who reigned seventeen years over Israel in Samaria. He was a weak-minded and a bad-hearted man. In this respect he was no exception to the kings of Israel. It is a remarkable thing, that whilst Judah had now and again a good king, Israel never had one after the division of the kingdom. How are we to account for this? Israel and Judah were practically one family, yet along the one line from the point of departure there is nothing but stubbornness, selfish-

ness, idolatry, and love of evil. Along the other line there were occasional gleams of goodness, high quality of character, and some approach to patriotic statesmanship. This would be a marvel to us if the same thing were not happening every day in the year, within our own knowledge, and perhaps within our own families. The mystery is not to be accounted for, and certainly it is not to be lightly treated. All these things are for our instruction: they call upon us to halt, and think, and pray; they make us quiet, when otherwise we might be tumultuous and violent in the face of heaven. But is not the mystery deepened by the fact that every man is himself two selves—both Israel and Judah in his own personality? Look at him for days together, and say if ever sweeter man lived,—apt in religious thinking, gifted even in the power of prayer, carrying with him as it were the very key of heaven, and having boldest and broadest access to God at all hours. The same man shall descend from heaven like a star that has lost its centre, and shall plunge in darkness, and do wickedness with both hands. Instances of this kind are known to us, and may be too painfully known to us by reason of our own consciousness. Which will be uppermost at the last? Determining the personal life by a majority—for even personal lives are settled by majorities as well as the affairs of state—on which side will the majority be at the last? Let us hope the best, even of those who now seem to be the worst. The men whom we have seen farthest away from the throne of God and the cross of Christ and all spiritual loveliness, have come back again, and have almost claimed the very highest place known to Christ. Then when they have returned, we have said, After all, the good will get the upper hand: “Gad, a troop shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last.” There remains, however, this broad lesson in the history now before us, that whilst in Judah there were occasional kings worthy of the name, yet in Israel from the point of division there was one continual succession of bad men.

What was the Lord’s action in relation to the city which had been ruined by the policy of this evil Jehoahaz? A very tender word supplies the answer:—“Jehoahaz besought the Lord,”—and the Lord is very pitiful and kind; a touch at his robe and he

turns round as if a friend had greeted him ; one look through blinding tears, and he comes back to the prodigal as if he himself had something to make up to the wayward man. The Lord heard even Jehoahaz—"And the Lord gave Israel a saviour" (v. 5). A beautiful word this! We have come to love it. It stands in our English Bible, however, in significant typography ; it has not a capital initial ; it has but a small letter, like the rest of the word. Still, coming back upon it from Christian associations, it reads like the New Testament in the midst of the Old. "A saviour,"—the very syllables have music in them ; the word itself sounds like a gospel. There has always been in the world a man who especially represented God—not God's majesty only, but God's love and tenderness, pity and mercy. Here again is a great mystery—that one man should be different from another. A marvellous thing that one man should be as a saviour, and another should be as a saved one. Why this difference ? This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, which is excellent in counsel, and wonderful in working. Have no fear of the cry about equality, because equality is impossible. There are kingships that come up out of eternity ; there are rulerships which are ordained of God. In the highest sense, the powers that be are ordained of God, not in the case of the individual men, viewed within the limits of their own personality, but in the idea which they represent—an idea of righteousness, clemency, purity, progress. God has always had his Abel in the world, who offered the acceptable sacrifice ; he has always had a Moses or a Joshua, or some brave judge in Israel who knew right from wrong, and who could not be bribed to do that which was corrupt ; he has always had his Eli or Samuel, or mighty singer who turned righteousness into music ;—evermore has God had his representative upon the earth. Why did not Israel create their own saviour ? Why was not Jehoahaz made the saviour of his own people ? Saviours are divine creations. Redeemers come from heaven. Great prophet-minds are creations of God, and they are as it were sent down here like lights to show us the road in darkness, and to reveal to us beauties which but for them would have been undiscovered. We know them when they come. If we do not give them instant welcome, we acknowledge the mystery of their personality.

We say regarding each of them, "Whence hath this man this wisdom?" He is no scholar, he has not gone through the usual curriculum, certainly; yet when he speaks he seems to have a right to speak; when he gives his judgments we feel that the words which proceed out of his mouth are gracious and wise. In all these things Christ teaches us to recognise the hand of God, and we are thus trained towards Christ himself—the real Saviour, so mighty that he could humble himself; so majestic that he could take upon him the form of a servant; so infinite that he was first, last; the beginning, the end,—the unbeginning beginning, the unconcluding end. Thus early we come upon sweet names. They surprise us as flowers would amaze us in a wilderness.

What a tremendous hold sin gets upon the heart. "Nevertheless they departed not from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, who made Israel sin, but walked therein" (v. 6). Israel was punished, and still sinned; Israel had a saviour sent, and still sinned. Hazael, the cruel Syrian king, impoverished the army of Israel until there was nothing left to Jehoahaz "but fifty horsemen, and ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen; for the king of Syria had destroyed them, and had made them like the dust by threshing" (v. 7). He visited them with contempt. To leave them fifty horsemen and ten thousand footmen was to brand them with an insult. So has providence dealt with many men: they have been reduced to a minimum; they have had the barest field in the world; one inch more taken away, and down they would fall, and be irrecoverably lost. What is the meaning of this pruning, cutting, impoverishment,—this almost total depletion? Why this mental darkness, this social degradation, this loss of status and influence, this withdrawal from our companionship, this intolerable solitude! Instead of answering the question in words, let each ponder for himself the inquiry, and answer it according to his own knowledge.

How very little we know even of the men whose lives are written: "The rest of the acts of Jehoahaz, and all that he did, and his might, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?" No! Another hand there indeed

endeavours to sketch the life, but how much is left out! No human chronicler can put down all things concerning the subject which he has undertaken to depict. But the rest of our lives is written. A diary is kept in heaven; the journal is not published for the perusal of others; but the whole life, day by day, is put down in the book of remembrance; and we shall be able to recognise the writing, and to confirm the accuracy of the minute. We cannot get away from it, there is the writing, and it abides—a perpetual witness for us or against us. What is the divine scribe now writing? The pen is going. We are obliged to use such figures to represent the spiritual reality. The writing is now proceeding: every thought registered, every deed chronicled, every day's work added up and carried over to the next page. It is a solemn thing to live! We are stewards, trustees, servants sent on messages, and entrusted with specified duties, and we are expected back with a definite answer and a complete report of our lives.

These introductory points bring us to the decease of Elisha. The account begins in the fourteenth verse and proceeds to the twenty-first, "Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died." He was supposed to be about a hundred years of age. We have seen that he was a domestic rather than a public prophet; he was unlike his great predecessor and father. The awful Elijah dwelt alone. He came upon society now and then; came down like a flood from the threatening clouds: shot out like a fire, and burned the men whom he approached. He needed no hospitality. He asked for no testimonial, pledge, or favour, certificate, introduction, or commendation. He was in very deed a son of thunder. Such a man is often wanted—a man who accepts no invitation; a man who stands back in religious solitude and speaks the judgments of God with an unflinching voice. Elisha was exactly the contrary. He worked his miracles in the house. He often called upon people; he was quiet, serene, most sympathetic and tender-hearted; now and then he could stand bolt upright, and send away proud men from his door with disdain they could never forget; but in the usual process of his life he was a kind of mother-man in Israel. He went into people's houses, and asked them how they were. He consented to increase

their oil and their flour, and to bless their family life with prophetic benedictions. He was most gentle to the young prophets, so much so that you could scarcely tell the old man from the young man: he was young in heart: his voice was musical to the end, and on the very last day there flashed out of him the old grand power. See in Elijah, John the Baptist, monastic, solitary, self-involved, haughty in a certain sense, disdainful and contemptuous of things valued by men who worship at base altars. Then see in Elisha the type of the Messiah, the gentle One, who wrought his miracles in houses, raised little children from the dead, healed the sick, opened the eyes of the blind, brake bread at eventide for those who had given him hospitality; yet even he could stand up sometimes and create a place for himself, and no man might venture within the circumference of his elevated majesty. Still, he came back again to the domestic life. "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." A domestic visitor, a domestic pastor, a family Saviour,—the God of the families of the earth: not only so, see what the line of progress means, look at the historical philosophy of the fact. First you have majesty, thunder, righteousness: all things significant of divine rule and authority; then you have grace and truth: "first that which is natural, afterward that which is spiritual:" the kingdom of heaven enclosed within a parable; the whole purpose of God set forth in beatitudes: the awful voices of Sinai displaced by the gentle Sermon on the Mount. Such is the line of development or progress, from the outward to the inward; from the natural to the spiritual; from the earthly to the celestial; and thus we proceed, being changed as it were from glory to glory, at last losing all carnality, fleshliness, worldliness, all sordidness and weight and sense of burden, and becoming finally angels bright with everlasting light, and strong with knowledge that never fails. Thus one life is shed off after another, until at last we are clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.

A very beautiful incident occurred near the close of Elisha's death. The king called upon him, "and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father" (v. 14). There are times when the heart gets the better even of the worst men; there are hours in which even bad kings become almost good. In those hours it

is the heart that speaks. This man described Elisha well, for, said he, "The chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof:" an expression equal to: Thou art worthy of honour, for thou art greater than all the horses of Israel and all the chariots of the kingdom; thou art stronger, thou hast done more for Israel than the army ever did: O my father, my father, by thy removal Israel loses her defences and is exposed to the enemy. Tributes come at last, righteous eulogiums are pronounced sometimes by reluctant or unwilling lips. There are hours in which men are well rewarded for whole years of neglect and contempt. How true it is that Elisha was the security of Israel! It is ever so. The religious people of the country are its salvation. This is a proposition which would be met with contempt in many quarters, but religious people are accustomed to be contemned. They stand, however, on the foundations of history, and they recall the words—If ten righteous men can be found, the cities shall not be destroyed: ye are the salt of the earth; ye are the light of the world; a city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Realise your position and its corresponding responsibilities, and know that "righteousness exalteth a nation," and that the Church—the living Church, the spiritual Church—of any country is its best army—Christians are the most useful of all the restrictive and regulative influences of a social kind. The teacher, the sick-visitor, those who sympathise with the wronged and suffering, and the great prophets are the true army and the invincible defence of the land. What then? Spread the Bible; uphold all Christian influences; prize Christian instruction in the school, in the house, and in the church. Prayer is a battering-ram. Faith in God will save the land, even when it is most corrupt in its high places, when its kings have gone wrong, and its judges have accepted the bribe. All this will be acknowledged at the last, as it was acknowledged in the case of Elisha. Elisha then gave the king comfort. A beautiful transaction now took place:—

"And Elisha said unto him [Joash] take bow and arrows. And he said to the king of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow. And he put his hand upon it: and Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands" (vv. 15, 16).

That is the point. We cannot live without contact with higher lives. There must be a touch, a fellowship, an electric

thrill, a unity that can hardly be expressed in verbal symbols. The king's hands were nothing but common fingers until Elisha touched them and infused into them divine energy. And Elisha said, "Open the window eastward. And he opened it. Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot." In many nations, notably in ancient Rome, the challenge to war was this: the party intending to conquer a nation took bow and arrow, and shot the arrow into the country which he intended to subdue. That was accepted as a challenge, or, if not accepted, possession was immediately taken of the land. Have we shot preliminary arrows into the lands we ought to take for Christ? What arrow have we shot into the land of ignorance, the land of oppression, the land of spiritual darkness, the land of heathenism? We should find the Lord's arrows in every land, and they should mean: There is going to be a battle to-day—a great fight; and the Lord will conquer. The Church should always be addressing its challenges to the world. When the world has some new plan of pleasing, entertaining, or satisfying the people, the Church should invent something infinitely superior. This is the duty to which we are called in Christ Jesus. We should have nobler feasts, larger charities, medicines that can heal more diseases; we should be enabled to say to the world, You need not go away from the Church for anything; is any man sick? Let him call for the elders of the Church; is any among you merry? Let him sing and dance and be glad. The Church has an answer to every condition and every class of circumstances. If not—if it is mumbling its obsolete dogmas, if it is talking sentences the world cannot understand, if it is overshooting the mark by high references, literary allusions, and learned things that are inapplicable and jejune, the world will go away and leave the Church in its own society. Let us, then, take lessons, and so live that even our dead bones shall have virtue in them. We see that when a body was let down into the grave and touched the bones of Elisha, the dead man stood up on his feet and lived. Herein is a mystery we cannot explain, but a parable the meaning of which is evident. We get our life out of the dead Christ, and the Christ that rose again. We have life out of death; we have deliverance out of the grave; we have heaven out of the tomb in which the Saviour lay. These

are mysteries. We acknowledge their impenetrableness and their solemnity, and if we cannot explain them in words, yet there are solemn occasions in life in which every one of them comes in like an angel, and says, I am waiting, I am ministering, I am still of use in the upbuilding of the world's best life. Let not history be lost upon us. The history of evil is written in plain letters. No man, wayfarer though he be, need misunderstand the solemn suggestion with which the history of evil is fraught. "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." They have a sad fate who have challenged God to battle. If they are not yet crushed, it is because his mercy endureth for ever. On the other hand, let the Elishas of society work on, suffer on, visit sick folk in their sickness, and give the message of God to those who are far away from the father's house as to thought and purpose and sacrifice. There is a quiet ministry, as well a grand public one: there is an opening for Elisha as certainly as there was for Elijah; nay, the world could not tolerate Elijah long. Who could live always amid thunder and lightning and a great tempest of judgment? We live under Christ, who has a word in season to him that is weary, a balm for every wound, an answer to every desire that is pure. Blessed Saviour, we are under thy government, under thy benediction; it is good to be there; it is like resting on high hills on summer days, when the very sun is a friend, and the great heaven is a protection. As for those who wish to receive this Saviour, he stands ready. The reluctance is not on his side. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thy voice is everywhere if we could but hear it. Lord, anoint our ears that they may be able to hear. We would not only hear the broad commandments, the great words spoken in thunder; we would hear the undertones, the minor voices, the persuasive whispers and entreaties, which thou art always breathing upon the sons of men. We beseech thee that we may be enabled always, by the mighty energy of thy Holy Spirit, to say, Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth. We bless thee for all the voices of providence, all the monitions of history, all the eloquence of events; may we hear, and consider, and understand, and apply our hearts unto wisdom. Thy purpose concerning us is always good: thy mercy endureth for ever; it is larger than our sin: where sin abounded grace did much more abound. Who can excel the Most High? Who can get in advance of God? Behold, thy love is our continual astonishment, and thy grace awakens within us ineffable surprise. How long-suffering thou art, how patient, how hopeful! Surely thou dost see more than we see, or thine anger would burn us, and utterly consume us: but thou dost look upon all things from eternity; thou knowest what time is—a flicker, a pulse, a flying shuttle, a shadow that is being chased away. Thou dwellest in the solemn unbeginning, unending eternity, and thou dost speak words from thine habitation worthy of its dignity; behold, thou dost publish gospels, and then judgments; and ere the judgments are uttered the gospels are resumed, and repeated in still tenderer tones. Oh, that we might hear these, lest at the last the Son of God should say, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thee, but ye would not. May our reply to thy love be a glad consent; may we now say, The will of the Lord be done. We should have no confidence in our own prayers did we not breathe them at the cross: did we not, whilst praying, touch the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us. He bare our sins, and carried our iniquities, and drank the cup of woe. We live in him; to him we commit our prayers. Amen.

2 Kings xiv.

1. In the second year of Joash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel reigned Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah.

2. He was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem.

3. And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, yet not like David his father [yet not with a perfect heart]: he did according to all things as Joash his father did.

4. Howbeit the high places were not taken away : as yet the people did sacrifice and burnt incense on the high places.

5. ¶ And it came to pass, as soon as the kingdom was confirmed [firmly established] in his hand, that he slew his servants which had slain the king his father.

6. But the children of the murderers he slew not : according unto that which is written in the book of the law of Moses [a quotation from Deut. xxiv. 16], wherein the Lord commanded, saying, The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor the children be put to death for the fathers ; but every man shall be put to death [shall die] for his own sin.

7. He slew [He it was that smote] of Edom in the valley of salt [comp. 2 Sam. viii. 13], ten thousand [the number slain in one conflict], and took Selah by war [or in the battle], and called the name of it Joktheel [a town of Judah bore this name (Josh. xv. 38)]. The name probably means "God's ward", unto this day.

8. ¶ Then [after the reduction of Edom] Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, Come, let us look one another in the face [a challenge to battle].

9. And Jehoash the king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah, saying, The thistle [or bramble or briar. (Comp. Job xxxi. 41 ; Cant. ii. 2)] that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon, saying, Give thy daughter to my son to wife : and there passed by a wild beast that was in Lebanon, and trode down the thistle.

10. Thou hast indeed smitten [thoroughly worsted] Edom, and thine heart hath lifted [lifted] thee up : glory of this, and tarry at home [rest on thy laurels, and do not risk them by further enterprises which might not turn out so favourably] : for why shouldst thou meddle to thy hurt, that thou shouldst fall, even thou, and Judah with thee ?

11. But Amaziah would not hear. Therefore Jehoash king of Israel went up ; and he and Amaziah king of Judah looked one another in the face [encountered one another ; joined battle] at Beth-shemesh, which belongeth to Judah.

12. And Judah was put to the worse before Israel ; and they fled every man to their [his] tents [the enemy disbanded, as usual after a great defeat (comp. chap. viii. 21)].

13. And Jehoash king of Israel took Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Jehoash the son of Ahaziah [comp. v. 8], at Beth-shemesh, and came to Jerusalem, and brake down [made a breach in] the wall of Jerusalem from the gate Ephraim unto the corner gate, four hundred cubits [about 222 yards].

14. And he took all the gold and silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king's house, and hostages [having humbled the pride of Amaziah, Jehoash left him in possession of his throne, taking hostages for his future good behaviour], and returned to Samaria.

15. ¶ Now the rest [comp. chap. xiii. 12, 13], of the acts of Jehoash which he did, and his might, and how he fought with Amaziah king of Judah, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel ?

16. And Jehoash slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel ; and Jeroboam his son reigned in his stead.

17. ¶ And Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah lived after the death of Jehoash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel fifteen years.

18. And the rest of the acts of Amaziah, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah ?

19. Now [And] they made a conspiracy [the death of Amaziah would seem to be the result of general disaffection : no individual conspirators being mentioned] against him in Jerusalem : and he fled to Lachish ; but [and] they sent after him to Lachish, and slew him there.

20. And they brought him on horses : and he was buried at Jerusalem with his fathers in the city of David.

21. ¶ And all the people of Judah took Azariah [he is called Uzziah in 2 Chron. xxvi. 1], which was sixteen years old, and made him king instead of his father Amaziah.

22. He built Elath, and restored it to Judah, after that the king slept with his fathers.

23. ¶ In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel began to reign in Samaria, and reigned forty and one years.

24. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord : he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.

25. He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain [the Dead Sea (Numb. iii. 17, iv. 49 ; Josh. iii. 16], according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai [comp. Jonah i. 1], the prophet, which was of Gath-hepher [Josh xix. 13].

26. For the Lord saw the affliction [oppression] of Israel, that it was very bitter [stubborn, inveterate, unyielding (comp. Deut. xxi. 18-20)] : for there was not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helper for Israel.

27. And the Lord said not that he would blot out the name [the figure is taken from blotting out writing (comp. Numb. v. 23)] of Israel from under heaven : but he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash.

28. ¶ Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, and all that he did, and his might, how he warred, and how he recovered [restored] Damascus, and Hamath, which belonged to Judah, for [in] Israel, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel ?

29. And Jeroboam slept with his fathers, even with the kings of Israel [the original was probably, "and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel" (comp. v. 16)] ; and Zachariah his son reigned in his stead.

INCIDENTAL POINTS.

IN this chapter there is little, so far as the historical sequence is concerned, which can be turned to spiritual profit; yet here and there are lines which are very striking, and well worthy of being brought into clear view.

“And it came to pass, as soon as the kingdom was confirmed in his hand, that he slew his servants which had slain the king his father” (v. 5).

Perhaps he had no alternative; perhaps he did not seek for one. There are a great many alternatives to murder, injustice, wrongdoing, if we would diligently seek them out. Is it not, however, a disposition strongly characteristic of human nature to take a revengeful advantage of circumstances? We might not have known the character of this man in all its completeness had he not come to the throne. Office tests men. A most singular thing it is that office in many instances develops a new man even in our most familiar friends. They no sooner become “dressed in a little brief authority” than they surprise us by unsuspected dispositions: they are haughty, self-considering, revengeful; they seem to say in effect: Now that I am confirmed in the kingdom, and that there is no doubt about my opportunity, I intend to remember old grievances, and to show that never from my memory has there been erased the name of a single adversary. Let us not condemn the habit of the ancient kings, for we do not know familiarly all their environments and the pressure that was put upon them to go in directions which perhaps some of their better impulses would have declined. Enough for us to know that there is something better than vengeance. When we are confirmed in the kingdom, let us show how magnanimous we can be, so that our enemy, fearing the blow of judgment, may be surprised that we take but little notice of him, or that noticing him our attitude is one of gracious dignity, and our spirit one of forgiveness of every species of injury. “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” That is the true revenge—to have nothing whatever to do with the past in any resentful spirit, but to live in God, trust in God, commit all things to God. Surely if we would that an enemy

should be handled, better that Almightyness should smite him in the face than that our poor fingers should put themselves out in impotent attempt to do him some little injury. O rest in the Lord—in all things, not only in hope of self-deliverance and self-vindication, but in all matters pertaining to final judgment: the Judge of all the earth shall do right.

There was a recall of an ancient law, not forgotten, but a law which had perhaps fallen in some degree into desuetude. Let us remember that it was written in the Book of Deuteronomy:—“The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin” (xxiv. 16). That is a key which opens many a mystery. Does the Lord trifle with law? Does he vary the law according to the days of the week as they come and go? or do his judgments stand in constancy? If so, what a light is thrown upon some problems whose mystery has darkened many a thought. The law of the Lord is this: “Every man shall be put to death for his own sin.” Give that doctrine the widest possible application. No man is slain because Adam sinned. Sin is a personal matter. The transgression of the law is done by the individual. Sin is not a generic term only; it is specific and individual; and this law commends itself instantly not only to the reason but to the conscience,—for reason varies, reason goes to school, reason learns larger lessons; but the conscience begins with, continues with, ends with—Right. God never troubles the conscience of the world. He dazzles its imagination, he humbles its reason; but it has always been his purpose to show the world that he is right, just, and that every judgment is based upon law and argument. What can we say to this declaration, “Every man shall be put to death for his own sin”? Varying the terms without altering their central purport: Every man puts himself to death by his own sin. “The wages of sin is death”—not only in the sense of pointing to an external judgment, an external executioner, but in the sense of an internal self-conviction, in the sense of the soul acknowledging that sin brings with it death. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die;” it would die by external judgment, but the profounder thought is that sin drives the soul to suicide. “Turn ye, turn ye, why will

ye die?" "He that sinneth against God wrongeth his own soul,"—that is to say, impoverishes his highest nature; takes away the right use of his finest faculties; hangs himself in the sight of the universe; destroys his soul. This law was recalled, and let it be said to the credit of the king that he kept within the limits of the law: "The children of the murderers he slew not;" he slew but the men themselves who had done the deed.

Now the king proceeds to a wider field. He goes to Edom, and in the valley of salt he slays ten thousand men; there he "took Selah by war, and called the name of it Joktheel unto this day" (v. 7). This we are always doing; that is to say, we sanctify human successes by divine names; we baptise our iniquity, and give it a place in the sanctuary; we pay in response to the clamour of conscience, and having laid down the gold we forget the wrong and the shame, covering up our old selves with some religious office or appellation. The place was called Selah, meaning nothing in particular, simply "the rock"—a city of stone, a Gibraltar. The name signified nothing of a religious nature. The king took a great rock by war, and having taken it he called it "Joktheel," meaning "subdued by God." There is a fine hypocrisy in many an appellation. We should be careful how we name our own deeds by divine terms and characteristics. Let us be true—true outside, true inside, all true. Then how many fine names we shall obliterate! In many instances the church will be but a painted market-place. We go to it that we may think over our business the more calmly and collectedly; we say that at church we can turn all these commercial matters over in our minds; and having prostituted and profaned the altar by such base uses, we think we have kept the law of the Lord by not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together. We say that on the Sabbath day we will collect our wits; go through the documents carefully; set them out in order, and will devote the whole day to the consideration of the perplexing case; and because we have been indoors and quiet, and have indeed withdrawn into solitude, even within the four walls of our own house, we leave others to suppose that we have kept the Sabbath. Why this false labelling of things? Why this iniquitous profanation of terms which ought only to have one use, and that the very

highest to which they can apply? Why call him "reverend" whose prayers are the children of his tongue, and whose appeals come not with the blood and energy and sacrifice of the heart? Why call him "Christian" who makes his Christian profession an element of respectability—a password by which he obtains entrance into circles from which, if he were known, he would be expelled with a sense of offence, indignation, and horror? Names ought to be realities; appellations ought to stand with moral significance, so that men might not be misled by them. What should be done to the guidepost that is painted with the wrong name? It should be torn down. What should be said of the man who, being labelled "Christian," would not be tolerated even by a Jew, and would be but a surprise to an honest Pagan?

Still pursuing our gleaning way through the field of this chapter, we come to these words, uttered by the messengers of Amaziah in the king's name: "Come, let us look one another in the face" (v. 8). These are sweet words. What can they mean? Surely but one thing only. Giving them transliteration and broadest meaning, they will sound thus: We have been a long time estranged; let us burn down the barriers of separation: we have hidden ourselves from one another when we ought to have stood face to face, each beaming with complacency upon the other; come, let us make an end of this alienation, and fraternally and trustfully look one another in the face. Was that the real meaning of the message? Not a whit! These beautiful words were the velvet which hid the sword. These terms of supposed approach and trustfulness are really a challenge. The right reading would be: "Come, let us fight; let us see which is the stronger man." Here again we keep upon the same line as in the former instance—the line which points to the right use of language. There is a morality of words. Men are not at liberty to put words into any shape they please; they must consider whether in putting words together they are building a pillar, plumed by the Eternal Righteousness, and going, so far as they do go, straight up to heaven. But if this were the rule, society would be dissolved. Who can speak truth with his neighbour—except in some broad and general sense? Who can let his Yea be yea, and his Nay, nay? When the Saviour delivered that

injunction we thought it was elementary ; in reality it is ultimate ; there is nothing beyond it. When Yea means yea, and Nay nay, the millennium has come : men will not tell lies, nor will they act them ; they will not allow wrong impressions to be made upon the mind ; there will be no grammatical torture, no mental reservation, no putting out of words in the sense of putting out a "feeler:" every heart transparent, every motive pure and generous, human speech a human religion, and the human religion sanctified and cleansed by the blood of Christ. But we live in lies ; we tell them, we act them, we look them, we suggest them. When David is reported in English to say, "All men are liars," he is misreported ; the right reading is, "All men are a lie,"—a grander speech ; not a stone thrown at individuals, but an impeachment made upon human nature. These are terrible words ; but until we have been terrible we cannot be gentle. Judgment first, then the gospel ; the ripping plough, then the seed of heaven thrown into the opened furrows. Blessed are they who cry out for judgment that they may hear the word of the Lord in its terribleness ; for by so much they will become prepared to hear how gentle is God, and how true it is that his mercy endureth for ever, and how supreme, sublime, immeasurable is his redeeming love.

