

# THE PEOPLE'S BIBLE:

*DISCOURSES UPON HOLY SCRIPTURE.*



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# THE FIRST BOOK OF CHRONICLES

(Continued).

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## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, let thy morning be unto us as an opening into heaven. We are tired of the earth. We look upon it in itself; it began so little and so cold, and so full of disappointment: a garden of bitterness, a vineyard in which we seek wine and find nothing but sourness: but when we see its connection with heaven it becomes beautiful, a worthy habitation for a little while, a vital opportunity. So may we regard it at this moment. Let the light which is above the brightness of the sun make our souls glad; let our poor voices be taken up on high, purified of all dissonance, and made to harmonise with the music of the angels. Give us to feel how near the earth is to heaven, and how at any moment heaven may open and take us into its light and peace. Thus may we rejoice with exceeding joy, and thus may the peace we possess pass all understanding—an infinite depth, a tranquillity that cannot be perturbed. Great peace have they that love thy law; they are blessed with the calm of heaven; though the earth be removed and though the mountains be cast into the midst of the sea: a strong rock is our God, a hiding-place not to be violated. When we think of ourselves, and trust to our own little strength, then the day becomes night, and the night becomes sevenfold in darkness; but when we think of God, there is no more sea, no more death, no more night, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor any pain. May we be filled with God; may we be the subjects of spiritual ecstasy, gracious transport, the holy enthusiasm which lifts the soul above all detail of care, and anxiety, and darkness, and leads it into the liberty of heaven. For occasional blessedness we are grateful: but having tasted that the Lord is gracious we would eat and drink abundantly of his goodness. Lord, excite our hunger, and then satisfy it; afflict us with a gracious thirst, and then quench it with the river of life. Is not all time an opportunity for the display of thy goodness? We have lived, and therefore we believe. Dead men cannot praise thee, but conscious men feel that thou mayest be, and the wisest of them dare not deny thee. But to some thou art ever coming as a light of heaven, a glory ineffable; and they assert thine existence, and declare thy providence, and vindicate thy righteousness. Because we have lived we believe; we see what thou hast done in the days that are gone, and all thy doing has

become a noble argument, conclusive by its very persuasion. For all thy love how shall we bless thee? It falls out of every pore of the sky. Thy goodness endureth for ever—now beautiful, now solemn, now a great blessing, now an immeasurable bereavement, now a cradle, now a grave; but it is the same God that worketh in all. Thine acts are full of tenderness, thy dispensations of affliction are full of mercy. Why will we not let thee alone? Why will we criticise our Father, whose right hand is power, whose left hand is mercy, whose head is wisdom, whose heart is love? Forgive us wherein we have been ungrateful, frivolous, worldly, selfish, and set within us the Spirit of the dear Christ, Son of God, God the Son, who loved us, and gave himself for us, and has been a highway unto God, that we may find at thy throne pardon and peace. May Jesus dwell within us, then there shall be no darkness in the soul; may the Christ of God be our guest, then there shall be bread enough and to spare for the spirit; may he who is the Light of the World be the light of our individual life. Dry our tears; call back the wanderer; if any man has lost the way and wants to find the road again, send angels to help him, and all through eventide may he rejoice in that his feet are walking the right path. For all mankind we pray; the whole world is thine; all men belong to the common Father; may they belong to one another, may recognition take the place of alienation, may hostility be displaced by trust, and may the whole world find kinship in Christ. Amen.

## 1 Chronicles x.

### LIFE A BATTLEFIELD.

WE now come to a portion of the history which is so clearly a repetition that we need not follow it in all its well-known detail. Having already treated nearly the whole of the matter at some length, it will be sufficient now to rest at a point here and there which will enable us to fill in some practical and suggestive instruction. Let it be understood however that what we are about to do is rather of the nature of indication than of exposition. The peculiarity of the Bible is that many of its separate sentences admit of being taken out of their proper setting and used as mottoes or maxims bearing upon immediate questions of spiritual interest or actual conduct. When portions of the Bible are so used it must be distinctly remembered that there is an infinite difference between the accommodation of a text and its critical exposition. It is important to keep this vividly in mind, lest the Bible be charged with unnatural and intolerable responsibilities. With this general caution let us proceed.

"Now the Philistines fought against Israel" (v. 1).

Yet Israel was chosen of God. Is it possible for men who are specially favoured of heaven to be brought into controversy or war? Will not everything be made plain and clear before them, and will not the enemy flee away in order to let the hosts of God pass through without fear of delay? We find the exact contrary to be the case in practical life. The holier the man the severer the conflict. The way of Jesus Christ was hedged up on every side by direct temptation of the devil, by unbelief, by contempt, by suspicion, and by all manner of hostility. In the most reverent sense of the term God himself has to maintain his own sovereignty by daily controversy. Providence is denied, beneficent purpose in life is not credited. Special inspiration is derided, and ultimate judgment is the subject of stubborn doubt. We must not think we are wrong simply because opposition is energetic and persistent. The battle of the Philistines against Israel was fought in the plain of Jezreel or Esdraelon, the scene of so many of the struggles of ancient history. It would appear as though many of the controversies of the Church were localised in as distinct a manner. What battles have been fought at Rome! What conflicts have there been at Constantinople! What furious assaults have taken place at Westminster! Luther, Calvin, Knox, Wesley, are names which are distinctly associated with battlefields. Then there are questions around which the great controversies of the Church have raged; as, for example, Inspiration, Authority, Miracles, Atonement, Immortality, and many others. The historical ground of the Church in this very matter will one day be the most precious possession of the Church. The battlefield should become a fruitful orchard, and the desert of strife should blossom as the rose. Our remembered battlefields should be amongst our wisest teachers. In conducting the conflict we saw much of human nature; we measured our own strength; we felt our need of supernatural ministry; we uttered our boldest and tenderest prayers; we dispossessed ourselves of many misleading and dangerous illusions. What a battlefield is life! There are more wars in human history than are public to the world. What room for heroism even within the narrowest

family circle! But the most desperate of all wars are fought within the heart itself. Many a man can conquer Philistines who cannot subdue his own passions. Moreover there is help in the conduct of public or open war arising from the knowledge and sympathy of observing friends; but in the wars of the soul even sympathy can take no part because of the very secrecy of the tremendous battle. No man can tell all his thoughts. The hesitation of the tongue may sometimes betray the reality of the inward struggle, but never can the most confiding heart tell all the detail of its conflict and sorrow. But is life all battle, are not many quiet victories won, is there not a ministry of the Spirit as well as a temptation of the devil? Justice demands that we look at both aspects of life's tragedy and so learn that the ways of the Lord are equal.

**"The battle went sore against Saul" (v. 3).**

Literally, the battle was heavy upon Saul, like a burden crushing him to the earth. They that shot with the bow came upon him; and he shuddered greatly before the shooters. Why was the battle sore against the king of Israel? Saul believed himself to be forsaken of God, and therefore to have become the sport of man. Indeed it was this idea of "sport" that embittered Saul's last moments. He prayed his armour-bearer to draw a sword, and thrust him through therewith, giving as a reason, "lest these uncircumcised come and abuse me," literally "make a toy of" or "sport with." We notice the word in the tenth chapter of Exodus—"Now I have made a toy of Egypt." The battle will go heavily against the Church, just in proportion as the Church is conscious of the departure of God. Here we are reminded of the analogy of the vine and the branches. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can the Church make vital and fruitful progress, except by continual fellowship with God. Saul was as muscular as ever, as ambitious as ever, and as energetic as ever, but he had lost the consciousness of the nearness of the Almighty. What are all church buildings, formularies, ceremonies, pecuniary resources, literary achievements, when the Spirit of God has been grieved or quenched? Hence the need for continual praying for the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Every day should now be a day of

Pentecost. Not even the most trivial act should be done except in the spirit of prayer and trust. So long as we think that some things in the Church are spiritual, and other things are temporal, we shall bring a divided mind to bear upon our work. Communion with God will help a man to do every part of his duty with a joyful heart. It is joy of heart that turns labour into delight, and that banishes from the spirit all the calculations and devices of a hireling. Although the battle went sore against Saul, we must not suppose that Saul represented an unblest cause. The reason may be in Saul himself, rather than in the cause for which he fought. The situation does not lie between the sunrise and the sunset of one little day. By-and-by we shall come upon the spiritual explanation of all things. It is popular to contemn metaphysical study as unpractical and tedious; but we have had history enough to show that the commonest incidents go back into metaphysical reasons, and that not until the metaphysical has been purified, will practical life as it is sometimes too narrowly described, be really virtuous and beneficent. The Philistines who came up from Egypt, and shot their arrows against Saul, might boast themselves of their superior strength and skill, little knowing that in congratulating themselves, they were operating in total ignorance of the reality of the case. The enemy sometimes laughs too soon. Many who suppose themselves to be fighting against God, may in very deed be used by the Almighty for the infliction of his judgments. Many a Philistine has laughed at the perplexities and failures of the Church, imagining that by his own wit he had brought contempt upon the people of God; but events have shown that the very people whom he had momentarily discomfited had brought themselves within his malign power, by unfaithfulness to their sacred trusts. We know in common life how unfaithfulness disables the firmest strength. When conscience gives way, all outward fortresses crumble into dust. It is only when we know that we are spiritually right, that we can conduct every battle fearlessly, and in assured hope of success. Sometimes leaders, captains, and commanders, have to be overborne or displaced, in order that the great cause which they fail to grasp, and adequately to represent, may vindicate its own claim to a position of confidence and honour. It does not follow that



because a man has been once a leader, that he must always be at the head of the army. Sometimes by sin, sometimes by obvious incapacity, sometimes by the infirmity of old age, the very princes of the Church are displaced and put behind. There are some trusts which we only keep as long as we keep our character. Alas! poor Saul had fallen from his moral elevation, and when he went out to war he went out to die.

“And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his sons fallen in mount Gilboa. And when they had stripped him, they took his head, and his armour, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to carry tidings unto their idols, and to the people. And they put his armour in the house of their gods, and fastened his head in the temple of Dagon” (vv. 8-10).

Samuel refers to Saul's three sons. The Philistines stripped Saul and carried off his head,—in Samuel we read “and they cut off his head, and stripped his armour off.” A kindred expression occurs in Genesis. “Pharaoh will lift thy head from off thee” (xl. 19). This verse shows how strictly local was the conception of deities implied in this act of the Philistines; their idea was that their idols could neither see nor hear beyond their own temples. We have seen this illustrated with some detail in 1 Kings xx. 23. In the tenth verse our text literally reads,—“and his skull was fastened in the house of Dagon.”\* In the First Book of Samuel (xxx. 10) the expression is varied, viz., “and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan.”

This passage abounds in mournful monition. Consider the beginning of Saul's history and compare with it this melancholy close. Who could have anticipated a catastrophe so pitiful? Here is not only overthrow in battle but an infliction of the most withering contempt. At the beginning we found the divine vocation, holy anointing, royal felicitation, and every sign of influence and fame. Saul seemed to begin his royal career on the very top of the mountain, now look at the close of the day which opened so brightly. “Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.” Many men begin with influential parentage, social station, ample education, pecuniary competence, yet

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\* The name of a national god of the Philistines at Gaza and Ashdod (Judg. xvi. 1, 23; 1 Sam. v. 1 *seq.*).

they travel a downhill road, falling first into neglect and then into oblivion. The whole lesson is cautionary. "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." How few are the men who have had a more favourable beginning than Saul! If Saul fell, what guarantee is there that the strongest may not be thrown down? "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." Physical greatness, social security, public applause, are being continually rebuked, yea, humiliated and put to shame. Yet men covet them, pay a heavy price for them, boast of them with exceeding pride. How difficult it is to teach men wisdom, even by the sternest facts, and the bitterest experience! The proverb wisely says, "Call no man happy until he is dead." The meaning is that at the very last a man may make a slip which will bring his whole life into degradation, in every sense of the term. As we have often had occasion to say, there is but a step between man and death—not physical death only, but the death of character, reputation, and influence. What a gloating time for the Philistines when the dead giant was absolutely in their hands! How they laughed over the fallen king, how they tried his muscle and measured his girth and commented upon his stature, and then struck a blow of contempt upon his royal head! Who respects a man when he is no longer able to defend himself? Who does not throw a contemptuous word at the man whose fortunes have been blighted? Under such circumstances the quality of character is tested. Consider how David lamented the overthrow of Saul, how bitter was his grief, how eloquent his pathos! David had been misunderstood by Saul and subjected to all manner of degradation by the king, yet when Saul died David's voice was deepest and loudest in lamentation. It remains with each man to say whether a good beginning shall have a good ending. This is a question of personal discipline, holy fellowship with God, and an acceptance of all processes which have been divinely established for the training and sanctification of man. The word comes with special urgency to young persons, to men of influence, to successful men, and to all who are plied by the temptations incident to high station and wide influence.

"So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord" (v. 13).

Now we touch the real reason of things. The story was incomplete until this explanation was added. The lesson comes up again and again in history that behind all disorder there is to be found either a moral reason for penalty, or a moral reason for chastening. "The wages of sin is death." There is no escape from this inexorable law. Who can fight against the Almighty and prevail? Put a tombstone near the oak in Jabesh and write for an epitaph—"So Saul died for his transgression." Is not this an epitaph appropriate to the whole human race? What need have we for more epitaphs than one? "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." The sin of Saul is particularly indicated—"even against the word of the Lord which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit."\* Saul's unfaithfulness was thus twofold, viz., first, neglect of the divine word, and secondly the consultation of a necromancer. Saul broke the general law of his people,—*"Turn ye not to the necromancers"* (Lev. xix. 31). And beside this he violated the special command which was addressed to himself. It is true that Saul had inquired of Jehovah before consulting the witch of Endor, "but the Lord answered him not, neither by the dreams, nor by the vision, nor by the prophets." Saul was impatient, obstinate, and ambitious, and having deprived himself of intercourse with heaven, he sought to create a new altar and a new deity. The historian does not scruple to say that God slew the first king of Israel. God works through instrumentality, and what he empowers he is said to have done himself. This holds good alike in punishment and in restoration; hence the Assyrian conquerors were the servants of God in scourging guilty people, and Cyrus was also his servant when he fulfilled

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\* Whatever *reality* God may have permitted to this remarkable case of divination, the resort to it by Saul was most offensive to the Divine Being; the king's rejection is partly ascribed to it in 1 Chron. x. 13: somewhat similar is the reason assigned for God's vengeance on Manasseh (2 Kings xxi. 11). [The notes in this volume, except where ascribed to other authorities, are mainly extracted or abridged from KITTO'S *Cyclopædia of Biblical Literature*.]

all the pleasure of God. The frankness of Scripture in all its explanations is not the least worthy of its characteristics. At the very first, God charged sin upon Adam saying, "Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded that thou shouldest not eat?" and in this moral reason he found the explanation of Adam's absence from the usual place of meeting. All through the line of history the same standard is set up. When the world was drowned, it was because man had sinned; when fire and brimstone fell upon the cities of the plain, it was because ten righteous men could not be found within all their borders. And now Saul dies because he has committed transgression against the Lord. There is only one way of life, and that is the way of obedience, trust, and love. Why should we attempt to escape the arrangements of God? Why should the tree tear itself up by the roots and try to bring forth blossom and fruit without connecting itself with the great currents of sustenance? All that man can do by his own hand is to commit suicide. From the beginning until now man has been engaged in the awful tragedy of self-slaughter. The Lord exclaims through the prophet, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy hope." We must all turn to the Living One if we ourselves would live. Nor need we hesitate about doing so, for God loves us and yearns for us and continually cries, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" There is nothing along the road of sin, how many soever may be the flowers which grow by the wayside, but failure, disappointment, shame, and death. Here the great gospel of Jesus Christ breathes its instruction, its welcome, its benediction. Come, let us return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon us; and remember that it is said of him that he will abundantly pardon.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thou givest unto all men liberally, and there is no grudging in thy gift. Thou dost ask us to bring forth all our vessels, that they may be filled: our vessels are too few, thy rain is infinite. We thank thee for the opportunities in life which are distinctly religious. Every hour is an opportunity, but some hours are like doors that fall back upon heaven, showing its wealth and light and glory. May such hours often occur in our history; then shall every day be precious, then shall every breath be a possibility of God's coming to us in larger measure, in fuller, tenderer benediction. Thy Son Jesus Christ is our Daysman; in his hands our case is found; he knows us, he lived with us, he communed with us; he is Immanuel—God with us, and God in us. He needed not in his lifetime here that any should testify of man, because he knew what was in man. He still knows the humanity which he represented and for which he died; behold his wounded hands, his pierced feet; behold the blood he shed: in it is the assurance of pardon. We plead it, we hold on to the mystery which it represents, we cannot tell anything concerning it but that we need it all, and need it now, for sin torments, and hell is kindled already. Saviour of the world, Child of time, Ancient of days, take up our poor sob, our feeble prayer, make it thine own, cause it to grow into a prevailing plea. Amen.

### 1 Chronicles xi. 1-4.

1. Then all Israel gathered themselves to David unto Hebron, saying, Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh.

2. And moreover in time past [*Heb.*, both yesterday and the third day], even when Saul was king, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel: and the Lord thy God said unto thee, Thou shalt feed [*or*, rule] my people Israel, and thou shalt be ruler over my people Israel.

3. Therefore came all the elders of Israel to the king to Hebron; and David made a covenant with them in Hebron before the Lord; and they anointed David king over Israel, according to the word of the Lord by [*Heb.*, by the hand of] Samuel.

4. And David and all Israel went to Jerusalem, which is Jebus; where the Jebusites were the inhabitants of the land.

**THE ELECTION OF DAVID.**

**T**HIS is the instance in which David's election was not made by Judah only (2 Sam. xi. 4). Hebron\* was the birthplace of the patriarchs, and was the capital of Judah, of which tribe David came. Why should all Israel come to one man? Is not this an inversion of an obvious and rational mode of procedure? Would it not have been better had one man come to all Israel, seeking the protection of an innumerable host? How is it that God again and again in human history, apart altogether from any special ideas of inspiration as associated with the Bible, has indicated that one man or another in every department of life has been leader and chief? It would seem as if throughout the ages the whole series of events

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\* Hebron, a town in the south of Palestine and in the tribe of Judah, eighteen miles south from Jerusalem. It is one of the most ancient cities existing, having, as the sacred writers inform us, been built "seven years before Zoan in Egypt," and being mentioned even prior to Damascus (Num. xiii. 22; Gen. xiii. 18; comp. xv. 2). Its most ancient name was Kirjath-arba, that is, "the city of Arba," from Arba, the father of Anak and of the Anakim who dwelt in and around Hebron (Gen. xxiii. 2; Josh. xiv. 15; xv. 13; xxi. 11; Judg. i. 10). It appears to have been also called Mamre, probably from the name of Abraham's Amoritish ally (Gen. xxiii. 19; xxxv. 27; comp. xiv. 13, 28). The ancient city lay in a valley; and the two remaining pools, one of which at least existed in the time of David, serve, with other circumstances, to identify the modern with the ancient site (Gen. xxxvii. 14; 2 Sam. iv. 12). Much of the lifetime of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was spent in this neighbourhood, where they were all entombed; and it was from hence that the patriarchal family departed for Egypt by way of Beer-sheba (Gen. xxxvii. 14; xlv. 1). After the return of the Israelites, the city was taken by Joshua and given over to Caleb, who expelled the Anakim from its territories (Josh. x. 36, 37; xiv. 6-15; xv. 13, 14; Judg. i. 20). It was afterwards made one of the cities of refuge, and assigned to the priests and Levites (Josh. xx. 7; xxi. 11, 13). David, on becoming king of Judah, made Hebron his royal residence. Here he reigned seven years and a half; here most of his sons were born; and here he was anointed king over all Israel (2 Sam. ii. 1-4, 11; 1 Kings ii. 11; 2 Sam. v. 1, 3-5). On this extension of his kingdom, Hebron ceased to be sufficiently central, and Jerusalem then became the metropolis. It is possible that this step excited a degree of discontent in Hebron, which afterwards encouraged Absalom to raise in that city the standard of rebellion against his father (2 Sam. xv. 9, 10). Hebron was one of the places fortified by Rehoboam (2 Chron. xi. 10); and after the exile the Jews who returned to Palestine occupied Hebron and the surrounding villages (Neh. xi. 25).

has been running up into the personality of One man. Christians believe that all these initial and intermediate movements have culminated in the person and reign of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of man, the embodied ideal of humanity. Have all the ages been groping for the true king? There have been stopping-places indeed, and places which have for the moment afforded considerable security and contentment; but even in those cases time has developed some higher instinct or intenser yearning, and soon the age has moved on towards another and grander personality. Instincts and aspirations of this kind must have some deep meaning. It is evident that they were not meant to be limited by any immediate experience, but were charged with still higher energies and endeavours, unfolding in due time, and directed unfailingly to a supreme end. It is the Christian belief that in the fulness of time God sent his Son, and that in the Son of God there is sufficient to satisfy every desire or aspiration for personal primacy, official dignity, supreme benevolence, and complete redemption. The human mind cannot transcend the personality of Christ. Even readers who are not theological are bound to admit that in Christ humanity seems to culminate. Jesus Christ could not have come before in the history of the world: the very moment of his advent seems to be a revelation of an overruling providence, fixing all times, bounds, and issues, and doing all things by a might and a will neither to be calculated nor controlled by man. Instead, therefore, of looking forward to some coming One, who will solve all mysteries and subdue all tumult into order, we look up to the ascended and glorified Christ, and find in his mediation a pledge that in due time God shall be all in all.

Mark the reasons given to David why he should become king of Israel. The first reason is that which is founded upon kinship—"Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh." That is a rational point to begin at. It is always important to have a good starting-point in every argument and in every enterprise of life. Many persons who cannot attain to a comprehension of the sublimities of the atonement, can see clearly that there is what may be termed a line of providence running through all the transactions of human life. We must not narrow this doctrine of kinship too

much ; that is to say, we must not limit kinship merely to bodily relation : there is a heredity of soul, and kinship of spirit, a family union of genius and aspiration. It is along this often-neglected line that we find great lessons of primogeniture and entail. It is no doubt of great social consequence to be descended from a prince or ruler, but it is of still more consequence to be able to trace the soul's kinship back to the highest thinkers of the world. It is in this nobler region that many men find compensation for what may have appeared insuperable social disadvantages. They have but little money : but see how large and energetic are their minds ; they have no acres : but what an eye they have for the landscape, and what ability to turn it into a parable abounding in moral suggestion and colour ; their names are not written in the book of heraldry, but they may be inscribed in the book of life. Aristocracy does not run altogether in one direction. It has indeed been so narrowed as to be associated with family lines or household boundaries, but in the day of true interpretation it will be found that there is an aristocracy of mind, soul, spirit, sympathy, and in that day aristocracy will not be looked upon as an heirloom but as a divine coronation. We see something of that even in the case of David, for not only was the invitation to the throne founded upon kinship but upon work actually done—"in time past, even when Saul was king, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel." A kinsman who has done nothing has but frail claim upon attention and confidence ; but a kinsman who has also proved himself to be officially competent doubles his claim to honour and obedience. The time will surely come when every man's record will be perused in order that some estimate may be formed of the uses to which he has put his life. A miserable thing indeed when reference to a man's history discloses nothing but blank paper. Under such circumstances it is of no avail that he is a king's son, or a titled ruler, or the descendant of an illustrious sire ; his record will challenge his dignity and invalidate all his pretences. The palm be his who wins it. The time is coming when the one inquiry will relate as to what a man has done, in the way of leading out and bringing in all who depend upon his care. Whilst the matter of physical kinship is arbitrary, or is beyond control, this matter of working beneficently, in a shepherdly



spirit, yea even under the inspiration of redeeming compassion itself, points to a field in which all men, how humble soever in birth and position, may achieve renown.

It is no surprise that such a man as David should have been marked by special divine indication,—

“The Lord thy God said unto thee, Thou shalt **feed my people Israel**, and thou shalt be ruler over my people Israel” (v. 2).

Here again we come upon a line full of mystery, yet so broad and clear in the story of the world as to be beyond all dispute. It is not straining language so to use it as to represent the idea that God has actually said concerning this or that man—Behold my chosen, my elect, the prince to whom I have committed great trusts and responsibilities. The divine indication is none the less definite and emphatic because no words are heard and no image is seen: by genius, capacity, temper, actual service, and indisputable superiority the man is marked out as the one to whom the nations are to look for guidance and rulership. A very solemn thought this, and in no wise to be regarded as other than setting out the doctrine of divine vocation in life. The man who is so called will show that over and above all his other credentials there stands the authority of personal modesty. The man who is divinely inspired is never vain, self-conscious, or contemptuous of others. His call does not excite a personal and selfish ambition; it rather solemnises the mind, and so lifts up the entire nature as to invest it with reverence and awe. Those who are not inspired, or specially gifted, or honoured in any significant way, may imagine that the sons of genius—yea, the very elect of God—must be the subjects of happy excitement or gratified ambition; but all history, especially all Bible history, shows that a divine vocation is associated with a divine chastisement, and that the very presence of God in the soul rules the whole character into chastened and sacred humility.

But was there not a deeper motive than that which is discoverable in the three reasons of kinship, work done, and evident divine indication? Is there not the inevitable line of selfishness running through the whole motive and argument of Israel?

Was it not because David could do more for them than any other man could do that the assembly of elders, the senate of Israel, sought to confer upon him the kingship of the people? In one aspect the whole transaction seems to be profoundly religious. David was anointed king over Israel before the Lord,—that is to say, in presence of the high priest, and probably in presence of the ark; both in Exodus xxi. 6, and 1 Samuel ii. 25, the priestly judge is called God, because in his official capacity he represented the authority of the divine Judge. But amidst all this religious ceremony was there not an unexplained and a more or less half-conscious action of selfishness? But we must not press this inquiry too closely, because it covers larger ground than the case of the coronation of David. There is no selfishness so profound as that which sometimes operates even in the assumption of Christian profession. Strange as it may seem, and even shocking, yet it is possible that a man may come to Christ in some way or other under the influence of merely selfish feelings. When men profess the Christian name because they are afraid of the punishment which is denounced against sin, they are acting from a selfish motive: when the mind is intent only upon reaching the state which is called heaven, with all its beauty and rest, its exemption from care and its gratification of all pure senses and desires, they are acting also under the same spirit. A very subtle action indeed is the action of selfishness: it taints our prayers; it debases our best professions; it excites suspicion regarding our most benevolent activities. For ever is it possible that men may come to Christ not because of the miracles but because of the loaves and fishes. Here it does not become one man to lecture another as if he were superior. The one duty is that of searching self-examination, the severest analysis of motive and intent, and the most ardent prayer that God would search and try and prove in every way the reality of the heart's love. "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, give us the blessing of heaven, and we shall never more be poor. Without thy blessing there is no wealth; with it there is no poverty. Send upon thy believing children a double blessing, and no sorrow shall be added with it; it shall be a great peace, a tender light, an assured and inextinguishable hope. They who are thus blessed can never be disquieted; the foam will be on the surface, the depths of their hearts will be as a sanctuary inhabited by the spirit of peace. Great peace have they that love thy law. Give thy Church understanding of the times that it may know what Israel ought to do; clothe thy Church with her garments of beauty, and inspire her with the spirit of courage, and in an age of unbelief may her faith increase day by day, and where clouds of doubt gather may the stars of heaven thicken and shine. Thy presence in the heart is our safety, our immortality. Saviour Jesus, God the Son, abide with us: then shall our life be increased in all highest quality, in all noblest forces, and we shall sing while we live, and our zeal shall burn and our knowledge multiply. Help us in the night-time of life, when the sky is dark and cold, and the wind moans among the hills like a troubled spirit: then give us confidence in the living God, and may men hear our song in the night-time and take heart again, because some are glad in the Most High. Amen.

### 1 Chronicles xi. 5.

"And the inhabitants of Jebus [Jerusalem, which is Jebus (Josh. xv. 8; Judg. xix. 10),] said [for the full speech of the Jebusites on this occasion see 2 Sam. v. 6] to David, Thou shalt not come hither. Nevertheless David took the castle of Zion [the 'stronghold' of 2 Sam. v. 7 is better than the 'castle' of this place. The Hebrew word means 'a fortified place,'] which is the city of David." [This name is applied in Scripture to two different places. (1) In 2 Sam. v. we read that David having taken Jerusalem, and stormed the citadel on Mount Zion, "dwelt in the fort, and called it the city of David" (1 Chron. xi. 7). After that time the castle and palace of Zion appear to have been called "the city of David," as contradistinguished alike from Jerusalem generally, and from Moriah and other sections of it (1 Kings iii. 1; viii. 1; 2 Chron. v. 2). In it David and most of his successors on the throne were buried (1 Kings ii. 10; 2 Chron. xi. 31, etc.). Mount Zion, or the city of David, is on the south-west side of Jerusalem, opposite Moriah, or the temple-mount, with which it was connected by a bridge spanning the deep valley of Tyropœan. The tomb of David on Zion is to this day one of the most honoured sanctuaries of the Mohammedans; and the square keep, called the Castle of David, on the northern end of Zion,

is one of the most ancient and interesting relics in the holy city. (2.) In Luke ii. 4, 11, Bethlehem is called the City of David. Joseph and Mary went from Nazareth "unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem." This was David's birthplace, and the home of his youth. We know not at what time the little mountain village began to be called by his name; but there is no trace of it in the Old Testament. It appears, however, to have been pretty generally used in the time of our Lord.]