Still advancing, we come to see how sacrilege is the natural and easy sequence of violence.

"And he took all the gold and silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king's house, and hostages, and returned to Samaria" (v. 14).

Once let men get loose in their views of human life, and it becomes an easy thing for them to despoil the sanctuary. Sometimes the process begins at the other end ; then we may put it thus : Once let a man fall in the matter of reverence in relation to God, and all social claims and businesses, and all personal rights, will be trampled under foot. What a base use was made of the temple stores in the old times ! "Then Hazael king of Syria went up, and fought against Gath, and took it : and Hazael set his face to go up to Jerusalem." And he was bought off. How was Hazael bought off ? "And Jehoash king of Judah took

all the hallowed things that Jehoshaphat, and Jehoram, and Ahaziah, his fathers, kings of Judah, had dedicated, and his own hallowed things, and all the gold that was found in the treasuries of the house of the Lord, and in the king's house, and sent it to Hazael king of Syria." And Hazael accepted the bribe, and went back from Jerusalem. Is there no lesson in all this surrender? When Hazael the heretic comes to the church-door, what do we do under the painful circumstances? When Modern Thought glares in at the window, how are we moved in relation to the unexpected and affrighting apparition? Then is there no Jehoash who says, Give him all the gold, all the treasures, all the vessels; bribe him; send him away? Are there not those who say in reply to the Hazael of Science and Progress, Throw to him all your old interpretations, perhaps they will soothe and satisfy him; tell him you were mistaken when you thought there was a supernatural element in the Scriptures; say that without committing yourselves you surely were in some degree mistaken;—throw that out to him, and perhaps the dog will be satisfied with the mouthful, and betake himself away, and leave you to sing a hymn that can never find its way to heaven. Perhaps you will throw out to Hazael the miracles—not altogether, but certain interpretations of them: you will call them "phenomena." That will be a happy way of getting rid of them! Say to Hazael, when he thunders on the church-door, We only meant phenomena; and perhaps having come in anger he will retire in folly, and think we have changed our ground. When the enemy comes and attacks us upon our faith, we may throw out to him the doctrine of what is called a Personal Providence; we may say—In reality we did not mean what you seem to think we intended; we do not suppose that God numbers the hairs of our head: we look upon the universe as a gigantic machine, an infinite organisation, very complex, intricate, subtle, marvellous altogether: that is really all we meant. Has not Hazael emptied the Lord's table of much gold and silver, and many a significant and symbolic vessel? Has he not depleted the altar? There is another way of putting this. We may say, No; all we have given to Hazael is of our own contrivance; we have made mistakes in the interpretation of history, in the grammatical and theological construction of the Scriptures; we have not given away the Bible to Hazael, we have

given him our interpretation ; the Bible itself still remains ; we have not given up the doctrine that the Bible is the word of God ! we have only thrown to Hazael some theories of inspiration : inspiration itself remains an abiding and all-sufficing quantity. There may be reason in that reply. It is not to be dismissed flippantly at all events. But let us take care lest, in giving away things that do not belong to us with a liberal hand, we go too far ; and above all let us beware that we do not in the hurry of the moment give away something that we have no right to give. The enemy may be bought off too dearly.

We read in the nineteenth verse that the king " fled to Lachish." There we seem to come to a kind of home. Lachish has a history. It resisted Joshua for two days when the neighbouring cities fell in one. " The Lord delivered Lachish into the hand of Joshua, who took it on the second day." Sometimes God would seem to take two days to a miracle : sometimes he lingers over it, and watches us all the time. Lachish was among the strongholds fortified by Rehoboam. Lachish was known to be one of the strongest places available by the king ; so " he fled to Lachish." It is so that Christians may well act in all their great spiritual battles. Let us return to first principles. Let us get back to eternal truths. The assaults made upon the Church, the altar, the Christian faith, the Christian cross itself, will do good, if they be so utilised as to enable us to throw away much that is false, fictitious, merely decorative, and drive us to realities, elementary principles, eternal truths. So when you are hunted through the Bible by the enemies of revelation ; when you are challenged with its supposed discrepancies, its literal contradictions, its clerical errors, its perplexing numbers and figures, flee to the Lachish—" God is love." You will find hospitality there, and security, home, angels, sweet fellowship ; and then you will have time to recover your strength, and consider again the exact position which you occupy in relation to assaulted fortresses. In all criticism remember the Lachish which we may thus translate—God is right : righteousness is at the heart of things : all events are moving, with some slowness, indeed, but with infinite certainty, towards final justice, right, truth. We cannot all fight controversial battles ; we must refer many of our assailants to books which

have been written by master-hands, saying, In the pages of such and such a volume you will find definite answers to the questions you are now putting. But little children can understand this—"God is love;" and yet no angel can exhaust its meaning. God is love, but what is "love"? "Love" is as mysterious a term as "God"—invisible, spiritual, subtle, intricate, yet vivid in manifestation, unmistakable in its revealed forms, not to be confounded with any other voice in its tender music, its whisper of healing. Many of us were not intended to be controversialists, soldiers, fighters in the open field; we are not all called upon to vindicate everything that is literal in the Scriptures, but we are all called upon to love God, fear God, come to Jesus Christ, behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world. Nor are we to be driven back by the men who say, Explain these things. We cannot explain everything. We cannot explain "love;" we can talk about it, give hints of it, give representations of it, point to it in various passing forms and features, but explain it we never can: but we can feel it. Explanation may be the trick of a grammarian. But love is the joy of a soul lost in wonder and in praise. Fear not because you cannot explain everything. Blessed be God, Lachish stands there. Outside is written upon it, "God is right;" inside, "God is love;" on it there stands a banner, unfurl it, and read in letters of gold, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." There are hard battles we cannot fight, but there are sacred refuges which are always open to us.

PRAYER.

ALL thy works praise thee, O God, in all parts of thy dominion : then shall we be silent—shall man be dumb ? Whatever thou hast done for the great creation thou hast outdone in redeeming man—not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Jesus Christ thy Son. Man's song shall be loudest in the universe : Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, unto him be glory and dominion, now and for ever. We will praise thee for thy wondrous kindness, saying with one voice, Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift. We are lost in wonder, love, and praise, as we stand before the cross, and behold the Saviour of mankind, bowing his head in weakness, and pain, and death. He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities ; himself bore our sins and carried our iniquities. We lay our hand upon him. Standing at his cross, we make confession of sin. We are broken-hearted because of our sin : God be merciful unto us sinners. Pity us in thy loving-kindness. We cannot account for it, but the sin is in us, and it comes out in many a deadly deed : and that is not the worst ;—it abides within us, inventing new forms of blasphemy, suggesting new methods of gratification, and contriving, plotting, scheming always against the sovereignty of holiness. We must be born again. Holy Spirit come to us ; brood over us ; work in us all the good pleasure of the divine will ; perfect us in our love for holiness, and then train us gradually to its complete fulfilment. Thy care is wonderful. If it be numbered, it is without number as to its daily details of mercy and pity, love and tears ; if it be measured, it has no height known to man ; as for its depth, no language can represent it ; behold, what manner of love hath the Father bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God ! Thou art very gentle, patient, father-like, mother-like, always hoping for the best, always waiting for the best. We have heard of the patience of the husbandman and of the patience of Job, but what shall we say concerning the patience of God, whose mercy endureth for ever ? To thy mercy we flee. We have no hope in justice or righteousness, for it can only be to us an avenging sword, a burning fire ; but to thy cross we come, O Son of man, O Son of God ; and there no broken-hearted sinner ever died. Amen.

2 Kings xv.

1. In the twenty and seventh year of Jeroboam king of Israel began Azariah son of Amaziah king of Judah to reign.

2. Sixteen years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned two and fifty years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jecholiah of Jerusalem,

3. And he did that which was right [Azariah supported the legitimate worship, and lent his countenance to no foreign cultus] in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah had done ;

4. Save that the high places were not removed : the people sacrificed and burnt incense still on the high places.

5. ¶ And the Lord smote [struck] the king [because of his usurpation of the priestly functions in the sanctuary], so that he was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house [sickhouse (or hospital) in a royal residence outside Jerusalem (Lev. xiii. 46 ; chap. vii. 3), set apart for such cases]. And Jotham the king's son was over the house, judging the people of the land [as his father's representative].

6. And the rest of the acts of Azariah [2 Chron. xxv.] and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah ?

7. So Azariah slept with his fathers ; and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David : and Jotham his son reigned in his stead.

8. ¶ In the thirty and eighth year of Azariah king of Judah did Zachariah the son of Jeroboam reign over Israel in Samaria six months.

9. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, as his fathers [*i.e.*, the dynasty of Jehu, of which he was the last member. Like all his predecessors, he upheld the illicit worship established by Jeroboam I.] had done : he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.

10. And Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him, and smote him before the people [in public], and slew him, and reigned in his stead.

11. And the rest of the acts of Zachariah, behold they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.

12. This was the word of the Lord which he spake unto Jehu, saying, Thy sons shall sit on the throne of Israel unto the fourth generation. And so it came to pass.

13. ¶ Shallum the son of Jabesh began to reign in the nine and thirtieth year of Uzziah [Matt. i. 9, called Ozias] king of Judah ; and he reigned a full month [Heb., a month of days] in Samaria.

14. For Menahem the son of Gadi [or a Gadite] went up from Tirzah [on the news of the murder of Zachariah, Menahem marched to the capital], and came to Samaria, and smote Shallum the son of Jabesh in Samaria, and slew him, and reigned in his stead.

15. And the rest of the acts of Shallum, and his conspiracy which he made, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.

16. ¶ Then Menahem smote Tiphshah, and all that were therein, and the coasts thereof [literally, her borders (or territories) (comp. Josh xvii. 8)] from Tirzah : because they opened not to him [the gates were closed against him], therefore he smote it : and all the women [comp. chap. viii. 21 ; Hosea xiii. 16 ; Amos i. 13] therein that were with child he ripped up.

17. In the nine and thirtieth year of Azariah king of Judah began Menahem the son of Gadi to reign over Israel, and reigned ten years in Samaria.

18. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord : he departed not all his days from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.

19. And Pul the king of Assyria came against the land [occupied it] : and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver [about £375,000], that his hand might be with him to confirm the kingdom in his hand.

20. And Menahem exacted [literally, caused to go out] the money of Israel, even of all the mighty men of wealth, of each man fifty shekels [the talent of silver was worth 3,000 shekels. The payment of 1,000 talents (3,000,000 shekels) therefore implies a total of 60,000 persons able to contribute] of silver, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back, and stayed not there [then (Ps. xiv. 5)] in the land.

21. ¶ And the rest of the acts of Menahem, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel ?

22. And Menahem slept with his fathers ; and Pekahiah his son reigned in his stead.

23. ¶ In the fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah Pekahiah the son of Menahem began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned two years.

24. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord : he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.

25. But Pekah the son of Remaliah, a captain of his, conspired against him, and smote him in Samaria, in the palace of the king's house [palace : 1 Kings xvi. 18], with Argob and Arieah, and with him fifty men of the Gileadites : and he killed him, and reigned in his room [Josephus accounts for the short reign of Pekahiah by the statement that he imitated the cruelty of his father].

26. And the rest of the acts of Pekahiah, and all that he did, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.

27. ¶ In the two and fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah Pekah the son of Remaliah began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned twenty years.

28. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord : he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.

29. In the days of Pekah king of Israel came Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, and took Ijon, and Abel-beth-maachah, and Janoah, and Kedesh, and Hazor, and Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali [comp. 1 Kings xv. 20] and carried them captive to Assyria.

30. And Hoshea the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah, and smote him, and slew him, and reigned in his stead, in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah.

31. And the rest of the acts of Pekah, and all that he did, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.

32. ¶ In the second year of Pekah the son of Remaliah king of Israel began Jotham the son of Uzziah king of Judah to reign.

33. Five and twenty years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jerusha, the daughter of Zadok.

34. And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord: he did according to all that his father Uzziah had done.

35. ¶ Howbeit the high places were not removed: the people sacrificed and burned incense still in the high places. He [it was who] built the higher gate of the house of the Lord.

36 ¶ Now the rest of the acts of Jotham [some of these are related in 2 Chron. xxvii. 4-6], and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?

37. In those days the Lord began to send against Judah Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah.

38. And Jotham slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father: and Ahaz his son reigned in his stead.

ISRAEL'S WICKED KINGS.

WE have to wander for a little time in the cemetery of kings. Not only so, we have to visit the sepulchres of murdered kings. Verily the field we are about to traverse might be called Aceldama—the field of blood. Perhaps we do not always realise how sanguinary were the ages in which the early kings lived. We take up one story after another, but seldom bring them all into one focal view, and therefore we are the less shocked by the awful tragedies which took place in ancient days.

Here is a man called Azariah. In other places he is called Uzziah. His mother's name was Jeholiah of Jerusalem. The mothers of the kings of Judah are mentioned: the mothers of the kings of Israel are not referred to. Who cares to know anything about the ancestry of bad men? They were from a certain point in the history all bad. That we have seen in an earlier study. In Judah there were varieties of kingly character. Some of the sovereigns were really good, or to a large extent were excellent men; their mothers' names are given. We like to know something of the history of sweet flowers, beautiful things, charming lives. But who cares to know much about the ancestry of men who had no good qualities, who lived for themselves, who were base out and out, and who have left behind them records we are almost ashamed to read? Azariah was sixteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned two and fifty years in Jerusalem, "and he did that which was

right in the sight of the Lord" (v. 3). Fifty-two years of right-doing! A record of that kind ought not to be passed over as if it were common writing. It is so easy to forget good living, patient action, constant discharge of domestic or public duty. It is easy to get up a great excitement about wars, revolutions, blood-shedding, on all possible occasions and for all possible reasons; but think of a man going steadily on for fifty-two years doing that which was right in the sight of the Lord,—at least in the main—keeping at it, praying every day for daily help; whether the times were exciting or tranquil, still doing his duty as best he could. A monument like that ought not to be rushed past, as if it were not worthy of heed and attention and grateful thought. But was it all good? We have said it was good "in the main," and we had a purpose in putting in that cautionary word. Still, it is something to be good in the main. Surely God who counteth up, and reckoneth with accurate arithmetic, all the days and policies of man, and who numbers the hairs of his head, will also conduct the same scrutiny when he looks over the life that has been lived. Woe unto us, and distress intolerable, if all the good effort, all the strenuous endeavour, all the sobbing and broken-hearted prayers shall go for nothing. But we are in God's hands. He who numbers up his jewels, and looks carefully into all things, let him be judge. Amen! What then about the reservation? The text explains:—"save that" (v. 4). Mark these excepting words—"save that." It would seem as if we could not get the devil's footprint quite rubbed out of the earth. It has been a good deal covered up, and very much has been done towards removing the impression, but there it is! We think that we are ourselves Christians, saved men,—at least beginning to be good; and this we account, and justly so, a miracle of grace, but every now and then there is a flash of unholy anger, a knock at the heart-door to a passion that wants to be let loose: then we are thrown back in infinite discouragement, saying, It is useless to attempt to climb the steep of duty, or force our way, even by the help of the triune God, into heavenly purity and peace. But presently we come upon a verse which seems to overturn all the argument which has been outlined. The king has been doing good fifty-two years; the high places which every king has allowed to

stand have indeed not been removed; the people have sacrificed and burnt incense still on the high places, but that has taken place in all the former histories: now we come upon this word of judgment, and it makes us wonder:—"And the Lord smote the king, so that he was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house" (v. 5). Who expected the narrative to take this course? We were prepared to journey with Azariah from height to height until he passed into the skies—a good knight—a holy, noble soldier, as well as king; and behold he is a leper white as snow. This is surely not the reward of good-doing? Verily this must be an anti-climax; at all events we cannot read this narrative as if it were a sequence; conscience stops and says—I cannot go any farther in any book that first tells me a man did that which was right in the sight of the Lord two-and-fifty years and then was smitten with the leprosy. Conscience annotates the Bible. Conscience cannot be beguiled by literal criticism, by far-fetched suggestions respecting etymology and grammar. Conscience boldly says, If the man did right he ought not to have been smitten with leprosy: there is something wanting in the record, and it must be found. That is right. Are we not referred in this very text to the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? Where there is a reference we must follow it. Adopting that rational course, we refer to the Second Book of Chronicles, and read:

"But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction; for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense. And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the Lord, that were valiant men: and they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord, but to the priests, the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honour from the Lord God. Then Uzziah was wroth, and had a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord, from beside the incense altar" (xxvi. 16-19).

He was punished for trespass. He would not only be king, he would be supreme pontiff in Judah. Let us beware how we break through divinely-imposed limitations. Again and again we have had occasion to point out that we have only liberty to

obey. How ambition hurts the soul, breaks in upon its piety, drives its holiness in the direction of carnality and selfishness ! How it will not allow a man to sleep all night, but will awake him out of his deepest slumbers to hold before him some flashing vision of success and honour which never can be realised ! How it will tempt his eyes and heart and his whole appetency by a mirage which fades as he approaches. Let us keep within our own limits ; let us know ourselves to be but men : then shall we live quietly, honourably, and usefully, and there shall be no trace of leprosy in the closing days of our life. Trespassers, beware ! "Whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him." To keep down ambition is to begin at least to grow in true goodness.

The king is dead. He is sleeping with his fathers in the city of David. We come now upon a very rapid course of history. There are two short reigns, Zachariah the son of Jeroboam reigned over Israel in Samaria six months, "and he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord." Certainly ! The moment you come upon that old line you come upon evil. How is it that out of some families and lineages you cannot get the devil ? Zachariah had reigned only six months ; but they were six exciting months : he served the devil with both hands, earnestly, during the whole time. If it was a short reign, he proposed that it should be a merry one ; but it ended in blood. Then came Shallum, and he reigned a full month. He slew Zachariah, and afterwards was slain himself. A month's royalty ! And what is any royalty but a month, if it is not a royalty of righteousness and patriotism and faithful discharge of high duty ? No man is a sovereign in God's sight who is not the subject of his own people. Then a cruel man arose, a man with a fiend's heart ; one of the Iscariots that make all the history red with shame. He reigned ten years over Israel. We cannot dwell upon his reign : ten years of the worst kind of evil-doing. Sometimes we come upon a kind of evil that seems at least to be streaked with occasional good ; now and then the black becomes a kind of grey, and the grey seems to lighten a little in patches here and there ; but in the case of Menahem there was nothing but the blackness of darkness of guilt. He bribed the king of Assyria with a thousand talents of silver, that

is to say, he gave the king of Assyria £375,000, that he might confirm the kingdom in his hand. How did Menahem obtain the money? By the old way: "And Menahem exacted the money of Israel, even of all the mighty men of wealth, of each man fifty shekels of silver, to give to the king of Assyria;" so the king of Assyria having appropriated £375,000 of the money of Israel, stayed not in the land. What can you expect of a bad man? He will bribe, he will slay, he will break vows, he will enter into evil compacts and covenants of every kind, because he is bad in heart.

Then came his son Pekahiah, and reigned two years and reigned badly. But why dwell upon the evil reigns of the kings? Because there is a great doctrine underneath the history, an eternal doctrine. These are not anecdotes of ancient Israelitish history: these are all outgrowths of certain moral philosophies. We thought the kings would have been happy men. Why were they evil? Because they had a bad beginning. Always go back if you can to the origin of the appearances which excite your wonder and sometimes perplex both understanding and conscience. We still hear the moan of the old prophet when he said: The people of Israel say I am getting old, and they want a king like the other nations of the world. That is the explanation! Verily God gave them kings enough. He surfeited them with kings. This is a way very noticeable in the developments of providence. God gave them their desire, and sent leanness into their souls. It is a terrible thing to have some prayers answered! Israel desired a king; Israel was ambitious; Israel would not represent any longer an invisible and spiritual theocracy: but Israel would have a throne, a crown, a sceptre, and all the paraphernalia of royalty; and, behold, the prayer was answered. But look at the history. What is it? A river of corruption; a black, broad, deep river rolling on, and swallowing up so much of Israel's strength and beauty and nobleness. Let us chasten ourselves even in prayer. We are safe only in the utterance of one petition. All other petitions are subject to expansions, contractions, variations, which may be of a most pernicious character; but there is one petition which angel and old man and little child may all utter: Not my will, but thine, be

done. When a man has prayed that prayer, he has done with prayer; the next we shall hear of him will be—praise: prayer has culminated, prayer has no other eloquence; it has used up all speech; it now must pass into the service of music.

Then circumstances are no guarantee of character. What ought the men to be who have bread enough, who live in palaces, who lift up a finger and command multitudes of servants! How happy ought they to be whose fields are loaded with golden fruits of every name; whose word is law and whose smile is the only heaven their servile dependants ever hope to reach! They will be good men; their homes will be churches; they will never leave the altar; their mouths will be filled with praise. Is it so? The book of history is open. It is not for the theologian to pronounce morally upon the question; it is for the historian to testify as to facts. Let him stand up and tell us if a man's life consists in the abundance of the things which he possesses; let him name the man who was good because he had plenty, who was holy because he ruled the world. Great positions impose great responsibilities. How difficult it is to make the position and responsibility equivalent terms, the one exactly filling and covering the other! We envy men who are in great positions, but really we need not. They have corresponding burdens. Exactions are made upon them from which we are largely free. We cannot tell what secret pain they endure, what continual torture of mind, what anxiety of heart lest the issues of policy and government should be disastrous, and lest things meant for good, should be converted into poison and should minister to the reign of death. But whatever our position, it is one of influence. If we are not kings nominally we may be kings really; or if not kings, we may be under-rulers, inferior, but still influential servants. Every man should reckon upon it that even his word has an effect, and therefore should measure his words, and be careful how he deports himself: some child at least may be looking or listening who will receive an impression from him. Had the kings of Israel and Judah been good men, who can tell what happy influences might have issued from their thrones? Let prayer be made for all men; for kings and for all in authority, that they may be chastened, that they may be sober-

minded, that they may be wise, patriotic, and resolute in all knowledge and goodness. When the most influential centres are healthy, pure, true, what may we not justly expect, but that all round the circumference there will palpitate effects corresponding to the quality of what is found at the centre ?

Awful is the story—who can read it? Shallum conspired against Zachariah, and smote him, and reigned in his stead; Menahem smote Shallum, and slew him, and reigned in his stead; Pekah conspired against Pekahiah, and killed him, and reigned in his stead; Hoshea conspired against Pekah, and smote him, and slew him and reigned in his stead.* And these were the kings of old time—the men for whom Israel panted in unholy prayer! Here is wickedness let loose. Here we see what wicked men would do if they had their own way: they will leave nothing standing—no corn in the field, no fruit in the orchard, no bread in the house. Everything goes down before wickedness. It is a blight, a curse, a hell in action, in locomotion, scorching, blasting wherever it goes. Why then do we trifle with great questions involving moral influence and moral issue? Why do we try to whitewash sin? Is it that we might see what sin really is that these men were permitted to live and to carry out all their riotousness according to their own evil will? Did the Lord look down from heaven and say, Let men see what wickedness is when it can work out its own career, when, apparently at least, all discipline is removed; let

* Hoshea, son of Elah, and last king of Israel. He conspired against and slew his predecessor Pekah, and seized his dominions. "He did evil in the sight of the Lord," but not in the same degree as his predecessors: and this, by the Jewish commentators, is understood to mean that he did not, like former kings of Israel (2 Kings xv. 30), restrain his subjects from going up to Jerusalem to worship. The intelligence that Hoshea had entered into a confederacy with So, king of Egypt, with the view of shaking off the Assyrian yoke, caused Shalmaneser, the king of Assyria, to march an army into the land of Israel; and after a three years' siege Samaria was taken and destroyed, and the ten tribes were sent into the countries beyond the Euphrates, B.C. 720 (2 Kings xv. 30; xvii. 1-6; xviii. 9-12). The chronology of this reign is much perplexed. [Two other persons of this name are mentioned, the son of Azaziah (1 Chron. xxvii. 20), and one of the heads of the people in the time of Nehemiah (x. 23). This was also the original name of Joshua, the son of Nun (Deut. xxxii. 44; Numb. xiii. 8)].

them see what it will do : will any home be inviolable ; will any altar be protected from sacrilege ; will any commandment be kept in its integrity ? What wonder that once at least God shook the heavens in the form of fire and brimstone and an horrible tempest, that he might disinfect the earth that had been cursed with iniquity ? How he has tried to save the world ! He has sent his Son, the true King, to reign over us. Some of us have said, We will not have this man to reign over us, but will we have kings of our own making, or in very deed be our own kings. Why do we not learn from history ? We blame men in political life for not learning from the records of the past ; we taunt them, and justly, with their stupidity and denseness of mind and selfishness of heart ; we say, Think what history has always done in contradiction of such foolish fancies and vain dreamings ; and pointing them to historical records, we say, Why not be wise ? If this appeal be permitted in other circles, it may be permitted *a fortiori* with ever accumulating force and strength in the Christian sanctuary. "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity ? And the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge ?" Read the judgment of God in the history of the world upon all men who are evil thinkers and evil doers. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." The bad men's graves are amongst us : we ought to learn something from their very sepulchres. What is it we ought to be learning ? That the way of transgressors is hard ; that a man's thought being against the Lord is also against his fellow-men, and eventually against himself ; and wondering at all these things, who would not say : What then is to be done ? When that inquiry is propounded, the only answer comes from the gospel of the cross of Christ. God will have no tampering, no daubing of the wall with untempered mortar, no crying Peace, peace, where there is no peace : he will be fundamental, regenerative, vital ; he will work a miracle :—
a man shall be twice born !

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thou art a Spirit. Thou art the King—eternal, immortal, invisible ; the only wise God. Thou didst send thy Son to die for us, and rise again, and teach us thy will, and bid us welcome to the feast of thy love. We did scornfully intreat him. We stoned the prophets from the beginning, and thy Son we slew, and hanged on a tree. But we knew not what we did : who can tell what he is doing at any time, or follow out his action to all its issues ? Who can follow his own words, and tell where they beat and throb, and where their influence ends ? We know not all we do. We bless thee that our ignorance is herein our privilege. May it never deter us from zealous action ; but fearlessly, lovingly, with full trust upon the living God, may we go forward to do our duty as we may be able to discharge it, knowing that we do not see all, we cannot measure all, we can follow ourselves but a very little way. We are multiplying ourselves a thousandfold every day so that at last each man may be found to be as a great multitude. This is the way of the Lord ; this is the plan of the Most High ; thou wilt carry it on, and none can stay thy hand. We will say, therefore, with our whole heart's love, The will of the Lord be done. But remembering how we multiply ourselves, may we be careful about ourselves lest we multiply that which is evil, and grieve the Spirit of the Most High. Give us understanding of truth, righteousness, and all goodness ; and understanding these things may we follow after them, with ever-burning zeal, with religious hopefulness, with completeness of piety and devotion. We bless thee for all thy care of us. Thou dost nurse us as if we were little children : what other are we to thee, Eternal One, but children of yesterday—poor, frail, ignorant, dying, yet having on us the seal of divinity ? Continue thy care, and train us up into all strength and nobleness, and make us perfect men in Christ Jesus. This is thy purpose concerning us, that we should be men in understanding in comprehension of truth, in loyalty to the throne of God. When our sorrows are many, when our eyes are blinded by tears, when the whole horizon is one frowning cloud, then let the Lord come to us, mighty to save. When heart and flesh do fail, then be thou the strength of our heart, and our portion for ever. Keep us in the enjoyment of a contented spirit. Make us strong in recollection, clear in reminiscence ; may no line of gracious interposition fade from our memory, and having full knowledge of what God did yesterday we shall proceed into the mystery of to-morrow with a calm heart and with a rational intrepidity. The Lord hear us, multiply his comforts toward us, make us glad by the nearness of his presence, and when we reel and totter, or show signs of weakness, one touch of thine hand will bring back our strength and settle us in our love and in our purpose. Amen.

2 Kings xvi.

1. In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah Ahaz the son of Jotham king of Judah began to reign,

2. Twenty years old was Ahaz when he began to reign, and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem, and did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord his God, like David his father.

3. But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire [a sacrifice by fire. Such an appalling rite is really intended: chap. xvii. 31; Jer. xix. 5, xxxii. 35; Ezek. xvi. 20, xxiii. 37. It was not in love to his child (Judg. xi. 31). Such dreadful sacrifices were only made in cases of dire extremity (comp. chap. iii. 27], according to the abominations of the heathen [more particularly the Ammonites, who made such sacrifices to Molech or Milcom], whom the Lord cast out from before the children of Israel.

4. And he sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree.

5. ¶ Then Rezin king of Syria and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to war: and they besieged Ahaz, but could not overcome him [literally, they were not able to war].

6. At that time Rezin king of Syria recovered Elath to Syria, and drove the Jews from Elath: and the Syrians came to Elath, and dwelt there unto this day.

7. So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, I am thy servant and thy son: come up, and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, which rise up against [are assailing] me.

8. And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent it for a present to the king of Assyria.

9. And the king of Assyria hearkened unto him: for the king of Assyria went up against Damascus, and took it [Damascus stood a two years' siege], and carried the people of it captive to Kir, and slew Rezin.

10. ¶ And king Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, and saw an altar [and he saw the altar] that was at Damascus: and king Ahaz sent to Urijah the priest the fashion of the altar, and the pattern of it, according to all the workmanship thereof [the king's interest was artistic rather than religious].

11. And Urijah the priest built an altar according to all that king Ahaz had sent from Damascus: so Urijah the priest made it against king Ahaz came from Damascus.

12. And when the king was come from Damascus, the king saw the altar: and the king approached to the altar [the king approached to the altar, and went up thereon (comp. 1 Kings xii. 32, 33). It thus appears that Ahaz, like Uzziah, personally exercised the priestly function of sacrifice], and offered thereon.

13. And he burnt his burnt-offering and his meat-offering, and poured his drink-offering, and sprinkled the blood of his peace-offerings, upon the altar.

14. And he brought also the brasen altar, which was before the Lord, from the fore-front of the house, from between the altar and the house of the Lord, and put it on the north side of the altar.

15. And king Ahaz commanded Urijah the priest, saying, Upon the great altar [the high altar] burn the morning burnt-offering, and the evening meat-offering, and the king's burnt-sacrifice, and his meat-offering, with the burnt-offering of all the people of the land, and their meat offering, and their drink-offerings; and sprinkle upon it all the blood of the burnt-offering, and all the blood of the sacrifice: and the brasen altar shall be for me to enquire by.

16. Thus did Urijah the priest, according to all that king Ahaz commanded.

17. ¶ And king Ahaz cut off the borders of the bases, and removed the laver from off them; and took down the sea from of the brasen oxen [these were ultimately carried off by the Babylonians (Jer. lii. 20)] that were under it, and put it upon a pavement of stones [a pedestal or foundation of stone-work].

18. And the covert for the sabbath [an obscure expression. The best interpretation is "the covered hall (or stand) set apart for the use of the king and his attendants when he visited the Temple on holy days"] that they had built in the house, and the king's entry without, turned he from the house of the Lord [stripped them of their ornamental work] for the king of Assyria.

19. ¶ Now the rest of the acts of Ahaz which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?

20. And Ahaz slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David: and Hezekiah his son reigned in his stead.

2 Kings xvii.

1. In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah began Hoshea the son of Elah to reign in Samaria over Israel nine years.

2. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, but not as the kings of Israel that were before him.

3. ¶ Against him came up Shalmaneser king of Assyria; and Hoshea became his servant, and gave [rendered] him presents [or, tribute].

4. And the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea: for he had sent messengers to So king of Egypt, and brought [offered] no present to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year [omit "year by year"]: therefore the king of Assyria shut him up [comp. Jer. xxxii. 2, 3, xxxiii. 1, xxxvi. 3] and bound him in prison.

5. ¶ Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years.

6. ¶ In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them [literally, made them dwell] in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan [on Habor the river of Gozan] and in the cities of the Medes.

7. For so it was [literally, And it came to pass], that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods [such as the Baals and Asherahs of Canaan, which symbolised the productive powers of Nature, and, further, the heavenly bodies (comp. Amos v. 25, 26; Ezek. viii. 14, 16),

8. And walked in the statutes [religious rules or ordinances. (Comp. Exod. xii. 14, "statutes;" Lev. xx. 23, "manners;" 1 Kings iii. 3, "ordinances")] of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out from before the children of Israel, and the kings of Israel, which they had made.

9. And the children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right against the Lord their God, and they built them high places in all their cities, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city. [The towers are such as are mentioned in 2 Chron. xxvi. 10.]

10. And they set them up images [statues], and groves [pillars and Asherahs—sacred trunks], in every high hill, and under every green tree:

11. And there they burnt incense in all the high places, as did the heathen whom the Lord carried away before them; and wrought wicked things [not merely idolatrous rites, but also the hideous immoralities which constituted a recognised part of the nature-worships of Canaan] to provoke the Lord to anger:

12. For they served idols [And they served the dunglings; a term of contempt], whereof the Lord had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing.

13. Yet the Lord testified [gave solemn warning or charge] against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets.

14. Notwithstanding they would not hear [and they hearkened not], but hardened their necks [neck. (Comp. Deut. x. 16; Jer. xvii. 23; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 13)], like to the neck [more than the neck] of their fathers, that did not believe in the Lord their God.

15. And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the Lord had charged them, that they should not do like them.

16. And they left all the commandments of the Lord their God, and made them molten images [1 Kings xii. 28: literally, a casting], even two calves, and made a grove [an Asherah (1 Kings xiv. 23, xvi. 33)], and worshipped all the host of heaven [chap. xxi. 3; comp. xxiii. 4], and served Baal.

17. And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire [the cultus of Molech (chap. xvi. 3)] and used divination and enchantments [Deut. xviii. 10; Numb. xxiii. 23], and sold themselves [idolatry is regarded as a servitude (comp. 1 Kings xxi. 20, 25)] to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger.

18. Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight [by banishing them from his land (v. 23)]: there was none left but the tribe [*i.e.*, the kingdom (comp. 1 Kings xi. 36)] of Judah only.

19. Also Judah kept not [Judah was no exception to the sins and punishments of Israel; she imitated the apostasy of her sister-kingdom, and was visited with a similar penalty] the commandments of the Lord their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel which they made.

20. And the Lord rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of spoilers, until he had cast them out of his sight.

21. For he rent Israel from the house of David; and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king: and Jeroboam drave [put far away] Israel from following the Lord, and made them sin a great sin.

22. For the children of Israel walked [obstinately persisted, in spite of all warning] in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they departed not from them;

23. Until the Lord removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets. [Comp. Hosea i. 6, ix. 16; Amos iii. 11, 12, v. 27; Isa. xxviii. 1-4.] So was Israel carried away [that the land was not entirely depopulated appears from such passages as 2 Chron. xxx. 1, xxxiv. 9] out of their own land to Assyria unto this day.

24. ¶ And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them [made them dwell] in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof.

25. And so it was at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they feared not the Lord: therefore the Lord sent [the] lions [in the interval between the Assyrian depopulation and the re-peopling of the land, the lions indigenous to the country had multiplied naturally enough] among them, which slew some of them.

26. Wherefore they [men; the prefects of the province] spake to the king of Assyria, saying, The nations which thou hast removed, and placed in the cities of Samaria, know not the manner [appointed worship] of the God of the land: therefore he hath sent lions among them, and, behold, they slay them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land.

27. Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, Carry [cause to go] thither one of the priests whom ye brought [carried away] from thence; and let them [him] go and dwell there, and let him teach them the manner of the God of the land.

28. Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Beth-el [because he was a priest of the calf-worship], and

taught [and was teaching; implying a permanent work] them how they should fear the Lord.

29. Howbeit [And] every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans [the people of northern Israel (comp. v. 24)] had made, every nation in their cities wherein they dwelt.

30. And the men of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, and the men of Cuth made Nergal, and the men of Hamath made Ashima,

31. And the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burnt their children in fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim.

32. So they feared [were fearing] the Lord, and made unto themselves of the lowest of them [of all orders, or promiscuously (comp. 1 Kings xii. 31). Another indication that it was Jeroboam's mode of worship which was now restored] priests of the [omit "the"] high places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places.

33. They feared the Lord, and served their own gods [literally, Jehovah they were fearing, and their own gods they were serving], after the manner of the nations whom they carried [who carried them] away from thence.

34. Unto this day they do after the former manners [they still keep up the religious customs of the first colonists]: they fear not the Lord, neither do they after their statutes, or after their ordinances, or after the law and commandment which the Lord commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel:

35. With whom the Lord had made a covenant, and charged them, saying, Ye shall not fear other gods, nor bow yourselves to them, nor serve them, nor sacrifice to them:

36. But the Lord, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt with great power and a stretched-out arm, him shall ye fear, and him shall ye worship, and to him shall ye do sacrifice.

37. And the statutes, and the ordinances, and the law, and the commandment, which he wrote for you, ye shall observe to do for evermore: and ye shall not fear other gods.

38. And the covenant that I have made with you ye shall not forget; neither shall ye fear other gods. [This formula is repeated thrice (vv. 35, 37, 38) as the main point of the covenant between Jehovah and Israel.]

39. But the Lord your God ye shall fear; and he [the pronoun is emphatic: and he, on his part, will deliver you] shall deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies.

40. Howbeit they did not hearken, but they did [continued doing] after their former manner.

41. So these nations feared the Lord, and served their graven images [a variation of v. 33], both their children, and their children's children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day.

GENUINE RELIGION.

A VERY significant expression occurs in the twenty-ninth verse of the fifteenth chapter.

“In the days of Pekah king of Israel came Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, and took Ijon, and Abel-beth-maachah, and Janoah, and Kedesh, and Hazor, and Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and carried them captive to Assyria.”

A very humbling expression! But this is an aspect of providence we cannot afford, if we be wise men, to ignore. Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, came and carried away all these people captive to Assyria—simply “carried” them. When men have lost their soul, their spirit, their fire, they are simply carted away like so many hundredweights and tons of dead matter. We are not men if we have lost manliness—in other words, if we have lost the indwelling Spirit of God, the force eternal, the seal divine; we are not then conquered, because to be “conquered” would imply some measure of calculated and rational resistance,—we are simply carried away, borne off, as men might carry dead matter. This is the lot of all nations that forget God: this is the lot of every man whose heart ceases to be the sanctuary of the living Spirit: he is but so much bulk; name him in pounds avoirdupois, report him in so many inches and feet of stature and girth;—he has grieved the Spirit; he has quenched the Spirit; henceforth he is to be driven as one of a herd of dumb cattle; he is to be carried as if he were but so much flesh. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” The Almighty can humble us in many ways—unexpected, wholly unforeseen, and absolutely inevitable, so that he who was the crown of his people is trodden under foot, and as for the fine gold, men are struck by nothing so much as by its dimness.

We now come to the incident of Ahaz sending messages to Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, complaining to him that the hand of the king of Syria and the hand of the king of Israel had been raised against the king of Judah. Ahaz afterwards paid a visit to Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, going to Damascus to

meet him ; and when he was at Damascus, Ahaz saw an object which attracted his attention. Ahaz reigned wickedly in Judah, but like the rest of mankind he was a strange mixture. Ahaz, while at Damascus, saw a new kind of altar : he took a plan of it ; he reported in terms of a literal specification all its curious workmanship ; and he told Urijah the priest to have one exactly of that description ready for him by the time he came from Damascus. Here is an interest in religious things. Ahaz takes an interest in an altar. It was an architectural interest. Ahaz was pleased with shapes, forms, colours ; he had an eye for artistic beauty ; he looked upon the altar as a child might have looked upon a toy : as an artist might have looked upon a picture, as a musician might have regarded a new piece of music. It was, however, a costly interest. Let us do Ahaz full justice. Ahaz could not have this altar without paying for it ; and pay for it he did. Are there not men who are exactly like Ahaz to-day ? They see new forms of worship, new programmes of a devotional kind, new clothing for the priests who minister at the altar, new ways of lighting the sacred edifice, new plans of opening and closing doors, new systems of ventilation, administration ; and seizing all these things, and being willing to pay for the execution of their own fancies and ideas, it might easily be supposed that they were religious men. There is no artistic religion ; that is to say, there is no religion that begins and ends in mere art, method, mechanism, arrangement. Yet how many there are who can only worship in certain places ! They do not know the gospel unless they hear it uttered by certain men. They live by the voice, not by the truth. How many there are who can only be comfortable in religious worship in proportion as they are surrounded by familiar persons ! Any derangement of the usual environment would mean impoverishment of the prayer, the upset of religious calmness, the utter depletion of Christian virtue : the whole service would simply go for nothing, because the surroundings had been altered or modified. Is ours a merely artistic interest in the service of God ? Are we struck by new forms only—or do we hold every one as with a light hand, saying, They are nothing but as they express an inward and spiritual grace and force ? To these questions every man must make his own answer. But the lesson is general, namely,

that we may take an interest in religious things without being under the influence of a truly religious spirit. It is possible to spend a lifetime in collecting rare editions of the Bible. A man may have a thousand Bibles, and yet not have one revelation. But surely the man is religious who collects editions of the Bible, in all manner of type, and paper, and binding; who would spend much money in getting a rare edition that contained some particular phrase or word not known to other editions? To regard such a man as not religious would surely be a violation of charity? Not of necessity. All depends upon other circumstances. The man may be most pious, devoted, simple-minded, holy, but he is not all these simply because he spends so much time and money in collecting rare editions of the Bible. Any edition of the Bible will do when a man wants with his whole soul to know which is the greatest commandment of the law. He will be sure to secure an edition containing the gospel, then let all that is curious, rare, valuable from an artistic point, come in as it may, or not come in at all, he has the Bible, he knows the commandments, and keeps them. Are there not those who take a great interest in embellishing the house of God? They wish to have everything beautiful round about them. All this is right. We cannot but sympathise with this spirit. God does not want any of our disorder, slovenliness, or neglect of things that are true and beautiful; God himself condescends to accept all our efforts to make the place of his feet glorious: but we may have only an artistic interest in the house of God. He builds God's house who builds a man's true life. He loves the sanctuary who accepts its stones as but symbols: altars that do nothing themselves, but help men to pray steadfastly and hopefully in the name of the eternal Son of God. Let us be quite clear about this teaching. It is delightful when men are interested in any department of the sanctuary; it is encouraging to find that persons do take a deep enthusiastic interest in all that pertains to Christian ministry, Christian worship, and Christian evangelisation; the only thing that the most zealous devotee has to take care of is this: lest he expend his enthusiasm in that which is external. We are right when we combine the inward with the outward, when we give a beautiful soul expression in beautiful form,—but the form is nothing if the power be not.

Turning now from Judah to Israel, we find a noticeable point in the seventeenth chapter :

“And the children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right against the Lord their God, and they built them high places in all their cities, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city” (v. 9).

Again we come upon this report which we have had as it were a thousand times in identical terms. What is the wonderful charm of evil? Surely the philosophers have not answered that enquiry completely. There must be some peculiar inexpressible charm in evil, or men would not do it, and do it with both hands earnestly, and live in the doing of it, and reap in its execution some kind of harvest of contentment and gladness. What is this charm? Men repeat the evil even whilst denominating it iniquity and marking it as vile. In this matter we are curiously and wondrously made. We go back to the evil. The devil seems to be more attractive than God. One would have thought that one vision of truth, beauty, heaven's own light, would have for ever fascinated us, and made us incapable of meanness, wrong-doing, untruthfulness, or any form or colour of iniquity. But it is not so. The devil is most charming! We know he tells lies, but he tells them eloquently. We are aware that he cannot keep any promise that he ever made, yet when he puts out his black hand to us we grope for it in the dark, and think the fellowship not without advantage! Who can explain this? Is the explanation in the heart? “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” But what of this infinite infatuation of evil-doers? It is not in theory. The world has not gone so far wrong in theory as some pessimists may have imagined; if even the bad man were set down to write a book which he would like his own children to peruse, and follow out in daily practice, he would not begin his book by saying, “Serve the devil.” No. Surely the very worst man having taken upon himself the task of directing his own children, would write good theories, and would come quite near to quoting and repeating God's own commandments. Yet ere he laid the pen down he would be purposing in his heart to keep an appointment with the devil! Who can sound the heart? Who can find out human nature to perfection? Often we say, “Who can find out God unto perfection?” But let us alter the enquiry and say, “Who

can find out human nature fully, to its last line, thought, motive, and flash of will and desire?" Man is mysterious: because God is mysterious. It would seem impossible for men to make a correct distinction between crime and sin. Many men commit sin who would be shocked if they were charged with crime. This would seem to be a lesson hardly ever learned, even by the most spiritual men. There is probably hardly a man in a thousand who attends regularly the services of the sanctuary who could be charged with crime. This is regarded as "respectability." It has come to this, within the shadow of Christ's own cross, that if a man be not chargeable with crime he accounts himself respectable! The inquest should be spiritual. What of motive, thought, unexpressed inclination, unuttered desire? What of the life of the soul? What of those things we would do if we dare? The word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Oh that thrust of heaven's steel, that look of heaven's righteousness! Who can bear that judgment?

Here we join hands with the children of Israel and of Judah, and with human nature all over the world, owning the charm of evil. But the infatuation is more remarkable than the charm. The children of Israel did "secretly" those things that were not right. Ask them this question: Does God see all things? and the answer would be, Yes. Are the darkness and the light both alike unto him? And the reply would be, Certainly. Are his eyes as a flame of fire? The reply would be, Truly: no fire burns like those eyes of judgment. Then why do you blind yourselves with the mortal infatuation that you can do anything "secretly" against the Lord? Theoretically the reply would be—It is impossible to do anything secretly, for heaven sees every deed and the motive out of which it comes. Still, there remains the fact—the very mystery of psychology, the very despair of spiritual teaching—that even the wisest men imagine that they at least take off part of the iniquity by the secrecy of its perpetration.

Was all this done in Israel, or in Judah, in times of ignorance? The answer is in the seventeenth chapter:

"Yet the Lord testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets" (v. 13).

The people did not perish for lack of knowledge. The ministry was not short in that day. Prophets came in great numbers, or in great force, and seers were ready to interpret the invisible and the distant; the land was full of a teaching ministry. Yet the people sinned against all this light! How much can be resisted by the desperately wicked!

"Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the Lord their God. And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the Lord had charged them, that they should not do like them. And they left all the commandments of the Lord their God, and made them molten images, even two calves, and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger" (vv. 14-17).

How much men can resist when their hearts are set within them to do despite to the Spirit of God and the offers of his grace! Talk about God's almightiness, is there not a certain omnipotence in evil-doing entrusted to the human heart? The almightiness of God is without doubt in relation to all physical control and domination, but is not God as weak as any creature he has made when he comes to deal with the obdurate human heart, the rebellious human will? Then he is like a crying mother reasoning with her children, baptising them with her hot tears, expostulating with them in pungent tones, able only to say, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" The book of God does not conceal the weakness of God, if we may so name it, in regard to this contest as between himself and the human heart. He says, "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me." "It repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." Is there no resistance now? The man who dies out of Christ now dies a thousand deaths. He is surrounded by Christian atmosphere,

and by Christian influences ; he is followed by Christian prayer ; he is pursued by Christian importunity and remonstrance. He must force his way past God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost ; he must tread down the cross, trampling under foot the blood of the everlasting covenant, counting it an unholy or unworthy thing ; he must be a very miracle of wickedness—the devil's supreme achievement in the dehumanisation of the race ! Grieve not the Spirit. Quench not the Spirit. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts ; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him ; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

Notice one vital point. Just as the education and discipline of man became spiritual did man turn away from the living God. What was it that God had introduced into the education of the race ? The names are given in chapter xvii. 13—"commandments, statutes, law." Had it come to this ? Yes. It had to this certainly come. No fire, no sword, no thunder, no miracle of judgment ; the spiritual education of the race had been brought up to this point—"commandments, statutes, law"—a spiritual education and a spiritual appeal. It seems sometimes that if God would only teach by miracles we might be converted, and upon this we should be inclined to insist if Jesus Christ had not given the suggestion the flattest contradiction, saying, "They have Moses and the prophets ; let them hear them. . . . If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." Sometimes in heart-ache, and spiritual despair of an intolerable kind, we say, oh that God would teach by signs written upon the blue heavens, by great and visible judgments, by smiting the wicked man when his deed was half done, by crowning the righteous man in the very midst of his prayer,—then surely the world would believe ! But against this Jesus Christ has set his great and irrevocable judgment. Miracles have been tried : they have had their place, they have done their work, they have passed ; and now we have come to spiritual training. It was just so in Christ's own ministry. When he approached the spiritual point, the people rose as it were from their seats and left his church. So long as he was performing miracles, distributing loaves and fishes, showing mighty

signs, then the people came around him in great multitudes ; but when he said, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you," they said, "This is an hard saying ; who can hear it ?"—how can it be done ? The moment he came to a spiritual appeal, and to an insistence upon spiritual religion, they turned round ; and he said to his disciples who lingered at his side, "Will ye also go away ?"—The people had mistaken his purpose ; they thought him a mighty conjurer, the prince of miracle performers, a marvellous magician without an equal in known history ; but when he came to truth, purity, mercy, justice, submission, resignation, worship of the invisible God, they became weary of his teaching, and left him. This is the distress of every ministry. Who can lay hold upon spiritual affection, spiritual loyalty, and be surrounded and supported by people who say—We love the word of God as you proclaim it, because it affects us spiritually, ennobles our very soul, lifts our thought from the dust and time, and takes us into the upper city and the very eternity of God ? Here is a test of judgment, here is a standard of measurement : let there be no mistake about this : we are to grow in grace—not in miracle-doing—and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ—not in the criticism of his miracles or the admiration of his wonders : ours is to be a soul growth, a spiritual liberation, a mental development, a whole-hearted consecration. Spirit of the living God, crown thy miracles by this, the greatest of all !

"The king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel : and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof" (xvii. 24).

The king of Assyria intended here is not Shalmaneser or Esarhaddon, as is generally supposed, but Sargon. It is not doubted that Esarhaddon sent colonists into the country, from whom the new Samaritans were, at least in part, descended. It is believed that there was a previous colonisation by the conqueror of the country. We must regard these men as strangers ; and so regarding them, their judgment upon the religious condition of the people is the more remarkable. They noticed, for example, that at the beginning of their dwelling in the country, the people "feared not the Lord." It should be a rule with us in life

to know that even those who do not share our own religious sentiments may yet be observing how those sentiments affect our personal conduct. Probably there is hardly a deeper humiliation than that the people of God, at least nominally so regarded, should have been judged as impious by men who came from a far off land and who professed only a heathenish religion. It is noticeable that one of the very first things observed by the Assyrians was that the people were not faithful to their religion. There is evidently something deeper than a mere form of religious faith; otherwise the Assyrians could not have noticed a discrepancy between doctrine and practice; the nominal people of God had so far descended into corruption and licentiousness as to care absolutely nothing for the opinion of heathen critics. Their piety had been displaced not only by impiety, as representing a negative condition of mind, but by absolute contempt and defiance. It is not to be supposed, because our life-work lies amongst men who do not profess religion, that therefore we can afford to dispense with our own religion and not incur the disapprobation of observers. There is an honesty even apart from spiritual religion; that is to say, there is a spirit in man which instinctively revolts at inconsistency, treachery, and all forms of practical lying in reference to high religious obligations. This should be noticed by men who enjoy spiritual emoluments and advantages which they have not earned by merit or by honest labour. All kinds of religious promotion should be jealously regarded as being under the criticism of men of the world. We might so far become victims of infatuation as to suppose that men of the world would rather applaud us for so using ecclesiastical position and privilege as to consolidate our financial and social position. Men of the world, however, do nothing of the kind; although they do not profess to be pious, they yet have clear ideas as to honesty and integrity. To be condemned by men of the world for want of faithfulness to our religious convictions is one of the severest judgments which can befall our religious life.

The report which the colonists gave to the king of Assyria is here recorded—"The nations which thou hast removed, and placed in the cities of Samaria, know not the manner of the God of the land" (xvii. 26). They supposed that every locality had

its own deity. At this notion it has become customary to smile in a complacent way: but is there not another aspect of this ignorance which ought rather to secure our best interest, and no small degree of our confidence? Better that men should have a local deity than that they should have no deity at all. The Samaritans may have supposed that because they themselves did not know the spirit and law of the local deity that therefore the offended deity had sent lions amongst them.* The word "therefore" occurs in the Authorised Version in the twenty-sixth verse, but it is not in the original: instead of the word "therefore" substitute the word "and," because there is no argument intended: nothing is designed but a narrative of events.