## SPIRITUAL FORTRESSES.

"The castle of Zion."

**T**HIS beautiful expression may be so accommodated as to yield some useful spiritual suggestions. Understand, however, the difference between accommodation and exposition. In the present instance we avail ourselves exclusively of the uses of accommodation. Every Christian dwells in the castle of Zion; that is to say, he does not dwell in a wilderness, in an uncertain place, in a temporary cloud, but in a fortress or stronghold. Men should always dwell upon the strong points, and not upon those that are doubtful or half-proved in connection with Christian experience and speculation. For example, it is possible for a man to have the distinctest conviction of the existence and government of God, and yet to be quite unable to give any metaphysical explanation of the nature of the Godhead. Be very careful about making clear distinctions here. A child is absolutely sure that such and such a man is his father, and yet he may be wholly unable to give an account of the psychology of that man,—that is to say, to represent the attributes, the forces, the mysteries, which constitute the mental genius or peculiarity of his father. A man may be perfectly sure that the earth will do certain things in relation to growth and production, and may operate upon that faith, without having the slightest instruction in geology or chemistry. So it is possible to believe God, to love God, to obey God, and to wait patiently for God, without being a scientific theologian, or a metaphysician who can talk long words and construct lofty and intricate arguments. A man must work, therefore, according to his capacity and power. This suggestion applies also to the true uses of the Bible. It is not every man who can have a distinct and complete theory of inspiration, and be able to defend that theory by ingenious and learned evidences. It is possible for

a man to know that the Bible contains the word and will of God, and for him to seek the word and will amid all the miscellaneous contents of the Bible. If some men were to attempt to clear up mysteries in biblical expression, to reconcile discrepancies, or to defend certain historical and other references, they would feel themselves utterly unfit for the work they had rashly taken up; but these very men may have absolute confidence, in traversing the moral line which unites the whole Bible, that they are communing with the spirit of divine righteousness and divine purity. Some parts of the Bible are strong as a castle, mighty as a fortress built by eternal hands; and other parts of the Bible may be felt by untrained or half-trained men to be wholly beyond their power of thorough and useful appropriation. Their wisdom will be to keep within the castellated parts of the Bible: to store their minds with its moral principles and spiritual exhortations and exceeding great and precious promises.

It is the same also with regard to the acceptance of any doctrine respecting Jesus Christ. No one of any authority in Christian literature has successfully disputed the historical existence of Christ. That is a strong point to begin with. It having been certified that such a man as Jesus Christ really lived, the next inquiry will relate as to his spirit, purpose, and doctrine. Thus will arise the noble edifice of the character of Jesus Christ,—his patience, compassion, love, philanthropy; his evident desire to do men good; his practical service in the direction of the ignorance, weakness, and suffering of the people round about him. Here all is strong, impregnable, everlasting. It is the lot of some people to remain upon this ground, and not to venture beyond it. Other men can take a larger view, and commit themselves to larger responsibilities, in the matter of statement and defence; as a rule, however, speaking of Christian people in the bulk, it is wise for them to remain within well-defined lines, and to take their stand upon actual experience as tested by themselves. Outside all specifically religious mysteries there stands the great castle of an evident Providence in human life. Here there ought to be no mistake or uncertainty of mind. Look back upon history, altogether apart from the Bible, and see how it has shaped itself: how kingdoms

have risen, flourished, decayed : how civilisation has marched in certain directions beyond all control, brightening some places for a time, then deserting them, passing on to other regions, making new disclosures and advances, abandoning them also, and fleeing beyond the sea like an invisible spirit, and there repeating its silent or tumultuous miracles. Look at the individual life : mark its feeble beginnings : note its rise, progress, action, influence, destiny : see how ambition is foiled, how the victor is overthrown, how evil purposes come up to a given degree, and just when they are about to assume all the honour and pride of conquest they are turned back and overwhelmed in confusion : see how the plans we thought the wisest have been turned into cloud and wind, and how things which we were least certain about have become the most energetic factors in life : see what uses have been made of little things, trivial events, unimportant or unrecognised occurrences : let all these be taken into view, then let the man say whether the whole does not suggest the interposition of a wise Mind, a moulding guiding, sustaining Hand. Every man must fix his own strong points. The man in the gospel of John who was cured of blindness steadfastly asserted the one thing which he did know, and therein became a strong man and most dangerous to the enemy — "Whether he be a sinner, or no, I know not : one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." This is precisely the case in religious experience. It is not necessary in order to be a genuine and a happy Christian to be able to answer every question which may be propounded either by ignorance or candour : here indeed is great scope for what is with proud modesty called agnosticism : the humble Christian does not so much care to know intellectually as to feel morally, lovingly, compassionately, or, in other words, as to enjoy profound and often silent communion with God. Innumerable are the temptations which lie along the purely intellectual line. Men are tempted to be clever, ingenious, superior to their brethren, and are thus led on into a kind of priestly assumption without any official designation or limitation of authority. The thing that is most valued in the Bible, set above all rubies and all precious substances, is the broken and contrite heart, the meek and lowly spirit, the docile and modest mind. Nowhere is mere genius praised or

idolised in the Scriptures. Never is God attracted by great intellectual power or dazzling mental acquisitions ; but again and again, so to say, he turns aside that he may linger with the contrite in spirit, and hold sweet fellowship with the broken heart. From eternity he bends down to hear the prayer of modesty, and out of heaven he looks to watch the ways of those who have lost confidence in themselves, and are bowed down by the spirit of penitence.

Some men are always living in what Bunyan calls "Doubting Castle." That indeed, is not so much a castle as a dungeon. Verily, it is strong enough : the walls are high and thick, and windows there would seem to be none. Mere strength, therefore, in any castle is not enough : there must be elevation, light, a sense of enjoyment as well as a sense of security—and indeed arising out of the sense of security. Others again are dwelling in castles in the air. They are full of speculation : they are always going to be something more than they are at present : they feed upon the wind : they tempt themselves with impossible promises : they tell lies to their own hearts, and force themselves into dancing and merriment, not knowing that their follies portend their ruin. Many castles there be, but only one in Zion, built by the living Lord, founded upon the eternal rock, and designed for the protection of worthy souls. When a man, therefore, imagines himself to be in a castle, let him ask what kind of castle it is, whether it be darkened by the spirit of doubt, or whether it be unsubstantial as the passing wind or the fading cloud. "Rock of Ages, cleft for me"—that is the fortress in which we must hide, if we would calmly survey the storm, or triumphantly defy the spirit of ruin.

Let such as need it comfort themselves with the thought that whilst some men are called to pursue high adventures in theological thinking and in religious argument, others are called upon to remain at home, and do a humbler but hardly less useful kind of work. At the same time let us not forget that there is a great chase work to be done ; some men are called upon to be mighty hunters before the Lord, to go out under what to others would be desperate circumstances, scouring the country, fighting

wild beasts, and driving off all things which threaten and alarm. There is a great war to be conducted and to be carried on to happy issues. Let not those therefore who remain at home undervalue those who are called to go out to danger and suffering. When a nation is at war some must fight and some must remain at home. Let those who so remain in comparative security and quietude prayerfully think of those who have gone forth with their lives in their hands to uphold the honour of their country. And let not those on the field, whose blood is up, whose temper is heated by contest, look sneeringly upon those who are unable to take part in the war. We must recognise the great divisions appointed by Providence, and each work according to his own undoubted vocation. Let every man say to himself from a spiritual point of view, Am I dwelling in the castle of Zion? Am I steadfast in those few or many principles about which I have no doubt? Do I delight in the certainties of my faith? or am I troubled as by an evil spirit, and moved in the direction of doubt, speculation, hesitancy, compromise? I am not fitted for high speculation; it was never the purpose of God that I should lead hosts to war; I was meant to do a quieter work; yea, God hath surely chosen me to the enjoyment of some of the highest privileges of the Christian life--namely, to communion with himself, to pursue in quietness the most tender portions of the Holy Book; I am not called upon to answer the trumpet of battle, but to wait patiently at the altar of prayer. Work within the lines of your strength. Do not imagine that you are nothing because you are not everything. Abide in the station appointed of God, and though it be not on the highest hill which first catches the morning light, yet God will not leave you without visitation and succour and comfort.



## 1 Chronicles xi. 9.

“So David waxed greater and greater : for the Lord of hosts was with him.”

### THE PROGRESS OF DAVID.

**T**HIS expression occurs almost identically in Samuel : literally it is—“and David walked on, walking and growing great,”—a Hebrew metaphor well known as indicating steady going and increasing. The Lord of hosts is a contracted form of the fuller expression, Lord God of hosts. It is worthy of notice that this title is derived from God’s sovereignty over the stars, worshipped as deities by the races round about Israel. We understand that the very word for *God* in the old Babylonian is represented by a star or asterisk, and in the later Assyrian character, *star* is said to have been represented by the symbol for *God* thrice repeated. The supreme Assyrian deity is designated “King of the legions of heaven and earth.” Being described as the Lord of hosts, the meaning is that the Lord rules the stars : (compare Psalm viii. 3 ; Isaiah xl. 26 ; Judges v. 20). In the remotest antiquity the stars were thought of as a heavenly army marshalled in orderly array. The argument would seem to be that as the Lord of hosts governs and controls all the stars, therefore he governs and controls all lesser things. He is not described as the Lord of hosts in any sense which separates him from daily providence, minute and special inspection of human affairs : in this, as in other instances, the greater is said to include the less. It is interesting to mark David’s line of progress. First of all he dwelt in the castle, and from this circumstance it was called the city of David. Here we have quiet possession, supreme control, sense of security ; then we learn that he built the city round about. It was not enough to abide in the castle ; David must needs go forth and see what required rebuilding or repairing ; David never took willingly to a life of

ease or indulgence. His was a spirit so energetic as to be irrepressible; whilst there was anything to be done David was moved ardently to attempt its accomplishment. David not only dwelt in the castle, and built the city, but he waxed greater and greater: he surprised himself by his growth; faculties rightly used increase their own power; so to say, they multiply themselves, and yield a good return for all the uses to which they are put. We should be greater men if we did greater work. The very attempt to do great things strengthens the faculties which we put into exercise. Stir up the gift that is in thee; provoke thyself to do more and more; accept the spirit of emulation, and under its genius incalculable progress may be made. In all things beware of indulgence, contentment with little attainment, satisfaction with immediate and perishing blessings. Greater and greater, more and more, further and further, from conquering to conquer,—such must be the mottoes and watchwords of Christian faith and activity.

How did David wax greater and greater? Was the secret in himself? The reason is given in the text—"for the Lord of hosts was with him." We are not to understand that this is a merely arbitrary association with the man, but that a distinct work was completed within the man himself by the energy of the inspiring Spirit. When the Lord of hosts is with a man he feels himself to be nothing but an instrument which God is using, therefore he is saved, as we have just seen, from vanity, petty ambition, miserable self-satisfaction: he does not say, Behold how clever a man I am,—he rather bows down his head, saying how thankful he is that the Lord has been pleased to make use of him but for a moment as the medium of great messages and deliverances. When the Lord of hosts is with a man the public benefit is all that he thinks about and strives for. He has no personal ends to serve, no limited friendships to gratify, no questionable policies to sustain and perfect. He himself becomes as it were a man of hosts,—that is to say, a man who holds great interests, great stewardships, and who looks upon the order, security, and harmony of all as the one thing to be accomplished by ministry and suffering. When the Lord of hosts is with a man, the man feels himself to be but part of a

great scheme of worlds ; he is a little atom in an infinite universe ; a flickering light amid the glories of creation ; something that owes all its importance to divine quickening and recognition. How is all this to be tested in the case of any man who declares himself to have been sent of God, and to have been charged with special missions and prerogatives ? The whole test is in the one word Character. What is the man as to goodness, benevolence, sincerity, unselfishness ? Not that we are to look for absolute perfection in any human creature, but we may certainly look for the desire which yearns for perfection—longs, prays, and toils for the accomplishment of the heavenly ideal. When we are called upon to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect, we are not called upon to do miracles in the sense of attaining that which is obviously impossible, but our whole mind and heart must be set in the direction of the divine ideal, and nothing less should satisfy us. When we pant for the living God as the hart panteth for the water brooks, when we desire God's perfectness with the yearning which holds every other attainment in contempt, we may be truly said to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect, within all the limitations imposed upon human capacity and conduct. The Lord of hosts will be with every one of us if we desire his fellowship and inspiration. He will not be with us necessarily in the sense of making us great soldiers, leaders, and rulers, but in the sense of directing every step we take, purifying every thought which engages the mind, and bringing into captivity every passion which agitates and torments the heart. The Lord was with Joseph, the Lord was with Samuel, the Lord has been with his people in all ages, making some great in mind and in power, and making all good in the sense of working in them all the good pleasure of his will. "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will direct thy paths." "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." Invoke the Living One day by day, that all life may be lifted up to a higher plane, and consecrated to nobler endeavours.

## 1 Chronicles xl 17.

And David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Beth-lehem, that is at the gate!"

### A PATHETIC INCIDENT.

**T**HIS is one of the pathetic incidents in personal history, without which, indeed, personal history would be a monotonous and dreary record. We owe quite as much to the rainy days in life as to the days of sunshine; the sunshine and the rain must, indeed, co-operate, in order to make our life produce its richest beauty and its most satisfying fruit. We have seen David on the mountain, and have watched him in the valley, and have noted that in all places and under all circumstances he is a profoundly religious man. The religious instinct or sensibility expresses itself in innumerable ways. Even in this cry for water from the well of Bethlehem\* there is a touch of religious supplication. In all such sighing and yearning we find the beginnings of true prayer. Even where men deny formal prayer, and repudiate the thought of holding intercourse with heaven, we find in the expression of daily desire and want the foundation of all prayer. Whatever softens life blesses it. The battle, the business, the wrangling, the controversy, the continued attrition and conflict of life,—how these soon roughen

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\* Eastern people are great connoisseurs in the taste of water. They drink very little else, except coffee without sugar, so they learn to distinguish the peculiar quality of water from different springs. Van Lennep tells us that there are in Constantinople shops in which nothing but water is sold, the price of a glass varying in accordance with the reputation of the spring whence it is brought. A steamer regularly plies between the capital and the island of Marmora, seventy-five miles off, in order to supply the Sultan's seraglio with the water of a celebrated spring. The actual excellence of the water from the "well of Bethlehem" may partly account for David's longing to drink of it; but there were probably also home yearnings in his heart.—From *Biblical things not generally known*.

human nature and develop its worst forms and aspects! Hence the necessity and the graciousness of the ministry of affliction and loss. When man reaches any point at which he is conscious of a deep necessity he begins to be a better man,—if indeed he turn not off into the darkest regions of despair. Whatever the necessity may be, it is fraught with religious interest, if so be the want be deep enough really to excite the solicitude of the heart. Many men can say, “It was good for me that I was afflicted,”—good in every sense; not only because of the supreme benefits accruing from it, but because of many minor advantages and blessings almost too minute to be named or to be traced, but all exercising a subtle influence upon the chastening and beautifying of disposition and character. Some men can date the beginning of their wealth from the day of their losses: up to that day they had been operating upon a false arithmetical basis: they had been calling that something which was really nothing, and had been confusing and misrepresenting values to their own imagination; but the great shock came, the man reeled under the intelligence that all he had was taken away from him, and he was once more cast upon his resources; the proud man bent his head; the man who had made up his mind to retire and enjoy luxurious repose was stung by the thought that he had once more to put out his arms to battle and to service, and undergo all the trial and discipline of his first experiences. These things being taken in a right spirit, a new bravery sprang up in the heart, a new tenderness subdued the disposition, a new motive animated and ennobled the whole life. Some of us planted our first flowers upon the grave of our greatest losses: up to that time we had taken no interest in the flowers or in birds, in things beautiful and musical; but no sooner was the grave dug and covered up, than we began to think what could be done with it in order to crown it with love and tenderness. The garden indeed was small enough in extent, but how rich in suggestion, in possibility; how loaded with all the treasures of compassion and sympathy and love! In a thousand various ways God thus nurtures our life, leads us out of ourselves, and trains us at least to grope after him if haply we may find him.

In this instance David seems to be under the fascination of the

past and the distant. There are times in life when our childhood comes up with new meaning and new appeal. We long for the old homestead, for the mountains that girdled us round in early life, for the friends who heard our first speech and answered our first desires ; we want to leave the far country and go home again, and forgetting all the burden of the past, start life with all that is richest in its experience. Any water would have quenched David's thirst, but there are times when mere necessities are not enough ; we must have the subtle touch, the mysterious association, the romantic impulse, all the poetry of life. Had this been a mere question of a burning thirst, then any pool would have quenched it, but this was a thirst within a thirst, a thirst with a difference, a desire that had in it more than mere necessity. So it is in our spiritual life : we cannot be satisfied with great conceptions, brilliant thoughts, miracles of genius, words employed by the tongue of the master ; we need a tone, a look, a touch, a peculiar and distinctive something which belongs to the very root and core of life, being charged with a poetry and a force all its own. Any great book would do to read in the time of intellectual vitality : but when the heart is athirst for a specific kind of knowledge, when it cries out for the living God, then it wants a water brook which flows in a particular course, then it can only be satisfied by a Book which carries within it the evidence of its own inspiration and authority. It is foolish to deny the place of sentiment in human life ; it is common indeed to describe this or that desire as merely sentimental : but what would life be without sentiment, feeling, poetic impulse,—that noble ardour not kindled by human forces ? All hand-shaking is not the same ; there is a kiss which a mother only can give ; there is a blessing which only a father can bestow ; there is a fellowship which can only be begun and sustained by love most eloquent when most mute. Into all these experiences the heart must grow little by little, day by day, understanding them not merely through an intellectual process but by a way quite its own. There will come a time when those who are now neglectful of Christian ordinances may wish to return to the spiritual enjoyments of early years ; for a long time they have been in a far country, speculating, conjecturing, debating, fabricating spiritual refuges of their own,

drinking at every fountain, and passing through all the tumultuous experience of daily religious change : by-and-by there will come a weariness over the spirit, an ardent longing for something that is far off, a simple childlike desire for first places, first impulses, first affections ; in that hour the power of the spirit will be revealed, and the proudest intellects will be brought to say that after all the kingdom of heaven is to be received in a child-spirit ; it is not to be taken by force of genius, by the arms of scholarship, or intellectual prowess, but is to be received into a docile and loving heart. We might imagine that any man could help us in certain hours of need, just as any water might have quenched David's physical thirst. But this is not so. We want the friend who knows us, and the friend whom we ourselves know. The sick man is not content in all cases with seeing a stranger, however Christian and devoted that stranger may be, however gifted in conversation or in prayer ; the sufferer wants to see the pastor to whose prayers he has listened, and under whose appeals he has responded to the grace of God ; he feels that he knows his pastor ; he knows the voice, the touch, and confidence has been established between the one and the other : the man cries out for water of the well of Bethlehem that is at the gate, and none other will satisfy his raging thirst.

When the men brought the water to David, "David would not drink of it, but poured it out to the Lord, and said, My God, forbid it me, that I should do this thing : shall I drink the blood of these men that have put their lives in jeopardy ? for with the jeopardy of their lives they brought it. Therefore he would not drink it." Here again we come upon the line of instinct rather than upon the line of reason. David poured out the water as a libation or drink-offering ; he turned it indeed into a sacrifice before the Lord. There was no appointment in the law by which this should be done. There are times when we transcend the written law, the formal statute, the prescribed order of worship and ceremony, and under the impulse of unselfish thankfulness we become our greater selves. Whatever our form of worship may be, scope should always be left for free and spontaneous oblation and sacrifice. Whilst we have order we must also have liberty. Man was not intended to be enclosed in

a cage : he is so constituted that he can worship under circumstances that have not been anticipated by mechanical laws and ordinances. Why should not men cry out aloud and praise God with a resounding voice, even at the risk of violating cold order? Can the heart always keep itself within statutory bounds? Is there to be no enthusiasm in the service of God? Is there not an instinctive worship, a psalmody of the heart, an outburst of love? Jesus Christ never restrained the enthusiasm of worship. Enthusiasm indeed is but a proof of earnestness. When the children cried out and sang before him he did not rebuke them; he said indeed that if these held their peace the very stones would cry out. We suffer immensely and continually for want of enthusiasm in our religious life. We are too orderly; our dignity is oppressive; our regulation schemes often threaten to devitalise our worship. There is no sadder condition in all human existence than to be "past feeling." Cold worship is worthless; cold worship is indeed a contradiction in terms. Not that men can be always equally passionate or enthusiastic; it would be impossible perhaps to live every day at the same altitude of religious excitement; at the same time it is possible for the heart to be in such a condition as to respond to the least appeal, to go out lovingly and consentingly after those who call to worship on the high mountains, and who would call to their aid trumpet, and harp, and organ many-voiced and solemn. Let us be careful that we do not wreck ourselves by prudence—mis-called, and perverted indeed. Who would talk of making love formal, orderly, and decorous? Who would set mechanical bounds to a child's enthusiasm on behalf of its parents? Who would bind down patriotism and forbid it to transgress certain limits of loyalty? If we do not so treat love, patriotism, friendship, neither should we so treat the religious instinct, the passion which surpasses and ennobles all other feeling.

Is any man conscious of unusual thirst, saying, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul for thee, O God"? Satisfaction is offered in the Bible, in the sanctuary, in holy and tender Christian fellowship. Let the existence of the thirst be known. Do not be afraid to say—I am thirsty, and would to God I could drink of the fountains of heaven. In



making your religious necessities known you may awaken the enthusiasm of others. To-day the nations are complaining of thirst which they cannot altogether explain. Verily it is a thirst for the living God. We, who are Christians, must explain the nature of the thirst to those who are suffering from it. They have drunk at well after well; they have, as it were, devoured river after river; and still their thirst burns unquenchably: they have tried intellectual excitement, penitential discipline, acquisition of knowledge, the enjoyment of pleasure, the pursuit of the world in all its forms and fashions, and yet the great cry pierces the air, We thirst, we thirst! Do we not know where the water flows which can quench that burning desire? Is it not for us to go forth and cry, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters"? The very thirst of the soul testifies to the greatness of human nature: were man less, he could be more easily satisfied; were man but an animal he could live in the pasture and be satisfied with his fodder: but oh that thirst which burns in the soul—that inexpressible pain which troubles the heart—that ever-crying necessity which continues day and night in youth and age! Its true interpretation is that man has lost God, and is calling out for him, often inarticulately, sometimes unintelligently, but always with a reality which attests the higher origin and solemn destiny of the soul.

## 1 Chronicles xi. 17-19.

17. And David longed, and said, Oh, that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Beth-lehem, that is at the gate!

18. And the three brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Beth-lehem, that was by the gate, and took it, and brought it to David: but David would not drink of it, but poured it out to the Lord,

19. And said, My God forbid it me, that I should do this thing: shall I drink the blood of these men that have put their lives in jeopardy [*or*, "shall I drink in this water the souls, and so the blood, of these men; for they have brought the water even for the price of their souls?"] for with the jeopardy of their lives they brought it. Therefore he would not drink it. These things did these three mightiest.

### UNRECORDED HEROISMS.

“AND the three brake through the host of the Philistines . . . with the jeopardy of their lives they brought it.” Truly there were heroes before Agamemnon, as has been well observed. There are unrecorded heroisms in life, little things we take no notice of, which being interpreted by God assume grand importance, and will be deemed to be worthy of great rewards. Did not these three men anticipate in some degree the wonderful words of Christ, “Whosoever giveth unto you a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple shall in no wise lose his reward”? These men did give to David, as it were, in the name of a disciple. He was their friend and leader. We may see the character of David through this action as clearly as the character of the men themselves. What love and devotion some men inspire! These men had seen David in the whole of his illustrious career, and they were willing to risk their lives for him, because he asked for water from the well of Beth-lehem. Do men throw away their lives for nought? David himself was helpless at the time of his prayer, and yet his friends arose on his behalf, and forced their way through the outpost in front of Beth-lehem, and brought the water that was

desired. We think of the men in this case, and deservedly praise them as heroes; but we must not forget the other side of the picture—namely, the aspect which it gives of David's personal character. "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die,"—that is, for a merely strict, severe disciplinarian. Who would not rather say, He lived by the law, let him be judged by the law? But the Apostle Paul says, "Yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die." By the "good man" he means the generous, benevolent, sympathetic soul, the genial spirit, that was interested in others, and that spared not itself when the fortunes of others were interested. Judged by this standard David comes out well in this instance. The men, who had everything to lose and nothing to gain by the transaction, went forth on behalf of their leader, and brought to him the water which he coveted. As they went on their way what musing was in their hearts! Did they not say to one another, He is worthy for whom this should be done; for the moment he is a disabled lion-heart; he is brave, he is truly grand; this is only what he himself would have done for us had we been in similar need; there is nothing too much that we can do for him, for he is every inch a king—a very son of God. Thus circumstances test quality; thus hypocrisy is brought to bay, and sincere friendship is allowed to disclose itself under its most fascinating forms.

It is in this way that Christians show the character of Christ. What devotion has Christ inspired in our hearts? What are we prepared to do for him? Let the Apostle Paul answer—"Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry that I have received of the Lord Jesus." And again he says—"I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." We do not see all that is in Christ when we simply look at Christ himself. There is a sense in which it would seem to be necessary to study the character of

Paul, before we can really and accurately estimate some of the qualities of his Lord. Consider what Paul was: how great in mind, how high in position, how reputable in status amongst his brethren; and yet this man, probably the greatest man of his time, counted all things but loss that he might win Christ; said, "For me to live is Christ;" said, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of Christ;" said that he had no other object in life than to magnify Christ, whether by life or by death. All this shows us the fulness of Christ himself,—he satisfied the most capacious intellect, he inspired and thrilled the most heroic heart; he was all and in all to the greatest man of his time. In this direction it is in our power also to reveal the riches of Christ to the world. The rich man may so distribute his wealth in Christ's name and for Christ's cause, as to compel the world to say what a wonderful Christ he must be who inspires such trust, devotion, and love. Nor is this a mere matter of giving; for if it were limited by simple donation it might be equalled by some of the heathen sacrifices. Not only do men give to Christ, they suffer for him; they study his law, they endeavour to walk according to the purity and exactions of a heavenly discipline; day by day they pay a tribute, not of gold and silver, but of a wholly different kind, which really taxes the heart, and through immediate poverty brings ultimate wealth. There is a giving that may be but a species of bribery or self-flattery, but all the giving that is done at the cross carries with it an expression beyond itself, and is meant to testify that along with the gift the whole heart goes with all its force and passion. It is in the power of Christians to show that the love of Christ constraineth them, and that nothing is kept back from the appeal of that infinite tenderness.

"These things did these three mightiest" (v. 19).

Not mighty only; for mere power is seldom praised and is indeed seldom to be admired, but in a very partial and discriminating way. We must not be deterred by the word "mightiest" in the text, or say to ourselves that if we were mightier we would do more, or because we are not mighty we will not attempt anything; this would be mere excuse and subterfuge. Yet there are men who flatter themselves that if they

were rich they would give much, if they were strong they would fight hard, if they were agile they would run swiftly in the race. All this, is the simplest self-deception. If a man will not give out of his "little" he would never give out of his "much." If a man will not give according to his ability, whatever it is now, he simply tells lies to the Holy Ghost when he says what wonderful things he would do if his circumstances permitted him. The miracle is not in the extent but in the spirit of doing. To double the first gift is to complete the only miracle that God asks at our hands. We shall make a right use of all that was done by mighty men, by taking encouragement from it to attempt something ourselves. Knox, Luther, and Wesley are not to be regarded as deterrents, driving away all humble-minded and poorly gifted servants of the Cross; they rather stand out among the mightiest, to show that even the humblest labourer does not go without recognition and reward. Spinoza, Leibnitz, and Descartes do not stand at the head of philosophy to rebuke all humble pupils, but rather to encourage them, saying from the heights, Follow us, little by little, a step at a time; and if you are afraid that dizziness will overpower you, remain where you are, and be content that you have been faithful according to the measure of your ability. Let each of us look at the mightiest and say—I, too, am a man. Let us look at the immortals and exclaim—I, too, am alive. Let us in all things consider that in the great household there are vessels of gold, and silver, and of inferior material, and remember that it is enough for us to be a vessel in the household of God. There were three mightiest; there may be a countless host of mighties, and yet the very poorest woman who seeks to touch the hem of the Saviour's garment, may receive power to go forward and heal and comfort others.

## 1 Chronicles xi. 22, 23.

22. Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man of Kabzeel, who had done many acts; he slew two lionlike men of Moab: also he went down and slew a lion in a pit in a snowy day.

23. And he slew an Egyptian, a man of great stature, five cubits high; and in the Egyptian's hand was a spear like a weaver's beam; and he went down to him with a staff, and plucked the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and slew him with his own spear.

### VALIANT MEN.

**B**ENAI AH is described as "the son of a valiant man." Even if we regard the word "son" in this particular place as a spurious addition, we must remember that the Septuagint reads "son of a mighty man," and that it is nothing uncommon to find a son traced to a distinguished parent. If we are to expect the virtues of the fathers repeated in the sons, what wonderful progress the ages ought to have seen! It is a marvellous fact that whatever a father may be able to bequeath to his children he is unable to give them the information which he himself has acquired. Every man must learn the alphabet for himself. Some degree of mental force may be traceable to heredity, and unquestionably is so; at the same time that mental force is to be exercised by its owner on quite independent grounds. We cannot live long on the reputation of our fathers. There is hardly a more humiliating spectacle than a man who has to be accounted for as to his social position, by the fact that his father was a man of considerable eminence. A curious law of recession seems to operate in the progress of mankind. The son of Aristotle is not Aristotle *plus*; he may indeed be Aristotle *minus* in an alarming degree, quite an indifferent figure, an incapable person, a living irony upon the greatness of the father to whom he belongs; yet in the next generation there may be a distinct advance, and even the original greatness may be transcended; so the law

moves on, and retires, advancing, receding, now working miracles on the right hand, and now on the left hand, and now falling into dead monotony, and producing nothing for many a weary day; and then again a man arises who surprises the ages by his mental capacity or transcendent valour of every kind. If the son of a benevolent man were himself to be benevolent, the philanthropy of past ages would soon sink into comparative insignificance. But this is not the case. There would seem indeed to be a wonderful similarity between one age and another in all moral excellency and in all personal acquirements. In the Old Testament and in the New there are men separated by ages whose benevolence is perfectly equal; and so there are men to-day whose philanthropy will compare favourably with the philanthropy which was shown by the earliest Christian churches. Providence appears to rebuke everything like personal vanity in this matter; raising up and casting down by an uncontrollable law, and thus preserving a wonderful equality amongst men, even in the midst of apparent inequalities that would seem to separate men by impassable distances. The dowries are different, but the execution equalises the level, and constitutes a kind of indestructible brotherhood. We must never forget the responsibility of having a great Father. If we cannot claim a great father in the physical sense of the term, yet there is not a man now in civilised society who cannot claim an illustrious parentage in the broadest social sense. Once the only eminence would seem to have been that of merely personal relationship. A man born in a distinguished family became by so much distinguished himself. Now all this is changed: whoever is born in a great civilised land is born to inheritances, rights, and privileges compared with which any merely personal possessions dwindle into insignificance. Every man now is, as it were, born in a school-house, or a library, or a museum. The great world-house is fully furnished in all its apartments, so that when we awake to consciousness we find that the ages have been here before, providing as it were for our reception into the world. We are embarrassed by riches. We have to invent pleasures and excite our mental powers, in order to surpass what has already been done: in other words we have almost to perform miracles. We are all, therefore, the sons of an illus-

trious parentage, and we degrade ourselves and dispossess ourselves of many an honour, by simply thinking of our local habitation and our immediate family relationships, instead of looking abroad upon the whole world, and claiming everything we can mentally appropriate as truly part of our possessions. What an irony it is to think of being the son of a valiant man, and yet not being valiant oneself; or the son of a good man, and yet being bad; or the son of a philosopher, and yet being almost an imbecile!

What did Benaiah do to create for himself a place in history? Three things are represented in the text as having been accomplished by this valiant man. (1) He slew two lionlike men of Moab; (2) he went down and slew a lion in a pit on a snowy day; (3) and he slew an Egyptian, a man of great stature, five cubits high. All these constituted so many local anecdotes, and as such they are hardly worthy of quotation in our own day. At the time of the transactions they were no doubt the subject of excited talk, for it was no small thing that a man should go down and smite a lion in the middle of the cistern\* in the day of snow,

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\* *Or pit.* In a country which has scarcely more than one perennial stream, where fountains are not abundant, and where the months of summer pass without rain, the preservation of the rain water in cisterns must always have been a matter of vast importance, not only in the pasture-grounds, but in gardens, and, above all, in towns. Hence the frequent mention of cisterns in Scripture, and more especially of those which are found in the open country. They are usually little more than large pits, but sometimes take the character of extensive subterraneous vaults, open only by a small mouth, like that of a well. They are filled with rain water, and (where the climate allows) with snow during winter, and are then closed at the mouth with large flat stones, over which sand is spread in such a way as to prevent their being easily discovered. If by any chance the waters which the shepherd has thus treasured up are lost by means of an earthquake or some other casualty, or are stolen, both he and his flocks are exposed to great and imminent danger; as are also travellers who hasten to a cistern and find its waters gone. For this reason a failure of water is used as the image of any great calamity (Isa. xli. 17, 18; xlv. 3). There is usually a large deposit of mud at the bottom of these cisterns, so that he who falls into them, even when they are without water, is liable to perish miserably (Gen. xxxvii. 22, *seq.*; Jer. xxxviii. 6; Lam. iii. 53; Psalm xl. 2; lxix. 15). Cisterns were sometimes used, when empty, as prisons, and indeed prisons which were constructed underground received the same name (Gen. xxxix. 20; xl. 15).



or that he should slay an Egyptian so vast in stature and so completely and heavily accoutred. Probably these were the only things which a man like Benaiah could do. His was the rudest kind of power, quite elementary, yet perhaps the only strength that was available or possible, considering the man's environment. Examples of this kind are not set down for our imitation within the limits of the letter. Yet we are called upon to imitate them in the highest spiritual senses. We, too, are called upon to slay, to destroy, and to overthrow. Are we anxious to slay a lion? "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." *There* is a lion to be fought by every man! Are we inclined to go out and search for the nest of the serpent and destroy the horrible creature? The devil is described as "that serpent," and from the beginning he has been "more subtil than any beast of the field."\* The Son of man came

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\* The agency of Satan extends to all that he does or causes to be done. "Qui facit per alium facit per se." To this agency the following restrictions have been generally supposed to exist: It is limited, first, by the direct power of God; he cannot transcend the power on which he is dependent for existence;—secondly, by the finiteness of his own created faculties;—thirdly, by the established connection of cause and effect, or the laws of nature. The miracles which he has been supposed to have the power of working, are denominated lying signs and wonders, *σημείους καὶ τέρασι ψεύδους* (2 Thess. ii. 9). With these restrictions, the devil goes about like a roaring lion.

His agency is moral and physical. First, moral. He beguiled our first parents, and thus brought sin and death upon them and their posterity (Gen. iii.). He moved David to number the people (1 Chron. xxi. 1). He resisted Joshua the high-priest (Zech. iii. 1). He tempted Jesus (Matt. iv.); entered into Judas, to induce him to betray his master (Luke xxii. 3); instigated Ananias and Sapphira to lie to the Holy Ghost (Acts v. 3); hindered Paul and Barnabas on their way to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. ii. 18). He is the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience (Eph. ii. 2); and he deceiveth the whole world (Rev. xii. 9).

The means which he uses are variously called wiles, darts, depths, snares, all deceivableness of unrighteousness. He darkens the understanding of men, to keep them in ignorance. He perverts their judgments, that he may lead them into error. He insinuates evil thoughts, and thereby awakens in them unholy desires. He excites them to pride, anger, and revenge; to discontent, repinings, and rebellion. He labours to prop up false systems of religion, and to corrupt and overturn the true one. He came into most direct and determined conflict with the Saviour in the temptation, hoping to draw him from his allegiance to God, and procure homage for himself; but

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to crush the head of the serpent, and we are called upon to take part in that great destruction. The battle has only changed its ground, its scope, and its purpose. Life is still a tremendous fight. The weapons of our warfare are indeed not carnal, but they are not therefore the less weapons of war; for us there is a sword and a shield and a buckler: "Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand." Enemies are the more mischievous and deadly when they are invisible, and when in any sense they partake of a ghostly nature, coming and going quite spectrally over and around the life, without giving any notice of their method of attack or the weapons with which they will strike. We are called upon to fight against self-indulgence, to mortify our members, to crucify the flesh, to keep ourselves under, lest after having preached to others we ourselves should become castaways. Christians are expected to fight against merely worldly fashion: they are not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed, by the renewing of their minds, by the creation of a new conscience, a new purpose, and a new will in life. They are to see the temporariness, yea pitiful evanescence, of all things earthly; they are to use them as not abusing them; they are to say concerning every pageant, how grand soever its pomp,—*"The fashion of this world passeth away."* Christians are called upon to fight a battle every day against the insidious attacks of worldly ambition. They are tempted to take one step in advance of their brethren, to have larger estates, finer habitations, wider fame, more determining influence: they are tempted to live in display, and in all the petty vanities which attract and dazzle general attention: they are called upon not to be high-minded but to fear; to have regard to the brother of low estate; to go out and seek that which is lost until it be found; they are

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he failed in his purpose. Next he instigated the Jews to put him to death, thinking thus to thwart his designs and frustrate his plans. Here, too, he failed, and was made to subserve the very ends which he most wished to prevent. Into a similar conflict does he come with all the saints, and with like ultimate ill success. God uses his temptations as the means of trial to his people, and of strength by trial, and points them out as a motive to watchfulness and prayer. Such are the nature and mode of his moral influence and agency.

to let this mind be in them which was also in Christ Jesus, that being abased in his humiliation they may be raised with him in his glory and honour. A man who sets his military thoughts in this direction will have battlefield enough, and opportunity enough of showing of what metal he is made. We need not lament the old days of war, aggressive and defensive; the days of storm and tempest, the days of so-called heroism and chivalry. Truly there is battle enough now to be done. Whosoever will set himself against the customs of his time, the popular policies of the circle in which he moves, the prejudices of the persons whose friendship he values, will find that he must have a sword in his right hand, and that even whilst he sleeps he must have his armour so near that at a moment's notice he can be once more in the fray.

A beautiful expression is this—"a valiant man." This is what the Church needs now, both in the pulpit and in the pew. This is no time for indifference, timidity, self-consideration, or cowardice. To his credit or discredit be it said, the devil is valiant enough. He plants his evil places at the corners of the streets; he is up first in the morning and last at night; he studies the tastes of the people, and accommodates himself to them; though a leader he is yet a follower; there is no man, how low or how high soever, whose peculiarities he does not study with a view to his corruption and overthrow. How is it that the Church will operate but in one direction, forgetting the breadth of human life, and the multitudinousness of its necessity? The Church is apt to confine its valour to one line or to one point. It does not follow the sinner, tracking his every step, passing with him from chamber to chamber, pleading with him, wrestling with him, and giving him to feel that he will not be let go until he has answered the great appeals of heaven. Is it enough to build a sanctuary and to say that the people may come to it if they please? The sanctuaries must be built, and steady, careful, scriptural teaching must be maintained; but in addition to all this there must be a spirit of going out, a missionary spirit, an aggressive spirit, and spirit of distribution and evangelisation, that will not rest until the Gospel has been preached to every creature under heaven. Then again we must allow for differ-

ences of valour. All men are not valiant in the same direction, any more than they are valiant in the same degree. One man is valiant as a public controversialist: give him his sword and let him fight his battle in his own way. Another man is valiant in the matter of self-culture: let him also have his sword and fight his secret battle as it were in the solitude of prayer. Another is valiant in the way of leading good causes, setting good examples: let him also have abundant scope, that he may stimulate others, and lead them to join in the great battle for right and purity and love. A pitiable day it will be for the Church when it is forgotten that though the regiments are many the army is one. Is it a time to be fighting about uniforms, badges, and mere marks of distinction, when the enemy is at the gate, his mouth filled with loud boasting, and his eyes blazing with malignant passion? Let us forget all petty separations, all merely regimental distinctions and honours, and gather together into one great force to strike a united blow at a common enemy. Blessed be God, every effort is put down in his book as if it were a victory. This is the peculiarity of divine benevolence. Men do not give one another sufficient credit for good intention or strenuous endeavour; they simply look at results, and judge everything by that which is visible and estimable in plain figures. By no such rule does God judge the world. He knows who are heroic in heart, and he writes down the inward proofs of heroism as if they were accomplished facts in arms. He knows who would give much if he had much to give, and he sets down in his book a great sum as if it had actually been contributed. God knows every fight that is proceeding in the heart, in the family, in the Church, in the world. At last many shall be found who have been giants and heroes, mighty and valiant men of war, who have been regarded in this life as timid, silent, and almost useless. But let no man here play the thief, and take encouragement who has no right to take it. Every man knows in his own heart what he is, what he would be if he could, and what he would do if he could. We need not wait for the least illumination to throw light upon our own character, because at this moment we may see it just as it is, if we really want to do so, and will study ourselves at the cross of Christ.

## PRAYER.

**ALMIGHTY God**, thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us. We know it in very deed; our souls are glad in the holy consciousness that we are thine and cannot be separated from thee, that we are bound up in the bundle of life. This assurance we have in thy Son Jesus Christ. We live upon it; we rekindle the torch of our hope by this holy fire; we stand here in all the sacredness and safety of inviolable strength. God is our refuge the Judge of the whole earth is our upholder; the God of the fathers is our God. We cannot explain this in words, even to ourselves; but behind all tumult, and unrest, and fear, and loss, and pain, we stand in this holy consciousness. We bless thee for the revelation of thyself in Christ Jesus. He is thy Son, our Brother, the Captain of our salvation, the Redeemer of the whole world, the ever-living—the unchanging Priest. May we study his words; may we imitate his character; may his mind be in us, and repeat itself in every action of our hands. We bless thee for the quiet place in the midst of the city, for the sweet hymn of praise, for the altar of the Cross, where we now bend in lowliest prostration, in most hopeful affection. Let our coming together be for the profit of our souls, that, being enriched with religious thought, and ennobled by Christian aspiration, and comforted by heavenly solace, we may do all the work of life with a firmer hand, with a completer patience, with a nobler heroism. Undertake for us in all things; we would be servants of thine and in no wise masters, receiving thy will, in a measure understanding it, and gladly attempting in thine own power to carry it out in all its gracious meaning. Thus would we begin our life by spending our few earthly days wisely and well. We do but begin here: our full time is not until by-and-by, when the veil shall be rent and destroyed, and we shall stand in the eternal, and see thy purpose more completely. Cleanse us by the precious blood; give us the consciousness of the nearness of the Holy Ghost in all our thought, and purpose, and speech; and at last, in thine own time, in thine own way, bid us come higher, that we may see all things from a better level, and in a clearer light. Amen.

### 1 Chronicles xii.

#### SKILLED HANDS.

**T**HIS chapter is supplemental to the preceding, and has been described throughout as peculiar to the chronicle. Here we have two registers: the first is of the warriors who

went over to David during his outlaw career, and the second is of the tribal representatives who crowned David at Hebron. There are two or three resting-places even in this chapter of names, where we may tarry for a moment and partake of spiritual refreshment. These resting-places are the more remarkable as occurring in a chapter which is largely filled with such names as Ahiezer, Shemaah, Jeziel, Berachah, Ismaiah, Johanan, Josabad, Eluzai, Jerimoth, and many others. We seem to be wandering in very stony places, hence any sprig of flower is the more remarkable, and any pool of clear water the more valuable and precious.

Take the second verse for example, where we read :—

“They were armed with bows, and could use both the right hand and the left in hurling stones and shooting arrows out of a bow.”

On what comparatively small points fame often seems to rest. We have noticed before how many men there are in Scripture whose names seem to be preserved in association with some trifling eccentricity or local speciality of circumstances. In times of conflict and danger, however, it was no small qualification to be able to use both the right hand and the left in hurling stones and shooting arrows out of a bow. How few men know that they have a left hand; how very much are the operations of life confined to one side of the body; men speak of the right hand and the right eye as if they were crowned with a special kind of honour; other men seem to have cultivated both sides of the body with equal success, so that they are what are termed all-round men, able to do double work, and proving themselves to be most useful in complicated and unforeseen circumstances. We hardly yet know how many faculties we have. Physiologists delight to tell us that there are muscles in the body whose very existence we had not suspected, and they call us to this or that kind of unusual exercise, in order that such muscles may be excited and developed. Whilst all this may be perfectly true regarding the body, the use which we wish to make of the incident is purely spiritual. All faculties are needed in this great warfare to which we are called. It is the peculiarity of Christian service that all our faculties can be utilised within its lines. Yet have we not practically forbidden the use of certain

faculties in seeking to complete our Christian avocation? We have given a high place to Reason, and a higher place still to Faith, and we have set Reverence in great honour, and crowned Veneration as the chief of worshippers. All this is right; so obviously right that it needs no vindication. But man is more than rational and reverent. His faculties are well-nigh innumerable. What place have we assigned to Imagination in the Church—that marvellous faculty which makes new heavens and a new earth, which turns the dust of the ground into men, and makes men sons of God; the creative faculty which turns bread into flesh, wine into blood, and sees in all the processes of nature a **many-coloured** and eloquent parable? We have been unjust to Imagination. We have treated Imagination as a trespasser, and thus have acted to our souls as a man would act towards an eagle who cut off the wings of the great flier. Even wit and raillery have their place in Christian teaching. Some men can bring wicked customs into ridicule who cannot set up against them a continuous and conclusive argument. Some men are gifted with the power of banter, so that by throwing anti-Christian contentions into grotesque forms, and reducing them to absurdity, they may do more by their raillery than others can do by formal and elaborate logic. Others again may have the faculty or power of amusing men, and so withdrawing them from cruel or brutal engagements to exercises that are innocent, and which may in due time create a desire for something higher than themselves. The Christian ministry should represent a marvellous piece of mosaic; or, to change the figure, a very intricate but beautiful and exquisite piece of machinery. Continually there is a danger that the ministry should be regarded as being only orthodox when of one and the same pattern, when using the same vocal tones, walking in the same literary paths, and practically saying the same thing without variety and without passion. Have we not many members in one body? and yet the body is one. The eye cannot say to the ear, I have no need of thee; nor can the hand do without the services of the foot. If we be many members therefore and one body, shall we not, in the Christian ministry, find the thinker, the teacher, the expositor, the eloquent orator, the burning evangelist, the tender and gracious suppliant, the sympathising visitor, the friend who has

no power but that of suggestive teaching, so that the very grasp of his hand would seem to communicate energy and hope? There is indeed a danger of becoming envious of men who accomplish more than we can. This is pitiful everywhere, but doubly pitiful and inexcusable in the Christian Church. We are inclined to mock each other's superiority, or to make the least of it, or to charge it to false motives. The man who can hurl stones with only one hand is apt to depreciate the man who can hurl stones with both hands. The enemy has no stronger ally, no better or more reliable colleague, than the man who, whilst professing to be a brother, plays the part of a sneerer or traducer.

In the eighth verse there are further discriminations of faculties and their uses—

“And of the Gadites there separated themselves unto David into the hold to the wilderness men of might, and men of war fit for the battle, that could handle shield and buckler, whose faces were like the faces of lions, and were as swift as the roes upon the mountains. . . . These were of the sons of Gad, captains of the host : one of the least was over an hundred, and the greatest over a thousand ” (vv. 8, 14.)

These men were inspired by a common sentiment of faithfulness to David ; therefore they followed him to the cave of Adullam, and to the woody mount of Hachilah, and the crag of Maon, and the rocks of Engedi. Wherever David was there they wished to be, for his presence was inspiration, and his benediction was as the beginning of heaven. The Gadites were men of might, elsewhere called “mighty men of valour” (v. 25), and “valiant men of might” (vii. 2). They were men of war, fit for the battle (literally, men of service, or training for the war); they had seen battle in many forms ; their lives had been full of risk ; they were familiar with danger, and they seemed to hail its presence as men hail the oncoming of familiar friends. In other words, the Gadites were veterans in war.\* Truly in the Church

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\* The Gadites were descendants of Gad, the son of Jacob and Zilpah, Leah's maid. His name is explained in the story of his birth, and the explanation is confirmed by a subsequent allusion—“Zilpah bare Jacob a son ; and Leah said, *A troop* cometh : and she called his name *Gad*” (Gen. xxx. 11). The name is thus rendered by Dean Stanley : “Gad is a *troop*.”



we need men of experience, old men, men of mellowness and ripeness of character, men who have seen life in a thousand aspects, and have tested all the offers which have been made to seduce them from right, and lure them from the upward path. Whilst we always need youthfulness, energy, passion, we must never despise those who, having seen many days of war, are not unwilling to rest awhile, and contribute to the general progress what they can of wisdom and experience. The Gadites could handle shield and buckler. How much depends upon our handling of things! We may have the shield and the buckler, but if we have not the hand, of what use are the finest weapons of attack or defence? The difference of one man from another would seem to be a difference of handling. Some men appear to have no hands or no fingers, no fine faculties; they are utterly without skill; what they do is done by rude force or sheer endurance; of science, skill, and ingenuity of method they know nothing; hence in doing little they make great noise, and put themselves to infinite pains and suffering in accomplishing that which other men would do without lifting up their voice or crying in the streets. But here again comes in what we cannot better define than as the sovereignty of God. It is perfectly true that

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*of plunderers; a troop of plunderers shall plunder him, but he shall plunder at the last" (S. and P. 320).*

The Gadites were a warlike race, and they bravely aided their brethren in the conquest of Canaan. Leaving their women and children in their strongholds east of the Jordan, they crossed over armed, and with Reuben and Manasseh led the van in the long campaign under Joshua (Josh. iv. 12, 13; xxii. 1-4). The position of their territory compelled them to keep up their warlike spirit and training in after ages. The Ammonites, whose country they possessed, hung upon their eastern border (Judg. x. 17); and the wild hordes of the Arabian desert made periodical raids upon their pastures and flocks (chaps. vii., viii.). Though often sorely pressed by these fierce plunderers, yet they nobly defended their country, and more than once bore back the tide of conquest on their assailants. One of their greatest victories was that gained over the descendants of Ishmael, the tribes of Jetur, Nepish, and Nodab, from whom they took enormous booty (1 Chron. v. 19-22). The Gadites were well described at that time as "valiant men, men able to bear buckler and sword, and to shoot with bow, and skilful in war" (v. 18). This country, too, produced many eminent men. Jephthah the Gileadite ranks high among the heroes of Israel; and "Elijah the Tishbite of the inhabitants of Gilead," was one of the grandest characters the world ever saw. It may be that he owed some of those

some men have no skill in handling, that hands seem to have been withheld from them in their constitution; but God will know this, and judge them accordingly, when he comes to reward every man according to his works. Not only were the Gadites gifted with the great power of handling, but their "faces were like the faces of lions."\* It is obvious that some men have power of face as well as power of hand. Earnestness burns in their countenance. Their very image testifies to the exactness and severity of their discipline. When they look upon injustice, their faces become as a flame of fire; when they behold oppression, it is not difficult to observe the storm which rages within them. Blessed was David in having the services of such men! And is David's greater Son, the very Son of God, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, to be left without men strong of hand, and of the burning face, on whose every lineament is written courage, consecration, and hope?

qualities for which he was distinguished to the habits and state of his native country—his wonderful physical strength; his powers of enduring fatigue, hunger, and thirst; his dress in every respect resembling that of a modern inhabitant of Gilead; his wandering mode of life; and his apparent dislike to the restraints of society. Gilead was a land of roving shepherds, and moving camps, and mountain castles, and wild adventure.

The Gadites were devotedly attached to both Saul and David. Some of their mighty men followed the fortunes of the latter in their darkest period—men of whom it is said that they were "men of war for the battle, that could handle shield and buckler, whose faces were the faces of lions, and who were swift as the roes upon the mountains" (1 Chron. xii. 8). The taking down the bodies of Saul and Jonathan from the battlements of Beth-shean was an act of noble daring and grateful recompense. Among the Gadites David afterwards found an asylum when he fled from Absalom; and in their territory the battle was fought which regained him his throne (2 Sam. xvii., xviii.). The Gadites suffered much during the ascendancy of the warlike monarchs of Damascus. At length the whole country was overrun by the armies of Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, and the people carried away captive (2 Kings xv. 29). Soon afterwards the Ammonites appear to have taken possession of the land; and Jeremiah was then commissioned to pronounce that prophetic doom, which we now see so fearfully executed on the cities and villages of Gilead (Jer. xlix. 1, *seq.*).

\* Literally, "And face of the lion, their face; and like gazelles on the mountains they speed." The chronicler may here be borrowing from some contemporary record. Compare, for example, David's own description of Saul and Jonathan, in 2 Sam. i. 23.

In the nineteenth verse we come upon a baser sort of men—

“And there fell some of Manasseh to David [v. 20; 2 Kings xxv. 11], when he came with the Philistines against Saul to battle: but they helped them not: for the lords of the Philistines upon advisement [*i.e.*, with forethought and after deliberation (Prov. xx. 18)] sent him away, saying, He will fall to his master Saul to the jeopardy of our heads.”

It would seem as if the story of human life cannot be long continued without break or flaw. Sooner or later we come upon the line of baseness, the signature of evil, the proof of depravity—call it original or derived, there it is, the most stubborn and discouraging fact in human philosophy. Now David knows the pain and loneliness of partial desertion. Whether the Philistines were deserted, or David was deserted, or desertion took place alike upon both sides, does not disturb the doctrine that in human life there are baser men, men who consider themselves before others, and who upon advisement or deliberation are willing to bring the connection to their own benefit. This is the continual trouble of the Christian Church. It was the trouble of Christ himself: why then should those who bear his name be amazed when it occurs in their own times, and in ways which put their faith to the severest test? Did not Christ say to some of his disciples, “Will ye also go away?” Is it not said, “All his disciples forsook him and fled”? Did he not also assure his hearers, and through them his Church in all ages, that the man who flees is an hireling, and not a true shepherd? It is in circumstances of difficulty and impending danger that the quality of men is made known. Of a truth, there are many who are only fair-weather friends, both in common daily life and in special spiritual associations. So long as loaves and fishes are to be had the crowd will not be wanting. A subtle process of calculation may be going on in the mind as to issues and results, and men may actually be secretly balancing the *pro* and *con* of an argument bearing upon their very prayers and sacrifices. Again and again we have had occasion to point out how subtle is the operation of selfishness, even in the settlement of spiritual questions. Men will go with Christ because he is leading them to green pastures, to bright, calm, eternal heavens. Such men would leave Christ instantly if some bolder offer were made and they could for a moment believe in its reality. Hardest of all

lessons is it to learn that we are to do right because it is right, and not because it ends in heaven. If the doing of right were to end in the exaction of severe discipline, still right ought to be done for its own sake, whatever its personal issue. Who can learn this lesson? It can only be fully learned by those who live and move and have their being in God, who are swallowed up in the divine love, who are crucified with Christ, and are indeed all but indistinguishable from their Lord.

In the twenty-second verse we read :—

“For at that time day by day there came to David to help him, until it was a great host [camp], like the host of God.”

In Genesis xxxii. 1, 2 we read—“And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God’s host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim,” that is, two camps. The verse points to the inclusion of considerable accessions to David’s forces which followed upon the defeat and death of Saul. The point of beauty in the verse would seem to be in the words “day by day.” All the forces did not come at the same hour. Some came on the first day, some on the second, some on the third; yea, day by day, as the need deepened the hosts came as if specially sent from God. Our Lord teaches us to pray—“Give us this day our daily bread.” Daily help for daily need should be the confidence of every Christian soul. “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” It is true that to-morrow will bring its own burden, it is also true that to-morrow will bring its own strength. Why do we project ourselves into the future, and try to live to-morrow within the limits of to-day? Christ endeavoured to teach us a contrary lesson, and he plied both our reason and imagination with many arguments and appeals; yet even now we treat to-morrow as if Christ had not laid down a doctrine concerning it, or made any promise that God would meet us then as certainly as he meets us now. Is it not the very law of life and progress that day by day we receive new accessions of strength and light and confidence? Who can tell how the mind grows, how ideas multiply, how sources of comfort reveal themselves, how pools of water are found in the burning desert? Who has not often said that he could not imagine himself doing

this or that, but somehow, when the need arose, the faculty was awakened or the resources were assured? Men are continually surprising themselves by what they are enabled to do and to bear; and yet, should there come a moment of danger, and should they be called down from their enthusiasm, they soon sink into unbelief or indifference. "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." The Lord has many things to say unto us, but we cannot bear them now. To-morrow we shall be stronger, to-morrow we shall be wiser, to-morrow we shall be nearer heaven. The only way in which we can affect to-morrow is by living wisely to-day. To-day is the seed-time; to-morrow will be the harvest; and according to the seed we sow will be the harvest we reap. There is, therefore, a sense in which to-morrow is quite in our own hands, and that is in the sense of so using to-day that we shall have no fear of to-morrow bringing forth an evil harvest, because we know that we have sown the field of to-day with earnest labour, earnest prayer, ungrudging sacrifice, and that by the eternal law of God such seed must bring forth precious fruit.

We have seen what mighty men David had around him—men of valour, ambidextrous men, men of the lion face, men who never went forth but to victory; we see however in the thirty-second verse that David had men who were not only valiant but wise.

"And of the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do" [literally, "And of the sons of Issachar came men, sage in discernment for the times, so as to know what Israel ought to do"].