The king of Assyria was ready to attend to the report of his people, and his method of meeting the difficulty was that one of the priests should be carried back to the land that he and his assistants might dwell there and teach them the manner of the God of the land. One of the priests was probably one of Jeroboam's priests, not remarkable for dignity or holiness of character. This arrangement is to be put to the credit of the king of Assyria, for it does not appear that he attempted to proselytise the people to his own religion. There was a kind of rude regard paid to what we now term the right of private judgment. Nor is the arrangement adopted by Sargon destitute of a principle of philosophy. He might well suppose that the people would take more kindly to his domination if some concession were made to them on the ground of religion: Sargon said in effect—Let the people practise their own religious rites, put themselves into a proper relation to their own God, amend their character as well as they can: because the more faithful they are to their own God the less likely are they to rebel against myself. Even wicked kings are not destitute of practical wisdom in all matters which affect their

* As to what part lions played in biblical history, see Judges xiv. 5; 1 Sam. xvii. 34; 2 Sam. xxiii. 20; Prov. xxii. 13, xxvi. 13. There is but little trace of lions in biblical events between the time of Solomon and the ruin of Samaria (1 Kings xiii. 24). It has not been deemed improbable that a number of lions had always lurked in the jungle along the course of the Jordan (see Jer. xlix. 19, l. 44); nor has it been deemed improbable that these lions now ventured into the hill country and were emboldened also to enter into the cities.

supremacy : that is to say, they make sentimental concessions, they are willing that any number of abstract resolutions should be passed, and that men should be quieted by that species of indulgence which does not interfere with political subservience and obedience. Benevolence of this kind should always be narrowly scrutinised. Sometimes men appear to be giving large liberties, when in reality they are not adding to substantial freedom.

It appears from the history that even the priest and his assistants did not succeed in their mission—

“Howbeit every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in their cities wherein they dwelt” (xvii. 29).

The Babylonians were polytheists, and did not fear to multiply their gods in all the nations which they took in war. Instead of adopting the local religion they set up their own altars. The history reads very strangely at this point :—

“And the men of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, and the men of Cuth made Nergal, and the men of Hamath made Ashima, and the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burnt their children in fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim” (xvii. 30, 31).

All these names are without significance to us, but being translated we seem to see to what depths of degradation heathenism brings its votaries. Succoth-benoth was made in the form of a hen taking care of her chickens ; Nergal is supposed to signify a wood-cock, or a roost-cock ; whilst Ashima is a goat or wolf, Nibhaz a dog, and Tartak an ass. Adrammelech and Anammelech were made in the shape of a horse and a mule. These descriptions may indeed be caricatures of the Babylonian religion, and are not to be too closely criticised. We should be restrained in all our endeavours to travesty even the religion of heathenism by a remembrance that the Christian religion itself has been caricatured and covered with contempt. On the other hand, it is to be remembered that idolaters have not been ashamed of their gods, and it is possible that though the symbol may have been rude, grotesque, and even offensive, yet the mind might even in spiritual bewilderment be looking beyond to the spiritual thought and the higher reality. Our laughter must be sometimes restrained in the presence of some forms of idolatry. Men are not to be ridiculed out of their false religions. There will come a

time in their education when they will understand the most mocking laugh, but until that time has come better treat even superstition with some measure of religious respect.

A curious instance is here seen of what we cannot better describe than as a double life :—

“So they feared the Lord, and made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of the high places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places. They feared the Lord, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence” (vv. 32, 33).

Men made unto themselves of the lowest of the people priests of the high places. By the expression “the lowest of the people” we are not to understand the lowest classes or the most vulgar section of the community ; we are rather to understand all ranks, so that the priesthood was really representative and not taken from one particular line or family. Notwithstanding all this priest-making, the people “served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence.” All this sounds grotesque, but, rightly comprehended, it represents our own experience in a very awful and tragical light. We do not carry the God of the sabbath throughout all the days of the week with reverent and faithful consistency. Every man must decide for himself whether he does not really leave his God in the church at the close of the sabbath day's exercises. It would seem as if in many instances our religion, or religions, corresponded with the clothes we wear ; we have one suit for Sunday, another for holidays, another for festive occasions, and another for the ordinary work of life ; how far it may be so in the matter of religious conviction and consistency must be left to every man to determine in his own particular case. When we read that the nations feared the Lord and served their graven images, we are really reading part of our own history. We have magnificent theories, but the epithet cannot be carried over to our practices. We have orthodoxy of the sublimest quality, nor will we permit any violent hand to be laid upon it at any point, for we regard it as altogether sacred ; yet it is perfectly possible for us to have a theoretical orthodoxy and a practical heterodoxy,—to be absolutely sound and unimpeachable in all our theological phrases, and yet to be rotten at the core when it comes to disposition, temper, and social conduct.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, if thou wilt look upon us our hearts will take hope again and be strong and fearless, and our whole nature shall go out in sacrifice and labour. But without thy look we cannot live. Thou hast called upon us to look unto thee and be saved, but the power to look must come from thee. We are undone, we are lost men ; we know not of ourselves in what direction to look : for, behold, when we have looked we have seen nothing but a great cloud. It belongeth unto the Lord to point us to the saving One, the uplifted cross, the dying, atoning Son of God. We bless thee that we have heard of him, and that having sat at his feet, and heard his words, and having become accustomed to his method of teaching, we feel that he knows us altogether, every word is inspired by love as well as wisdom, and that his whole purpose is to save our souls. We see now what sometimes we have not seen. Thy Son could have had but one purpose. He was despised and rejected of men. We gave him small hospitality. He came unto his own, but his own received him not. He has been kept waiting outside, knocking upon the barred door, and seldom heard or cared for. Himself bore our sins, and carried our iniquities. He died for us, the just for the unjust. All these were mysteries to us ; we understood them not : we said, Beauty will attract attention, and goodness will win confidence, and benevolence will disarm criticism, and if this man be the Son of God, who could shut him out of the human heart ? So foolish were we before thee, and utterly ignorant of ourselves, and of the inmost truth, and the larger reality of things : for we saw but appearances, and were misled by accidents, and so did we utter the fool's speech. Now light has come ; we see what sin is, we see what hardness of heart really means ; we know now that it is possible—and we burn with shame whilst we say it—for the human heart to forget the eternal God. We have done the things we ought not to have done ; all we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way. We have done the things which we now confess to be wrong. Unless we do them again, Holy Spirit, dwell with us. We are not sure of ourselves even now. From the sanctuary we could throw ourselves down into great depths ; from the very pinnacle of the temple we could leap into hell. Lord, protect us ; Christ, defend us : Eternal Spirit, hear our cry ! Amen.

2 Kings xviii.

1. Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that Hezekiah [the name in this form means, "My strength is Jah" (Ps. xviii. 2), and its special appropriateness is exemplified in Hezekiah's history] the son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign.

2. Twenty and five years old was he when he began to reign ; and he

reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Abi [should probably be Abijah], the daughter of Zachariah.

3. And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father did.

4. ¶ He [it was he who] removed the high places, and brake the images, [shattered the pillars (1 Kings xiv. 23; Hosea iii. 4; 2 Chron. xiv. 2)] and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it; and he called it Nehushtan [the popular name of the serpent-idol].

5. He trusted in the Lord God of Israel [Hezekiah is thus contrasted with the idolatrous kings, such as those who trusted in Nehushtan]; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him.

6. For he clave [And he held fast] to the Lord, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses.

7. And the Lord was with him; and he prospered [comp. 1 Kings ii. 3; Prov. xvii. 8. Going forth denotes any external undertaking or enterprise, especially going forth to war. (Comp. the phrase "going out and coming in")] whithersoever he went forth; and he rebelled against the king of Assyria [refused the tribute his father had paid], and served him not.

8. He [it was who] smote the Philistines, even unto Gaza, and the borders thereof, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city.

9. ¶ And it came to pass in the fourth year of king Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against Samaria, and besieged it.

10. And at the end of three years they [the Assyrians] took it: even in the sixth year of Hezekiah, that is the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel, Samaria was taken.

11. And the king of Assyria did carry away Israel unto Assyria, and put them in Halah and in Habor, by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes:

12. Because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord their God, but transgressed his covenant, and [omit "and"] all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded, and would not hear them, nor do them [literally, and hearkened not, and did not].

13. ¶ Now in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah did Sennacherib king of Assyria come up against all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them.

14. And Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria to Lachish saying, I have offended [sinned]; return from me: that which thou putttest on me [in the way of tribute] will I bear. And the king of Assyria appointed unto Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold [the sum mentioned is about a seventh less than that exacted by Pul from Menahem (chap. xv. 19)].

15. And Hezekiah gave him all the silver [the money] that was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king's house.

16. At that time did Hezekiah cut off the gold [literally, trimmed or stripped] from the doors of the temple of the Lord, and from the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it [Heb., them] to the king of Assyria.

17. ¶ And the king of Assyria sent [apparently in careless violation of his word] Tartan [the commander-in-chief] and Rabsaris and Rab-shakeh from Lachish to king Hezekiah with a great host against Jerusalem. And they went up and came to Jerusalem. And when they were come up, they came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which is in the highway of the fuller's field.

18. And when they had called to the king, there came out to them Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, which was over the household, and Shebna the scribe [secretary], and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder.

19. And Rab-shakeh said unto them, Speak ye now to Hezekiah, Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this wherein thou trustest ?

20. Thou sayest [talkest], (but they are but vain words,) [literally, thou hast said—a mere lip-word it was, *i.e.*, insincere language] I have counsel and strength for the war. Now on whom dost thou trust, that thou rebellest against me ?

21. Now, behold, thou trustest upon the staff of this bruised [cracked or flawed] reed, even upon Egypt, on which if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it ; so is Pharaoh king of Egypt unto all that trust on him.

22. But if ye say [the address seems to turn abruptly from Hezekiah to his ministers, and to the garrison of Jerusalem in general] unto me, We trust in the Lord our God : is not that he, whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away [this is just the construction which a heathen would naturally put on Hezekiah's abolition of the local sanctuaries (v. 4 ; 2 Chron. xxxi. 1)], and hath said to Judah and Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem ?

23. Now therefore, I pray thee, give pledges [make a compact with] to my lord the king of Assyria, and I will deliver thee two thousand horses, if thou be able on thy part to set riders upon them.

24. How then [literally, And how] wilt thou turn away the face of [repulse ; reject the demand of (1 Kings ii. 16)] one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put thy trust on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen ?

25. Am I now come up without the Lord against this place to destroy it ? The Lord said to me, Go up against this land, and destroy it.

26. Then said Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, and Shebna, and Joah, unto Rab-shakeh, Speak, I pray thee, to thy servants in the Syrian language ; for we understand it : and talk not with us in the Jews' language [in Jewish ; an expression only found in Neh. xiii. 24 besides the present narrative] in the ears of the people that are on the wall.

27. But Rab-shakeh said unto them, Hath my master [Is it to thy lord and to thee that my lord hath sent me to speak these words] sent me to

thy master, and to thee, to speak these words? hath he not sent me to the men which sit on the wall [the soldiers on guard], that they may eat their own dung [these coarse words are meant to express the *consequence* of their resistance: it will bring them to such dire straits that they will be fain to appease the cravings of hunger and thirst with the vilest garbage (comp. chap. vi. 25, *seq.*)], and drink their own piss [Heb., the water of their feet] with you?

28. Then Rab-shakeh stood [came forward] and cried with a loud voice in the Jews' language, and spake, saying, Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria:

29. Thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you: for he shall not be able to deliver you out of his [my] hand:

30. Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord [Hezekiah cannot save you himself (v. 29); Jehovah will not do so (v. 25)] saying, The Lord will surely deliver us, and this city shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria.

31. Harken not to Hezekiah; for thus saith the king of Assyria, Make an agreement with me by a present [literally, make with me a blessing: *i.e.*, make peace with me] and come out to me [from behind your walls: surrender (1 Sam. xi. 3; Jer. xxi. 9)], and then [omit "then"] eat ye every man of his own vine, and every one of his fig-tree, and drink ye every one the waters of his cistern [or pit]:

32. Until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of oil-olive and of honey, that ye may live, and not die: and hearken not unto Hezekiah, when he persuadeth [or deceiveth] you, saying, The Lord will deliver us.

33. Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered at all his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria?

34. Where are the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad [the question may imply that they had been annihilated along with their temples and statues (comp. Job xiv. 10)]? where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah? have they delivered Samaria out of mine hand?

35. Who are they among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of mine hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand?

36. But the people held their peace, and answered him not a word: for the king's commandment was, saying, Answer him not.

37. Then came Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, which was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder, to Hezekiah with their clothes rent, and told him the words of Rab-shakeh.

2 Kings xix.

1. And it came to pass, when king Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord [to humble himself before Jehovah, and pray for help (comp. 2 Chron. xxxii. 20)].

2. And he sent Eliakim, which was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz.

3. And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke [chastisement (Hosea v. 9)], and blasphemy [provocation]: for the children are come [expressive of the utter collapse of all human resources (comp. Hosea xiii. 13)] to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth.

4. It may be the Lord thy God will hear all the words of Rab-shakeh, whom the king of Assyria his master hath sent to reproach the living God; and will reprove the words which the Lord thy God hath heard: wherefore lift up [heavenwards] thy [a] prayer for the [existing (or present)] remnant that are left.

5. So the servants of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah.

6. ¶ And Isaiah said unto them, Thus shall ye say to your master, Thus saith the Lord, Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard, with which the servants [denoting apparently personal attendants (comp. chaps. iv. 12, v. 20, viii. 4; Exod. xxxiii. 11; Judg. vii. 10; 2 Sam. ix. 9; 1 Kings xx. 15)] of the king of Assyria have blasphemed [not the root as in v. 3 (Numb. xv. 30; Ps. xliv. 16; Isa. li. 7)] me.

7. Behold, I will send a blast upon him [Behold, I am about to put a spirit within him], and he shall hear a rumour, and shall return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.

8. ¶ So Rab-shakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah: for he had heard that he was departed from Lachish.

9. And when he heard say of Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, Behold, he is come out to fight against thee: he sent messengers again unto Hezekiah, saying,

10. Thus shall ye speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying, Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee [through prophets, or dreams, or any other recognised medium of communication], saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria.

11. Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly: and shalt thou be delivered?

12. Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my father have destroyed; as Gozan [chap. xvii. 6], and Haran, and Rezeph, and the children of Eden which were in Thelasar?

13. Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivah?

14. ¶ And Hezekiah received the letter [vv. 10-13 may be regarded as embodying the substance of the letter, which the envoys first delivered orally, and then presented the letter to authenticate it] of the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up into the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord.

15. And Hezekiah prayed before the Lord, and said, O Lord God of Israel which dwellest between the cherubims [which sittest above the cherubim,

or, the cherub-throned (comp. Exod. xxv. 22; 1 Sam. iv. 4; Ps. xviii. 6; Ezek. i. 26)], thou [emphasis on "thou"] art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth.

16. Lord, bow down thine ear, and hear [not so much my prayer as the words of Sennacherib]: open, Lord, thine eyes, and see [interfere actively between me and my enemy]: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him [which he hath sent] to reproach the living God [in contrast with the lifeless idols of Hamath, etc.].

17. Of a truth [It is even as Sennacherib boasteth], Lord, the kingdoms of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands,

18. And have cast [put] their gods into the fire [comp. 1 Chron. xiv. 12]: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them:

19. Now therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only.

20. ¶ Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, That which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard.

21. This is the word that the Lord hath spoken concerning [against] him; The virgin [the term Virgin naturally denotes the inviolable security of the citadel of Jehovah] the daughter of Zion hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee [hath nodded behind thee (comp. Ps. xxii. 8)].

22. Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? [towards heaven (Isa. xl. 26)]. (Comp. Isa. xiv. 13, 14) even against the Holy One of Israel [a favourite expression of Isaiah, in whose book it occurs twenty-seven times, and only five times elsewhere in the Old Testament].

23. By [Heb., By the hand of] thy messengers thou hast reproached the Lord, and hast said, With the multitude of my chariots I am come up to the height of the mountains, to the sides of Lebanon, and will cut down [and I will fell the tallest cedars thereof. Cedars and firs in Isaiah's language symbolise kings, princes, and nobles, and all that is highest and most stately (Isa. ii. 13, x. 33, 34)] the tall cedar-trees thereof, and the choice fir-trees thereof: and I will enter into the lodgings of his borders, and into the forest of his Carmel.

24. I have digged and drunk strange waters [scarcity of water has hitherto been no bar to my advance], and with the sole of my feet have I dried up all the rivers of besieged [or fenced] places.

25. Hast thou not heard long ago how I have done it, and of ancient times that I have formed it? now have I brought it to pass, that thou shouldest be to lay waste fenced cities into ruinous heaps.

26. Therefore their inhabitants were of small power [literally, short-handed (comp. Isa. l. 2, lix. 1)], they were dismayed and confounded; they were as the grass of the field, and as the green herb, as the grass on the house tops, and as corn blasted before it be grown up.

27. But I know thy abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy rage against me.

28. Because thy rage against me and thy tumult is come up into mine ears, therefore I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest.

29. And this shall be a [the] sign unto thee [the prophet now addresses Hezekiah], Ye shall eat this year such things as grow of themselves, and in the second year that which springeth of the same; and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruits thereof.

30. And the remnant [the survival, survivors of the house of Judah that are left] that is escaped of the house of Judah shall yet again take root downward, and bear fruit upward.

31. For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Zion: the zeal [jealousy] of the Lord of hosts shall do this.

32. Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there [at it], nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it.

33. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into [unto] this city, saith the Lord.

34. For I will defend [And I will cover (with a shield) (comp. Isa. xxxi. 5, xxxviii. 6; chap. xx. 6)] this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake.

35. ¶ And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold they were all dead corpses.

36. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh.

37. And it came to pass [twenty years afterwards], as he was worshipping his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword: and they escaped into the land of Armenia [Heb., Ararat]. And Esar-haddon his son reigned in his stead.

2 Kings xx.

1. In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order [Heb., give charge concerning thine house]: for thou shalt die, and not live.

2. Then he turned his face to the wall [And he turned his face round (1 Kings xxi. 4). He did so to avoid being disturbed in his prayer], and prayed unto the Lord, saying [Heb., with a great weeping],

3. I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked [Hezekiah deprecates an untimely death—the punishment of the wicked (Prov. x. 27)—on account of his zeal for Jehovah and against the idols] before thee in truth

and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore.

4. And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the Lord came to him, saying,

5. Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the Lord.

6. And I will add unto thy days fifteen years [with this very definite prediction, comp. Isa. vii. 8, xxiii. 15; Jer. xxv. 11, 22]; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake.

7. And Isaiah said, Take a lump of figs [figs pressed into a cake (1 Sam. xxv. 18)]. And they took and laid it on the boil [the word "boil" denotes leprous and similar ulcers (Exod. ix. 9; Job ii. 7), not plague], and he recovered [Heb., lived].

8. ¶ And Hezekiah said unto Isaiah, What shall be the sign that the Lord will heal me, and that I shall go up into the house of the Lord the third day?

9. And Isaiah said, This sign shalt thou have of the Lord, that the Lord will do the thing that he hath spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees?

10. And Hezekiah answered, It is a light thing for the shadow to go down [spread] ten degrees: nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees.

11. And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the Lord: and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial [Heb., degrees] of Ahaz.

12. ¶ At that time Berodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah: for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick.

13. And Hezekiah hearkened unto them, and shewed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment [the fine oil; perfumed oil used for anointing], and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures [see 2 Chron. xxxii. 27, 28, storehouses beyond the precincts of the palace]: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not.

14. ¶ Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country, even from Babylon.

15. And he said, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All the things that are in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them.

16. And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the word of the Lord.

17. Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord.

18. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.

19. Then said Hezekiah unto Isaiah, Good is the word of the Lord [pious acquiescence in the will of God (comp. Eli's "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good." Comp. a similar expression in 1 Kings ii. 38)], which thou hast spoken. And he said, Is it not good, if peace and truth [peace and permanence (or, security and stability: Jer. xxxiii. 6)] be in my days?

20. ¶ And the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and all his might, and how he made a pool, and a conduit, and brought water into the city, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?

21. And Hezekiah slept with his fathers: and Manasseh his son reigned in his stead.

HEZEKIAH.

SO far in our Bible studies we have had many weary wanderings amongst bad men. The fear was that to some extent familiarity with them might blunt our own moral sensibility. Man after man has passed before us out of whose very countenance the image of God had faded. How pleasant it is then, how spiritually exhilarating, to come upon a case in which we read—

"And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father did" (xviii. 3)!

After a long journey underground we seem to have come suddenly upon a sweet garden, and the sight of it is as heaven. The charm is always in the contrast. If things are not quite so good as we supposed them to be, they are all the better by reason of circumstances through which we have passed, which have made us ill at ease, and have impoverished or disheartened us; then very little of the other kind goes a long way. A man comes up out of the underground railway and says when he emerges into the light, How fresh the air is here! What a healthy locality! How well to live in this neighbourhood! Why does he speak so kindly of his surroundings? Not because of those surroundings intrinsically, but because of the contrast which they present to the circumstances through which he has just passed.

Hezekiah was no perfect man. We shall see how noble he was, and how rich in many high qualities, yet how now and again we see the crutch of the cripple under the purple of the king. It is well for us that he was occasionally and temporarily weak, or he would have been like a star we cannot touch, and at which we cannot light our own torch. No. Even Hezekiah was a man like ourselves in many particulars, and therefore what was good and sound in him is all the more attractive and is all the more possible to us. Who can mistake an honest man? If all men were upright, where would be the peculiarity of any one individual man's integrity? But, given a corrupt state of society, when the honest man appears, we say, The wind has changed: it blows balmily, healthfully; it comes from a fine origin and brings with it many a blessing. Who can mistake the atmosphere of the sea? How it blows away all the city dulness! How it quickens the blood! How it throws off increasing years, and makes the voyager feel almost young again! It is so with honesty, nobleness, charity, goodness of character, when the surrounding air is charged with some kind of poison or pestilence. So it is that we come upon Hezekiah. Perhaps it is well for him that we approach his case after such an experience. He thus gets advantages which otherwise might not have been accorded to him: he looks the higher for the dwarfs that are round about him, the whiter because of the black population amidst which he stands, at once a contrast and a rebuke. But from Hezekiah's point of view the case was different. Behind him were traditions of the corruptest sort. He was as a speckled bird in the line of his own family. It is hard to be good amidst so much that is really bad. Any attempts at goodness are accounted examples of affectation, conceit, vanity, pharisaism; and under such circumstances sometimes a man's foes may be the people of his own household: they wish he was more pliable, less sabbatarian, less devoted to his Bible, less constant in his attendance at church; he might go once a day, and give himself one end of the rope not tethered to the altar; but he will not. Has that man an easy time of it? No hard word may be spoken to him, certainly no bitter word, and yet all the while he may be made to feel that perhaps after all he may be affecting somewhat of piety and pureness, and those who are looking on

may be better critics of him than he is of himself. At all events, there come to him periods of trial, and sometimes he says within himself, Shall I to-day be as constant as I have been, or may I not break away now? Have I not built up a character, and may I not retire upon my moral competence, and live henceforth the life of a latitudinarian? After a long spell of many years, surely I might intermit a little. Who shall say that the temptation is not subtle and strong? Some men have to force their way to church through innumerable and unnameable difficulties. This ought to be reckoned. Some credit must be due to men who are thus constant to their sense of public duty and religious obligation. Men are not always at church with the entire consent of those who are round about them. What, then, must be done? One of two things: either yield to the temptation, or resist it. You cannot trifle with it: you cannot now compromise, and then recur to firmness, and again connive, and again balance and consider, and hesitate. Virtue is not an intermittent grace. We must stand, or we must fall.

Hezekiah had a wicked father. How will that wickedness come out in the son? Not perhaps as wickedness, but as infirmity, weakness, want of constancy in some directions, though there may be no want of firmness in others. Can a man wholly escape the bad blood of his father? We must not forget that Hezekiah's mother's name was Abi, the daughter of Zachariah. How she came to marry a wicked husband must remain a mystery. But the mother will come up in the son. She was the daughter of Zachariah, and Zachariah was a prophet, or seer—a man with double sight—one of those strange men who can see beyond the merely visible, the palpable, and read things that lie behind. He came up again in his daughter, and the mother came up again in the son, and so there was a mysterious play of inheritance, transfer, transition, reappearance, somewhat of resurrection,—a great tragic mystery of transformation and representation. We speak about a man as if he were self-contained, just standing upon so much ground, without relation behind or before, on the right hand or on the left: whereas, no man is thus insularly placed, no man is an absolute solitary. Every man has in him the blood of the past,

and the life of the future. Can a son of a good mother be altogether bad? Surely not! You must have mistaken the case if you thought so. Your very thinking so may constitute an element of hopefulness in your case. Take comfort from that suggestion. So long as you can think of yourself seriously, and of the past, and of your advantages and compare what you are with what you might have been, there is hope of you. But can there be in all history such an irony as this, that a man should have had a praying mother and be himself a prayerless man? No, it cannot be! Somewhere, at some time, and in some way, the better nature will assert itself, and out of a good seed surely there will come a good harvest. But the lesson does not lie upon one side only: here is encouragement to praying fathers and to praying mothers. Zachariah, read on; read between the lines of things; interpret events symbolically; read the apocalyptic sense of what is happening; and out of all this mental elevation and spiritual conduct there will come results in your daughter or your son. Abi, pray on; be just to your father's memory; say—He was a holy man,—I must prove it by being a holy woman; he cannot live upon a written character,—he must live in my life: I will prove that such a child must have had a good father. So the vital lessons fall, on the right hand, on the left, and round about us: shame be to us if, amid this shower of monition and encouragement and stimulus, we be deaf and dumb and blind, unfeeling, unresponsive.

Hezekiah will now go to work and prove himself to be an energetic reformer:—

“He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it *Nehushtan*” (xviii. 4).