It has been thought that the tribe of Issachar had skill in astrology, so that they could read in the heavens what seasons were auspicious for action. On the other hand, it has been thought that the meaning of the text is limited to the fact that the men of Issachar showed political sagacity in going over to David. It is noted that no similar phrase occurs elsewhere in the Old Testament. Taking this text as it stands, it leads us to see how important it is that men should study the times in which they live, and adapt their work to the conditions which constitute their opportunity. It is in vain that we endeavour

to sew new cloth on to old garments, or to put new wine into old bottles. It is perfectly possible to be changing always as to mere position, attitude, direction, and yet to be never changing as to inner doctrine and moral purpose. Why should men think that the church is in danger, when it is only some old leaves that are being shed from the tree which the Lord himself has planted? Why should men think themselves reverent, simply because they are vainly endeavouring to make old methods suit new necessities? He is the wise man who considers all the features of a case, and adapts the treasure of which he is possessed to meet new desires and new demands. There may be change without change; in other words, the change may be but superficial, whilst the immutable may be within, giving order and dignity and energy to all that is attempted from without. Love is eternal, but its expression admits of continual variety. Prayer never changes as to its spirit and intent, yet every day may find it laden with new expressions, because human history has revealed wants which had not before been even suspected. He who understands every time but his own, will do no permanent work for society. He is like a man who knows every language but his native tongue, and is therefore unable to speak to the person standing at his side. To know everything but human nature is to be supreme in ignorance. The parent does not stand upon some high law of physiology, and command his child to show the phenomena which have justified that law, or resulted in its enactment; he studies the child's particular want, or peculiar temperament, or special circumstances, and says the law was made for the child, not the child for the law. The Apostle Paul became all things to all men, that by all means he might win some. Conservatism is madness, when it will not study the law of the times and adapt itself to passing conditions.

In the thirty-third verse we find another description of men —:

“Of Zebulun, such as went forth to battle, expert in war [rather, “arrayed for battle with all harness of battle”], with all instruments of war, fifty thousand, which could keep rank: they were not of double heart.”

The expression “falling into rank” occurs only here and in verse thirty-eight. The phrase “double heart” might be rendered

“without a heart and a heart,” and is meant to assert the abiding and incorruptible fidelity, and determined and unchangeable courage of the warriors of Zebulun. “With a double heart do they speak” (Psalm xii. 2) might be literally rendered—“A speech of smooth things with heart and heart they speak,”—that is to say, they think one thing and say another,—double-minded men, hypocrites, wholly unreliable. A great deal is made of the heart in verse thirty-eight:—

“All these men of war, that could keep rank [literally, “arrayers of battle,” men that could set the battle in array], came with a perfect heart to Hebron, to make David king over all Israel: and all the rest also of Israel were of one heart to make David king.”

A beautiful expression is this, “one heart.” We find it in the New Testament, in the Acts of the Apostles (iv. 32)—“The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul.” This is the great need of the Christian brotherhood. “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.” “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” “Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” God calls for unity of heart,—that is, for the undivided purpose, the aspiration that moves steadfastly in one direction only, and is not to be turned aside by rebuke, or fear, or seduction.

“If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only.”—Given a consecrated and undivided heart; given an army animated by such a heart, and the enemy will flee away, and the host of God will bring to Zion banners inscribed with Victory.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, may we read the word with our heart, and see its beauty, and answer all its solemn appeal. The word was written for us; it is a word sent to our life, bringing with it life and truth and love, and high vision, and glorious possibility of destiny. It is written with the finger of God. No man can erase the writing; it abides the fire; it outlasts the ages; it is grand with the quietness of Godhead. It is thy word,—it is all thine; we cannot add to it, and we cannot take from it, without showing the mischievousness of our attempts. We would receive thy word in all its fulness, read it with simple hearts, accept it with the trust of little children. We would prove its inspiration by living in its strength, enjoying its comfort, and magnifying its statutes and precepts. Help us to learn the doctrine by doing the will: show us how obedience explains what is written, and how to the broken heart hardly any light is refused—all heaven stoops to the contrite spirit to bless it with gospels and promises. Give us the understanding heart, the open mind, the unsophisticated spirit;—then shall we see much, and learn much, and do it with tender obedience to God. Let thy word always be amongst us as bread and water. Jesus said: I am the Bread of life. Jesus said: I am the Water of life. Bread of heaven, feed us, till we want no more! Amen.

### 1 Chronicles xiii.

#### HOLY EBULLITIONS.

CHAPTERS xiii.—xvi. form a section complete in itself, relating to the transfer of the ark from Kirjath-jearim to Jerusalem. There is a short parenthesis in chapter xiv. The fourteenth chapter is almost parallel to 2 Sam. vi. 1–11, except that the introduction goes into much more detail. Even David, though so mighty, was wise enough to consult with the captains of thousands and hundreds, and with every leader. The hundreds were the smaller military divisions of the tribe. Every leader means every prince or chief; when all the chiefs were gathered together they constituted what was known as the Great Council of the nation. David was about to enter upon a distinctly religious enterprise, yet he surrounded himself with all the forces at his



command. None could tell the difficulties with which he might meet, so like a sagacious prince he prepared himself for every exigency. To bring the ark from one locality to another was easy enough, so far as mere weight and distance were concerned ; but who knows what enemies may unexpectedly arise, or what obstructions may suddenly be developed ? Those who conduct the enterprises of the Church should take a complete survey of all the possibilities of the case, and not allow themselves to be surprised by things which might have been foreseen and prepared for. They are not wise Church statesmen who see only the one particular thing to be done ; they rather are the true philosophers and leaders who note every circumstance, and upon a complete survey of the entire detail base their plan of operation. Men work best when they are thus consulted ; their sense of responsibility is developed ; their instinct of honour is happily touched ; so the work becomes more than personal, it broadens itself into a national enterprise. David does not want the ark simply as an ornament ; he wishes to inquire at it, that he may hold more direct and distinct communication with God. David remembers that in the days of Saul the ark was neglected, men were secularists, or atheists, or self-idolaters ; they supposed that they had the directing voice within themselves, and need not have recourse to instrumentalities : David now sees the mistake of all this, and re-institutes the ark, and looks upon it as the medium through which God will come to him in all the exigencies and perplexities of life. David gathered all Israel together to bring the ark of God from Kirjath-jearim (v. 5). The ark did not belong to one man nor to the chiefs of the nation, nor to the rich and the mighty ; it belonged to the whole people of Israel. This is the true conception of all Christian ordinances ; they are not priestly ceremonies ; they belong to the whole people, to the human heart, to that one peculiar element which constitutes Humanity. The ark was at Kirjath-jearim, a city of Judah, and Judah was the tribe to which David himself belonged : but it was not enough that the ark should be associated with one tribe ; the king desired to place it at the centre, in the capital, and in the royal residence. Though we may not follow this direction literally, we may adopt it in all its spiritual meanings. The ark of God is not to occupy some side-place, some outside locality,

however respectable ; nor to be identified with one tribe or family how distinguished soever : it is to be in the supreme place, in the imperial city, accessible to all ; yea, it is to be as "a city set on an hill that cannot be hid," and which is not kept apart by gates of man's formation or erection. According to verse seven, the ark was carried in a new cart out of the house of Abinadab, where it had been for twenty years after it had been returned by the Philistines. These little attentions to what may be called the spirit of homage or courtesy, such as the providing of a new cart, are not to be omitted when looking carefully into the nature of ancient religion. Men may be right in points, and yet wrong in the whole. A great character cannot be built upon individual excellences, or exceptional attentions to duty and ceremony. The spirit which is within determines the quality of the character, and the measure of its best influence. As David and all Israel played before God with all their might, and with singing, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets, they expressed a great religious joy. Enthusiasm is of the very nature of religion. David and his people were filled with a higher gladness than if they had captured a city. We should be careful upon what objects we expend our purest enthusiasm. Here we find great numbers of people rejoicing, because their connection with heaven had been more visibly established. This ought to be the one joy of the human heart, absorbing all others, and giving quality to every degree of minor gladness. There is nothing merely sentimental in holy ebullitions of this kind ; they expressed deep conviction, they signified indeed the real passion and consecration of the heart. There is a quietness that is not decent, because it is not just. Many persons mistake indifference for peace, or self-control, or dignity : it is nothing of the kind : it is simply an offence against the very spirit of the sanctuary, which is one of jubilation, of triumph, and music. Whenever a church is consecrated to the service of God all the people should celebrate the event with singing, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets, if not literally yet in the spirit represented by these words, a spirit of abounding, grateful enthusiasm and gladness.

**"Uzza put forth his hand to hold the ark ; for the ox shook**

it."\* On this we have already commented.† The lesson is not difficult to learn, when men are moving along the commandment of God, they may be sure that God will see to the fulfilment of his purpose without their excitement and interposition, as if everything depended upon themselves. God takes care of his own stars: God takes care of his redeemed Church. We may be impious even in the defence of our religion. The religion is not ours, except as a spirit that is to rule our life; it is God's gift, as is the sun in the heavens, and he himself is the one Defender of the faith, and to him must be left the answer to every difficulty, the reply to every form of opposition and assault. David, however, was affrighted by what he saw. He thought that God was calling him to do that which was impossible, to walk along a line fraught with danger; a line perforated, so to say, with the deepest pits, into any one of which he might fall at any moment. David was so alarmed indeed that he "brought not the ark home to himself to the city of David, but carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite" (v. 13). Who knows whether

\* Uzza ("strength") son of Abinadab, a Levite, who, with his brother Ahio, conducted the new cart on which the ark was taken from Kirjath-jearim to Jerusalem. When the procession reached the threshing-floor of Nachon the oxen drawing the cart became unruly, and Uzza hastily put forth his hand to stay the ark, which was shaken by their movements. For this the anger of the Lord smote him, and he died on the spot. This judgment appeared to David so severe, or even harsh, that he was much distressed by it, and becoming afraid to take the ark any farther, left it there, in charge of Obed-edom, till three months after, when he finally took it to Jerusalem (2 Sam. vi. 1-11). The whole proceeding was very irregular and contrary to the distinct and far from unmeaning regulations of the law, which prescribed that the ark should be carried on the shoulders of the Levites (Exod. xxv. 14), whereas here it was conveyed in a cart drawn by oxen. The ark ought to have been enveloped in its coverings, and thus wholly concealed before the Levites approached it; but it does not appear that any priest took part in the matter, and it would seem as if the ark was brought forth, exposed to the common gaze, in the same manner in which it had been brought back by the Philistines (1 Sam. vi. 13-19). It was the duty of Uzza, as a Levite, to have been acquainted with the proper course of proceeding: he was therefore the person justly accountable for the neglect; and the judgment upon him seems to have been the most effectual course of insuring attention to the proper course of proceeding, and of checking the growing disposition to treat the holy mysteries with undue familiarity. That it had this effect is expressly stated in 1 Chron. xv. 2, 13.

† Vol. vii., p. 122.

this turning aside was not the real meaning of the punishment which fell upon Uzza? Things may be larger than they seem at first sight. By very small occurrences the course of great lines may be changed in history. If we look at any little occurrence we may be surprised that God should have taken action upon it, because of its insignificance; yet if we take into view the whole history following, we may see that a great door was hung upon a small hinge, and that what we considered insignificant was needful to the development and progress of a stupendous plan. How much we owe to the "asides" of God! But for these how many would have remained unblest! Obed-edom owed the benediction which descended upon his house to this "aside." God's way through life is thus wondrous: always, indeed, one great main line of progress, yet who can count the *détours* which he makes, the asides, the incidental variations, the small things which men regarded as unworthy of notice,—who can tell how all these are wrought up into a comprehensive revelation of wisdom and love? If we only took the things which came to us on the great main thoroughfares of life, some men would hardly be blessed at all: they owe nearly all they are and have to circumstances which appear to be out of the general course, quite exceptional, so unique indeed that the men receiving the benefits accruing therefrom have no difficulty in proclaiming the doctrine of special providence. A study of the "asides" of life would confirm us in our general Christian faith.

## 1 Chronicles xiv.

### THE DIVINE AND THE HUMAN.

**T**HIS section is a duplicate of 2 Sam. v. 11-25. The order of chronology has not been particularly observed. It has been thought indeed by some that "the chronicler may have transposed the two accounts, in order to represent the removal of the ark to the new capital in immediate connection with the acquisition of the city." This chapter treats of two subjects: the first, David's palace-building, and family; and the second, the two victories which he won over the Philistines in the valley of Rephaim. When David observed the effect of concurrent circumstances—such as the sending, by Hiram king of Tyre, messengers and timber of cedars with masons and carpenters to build him an house—he took knowledge that the Lord had confirmed him king over Israel, and that his kingdom was lifted up on high because of the people Israel.

In studying the great subject of Providence we should carefully watch how one circumstance combines with another, and how the element which we designate by some such term as "unexpectedness" unites the whole, shaping it into evident meanings. It was thus that David regarded the willing alliance of the great sovereign of Phœnician Tyre. David looked upon this alliance as a practical miracle. Such miracles abound in human life, if we carefully note them. Enemies are subdued, strangers are brought into friendship: men whom we have not known before have suddenly developed into friends: and persons whom we regarded as implacable have become unaccountably gracious and approachable. These changes do not pass in life under the name of miracles, yet they deserve to be so ranked, for they are conquests of spirit if not of matter, overrulings of stubborn will and obstinate prejudice, such overrulings as are possible only to

Almightiness. This could not go on without an effect being produced upon the observers. When the Philistines heard that David was anointed king over all Israel, they came and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim, determined to oppose one whose might was visibly growing day by day. This opposition may be a sign of power, not on the part of those who oppose but on the part of those who are opposed. When a man is envied, he should reason that there is something in himself which excites that envy, and that the something which excites the evil passion may be something really good : no man envies poverty, meanness, worthlessness ; no burglar attacks an empty house if there be a full one at hand into which he can effect an entrance : orchards are not robbed in winter, but in summer and autumn when every tree is loaded with fruit. It is so in human relations, and herein is the comfort of the man who suffers from envy and jealousy. Let him reflect how much there is in him, wrought by the grace of God, which bad men may envy and which they may wish to turn aside. The envy of bad men is a tribute to the power of good men. Before David did anything in the matter of the Philistinian attack he made diligent inquiry of God. How did he do this ? Was it through the high priest Abiathar, who sought divine direction by means of the Urim and Thummim ? Or was it by direct personal prayer ? When men have no established ordinances they often take the great work of approaching God into their own hands, the heart forcing its way through all difficulties, and crying mightily to heaven for light and strength. The Bible has no hesitation in declaring that prayer is answered. Thus we find these words in this chapter : " And the Lord said unto him, Go up ; for I will deliver them into thine hand " (v. 10). How these communications are made to the heart may never be fully explained in words ; but that they are made there can be no doubt in any Christian mind. They come in the form of convictions, deep impressions, impulses that cannot be resisted without doing injustice not to feeling only but to reason and judgment ; and if any man can venture to say that he has received such and such an answer from heaven, he is justified in putting those convictions and impulses into words which best express their scope and energy. Let us not be critical about the mere words ; the fact is wholly within the terms—namely, the gracious

fact that a great necessity has been expressed, and a great conviction has followed, which conviction the religious heart represents as an answer to prayer. In all this process there is nothing to violate reason nor to trouble conscience.

When the victory was won, David did not hesitate to ascribe it to God, saying, "God hath broken in upon mine enemies by mine hand like the breaking forth of waters" (v. 11). Here is a happy combination of the divine and the human. The leader was God, the soldier was David. God works by instrumentality. The instrumentality must never imagine itself to be the original cause. When lands are converted to Christ, and deserts blossom like a garden, the miracle is wrought in heaven, and as for man he has but the honour of the service, the glory of having obeyed a divine mandate—glory enough for the human heart, an infinite satisfaction indeed. Observe that the Philistines also took their gods with them to battle. They were not ashamed of their religion. We should learn something from Pagans even in this matter. Idolatry is not to be scorned, but is rather to be respected as marking the highest height to which men have come under darkness. Contempt is not to be uttered as regards men who are doing their utmost according to the light they have; they are to be instructed, not sneered at; the sneering may come afterwards when the mind has been emancipated, and the higher and purer thought has been established as the standard of judgment; but at first he will make no progress in winning idolaters who begins by sneering at their idols. What is true of Pagan idolatry is true also of intellectual perversion or self-worship: reveal the higher truth; establish the larger reason; and when progress has been made on the constructive side, that very progress will itself set in a contemptuous light that which before was believed in by the uninstructed and undisciplined mind.

As the result of a second inquiry David was commanded not to go up after the Philistines, but he was ordered to "come upon them over against the mulberry trees" (v. 14). In connection with this arrangement, a miracle is supposed to have been wrought—"And it shall be, when thou shalt hear a sound of going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt go out

to battle : for God is gone forth before thee to smite the host of the Philistines" (v. 15). "A sound of going" has been translated "*The sound of marching,*" and it has been supposed that the sign may have been natural, not miraculous. Investigators of ancient history have reminded us that all ancient people attached a religious or prophetic import to the motion and rustling of leaves. There were speaking oaks at Dodona.\* In Judges (ix. 37) we read of Meonenim, "the oak of the diviners;" Deborah refers mysteriously to a palm-tree; and some of the most reverent commentators have not hesitated to refer the burning bush itself to the same order of ideas. The Arabs believe that certain thorny bushes are capable of uttering prophetic words; they regard the Egyptian thorn as sacred. All these are matters of history, yet they need not be regarded as throwing any doubt upon the miracle which is supposed to have occurred in connection with this attack upon the Philistines. If we have to struggle our way up to miracles, there can be no wonder if we often find them too high for reason, and often fail in faith absolutely and implicitly to receive them : but if we so live in God, in the noblest religious excitement, as to come down upon miracles as from an infinite heavenly height, then even the most wonderful of the miracles will appear to our inspired reason

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\* Dodona (Δωδώνη), the most ancient oracle in Greece, was situated in Epirus, and probably at the south-east extremity of the lake of Joannina near Kastritza. It was founded by the Pelasgians, and was dedicated to Zeus. The responses of the oracle were given from lofty oaks or beech trees, probably from a grove consisting of these trees. The will of the god was declared by the wind rustling through the trees; and in order to render the sounds more distinct, brazen vessels were suspended on the branches of the trees, which being set in motion by the wind came in contact with one another. These sounds were in early times interpreted by men, but afterwards, when the worship of Dione became connected with that of Zeus, by two or three aged women who were called *πελείαδες* or *πέλαιαι*, because pigeons were said to have brought the command to found the oracle. There were, however, also priests, called *Selli* or *Helli*, who had the management of the temple. The oracle of Dodona had less influence in historical times than in the heroic age. It was chiefly consulted by the neighbouring tribes, the Aetolians, Acarnanians, and Epirots, and by those who would not go to Delphi on account of its partiality for the Dorians. In B.C. 219 the temple was destroyed by the Aetolians, and the sacred oaks cut down. But the town continued to exist, and we hear of a bishop of Dodona in the council of Ephesus.—DR. SMITH'S *Classical Dictionary*.



but as common-places, mere undulations in the serene progress of nature : nature now high, now low, but always obeying the decree of God, and always signifying his deep and gracious purposes. We can judge the miracles either by a cold reason or an ardent faith, and according as we look at miracles from the one or the other consequent standpoint will be our judgment of them.

“The fame of David went out into all lands; and the Lord brought the fear of him upon all nations” (v. 17). If we did more work we should have more influence. Were we more obedient the fact of our religiousness would more deeply impress observers. Where we are calculating, worldly, selfish, like other men, there can be no wonder if they ascribe our progress to natural causes. If on the other hand we are filled with the spirit of religious adventure and enterprise, and if we are so self-controlled as to await in all things the bidding of God, men will see that our religion is not a sentiment or a superstition, but a living and ruling force, and in proportion as this impression is deepened will our fame go from land to land, not as a noise excited by admiration, but as a character mighty because holy. The fear which God brings upon men is a religious fear. The nations did not fear David simply because he was a great soldier, but because there was behind him a mysterious force which nothing could resist. Religion is not only a mystery, it is a power. When men observe what this power can do in us, and when what they see is great, pure, and noble, they will begin to think that our religion is the higher reason, and respect it even where they cannot understand it.

## 1 Chronicles xv.

### MISUNDERSTOOD MEN.

**D**AVID'S thoughts still recur to the ark of the Lord. He cannot allow it to remain in the house of Obed-edom ; he must have it nearer to himself. How ennobling it is to have in the heart some grand impulse of this kind ! Life is controlled by one master-motive. Whatever David built, so long as the ark was absent, he could find no rest for himself. Although the ark itself was not there, yet David occupied himself in preparing a place for it, and pitching for it a tent or tabernacle. The old tent was at Gibeon, where Zadok ministered as high priest. David builds a new tent, but it is for the old ark. The new and the old are thus happily associated in all religious progress. The church was built but yesterday, yet the word to be spoken in it comes up from everlasting. Only the tent is new ; the ark is historical and is symbolical of the Eternal One, who settled its every dimension, and determined its whole building and quality.

Now David will proceed according to the right plan. He reminded the people that none ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites, and he reminded them (v. 13) that they did not thus carry it at the first, and therefore the Lord God made a breach upon them, because they had not sought him after the due order. Thus we may learn by our mistakes. We may proceed in one of two courses : either, first, accepting the mistake, and losing all heart, and going down under the spirit of discouragement into utter religious neglect, and from neglect sinking into more positive disobedience and profanity ; or we may, secondly, recognise our early mistakes in life, and seek opportunities for their correction, amending our ways and accepting the order of God. The second course is the only right one for wise men to pursue. Who is there who has not made great mistakes in the

beginning of his religious life ? Some of us have seen men as trees walking ; some of us have been superstitious, in that we have attached too great importance to the letter and have forgotten the spirit ; or we have exalted the ceremony above the inward and spiritual grace ; or we have trusted to men when we ought to have used them as a medium through which to approach the Most High ; or we have read the Bible itself in the wrong tone, or under the influence of a misleading prejudice, or under the fear of priestly criticism : all this may have happened, but because it has happened we are not to be discouraged, or turned aside from the hope of mankind ; the thing to be done is to confess the fault, to feel penitently concerning it, and to go in a docile spirit to the consideration of what God himself has marked as "the due order." The due order is not necessarily a human arrangement : all human arrangements that are wise are attempts to discover and re-establish the due order : an arrangement is not right because it is old, neither is it wrong on that account ; the supposition, however, is that that which goes furthest back in history may be the most simple interpretation of the divine mind, because as we have come upon the line of a complicated civilisation, we may have embarrassed ourselves with multitudinous and worthless inventions. There is a "due order" even in Christian worship. Christianity is not lawlessness. We are to approach the Father through the Son, and thus hold fellowship with him. There is to be no attempt on our part to set aside the due order which was established in the Apostolic Church : it is of consequence to whom we pray ; prayers are to be addressed to the Father, and are to be offered in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ, and are to be filled with the grace and unction of the Holy Spirit. There is an appointed place for public prayer ; there is "an hour of prayer," such as the apostles themselves observed. All these arrangements do not relate to private religious exercises ; therein every man must study the whole question for himself, and make such arrangements as he can adopt with the fullest consent of reason and conscience : but it is obvious that wherever public worship is contemplated, due order cannot be dispensed with without loss and confusion and disappointment. There is a spirit which boasts of its contempt of details, but history has not left the record of the exercise and results of that spirit. The men who

have done most for the world's religious progress have been those who have walked by the same rule, and minded the same thing, and been steadfast in all approved methods and customs of worship. Liberty and law may happily combine in religious observances. No man can pray for us in any sense which renders it needless for us to pray for ourselves. When the whole body of the Church begins to come together, all must not speak at once or with divers tongues; otherwise confusion will be the result: when two men come together the principle of order begins to assert itself, if their relations are to be moderate, considerate, and beneficent; much more when hundreds of men come together for the purpose of expressing a common feeling of adoration and thankfulness to God.

In verse sixteen we read that "David spake to the chief of the Levites to appoint their brethren to be the singers with instruments of musick, psalteries and harps and cymbals, sounding, by lifting up the voice with joy." We also read of cymbals of brass, psalteries\* on alamothe, harps on the sheminith to excel; and we read of one who was chief of the Levites for song, who instructed about the song, because he was skilful; nor are the doorkeepers of the ark omitted from the record. We are entitled to reason from these arrangements that all instruments, faculties, or degrees of service, are to be utilised in the unfolding and propagation of the kingdom of Christ. It does not follow that the man who could play the harp could also use the cymbals effectively; nor does it follow that the teacher of song would have been a capable

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\* The psaltery (*Heb., nebel*) is first mentioned in 1 Sam. x. 5, and from that time forward we continue to meet with it in the Old Testament. The use of the instrument prevailed particularly in the public worship of God. David's own instrument was the harp (*Heb., kinnor*); but he neglected not the *nebel*. It was played upon by several persons in the grand procession at the removal of the ark (1 Chron. xv. 16; xvi. 5); and in the final organisation of the temple music it was entrusted to the families of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun (1 Chron. xxv. 1-7). Out of the worship of God it was employed at festivals and for luxurious purposes (Amos vi. 5). In the manufacture of this instrument a constant increase of splendour was exhibited. The first we meet with were made simply of the wood of the *berosh* (2 Sam. vi. 5; 1 Chron. xiii. 8), others of the rarer *algum* tree (1 Kings x. 12; 2 Chron. ix. 11); and some perhaps of metal.

keeper of the door; nor is it necessary to pour contempt upon the doorkeeper because he was not instructed in the use of instruments of music, psalteries, and harps, and cymbals. Every man in his own order. No one man is complete in himself. No preacher represents the whole ministry of Christ. No single form of Church government is to be looked upon as typifying the ideal kingdom of God. All ministries must be brought together, all forms, methods, and customs; all varieties of intellectual energy must be constituted into a whole before we can get God's view of the operations which are daily proceeding in the manifestation of his ultimate purpose. We see but a man here and there, and instantly we set up our criticism as if all the case were open to it: we forget that we see but a point or two in the infinite circle, and that criticism ill-becomes those who see next to nothing of the divine idea in the universe. The man who played cymbals, taken out and viewed in his separate individuality, seemed to be doing but little if anything in connection with the progress of God's purpose in Israel. The men who stood before the door of the ark were but mutes, who could give little or no account of themselves that would be satisfactory, except that they were watching hardly knowing what and awaiting orders which appeared never to be delivered. The author, the preacher, the musician, the poet, the man gifted in prayer, the critic,—all these must be regarded in their individuality, and in their relations and unity, if we would see how great is the force which is working in society on behalf of truth and righteousness and love.

Whilst David was filled with joy, and clothed with a robe of fine linen,—yea, whilst he was so excited that he danced and played before the Lord, being wholly carried out of himself, Michal, the daughter of Saul, looked at him out of a window, and despised him in her heart. Thus people who are related to one another, legally and otherwise, may be living in totally separate worlds. A house may be divided against itself: the husband may be in heaven whilst the wife is on earth, and contrariwise, and so there may be lack of mutual understanding and sympathy. How sad it is to be outside of a great enthusiasm! We have here two opposite pictures, the one of passion, and the

other of cold disdain. Such pictures are never absent from the canvas of human history. This same thing is proceeding day by day in our midst. There are men who are carried away with the spirit of religious enthusiasm until they can scarcely speak the common language of the world—until indeed they are impatient with all the discipline of this mean and transient life: they seem to live in heaven, to walk on the mountain-tops of a loftier world, and to hold converse with intelligences diviner than other men have known;—and they are mocked in all this by the cold-hearted, the narrow-minded, the worldly spirited: they are not understood, but misunderstood; their enthusiasm is regarded as violence, and their worship is sneered at as superstition. We must content ourselves with recognising these facts, for the two opposing forces can never be reconciled: earth can never understand heaven; winter can never comprehend summer; the dumb can never appreciate the eloquent; the self-considering can never hope to understand the self-sacrificial. There is, however, great danger lest those who are cold and worldly should evilly affect those who are ardent and heavenly-minded. It would seem as if it were easier to do harm than to do good, to cool enthusiasm than to fan its sacred flame. Let us be sober and vigilant, and watch unto the end; our enthusiasm should be a growing fire, becoming more and more intense day by day. The waters which are thrown upon it should but increase the intensity of its glow. May God help us in this matter. It is not easy, limited as we are by a body of flesh and surrounded on every hand by material appeals, to keep up the faith-life in all its eagerness and ardour. It is indeed the supreme difficulty with which we have to contend, but the grace of God is sufficient for us; we can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us; blessed be God it is possible so to live that prayer may every day enlarge its compass, and love may every day renew its ardour. We are called upon to realise this possibility and to work for its attainment; such recognition and such labour may be said to constitute the whole Christian life, for out of it there will come those endurances, activities, and sacrifices, which comprise the whole circle of religious culture.

## PRAYER.

**ALMIGHTY God,** the children of Zion will be glad in the Lord; they will praise his name in the dance, and on the timbrel and harp, and their shout of triumph shall be the shout of men who reap harvests and take great spoil in war. We bless thee for the lifting up of the heart in sacred praise. It ennobles the spirit; it gives hope to the heart; it bears upon our life with all the healing of a divine benediction. We thank thee for lights from above, from portals opening upon heavenly places, for thoughts that lead the mind into infinite liberty, and for emotions that cleanse the hearts which they agitate. This is the delight of the sanctuary; this is the reward of those who live within the shadow of the altar. Such joy have all thy saints, and such honour have they that wait upon thee. The water of thy fountain is living water; the gift of God is eternal life. There is no word like thine; it finds out our life in dejection, in shame and in darkness, and gives us hope; it is a gospel; it is a voice, not of angels, but of the Three-One God. May we hear it, answer it, live in the spirit of its music. Then shall our life be a process ending in immortality, a discipline to be exchanged for the completeness of rest and service. We thank thee for thine house; make it large as the earth and bright as heaven; extend the walls until they enclose every broken heart, all wandering men,—yea, all obstinate rebels. Give thy Church such wondrous power in uttering thine invitations that the most reluctant shall listen and gratefully obey. Take out of our tone all harshness, all argument that is of the nature of irritating controversy, and may our voice be like thine own, full of sweetness, tenderness, benevolence, — a voice soft as with tears, made tremulous with reverence, and reaching the farthest away, and bringing back those who had renounced all hope. Let thy word come to us as we need it most—a great welcome, a sharp stimulus, a gentle rebuke, even a threat of judgment, if so be; but especially as a great redemption, a living gospel, a healing balm. All men are in sorrow; all men answer the touch of love. May we know that this is our Father's house by the nobleness of its doctrine, by the hospitality of its invitation, by the graciousness of its spirit; yea, may the most reluctant say,—Surely God is in this place. Amen.