He must have been a strong man. He had no colleague, no ally; no one to say to him, Be brave, be true. He went straight against the hardest wall that ever was built by the stubbornness and perversity of man. It is not easy to begin life by a destructive process of reformation. Who would not rather plant a tree than throw down a wall? Who would not rather plant flowers, and enjoy their beauty and fragrance, than give himself the severe toil, the incessant trouble, of destroying

corrupt and evil institutions? Whoever attempts this kind of destructive work, or even a constructive work which involves preliminary destructiveness, will have a hard time of it: criticism will be very sharp, selfishness will be developed in an extraordinary degree. If a man be more than politician—if he be a real born statesman, looking at whole empires at once and not at mere parishes, and if in his thought and purpose he should base his whole policy upon fundamental right, he will not have an easy life of it even in a Christian country. In proportion as he bases his whole policy on righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, he will be pelted with hard names and struck at with unfriendly hands. This holds good in all departments of life, in all great reformations, in all assaults made upon ignorance, selfishness, tyranny, and wrong of every name. The children of Israel always seemed to live a foolish life. They were the veriest children,—so at least we would say but for fear of branding sweet children with an evil stigma. They were infantile, weak, treacherous to themselves, uncertain at every point, and so, having kept the brasen serpent, they burned incense to it. They liked a visible god. When the calf appealed to their religious feelings they danced around it as if at last they had found a deity: but who can worship a spirit, invisible, impalpable, far away, near at hand, without a name, without a shape which we can verify and say, It comes to thus much, and this is the weight, and this is the value of it? It requires a mind of some mental strength to stand up, take hold of the brasen serpent, and call it “Nehushtan”—a contemptuous term, meaning a piece of brass—dead brass—useless, worthless brass,—a relic, but not a God. Let us give credit to the men who have been bold, religiously intrepid in the midst of circumstances of a most discouraging and overbearing kind. They are the men to whom we owe our present privileges. We have the Bible in our mother-tongue because they were valiant. Not a church would have been built to-day in which men could assemble with a sense of freedom—sweet, joyous liberty—but for the Hezekiahs and others who went forth, and, at great cost and great peril, destroyed things evil and black, by the power of God’s almightiness,—overthrew them, and set up a better kingdom.

What was the root of Hezekiah's character? At present we have seen phenomena of a gracious kind; we like what we have heard of this man; but what about his root?

"He trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah nor any that were before him. For he clave to the Lord, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses" (xviii. 5, 6).

At length a man arose who said, I will do God's will, God helping me: I will not only read the commandments, I will incarnate them; I will not speak religious words only, but live a religious life. How tender and yet how emphatic are the words, he "trusted," he "clave," he "kept." "He trusted," that is to say, he had no other trust. His religion was not a convenience, one thing amongst many things, an occasional exercise in piety: but a perpetual confidence, the one trust, the all-centralising, and all-ruling fact. Then "he clave," he kept close to; he would not allow anything to come between his hand and the God he seized; the hand could do nothing else except cleave to God, and what was possible through that cleaving, and much is possible of a beneficent and helpful kind. "He kept the commandments," counted them one by one; examined himself in them; took himself daily to task about the whole ten. We live an off-hand life. Religion is now as easy as a wave of the hand, a salutation across a thoroughfare; it is something that can be taken up, and laid down, and forgotten, and resumed. What wonder if the Rab-shakehs of the age come and taunt us, and mock our piety, and blow back our prayers before they get to the skies? We want more trust, more cleaving piety, more keeping of the commandments, living in them, and having no other life that is not consonant with them.

Now came, as we have often seen, the inevitable temptation. We pass instantly to the visit of Rab-shakeh. This Rab-shakeh was an eloquent man. He had the gift of mockery; he could gibe well. He was not without a certain logical qualification. He made a long offensive speech to the people under Hezekiah's rule; and he thought he had them at both ends of the argument. Having mocked their piety, laughed it down, challenged it, spat upon it, he said, Perhaps you will say, "We trust in the Lord our God," but you forget, said Rab-shakeh, that this very man

Hezekiah has thrown down his altars, has taken away his groves, has rooted up the house of your God by the very foundations. Rab-shakeh did not understand the destructive reformation wrought out by Hezekiah. He heard of the groves being cut down and the holy places being removed, and he said, This is so much to our advantage : the king of Assyria shall hear of this, and we shall make good commerce of it. He did not distinguish between idolatry and piety, between a reform essential to health and a mere accident in history. What was good in Hezekiah seemed to be wickedness to Rab-shakeh. Oh, how Rab-shakeh assaulted the people, trampled upon them, leaped, as it were, over their bodies, and mocked their refuges and their trust, and thrust his fist in the face of Egypt and said, Come away from Hezekiah : trust him not ; he is blind, he is incapable ; leave him, and I will tell you what Assyria will do for you : I will " come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of oil olive and of honey, that ye may live, and not die : and hearken not unto Hezekiah, when he persuadeth you, saying, The Lord will deliver us " (xviii. 32). It is but an empty saying, Come, and I will give you a great Canaan ! Sometimes it does seem as if the enemy had the best of it. Everything lies so handily to him. He says, I will get you through this difficulty : I know a lie that would deceive a king ; I can instruct you in a policy that would blind a judge ; I could get the money for you ; you need have no difficulty about that ; why, I say in confidence, I can let you have it now ! What can the preacher do in the presence of such a Rab-shakeh ? Or he may not offer temptation in that direction, but in another, and say, All these arguments I could answer if I cared to do so. Who wrote the Bible ? Who has seen the original manuscripts ? Who has ever seen God ? It is utterly impossible to know the infinite,—come, and I will make you rich at once in real solid practical things : I can give you work instantly, and wages immediately the work is begun ; I can give you something in advance ; leave the preacher, the altar, the Bible, the church, and come and work in the open streets, and be doing something that you can handle, and about which there is no manner of doubt. People begin then to wonder. They should adopt the policy which was imposed upon the children

of Hezekiah, "But the people held their peace, and answered him not a word: for the king's commandment was, saying, Answer him not" (xviii. 36). Nothing is to be got out of wordy controversy. Live the Christian life; grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. While the controversialist is contemning you, taunting you, and smiting you, show him that you are growing broader, more massive in character, more tender in disposition, more benevolent in every aspiration and desire and purpose, and thus by well-doing "Put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." Defend your Christianity by the eloquence of your life.

The servants of Hezekiah said to him, What Rab-shakeh has said may come to pass. Let us go to Isaiah and tell him all. Hezekiah himself thought that perhaps there might be something in it after all. There he and his servants fell into a state of spiritual incertitude. "So the servants of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah." They came to the right man. Standing up like a king, he said:

"Thus shall ye say to your master, Thus saith the Lord, Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and shall return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land" (xix. 6, 7).

He would make no violent attack upon the men; he would summon no legion of angels to overwhelm this great Oriental potentate;—he would simply "send a blast,"—he would change the wind, he would scatter something upon it and bid it blow across the brain of the king of Assyria, and the king would not know his right hand from his left, nor the morning from the night; he would be calling everybody by the wrong name, and asking for things he did not wish to possess, and generally be thrown into a state of unbalanced, wandering mind. I will send a whisper to him; he shall simply go to the ear of the king of Assyria and say something, and the king will take fright, and fly away in a panic. O Hezekiah, continue thy prayer, repeat thy morning sacrifice and thine evening oblation; and as for the king of Assyria, I will send a blast, and a rumour; I will answer Rab-shakeh. Let the contempt of the enemy be answered by the contempt of heaven.

Rab-shakeh having found that the king of Assyria was warring against Libnah, returned, and when he heard that Tirhakah king of Ethiopia was come up to war, he once more addressed Hezekiah in terms of exultation and contempt. He was pretendedly anxious that Hezekiah should not be deceived by the Lord his God, and then he taunts him with many a history in which Assyria had been conqueror over opposing nations. He completes his taunt by asking, "Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivah?" (xix. 13). This message came to Hezekiah in the form of a letter, or letters, and Hezekiah instantly "went up into the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord." There is no need to regard this as in any sense involving a heathenish custom: the meaning simply is that Hezekiah consulted the Lord upon the whole matter, and declined to take anything into his own counsel or power. He acknowledges the dignity of God by the expression—"O Lord God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubims," and then he points to the letter which more immediately concerned himself, thus showing his consciousness that the majesty of the Lord did not separate him from taking an interest in earthly things. We are not to stop at the point of majesty, but are to reason that because God is so majestic and august he will pay attention to the prayers and desires of the beings whom he has created in his own image and likeness. The divine majesty is not a rebuke to human approach but an encouragement to human prayer. When Hezekiah says, "Thou art the God," the emphasis is to be laid upon the word "thou,"—Thou art the true God, and thou alone. When he desires God to bow down his ear, and hear, the reference is not so much to listen to Hezekiah's prayer as to the words of Sennacherib. The meaning of the whole petition may be—Interpose immediately and energetically between me and mine enemy: let thine ears hear, let thine eyes see, and let thine arm be extended. Hezekiah acknowledges that the kings of Assyria had destroyed the nations and their lands, and had cast the gods of the nations into the fire. By so much he gives the Assyrians credit for having spoken the truth, and for having thus founded their project against Israel upon the success which they had already attained. Hezekiah acknowledges, indeed, that the gods

of the nations were no gods; at the same time he feels that to the mind of the Assyrians they may have been as real deities, and their overthrow may have encouraged the Assyrians to believe that Jehovah was like unto them. Thus the prayer of Hezekiah was argued and ordered in logical and historical form, and was intended to excite, as it were, the very jealousy of the Lord God of Israel.

We now turn to the reply which was made to Hezekiah through the lips of Isaiah the son of Amoz. The reply was manifestly given in a contemptuous tone,—

“The virgin the daughter of Zion hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee” (xix. 21).

This is a poetic personification of place, Zion being regarded as mother of the people dwelling there. Whilst the term “virgin” may denote the inviolable security of the citadel of Jehovah, it may also intimate that a woman, even a solitary woman, was enough, when under the inspiration and protection of God, to repel the assault of the most boastful and audacious king. The expression, “hath shaken her head at thee,” has been literally rendered—“hath nodded behind thee:” it signifies an act of security; as for example, in Psalm xxii. 7, 8—“All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.” The people of Jerusalem are represented by this expression as nodding their heads in contempt at the retiring envoys of Sennacherib. The answer of Isaiah to Hezekiah constituted a religious revelation to the king of Assyria.

The twenty-second verse puts into an interrogative form a reproach against the ignorance of the king:

“Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high?”

The meaning evidently is that the king did not know the real nature of the God of Israel and Judah, and that he was making an infinite mistake in confounding that nature with what he had already seen of the idols of the nations. Humiliation is promised to the king of Assyria: a hook is to be thrust into his nose, a bridle is to be put upon his lips, and he is to be turned back by

the way which he came. Whilst the king of Assyria is humiliated, the remnant that escaped of the house of Judah is promised again to take root downward, and bear fruit upward; literally, shall add root to root, shall take firmer root than ever, as a tree often does after a storm; the ravaged land was to be newly stocked by the remnant that was to be saved out of Jerusalem. All these statements are supported by the declaration—"The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this." Thus the promise is not made in any human name or guaranteed by the conquests of human history; it is immediately connected with the very purpose and power of the Most High. Nor is this the only instance in which divine strength is promised on behalf of Judah and Israel: in verse thirty-four we read, "For I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake." We must always be careful to notice that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, and that no occasion is ever given for man to glory in man, but that everywhere from the beginning of religious history, as given in the Bible, it is God who is King, and Ruler, and Protector, and to him all the glory of deliverance and conquest undividedly belongs.

And "that night"—that night!—"The angel of the Lord went out and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses" (xix. 35). Again and again we say, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Let Rab-shakeh talk, let him deliver his burning messages, and when he has ceased his mockery it is not necessary for us to answer: God will defend his own cause. There is one Defender of the Faith.—His name? Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. There is one Head of the Church.—His name? King of kings, Lord of lords. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.

Here we stand. We think all history is upon the Christian side. But let us never forget that the finest argument in favour of Christianity is a Christian life.

ANNOTATED TEXT.

The remainder of the Second Book of Kings so strongly resembles former portions, and refers for amplification of its bare memoranda to the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah, that it will be sufficient to present it as thus annotated :—

2 Kings xxi.

1. Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign [therefore he was born during Hezekiah's dangerous illness], and reigned fifty and five years [a number confirmed by Josephus] in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hephzi-bah [in whom is my delight].

2. And he [falling under the influence of the chief Jewish nobles] did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel.

3. For he built up again the high places [where Jehovah was worshipped with idolatrous rites] which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, as did Ahab king of Israel; and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. [Star-worship from this time became a favourite idolatry.]

4. And he built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord said, In Jerusalem will I put my name.

5. And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord [not in the temple, but in the outer and inner courts].

6. And he made his son pass through the fire, and observed times [forbidden by the law (Lev. xix. 26)], and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards [forbidden (Lev. xix. 31)]; he wrought much wickedness in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger.

7. And he set a graven image of the grove [the carved work of the grove] that he had made in the house, of which the Lord said [see 2 Sam. vii. 10-13; 1 Kings viii. 29] to David, and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever:

8. Neither will I make the feet of Israel move any more out of the land which I gave their fathers; only if they will observe to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that my servant Moses commanded them.

9. But they hearkened not: and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel.

10. ¶ And the Lord spake by his servants the prophets, saying,

11. Because Manasseh king of Judah hath done these abominations, and hath done wickedly above all that the Amorites did, which were before him, and hath made Judah also to sin with his idols :

12. Therefore thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle.

13. And I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria [I will punish Jerusalem as I punished Samaria, and her kings as the house of Ahab], and the plummet of the house of Ahab : and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down [a metaphor signifying that Jerusalem was to be wholly swept away].

14. And I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies ; and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies ;

15. Because they have done that which was evil in my sight, and have provoked me to anger, since the day their fathers came forth out of Egypt, even unto this day.

16. Moreover Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another ; beside his sin wherewith he made Judah to sin, in doing that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. [“ Manasseh’s reign has been compared with some justice to that of Mary Tudor. The idolatrous party, which had remained sullen and discontented during the reforms of the preceding reign, came suddenly into power, and, burning with resentment, endeavoured to annihilate their adversaries by a furious persecution. . . . From end to end of Jerusalem were to be seen traces of the blood of the prophets. . . . According to tradition, Isaiah was among the first to perish.”]

17. ¶ Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, and all that he did, and his sin that he sinned, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah ? [(1) He called his son Amon, or Ammon, after the noted Egyptian god. (2) He not only allowed the establishment of human sacrifices to Molech, but dedicated to the purpose a special place in the valley of Hinnom, known as Tophet. (3) He removed the Ark of the Covenant from the Temple. (4) He destroyed all the copies of the law which he could find.]

18. And Manasseh slept with his fathers, and was buried in the garden of his own house, in the garden of Uzza [the catacomb of David was probably full] : and Amon his son reigned in his stead.

19. ¶ Amon was twenty and two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. And his mother’s name was Meshullemeth [friend of God], the daughter of Haruz of Jotbah.

20. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, as his father Manasseh did.

21. And he walked in all the way that his father walked in, and served the idols that his father served, and worshipped them :

22. And he forsook the Lord God of his fathers, and walked not in the way of the Lord.

23. ¶ And the servants of Amon conspired against him, and slew the king in his own house.

24. And the people of the land slew all them that had conspired against king Amon; and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his stead.

25. Now the rest of the acts of Amon which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?

26. And he was buried in his sepulchre in the garden of Uzza: and Josiah his son reigned in his stead.

2 Kings xxii.

1. Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jedidah [beloved], the daughter of Adaiah of Boscath [a city of Judah not far from Lachish].

2. And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left [undeviating obedience: the phrase is rare in the later Scriptures].

3. ¶ And it came to pass in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, that the king sent Shaphan [frequently mentioned by Jeremiah as his friend and protector] the son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, the scribe, to the house of the Lord, saying,

4. Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may sum the silver which is brought into the house of the Lord, which the keepers of the door have gathered of the people [during a period of six years]:

5. And let them deliver it into the hand of the doers of the work, that have the oversight of the house of the Lord: and let them give it to the doers [contractors or overseers] of the work which is in the house of the Lord, to repair the breaches of the house,

6. Unto carpenters, and builders, and masons, and to buy timber and hewn stone to repair the house.

7. Howbeit there was no reckoning made with them of the money that was delivered into their hand, because they dealt faithfully. [For the names of the honest overseers, see 2 Chron. xxxiv. 12.]

8. ¶ And Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law [no doubt the copy deposited according to Deut. xxxi. 26] in the house of the Lord. And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it.

9. And Shaphan the scribe came to the king, and brought the king word again, and said, Thy servants have gathered [emptied out] the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of them that do the work, that have the oversight of the house of the Lord.

10. And Shaphan the scribe shewed the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest hath delivered me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king.

11. And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes [partly in grief and horror, and partly in reverence].

12. And the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam [a protector of Jeremiah] the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Michaiah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asahiah a servant of the king's, saying,

13. Go ye, enquire of the Lord for me [seek out a prophet, for enquiry by Urim and Thummim had ceased], and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us.

14. So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe [the robes]; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college [the new or outer city];) and they communed with her.

15. And she said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me,

16. Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words [the threatenings] of the book which the king of Judah hath read:

17. Because they have forsaken [see Deut. xxix. 25-27] 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 kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched.

18. But to the king of Judah which sent you to enquire of the Lord, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, As touching the words which thou hast heard;

19. Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee [in unspoken prayer, or through symbolic action], saith the Lord.

20. Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers [Josiah was the last king of Judah honourably buried in Jerusalem], and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word **again.**

2 Kings xxiii.

1. And the king sent, and they gathered unto him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem.

2. And the king went up into the house of the Lord, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great : and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the Lord. [It has been pointed out that there were not more than two or three prophets in Jerusalem at this time--namely, Zephaniah, Urijah, and perhaps Jeremiah, and some critics have proposed to substitute the word "Levites" for the word "prophets." On the other hand, it has been contended, that although the three prophets mentioned are all that can be named as belonging to the order at that time, there is no reason to doubt that Judah contained other prophets who cannot now be recalled by name. We have been reminded that schools of the prophets were as common in Judah as in Israel. A high authority has said that there were hundreds of prophets contemporary with those whose writings we have.]

3. ¶ And the king stood by [upon] a pillar, and made a [renewed the] covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their [the king spoke in his public capacity] heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant.

4. And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, and the priests of the second order [pointing to the growing dignity of the high priest], and the keepers of the door, to bring forth out of the temple of the Lord all the vessels [all the apparatus of worship] that were made for Baal, and for the grove, and for all the host of heaven : and he burned them without Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried the ashes of them unto Beth-el.

5. And he put down [he caused to cease] the idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained [quite in accordance with the proceedings of Manassch and Amon] to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem ; them also that burned incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets [signs or constellations], and to all the host of heaven.

6. And he brought out the grove from the house of the Lord, without Jerusalem, unto the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron, and stamped it small to powder, and cast the powder thereof upon the graves of the children of the people. [Graves were regarded as unclean places.]

7. And he brake down the houses of the sodomites [self-mutilated devotees], that were by the house of the Lord, where the women [priestesses] wove hangings for the grove.

8. And he brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah, and defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beer-sheba [from the extreme north to the extreme south of the kingdom of Judah], and

brake down the high places of the gates that were in the entering in of the gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which were on a man's left hand at the gate of the city.

9. Nevertheless the priests of the high places came not up to the altar of the Lord in Jerusalem, but they did eat of the unleavened bread among their brethren [as if disqualified from serving at the altar by a bodily blemish].

10. And he defiled Topheth [so called from a root signifying "to burn"], which is in the valley of the children of Hinnom [the name attached to the valley west and south of Jerusalem, which guards the city on these two sides like a deep moat], that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech.

11. And he took away the horses [the Persians were accustomed to dedicate a chariot and horses to the sun] that the kings of Judah [Manasseh and Amon certainly] had given to the sun, at the entering in of the house of the Lord, by the chamber of Nathan-melech the chamberlain, which was in the suburbs [the expression occurs nowhere else], and burned the chariots of the sun with fire.

12. And the altars that were on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the Lord, did the king beat down, and brake them down from thence, and cast the dust of them into the brook Kidron.

13. And the high places that were before Jerusalem, which were on the right hand [always the southern portion] of the mount of corruption [Mount Olivet], 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, did the king defile.

14. And he brake in pieces the images, and cut down the groves, and filled their places with the bones of men [accounted unclean].

15. ¶ Moreover the altar that was at Beth-el, and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, had made, both that altar and the high place he brake down, and burned the high place, and stamped it small to powder, and burned the grove.

16. And as Josiah turned himself, he spied the sepulchres that were there in the mount, and sent, and took the bones out of the sepulchres, and burned [probably by divine command, as such burning was contrary to all ordinary Jewish feelings] them upon the altar, and polluted it, according to the word of the Lord which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words.

17. Then he said, What title [pillar] is that that I see? And the men of the city told him, It is the sepulchre of the man of God, which came from Judah, and proclaimed these things that thou hast done against the altar of Beth-el.

18. And he said, Let him alone; let no man move his bones. So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet that came out of Samaria.

19. And all the houses also of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke the Lord to anger, Josiah took away, and did to them according to all the acts that he had done in Beth-el.

20. And he slew all the priests of the high places that were there upon the altars, and burned men's bones upon them, and returned to Jerusalem.

21. ¶ And the king commanded [here the author returns to the narrative of what was done in Josiah's eighteenth year] all the people, saying, Keep the passover unto the Lord your God, as it is written in the book of this covenant.

22. Surely there was not holden such a passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah [see the details in 2 Chron. xxxv. 1-18];

23. But in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, wherein this passover was holden to the Lord in Jerusalem.

24. ¶ Moreover the workers with familiar spirits, and the wizards, and the images, and the idols, and all the abominations that were spied in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, did Josiah put away, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the Lord.

25. And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him. [A panegyric not to be pushed to the letter, but to be understood in the spirit.]

26. ¶ Notwithstanding the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations [wrath is heaped upon wrath] that Manasseh had provoked him withal.

27. And the Lord said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there.

28. Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? [Josiah lived thirteen years after the celebration of his great passover.]

29. ¶ In his days Pharaoh-nechoh king of Egypt went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates: and king Josiah went against him; and he slew him at Megiddo, when he had seen him. [In *The Speaker's Commentary* we learn that Megiddo lies on the caravan route from Egypt to Damascus, the ordinary line for an army. Josiah probably took up his position here, near the point where the road over the hill debouches upon the plain, in order to assail with all his force the head of the Egyptian column as it merged from the pass into more open ground. The battle would be fought, not at the point itself, which is on a hill, but in the valley at its foot, as is noted in 2 Chron. xxxv. 22. When Necho found his way blocked by Josiah's troops, he sent ambassadors to him, and tried to induce him to retire but as Josiah refused to move, Necho was obliged to fight. According

to one rendering, the Jewish king, following an unhappy precedent—that of Ahab—disguised himself before entering into the battle, and like Ahab was slain by a chance arrow.]

30. And his servants carried him in a chariot dead [mortally wounded] from Megiddo, and brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own sepulchre [in the new cemetery made by Manasseh]. And the people of the land took Jehoahaz [Shallum originally] the son [not the eldest] of Josiah, and anointed him [a rite observed only where there was some irregularity in the succession], and made him king in his father's stead.

31. ¶ Jehoahaz was twenty and three years old when he began to reign; and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah.

32. And he did that which was evil [Josephus calls him irreligious and of impure habits] in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done.

33. And Pharaoh-nechoh put him in bands [loaded him with chains] at Riblah in the land of Hamath, that he might not reign in Jerusalem; and put the land to a tribute [set a mulct upon the land] of an hundred talents of silver, and a talent of gold.

34. And Pharaoh-nechoh made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in the room of Josiah his father [Necho did not acknowledge that Jehoahaz had ever been king], and turned his name to Jehoiakim, and took Jehoahaz away: and he came to Egypt, and died there.

35. And Jehoiakim gave the silver and the gold to Pharaoh; but he taxed the land to give the money according to the commandment of Pharaoh: he exacted the silver and the gold of the people of the land, of every one according to his taxation, to give it unto Pharaoh-nechoh.

36. ¶ Jehoiakim was twenty and five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Zebudah, the daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah.

37. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done.

2 Kings xxiv.

1. In his days [605 B.C.] Nebuchadnezzar king [at this time Crown Prince] of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant three years: then he turned and rebelled against him. [Nebuchadnezzar, son of Nabopolassar, and second monarch of the Babylonian Empire, ascended the throne 604 B.C., and reigned forty-three years, dying 561 B.C. He is acknowledged to be the most celebrated of all the Babylonian sovereigns. No other heathen king occupies so much space in Scripture. It would be an interesting exercise for the young to bring together into one view all the passages in which the name of Nebuchadnezzar occurs.]

2. And the Lord sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians [Jer. xxxv. 11], and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the Lord [the expression "according to the word of the Lord" should be compared with Lev. xxvi. 17-25; Deut. xxviii. 25; Jer. iv. 20-29, v. 15-18; Hab. i. 6-10], which he spake by his servants the prophets.

3. Surely at the commandment of the Lord [no human power could have done this] came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did;

4. And also for the innocent blood that he shed: for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; which the Lord would not pardon.

5. ¶ Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? [The most eminent critics concur in regarding the latter part of Jehoiakim's reign as a period of considerable obscurity. In 2 Chronicles we read: "Against him came up Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and bound him in fetters, to carry him to Babylon" (2 Chron. xxxvi. 6). Jeremiah says: "He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (Jer. xxii. 19). In the text before us we are simply told that "Jehoiakim slept with his fathers." The most circumstantial account of Jehoiakim's later years is given in the book of Ezekiel: "Then the nations set against him on every side from the provinces, and spread their net over him: he was taken in their pit. And they put him in ward in chains, and brought him to the king of Babylon: they brought him into holds, that his voice should no more be heard upon the mountains of Israel" (Ezek. xix. 8, 9). In attempting to reconcile these various statements *The Speaker's Commentary* says: "Nebuchadnezzar must in the fifth or sixth year of Jehoiakim's revolt have determined to go in person to Syria, where matters were progressing ill, the revolt of Judæa in 602 B.C. having been followed by that of Tyre in 598 B.C. On his arrival he proceeded, probably from his headquarters at Riblah, to direct operations first against Tyre and then against Jerusalem. The troops which he employed against Jerusalem took Jehoiakim prisoner, and brought him in chains to Nebuchadnezzar's presence, who at first designed to convey him to Babylon, but afterwards had him taken to Jerusalem, where he was executed, and his body ignominiously treated (Jer. xxii. 19, and xxxvi. 30). Afterwards, when the Babylonians had withdrawn, the remains were collected and interred in the burying-place of Manasseh, so that the king ultimately "slept with his fathers."]

6. So Jehoiakim slept with his fathers: and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his stead.

7. And the king of Egypt came not again any more out of his land: for the king of Babylon had taken from the river of Egypt [not the Nile, but the Wady-el-Arish] unto the river Euphrates all that pertained to the king of Egypt.

8. ¶ Jehoiachin [Jehovah will establish] was eighteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months [by favour of Nebuchadnezzar]. And his mother's name was Nehushta [brass], the daughter of El-nathan of Jerusalem.

9. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father had done.

10. ¶ At that time [in the spring of the year] the servants [generals] of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against Jerusalem, and the city was besieged.

11. And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came against the city, and his servants did besiege [were besieging] it.

12. And Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out [surrendered at discretion] to the king of Babylon, he, and his mother [this mother is almost always mentioned with her son—a sign of her rank and dignity], and his servants, and his princes, and his officers: and the king of Babylon took him [as a prisoner] in the eighth year of his [Nebuchadnezzar's] reign.

13. And he carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the Lord, as the Lord had said [to Hezekiah, ch. xx. 17].