### 1 Chronicles xvi.

**"So they brought the ark of God, and set it in the midst of the tent that David had pitched for it: and they offered burnt sacrifices and peace offerings before God" (v. 1).**

**DAVID'S THANKSGIVING.**

**T**HROUGHOUT the Old Testament we are continually reminded of the conjunction of the Old and the New. This conjunction is set forth most distinctly in this verse. The ark of God represented that which was historical, and the tent which David had pitched for it represented the work of the current day. David did not make the ark; he only made the tent which it glorified. This indeed is all that we can do for any of the great revelations of God at this late period of history. We receive the Bible, we do not invent it or re-edit it; it is ours, however, to build a tent for its reception; that is to say, a sanctuary or a church in which it is to be publicly read to the people. We made the church, we did not make the Bible. We must be careful, therefore, how we interfere with that which we did not create. We are at liberty to reconstruct our churches, but no man may add to the Word of Life or take away one line from its sacred integrity. It is not humbling to us that we have to receive some gifts and simply conserve them. The greatness of the gift destroys the possibility of humiliation. Where the gift is small, and unworthy of our progressive nature, there may indeed be some degree of humiliation connected with its continuance; but where the gift is, so to say, of the very nature of God himself, his highest thoughts, his supreme concern, then the custody of such a gift invests the custodian with eternal honour. The danger is lest we should merge the quality of the one possession with the quality of the other, thus imagining that the ark is only upon a level with the tent, or that the tent is of equal value with the ark itself. When will men learn to distinguish between things that differ and between things of relative importance in the kingdom of Christ? The ark consecrated whatever building it entered into, and so the Bible consecrates every edifice in which it is reverently read. "Our earthly house of this tabernacle" is a phrase which relates to all institutions and ceremonies of intermediate or secondary value, and all such institutions and ceremonies are to be regarded as subservient to the revelation of the ark of God, or in our case the revelation of the cross of Christ, which takes the place of the ancient ark, as representing the



conjunction of law and mercy in the atonement made for sin by the Son of God. David "pitched" the tent, but he only "brought the ark;" David's solicitude for holy things was none the less that he did not create or build the ark itself: he did what lay within his power with a cheerful heart and an industrious hand, and therein lay all the honour of his useful ministry. One thing more however was done, namely, the offering of burnt sacrifices and peace offerings before God. Such sacrifices and offerings derived the whole of their value from the presence of the ark. In this respect the ark performed the office of mediation. So in the Christian Church to-day all offerings, sacrifices, and acts of adoration, are utterly valueless except as they are offered at the cross and sanctified by the spiritual meaning of Christ's offering.

"And when David had made an end of offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord. And he dealt to every one of Israel, both man and woman, to every one a loaf of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine" (vv. 2-3).

Here again is a service having a distinctly twofold relation,—the one upward towards God, and the other downward towards the people. David could not have blessed the people if he had not first offered the burnt offerings and the peace offerings commanded by the law. What is this whole office but another way of stating the two cardinal commandments—Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself? David's first and long lingering look was towards God, in his majesty and holiness and condescension: then, having, so to say, identified himself with the living God, David turned towards the people and pronounced a priestly benediction upon them. The people were blessed in the name of the Lord; that is to say, the benediction was intensely religious; humanity was baptised in the divine name, and glorified by that name, and united indissolubly in that name. Looked at amongst themselves men appear to be separated and dissociated one from another, each having his individual characteristic and each asserting his personal claim. The human race is thus an endless series of jealous and angry rivalries. Something is needed to bring the whole into vital relations part with part, and that something is "the name of the Lord." This was the designation given to the uniting force in the old dispensation; in the Christian economy the uniting energy

is found in the Son of man. Apart from the mediation and rule of Jesus Christ men must live in perpetual conflict, misunderstanding one another, and urging upon one another unrighteous and unreasonable claims. The reconciliation of all human interests is in the Son of God. Where Jesus Christ reigns in the heart every concession is made to his authority; men ask one another what Christ would have them do, and they concur in sweet consent to seek his will and to abide by it, knowing that however much personal relations may be changed as to attitude and value, in the end it will be shown that Jesus Christ knew what was in man, and knew also what was best for every man to be and to do. Even if this were only a sentimental energy, it is full of beneficence in reference to all human relations: it checks ambition, it subdues selfishness, it enables the man to magnify the virtues of others, and it creates in the soul that sweet courtesy and brotherhood without which trustful and helpful life is impossible.

Not only did David bless the people in the name of the Lord, but dealt to every one of Israel, both man and woman, some outward and visible sign of goodwill and fellowship; he dealt to every one a loaf of bread—a round cake—a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine,—rather, a raisin-cake, or mass of dried grapes. Soul and body are cared for in the Church. However high the enthusiasm, however ecstatic the joy, Jesus Christ never neglected what was practically needful in the case of every man. This is what the Church should do at all times. Its worship should be supreme, a very rapture of gladness; then it should be a benediction pronounced upon the people; and then it should be a gift of what is needful for the body as well as for the soul. All the wants of men should be supplied in the Church and by the Church. We are too much afraid of the word “secular” when we speak of religious relations and fellowships. We say that bread and flesh and wine belong to the market and not to the sanctuary. In a very narrow sense that may be true, but in the widest sense the Church should be the inclusive institution. It would seem that this principle was recognised by Jesus Christ when he said, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things”—bread and flesh and wine—

“shall be added unto you.” All the tenderest memories of the heart should cluster around the Church. Men should be able to say, It was at the Church I found reconciliation with God, peace with my fellow-men, a blessing fitted for the heart in all its faculties and aspirations, contentment of mind—all blessings indeed for the body, all healthy and helpful enjoyments and recreations needed for the relaxation of the mind, and the retuning of its powers to resume the higher music of life. When did Jesus Christ ever send any one away from the Church to get a want supplied by some other minister? He had everything in his own hand, and he opened that hand without stint or grudging, that the whole hunger of mankind might be satisfied.

After appointing certain Levites to minister before the Lord, and to record, and to thank and praise the Lord God of Israel; after appointing Asaph the chief and others to follow him in the service of music, with psalteries and with harps, with a sound of cymbals, and with trumpets, David himself delivered a psalm to thank the Lord, calling upon Asaph and his brethren to set that psalm to music. Viewed as an ancient song the psalm is full of gracious suggestion. It calls upon the people to “give thanks unto the Lord.” The exercise of gratitude has an ennobling and a purifying effect upon the heart which practises it. David repeatedly insists upon the offering of thanks unto the Lord. This is not sentimental religion, it is religion founded upon reason, and suiting itself to the fitness of things. To receive benefits without returning thanks for them is to depress the mind from the elevation which is possible to it, and take away from the mind what may be called its wings, on which it flies back to the All-giving God, that he may be blessed for the blessings he has bestowed. David will have this expression of gratitude rendered in song—“Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him.” This is the highest form of worship. Not only judgment, conscience, will, affection, but imagination and music are pressed into this holy service. What mouth can speak words of evil after it has been filled with religious song? Would not the attempt to send forth from the same mouth praise and cursing convict any man of an irony amounting to falsehood? With which of them should the mouth be credited, with the praise or with the curse?

In which was the real man expressed? Happy he who can answer that his whole soul is uttered in religious music and aspiration, and that when any other word escapes his lips it is but an occasional break or flaw in the steady outgoing and uprising of his soul towards heaven.

The whole song which David indited was founded upon history—"Give thanks unto the Lord,\* make known his deeds among the people," and again, "Remember his marvellous works that he hath done, his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth." When men are called upon to praise God from a historical standpoint, their song may indeed be loud and sweet, for all the facts of history come to suggest the sentiment and to ennoble the music. The worshippers are not praising a God who is in the clouds, far off and unseen; he is one whose judgments are in all the earth, whose proofs of existence and government are to be found in the heart of every man who takes part in singing his praise. Nor will the psalmist have the covenant forgotten. When great miracles and wonders are wrought in the sight of all the people, he traces these tokens back to the covenant which God made, and the word which he commanded to a thousand generations. Nothing occurs in the history of providence which surprises the psalmist in such a degree as to suspend

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\* The psalm here put before us by the Chronicler as sung liturgically by Asaph and his brethren, on the day of the ark's entrance into Jerusalem, accords closely with the following passages of our present Book of Psalms: verses 8-22 with Psalm cv. 1-15; verses 23-33 with Ps. xcvi.; verse 34 with Ps. cvii. 1; verses 35, 36, with Psalm cvi. 47, 48.—*The Speaker's Commentary.*

This hymn forms a connected and uniform whole. Beginning with a summons to praise the Lord, and to seek his face (vv. 8-11), the singer exhorts his people to remember the wondrous works of the Lord (vv. 12-14), and the covenant which he made with the patriarchs to give them the land of Canaan (vv. 15-18), and confirms his exhortation by pointing out how the Lord, in fulfilment of his promise, had mightily and gloriously defended the patriarchs (vv. 19-22). But all the world also are to praise him as the only true and almighty God (vv. 23-27), and all peoples do homage to him with sacrificial gifts (vv. 28-30); and that his kingdom may be acknowledged among the heathen, even inanimate nature will rejoice at his coming to judgment (vv. 31-33). In conclusion, we have again the summons to thankfulness, combined with a prayer that God would further vouchsafe salvation; and a doxology rounds off the whole (vv. 34-36).—KEIL.

his recollection of the ancient covenant. Whatever occurs, occurs as a comment upon the divine word. Nowhere does he say that anything new has been spoken, but everywhere he shows that some new illustration is being constantly given of the strength and goodness of the covenant of God. Hear how he speaks—"Be ye mindful always of his covenant; the word which he commanded to a thousand generations; even of the covenant which he made with Abraham, and of his oath unto Isaac; and hath confirmed the same to Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant." Thus, what we found in the first verse is repeated in the psalm. In the highest music true and simple history is never forgotten; whatever flowers of poetry or song may blossom in the psalmist's garden, he always finds underneath them the solid rocks of divine covenant and providence. He is not forgetful of the fact that there were times when the covenant seemed to be set aside, and when God's people were in a state of chaos, and were almost at the mercy of those who despised them—"When they went from nation to nation, and from one kingdom to another people; he suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reprov'd kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm." Through all the undulation of circumstances there ran the unchangeable line of promise. We are not to look at our circumstances and suppose that the divine purpose is as mutable as themselves, always coming, always going, often disappointing the heart, and throwing down the pride of man into confusion and shame. In life we find what we have found in the first verse of this chapter—a conjunction of the divine and the human, the immutable and the changeable, the covenantal and the circumstantial. What is it that has changed? In no case is the change to be found in the covenant of God, but always in the conduct of the people and their outward relations to one another, and to the peoples round about. Wherever good men wander they are still God's anointed, and are still reckoned among his prophets; though they be homeless wanderers in the desert, they do not lose their divine election, or any of the honour which that election implies; though the Son of man had not where to lay his head, he was still the Son of man. When we turn away our eyes from our circumstances to the divine covenant we shall

find rest and peace,—yea, a double assurance, an infinite comfort and security. We do not trust for our illumination to lights which men have kindled, but to those luminous orbs which lie beyond the touch of the hands of men. “My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth: he will not suffer thy foot to be moved.” So great was the religious joy of David, that he would have all nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues unite in the psalm of adoration. Even for this universal praise he assigns a reason, that reason being the greatness of the Lord. David does not call the people to worship One whose greatness was unattested, but to worship him who reigns over all the earth, a gracious Sovereign, a loving Father, whose mercy endureth for ever. It is indeed this word that gives the song all its nobleness and value—“his mercy endureth for ever.” All men may not be able to appreciate power or glory, but who cannot respond to the appeal of mercy, compassion, pity, love? The answer of the people showed that there was something in the song which touched every instinct—“And all the people said Amen, and praised the Lord.” Some songs at once establish their claim to universal confidence. They come to us as if we had heard them in some other world; they have not to make their way into our affection and regard, instantly they attach themselves to the memory and awaken within us all our noblest powers; we feel indeed as if we must take part in them, as if to withhold our voices from the utterance of such songs were to deny the heart some gracious and inviolable right. Herein lies the great appeal of Jesus Christ. His gospel is not a lesson to be learned in a foreign tongue, a doctrine to be represented by dreams which are strange to our minds and to our senses; it is rather a gospel which needs only to be spoken in order to find its echo throughout our whole nature: it is the gospel we need; it is the very word we have been waiting for; it fulfils our expectation; it fills the heart to overflow.

Now the song is ended, the work of detailed religion began. David “left before the ark of the covenant of the Lord Asaph and his brethren, to minister before the ark continually, as every day’s work required” (v. 37). So it is in our own religious life. There are days of high festival and thrilling song, when the whole life

seems to be given up to the joy of music; then there comes the time when we must descend from rapture to daily toil, to detailed and critical service, to all the minor industries which are at once a test of character and a blessing to those who are interested in their discharge. Every day has its work. We must see to it that there are no arrears in our Christian service. He who leaves over from one day to another what he ought to have done on the first will find his life crowded and confused. Discipline is the very soul of religion. We do not grow in grace by fits and starts, by doing two days' work in one, or by showing our great skill and energy in the discharge of arrears; we grow little by little, line by line, almost imperceptibly, and only at the end do we see how minute has been the process, how detailed the whole exercise through which the mind has passed. David himself had his detailed work to attend to; we read in the forty-third verse, "David returned to bless his house." We cannot always live in public; it is true that we have tent-work to do, temple-work, sanctuary-work, great public and philanthropic appeals to respond to, but when all that which is external or public has been done, every man must bless his own home, make his own children glad, make his own hearthstone as bright as he possibly can, and fill his own house with music and gladness. The danger of the day probably is that men may live too much in public; that they may care more for the platform than for the hearthstone, and be rather anxious to take part in the loud trumpeting of the sanctuary than in the quiet and loving household. This ought ye to have done, and not to have left the other undone. We are not called upon to give up either the public or the private, but to find a way of uniting them, and making the one balance the other in discipline, in service, and in gladness.

## 1 Chronicles xvii.

"Now it came to pass, as David sat in his house, that David said to Nathan the prophet, Lo, I dwell in an house of cedars, but the ark of the covenant of the Lord remaineth under curtains" (v. i).

### THE SANCTIFICATION OF LIFE.

WHEN it is said that David "sat in his house," the literal meaning is that he "dwelt" there. To understand the whole action properly we must refer to the last verse of the preceding chapter, in which "David returned to bless his house." David then was dwelling in a sanctified house, and was under the influence of all the suggestions which are associated with such a habitation. We cannot sanctify any one point of life without the sanctifying influence going out to adjacent points and relations. Herein it is important to sanctify time, say the first day of the week; or money, say one tenth part of the income;—where time and money are so sanctified, the days and the amounts not included cannot wholly escape the influence of such a dedication. This extended action of sanctification is vividly illustrated in this verse: no sooner does David realise that he is dwelling in a sanctified house himself than he begins to think of the ark of the covenant, which occupies an unworthy habitation. Thus one good thought begets another, and thus one noble action prepares the way for a successor. David made the right use of a pure and happy home; he expanded the idea so as to include in it the very sanctuary and altar of God, and he reasoned that as his own house was so well cared for it became necessary that the ark of the covenant—by which we may understand in general terms the house of God—should also be an object of solicitude and generous care. When we contrast personal comfort with public conditions we are stirred into the practice of new and broader philanthropy. A man who sits at his own warm fireside, and does not think of the shivering and destitute poor outside, is unworthy of the



comfort which he enjoys. Such a man degrades domestic blessings and makes them the instruments of selfishness, instead of reasoning from them that there are other lives that ought to be enjoying somewhat of the same advantages, and feeling that he who is in possession of domestic securities and enjoyments is a steward on behalf of others less fortunate or less successful than himself. Who can see his own children well clothed, well educated, and in every respect well cared for, without thinking of the innumerable destitute children who have no such opportunities of culture and advancement? Thus we learn from David how to proceed from one point to another in the sanctification of life: there is no stopping-point in all the line of progress: we should adopt the well-tested motto that nothing has been done whilst anything remains undone; and that nothing has been given whilst anything has been withheld. It is not enough to have comfortable spots in life, chosen and favourite localities, which are overloaded with benefits and advantages; all such spots and positions and localities should point to regions beyond themselves which need sedulous culture and much self-sacrifice. David appears before us as a man who has great thoughts for God. He cared for the ark of the covenant, and by so much he lifted himself beyond his merely earthly kingship into a broader and more enduring reality. No throne should be considered as complete in itself. Whatever we know of order ought to point us to the great work of subjugation which is yet to be done in moral regions. Whatever we know of law should incite the mind to consider how many anarchies and rebellions and tumults have to be subdued in the human heart all the world over.

“Then Nathan said unto David, Do all that is in thine heart; for God is with thee” (v. 2).

According to Hebrew ideas, the heart was the seat of the mind and will. When God said, “Son, give me thine heart,” he asked for the whole man, in all his intellectual strength and all his emotional tenderness. The heart has always been considered as playing a most important part in the development and action of life. Aristotle did not hesitate to teach that the brain was inferior to the heart as to the functions which it performed. David's conception therefore in this particular was not a mere

emotion or sentiment ; it really expressed the entire consent of his intellectual and moral nature. He was adopting a course of reasoning as well as expressing a high religious sentiment. The answer which Nathan thus made to David looks like an inspiration. What could be happier than the instantaneous answer sent to the king's suggestion ? That suggestion itself was a noble one, and would in all probability be adopted in days to come by other kings of Israel, if not by David himself. There are, however, extemporaneous inspirations in life, which have to be revised, amended, and in some instances discarded altogether. A judgment is not always right simply because it is sudden. There are instances in which second thoughts are best. The mind must be carefully on its guard against apparent and superficial inspirations—the whole series of suggestions which commend themselves by their obvious pertinence and utility. What could be better than that David should instantly proceed to answer his own prayer, or confirm in action the noble sentiment which sanctified his thoughts ? Have we not come to similar points in life ? There have been days upon which we have been perfectly sure that our duty lay along such and such lines ; everything concurred to prove the providence of the situation ; circumstances and impressions combined to show that a well-defined line of action had been actually described by the divine finger. It is precisely where duty appears to be so plain that vigilance should be most on the alert. Even in the simplest actions of life there are elements to be taken into account which do not immediately present themselves to the observation. Sometimes, in order to determine a very simple action, we may have to embrace a whole circle of metaphysical considerations. So subtle, so comprehensive, is human life ; let us prove this by the next paragraph.

“And it came to pass the same night, that the word of God came to Nathan, saying, Go and tell David my servant, Thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not build me an house to dwell in : for I have not dwelt in an house since the day that I brought up Israel unto this day ; but have gone from tent to tent, and from one tabernacle to another. Wheresoever I have walked with all Israel, spake I a word to any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people, saying, Why have ye not built me an house of cedars ?” (vv. 3-6).

How different is God's view from the view which the prophet Nathan adopted ! Let us suppose that Nathan spoke in the

morning, when everything appeared to be perfectly lucid, and the whole course of action lay open to the mind; then we read in contrast that that same night the Lord presented to the prophet's mind a totally different aspect of the case. When "the same night" is referred to there is a probable indication of a dream as the chosen medium of communication between God and Nathan. Thus the night amends the day; thus the night and the day constitute a complete circle; thus it is needful that some subjects should be viewed in the quietude of night, and not in the glare and bustle of day. The Bible never hesitates to point out the fallibility of its own prophets. Nathan having spoken extemporaneously and positively was not confirmed by heaven simply in order to preserve an outward and technical consistency. Nathan was to go back to David with a totally different lesson. Thus we come upon the line of truth in all the biblical narrative, showing that whatever rises or falls the Spirit of Truth is invariably and sacredly honoured. It is important to notice that the conversation which took place between David and Nathan was known in heaven. Hence the communication which was made to Nathan in his dream. God's view of any case is of necessity fuller and larger than the view which men can take. Here is the necessity for continual and anxious prayer. "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Surely it would seem, when certain great impulses seize the heart, as if they brought with them their own divine confirmation—they are so large, so spontaneous, so pure, so unselfish, that they need no corroboration from above. At this very moment, once more vigilance must ascend the watch-tower, and look carefully at every point of the horizon. Nothing is left for us to do in our own wisdom and strength: we cannot even pray without being taught to pray. we live on daily bread from heaven, and if we propose to do anything in our own strength we are sure to be disappointed and mortified. Even when we propose to build a tabernacle for the ark, we should ask the God of the ark whether the movement of our heart is a divine inspiration or a merely human and selfish idea.

"Now therefore thus shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I took thee from the sheepecote, even from following the sheep, that thou shouldest be ruler over my people Israel; and I have been with thee whithersoever thou hast walked, and have cut off all thine enemies from before thee, and have made thee a name like the name of the

great men that are in the earth. Also I will ordain a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, and they shall dwell in their place, and shall be moved no more; neither shall the children of wickedness waste them any more, as at the beginning, and since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel. Moreover I will subdue all thine enemies. Furthermore I tell thee that the Lord will build thee an house. And it shall come to pass, when thy days be expired that thou must go to be with thy fathers, that I will raise up thy seed after thee, which shall be of thy sons; and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build me an house, and I will stablish his throne for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son; and I will not take my mercy away from him, as I took it from him that was before thee: but I will settle him in mine house and in my kingdom for ever: and his throne shall be established for evermore" (vv. 7-14).

The Lord here talks over with David the wonderful life which the shepherd-king had lived. When the Lord says, "I took thee from the sheepcote," we are to understand that the pronoun is emphatic, and the reading must be—"I it was who took thee from the pasture." Thus in order to understand a particular duty we must have the advantage of the focalised light of the entire preceding life. All our yesterdays are needful to show us the course which we ought to take to-day. Continually God protests against the detachment of life into parts and parcels, and insists upon its continuity and solidarity. Thus continually God guards us against sudden thoughts and sudden actions which appear so simple as not to require investigation. We may be sure that our whole life is being planned and directed so as to constitute an argument in reference to the next thing that has to be done. Go back to the beginning of your career, and, by studying the seed, endeavour to ascertain somewhat of its quality and issue: see how you have never been left a single day alone, and how the divine presence has been needful to the illumination and elevation of the whole nature: remember the instances in which you would have gone wrong if you had followed the motions of your own mind and heart: remember, therefore, in the light of all that has transpired that you are in danger of making mistakes in view of the very next policy that has to be adopted. Instead of speaking out of the confidence of your own heart, saying you will do this or that, first go to him who began your life, and has continued and shaped and blessed it, and ask him if even your noblest impulse is worthy of being embodied in action. David would be surprised when he was told that he was

not to execute so high and pure a sentiment as that which had moved his heart in reference to the ark of the covenant. God has his reasons for forbidding men to do certain things. Nor does God always state those reasons, and thus flatter human reason and human pride; by-and-by the reasons may be disclosed, and God's providence may be thus vindicated; but it is for him to consider the time and the measure under which the disclosure shall be made. There is a boundary to ambition, even of the holiest kind. It is beautiful, however, that a man should be moved to attempt the realisation of great ideals, or the conquest of difficult positions, and it is highly salutary that in many instances he should be denied the honour of carrying out the very finest impulses that have moved his religious ambition. Who would not wish to be himself the means of evangelising the whole world? Who would not be willing to accept the honour of being the first man to shed light from heaven upon all the inhabitants of a continent in which the name of Christ has hitherto been unknown? Yet we are driven back from our highest impulses and compelled to do other work of a lower and narrower kind, and so the mortification of our pride tends to the upbuilding of the strongest character. We are not driven back to idleness simply because our high and ambitious programme is discredited. There is plenty of work of a humbler kind to be done, and it is needful that it should be accomplished in all its exacting detail, rather than that we should give our strength to schemes notable for their ostentation and self-gratification.

"For thou, O my God, hast told thy servant that thou wilt build him an house: therefore thy servant hath found in his heart to pray before thee. And now, Lord, thou art God, and hast promised this goodness unto thy servant: now therefore let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may be before thee for ever: for thou blessest, O Lord, and it shall be blessed for ever" (vv. 25-27).

The Lord assured David that the house should be built, though by other hands than his. The Lord is thus continually showing himself to be independent even of the greatest men. Observe here that the Lord declines, so to say, the co-operation of the king. There are other men who are coming who will continue and complete divine purposes. David acquiesces in the divine arrangement, but he desires that the future promise should be made into a present blessing:

"Now therefore let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may be before thee for ever: for thou blessest, O Lord, and it shall be blessed for ever" (v. 27).

David was comforted by the fact that the blessing which was denied to him was promised to his house. David's life was thus enlarged, and made to include the generations that were yet to come. By anticipating the divine benediction in this way our souls become encouraged and stimulated by an immediate realisation of the divine presence. The meaning would seem to be that what is yet to come upon the Church in the way of enrichment and enlargement is already a source of comfort to ourselves. So we may even now live in the millennium. We read of a time when Satan shall be bound, when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ, when there shall be day instead of night, and when summer shall enrich all the fields of winter with blooming flowers, and the desert shall blossom like the rose: we are not to think of these things as absolutely future; we are rather to realise them as immediate possessions of our own, because they are promised for Christ, and we ourselves are hidden in Christ, and Christ is hidden in us, so that already the joy which is before him gleams upon our vision and satisfies our expectation. Thus we live in the future, and thus we are indebted to posterity. If the day were bounded by the night, our thoughts might well sink in gloom, and go down without hope of ever reappearing above the horizon. But beyond the night is the broader day; the larger, brighter, kindlier day; the day eternal on which no night should cast its discouraging shadow. Thus we are enabled to bring the power of an endless life to bear upon the present moment. David was blessed by Solomon, and was enriched by all the blessings promised to Solomon: and so the Church is blessed by One who is greater than Solomon, and already she sees herself in possession of the heathen for an inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth as a territory delivered to her by the mighty hand of God. Abraham rejoiced to see Christ's day afar off, and he saw it: we now rejoice to see the millennial morning, and even in "the winter of our discontent" we may see and feel the foregleamings of the world's abiding summer.

## PRAYER.

**ALMIGHTY God, thy word is with us, it is within us; it is the man of our counsel, it is the guide of our heart; other word there is none that is true.** Blessed is the man that studieth thy law, meditating therein day and night; he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, he shall bring forth his fruit in his season. We thank thee for thy book; we bless thee that it is written in our mother tongue, and that so much of it is plain to the understanding of the simple; wherein we cannot comprehend its meaning we will await the issue, diligently obeying thy commandments as we may be assisted by thy grace, knowing that whosoever doeth the will shall know the doctrine. Enable us to take up thy book where we can, to begin at any accessible point, and to work with all carefulness, simplicity, and piety, that we may thus advance into the more mysterious and solemn parts of thy temple, and there see thee with pure heart, as it were face to face. Thy word is a light, a lamp, a tender comfort, a standard by which our shortcomings may be rebuked, and yet an encouragement by which all our efforts may be inspired and stimulated to grow up into fulness of fruition. May thy book dwell within us richly, an answer to every temptation, a refuge in every storm, a place of confidence amid the tumult and uproar of life. When we open the Scriptures may Jesus himself draw near, and beginning at Moses and the prophets may he in all the Scriptures expound unto us the things concerning himself; then shall our hearts burn even whilst we peruse the ancient history of thy Church, and all the way our love shall glow, our vision shall brighten, all the outlook shall be full of charm and sacred allurements, and we shall be drawn on day by day even until we ascend the high hills of heaven and see what is meant by eternal day. This will be the miracle of the cross, this will be the triumph of the Holy Ghost; and as we stand there, above the cloud and storm, above all sin and night and death, we will praise the Three in One, the One in Three, the Triune God. Amen.

### 1 Chronicles xviii. 1-12.

[*The Speaker's Commentary* points out that this chapter is closely parallel with 2 Sam. viii., differing from it only in a few passages. It contains an account of David's chief wars (vv. 1-13), and a list of his principal officers (vv. 15-17).]

1. Now after this it came to pass, that David smote the Philistines, and subdued them, and took Gath and her towns out of the hand of the Philistines.

2. And he smote Moab; and the Moabites became David's servants, and brought gifts.

3. ¶ And David smote Hadarezer [or, Hadadezer (2 Sam. viii. 3). This is a corrupt form of the name which is given correctly in 2 Sam. viii. 3-12, and 1 Kings xi. 23, as Hadadezer. It means "The Sun-God helps" or "has helped"] king of Zobah unto Hamath, as he went to stablish his dominion by the river Euphrates.

4. And David took from him a thousand chariots, and seven thousand horsemen, and twenty thousand footmen: David also houghed all the chariot horses, but reserved of them an hundred chariots.

5. And when the Syrians of Damascus came to help Hadarezer king of Zobah, David slew of the Syrians two and twenty thousand men.

6. Then David put garrisons in Syria-damascus; and the Syrians became David's servants, and brought gifts. Thus the Lord preserved David whithersoever he went.

7. And David took the shields of gold that were on the servants of Hadarezer, and brought them to Jerusalem.

8. Likewise from Tibhath, and from Chun, cities of Hadarezer, brought David very much brass, wherewith Solomon made the brasen sea, and the pillars, and the vessels of brass.

9. ¶ Now when Tou [this king is called Toi in 2 Sam. viii. 9. It is impossible to say which is the right reading] king of Hamath heard how David had smitten all the host of Hadarezer king of Zobah;

10. He sent Hadoram [in Samuel "Joram;" but "Hadoram" is preferable, since it is not likely that the Syrians would employ a name of which one element is "Jehovah"] his son to king David, to inquire of his welfare, and to congratulate him [the words are the same here and in Samuel, where the A.V. has "to salute him and to bless him." "To greet him and congratulate him" would perhaps best represent the original], because he had fought against Hadarezer, and smitten him; (for Hadarezer had war with Tou;) and with him all manner of vessels [the purchase of foreign aid by means of gold and silver *vessels*, rather than by specie, receives illustration from the later Jewish history, where we find Ahaz bribing Tiglath-pileser with "the silver and gold that was found in the house of the Lord" (2 Kings xvi. 8), as well as from the Assyrian records, which speak of a Babylonian monarch as procuring the help of the Elamites in the same way] of gold and silver and brass.

11. ¶ Them also king David dedicated unto the Lord, with the silver and the gold that he brought from all these nations; from Edom, and from Moab, and from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines, and from Amalek.

12. Moreover Abishai the son of Zeruiah slew of the Edomites in the valley of salt eighteen thousand. [This is no doubt the victory assigned in 2 Sam. viii. 13 to David, and there wrongly described as a victory over the Syrians. That the "valley of salt" was in Edom appears from 2 Kings xiv. 7; 2 Chron. xxv. 11. That Abishai was the general who gained the victory for David we learn from this passage only. Other incidents of the Edomite war are related in 1 Kings xi. 14-17.]



### SPOILS FROM EDMOM.

IT would appear from the opening of this chapter that David was called to war rather than to building. We are not to suppose that we are necessarily in direct chronological sequence; but we are face to face with the fact that the man who proposed to build a tabernacle for the ark was called upon to do the work of a warrior, which he could better do than his son Solomon. Who so mighty as David in battle? Who but himself could have taken Gath and her daughters, or outlying dependencies? At the same time we are entitled to reason that though David was prevented from entering upon the actual occupation of building, yet even in war he was contributing to the rearing of the tabernacle. Properly considered, righteous war means building. It is not the act of building, but it prepares for the work of edification. Until the work of subjugation has been completed, the building cannot be settled upon proper foundations. Alas, there is always an immense destructive work to be done before the work of construction can be properly begun. In reading these ancient records we must remember that at the time war was the only power that could be understood. We are not entitled to take back Christian ethics to pre-Christian times, and to judge those ages by the higher standards of apostolic morality. Did verses of this kind occur in the New Testament, we should hesitate to regard them as expressing the divine will, but should rather say, "an enemy hath done this." But when David lived, the sword appeared to be indispensable; war was a tremendous but necessary evil, and issues had to be wrought out which it would seem were impossible apart from the deadly action of the soldier. The moral meaning of this is clear enough: whilst we are destroying evil we are building the altar; whilst we are closing springs of evil we are opening the fountains of God; whilst we are causing men, by argument and example, to cease to do evil; we are also by so much teaching them to do well.

"Them also king David dedicated unto the Lord, with the silver and the gold that he brought from all these nations; from Edom, and from Moab, and from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines, and from Amalek" (v. 11).

The spoils which we take in war are not ours but God's.

Nothing that David took was to be used for the decoration of his own house, or the increase of his own ostentation in the eyes of his people: all that his right hand plucked from the enemy was to be set up in the house of the Lord. So it is in the Christian warfare. If we have conquered an enemy we must hold the conquest as an illustration of the power of God rather than of the skill of our own might or hand. The idols which we bring away from the lands of darkness are to be set up in God's house, and are to mark points in the progress of Christian civilisation. They are not to be laughed at or mocked; they are to be solemnly regarded as indications of a universal conquest which Christ has yet to win over the nations of the whole world. If we have brought back spoils—such as art, music, or any form of pleasure by which the popular mind can be reached and moved in an upward direction—we are to remember that in all these spoils we are to see the divine power and not proofs of our own military genius. Where Music has been abused, let the Church go forth and rescue the angel from the hands of those who have ill-treated her, and let that angel come and sing within the shadow of the altar; if Art has been prostituted so as to minister to the lustful eye or the degenerate heart, let her be rescued from her tormentors, and be brought into the Church to add some new beauty to all that is rare and choice and delicate in the treasures of the sanctuary. The whole object of the Christian life should be to enlarge the Church in the best sense; to increase its treasures, to add to its spoils, to prove its energies, and to uphold and vindicate the claim that the Church has within herself all that is needful to release men from the burden of sin, and give them all the joy of the highest service and all the comfort of the truest and deepest consolation. The Church of God should be the richest of all institutions, the very focus of all light, the very home of all goodness.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we would be thy sons and daughters. **Thou art our Father**, though Abraham be ignorant of us. Our Father in heaven; hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come. Be pleased to work within us all the good pleasure of thy will and the work of faith with power. Accomplish thy purpose in our hearts, and make our lives beautiful as a palace built for God. We thank thee that we have yearnings towards thee—outgoings of the soul strong and ardent—which cannot be satisfied but by the living God and by the fountains which spring and flow in heaven. This is the miracle of grace; this is the marvel of the Holy Ghost; this is the pledge that we have not been left unto ourselves, but are still cared for by the eye of heavenly pity. Thou hast called us thy sons, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be. Thou hast hidden a promise in our hearts. Thou hast set up the spirit of prophecy in the Church. We dwell not only in history, so full of thy presence and so gracious by thy providences, but we dwell in the future, in the morning of purity and peace and liberty; and already we feel upon our lives the warm sun-blaze of the coming time, and we rejoice in the dawn of the brighter day, and look onward with honest hearts and ever-enlarging faith—both the miracles of thy Holy Spirit—to the realisation of opportunities fast hastening. We bless thee for thy house. We run into it and are safe; we sit down within it and are conscious of a Father's blessing; we look forward to it, and it is as the rising of the sun. Pity us in our littlenesses and weaknesses, in our infirmities of every kind; and let thy pity grow into pardon when it fixes the eyes filled with tears upon our guilt and iniquity; cover it up we beseech thee; bless us with a sense of forgiveness, and dry the tears of our penitence with the assurance of divine pardon. The Lord's mercy be the secret of our life, the spring of our consolation, the pledge of our immortality in heaven. And to the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, Three in One, One in Three, be the kingdom and the power and the glory, world without end. Amen.

## 1 Chronicles xix.

“Now it came to pass after this, that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon died, and his son reigned in his stead” (v. 1).

## GRACIOUS MESSENGERS.

THE phrase “after this” has no chronological significance. David was moved once more by a fine human sentiment. He remembered that Nahash had been kind to him in the days

of his ancient trouble, so when Nahash\* died David proposed to show kindness unto Hanun † his son. David was thus far from being spoiled by his royalty and grandeur. He who could sing so well could always sympathise most deeply. These fine human traits in the character of David endear the king to the common heart of the world. Though he was always ready for war, yet David was always ready also to bind up broken hearts, and to lead back to the **right road men** who had lost their path in life.

**A very tender expression is this :**

**“David sent messengers to comfort him concerning his father” (v. 2).**

It might have been thought that a man whose mind was pre-occupied with new military schemes, with ideas of advancement or aggrandisement, a man who slew thousands of enemies, would have cared but little for the death of a single man. Yet it was quite otherwise. David distinguished between the soldier and the man ; between what he believed to be his military duty, and all those kindly and generous sentiments which invest human character with its noblest attributes. Though we cannot

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\* Nahash (“a serpent”) was king of the Ammonites, noted for the barbarous terms of capitulation which he offered to the town of Jabesh-gilead, and for his subsequent defeat by Saul. It was natural that the enemy of Saul should be friendly to David ; and we find that he did render to the latter, during his persecutions, some acts of kindness, which the monarch did not forget when he ascended the throne of Israel (2 Sam. x. 2 ; I Chron. xix. 2). These acts are not specified, but he probably offered the fugitive hero an asylum in his dominions.

† Hanun (“bestower”) the son and successor of Nahash, king of the Ammonites. David, who had in his troubles been befriended by Nahash, sent, with the kindest intentions, an embassy to condole with him on the death of his father, and to congratulate him on his own accession. The rash young king, however, was led to misapprehend the motives of this embassy, and to treat with gross and inexpiable indignity the honourable personages whom David had charged with this mission. David vowed vengeance upon Hanun for the insult ; and Hanun himself, looking for nothing less than war as the consequence of his conduct, subsidised Hadarezer and other Syrian princes to assist him with their armies. The power of the Syrians was broken in two campaigns, and the Ammonites were left to their fate, which was severe, even beyond the usual severities of war in that remote age (2 Sam. x. ; I Chron. xix.). [The name occurs twice besides (Neh. iii. 13, 30).]

build a temple, we may send a comforting message to a human heart; though we cannot go forth to great wars such as require volumes of history for their proper narration, we can look out for instances of solitary grief and sadness to which we can minister encouragement and sympathy. Here, however, in the very act of carrying out a benevolent purpose, David is encountered by the all-poisoning thought in life, namely, the thought which is born of suspicion. Unfortunately, there are always men who misinterpret the motives of others, and assign sinister intentions to the very highest actions of the benevolent soul. How many feasts have these marplots spoiled? Into how many families have suspicious thoughts entered where they ought not to have had a moment's accommodation? It should be the delight of Christians to receive kindness without suspicion, and to give men credit for the best motives—especially in the day of darkness and distress—when they seek us out that they may comfort us with the light of the Lord. It would seem to require the whole energy of God to rid the human soul of suspicion and jealousy. How hard it is for us to give one another credit for really pure and good intentions! But in ascribing false or unworthy motives to human action, do we not thereby reveal the principal characteristics of our own disposition? Is it not true that evil is to him who evil thinks,—in other words, that only the evil man can think evil of other people, and that when we ascribe sinister motives to those who would help us, we are only drawing our own portraiture, and showing but too vividly what we ourselves would do under similar circumstances? The basest of motives was ascribed to David: he was making his pretended compassion a medium through which to search the city, and to spy it out, and to overthrow it. Unquestionably there are men who make an investment of Christianity, and turn their very Christian profession into an article of merchandise: unquestionably, too, there may be simulations of sympathy which deserve only to be denounced as cunningly arranged hypocrisies: at the same time, it is better to err, if we err at all, on the side of magnanimity, by ascribing to men the worthiest motives, and crediting them with intentions akin to the faith which they profess. We may exclude ourselves from the enjoyment of many spiritual

advantages by suspecting the motives of the men who offer them. Thus in going to the house of God itself we may regard the whole institution as an attempt to impose upon our credulity and generosity. In no such way do men realise the highest spiritual advantages; they embitter themselves; they rebuke all that is sweetest and noblest in human nature; and they betake themselves to narrowness and solitude, when they might live in the very largeness of the divine love, and in the sweetest companionship of the divine presence. All this suspicion brings upon those who indulge it punishment sooner or later.

The subsequent history given in this chapter shows that men cannot both be suspicious and successful when they are doing injustice to high motives and generous proposals. There are men who are clever within limited points, and whose policies instantly commend themselves because they appear to be marked by shrewdness. There is, however, a larger prudence—the great and generous prudence which gives men credit for being better than perhaps they are, and which disarms even their animosity by a liberal trust in what ought to be their main purpose. Beware of imprudent prudence; that is, prudence which sees only a portion of the situation, and does not take in the whole scope and horizon of the circumstances. The princes of the children of Ammon imagined themselves to be very clever in penetrating David's motive, but they lived to see that their cleverness was a mistake, and that astuteness when unregulated by magnanimity leads to penalty and ruin.

## PRAYER.

**ALMIGHTY God**, we bless thee for every sign of growth, because **it is a sign** of the victory of thy Son. Surely the world is better now than it was long ago. Thou hast not given the blessing in vain, thy word hath not returned unto thee void; thou seest the green blade piercing the dark earth, and foretoking the summer and the harvest. This is thy doing, thou Son of God; thou shalt see of the travail of thy soul, and shalt be satisfied; thou shalt say, **It is enough**; all thy pain shall be forgotten in thy triumph, thou shalt see in the throngs of heaven the spoils of thy blessed cross. Enable us to grow in grace, in knowledge, in every high quality, that at last we may come to the measure of the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus. We would not be soon discouraged, but the elements are against us, the great powers are not on our side; the powers that rule the air, and direct the world they would destroy, are all against us; but they that are for us are more in number and in quality than all that can be against us; to be with God is to be in the majority, to be associated with Christ is to be assured of victory; the Lord shall bring the issue according to his own purpose, and he shall see satisfaction which will give him perpetual delight. Enable us to be truly meek, and in some measure to understand that to serve is to grow, and that sometimes to wait is to serve; show us that by patience we may be exemplifying the Spirit of Christ; by withholding the moan of regret, by suppressing the sigh of discontent, we may be magnifying the cross of Christ; thus may we be encouraged to believe that in every department of life it is possible to show what Christ can do for the soul. As for those who are in darkness, and are groping, hardly knowing the night from the day, thou wilt be gracious unto them in the degree of their sincerity; if their doubt is the expression of their vanity, thou wilt permit them to go from ditch to ditch until they are wearied in their fruitless search. But if their doubt expresses the agony of the soul that would find God and come before him at the holy altar, thou wilt surprise such with revelations of thy presence, and gladden such by taking up thy residence in the heart. We leave all men, institutions, concerns, policies, and purposes with God; the great men of the earth can do nothing permanently against thy cross; all enmity is shivered to pieces there. Thou shalt reign, thou suffering, dying Christ, for thou didst rise again, and in thy resurrection thou hast given pledge that all who love thee shall share thine immortality. Help us to carry our burdens: sometimes the weight is too much; help us to believe that this body is only a momentary companion, and may at any moment fall away and allow the soul to pursue its unimpeded growth. Thus may we know that affliction helps, and that death comes with a blessing in its hands. Be with the sick, the weak, and those who

under any circumstances must make their sanctuary at home; the Lord be gracious unto such with double-handed blessing, the Lord make them forget their weariness in their spiritual joy, and may they and we together through the cross see the throne. Amen.

### 1 Chronicles xx.

1. And it came to pass, that after the year was expired, at the time that kings go out to battle, Joab led forth the power of the army, and wasted the country of the children of Ammon, and came and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried at Jerusalem. And Joab smote Rabbah, and destroyed it. [We learn from 2 Sam. xii. 27-29, that before the actual fall of the Ammonite capital, Joab sent for David, that the honour of the capture might be his; and that David took the command before the final assault was made. But, as the real merit of the success was Joab's (2 Sam. xii. 26, 27), the writer of Chronicles, studying brevity, speaks of Joab as the captor.]

2. And David took the crown of their king [*or*, according to some, "of Malcam," *i.e.*, Moloch, their god. Here David's presence at the time of the fall of the city is assumed as known from Samuel, though the writer of Chronicles has not mentioned it (comp. the last clause of verse 3)] from off his head, and found it to weigh a talent of gold, and there were precious stones in it; and it was set upon David's head: and he brought also exceeding much spoil out of the city.

3. And he brought out the people that were in it, and cut them with saws, and with harrows of iron, and with axes. Even so dealt David with all the cities of the children of Ammon. And David and all the people returned to Jerusalem.

4. ¶ And it came to pass after this, that there arose war at Gezer with the Philistines; at which time Sibbechai the Hushathite slew Sippai, that was of the children of the giant: and they were subdued.

5. And there was war again with the Philistines; and Elhanan the son of Jair slew Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, whose spear staff was like a weaver's beam.

6. And yet again there was war at Gath, where was a man of great stature [*Heb.* a man of measure], whose fingers and toes were four and twenty, six on each hand, and six on each foot: and he also was the son of the giant.

7. But when he defied [*or*, reproached] Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimea David's brother slew him.

8. These were born unto the giant in Gath; and they fell by the hand of David, and by the hand of his servants.

### SUBDUING GIANTS.

**H**ERE is a custom referred to as if it were quite a commonplace, yet it is associated with all that is devastating and tragical. Without any apology or explanation a time is indicated for conflict, murder, the overturning of one nation by another; the whole narration proceeds as if it were recording a very



commonplace transaction. There is something pathetic in the time that is indicated, "At the time that kings go out to battle,"—the usual time, the well-known period, the occasion that needs no further indication, because it is so well known. What time was it that kings went out to battle? It was the spring-time, which surely God never meant to have associated with blood and sorrow, loss and pain. Is there not an intolerable irony here? The winter has been passed in reflection, regarding the best means of assailing enemies, and no sooner does the sun return and the days brighten than the hearts of kings are stirred towards battle. This is wrong; this is a discord in the process and issue of things; this is rough reading. There comes into the mind at a certain time of education a sense of the fitness of things. Sometimes we get round our difficulties rather than go straight through them; we have a way of twisting language to suit our purpose, and to take away some of the more ghastly and revolting features of our policy. What cunning there is in the use of terms in this statement, "At the time that kings go out to battle"! Who could have sat down and plainly written in visible ink, "In the spring-time, which is dedicated to the cause of war"? But by referring to the time anonymously we seem to be landed in the battle before we have opened the gate of the occasion. Since these lines were written, has the world advanced in civilisation? Are the seasons now married to appropriate duties and services? Has the spring-time entered into living-association with better policies, healthier ideas, constructive arrangements, beneficent discipline and endeavour? Do men now long for the spring as they would long for a friend? Do we say, In the spring things will be better, brighter, cheerier for everybody; no sooner will the days lengthen than our hope will brighten, and all our attempts will become inspirations and successes? There should be a time when men go out to sing. Who can help singing in the vernal days, when all nature seems to be struggling into the utterance of praise? There should be a time when men go forth to holy war, to battle with all evil because it is evil, not to win a momentary or personal victory, but to rid the land of some giant enemy. There is a holy war, there is a sacred battle, there is a fighting on which God looks with approval: wherefore take unto you the whole armour of

God, and, clothed in that burning invincible panoply, go on to the victorious end. War can never be put an end to by argument. The case of war is now given up by all kings and statesmen so far as argument is concerned; they admit that little or nothing can be said in its favour. How, then, is war to be ended? By itself. All wickedness is suicidal. Whenever war goes forth it carries with it the weapon with which it will stab itself. The ages, guided by the benign spirit of peace and righteousness and harmony, will put an end to war: war will so swell with the vanity and idolatry of its own power as to burst and dissolve and pass away. All this is involved in the providence of God. Do not suppose that there is a single invention in the arsenal that is not adjusted by God. Do not imagine that wickedness has in any way got in advance of the divine kingdom, and is giving God more work to do than his omnipotence can undertake. Everything is under God's control, and in his own time and in his own way he will cleanse the earth, and leave it without one corner in which putrescence can rot or evil can repeat its machinations. This seems to be a long way off, simply because our vision is dull. We cannot see far, and because we cannot see clearly we blame distance: there is no distance with God; with God there is no time. "O rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him." Meanwhile, it is interesting and instructive to observe what men did in the olden days.

We read, "And Joab smote Rabbah, and destroyed it" in the spring-time. Here is a specimen of what we know as condensation. The statement occupies but a line: but we should look into all these condensed statements with some idea of grasping the detail which is involved or hinted at. We are too off-handed in some of our summaries. A railway collision occurs, and fifty lives are sacrificed: so we speak hurriedly, with a cruel condensation. The fifty lives were but a small number in relation to the population of the country, but in relation to their own households, their own particular circles, to the hearts that looked to them for daily joy, to the mouths that turned to them for daily sustenance, how cruel, how irreparable the loss! How easy to say "And Joab destroyed it"! Thus it is but the end of an anecdote, an allusion, and on the story goes into

broader paragraphs, or into fuller eloquence, dwelling upon more fascinating and entertaining themes. Do not overleap the tragedies of the world, and say there are none. Stop at this grave, and read the history that is there represented. The gravestone is always brief. We should write more on the gravestone; we should not crush our eloquence or our sympathy into terse epitaphs. Pause before that gravestone, and read, "Born . . . ;" "died . . . ." That is all. Yes, that is all that the stone knows, that the stone represents: but what lies between that "born" and that "died"? We should be more learned if we paid more attention to the opening out of terse and crude summaries, and went into the detail of human education and development. How easy to say the man "failed"! Who would not stop before that expression, and begin to wonder about the inner family suffering? How did the man fail? What suffering preceded his collapse, what stinging reproaches took away his sleep, what noble endeavours perished in abortion and futility, the world does not care to inquire; the world condenses the occurrence into a brief sentence, and passes on, merely saying the man "failed." How easy to say a man is "poor"; but who knows the meaning of the word "poor"? How easily it is said! Is there one man in ten thousand who knows the meaning of the word "poverty"? It may be questioned whether that proportion does exist. Most men know comparative poverty, the want of luxuries, and even the abridgment of necessaries: but that is not poverty. Nor is poverty mere destitution; a breadless cupboard, a fireless grate, a naked body, these are not the whole of poverty: there is the disabled influence, the infinite discouragement, the black despair, the awful shape that things take, and the awful voice that the shape assumes when it tells a man to give up and die. The man himself is lessened in force and quality, and the last flickering spark dies: that is poverty. There is a point at which we can turn our hunger to advantage; there are circumstances under which destitution becomes a kind of blessed inspiration: but after that there comes a time when man's poor frail strength turns into positive weakness, and the man himself crouches down by the wayside and says he must die unseen and unknown. We should look into this matter of poverty; it would be a blessed religious exercise to take that word to pieces and follow it in all

its significations. When we have seen the destitution of other men, probably once as happily circumstanced as ourselves, with what gratitude should we contemplate our surroundings, and with what thankfulness eat our bread! We have been too crude in our summaries; we have passed on to better themes; we have said, after hearing some gloomy narration of poverty and sorrow and pain, "Change the subject, if you please." Who said so? No philanthropist, no hero, no saint. Philanthropist, hero, saint, would often say, "Change the subject," but that would be when the subject was one of frivolity, superficiality, a subject which ignores the poverty that gnaws and never dies, the tragedy that is never satisfied till the life it smites is out of sight. It should be the business of the Church to expand the summaries of a rude insensibility.

In the process of events we read, "And David took the crown of their king from off his head." The loss of a crown is much or nothing. The crown itself is a mere bauble, but it is full of significance as a token; we must look at the ideality and the sign of things. Every office points in the direction of supremacy. The doorkeeper is on the road to the highest seat; the man who sets himself in his little cottage in the obscure country village to master letters, has begun what may end in the British Museum. Look at idealised action. Let a man lie down in slothfulness, and give up the whole battle of life, and we know what his end will be; but no sooner does a young life resolutely take to letters and figures, and history and philosophy, and like it all, and long for the morning to come to resume the sacred pursuit, than there opens a vista, bright, charming, fascinating, through which the youth follows to the crown. Do not have a crown that anybody can take from you; men may steal your clothes, but they cannot steal your character. He is poor who has nothing but what he can handle. Sometimes a man can be inventoried all through and through, and there can be nothing belonging to him that is not in the inventory, either on the first page or the last, or somewhere between. Do not be one of such paupers. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Let no man take thy crown. Start your son with fifty thousand golden pounds, and he may lose it all, and want

fifty thousand more : start him with a fine sense of honour, with a sound practical education, with a love of wisdom, with a knowledge of things real, simple, practical, and of daily occurrence ; start him as a practical man of sense, and not as a decorated pronouncer of things that are useless ; and he will be rich all the time : no man can rob his memory, no thief can break through and steal his beautiful simplicity, his sterling honour, his real determination to walk worthy of the influences which shaped and inspired him ; alas, he himself may give way, but no thief can break through and steal. If any bankruptcy take place in that instance it takes place within, not without. Let no man take thy crown. When Carlyle was so poor as hardly to have a loaf, he was walking by the popular side of Hyde Park, and looking upon all that gay tumult, he said to himself, with what in another man might have been conceit, but what in him was heroic audacity, "I am doing what none of you could do ;" that is to say, he was writing one of his profoundest and most useful books : there he was rich ; in original conception, in powerful expression, in daring valour of mind, he was wealthy beyond all the banks in all their uncounted bullion. Let no man take thy crown. Have ideas, convictions, resolutions, ideals, and be faithful as a steward ought to be faithful, and it will never be written of thee that any man took thy crown. A man may throw away such a crown, a man may play the fool even in old age : call no man happy until he is dead. But the truth now to be inculcated is this, that no man, or combination of men, can take away the moral crown, the spiritual diadem, the educational supremacy, without the man's own consent.

Now we come to the subduing of giants \*—"And it came to pass after this, that there arose war at Gezer with the Philis-

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\* Giants are frequently alluded to in Scripture. 1. They are first spoken of in Gen. vi. 4, under the name *Nephilim*. We are told in Gen. vi. 1-4, that "there were Nephilim in the earth," and that afterwards the "sons of God," mingling with the "beautiful daughters of men," produced a race of violent and insolent *Gibborim* (A.V. "mighty men"). But who were the parents of these giants ? Who are the "sons of God" ? They were most probably the pious Sethites, though the prevalent opinion, both in the Jewish and the early Christian Church, is that they were angels. It was probably this ancient view which gave rise to the spurious Book of Enoch, and the notion

tines. . . . And there was war again with the Philistines. . . . And yet again there was war at Gath, where was a man of great stature, whose fingers and toes were four and twenty, six on each hand, and six on each foot: and he also was the son of the giant. But when he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimea David's brother slew him"—crushed him as if he had been a fly. An easy accommodation of the text, and an allowable one, will permit us to see several practical lessons here. Do not under-estimate the powers that are opposed to you; count their fingers, count their toes, measure their stature, take their weight, calculate them to a nicety as to what they can possibly do. He is a fool who calls a giant a dwarf. The powers of this world are not to be sneered

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quoted from it by St. Jude 6, and alluded to by St. Peter (2 Pet. ii. 4). 2. THE REPHAIM, a name which frequently occurs. The earliest mention of them is the record of their defeat by Chedorlaomer and some allied kings at Ashteroth Karnaim (Gen. xiv. 5). Extirpated, however, from the east of Palestine, they long found a home in the west (2 Sam. xxi. 18, *seq.*; 1 Chron. xx. 4). It is probable that they had possessed districts west of the Jordan in early times, since the "valley of Replaim" (2 Sam. v. 18; 1 Chron. xi. 15; Isaiah xvii. 5), a rich valley south-west of Jerusalem, derived its name from them. They were probably an aboriginal people, of which the Emim, Anakim, and Zuzim were branches.