14. And he carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes [grandees of the court, and heads of the clans], and all the mighty men of valour, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths [literally "those who shut," corresponding to what we call locksmiths]: none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land. ["He carried away all Jerusalem" is a phrase which must be limited by what follows. It has been estimated that the entire number of the captives did not exceed 11,000, and they consisted of the princes, the mighty men of valour, and the craftsmen or artisans, who numbered about a thousand. The population of modern Jerusalem, which seems to be nearly of the same size as the ancient city, is estimated by the most judicious of modern observers at from 10,000 to 17,000. The population of the ancient city has been calculated from its area at 15,000. It is supposed that when Jeremiah, in chap. liii. 28, says that the number of captives carried off at this time was 3,023, his text has been corrupted.]

15. And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon, and the king's mother [note, she is placed before the king's wives], and the king's wives, and his officers, and the mighty [men of civil rank and dignity] of the land, those carried he into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon.

16. And all the men of might [men of valour], even seven thousand, and craftsmen and smiths a thousand, all that were strong [rather, all of them strong] and apt for war [warriors and doers of battle], even them the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon.

17. ¶ And the king of Babylon made Mattaniah his father's brother king in his stead, and changed his name to Zedekiah. [It has been pointed out that the tributary kings to whom their suzerain gave a new name were probably allowed to suggest the name that they would prefer to take. Mattaniah in fixing upon his seems to have aimed at securing the blessings promised by Jeremiah to the reign of a king whose name should be Jehovah-Tsidkenu—Jehovah our righteousness, Jer. xxiii. 5-8.]

18. Zedekiah was twenty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah.

19. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that Jehoiakim had done.

20. For through the anger of the Lord it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, until he had cast them out from his presence [there should be a full-stop after "presence"], that [And] Zedekiah rebelled [the date of the open revolt cannot be fixed] against the king of Babylon.

2 Kings xxv.

1. And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of that month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he, and all his host, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it; and they built forts against it round about.

2. And the city was besieged until the eleventh year of king Zedekiah. [The siege lasted one year, five months, and twenty-seven days.]

3. And on the ninth day of the fourth month the famine prevailed [reached a climax] in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land.

4. ¶ And the city was broken up [a breach was made in the walls by battering-rams, such as are depicted in the Assyrian sculptures], and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between two walls, which is by the king's garden: (now the Chaldees were against the city round about [the city was completely invested]:) and the king went the way toward the plain [the Arabah, or valley of the Jordan].

5. And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him.

6. So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him. [Nebuchadnezzar was not present at the storming of Jerusalem.]

7. And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes [a Babylonian punishment] of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass [literally, with the double brass], and carried him to Babylon [the blinding of Zedekiah need not have been done by the conqueror himself].

8. ¶ And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month, which is the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan [Nebo gave seed], captain of the guard [chief of executioners], a servant of the king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem:

9. And he burnt the house of the Lord, and the king's house [which were in the upper city], and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man's house burnt he with fire.

10. And all the army of the Chaldees, that were with the captain of the guard, brake down the walls of Jerusalem round about.

11. Now the rest of the people that were left in the city, and the fugitives that fell away to the king of Babylon, with the remnant of the multitude [the rank and file of the fighting men], did Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard carry away.

12. But the captain of the guard left of the poor of the land to be vine-dressers and husbandmen [ploughmen].

13. And the pillars of brass [understand *copper* throughout] that were in the house of the Lord, and the bases, and the brasen sea that was in the house of the Lord, did the Chaldees break in pieces, and carried the brass of them to Babylon.

14. And the pots, and the shovels, and the snuffers, and the spoons, and all the vessels of brass wherewith they ministered, took they away.

15. And the firepans [snuff-dishes], and the bowls, and such things as were of gold, in gold, and of silver, in silver, the captain of the guard took away.

16. The two pillars, one sea, and the bases which Solomon had made for the house of the Lord; the brass of all these vessels was without weight.

17. The height of the one pillar was eighteen cubits, and the chapter upon it was brass: and the height of the chapter three cubits; and the wreathen [lattice] work, and pomegranates upon the chapter round about, all of brass: and like unto these had the second pillar with wreathen work.

18. ¶ And the captain of the guard took Seraiah [probably the grandson of Hilkiyah] the chief [high] priest, and Zephaniah the second priest [probably the high priest's deputy], and the three keepers of the door [threshold]:

19. And out of the city [of David] he took an officer that was set over the men of war, and five men of them that were in the king's presence, which were found in the city, and the principal scribe of the host, which mustered [enrolled the names of such persons as were bound to serve in the army] the people of the land, and threescore men of the people of the land that were found in the city:

20. And Nebuzar-adan captain of the guard took these, and brought them to the king of Babylon to Riblah:

21. And the king of Babylon smote them, and slew them at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah was carried away out of their land.

22. ¶ And as for the people that remained in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had left, even over them he made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam [one of Josiah's princes], the son of Shaphan, ruler.

23. And when all the captains of the armies [who now came out of their hiding], they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah governor, there came to Gedaliah to Mizpah even Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and Johanan the son of Careah, and Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth the Netophathite, and Jaazaniah the son of a Maachathite, they and their men.

24. And Gedaliah sware to them, and to their men, and said unto them, Fear not to be the servants of the Chaldees : dwell in the land, and serve the king of Babylon ; and it shall be well with you.

25. But it came to pass in the seventh month, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the seed royal [probably suggests the motive], came, and ten men with him, and smote Gedaliah [at a friendly meal in the governor's own house], that he died, and the Jews and the Chaldees that were with him at Mizpah [soldiers left to support his authority].

26. And all the people, both small and great, and the captains of the armies, arose, and came to Egypt [and took Jeremiah with them, Jer. xliii. 6]: for they were afraid of the Chaldees.

27. ¶ And it came to pass in the seven and thirtieth year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the seven and twentieth day of the month, that Evil-merodach [Man of Merodach] king of Babylon in the year that he began to reign did lift up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah out of prison [gave him precedence over the other captive kings] ;

28. And he spake kindly to him, and set his throne above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon ;

29. And changed his prison garments : and he did eat bread continually before him all the days of his life.

30. And his allowance [besides his own sustenance at the royal table, Jehoiachin had a daily allowance from the treasury] was a continual allowance given him of the king, a daily rate for every day, all the days of his life. ["The author thus leaves the seed of David with a comforting thought—an anticipation of the dawn that was soon to break, . . . promising an ultimate restoration of the seed of Abraham to God's grace and favour."]

THE

BOOKS OF THE CHRONICLES.

THE best modern criticism has represented that the two Books of Kings originally formed a single work, and that the two Books of Chronicles were also a single production, undivided in the Hebrew copies so late as the time of Jerome. It appears that the present division into two books, which certainly occurs in the most suitable place, was first made by the Seventy translators, from whom it was adopted by Saint Jerome in the Vulgate, and so passed into the other versions, and the modern printed editions of the Hebrew Bible. According to *The Speaker's Commentary*, the Seventy translators were dissatisfied with the appellation, which is certainly not very appropriate, and substituted one which they regarded as more suitable to the contents of the work, and the position that it occupies among the historical books of the Bible. The curious name which the Seventy translators fixed upon was *paralipomena*, a word which means "the things omitted," and was intended to imply that Chronicles is supplementary to Samuel and Kings, written mainly for the purpose of supplying the omissions of the earlier history. For this reason it is not necessary for us to go through the Book of Chronicles with the same minuteness as that which we have bestowed upon the earlier records. It will be enough to fix upon points here and there which may be taken as elucidatory of the whole. The English word "Chronicles" relates primarily to the question of

time ; it may be taken, therefore, as a day by day book, rather than as constituting a consolidated and exact history, in a purely literal sense, of the events which are recorded. In Bishop Ellicott's Commentary, considerable attention is given to the relation which the Chronicles bear to the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah. According to that high authority, the Books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah resemble each other very closely, not only in style and language, which is that of the latest age of Hebrew writing, but also in the general point of view, in the manner in which the original authorities are handled, and the sacred law expressly cited, and above all in the marked preference for certain topics, such as genealogical and statistical registers, descriptions of religious rites and festivals, detailed accounts of the sacerdotal classes and their various functions, notices of the music of the temple, and similar matters connected with the organisation of public worship. Upon these resemblances in manner Bishop Ellicott founds a strong presumption of unity of authorship, which he represents as being asserted by most modern scholars. The Commentator upon the Chronicles in Bishop Ellicott's Commentary says : "As regards Chronicles and Ezra, this result is further indicated by the strange termination of the Chronicles in the middle of an unfinished sentence, which finds its due completion in the opening verses of Ezra (comp. 2 Chron. xxxvi. 22-23, with Ezra i. 1-4). Had Chronicles been an independent work, it might have ended less abruptly at 2 Chron. xxxvi. 21, but there is no real break in the narrative between 2 Chron. xxxvi. and Ezra i. ; and the awkwardness of the existing division simply points to the perplexity of some editor or transcriber who did not know where to leave off. It is absurd to lay any stress upon the too trivial variants between the two passages ; they are not marks of an editorial hand but merely errors of transcription."

It is not our intention, however, in writing this Bible

for the People, to enter minutely into such criticisms, at the same time it is important to note the probable unity of the authorship of the books in question. It has been argued that the orthography and language of the Chronicles, taken together with their Levitical tendency, conspire to suggest a comparatively late origin ; whether this is so or not, it has been regarded as matter of certainty that both in the genealogy of the house of David, and in that of the high priests, the writer descends several generations below the age of Ezra and Nehemiah, who flourished about B.C. 445. There is little but confusion amongst the highest authorities who attempt to assign the date of the Chronicles. One says it cannot be earlier than B.C. 538. A great German critic puts it down as B.C. 400 ; and a still greater critic, Ewald, assigns it to the time of Alexander the Great, B.C. 336-323 ; another distinguished critic gives it as his opinion that the Book of the Chronicles was not written till about B.C. 260. *The Spaker's Commentary* argues that if Ezra was the author, the date could not well be much later than B.C. 435, for Ezra probably died about that time. As to the authorship, it is by very general consent ascribed to Ezra. The same spirit breathes through the Chronicles and the Book of Ezra, and numerous little expressions almost identical seem to point to the same hand. As to the writer's sources of authority, it may be pointed out that his most frequent reference is to a general history, the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah, called in one place, the Book of the Kings of Israel. [For proof of this abbreviated title, see 2 Chron. xxxiii. 18, where the words cannot be misapprehended, as the kingdom of Israel proper had ceased to exist.] The Book of the Kings of Israel is supposed to have been a compilation from the two histories constantly mentioned in Kings,—namely, the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel, and the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. It has been well pointed out that it was not the "Book of Kings," as we know it as part of the sacred

canon, since it contains the deeds of the monarchs "first and last" (2 Chron. xvi. 11, xxv. 26, xxviii. 26, xxxv. 27), and it also contains "all their wars, and all their ways" (2 Chron. xxvii. 7). From incidental phrases it would appear that the author avails himself of several partial histories, probably the works of prophets who dealt with particular portions of the national annals. Some twelve or thirteen works of this class have been identified, for example ;—" the Chronicle of King David " (1 Chron. xxvii. 24) ; " the Book of Samuel the Seer," " the Book of Nathan the Prophet," " the Book of Gad the Seer " (1 Chron. xxix. 29) ; " the Prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite," " the Visions of Iddo the Seer " (2 Chron. ix. 29) ; " the Acts of Shemaiah the Prophet," " the Commentary of the Prophet Iddo," " the Acts of Jehu the son of Hanani," and others. We have no precise knowledge of any of these works, but they were evidently considered by the writer of the Chronicles as books which treated with some fulness of the histories of the kings. To the supposition that the Books of Samuel, Gad, and Nathan, mentioned in 1 Chron. xxix. 29, are simply our present two Books of Samuel under a different title, *The Speaker's Commentary* says there is perhaps no very serious objection. It is enough for our purpose, however, to accept the Books of Chronicles as they are given to us in the sacred canon, and to find what we can in them of instruction adapted to our own civilisation, and the discipline and culture of our own spiritual life.

As to the scope of the work, it opens with an outline of primeval history from Adam to David ; the Pentateuchal narratives are hardly touched upon at all, and the times of the Judges and the reign of Saul are passed over in silence : the first section of the work takes the driest and most succinct form imaginable, merely a series of genealogies interspersed with brief historical notices : in tracing the generations from Adam to Jacob, the writer glances at the twelve tribes, lingering longest over Judah,

the tribe of David, and Levi, the tribe of the priests ; then, it has been pointed out, his horizon narrows at once from all history to the southern kingdom only, comprising Benjamin, Judah, Jerusalem ; then is noted the death of Saul as transitional to the reign of David, which is dwelt upon at length : the second and main portion of the work relates the history of the kings who reigned in Jerusalem from David to Zedekiah, covering a period of between four and five centuries. The third part contains a history of the restored community under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

The Speaker's Commentary deals very frankly with one or two charges which have been brought against the two Books of Chronicles. The assailants of those books seek to prove that its author contradicts himself ; that he contradicts other scriptural writers ; and that he is guilty of mistakes from ignorance, or misunderstanding of his authorities. The same Commentary says—"The charges of self-contradiction may be disposed of without difficulty. They seem to amount to four. Asa is said to have "taken away the high places out of all the cities of Judah" (2 Chron. xiv. 5) ; yet we are told that in his time "the high places were not taken away" (2 Chron. xv. 17). Similarly of Jehoshaphat it is said that "he took away the high places and groves out of Judah" (2 Chron. xvii. 6) ; yet "the high places were not taken away" (2 Chron. xx. 33). Hezekiah and Josiah both celebrate passovers, the like of which had not been known in Judah for ages (2 Chron. xxx. 26, and xxxv. 18) ; lastly, we hear of a king's son slain by Zichri, early, as it would seem, in the reign of Ahaz, though Ahaz at his accession is no more than twenty years of age (2 Chron. xxviii. 1, 7). With respect to the high places, the true explanation probably is, that, when a monarch is said to have taken them away, the writer speaks broadly and with special reference to the monarch's aim and intention ; while, when it is remarked that they still continued to exist, the

writer refers to the actual fact, and notes a failure in the full carrying out of the king's wish. It is evidently not likely that a writer would in terms directly contradict himself *within a chapter*, unless he had a ready means of reconciling the two conflicting statements in his own mind, and expected the common-sense of his readers to supply it. In regard to the two passovers of Hezekiah and Josiah, a contradiction can no otherwise be made out than by assuming that in both passages, or at any rate 2 Chron. xxxv. 18, it is meant that *no passover at all* had been celebrated since the time mentioned. But the writer carefully guards himself against this misapprehension of his meaning by using the expressions "like this," "like to that," "such a passover"; which make it clear that he means only that on each of the two occasions specified the feast was celebrated with peculiar pomp and solemnity, not that it was not celebrated at other times also. The occurrence of the phrase "king's son" (2 Chron. xxviii. 7) constitutes a real difficulty, but falls very far short of a "self-contradiction." For, in the first place, it is not said in what year of Ahaz, Maaseiah was slain, nor is it said that he fell in battle, nor that he was Ahaz's son. Most probably he was the son of Jotham, who in his father's lifetime had been invested with the office whereto the title "king's son" attached, and had retained it under his brother Ahaz. Possibly he was a son of Ahaz, put to death by Zichri, though a mere boy. Or, if the war with Pekah took place later in the reign of Ahaz than is commonly supposed, he may have been a son of Ahaz slain in battle, and grown up. Any of these suppositions, which are all compatible with the text of Chronicles, would reconcile the death of the "king's son," recorded 2 Chron. xxviii. 7, with the statement made (in verse 1) that Ahaz was but twenty at his accession.

These quotations are from high authorities, not that we attach any particular value to the objections against which they are directed, but simply to show ordinary

readers that whatever apparent discrepancies may have been discovered in the historical records of the Bible, they have been either frankly recognised by religious commentators, or have been so far answered and reconciled as to show that those which have not yet been treated, or which may come suddenly upon the reader, are quite as likely to be open to frank and satisfactory treatment. In perusing such annals as the Kings and Chronicles, general readers must not imagine that what appears to them to be literal discrepancies are real historical discords. Upon all such matters they should consult the highest scholarship of the day, but above all things be sure to seek out the base-line of thought and purpose, and abide by that, leaving others who are competent to deal with such difficulties to settle all questions of chronology, discrepancy, and apparently direct contradiction as between historical events.

1 Chronicles 1.

THE SECOND ADAM—THE MIGHTY DEAD.

THIS chapter should be taken as one lesson from beginning to end, and having read it through the reader will certainly be filled with wonder at the list of strange and even marvellous names. The first question that will arise must naturally be, What do we know of these people? The answer is that we know next to nothing about them, and yet there is the fact that they actually lived, exerted an influence, concluded their mission, and then passed away. It is always of importance vividly to realise the fact that there are other people in the world beside ourselves. This may seem to be common-place, but in reality it is full of deep suggestion. How difficult it is, for example, for an Englishman to believe that there are other countries besides England! As a geographical matter he would not doubt it for a moment, for the Englishman keeps his atlas and looks at it from time to time for various purposes. But this is not the question. It is not enough to admit that the geography includes within its limits a great number of nations; we must so realise the nationalities in their variety and in their unity as to feel more and more that the human race is one, and is under the same beneficent providence. The last idea that will be driven out of the mind of an Englishman is that he is the superior person of the world. He looks upon all other languages as but signs of ignorance on the part of those who speak them. He smiles at the civilisation of other countries with which he is unfamiliar. He rudely comments upon the habits of people who do not belong to his own empire. Who can understand the smile of ignorance? Who can utterly exhaust all the meaning of the contempt which is even civilly suppressed? In order to overcome all this there must be much more intercourse between nationalities, and greatly enlarged sphere of education, much

deeper study of history and national polity than we have yet entered upon. However great may be the name of an Englishman, the word Man is greater than any epithet which can be attached to it, whether the epithet refer to nationality, to personal attraction, or to social position. Jesus Christ came into the world to teach us the value of the word Man: he himself was the Son of man—a title the full meaning of which we have not yet realised, but when we do realise it there will be great advances made in positive democracy, and more attention will be paid to the consolidated wisdom of the ages than to the arbitrary authority of single persons or officers.

The next effect of a perusal of this chapter will probably be something of the nature of wonder that we should have become connected with the extraordinary personalities given in this great list. What have we to do with Enosh, Jered, Meshech, or Gomer? Now, this is the miracle of Christ, that we should come to be related to all these names, not perhaps in any explicable way, which can be stated and defended in words, but mysteriously, yet vitally, as receiving atmospheric impressions, or inheriting intellectual estates, or entering upon the possession of new territories of thought. Jesus Christ came to claim the whole world in its unity, to be indeed the second Adam, carrying forward all the meaning of the first to its highest expressions. He was not one of a multitude, but the Head of the new race. It is suggestive that the very name Adam is applied to him by the Apostle Paul. He is called "the second Adam" which is the Lord from heaven. Other nations have had more or less imperfect visions of ancient history and of the unity of the race, but in the Bible alone do we find an authoritative declaration made concerning the antiquity and unity of man and the ultimate destiny of the human race. The Chaldeans had a tradition of ten antediluvian patriarchs or kings. They made the duration of this first period of human history four hundred and thirty-two thousand years. All other chronicles have been bewildered by their polytheism, whereas in the Hebrew history we have all the sublime unity which would seem to be necessitated by the monotheism of the writers. They who believed in one God were likely to believe in one humanity. Monotheism accounts

for the two commandments which relate first to God, and then to man. There is no theological diversity, multitudinousness, and consequent confusion: the Hebrews knew but one God, one fountain and origin of things, and they were consistent with their philosophy and their theology in tracing the human race back as it is traced in the Book of Genesis. It cannot but be an intellectual blessing, to take the very lowest ground, that we should accustom ourselves to think of all nationalities as one. Out of this practice will come an enquiry as to the varieties of habit which are discoverable in all human history—how to account for such variety, how to account for the difference in colour, stature, language, and usage of all people? Ethnology has some answer to give, but the only complete answer which covers the entire area of the question is to be found in the Bible. Not only is it an intellectual blessing to realise the unity of the human race, it has the effect of an inspired prophecy upon our whole thinking and outlook. How are these varieties to be brought into conscious reconciliation and brotherhood? That they can never bring themselves to such an issue has been abundantly proved by the abortive efforts which have covered the space of innumerable centuries. The Christian's hope is in Christ. The Son of man makes all men one. To touch him is to enter into the mystery and joy of universal brotherhood. To know the Son is to be made free; if the Son shall make us free we shall be free indeed. All gropings, endeavours, attempts, and efforts in the direction of bringing the world into conscious unity, are but so many prophecies, all but inspired, that there must be One somewhere, who holds the answer to this mystery, and who can bring to consummation this sacred and beneficent miracle.

Another effect arising from a thoughtful perusal of this chapter will be an awful familiarity with what may be called the death-roll of the human race. What a crowded cemetery is this! Kings, princes, leaders, mighty men, fair women,—hunters living upon the mountain, citizens dwelling in the plain,—statesmen, legislators,—all have come and gone; all have been laid in the common dust. When one man dies a solemn feeling is produced by his decease: but let another die, and a whole family

be added to the number of those who have departed, then a whole township, then an entire county, then a complete nation; and let this process of addition go on from century to century, and at last we come to expect death, to be familiar with it, and to care nothing about it, except at the point where it happens to affect us personally. Who could bear to look at once upon all the deaths which are occurring during any one hour of the world's history? We do but see our own dead. The father only knows of one dead child, and that child is his own. He hears of the death of others, he reads the death-list day by day as an item of general intelligence, but no man realises the dreadful extent of the ravages of death during any one hour of the world's career. The literature of our tombstones would fill a great library. Who could calculate the acreage of paper that would be needed to have copied upon it all the writing that is to be found in the cemeteries of the world? Yet, notwithstanding this continual removal of men, there is a continual influx of successors, so that the earth abideth for ever, even as to its human phases and relationships. Men go down in the night-time and are not missed in the morning. The greatest names in history pass away into partial oblivion, and new energies come to occupy the attention of the world. Blessed be God, no man can put away from him the thought of his own personal death. A right acceptance of that fact should lead to religious consideration and religious preparation. Death is not something that occurred long ago, or something that will transpire in distant ages: death will come as a guest to every house, and as a guest, if we may so say it, to every heart; and every man must make his own acquaintance with the last grim enemy. We cannot tell how we may die, but, thanks be to God, it is in our power to say in some measure at least how we may live. Christ has ennobled us by the thought that we may so live in him and for him as actually to abolish death, in so far as it is either a penalty or a degradation. Living in the Lord Jesus Christ, serving him diligently, acknowledging only his mastery over all our thoughts, feelings, and actions, we may come to long for death, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better; and in that sublime ecstasy we shall know nothing of the bitterness of death, but shall recognise in the last

messenger one who is sent to introduce us into the presence of the King.

What havoc is made in this chapter of the grandeur of titular dignity; what brilliant names are here; and yet they have become the names of the dead. The dukes of Edom, duke Timnah, duke Aliah, duke Jetheth, duke Aholibamah, duke Elah, duke Pinon, duke Kenaz, duke Teman, duke Mibzar, duke Magdiel, duke Iram,—what are they now? where are their robes? where the pomp and circumstance that made them figures in their time? And as for the kings of Edom, and Bela, and Jobab, and Husham, and Hadad, and Samlah, and Shaul, and Baalhanan,—is there not one of them left to represent the dignity of the house of Edom? are they clean gone for ever? Can spaces that have been occupied by kings be emptied of all glory and renown, and throw themselves open to uses of the people? We know that such things do happen as a mere matter of fact, but we seldom allow them to come so near to us as to produce a deeply religious impression upon our thought and feeling. If all these mighty men have come and gone, let us not attempt to put away from ourselves the common-place fact that we shall also go, and the place which knows us now shall know us no more for ever. The difference between the kings and the dukes of Edom and ourselves is, that they have a name on historical pages, whilst we have no names but in our own family Bible or on our own particular tombstone. But a fame is open to us: the fame of doing good is a renown which any man may enjoy, and though it may make but little figure as to historical importance, it will be recognised at the last by the words—“Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

The writer of this chapter shows us how necessary it is to understand the whole, if we would really understand the part. He boldly puts down the name of Adam at the head of his list. But is not the writer going to furnish the history of the kings of Israel and of Judah; is he not in the last resort to occupy a still narrower ground? Why, then, does he begin at the very beginning? Simply because in order to understand any one

man we must understand the whole man, or humanity. This gives importance to every individual. He is not self-contained and self-measurable, as if he had no relation to any who have gone before; every man may be said to be the sum-total of all the men that have preceded him upon the stage of history. If he is not so consciously, yet he is more or less so unconsciously. The man who is born to-day is born under infinite responsibilities: he has but few experiments to make, for all experiments have been made before he was born; it may come that the very last man who enters into this state of being may have nothing to do but to accept conclusions, for the little earth has been understood through and through, in every line and particle, so that nothing further remains to be discovered by science or argued by philosophy. Think of it—the little world utterly exhausted; every atom of dust has been examined, every insect has been anatomised, every flower has been made to give up its secret, and there is nothing now to be done on what we call “the great globe itself” but to accept the conclusions which other men have discovered. Think of the exhaustibleness of time and space, as these terms are now known to us! Is there then no sphere that may be described by the word “infinity”? Is there no duration to which the term “eternity” alone is applicable? It is our joy to believe that this world is a mere letter in the great alphabet of stars and planets, and that all we know of time is less than a syllable in the infinite literature of the revelation which is yet to be made. We are not ignorant of the past, nor are we ungrateful for it, but we shall best show our wisdom and our thankfulness by doing what we now can to make the future rich in thought and energetic in beneficence. The true use of the present is to brighten the darkness and lighten the burden of the future.

1 Chronicles ii.

THE SONS OF ISRAEL: THEIR GENEALOGY—TYPICAL SINNERS.

ALL this elaborate tracing of family lines shows that the historian is about to conduct his enquiries upon a complete and exact basis. We acquire confidence in the man by the minuteness of the very details, which at first taxes both our

patience and our memory. The names may be so read as to constitute only an elaborate catalogue, in which case the spirit of unity would be lost, and the whole process would end in nothingness and disappointment; on the other hand, the list may be so read as to impress the mind with the mystery of unity, suggesting not only a compactness of an individual family or race, but the solidarity of human nature itself.