No one has yet proved by experience the possibility of giant races materially exceeding in size the average height of man. There is no great variation in the ordinary standard. The most stunted tribes of Esquimaux are at least four feet high, and the tallest races of America (*e.g.* the Guayaquilists and people of Paraguay) do not exceed six feet and a half. . . . The general belief (until very recent times) in the existence of fabulously enormous men, arose from fancied giant-graves (see De la Valle's *Travels in Persia*, ii. 89); and, above all, from the discovery of huge bones, which were taken for those of men, in days when comparative anatomy was unknown. . . . Isolated instances of monstrosity are sufficiently attested to prove that beings like Goliath and his kinsmen may have existed. Columella mentions Navius Pollio as one, and Pliny says that in the time of Claudius Cæsar there was an Arab named Gabberas, nearly ten feet high, and that even he was not so tall as Pusio and Secundilla in the reign of Augustus, whose bodies were preserved. Josephus tells us that, among other hostages, Artabanus sent to Tiberius a certain Eleazar, a Jew, surnamed "the Giant," seven cubits in height. Nor are well-authenticated instances wanting in modern times. O'Brien, whose skeleton is preserved in the Museum of the College of Surgeons must have been eight feet high, but his unnatural height made him weakly. On the other hand, the blacksmith Parsons, in Charles II.'s reign, was seven feet two inches high, and also remarkable for his strength (Fuller's *Worthies*, Staffordshire.)—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*.

at. When young men imagine that by a wave of the hand they can brush away all difficulties, they are in the state of intoxication which is worse than positive drunkenness. Be sober, be vigilant; for your adversary the devil goeth about—like a cripple? like a weakling? like a thing that may be despised? No—like a roaring lion; and no man has ever sneered at a lion. Men have been in awe of the beast, they have called him king of beasts, they have written respectfully about him; it is not on record that any man ever sneered at a lion as a thing that he could handle easily, and dispose of with a thought,—your adversary goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. It will be a great omission if you fail to add up the forces that are against you: sometimes they are blatant, sometimes they are undemonstrative; sometimes they give you warning, sometimes the net is spread in the sight of the bird, and the bird is treated with contempt; sometimes they are subtle, insidious, so that the wise man becomes a fool under the plying temptation; he walks forward, a singular feeling, as of the operation of a magical opiate overcomes him; he sees rainbows in the darkness, he beholds opening heavens at midnight, he calls the earth a paradise, and he walks on, not knowing whither, until he takes the last step and no more is heard of him. Understand that the world is full of pitfalls, snares, and man-traps: that the devil never allows any man to get through his life easily if he can help it. Life is a battle, life is a daily conflict, life with the most of us is a tremendous struggle; if we get into heaven at all, it will be, as it were, by the merest hair's-breadth, the door will just close upon us, there will be no margin within which we can take liberties as if heaven had been easily won. It is hard for some men to pray; it is all but impossible for others to believe; and there are men who would tell us, in a condensed expression that they would not willingly amplify, that life is a terrible unendurable conflict, and that oftentimes it seems as if this day would be the last, for their poor strength is dying out, and the enemy seems to grow by what he feeds on. The power is not in you, but it is in God. If we had to fight the enemy, a very short account might be made out, for our fight would end in defeat: but God is our inspiration and strength and confidence. They that be with us are more than they that can be against us;

we are crucified with Christ ; nevertheless, we live ; yet not we, but Christ liveth in us ; and the life which we now live in the flesh we live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us, and gave himself for us. Take unto you the whole armour of God, the sword, and the shield, and the breast-plate, and the girdle, and be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. The panoply is provided : do not attempt to amend it. God's grace is sufficient for us : do not attempt to add to it. The spiritual will eventually prove itself to be the omnipotent. Meanwhile, it cuts but a poor figure at certain stages in the development of human history. What is argument against a sword ? The fool would say nothing ; the wise man will tell you that an argument will by-and-by put an end to all swords, turning them into ploughshares. What is an argument against a vested interest ? Why talk against institutions that have millions at their disposal ? Why come with your puling Christian sentimental eloquence to plead against men who are entrenched behind countless gold ? The argument will win, the prayer will succeed ; the time will come when all that countless gold will change hands, and the men who trusted to it will be left without one refuge ; yea, so destitute will they be as to ask those who were their enemies in name, but their real friends, for quarter and asylum. What is an argument against a custom ? The custom is centuries old ; men have become used to it, they expect its recurrence, it is second nature, they have done this, and their families have done it for generations past. The argument will uproot the custom, will take every fibre out of the ground, and when the ground is cleansed of the upas root the argument will sow the ground with the seed of the kingdom, and even in that spot shall grow flowers beautiful in the sight of heaven. Have faith in spirituality, in conviction, in moral persuasion, in ideas. For a time we shall be called fanatics, enthusiasts. So Christ was called, so Paul was denominated. But it lies within the power of reason to comprehend the proposition that mind must be mightier than matter, and that conviction is a greater force in history than is mere prejudice, and that enthusiasm is but logic on fire, and that passion is the least sacrifice we can render to him whose symbol is the Cross.



## PRAYER.

WE bless thee, thou Son of God, that thou art also Son of man. Thou lovest all mankind; we have heard of thee that thou didst taste death for every man; O wondrous miracle of love! This is none other than the work of God, the counsel of the Most High, made perfect before our eyes. What love thou hast expended upon man! The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. Thou didst not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. They that be whole, thou dost say, need not a physician, but they that are sick. Lord, thou art our physician, thou art our healer; other redcemer have we none, and we are not ashamed to worship thee, and to call upon thy name in the public assembly, asking for a renewal of thy grace, and for every encouragement we need in the pursuits of this life. We bless thee for all thy care and tenderness; thy tears have helped to dry our tears; because thou hast felt for us we have known that our misery has been lessened, and where thou hast not taken the sorrow wholly away thou hast whispered that thy grace is sufficient for us; we have tested this, this we have known in very deed, and now we say, The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. Help us to live in this faith, and in this faith to be noble, true, heroic, courageous, self-denying, self-sacrificing, always looking in the spirit of the Cross at the miseries and the necessities of mankind. Amen.

## 1 Chronicles **xxi.** 1-13.

1. And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.

2. And David said to Joab and to the rulers of the people, Go, number Israel, from Beer-sheba even to Dan; and bring the number of them to me, that I may know it.

3. And Joab answered, The Lord make his people an hundred times so many more as they be: but, my lord the king, are they not all my lord's servants [In the place of these words we find in 2 Sam. xxiv. 3, "And that the eyes of my lord the king may see it," a much more emphatic sentence]? why then doth my lord require this thing? why will he be a cause of trespass to Israel? [This clause does not occur in Samuel. It is perhaps added by the writer of Chronicles to show what was in Joab's mind: "Why wilt thou, by numbering them in a spirit of vainglory, run the risk of provoking God's wrath against Israel?"]

4. Nevertheless the king's word prevailed against Joab. Wherefore Joab departed, and went throughout all Israel, and came to Jerusalem.

5. ¶ And Joab gave the sum of the number of the people unto David And all they of Israel were a thousand thousand and an hundred thousand

men that drew sword: and Judah was four hundred threescore and ten thousand men that drew sword.

6. But Levi and Benjamin counted he not among them: for the king's word was abominable to Joab.

7. And God was displeased [*Heb.* And it was evil in the eyes of the Lord concerning this thing] with this thing; therefore he smote Israel.

8. And David said unto God [2 Sam. xxiv. 10], I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing: but now, I beseech thee, do away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly.

9. ¶ And the Lord spake unto Gad, David's seer, saying,

10. Go and tell David, saying, Thus saith the Lord, I offer [*Heb.* stretch out] thee three things: choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee.

11. So Gad came to David, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Choose thee [*Heb.* take to thee] either three years' famine; or three months to be destroyed before thy foes, while that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh thee; or else three days the sword of the Lord, even the pestilence, in the land, and the angel of the Lord destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel. Now therefore advise thyself what word I shall bring again to him that sent me.

13. And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let me fall now into the hand of the Lord; for very great [*or, many*] are his mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man.

### THE HANDS OF GOD BETTER THAN THE HANDS OF MEN.

**D**AVID was tempted to number the people of Israel. He said unto Joab and to the rulers of the people,

"Go, number Israel, from Beer-sheba even to Dan; and bring the number of them to me, that I may know it" (v. 2).

Joab was a wise counsellor; in this case the wisdom was with the subject, not with the king. Joab answered,

"The Lord make his people an hundred times so many more as they be: but, my lord the king, are they not all my lord's servants? why then doth my lord require this thing? why will he be a cause of trespass to Israel?" (v. 3).

The protest was disregarded. When kings are mad, who can stand before them?—mad, not intellectually, but morally; the madness of the heart, compared with which mental lunacy is an unspeakable blessing. There are times when the soul

seems to be given over to the power of the devil, when it is caught on every side, when religion itself becomes little better than a temptation to sin. Men are sometimes brought to suppose that they are doing things for the glory of God when in reality they are but heightening the crumbling pedestal on which their own little dignity is to be shown. David might have said to himself, I will see how many fighting men there are in Israel that can be brought up to the Lord's cause in the day of battle; I have no wish to magnify my own strength, or to put a fictitious value upon my own position; in fact, I am not concerned about myself at all in this matter, my only object is to see how many qualified men might be called up to the help of the Lord in the day of battle. In saying all this David might assure himself that he was deeply concerned only for the Lord's name and glory, and that nothing could be more unselfish than his godly concern for the welfare of Israel. There are what may be called subtle sins, as well as vulgar sins. A man may set himself in open opposition to God, and boldly say that he means to fight down the divine supremacy, and put a mark of dishonour on God's throne; he may be mad enough and vulgar enough for that and defeat his own intentions by his exaggeration. We need not argue the case with such a man, for he is not the kind of character that does much evil in society; his very fury is its own best check. The drunkard who is rolling in the ditch is rather a warning than a temptation to other people. The thing to be noted is, that there are subtle sins—sins which do not look like sins; sins that are done up in beautiful parcels, that have an inviting aspect, that come to men altogether in false guises, and take men unawares. There is a possibility of doing things that look well, and yet are bad; of encouraging ambitions, and strengthening tastes which, under a passable reputation, are eating away the substance and strength of our best life. It will be a mistake on our part to imagine that David exhausted the sin of counting, and that now arithmetical calculations may be made without trespassing upon the province and honour of God. It is easy for us to rise in petulant indignation against David, and to declare that he ought not to have counted his men; but let us beware, lest in so doing we provoke the spirit of David to retort that it is possible

for us to count our money so as to disclose the very motive and intention which in him we condemn as vicious. Yes, there is an atheistical way of counting money. A man may go over coin by coin of his property, and look at it in a way which, being interpreted, signifies, This is my strength, this is my confidence; so long as I have all these coins it is impossible that I can get far wrong, or know much trouble; these will be my answer and defence in the day of accusation and adversity! The most harmless looking things may be done in a distrustful and self-considering spirit. David was undoubtedly giving way to low considerations; he was trying an arm of flesh; he was encouraging himself by a review of forces which he imagined to be invincible. God, who is jealous for the honour of his servants, and jealous for the honour of his own name, sent Gad, David's own seer, to put three propositions before the king:

"Choose thee either three years' famine; or three months to be destroyed before thy foes, while that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh thee; or else three days the sword of the Lord, even the pestilence, in the land, and the angel of the Lord destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel" (v. 12).

To these propositions David answered:

"I am in a great strait: let me fall now into the hand of the Lord; for very great are his mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man" (v. 13).

Let us regard this answer as showing that in the saddest experiences of the heart, in the extremities of human guilt, in the allotment of penalties, and in the working out of law, it is better to fall into the hand of God than into the hands of men; that the Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy, and that like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.

The doctrine is, that as sinners, as sinners before God, and as sinners towards each other, our highest hope is not in the incomplete and perverted mercy of man, but in the infinite mercy which is founded upon the infinite righteousness of God. We may, perhaps, help ourselves towards a clearer understanding of this doctrine by first considering that it is better to fall into the hands of the highest class of men than into the hands of

the lowest ; if this be made clear, it will give us a hint of how much better it may be to receive sentence from God than from the highest human authorities.

Take a debated legal case. In the first instance it may be brought before the local magistracy ; but, very possibly, the result may be considered unsatisfactory by one party or the other, hence the case may be moved to the court above ; there again dissatisfaction may be the result, and an appeal may be carried to the highest court in the land. The decision of that court carries with it the advantage that at all events nothing further can be done—all that legal learning, acumen, skill, and experience can do, has been done. The result, even then, may not be satisfactory ; still, by so much as the case has been carried to the highest tribunal, and pronounced upon by the highest wisdom, there is strong ground to rest upon. Not only so, there is a point beyond this ; for by so much as a man wishes that there were yet another superior court to which an appeal might be made does he show how deeply graven upon the heart is the law that it is better to fall into the hands of the highest than into the hands of the lowest ; that it is better to fall into the hands of God than into the hands of men. It is quite true that the decision of the highest may not bring with it satisfaction to the mind ; that is not the point ; the one point is, that men do aspire to have their cases determined, not by the lowest, but by the highest authorities, and it is only by so much as they are persuaded that they have had access to those highest authorities, that they approach anything like a condition of satisfaction.

What is true in the law is equally true in all criticism. Take an amateur painter : as his work approaches completion, he permits his friends to look at it. His father declares himself lost in wonder ; his mother unhesitatingly says that the work of her son is perfect ; his kinsfolk generally admit that there is genius in the family. So much for one class of critics ; but, inasmuch as the artist is aware that this is the very lowest class, it is impossible for him to be satisfied even with the most flattering commendation of his skill. Next come other competitors for fame ; and they, as becometh incipient greatness, look on

critically and coldly; and the amateur consoles himself under their censure, by finding in envious rivalry a full explanation of their reserve. Is the artist satisfied with the opinions which have been pronounced upon his work? Does he consider himself favoured of fortune, because his father and his mother have, without modification, accorded to him the tribute of their favour? Or does he consider himself condemned to neglect and forgetfulness, because men who are in the same position as himself have treated his work with coldness? He says, alike to the flattery and the censure, I have yet to be judged by the academicians; *you* are not the judges; they will say what the work is worth; by their word I abide. I cannot accept your flattery; I cannot be discouraged by your censure: I must appeal to the highest, and by the highest I stand or fall. Even supposing the judgment of the highest to be unfavourable, the painter knows that, morally, it is impartial, and, artistically, it is supreme; and by so much he is set at rest as to the value of his work. But suppose that all preliminary criticism is favourable, the wise artist will yet say, I must not rest content with this, it has not the full consent of my own mind; these people are not able to judge my work by the right standards: the great judgment has yet to be pronounced; all that has been said may be confirmed or reversed, and not until the appointed authorities have expressed their opinion can I feel at rest.

Take the case of the young public speaker. It will be for the advantage of such a man to be judged by the greatest orators which the country can supply. Do not let his audience consist of half-educated men, but fill the house in which he is to speak with the highest talent of the land. Even then, should the young man fail in his effort, there will be in his hearers a discrimination that can find out any sign or trace of power that may be discovered in his service: there will be an honourable treatment of his failings; and everything that he does that looks in the direction of power will be viewed with hopefulness and encouraged with stimulating words. It is better to be judged by the highest than by the lowest; men have less to fear when they act or speak in the presence of the noblest minds than when they are criticised and judged by men of inferior sagacity

and culture. Constantly in life we are seeing the conflict of opinions, and waiting for the expression of the highest, and when the highest has been ascertained, society settles down into contentment and rest. On the other hand, until the highest has been made known, men cannot be quite at ease; the vexed question is still beset with perilous possibilities, and no man is foolhardy enough to build upon it with confidence and satisfaction.

In carrying these illustrations into the religious realm, we must distinguish between the principle and the accident. There is of course infinite disparity between God and the highest human authorities; those authorities are not infallible, even upon matters which come within the scope of their proper functions; judges may err in law; academicians may err in art; physicians may err in medicine;—the one thing to be remembered is, that by so much as men are sure that they have appealed to the highest accessible tribunal, are they satisfied with the decision. We come then to the one great question of sin. How is sin to be met? How is sin to be forgiven? That sin must somehow be recognised and punished is made abundantly clear by all the arrangements of society. By common consent it has been determined to hunt down sin that affects our social relations; how is the great sin which affects the heart and disturbs our attitude towards God to be met? We may seek to punish one another, or to heal one another, but our punishments are mockeries, and our healings do not touch the disease. You may scourge a felon, but he is a felon still. When you have shut up the manslayer for life in the gloomiest solitude, you have not touched the spirit of murder that is in him. When we have sought to modify sin, to show that corruption is not so corrupt, and that there are spots of light even in the densest moral darkness, we have not really healed the heart which we have addressed in such vain words, we have only put over it a thin covering of lies which will be consumed; and the heart will be the worse for the delusion to which it has yielded. All human punishment is but negative. Human punishment is, in fact, simply a protest.

**Why is it better that the sinner should fall into the hands of**

God rather than into the hands of men? In reply to this question, good use might be made of the many pleasing considerations which arise in connection with God's wisdom, God's righteousness, and God's perfect knowledge of facts; but we shall include all these in a higher answer—viz., it is better to fall into the hands of God than into the hands of men, because in his whole treatment of human sin God is constantly seeking, not the destruction, but the salvation of the sinner. The punishment which follows sin is not mere punishment; it is not a bald assertion of the rights of law: there is a redemptive element in it; the rod itself conveys a call to the cross. God has never answered our sin merely by punishment. To have contented himself with punishment, strictly as such, would have been to proclaim his weakness. Nothing is easier than to measure sin by penalty, and to make an end of transgression by a visitation of the rod. All this, however, is weakness itself; it is impotent compromise; it leaves the great rebellion untouched. God answers sin not by his hand only, but by his heart. When we ask, How does God propose to encounter sin? He does not point to the spear of lightning, and say, So long as that spear is at my command the sinner shall not go unpunished; he does not refer us to the thunder of his power, and say, So long as I can avail myself of such resources the sinner shall be humiliated: all this would amount to less than nothing; it is negative; it is puerile, if it be considered strictly within its own limits; God, instead of confining himself to penalty, set up the cross, and shows men the sinfulness of sin through the depth and tenderness of his own mercy. Man seeks to magnify his own righteousness, by pronouncing sentence of condemnation upon other people. Man is apt to think that he will be considered virtuous if he speak loudly against other people's vices. It is possible to have quite a genius in devising penalties, and yet for the heart to know nothing of true loyalty to virtue. Magistracy is one thing, righteousness is another. Law-making may be reduced to a science, but law-keeping comes out of the heart. All human legislation in reference to crime is of necessity incomplete, because it touches simply the overt act, and not the motive or the spirit underlying and explaining the life. All incompleteness is weakness, and weakness has but three courses



before it—it succumbs to an ignominious fate ; it takes advantage of compromise ; or it defends itself by exaggeration. All human penal law is *ex post facto* ; it is made after the crime ; it is something that comes up to meet a certain class of facts ; or by so much as human law is apparently anticipative, it is founded upon inferences and probabilities which make it really retrospective. Crime came first, the Statute Book came next. On the other hand, God's treatment of sin was determined before the creation of man ; for we read in the Holy Book of the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. The idea of redemption was established before the infliction of mere punishment could by possibility be accomplished. The cross is the first figure in the immeasurable past. Redemption lies at the very foundation of the divine government. It is no after-thought ; it is not the device of a magistracy organised to put down public crime ; it is the expression of the infinite righteousness and the infinite love of God.

Let us be clear upon this point, lest sentiments overrule reason. We are not to suppose that the punishment of sin is either unrighteous or inconsistent with the love of God. Sin must be punished. The law must smite. Sin punishes itself ; it kindles a fire in the soul ; it pierces the sinner with the sharpest sword. No man can do wrong without smarting for his iniquity, and all his smarting is a testimony that God is on the throne, that God is looking on, that the streams of his infinite life are flowing through the universe in one continual protest against all evil, and one continuous encouragement and benediction upon all good. We shall abuse the spirit of the text if we imagine that by going to God we shall escape the punishment of our sins. It is possible that some who have not been closely following our argument may say, Inasmuch as God deals so mercifully and lovingly with sinners, we shall leave our whole case in his hand and cast ourselves upon his mercy, in order that we may escape the consequences of our sin. They may say that, but let it be understood that it is not with the authority of the argument which we have been considering. It is more than a delusion, it is practical blasphemy. By going to God, we go to punishment ; in appearing before his

infinite holiness, we bring upon our souls a swift and sure condemnation of everything that is evil in our nature; but herein is the difference between the punishment man accords, and the punishment with which God visits the sinner who casts himself into his hands—under the divine punishment there lies the great and infinitely precious fact that God is seeking the salvation of the sinner. The punishment is not merely negative. God's government is not a mere magistracy. It is a moral dominion—a government of the heart.

Need a word be added about the fallacy that men would deal more lightly with one another, if the whole question of punishment were left between themselves, because of selfish reasons? First of all, the suggestion is philosophically untrue; and, secondly, its moral unsatisfactoriness is obvious. The conscience would remain after the judgment. To deal lightly with sin is actually to commit sin. To tell lies to one another, by way of modifying each other's guilt, is a method which carries its own condemnation. We must accept the great principle, that punishment can never lessen sin; that punishment is strictly negative; and that God alone can accompany punishment with a scheme of righteous and merciful redemption. It is good to fall into thy hands, gracious Father; when thou dost smite, it is that we, feeling the bitterness of sin, may desire to abandon it; when thou art angry, we see how true and pure is thy love; when thou dost terribly thunder against us, it is not that we may be driven to destruction, but that we may be called to salvation and peace.

What is wanted for a full acceptance of the principle of this text? 1. A deep sense of sin. David had it, "I have sinned greatly in that I have done; and now I beseech thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of thy servant, for I have done very foolishly." If men have inadequate notions of sin, they will, of necessity, have inadequate notions of its treatment. If a man comes to God with a sense of his own integrity, with a spirit that is prepared to defend itself against the charges of God's law, the gospel will be to him nothing but a mockery, an offer that is to be declined with indignation, if not with contempt. He does

not need it; he imagines that he is superior to it; he is not at all on the moral line on which the gospel operates. But let the heart be smitten with a sense of evil; let the whole soul cry out with contrition and with despair; let the watchword of the life be, "O wretched man that I am!" then in that hour of extremity, when all nature gives way, when life is a burden, when futurity is a threat, let the proposition be made to such to fall into the hands of God, who is gracious, long-suffering, and infinitely merciful, and who will mingle with all his judgment elements of love, and the heart will feel that the proposition appeals to its very deepest needs, and that there is but one answer which can be made to an offer so infinitely gracious. To those who are overwhelmed with a sense of their own moral respectability this message will be without meaning or application; but to the broken-hearted and contrite, to whom sin has become the most tormenting problem of their lives, it will be a word of illumination and encouragement.

2. An unreserved committal of our case to God. David gave himself up entirely to God's will. Mark the beauty of the expression, Let me fall into the hand of the Lord; not, Let me stand before the Lord and consult him, laying before him my opinions and pointing out a modification of his judgment; not that at all; God would not have treated with David on any such terms, nor will he treat with us if we come before him with a proposition instinct with such selfishness. We must fall into the hand of God—an expression which signifies resignation, perfect trust in the divine righteousness and benevolence, and an entire committal of our whole case to the disposal of God.

Fall into the hand of God, O misjudged man! We are living in a world where misjudgments are being constantly pronounced upon our conduct; our words are mistaken, our tones are perverted, our whole spirit is misunderstood: what is our hope? and in what does our soul find rest?—in the belief that God is over all, and that he himself pronounces the final judgment! In doing what is right and true, and doing it with individuality of method, we shall unquestionably expose ourselves to the censure of many critics. Men who profess to be men of taste, men who

have made taste their idol, men whose taste is so highly cultivated as to have become the most odious vulgarity, will tell us that their whole nature shrinks from this or that method of doing things, and they will not be slow to suppose that because what they call their "whole nature" shrinks from something that bears our individuality, they are, therefore, very lofty and righteous judges! God knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust; and in the hour of his judgment he will look upon our life, not in such incomplete portions as are visible to the public eye, but in all the secret things, in all the hidden elements and forces that have gone to make it what it is; he will look at our life from its beginning to its end, and see how circumstances that never could be told to men have often asserted an overruling claim in our spirit, and caused us to assume attitudes and relations which have actually been distressingly painful to ourselves; he will judge not by the outward but by the inward, and if it be possible for his infinite love to find in us one redeeming feature, he will so magnify that as to cause our weaknesses and our failures, in so far as they have been mere infirmities, to be forgotten in the amplification of those features on which he himself can look with any degree of approbation. The whole world is in the hand of God, let us be thankful. The whole past is under his review, let us leave it with the assurance that his judgment is righteous. The whole future is under his control, let us pass into it with the steadiness, the quietness and the majesty of those who know that all the resources of God are placed at the disposal of all who put their whole trust in his wisdom and love. We can talk but inadequately about these things now; poor are our best notions about the goodness of the divine rule and the blessedness of falling into the divine hands. Not until we reach heaven can we fully know how good a thing it is to have given up our whole heart and life to the keeping and direction of our heavenly Father.

## 1 Chronicles xxi. 14-30.

¶ 14. So the Lord sent pestilence upon Israel [From Samuel we learn that the plague raged throughout the land, from dawn to the time of the evening sacrifice]: and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men.

15. And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it [“And the angel stretched out his hand towards Jerusalem to destroy it”]; and as he was destroying [“About (at the time of) the destroying;” when the angel was on the point of beginning the work of death. It does not appear that Jerusalem was touched (comp. 2 Sam. xxiv. 16)], the Lord beheld, and he repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough, stay now [“Enough now, stay (drop) thine hand”] thine hand. And the angel of the Lord stood [was standing. Samuel “had come to be”] by the threshingfloor of Ornan [or, Araunah, 2 Sam. xxiv. 18] the Jebusite.

16. And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the Lord stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces. [On the bursting out of the pestilence it would be natural that David and the elders should put on sackcloth (see 2 Sam. iii. 31; 1 Kings xxi. 27; 2 Kings vi. 30, etc.); and on seeing the angel it would be natural that they should veil their faces (see Exod. iii. 6; 1 Kings xix. 13)].

17. And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep [verbatim as in Samuel, save that the appeal, “O Lord my God,” is wanting there. (Literally, “But these, the sheep.” The king was the shepherd)], what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, O Lord my God, be on me, and on my father’s house; but not on thy people, that they should be plagued [Literally, “and on thy people, not for a plague”].

### INTERRUPTED JUDGMENTS.

THE ministry of angels is not always a ministry of salvation. We read in the epistle to the Hebrews, “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” But in this case we find an angel charged with the awful mission of destruction. The city towards which the angel was flying was none other than Jerusalem, the fair,

the beautiful, the comeliest object upon all the earth, the very city of peace and of God. But position, history, outward advantages, cannot save men from divine judgment, when they have rebelled against God and invoked his wrath. Curious, however, it is to notice how judgment and mercy meet together, even under circumstances the most appalling. A beautiful instance of this occurs in the fifteenth verse—"and as he was destroying"—the Lord was looking on, and he himself interrupted the judgment which he had ordered to be poured out upon the doomed city. The Lord cannot look upon destruction with complacency. He did not make the earth to destroy it, or create the children of men that he might turn them to destruction; his thoughts are ever thoughts of restoration, maturity, completeness, and the blessedness of peace and sweet contentment. "Turn ye, turn ye; why will ye die?" "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." Are there not many interrupted judgments in human history? Sometimes we have wondered why the judgment was not carried on to the point of extremity, so that nothing whatever should be left behind of all the heritage of evil-doers. The explanation of our wonder is given in this verse, and specially in these words, "and as he was destroying." God has left a remnant; he would not have the uttermost farthing extracted; he would not carry out his judgment until there was nothing left upon the earth but the signs of the fire which had consumed it. What applies to a nation or to a city applies also to the individual life. We have had much taken away, and yet how much have we had left! As the angel was destroying, "the Lord beheld," and into his eyes there came tears of pity, and his voice was heard saying to the angel, "It is enough, stay now thine hand." In wrath God has remembered mercy; thus, although our house has been shaken down, and our life has suffered great chastisements, and all objects of beauty seem to have been withdrawn from our vision, yet when we come to look on what God has left behind, we may indeed often be more astounded by the mercy than we have been appalled by the wrath. "It is enough, stay now thine hand,"—enough, if rightly interpreted, but not enough if the right interpretation has been missed. Enough was done to assert the reality of divine righteousness, the certainty of the divine

superintendence of human affairs ; enough was done to show that God could have done more, had not his pity arrested his anger. Blessed are they who themselves say, "It is enough," and who justify their verdict of sufficiency, not because of their cowardice under the strain of suffering, but because their distresses have brought them to penitential humiliation and to full-orbed views of life and of God. We have never had enough punishment until we have been brought to an attitude of humiliation, confession, and uttermost penitence. The object of God in sending the destroying angel to city or nation, to family or individual, is to bring men to repentance, to use even the ministry of fear in order that he may bring home those who have wandered far from him. When David beheld the awful spectacle, he began to accuse himself with just severity, yet he began in that hour to know what it is to respond to priestly instincts and to pursue the holy work of mediation. David said unto God, I only am to blame—"I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed"—I am the guilty one before high Heaven : O thou God of mercy, kill me if thou wilt, but spare those who have no part or lot in this iniquity. Happy indeed is the man who can bring himself even to this distress of mind. Contradictory as the mere words may appear to be, there is joy in a distress in which we have not involved others, but which righteously falls upon ourselves, and which we accept in a spirit of submission and penitence. David was great in his repentance. The circumstances developed the highest quality of the man's nature ; he did not seek for the mitigation of his punishment in the punishment of innocent men : he felt that he could bear that penalty more resignedly, and even gratefully, if he himself were left alone to receive the full outpouring of divine indignation which he had justly incurred : "Let thine hand, I pray thee, O Lord my God, be on me, and on my father's house ; but not on thy people, that they should be plagued." Yet a curious illustration of providence is afforded by this very association of innocent people with divine judgments. We cannot sin ourselves without involving others in some measure of penalty and suffering. Surely this should be some restraint upon our eager appetites, our unholy ambitions, our diabolical desires. When the father of the house goes down in character he carries down with him, to a considerable extent, the character

of his innocent children. The bad man is laying up a bad fortune for those whom he has brought into the world; long years afterwards they may be told how bad a man their father was, and because of his iniquity they may be made to suffer loss and pain. If any man is now seeing innocent people suffering on his account he ought at once to confess the sin to be his own, and openly implore God to keep back the hand of judgment from those who are involved in the grievous offence.

"Then the angel of the Lord commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar unto the Lord in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite. And David went up at the saying of Gad, which he spake in the name of the Lord. And Ornan turned back, and saw the angel; and his four sons with him hid themselves. Now Ornan was threshing wheat. And as David came to Ornan, Ornan looked and saw David, and went out of the threshingfloor, and bowed himself to David with his face to the ground. Then David said to Ornan, Grant [*Heb.* Give] me the place of this threshingfloor, that I may build an altar therein unto the Lord: thou shalt grant it me for the full price: that the plague may be stayed from the people. And Ornan said unto David, Take it to thee, and let my lord the king do that which is good in his eyes: lo, I give thee the oxen also for burnt offerings, and the threshing instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meat offering [comp. Lev. ii. 1]; I give it all. And king David said to Ornan, Nay; but I will verily buy it for the full price: for I will not take that which is thine for the Lord, nor offer burnt offerings without cost. So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight. And David built there an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called upon the Lord; and he answered him from heaven by fire\* upon the altar of burnt offering. And the Lord commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof" (vv. 18-27).