With the sons of Esau, Edom, and the sons of Israel, in their mere personality we have nothing to do, but if it can be shown that they are part and parcel of a great continuity ending in our own existence and action, they become important in that degree. As a point of immediate criticism it is interesting to note, that the chronicler so far confirms the records which are given in Genesis, as to quote them without doubt or question. It is something to know that by so much the most ancient history of the Bible is confirmed. We have seen that the list given in the former chapter, and occupying something like eighteen verses, is an abridgment of the tenth chapter of Genesis. The importance of this may be seen from the fact that the old Jewish interpreters make out of this very list a total of seventy nations. The list has been well described as a classified summary of the ethnical and geographical knowledge of Hebrew antiquity. With a zeal which cannot but excite admiration, we observe that the chronicler is seized with the determination to write a history which shall begin at the first man, Adam, and go through, as it were, every family and tribe descendant from the head of the race. It is interesting to see that what may be called the spirit of universality, is already beginning to disclose itself in the very structure of the Bible.

We may compare the chronicler to an economist, who is determined that nothing human shall be lost, but that every man, woman, and child shall be scheduled and accounted for, the meanest having a line as well as the greatest.

Animated by this determination, the historian passes from Adam to the sons of Japheth the Fair, on to the sons of Ham, the dark-skinned or swarthy men of Ethiopia, then on to the ten races of Canaan, including Heth or the Hittite race, the Amorite or the hill-men of trans-Jordan, the Hivite dwelling on the slopes

of Lebanon, the Arkite, and the Sinite dwelling to the west of northern Lebanon, and the rest of the ten races; then he passes to the sons of Shem inhabiting Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, Aram, and other places; then he sketches the ten generations from Shem to Abraham, with a particularity that would give a human family register of all who came and went in that marvellous period, and so he passes on, showing familiar acquaintance with all the names and places which constituted the foundations and earliest courses of patriarchal and Jewish history.

In this chapter the narrative takes up the lines connected with the sons of Israel, naming them in order, and forming an introduction to their genealogies, which occupy chapters ii.-viii. All we can attempt to do with a mass of names so strange and bewildering is to fasten upon a point here and there, which may set forth certain definite aspects of human character. Mark, for example, the inevitable line upon which we come, so early as the third verse of this chapter (ii.). Whatever infirmities or sins may have marked the history of all the men and tribes given in the first verse, they are passed over by this chronicler in significant silence. It must not be forgotten, however, that all their infirmities and iniquities are written with most graphic vividness in the Book of Genesis. But in the third verse we have this line—"and Er, the firstborn of Judah, was evil in the sight of the Lord."—This character is taken word for word from Genesis xxxviii. 7. It would seem as if a certain ineradicable stigma specially attached to certain sins, rendering necessary that they should be recalled from time to time, to illustrate the most modern phases of wickedness. There have been, so to say, many typical sinners in the history of the world; for example, no name can take the place of Cain, when the sin of fratricide shocks the sentiment of society; Achan will always be a leading name in connection with religious felonies; Joab will always be associated with the vilest forms of treachery and cruelty; and Judas Iscariot can have no rival so long as the world endureth. Take, as another instance, the happy references made to the Calebite stock in verses 18-24. It is needful to remember that not only are these names particularly associated with evil, there are also names which God has been pleased to set on high, as marking

his encouragement and reward of virtue. This manifestation of justice is to be carefully noted throughout the whole development of biblical history. We cannot think of the wickedness of Cain without being reminded of the purity of Abel; if we are shocked by the felony of Achan, we cannot but be profoundly impressed with the virtue and conduct of Joshua, and so on throughout the whole of the impartial and fearless record. The instances of both kinds which we find in Holy Scripture are mere examples or specimens of the records which are kept on high. It is impossible for any human historian to put down all the iniquities of his race, but here, we may say, with man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible. We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

Other parts of the list remind us of how possible it is to exist in useful and happy relations without the family history being marked by any characteristic which invests it with peculiar fame. We read in verse thirty-four, "Now Sheshan had no sons, but daughters." It has been pointed out that the line of Sheshan-Jarha is pursued for thirteen generations of direct descent, but nothing is known of any of its members from any other source. The last-named member of the family, Elishama, is the twenty-fourth generation specified from Judah. Sometimes all that can be found of a family, is but the re-appearance of the family name. Even in the case of princes, this has been illustrated. Several of the names which occur in this line recur in the house of David, as for example, Nathan, Obed, Azariah (a by-name of King Uzziah), Shallum, Jehamiah, and Elishama. We see how one nation may become actually absorbed in another, and thus all original characteristics may be relatively lost. Deuteronomy rules (xxiii. 7, 8) that, in the third generation, persons of Egyptian blood are to be treated as full Israelites. [Compare Exodus xii. 38 with Numbers xi. 4.] We shall see that the Egyptian element was recognised in Judah. Even the name Jarha has an Egyptian cast, some commentators suppose that it is derived from a root which signifies "great river," and that river has been identified as the Nile. But all this is simply illustrative of the great and glorious truth disclosed by the personality and ministry of the Son of man. All so-called absorptions of one nation by another,

were but relative and suggestive. It is not until we come to Jesus Christ the Second Adam, the Lord from heaven, that we come to the glorious truth that God hath made of one blood all nations of men, and that in Christ Jesus there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek. If any man be in Christ Jesus he is a new creature, old things have passed away, and all things have become new. The reconciliation of race, the unification of the world, is the miracle of the cross of Christ. The careful reading of all such histories, as are given in the Old Testament, cannot but prepare the mind to receive the doctrine that Jesus Christ was more than a man : more than a mere Jew. Account for it as we may, he stretched himself across the whole human race, and at last offered himself to redeem every living soul. He made no ethnic difficulties. Language was never accounted a stumbling-block. He looked beneath all superficial, local, and personal differences and divisions, and saw the common heart beating in the human breast. He puzzled the world with no metaphysics that could be understood by one type of men only ; he preached a gospel of which even little children could comprehend somewhat, and made an appeal to sentiments acknowledged the world over. Had he been a pedant, he would have prided himself upon special knowledge of out-of-the-way peoples and kindreds and tongues ; had he been a self-seeker, he would have received honour by whomsoever it was offered ; had he been a Jew only, he would have flattered the people over whom he claimed supremacy, and have poured contempt upon all alien lands, but because he was the Son of God, the Son of man, Alpha and Omega, he made himself of no reputation, but took upon him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, that he might work out for the whole human race a Redemption, simple, beneficent, infinite in meaning, before which reason bows down in homage, and conscience stands at once in consent and adoration.

1 Chronicles iii.

SOME STRANGE NAMES—THE SONS OF DAVID—ZERUBBABEL.

Who has not in a foreign hostelry anxiously looked over the visitors' list in the hope that he might find some familiar name,

and so put himself upon the track of a friendly predecessor in the journey which he is pursuing? Who has not also wandered through an unknown cemetery, questioning every tombstone, if haply he might detect some name which would awaken the memories of his youth, or connect him with the associations of his own locality? So here, having read from the beginning of the Bible up to this point, we have, so to say, contracted acquaintance with a great number of persons; and now that a long list of names is put before us for perusal, what more natural than that we should in the first instance look for the names which awakened attention in our earliest studies? But the names are very strange. Nearly all of them are absolutely unknown to us. Think of Ithream, and Shobab, and Nogah, and Nepheg, and Japhia. These names awaken no interest, enrich us with no reminiscences, call us back to no trysting-place where we entered into vow with God or man. These names are, so to say, many variations of alphabetic symbols, making no appeal either to memory or imagination. Is it possible that we ourselves may become as unknown to the generations which are to succeed us? In answering this enquiry we are not addressing an appeal to ambition, when we say that it lies within our power, so to live as to establish a good and honest name in at least some limited family circle. It may be that the most of human life is predestined to be but negative as to influence and renown. But whilst the mountains are noble, and are so lifted up as to be conspicuous from afar, we must never forget that the lowlands may acquire fame for civilisation and fruitfulness. Neither must we forget that there is a false fame, which continually tempts selfish ambition, and also a holy fame which will not be disclosed until God himself pronounces judgment upon all the actors in human history.

The name of Daniel is found in the first verse of this chapter. He is mentioned as a son of David. So familiar are we with the name of Daniel that we seem to limit it to one man. There would appear to be in all history but one Daniel great in goodness and in wisdom. His name has come to be but another word for sagacity and judgment. We may here remind ourselves that Daniel the son of David is called Chileab in the Book of

Samuel. If names may be taken as indicative of character then we come upon the strange thought that Daniel was nicknamed "dog," that being the literal rendering of the word Chileab. Was the name deserved? Is this but a mark of contempt on the part of every speaker? It is possible to have two names and for the alias to be utterly undeserved. We are not to suppose that a man is bad because his contemporaries have pronounced judgment against him. Many a man is called mean, timid, cunning, selfish, calculating, ambitious and the like by those who only see certain aspects of character and are unable to determine the balance and effect of all his faculties and dispositions. We should beware of the easy and foolish cleverness which can invent nicknames. This teaching might be remembered with advantage alike in private and public circles. Even religious men have not been slow to mis-name one another by giving undue prominence to single characteristics and withdrawing the general line of gift and purpose from public criticism. It may seem but a common-place to say that Daniel was not a "dog" simply because he was so described by malignant or perverted wit. Think of men's best names. Look out for men's strongest and noblest qualities. Leave all nicknames and flippant depreciation to those who, having outlived their own character, seek to bring others into some degradation. Take some of the names of David's sons as given in the fifth verse of this chapter. The sons in question were born to David in the city of Jerusalem. As we read their names they convey no meaning to us, but as defined etymologically we may get a new aspect of part at least of the king's household. *Ibhar*, signifies "God chooseth;" *Elishama*, "God heareth;" *Eliphelet*, "God is deliverance;" *Eliada*, "God knoweth." Keeping in mind the well-established fact that in Oriental countries, it was customary to mark family history by the names of the children, we can but be struck with the deep religiousness of the family record now before us. There is no trace of atheism made by the hand of David in all his family register. In every child David sees some new revelation of God. Every son was an historical mark. Every life was a new phase of providence. Blessed is the man who need not look beyond his own house for signs and proofs of the manifold and

never-ceasing goodness of God. Is it not true that even in our own land and time, religious memories or providential events are brought up by the name of every child? One brings up the memory of great darkness, another of peculiar pain, another recalls the brightest morning that ever dawned, and another stands at the beginning of a course of providences, brilliant in their glory and deeply pathetic in inexpressible tenderness. In this sense, no child comes into the world as a solitary visitor. Each birth is the heading of a new chapter, and each chapter falls naturally out of the one which immediately preceded it. Shame be on those who can receive providences without noting them, who can allow God to pour out the whole heaven upon earth, and yet set up no sign of adoring gratitude. It was not so with David. If faults many and great, and never to be excused, marred the harmony and dignity of his character, yet never did he forget that God was his Shepherd and that to God all praises evermore belong.

We come upon the same view in looking at the names of the kings of the house of David. These names are found in verses ten to sixteen. Take examples: Rehoboam literally means "the kinsman," and that term must be understood as giving the idea "God hath enlarged," that is, has added to the number of the family and so multiplied all domestic incidents, resources and securities; Abia, signifies "God is Father;" Jehoshaphat, "God judgeth;" Joram (Jehoram), "God is high;" Amaziah points to strength; Azariah points to help; Jotham indicates perfectness; and Hezekiah signifies "God is my strength." We have often had occasion to point out the irony of names. Whilst in our case there may be no irony of a nominal kind, that is to say, no discrepancy between our names and our actions, yet there may be palpable irony of a circumstantial kind; for example, a man may be surrounded by wealth and yet may be known for his meanness, so that the poor receive nothing from his table, nor are the weak assisted by his hands. The wealthy man who is mean is a self-contradiction. Others of us may have the privilege of living in Christian families, yet in our spirit and thought we may belong to the coldest paganism. The family altar may be but a pile of stones, and the family repute for

Christian consecration may be but a concealment of the deepest worldliness of thought and desire. In this direction we may discover what may be termed many unconscious hypocrisies. The member of a Christian family might not consciously use the Christian repute of the household for the cover of an unsympathetic heart. The irony as we have said may be purely circumstantial. Yet even here there should be some attempt made to behold claims of honesty. The man who is mean should never make a bid to be regarded by the public as a generous person. The man who is profoundly worldly in every aspiration and arrangement should not use a Christian pedestal as a mere convenience enabling him to take a wider outlook or to exercise a larger influence.

In verses nineteen and twenty, we come upon a name with which we are familiar, Zerubbabel—this was the famous prince who, with Joshua the high priest, led the first colony of restored exiles from Babylon to Canaan under the edict of Cyrus. This occurred some five centuries before the birth of Christ. The name of Zerubbabel's father was Pedaiah, which signifies "God hath redeemed." The name of the father would seem to have been an inspiration to the son. For truly he was a redeemer and leader of his people. Thus all the names of the kindred and sons of Zerubbabel indicate the religious hopefulness of the people at the dawn of the restoration. All this matter connected with the signification of names is notable, because it points to the greatest incident of all, which we find in the person of the Son of God, who was called Jesus, because he should save his people from their sins. It will be found that all hints of this kind discoverable in the Old Testament, which seem to have little or no value in their own immediate connection, are in reality parts of the living line which terminates in Jesus Christ, and then in him takes a new departure in the direction of all Christian service and heroism.

1 Chronicles iv.

SOME FAMILIAR NAMES—JABEZ—CALEB.

In this chapter we find a compilation of scattered and broken notices, relating to the families or clans of Judah, with references

to their settlements and increase at a time which is not specifically determined; this section is first of all a supplement to the account of Judah already given in the first, second, and third chapters, and is also an instalment of the similar survey of the other tribes, which is given in the fourth chapter, from the twenty-fourth to the twenty-seventh verses. The remainder of the chapter is occupied with similar notices relating to the tribe of Simeon.

The ninth verse contains a reference to Jabez; the whole history is brief:—

“And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren; and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him with sorrow. And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested.”

Nothing more is known of this Jabez or of his brethren. *The Speaker's Commentary* regards it as remarkable that Jabez should be introduced without description or patronymic, as if a well-known personage, and supposes that he was known to those for whom the Book of Chronicles was written, either by tradition, or by writings which have perished. The word Jabez signifies sorrowful. Jabez was distinguished in some way above his brethren. By this distinction we are not to infer the exercise of an undue partiality in the spirit of his parents. Account for it as we may, some men appear to be born with what may be called a larger religiousness of nature than other men; it is easy for them to pray; it is a delight to them to peruse all sacred writings; it is a positive pain to them to be deprived of religious privileges. We must leave this mystery as insoluble. It is a very pleasant mystery to those who are gifted with religious intuition, but a most appalling mystery, on the other hand, to those who seem to be what we cannot better describe than by calling them natural atheists. The name which Jabez bore, was a memorial of his mother's sorrow, not a prophecy of his own. Yet Jabez was animated by that inexplicable superstition which discovers in names and circumstances omens and predictions, which the imagination can never treat with disregard. Jabez

might intellectually know that his name did but represent what his mother had endured, yet a subtle feeling took possession of him, as if he himself would in some way be involved in the same sorrow. Nor was this an irrational conclusion. As a matter of fact some men are born to more sorrow than others, as certainly as by constitution some men are more religious than others. Here again is a dark and painful mystery. We see the operation of this mystery even in the same family, where one of the children may be full of sunlight, and hope, and music, and another may be doomed to walk in darkness throughout a lifetime, unable to discern between summer and winter, loaded with trouble and oppressed with undefinable apprehensions.

Jabez is known to history, as pre-eminently a man of prayer. Although it has been considered that the prayer of Jabez was uttered in view of some imminent battle, or other dreaded experience, yet by common consent Jabez has been regarded by Christian students as a typical man of prayer. Judging the case within the narrow limits of the history given in verses nine and ten, it would seem as if Jabez started life in an act of prayer. The image is at once graphic and beautiful; think of a young man standing at the door of his house, looking abroad at the unknown and unmeasured world, listening to the conflicting voices which troubled his native air, and then turning his eyes to heaven and asking divine direction, before he would take a single step from the threshold of his home. Nothing of the nature of mere romance attaches itself to this picture. This indeed is what every young man ought to do, before going out to battle or labour. My son, in all thy ways acknowledge God, and he shall direct thy paths. It would appear from instances which have come under our view, that God condescends to receive from men promises of religious life on certain providential conditions. We cannot understand this now, but it is perfectly clear from such instances as Jacob and Jabez, that God was willing to respond to propositions of obedience founded upon the realisation of specified blessings. The prayer of Jabez must be judged to be good, for the sufficient reason that it was answered;—"and God granted him that which he requested." Is the conduct of life then open to regulation upon such high and sacred

lines? May a young man come before the Almighty, and speak out all his heart, and receive promises of continual guidance and defence from the Living One? If we could realise the certainty of this holy commerce as between earth and heaven, our whole life would be lifted to a noble level, our spirit would be released from the dominion of fear, and instead of labouring in toilsome prayer, we should be filled with the spirit of triumphant thankfulness and praise. What privileges are open to the young! It lies within their power to give a whole lifetime to God. Those who have advanced considerably in life, can now but give a fraction of their days, but the young soul can give God the brightness of the morning, the glory of noonday, and the tranquillity of evening. Let the young think of this, and give themselves diligently to the study of such instances as that of Jabez, knowing that if they remember their Creator in the days of their youth, increasing age will only mean increasing joy.

In the fifteenth verse we come upon the familiar name of Caleb. We have seen that Caleb obtained a part among the children of Judah, because that he wholly followed the Lord God of Israel (Joshua xiv. 9). The memory of the righteous is blessed. Come upon their honoured names where and how we may, there can be no mistake as to the reality of the blessing which testifies their divine acceptance. Are there not some faces which we are always glad to recognise in preference to all others? When we see them in the distance we take heart again, because we are sure of the hand of friendship, the smile of love, and the word of encouragement. Blessed, surely, are they, who enjoy this reputation in the hearts of their friends! Some persons we admire, some we fear, some we approach only on great occasions; but others we would have always with us, because of the tenderness of their hearts. Caleb was one of those sweet yet heroic natures that bless the world. We feel that whilst such men are in it, the world is not left without promise of restoration, and that every good cause has a friend in every Caleb. There was nothing boisterous in the courage of this son of Jephunneh. He spoke with the dignity of strength, with the ease of conscious power. Within his soft hand there lay a sinew of iron. Had he been violent, we should have trusted him less; being gentle we

had no doubt of his ability. As in every other truly great man there was in Caleb a distinct vein of womanliness. Never can he be called effeminate; but never can it be denied that his great courage had about it the bloom which distinguishes motherly love from all other affection. In verse twenty-two we come upon the expression, "And these are ancient things"; and verse twenty-three reads—"These were the potters, and those that dwelt among plants and hedges: there they dwelt with the king for his work." By ancient things understand things old and obsolete. We must not think of the antiquity, dating from our own times; it was Ezra who wrote this, and he lived before Socrates taught in Athens, and before any Chronicles now extant. Think then of the great antiquity of Holy Scripture. Verse twenty-three has been regarded as showing the humiliating aspect of human nature. An ancient writer has called those that dwelt among plants and hedges—hedge-rogues; the base brood of their forefathers, poor-spirited, mean wretches, who chose rather to abide under the hedges of Babylon, to plant gardens, make fences and flower-pots for the king than return to their own country, though liberty for them so to do had been proclaimed by Cyrus. Is it not so under Gospel proclamations? Has not Christ proclaimed a year of Jubilee, and offered freedom to all men, yet are there not some who are so accustomed to the yoke of sin as to choose it, rather than accept the glorious liberty of Christ? Let every man answer on his own account.

1 Chronicles v.

GAPS IN HISTORY—PAINFUL MEMORIES—AGONISTIC PRAYER—INTELLECTUAL SINS.

THIS chapter treats of the tribes east of Jordan, Reuben, Gad, and half Manasseh, with short notices of their conquest and their final captivity. At the very opening of the chapter we come upon the well-assured doctrine, that the highest privileges may be transferred to other than the original and legitimate lines. Men hold their great influence only so long as they continue their noble behaviour. Reuben was the firstborn, and therefore

entitled to honours and enjoyments of a peculiar kind, but because of a great sin, he dispossessed himself of the rights of the firstborn, and those rights were transferred to Joseph as to their substantial value. Joseph, or the sons of Joseph, did not occupy the first place in the lists of the tribes, but they succeeded to all that was really valuable in the primogeniture. What that was is clearly set forth in Deut. xxi. 15-17. The incident is worth dwelling upon, only because it elucidates a special phase of divine government. God is not bound by arbitrary laws. Primogeniture can be changed in the court of heaven. Reuben may have said that whatever events transpired, he would still be the firstborn of Israel; believing this he might give rein to his passions, and withhold nothing from the flame of his desire; but God distinctly taught him that there is a law above law, that all human institutions are subject to the law and criticism of righteousness, and that conduct is the only absolute guarantee of real and enduring primogeniture. A melancholy thing indeed that Reuben should be the firstborn, and yet that one born after him should bear the blessing which was due to the eldest son. In this case Reuben had a right to a double inheritance, but that right was transferred to Joseph. There is a theory which expresses itself in the much-abused words, "Once in grace, always in grace." That may be a glorious truth, but everything depends upon what is meant by being "in grace." They are not all Israel that are called Israel. A momentary experience of the goodness of God may not be regarded as constituting newness of spirit and of life. We can only prove that we were once in grace by continually living in grace. Any vital breach in the continuance will throw discredit upon the supposed reality of the origin. Connected with such transfers of dignity and power, there cannot but be a measure of melancholy in the experience of those who are called upon to sustain the lapse of primogeniture. Joseph and Judah, who divided between them the pre-eminence and the rights of Reuben, cannot but have felt that their honour was due to their brother's disgrace. Elisha took up a mantle that had never been stained, but, alas! many are called upon to succeed Iscariots in the noblest apostleships of life. But whilst there is a measure of melancholy, it should be balanced by increase of spiritual vigilance. "Be sober and

watch unto the end." "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe."

In the eighth verse we come upon the name of Bela, whose descent is traced like that of Berrah, but through fewer names. This circumstance is only worthy of notice because intermediate names are often omitted in genealogies. A notable example is given in the book of Joshua (vii. 18); we read—"Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah"—but in verse twenty-four we simply read—"Achan the son of Zerah." Here we are reminded that there are many gaps in history. As much may be learnt from omissions as from distinctly registered particulars. Often in history we seem to step from one mountain top to another without taking note of the localities which lie between. Even the life of a man may be summarised by two or three striking events. On many a tombstone, indeed, the longest life is simply indicated by the words "born" and "died." What then can be made of history? As a matter of fact, history can never be exhaustively written. It may be questioned whether any man who has lived a long and active life can really write his whole biography. Let him take what pains he may he will be conscious that much has been left out; even where a diary has been sedulously kept, it can tell but little of motive, purpose, desire, and all the mysterious operations of the soul; the spirit will not be imprisoned in words; after the words have expended their whole strength in embodying life there is something in life which will not condescend to be represented in symbols or uttered in signs. Let us continually remind ourselves of the lesson we have had so much occasion to set forth, that two or three famed sons in a family do not blot out all the sweet life, the gentle piety, the unobtrusive industry, and the anxious prayers of many an unknown member of the household. We belong to one another. We cannot always trace the influences which have culminated in eminence and power. Be assured that how famous soever any man may be there is a vital defect in his character in so far as he fails to remember all that made his home the beginning of his greatness.

In the ninth verse we come upon the subject of painful memories—

“And eastward he inhabited unto the entering in of the wilderness from the river Euphrates; because their cattle were multiplied in the land of Gilead.”

As their flocks and herds increased the Reubenites extended eastward even to the great desert lying between the Euphrates and Syria. This desert was inscribed all over with recollections which could not but be painful to the restored exiles. This desert has been described as a vast wedge interposed between the valley of the Euphrates and the fertile strip of coast along the Mediterranean which effectually shuts off Palestine from the rest of western Asia. The point to be remembered is that the desert had been the theatre of inexpressible suffering. Do we not ourselves often come upon old places, old acquaintanceships which reminds us of desert experiences, of graves dug in our hearts, of losses which no prosperity can repair? To some of us the world is full of frightful places. We remember where the holy vow was broken, where our best strength utterly gave way, where the word of blasphemy was forced out of our lips, where we were tempted to give up faith in prayer. On the other hand, there are places clothed with immortal beauty, and upon these our memory should dwell with holy delight. We remember the very spot at which we gave up our whole heart to the Son of God: we see quite vividly the green field or the flowery lane where we plighted the word of troth which only death can violate: we see the old quiet grey homestead associated with joy, festival, and gladness of every tone and hue: sometimes we long to go back to these old places which now by their very venerableness have become personal sanctuaries. Blessed be God, it is even now in the power of every man to create one holy place in the desert of life, for at this very moment the sinner may repent, and in this very place he may begin to pray. Do not let us yield to the temptation always to be dwelling upon the deserts, the churchyards, the stony places of the past; such exercises of memory may but becloud and discourage the heart: rather turn to the brighter scenes and take courage to regard them as merely symbolical of a greater glory yet to come. Truly to some travellers the way seems to have been all wilderness, or the path has lain through a very battlefield, so fierce has been life's controversies and so many

have been life's losses. This bitter experience is never to be ignored, for by ignoring we should simply lose influence with those whom we attempt to comfort: better show that we are fully aware of the extent and desolateness of the desert before we point out the beauty and the accessibleness of the garden of God.

In verse twenty we see an instance of what may be described as agonistic prayer:

"And they were helped against them, and the Hagarites were delivered into their hand, and all that were with them: for they cried to God in the battle, and he was intreated of them; because they put their trust in him."

It is beautiful to notice how in Bible times natural events were regarded as closely associated with the hand of God. Nothing was looked upon as unrelated or self-contained. On the contrary, everything was traced to the immediate action and purpose of God. Here we have men of valour, bearing shield and sword and drawing bow, and trained warfare, nearly fifty thousand strong, and yet they turn the very battlefield into a house of prayer. Circumstances give to prayer its real significance. Sometimes too we can only pray in mere words, for our feeling is not always excited and ardent. Sabbath after Sabbath we may assemble together, and in quietness hardly distinguishable from indifference, we may go through our religious exercises; but suddenly there comes an epidemic, a war, a family bereavement, a national crisis, or some other event which profoundly affects our feeling, then the very words which but a week ago were uttered without emotion express the keen agony of our souls. For our comfort let us remember that God knows all the circumstances under which we pray, and that the quietness of our utterance need not in any degree impair the earnestness of our meaning. On the other hand, do not let us suppose that indifference is a sign of piety. So prone is the heart to forget God, and to turn away from the discipline of life, that we need continual exhortation not to yield to the sleep which would first overcome us, and then deepen into death.

Verse twenty-five relates to the transgressions of the people against God, whose hearts went out after the idols of the land. If we turn to the Book of Kings, we shall be surprised to find how

the fatal sin of Israel was often of an intellectual kind, as distinguished from the baser iniquities, which corrupt and overthrow the soul. There were three instances in which the intellectual sin of Israel was conspicuous : (1) in the worship of the holy places ; (2) in adoration of the heavenly bodies, and the productive powers of nature ; (3) in the practice of magic and divination. Here we find nothing of adultery, drunkenness, theft, or licentiousness of any kind. Here, indeed, is a species of intellectual elevation and refinement ; certainly there is nothing coarse and brutish in the usual sense of the terms. Instances of this kind have surely a direct bearing upon ourselves. There are sins and sins. One man is simply a sinner of the coarse type, a criminal seen and known of all men and cast out by society ; another man sins intellectually, that is to say, he mentally deposes God, and more or less secretly endeavours to live without him ; never breaking any of the great social commandments, and thereby forfeiting social confidence, yet all the while committing the sin against the Holy Ghost. In this way men write their own bibles, invent their own deities, banish from the mind all the old orthodoxies, and in hidden vanity walk after the counsel of their own hearts. In all these matters God alone can judge ; we only know crime, we have not penetration keen enough to penetrate the disguises of sin. We may however exhort one another to be careful lest we indulge sin under the pretence that we cannot justly be charged with crime. The whole question in its highest aspect relates to the condition of the heart. "The Lord looketh on the heart." "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he." "Create in me a clean heart, O God ; and renew a right spirit within me." "God be merciful to me a sinner." O thou that lookest upon the heart and from whom nothing can be hidden, enter not into judgment with us, for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified : show us our sin until we be ashamed of it, and lead us to the cross of thy Son, there to begin in broken-heartedness, the better, the eternal life.

1 Chronicles vi.**AARON—ELEAZAR—UNKNOWN WORKERS—RELIGIOUS USES
OF MUSIC.**

THIS chapter traces the line of Aaron through Eleazar to Jehozadak. The chronicler takes infinite pains to trace the genealogy of Aaron from the period of his descent from Levi through his successors in the line of Eleazar until the Babylonian exile, and after setting forth the double series of the three sons of Levi, viz., Gershom, Kohath, and Merari, he repeats the line of Aaron from Eleazar to the age of David and Solomon as preliminary to an account of cities of the Levites given in verses 49–81. We ought now to be in good company seeing that we are in the lineage of priests. Every man's white robe will symbolize his holy character, and every man's official duties will indicate the nobler exercises of spiritual worship. Society has a right to draw inferences from the occupations of men. No surgeon should be inhuman because by profession he is a healer and restorer. No lawyer should be seditious, rebellious, dishonourable, because he is supposed to know the law and to have entered upon its exposition, because of his love of high study and the discipline of citizenship. If this is so in high professions, what shall be said of the priests of the living God? From them we look for whatsoever things are true, lovely, pure, honest, and of good report, and in so far as they fall short, they themselves must bear the responsibility, for they, and they only, are to blame for every lapse. But are we to look for absolute perfectness even in consecrated men? We may look for it, but certainly we shall not find it in any real sense. It is unjust to expect more from men than men can render. There must however be a steady determination to realise the ideal and to attain the divine. The apostle Paul did not count himself to have attained, but he continually pressed toward the mark, and by so much proved the earnestness of his spirit. There is an infinite difference between falling short of an ideal and seeking to accommodate the life to the lowest level of purpose and service. It should never be forgotten that the man who selects a high ideal is himself the creator of the very standard which his enemies may turn into a taunt against him. If he had not made known his determination

to climb the highest of all hills he might have secured some reputation by ascending much lower elevations. When he said he meant to go to heaven, he put into the hands of his enemies a rod with which they might chastise him. It must therefore never be forgotten that even an imperfect Christian may be a better man than the loudest boaster of virtue who knows nothing of spiritual motive or ideal standards. As a speck is more easily seen upon a white surface than upon a coloured one, so the flaws and drawbacks of Christians are the more conspicuous because of the dazzling purity of the Christianity which is professed.

We read of Eleazar that he was "priest in Aaron's room." This reminds us of the common-place, that the first and best of the priests must succumb to the law of death. When God appointed Aaron as priest, he did not only elevate an individual, he founded an office which was not to be abrogated until it was fulfilled as to its highest purpose in the man Christ Jesus. Aaron, therefore, may be said to have continued to the very end of the priesthood, which was begun in him through his legitimate successors. It is nothing to the point to say that the individual man has died, if so be the office is continued in full vigour and efficiency. The popular view is that the king never dies. So may it be said of the Christian ministry. Consecrated apostles, enterprising evangelists, learned teachers, individually die and are forgotten, but the great work of the ministry never ceases. Nor does the ministry ever go permanently back in efficiency. On the surface there may be great differences as to what is called pulpit power, but within the view of God, the motion of Christian influence is always towards increase and consolidation. The sentence however that Eleazar was priest in the room of Aaron is pathetic, as reminding us how difficult it is to fill the room which great men have occupied. In many instances we do not know how much a man has been really doing until we endeavour to find a successor to bear his mantle and carry forward his obligations. No man is less valued than a spiritual teacher. In many cases he is regarded as little better than an intruder and a meddler, who comes with an uncertain message, and is expected to deliver it in the least offensive form. When to outward disadvantages, often concealed in the form of distrust

or contempt, there is added a sense of personal inferiority to the Aaron who went before, the position of the Christian teacher becomes one of positive distress. The only mitigation of such sorrow must come from looking at the work rather than at the worker, steadfastly looking beyond and having respect to the recompense of the reward. If Eleazar thinks only of Aaron, he may well tremble to succeed so renowned a priest; the Christian teacher however is not to think that he has succeeded Paul or John, but to consider that he directly represents Jesus Christ, and that to represent Jesus Christ is to be assured of spiritual sustenance and final reward.

In this chapter as in others, we come upon a long list of unfamed priests and workers. Who ever heard of Bukki, Uzzi, Zerariah, Meraioth, Ahitub, Ahimaaz, or Johanan! There were twenty-two successors of Aaron in the interval between his death and the Babylonian exile. It is quite uncertain how many centuries that interval comprised; but in the lengthened period through which the succession ran we cannot but be struck with the absence of illustrious names. What social advantages are necessary to the development of men of supreme power? Can such men be born in slavery? Are they the product of ignorance and darkness? Are the great men of any period the natural issue of their times, or are they created on purpose to throw their times into contrast. Of some of these men we hear a little, but that little only shows how far short they fall of the highest reputation. Of Uzzi we hardly know more than that he was contemporary with Eli. Scripture is absolutely silent as regards the six persons named in verses 6 and 7. We know little more of Zadok than that he was appointed sole high priest by Solomon who deposed Abiathar (I Kings ii. 27, 35). Ahimaaz is chiefly known as a young man and a fleet runner, who rendered service to king David at the time of the revolt of Absalom. Johanan is utterly unknown. Yet all these men were either priests, or workers, or recognised persons in the social and official circles to which they belonged. So again and again we come upon the familiar lesson that there is a middle point between renown and contempt; there is a point of life-influence—thorough downright good work which never blossoms into the kind of

conspicuousness which belongs to world-wide and enduring fame. Even amongst the disciples of Christ there were only three who really stood out so as to attract the attention of all men. At the last indeed, one did stand out, not in fame, but in infamy, a man whose name can never be pronounced without horror and disgust. It must ever be true that the great majority of men must work within narrow limits and be content with the eulogium of domestic recognition. At the last the whole matter of reputation will be adjusted and determined by the Judge of the whole earth. The first may be last, and the last may be first. The very fact that all our awards may be reversed should make us cautious in the distribution of primacies which concern themselves more with the coronation of genius than with the recognition and encouragement of simpler merits. We are not to hesitate to give honour to whom honour is due, but we should never be so far carried away with pomp and grandeur, however real, as to neglect the least of Christ's servants or the humblest ministrants who wait upon his altar.

In reading verse 19—"And these are the families of the Levites according to their fathers"—we must remember that the word "families" does not mean single households but groups of households or clans. This is important as showing the beginning of an enlargement which is to continue until the whole world shall be regarded as constituting one family. Towards this consummation we can but proceed with painful slowness. The work of grace within us is long in subduing the idea that God is partial in his choices and blessings. The heart almost secretly cherishes the idea that walls of separation between men and men must in some degree continue for ever. It is hard for one nation to believe that other nations are as near to God as themselves. All this may not be admitted in theory, but an examination of the heart will lead to the conclusion that every man clings more or less to the notion that God is interested in his fortunes more than in the fortunes of other men. The spread of Christianity is important in a social as well as in a theological sense as tending to the instruction of men in mutual interpretation of motive and purpose. Christianity brings men together; never divides and antagonises men; it always points towards brotherhood, mutual

confidence, reciprocal honour, and united action. All this is possible of Christianity simply because Christianity represents the second Adam, the one man who idealises and crowns humanity. Nothing is more noticeable in the progress of Christianity than the disillusioning of the apostolic mind as to God's partiality for the Jews. [See the case of Peter and Cornelius as representing the whole Biblical idea upon this question of humanity.] Christianity is opposed to all limitation, narrowness, bigotry, exclusiveness; its noble watchword is the world, the whole world, the whole world for Christ.

In the thirty-first verse we are introduced to what may be called the larger ministry.

“And these are they whom David set over the service of song in the house of the Lord, after that the ark had rest.”

They were made to stand, according to a literal interpretation, by the sides [hands] of song as if to minister to the sacred music. They continue ministering, before the dwelling of the tent of meeting, with the music. The religious uses of music is a question which the Church has hardly yet considered. Possibly there will never be wanting those who look upon music as an alien, and regard every advance made by it with suspicion and condemnation. There are not wanting those who would describe thorough attention to music in the church as turning the church into a concert room. All such opposition however must end in nothing. It is now beginning to be recognised that music may be turned into a grand evangelical instrument, and the sneer about “singing the Gospel” is gradually losing the confidence of those who first ignorantly applauded. As a matter of observation and experience it is beyond all doubt that people will gather in great numbers to listen to music when no attraction of an ordinary kind will bring them to the sanctuary.

The wise religious guides of any age will watch the temper of the people, and will respond to it in a way which will involve nothing of degradation, but which will secure the attention which may be turned to the highest ends. On all such matters argument is simply needless. Obstinate bigotry is not to be put down by reasoning; it is simply left to be converted by events. Let the

church be open night and day for music ; let the music always be religiously rendered ; let every singer make the words heard as well as the notes ; and in the end it will be found that the music of the appeal has found an entrance for the truth of the doctrine. The service of song in the house of the Lord should be the most beautiful of all religious exercises. The heavenly ones are continually praising God in the upper sanctuary. We read nothing of preaching in heaven, but we do read of songs and harps, thanksgivings, and of praises louder than the sound of many waters. We are perfectly well aware that there are persons who would pervert the use of music and do injury to the very spirit of the Church, but we must not take our rule of procedure from them ; but endeavour to displace them by a right adaptation of music ; and to supersede them by pointing out and following a more excellent way.

1 Chronicles vii., viii.

VALIANT MEN—INGRATITUDE—A TORRENT OF NAMES.

IN these chapters we have summaries of the great clans of Issachar, Benjamin, Naphtali, West Manasseh, Ephraim, Asher, the families of Gibeon, especially the royal house of Saul, with innumerable and collateral allusions.

In verse 2 of chapter vii. there is a sentence which presents an excellent family record—"They were valiant men of might in their generations;" while the reference is to the sons of Issachar, and is therefore the more notable because in pronouncing upon each member of his family, Jacob had represented Issachar as a "strong ass," a figure not suggestive of fire and courage, and love of battle. Sometimes the man's sons are better than the man himself. It is important to notice this, lest some who are conscious of an unfavourable ancestry should lose heart and resign themselves to the tyranny of mere fate. History abounds in striking instances of men who, being socially low born, have conquered all opposing circumstances and entered into great estates of character and influence. If the sons of Tola had said, "A curse rests upon the whole house of Issachar, every man of

us is reckoned as belonging to the nature of the 'ass,' and throughout all Israel the ass has been held in contempt; it is useless for us to endeavour to secure any high position, or do any noble work"—they never would have made a name in history. We must beware of what may be termed historical superstition, and rid ourselves for ever of the unhappy and irrational thought that history has a grudge against us. A beautiful record is this truly,—“valiant men of might in their generations;” it did not therefore follow that every generation would be as valiant; each generation creates its own records and cannot live upon the excellence or fame of preceding days.

In the third verse of the same chapter we are introduced to a whole family of chieftains—

“And the sons of Uzzi; Izrahiah: and the sons of Izrahiah; Michael, and Obadiah, and Joel, Ishiah, five: all of them chief men.”

Here we come again upon a series of names each of which contains a divine element. Izrahiah means “God riseth like the sun,” and Michael means “who like God?” We cannot get rid, even if we would, of social diversities. From the beginning to the end of time “chief men” and lowly men, men of power and men of weakness, will divide the human family. In this division or classification there may be an element of sovereignty neither to be foreseen nor overruled. What may be termed an arbitrary distribution of talents is distinctly laid down in one of the parables of our Lord, wherein one servant has five talents, another two, and another one. But while there is a sovereignty in the distribution of the talents, there is a justice in the recognition of industry. The man was not honoured because he had ten talents, but because he had doubled the talents with which he began. We may be separate at the point of genius, but we may be one at the humbler point of industry. Never do we find that it is mere genius that is rewarded, but always the fidelity which is possible even to the humblest grade of mind. We cannot all be “chief men,” but we can all be lowly followers of the Lord, each doing his best to hold the light aloft and make known the good news of God's redeeming love. From the second to the fifth verses of the

seventh chapter it would seem as if a procession of giants were passing before us; thus we read of valiant men of might, chief men, bands of soldiers, and again is repeated the expression in verse five, "valiant men of might." That there have been such men in the world is obvious from innumerable proofs of their capacity and skill. Who subdued the beasts of the forest and turned the sites of jungles into the foundations of cities? Who ventured across the sea to discover lands afar off and established with them profitable commerce and exchange? Whose chisel formed the all but living image of man in shapeless blocks of marble? Who painted the pictures of which the world is proud? Who gathered into one orchestra countless instruments and trained voices which make the very wind eloquent with music? Who tunnelled the mountains? In short, who created the complex and glorious civilisation which satisfies every want and gratifies every taste of man? Truly there have been chief men, valiant men of might, and bands of soldiers in olden history. Sometimes it would seem as if all the great work had been done before we came into the world, and nothing is left for us to do but to admire or use or enjoy. A marvellous thought too is it that civilisation is self-exhausting; that it can fill all the space allotted to it and, having done that, can only go back again into decay or barbarism. The great thing which it is possible for us to do is to quicken the mind, to destroy superstition, to preach the doctrine of the endless development of life, and to hold up the cross of Christ amid the tumult of time as the explanation and meaning of all things.

In chapter vii. verse 11, we read of "seventeen thousand and two hundred soldiers, fit to go out for war and battle." Blessed are they who are really qualified for any needful work in this weary world! A beautiful character is this—"fit to go out." How many men go out before they are fit,—how many go out to preach, to teach, to lead, who have no qualification for the office which they have assumed! Men should not go out until they are sent; in other words, men should not go out to warfare at their own charges. There are controversialists whom God has specially qualified and inspired "to go out for war and battle." They are men of combative mind, their very sentences like

Luther's are half battles ; they never realise the extent of their capacity or the energy of their character until they are called upon to take arms in a great cause. Other men are fit to go out to sing sweet music to the weary and sad ; on no occasion could they fight ; they have a perfect horror of war ; but their voice is music, every tone is a revelation of sympathy, when they breathe, men are conscious of the descent of a benediction. Others again are fit to go out to preach ; they are workmen not needing to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth ; they combine both the foregoing classes, the controversial and the musical. How they denounce wrong ! How they burn against injustice ! How nobly they encourage virtue ! How sweetly they administer consolation, with what energetic music they proclaim that the Living God would have all men saved ! We must find out what we are fit for, and do that particular work with both hands earnestly. Do not let us foolishly wait under the impression, that by some dazzling sign God will point out the speciality of our gift. We must put ourselves into practice, and let revelation come through experience. "Stir up the gift that is in thee." "Put on thy strength." "Awake, awake." "Arise, shine." There is something for us to do ; we must begin where we can ; if we cannot speak to a kingdom, we may be able to speak to a family ; if we dare not address a whole family, we may venture to speak some word of instruction or hope to a little child. "He that doeth the will, shall know the doctrine ;" in other words he who is obedient in all directions and at all times, will soon come to discover what he can best do, and how he best can do it.

"And Zabad his son, and Shuthelah his son, and Ezer, and Elead, whom the men of Gath that were born in that land slew, because they came down to take away their cattle. And Ephraim their father mourned many days, and his brethren came to comfort him" (vii. 21, 22).

We here see how sons brought their father to grief. The sons were slain because they went down to Gath to steal cattle. There is nothing unreasonable in the supposition of some commentators that the young men may have gone out on this felonious business against their father's judgment and will. Where is the unreasonableness of such a statement ? Look around and see how to-day fathers are treated by their sons ! How experience goes for nothing ! How venerableness is

regarded as senility! How good advice is treated as worthless sentiment! The aged Ephraim still mourned over his sons notwithstanding their obstinacy. The influence of evil actions cannot be confined to the actors. The drunkard does not injure himself alone, he degrades his children and fastens a stigma on their name. Ingratitude does not punish itself, but it breaks the hearts of benefactors. We may have killed many men whom we have never violently assaulted. There is a murder of the heart, there is a man-slaughter that is not recognised as such by the law of the land. Strange it will be if many who have claimed to be respectable should at last be proved to have been slayers of men.

In verse 24, chapter vii. we actually find a woman doing something! "And his daughter was Sherah, who built Beth-horon, the nether, and the upper, and Uzzen-Sherah." Into the local details of this statement we cannot enter, but many may take encouragement from the fact that Ephraim's daughter Sherah built the nether and upper Beth-horon. What builders women may be! What character they can build in their sons and daughters! What influence they can build around themselves, and be as a beacon light amid surrounding darkness. Women can do a work which men cannot even attempt. It is not only unjust but absurd to assign to all women the same occupation. It is true that women have been painters, musicians, authors, and even devotees of the highest science, but whilst few can follow in that great train all women should be resolved according to the peculiarity of their circumstances to build up a sweet home, and train dependent lives to intelligence, justice, patriotism, and religious fidelity.

From this point and onward to the end of the eighth chapter we may be said to have little but a torrent of names. How the cataract rushes whilst we read! Whilst the torrent is fullest it is most difficult to select instances of special worth and excellence. The historian himself does not attempt to specialise. Where names are fewer, character stands out in bolder relief. This is so in every department of life; were there but one book in the world, how it would be sought after and perused with eager

interest; but because there are innumerable multitudes of books many are affrighted by the very extent of the library and hardly dare begin to read. Where but one or two distinguished persons claim attention, profound respect is paid to their presence and claims, but when the units become tens, and the tens swell into hundreds, even conspicuous men may become of no account, as miracles by their multiplication may be reduced to mere common-places.

1 Chronicles ix.

THE HELL OF DEATH—CHURCH USAGES—EVERY MAN IN HIS PLACE.

IF we regard all the names which occur in this chapter under the image of a deep flowing river, all we can hope to do is to wander by its banks awhile, and pluck here and there a flower, or watch here and there some shining bubble as it rises, gleams, and dies. We can hardly realise the toil that is expressed in the keeping of so large and critical a register. It is easy for us to run through the names, as but so many letters in the alphabet thrown into various relations and signifying little or nothing in particular. But let any one connected with a large family make a point of giving the name of every individual connected with that family, say during the last two hundred years, and he will soon see how vast and intricate were the labours of the registrars of Israel. We cannot too often repeat that all these lists of names represent a solemn process always taking effect in the divine administration of human affairs. From an early period in Biblical history we are accustomed to think of God keeping books in which are written names, and deeds, and judgments—a register traced in every line by a hand that cannot err. In the last portion of the sacred canon we come again upon the same idea, for John, the holy seer, noted the production of books, and of one particular book in which the history of the world was written. Solemn beyond all imagination is the thought that whilst literary men are writing the histories of their respective countries, God himself is putting on record the whole drama of human life the world over, a drama in which every actor is still alive, and upon whom special judgment will be eventually delivered. Historians speak about pre-historic

time, they draw a line beyond which they know nothing ; to that dim region they refer as the sphere of fable, conjecture, mythology ; they can only begin at a definite date and work down to modern times. Not so with the divine historian ; he begins his narrative far away in eternity, yea, by looking into the elements if we may so say, which constitute his own nature, and his history is the more complete and entrancing in that what he says of humanity he is really giving a revelation of himself. Hence the mysteriousness of the Bible. We feel that we do not get at the beginning so far as mere letters are concerned, so that when the letter comes before the eye it brings with it vitality and colour, celestial and indescribable. All edifices of stone began, continued, and ended, by dates clearly determinable ; but who knows where cloud first took shape, where rainbow first spanned the sky, when music first broke in upon the silence of space ? It is even so with every individual man's life, the man feels as if he had been in a pre-existent state ; he claims spiritual kinship and masonic brotherhood, and all the charm of soul friendship without being able to assign any reason of a strictly logical kind for the outgoing of his affection and confidence. All that we ever see is but a little and obscure part of so-called history. The infinite volume lies under the divine hand, and when we come to peruse it we shall find many a mystery illuminated, and many a fear dispelled.

In the very first verse, we come upon the expression—"Who were carried away to Babylon for their transgression." Familiar words these in various relations. Transgression always carries a man away from flowery paths, from sweet rest, from conditions of growth and perfectness ; carries him away into degradation, bondage, and despair. The way of transgressors is hard. Let no man or nation think that transgression is not followed sooner or later by adequate punishment. If we could in imagination summon all transgressors, their unanimous testimony would be that their master is deceitful, cruel, and implacable. Men do not think of the bondage of Babylon, they think of the delight of the immediate satisfaction of burning desires. Men are made mad by sin. When the soul rises in the fierceness of self-will, when a legion of devils seem to besiege the heart, when the ear is

filled with promises of delight, it is in vain for virtue to expostulate, or for judgment to threaten and denounce. But, alas! to what a Babylon is the sinful soul being driven! What time for reflection, unavailing repentance, and inexpressible suffering, is surely coming! It is the merest and emptiest sentimentalism to turn away from this aspect of the case, and to speak of the love or mercy of God. Love has been trampled upon, mercy has been abused, gospels with all their mystery of redemption and pardon have been scornfully entreated; what wonder therefore, that the apostle should solemnly declare that the only thing which remains in the case of impenitence is—a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. We must not look upon the future punishment of the wicked as a mystery of which no sign or hint has ever been given in this life. All the way through God has been pointing out that there is as certainly a way to destruction, as there is a way to immortality. Let there be no mistake about this matter, as if God had concealed the one way, and pointed out only the other. In his very first interview with man, God pointed out the hell of death. We are not to suppose that what we speak of as the bottomless pit is an invention of the middle ages, or a mere priestly contrivance, for the frightening of souls. It is hardly too much to say that there is more of hell in the Book of Genesis than there is of heaven. If we are the subjects of surprise at all, it must be that any heaven is possible to a soul which has disregarded the way of God. It is the more important to notice this, because there are not wanting those who would teach us that destruction, or hell, or the worm that dieth not, or the fire which is not quenched, is a superstition of days quite modern. Our answer is an emphatic No. Go to Genesis, the very book with which the Bible begins, and there you will find the revelation of the issue of disobedience.

In the thirteenth verse we read—"Very able men for the work of the service of the house of God," in other words, mighty men of valour, an expression which occurs in chapter vii. verse 9. The ability is noticeable in connection with its definite exercise. We do not read of ability in some merely general way, but of ability specially directed to the house of God. It is often supposed that ability is necessary in a larger way everywhere

than in the sanctuary. It is not uncommon to imagine that the son who has least mental power, may be able to serve in the Church. All this will be changed just in proportion as right conceptions of the Church of God prevail. If that Church is simply managed by mechanical regulations, by the starting of wheels, the turning of taps, the management of congregational machinery, then an automaton may some day be invented, that will conduct the whole process without intelligence or feeling. But if the Church of God is humanity in its best aspect, and humanity engaged in its most beneficent activities; if it is humanity intent upon bringing all races and grades of men into sympathy, and conducting them towards a worthy destiny, then is the Church a place for statesmanship, genius, and more than soldier-like discipline and authority. The Church does not exist for the purpose of retaining dogmas that are dead, no more than society is an institution for the preservation of barbarisms which civilisation has superseded. The Church as to its forms, usages, and methods must adapt itself to all variations of progress. In its quest after God, in its love of truth, in its consecration to the cross of Christ, in its sense of responsibility, it must remain the same through all the ages; we thus have in the Christian Church what may be termed the permanent and the changeable—the eternal truth, and the variable instrumentality.

In the nineteenth verse men are referred to as being over the work of the service, keepers of the gates of the tabernacle. Here there is no reference to special genius. The men were what we should call churchwardens, attending to outward things, to necessary but not supreme arrangements connected with the tabernacle or temple. But it is just here that Christianity in some of its rarest qualities is revealed. We must never forget that there are men unknown for genius or large capacity who can be entrusted with the lighting of the lamps or the keeping of the gate better than many poets or philosophers. The question should always be, what is the thing to be done and who is the best man to do it? There is quite as much responsibility in its own degree resting upon the door-keeper as upon the high priest. **It does not look so within our narrow limits of judgment, yet it may be really so in the estimation and criticism of God. But the**

distance is not always between the high priest and the keepers of the gates of the tabernacle ; it is often between the high priest and the man who stands next to him in dignity ; it is often between two men who are so nearly equal as scarcely to be measurable in influence as between one another ; it is where responsibility seems to lessen its claims as it goes down from office to office that men must be particularly careful lest they suppose that the office determines the responsibility. If a man can only keep a gate, then in keeping a gate he rises to the very highest degree of responsibility or obligation. Very often the highest work of the Church fails in the attainment of its object because it is not adequately supported by the secondary order of officer. When the keeper of the gate feels that he is as responsible for the success of the temple service as is the high priest himself, the institution will be equally vital at every point and exquisitely adapted to the ends proposed by its creation. Zechariah according to the twenty-first verse was porter of the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, that is to say, he was the door-keeper of the tent of meeting. Door-keeping was no sinecure in the olden days. There were two hundred and twelve porters or door-keepers according to the twenty-second verse. Nehemiah speaks of the total of the porters as one hundred and seventy-two. Ezra reckoned the number as one hundred and thirty-nine. Under David the number of warders was ninety-three. David and Samuel had ordained the door-keepers in their office of trust. It has been pointed out that no mention is made elsewhere of Samuel's part in arranging the Levitical service ; but tradition associated him with David in the work of religious reform, and the statement of the text may be true in spirit though not in form. It is interesting to notice according to the best authorities that the families of the temple warders, like those of the singers, lived on their farms in the villages round about Jerusalem, and came up for their duties every seventh day. There is always much work to be done which the supreme men of the Church—as priests, prophets, interpreters,—cannot do so well as it can be done by intellectually inferior men. The rule should be every man in his place, and a place for every man.

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