Another link is now introduced into this ministry of mediation. The Lord commanded the angel, and the angel of the Lord commanded Gad, and that prophet was to tell David to

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\* *The Speaker's Commentary* says: It is not so very surprising that this fact is not mentioned by the author of Samuel, since his object is to give an account of the sin of David, the punishment which it provoked, and the circumstances by which that punishment was brought to a close, not to connect those wonderful circumstances with anything further in the history. With the writer of Chronicles the case is different. He would probably have omitted the whole narrative, as he has the sin of David in the matter of Uriah, but for its connection with the fixing of the temple site, which he goes on to relate in chapter xxii. Now it was no doubt mainly the fact that God answered him by fire from heaven on this altar, which determined David, and Solomon after him, to build the temple on the spot so consecrated.



go up and set up an altar unto the Lord. The setting-up of an altar unto the Lord was not a mere act of masonry. Many sinners there are who would be willing to build altars and churches if thereby they could escape the penalty of their sin. There is no way into the blessedness of pardon through any golden door. How easy it would be for the rich man to claim a pardon because of the multitude of his donations, or the magnificence of the buildings for whose erection he has paid! The way of escape does not lie along that path at all. We are indeed to set up an altar, but that altar is to express the condition of the heart; in the heart itself the altar is first set up: all the building of the hand but shows forth visibly what has already been done secretly in the innermost parts of the soul. Instantly David went up at the saying of Gad, which he spake in the name of the Lord. David said to Ornan, "Grant me the place of this threshingfloor, that I may build an altar therein unto the Lord." David did not ask for a privilege, he asked to be allowed to purchase the site upon which his eyes were fixed. He told the object which he had in view, that object being none other than that the plague might be stayed from the people. He who had seen innumerable thousands of men slain by the sword, in the time of what he considered to be just and honourable war, could not bear to see innocent people mown down by the scythe of divine wrath. Here embodies the true idea of amelioration and all true restoration, namely, that the man must be made right with God in order that he may be made right with his fellow-men, and in order that divine judgments may be turned into divine blessings. David had nothing to say to Gad, nor had he a word to speak to the angel; these were but instruments in the divine hand: his business was to go immediately to God himself, and there, in amplest submission and deepest humiliation, make his peace with the offended Creator. Our rupture is not with our fellow-men, it is with our God. The answer to all the results of that rupture, therefore, is not to be found in political rearrangements, in social reforms, in manipulations suggested by an inventive genius; it is to be found in a deeply religious exercise, namely, the up-going of the soul to God with tears and brokenheartedness and uttermost contrition; and thus having purified

the fountain the streams will all be cleansed and sanctified. When David built his altar "he offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called upon the Lord." After all, this was work which David loved. With all his shortcomings, with his manifest and even monstrous defects, there was deep down in his heart an inextinguishable love for God and for God's house. Nor was the Lord slow to answer him; the Lord commanded the angel, and the sword was at once put up into its sheath. This was answered prayer. If we have difficulties in the matter of prayer being answered, we ought to consider whether those difficulties should not turn upon the nature of the prayer itself. What is the prayer which we offer? Is it a cry of selfish pain or selfish shame? Or is it in any way limited by merely selfish desires and considerations? If so, it is not prayer at all; it is the mere cry of cowardice, the mere whimper of childish timidity. We shall prove the reality of our prayer when we publicly confess our own sin, and when we openly go forward and at all costs purchase what is required in order to show the depth and power of our conviction, and when we lovingly and audibly cry in the hearing of the whole world that God would have mercy upon us and heal us: when our prayer comes to that point of agony, we shall be in a position to say whether God hears our prayers or allows them to die upon the idle wind. Before pronouncing upon prayer we ought ourselves to pray. We ought also to remember that to pray is not to use a form of words, however sacred and tender, but to pour out the living heart in absolute and ungrudging sacrifice before the throne of grace. Few men pray. Many men utter the words of prayer, but never truly aspire to heaven. Lord, teach us how to pray!

"At that time when David saw that the Lord had answered him in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there [*i.e.*, then (from the time of the fall of fire from heaven) David made this his regular place for offering sacrifice]. For the tabernacle of the Lord, which Moses made in the wilderness, and the altar of the burnt offering, were at that season in the high place at Gibeon [comp. ch. xvi. 39, 40, and 2 Chron. i. 3-5]. But David could not go before it to inquire of God: for he was afraid because of the sword of the angel of the Lord" (vv. 28-30).

This is a parenthesis, showing why David did not resort to the

ancient tabernacle which stood then at Gibeon. The dwelling-place of Jehovah is set forth in contrast with Ornan's threshing-floor,\* or the new sanctuary. David could not go to inquire of God, for he was afraid because of the sword of the angel of the Lord. David could not go to Gibeon because of the sword of the angel of Jehovah—that is to say, because of the pestilence which raged at Gibeon. It has been supposed by some that the awful vision of the angel had afflicted David with some bodily weakness; perhaps it is better to suppose that the sight of the angel had made an indelible impression upon the mind of David.†

There are some sights which we never wish to see repeated; so thoroughly unmanned have we been by certain spectacles that nothing could induce us to look upon them again. No man can see God, and live; and God can so show an angel to the human vision that that vision would on no account look again upon the appalling and bewildering sight. We know not what we ask for when we desire to see the invisible world. We cannot tell what is the meaning of the word "spirit"; we see one another in the body, and become familiar with one another in that relation, but who can tell what would be the effect upon the mind if we could really see the spirit of our dearest friend? Mysterious spirit! spirit of fire, spirit of life; an amazing, wondrous, immeasurable thing, palpitating in every part of the body, and yet wholly resident in none: the thing that thinks, that brings riches to the mind from afar, that wonders, schemes, plots, prays, blasphemes, and conducts the whole tragedy of life, and yet is itself invisible—

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\* Araunah, a Jebusite, who had a threshing-floor on Mount Moriah, which he sold to David as a site for an altar to Jehovah. This site was indicated to David by God as the spot where the angel of the plague had stayed his destructive progress. At first Araunah refused to accept payment from the king, but on David's insisting on this, he accepted for the site and for his oxen fifty shekels of silver (2 Sam. xxiv. 18-25). In 1 Chron. xxi. 25, the sum is stated at 600 shekels of gold, a discrepancy which there are no means of reconciling. The Chronicler also spells the name of Araunah *Ornan*.

† Upon this matter we have evidence in abundance which will illustrate David's feeling and position (Gen. xxviii. 17; Exod. iii. 5; Josh. v. 15; Judg. vi. 21-26).

impalpable! By our self-study we approach in some degree a knowledge of the nature of God. God is a Spirit. God is invisible. We are to know God meanwhile as we know one another, namely, through embodiment, incarnation, phenomena; we are to know him by the very nature that is round about us—the shining heavens, the flowering earth, the living air: all these things, rightly understood, interpret God as we are able to bear him. There is indeed another interpretation always to be desired and always to be earnestly sought for, and that is the indwelling Holy Ghost, taking of the things of Christ and showing them unto us, leading us into all truth, comforting us with appropriate solaces, and giving us confidence that the future shall be larger and brighter than the past, and that all our sorrows shall be but as dark roots out of which the flower of joy will spring. Solemn indeed ought every religious exercise to be: it should heighten the whole level of the mind, and bring to a finer pitch of harmony the action of all the powers of the soul. If we have left the altar in any other frame of mind than this, then our service there has been a vain oblation. When men go down from the house of God, their whole spirit should be marked by reverence, tenderness, submission, and a complete desire to obey and fulfil every tittle of the word of God. By this sign shall men know that they have offered acceptable worship.

## PRAYER.

**ALMIGHTY God, make us as little children.** We want to be taken up into thine arms and have thine hands put upon us, and to be blessed of God. Without this we cannot live. We have tried to keep all the commandments, and the stones fall down from the top of one another, because we are on the wrong foundation and there is no binding quality in the cement we use. We cannot build these stones at all. When we try to rise upon them they and we all fall down together. Who can build himself up into heaven? Not one. So we cease to do all this, and come to Jesus Christ our Saviour, and knowing nothing, arguing nothing, questioning nothing, we want simply to be taken up by him into his arms, and to feel his warm hands upon us, and to know that his blessing is stealing into our hearts with most tender persuasiveness. This is true godliness—to know no will but thine; to know nothing of argument and controversy and fierce quarrelling of words, but to know that thou art in us and we in thee; hardly to know ourselves from thee; to be absorbed in God, to be lost in love. Then shall we prove all this by many a generous deed. We shall be out before Pharaoh in the morning, and accost him ere he bathes in the water. We shall go to Pharaoh by night when he sends for us, as all cowards do, and shall there in the darkness be as free and safe as if in heaven. We shall serve the Lord; we shall rejoice in the Lord and greatly magnify his Name; and our life shall be no scented perfume but a daily service and sacrifice, and thus an acceptable oblation. But this is a great mystery, and it concerns Christ and his Church. It is not in man to work this miracle. Man argues, and builds stones that will not hold together, and invents long and foolish words. Lord, displace this first man and set up within us the Second Man, which is the Lord from heaven. Then our life shall upward go, our soul shall struggle to the skies, our whole estate shall have resting upon it the oath of consecration, and thy wing shall cover us all the day. Thou knowest who we are and what we want—the man with the burdened back, the sore heart, the scorched estate; thou knowest the broken in spirit, the weary and sad: they who laugh, when internally they are full of tears and crying bitterly: they who sit down to the feast and make believe they are eating when all the while they die of sad satiety; thou knowest the strong and the weak. Let a blessing come to every one of us—some word our own, some message all for us, some tone picked out of the general speech and meant for our attention. If thou wilt hear us in this, we shall know at the end that our prayers have been turned at the Cross into a great Amen, because of the love that shall glow in our thankful hearts. Amen.

**1 Chronicles xxiii.**

**"So when David was old and full of days" (v. 1).**

**HOW TO EMPLOY OLD AGE.**

**A**LTHOUGH the king was so old, he lost none of his interest in the highest department of his work. It is pitiful to see how soon some people sink into old age; on the other hand, it is inspiring to observe how the noblest workers have disdained to become old and have coveted only the glory of dying in harness. The pathos of David's action will be more clearly recognised if we remember that the literal translation is, "Now David had become satisfied with days." Satisfied with days, but not satisfied with labour: David had seen all the contents of time, in poverty, persecution, honour, and majesty, and yet he was anxious for the consolidation of his empire and the construction of the temple. When the heathen poet described the death of a philosopher it was under the image of a guest who had to the full enjoyed the feast. David, as a guest of the Lord, had himself sat long enough at the table of time, and now he was desirous that his son should take up the service and enjoyment of the empire, whilst he himself went forth to the mysteries of another state. Old age can do for the future what mere youth is not permitted to attempt. Old men are entitled to advise and stimulate those who are likely to succeed them in the ministry of life. Wise old men never omit to infuse into their counsels something of the fire and ambition of youth. They never recommend a mere repetition of the past; they point rather to its enlargement and amendment, believing that all the higher wisdom or providence is always a future blessing. There is no finality in the plans of men. Wait upon God, expect clearer light, listen for fuller instructions and always be prepared to accept and obey heaven's revealed will.

**"He [David] made Solomon his son king over Israel" (v. 1).**

We are to remember that we are now in the hands of a mere chronicler who is entitled to be brief in his statements, but we have a full account of what is here indicated in the first chapter of the first Book of Kings. David might be technically entitled

to elect Solomon as his successor, but it would be unjust to his memory to suppose that he availed himself of a mere technicality. In the instruction and exhortation which he addressed to his son we find the larger reason of Solomon's elevation to the throne. David prepared for the temple as we have had ample opportunity of observing, but we are in danger of neglecting to note that he prepared his son Solomon with still more assiduous solicitude. Both the preparations should be taken as one. It would have been a poor preparation had it been merely a direction as to stone and gold and cedar; the true preparation was in the enlightenment and direction of Solomon's mind and heart. Parents cannot always "prepare" a fortune for their children, but it lies within the power of the poorest to enrich the opening mind with solid instruction, and to comfort the tender heart with exhortations and promises against the weakening influence of fear and disbelief.

"Now the Levites were numbered [The tribe of Levi had not been numbered at the general census of the people recently taken (ch. xxi. 6); but in preparation for the arrangements now contemplated, a special census was made of them] from the age of thirty [The pattern of the Mosaic census was followed, and those only were reckoned who had attained the age of thirty. We may assume that the other limit mentioned in the Pentateuch (Numb. iv. 3, 23) was also observed, and that none were counted who exceeded fifty] years and upward; and their number by their polls, man by man, was thirty and eight thousand" (v. 3).

In the realm of Israel there may be said to have been three estates, namely, the princes and the priests and the Levites. David, therefore, in consulting the council, showed himself to be what, in modern language, is called a constitutional monarch. The details given of numbers and of ages indicate the military discipline which great leaders of men have never failed to exercise: financiers count their gold and statesmen count the people; before a man goes to war he should realise the exact amount of his resources, lest he begin with a great flourish of boasting and end with the muttering of humiliation. There should be nothing haphazard in the arrangements of the Christian army; we should know how many we are when all told, and a distinct estimate should be formed of the faculty, the genius, the flexibility, and the endurance of every soldier. Classification is an element of strength. The prince could not change places

with the Levite, and the priest might make a poor figure if he claimed to be prince. Mark the individuality of David's enumeration—the Levites were numbered by their polls [literally, "as to their skulls"]. Every man should have a skull; every skull should represent a man, in knowledge, in faculty, in ambition, chastened by reverence. In modern days we count hands; in ancient days Abraham counted souls and David counted heads. Every hand should be a head, every head a soul, every soul a hand, and thus there should be an inter-working and harmonious co-operation of all the powers and uses of our lives.

"Of which twenty and four thousand were to set forward the work of the house of the Lord" (v. 4).

The word that is rendered "to set forward" means "to lead, or superintend." When prisoners were taken in war the Levites were entitled to claim their share of the number, and employ the captives in the menial work of the sanctuary.\*

The Levites were much more numerous than the priests, hence it was ordered in the division of the prey, in the instance given in the Book of Numbers, that they were to have two per cent. of the spoil, whereas the priests had only one-fifth per cent. of a like amount: the calculation being, according to the best authorities three hundred and twenty maidens, six thousand seven hundred sheep and goats, seven hundred and twenty oxen, and six hundred and ten asses for the Levites. We recall the fact that the Gibeonites were spared on condition of becoming Levitical bondsmen, or, in Biblical words, "hewers of wood and drawers of water."† We need superintendence, as well as every other kind of service. The danger is that we pick and choose work that is daintiest, instead of undertaking the work that most needs doing. If all were generals, where were the army? If all were leaders, where were the followers? The right spirit regards even doorkeeping in the sanctuary as an honour to be coveted.

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\* On this point read Numbers chap. xxxi.

† The work undertaken by these superintending Levites is given in vv. 28-32.



## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, do thou grant unto us light in which to read thy word. Thou didst write the book for us, now do thou tell us what it means, that the heart may be won, that our whole being may go out after thee as after a fountain of living waters. The book is a dead letter unto us until thou dost give it life by giving us life to receive it; then how the book throbs with thy presence, glows with thy love, and offers to us all we need for our hunger and thirst of soul! Open thou our understanding that we may understand the Scriptures! We need no other book; all wisdom is here, all justice, all love; for here is the law of God, and here is the cross of Christ, and here is the gate that opens upon heaven. We bless thee that thou hast also written a book in human life; the chapters are events, the sentences are occurrences marking every day; may we have eyes quick to read, minds eager in quest of knowledge, hearts obedient to all heavenly monition: thus shall we live amid the revelation of God, and thy book and thy history shall be one revelation, and they shall be wise who understand it. Keep us alive to the gracious fact of thy sovereignty; enable our heart to say, when the day is one of darkness and the harvest is a heap, The Lord reigneth: though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: he hath been with me in six troubles, and in seven he will not forsake me. Thus louder than the cold wind may we raise our song of hope and praise and trust in the living God. Thus do thou write another book, thine own living Church, a peculiar people separated and sanctified, crowned with an invisible judgment, yea, with the approval and benediction of God. Men should then wonder, and ask whence this purity and nobleness and self-sacrifice, whence this scorn of time and space and sense, and this yearning after that which cannot now be seized and enjoyed. To the questioning of the world may thy Church be able to return a complete, a tender, and a satisfactory reply. Look upon us as men who want to be better, who take a step forward, then fall back again; who rise up to praise God, and fall down in the act of doing so: thou knowest which is uppermost, the feeling that wants to be right, or the failing that tends towards evil. Thou art a kind and merciful judge; thou art righteous, and yet there are tears in thine eyes; thou dost pronounce woe after woe upon those who are scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, yet at the end thine heart breaks in ineffable pathos, for thou wouldst have gathered the city that slew the Son of God. Help us to believe in our better selves; may we never blow out the lamp of our hope; may we never despair of the fruition of our faith, saying, It cometh to nothing, and to-morrow shall be written all over with disappointment: rather may we speak otherwise to our poor selves, and cheer our hearts by promise and solace sent down from God to make us glad. We have spoiled

many a page, but we are going to write better to-day ; we are now going to dip the pen and begin to write, thou holding our hand ; we care not for the shaking of the letters, or for the grammar of the record, if so be we can but write out of our heart, and make our meaning clear, and feel that having written our record we are so much nearer God. If we do blot the page thou wilt not send us away in wrath without end ; thou knowest how infantile we are and weak, and how soon our attention is diverted to frivolity, and how soon our best emotion is disennobled : but thou didst make us, and not we ourselves ; thou knowest our frame, thou rememberest that we are dust : what are we in our fullest strength but a wind that cometh for a little time and then passeth away ? Lord, pity us ; expect not from the little what the great alone can do ; our days are but an handful, we know nothing of thine eternity ; we have only time to be presumptuous and insolent and foolish, we have no time to gather solid wisdom. Thou wilt make time for us when we have escaped the limitations of the body, and thou wilt give us time enough, light enough, work enough, and we shall praise thee for thy service, for in it there is no sting of reproach, and in it there is no token of weariness. Let our houses be precious to thee ; watch the roof that the storm break not through ; secure the foundation that it be not burned up ; send a plentiful light upon the windows, and keep the enemy far away from our door ; and let the interior of our house be full of heaven's own colour and home's sweetest music. Make the bed when no other hands can make it, because of our affliction and soreness and infirmity ; speak to us when no other voice can reach us, and let thy whispered love strengthen us with conscious immortality, be with the old, the weary, and the sad ; the young, the energetic, and the buoyant ; and find for us, by way of the cross, by way of Calvary, a common home, a meeting place in heaven, where we shall forget all darkness, all sin, all pain, all death, for the former things have passed away. Amen.

### 1 Chronicles xxiv.-xxvi.

#### GLEANINGS.

FROM the twenty-fourth chapter to the end of the book we find much that cannot be turned to spiritual profit, yet here and there we come upon single expressions which are very significant and beautiful. What we lose in continuity, therefore, we may gain in single values. Continuity is not the only excellence to be studied. The string is continuous, but the pearls which are hung upon it are single. Do not despise a single stone, a single flower, a single ear of wheat. Men do not despise pounds sterling on the ground that each sovereign is a separate coin : why then pass over single expressions that are rare or quaint or beautiful or tender ? Let us go gleaning and see what we can bring home.

“Thus they were divided by lot [literally, “And they divided them by lot, these with those”], one sort with another” (xxiv. 5).

We have got no further on in distribution and qualification than did the ancients. Then are not men and officers all of one sort? It would appear not, for the expression now before us is, “one sort with another.” Even a monotony of excellence would become wearisome. If all the globe were Alpine heights, there would be no Alpine heights anywhere on the globe; the *all* would destroy the *some*, and the *some* constitutes the beauty of the whole. We must take men “one sort with another.” We should be glad to get rid of one of them, but we cannot. There is an art in mixing food for animals. We may give a horse too much wheat or too much hay. You, yourselves, if you study your own physiology must have in the very maintenance of your physical structure one sort of food with another. How do you estimate your business? You say, “taking all things together, taking one day with another, taking the year all round”: what is that but an indication of sorrow and gladness, loss and gain, valley and mountain, winter snow and snow of April blossom? So life must be taken; it is not one day, one event, one set of experiences. Do not judge the Lord as revealed in Providence by any one series of occurrences. Take a breadth of ten years, and call it nothing; in the judgment of God we must take in æons, millenniums, immeasurable periods gone and immeasurable periods to come, and therefore we shall not be qualified for a long time to make any judgment upon the administration of the affairs of the universe. We might profitably limit ourselves within the four corners of our own life, and, taking one sort with another, what a life it has been!—taking the bright days as well as the dark days, and taking all the joy as well as all the sadness, what a life has yours been! From the time when you had nothing, when you had no friend but your mother, and she could do nothing for you but love you, up to this day, what a series of visions, flashes of heavenly light, voices of tender whispering—what healing after the physician had retired, what comfort after science had uttered its little tale of nothings, and had concluded in a mood more disappointing than your own! That is the right way to look at life. Men are tempted, according to their constitutions, to depart from this rule. Give a sunny-natured man one good meal, and the idea will no longer trouble him that he

may one day be hungry again : give a man of bilious dejected nature all the corn that ever was stored in Egypt, and he will grunt out some hint of his fear that by-and-by it may all be gone. What a world it would be if we had only one of these classes to deal with ; but we have all classes, a diversified social existence ; we give and take, and by a ministry of contagion we help one another wondrously,—not always within the limits of positive and utterable knowledge, so that we can say we have received so much help : we cannot tell where all the help comes from ; the song of a little bird helped us over quite a mile of dreary sand ; the touch of an appealing hand elicited a nature which we thought was dead. Count the night as well as the day. In making out your bill of life never forget that there are four seasons in the year : it is not all winter ; some need to be reminded that it is not all summer.

“ The principal fathers over against their younger brethren ” [literally, “ The elder house equally with his younger brother.” That is, “ All the Levitical houses enumerated drew lots in their courses on equal terms, the elder families having no advantage over the younger ones ”] (xxiv. 31).

This is but an illustration of the previous expression, “ One sort with another.” Here is a marvellous idea of democracy, “ the principal fathers over against their younger brethren.” Then men are not all of one age ; that ought to be a blessing : then all men are not old ; that should be a comfort : then all men are not principal fathers ; what a delightful reflection ! There may be a vital mutually-helpful relation between the two. The senior ought to be the superior. Let us see how that stands to fact and reason. The proposition is not, A senior is a superior ; for then a thousand facts would pour down upon our poor argument like a torrent, and wash it away ; the proposition is, The senior ought to be the superior, for he has had more time, more experience, more opportunity ; he has seen how things combine, disintegrate, and recombine, and shape themselves into new forms, and betake themselves to uncalculated issues. Yet his own son rebukes him over the table, and gives him to know by the most circumlocutory methods that he is not as wise as he is old ; there is no bluntness in the speech, there is a filial euphemism which entirely denudes the senior speaker of his natural crown. A man is not necessarily wise because he is old. People have

gone through the world, and have never seen it. Many people are tourists who are not poets; many have looked upon the mountains, and have not seen one of them. Many men have allowed fifty summers to pass, in all their daintiness and loveliness and radiance and music, and have not made a single acquaintance among the fifty. Yet there is a democratic principle even in this text which seems to classify men so sharply; for it might be read literally thus, "the chief just like his younger brother." Office did not make men vain; seniority did not inspire contempt towards junior life. Some men have been kings, and yet have been the simplest children in the world; they were above their thrones, verily they sat on their thrones, they were not crushed by them as by a splendid incubus. It is possible for an old man to be quite young in feeling, disposition, aspiration, sentiment, and to be the very centre of the gracious storm of child-laughter.

Still the distribution proceeds, and, taking one sort with another, we have this classification—

"Moreover David and the captains of the host [rather, "the princes" the same persons who are mentioned in xxxiii. 2, and xxiv. 6] separated to the service of the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy [rather, "divided for the service the sons of Asaph, etc., who prophesied." By prophesying is probably meant public recitation of the sacred services (see v. 3)] with harps, with psalteries, and with cymbals" (xxv. 1).

Let us analyse these indications. We want warriors; there is not one in this list: we need builders; there is not a man in the catalogue that ever built anything that could be seen or valued arithmetically: we want legislators, men who can make duty mysterious, and dissolve responsibility in polysyllables; there is no such erratic genius in this guild. Whom have we? Prophets; for the word is "prophesy," and to prophesy means in this connection to teach, to reveal doctrines, to indicate duty, to exhort to service, to reveal the will and purpose of heaven. With what apparatus are these men furnished? Harps, psalteries, cymbals. They were known amongst their fellows as a guild of sacred minstrels. When a man prophesies he utters under a spiritual influence. We do not know how much we are indebted to music. He would be the most combative man that ever lived

who would fight with a tune ; the tune will not fight. There are atheists who have shed tears under the influence of what is known as sacred music. Then they were not far from the kingdom of God : they were only atheists argumentatively. How many men have committed suicide by the razor of logic ! They were never meant to be logicians. When you see a man take hold of a razor you do not exhort him to be careful, because you know that he can handle it wisely ; but if you saw a little child open a case and take out a razor, how you would exclaim, how you would rush to the rescue ; how you would deprecate the audacity of the thoughtless little creature ! It is even so with the Church. There are some infants we cannot keep away from the razor-case : if they would only take their seat within one inch of the organ they might be saved. How are these musicians described in the verse ? They are described by a word which some men would begrudge ; they are described as "the workmen." It should be put more vividly than this, namely, "the men working." But is music work ? Certainly. Is a song a sacrifice ? Yes, if sung with the whole heart. He labours who toils with his hands. Probably, but not he only. He labours who gives his brain away, who imparts to others the fragrance of his love, who makes the world welcome to all the hospitality of his prayers. He is a labourer who puts things into sweet musical rhyme for us. Sometimes we get our children to persuade themselves that they are enjoying an amusement when they are learning, in fact, the multiplication table, through the medium of rhyme. Children who would abhor the multiplication table if it were set before them nakedly would come up to it quite loving and sympathetically if they might sing it all through. So there are men who help to sing us into our duties, and who help us to sing in the discharge of those duties, and who show us, by a mysterious power given to them of God, that all work should blossom into play, all service should find its fruition in song. There are those who have distinguished between sacred music and secular music. What a marvellous faculty of analysis such men must have ! There are those who talk about sacred and profane history. By what right do they so talk ? What history is profane ? Is there anything profane that belongs to the development of humanity, the cultivation of the total nature of man ?

Are we to attach a stigma to the study of history, to the perusal of those documents and records which testify to the progress of all manner of human thought? There are persons who can sing bad common metre in the church, and think it pious; whereas they could not listen to a sweet domestically beautiful song in church without a shudder. The only thing to be done with such is to let them shudder. We must see to it that the religious spirit is maintained, and nothing can maintain it so healthily as music. To think that the enemy has all the brass bands but about a dozen! whereas the church ought to have every one, and he ought to be considered a thief who plays anything on an instrument that could not be played in the church. There was music in the Old Testament sanctuary; men praised the Lord loudly and sweetly in the ancient time.

"Of Jeduthun: the sons of Jeduthun; Gedaliah, and Zeri, and Jeshaiiah, Hashabiah, and Mattithiah, six" (xxv. 3).

There are not six, there are only five: where is the sixth? When an arithmetical number is put before us we are entitled to begin counting. "Of Jeduthun: the sons of Jeduthun; Gedaliah, and Zeri, and Jeshaiiah, Hashabiah, and Mattithiah,"—five. But the Chronicler says there were six. Then why did he not write six names down? We are entitled to inquire always for the missing man. Woe unto that shepherd who allows one little lamb to go, and not trouble about him: woe to that friend who can allow one of his comrades to fall out of the ranks, and never ask a question about his doom. How was the sixth name omitted? By a clerical error? Then we should find it again. It is of small consequence to be omitted by the clerk; the clerk is not almighty. It is of small account that our name be not found on the record of the visible church because some careless writer has omitted to inscribe it there. Has he gone out of the list by proved incapacity? Could he not play the harp? Did he make a false noise with the cymbals? Let us ask the question. Has he gone out by moral lapse? Was the fool caught in some snare, the existence of which he did not suspect? Was he treading in dangerous paths, and seized by a ruffian hand, when he ought to have kept near the altar and found his security at home? We cannot tell. In this instance, the sixth man was

found again. He is omitted from verse number three, but he is found in verse number seventeen. Do lists dwindle? Do friends grow fewer? They may grow fewer in one sense, and yet may be stronger in another, they may be but transplanted. The dead are not lost; they love the twilight, they can unfold themselves in shadows, they can speak through dreams; call not those dead who have gone up to be ennobled and crowned.

Regarding these six men we read of them still in verse three, as "under the hands of their father." The picture is a lovely one. It is that of six sons being conducted in musical exercise by their father. Let the picture shape itself vividly to the mental eye: six sons, with harps, psalteries, and cymbals, and the father conducting, educating, keeping them together, making all the sounds one, reconciling all the exercise into one blessed harmony. What is a father for if he is not to be a conductor? Some fathers are too separate from their families. What is a pastor to be if not a conductor? and what are children for if they set up for themselves on a basis of absolutely foolish independence? The inquiry is a two-edged sword: take care how you lift it up, for it is a dangerous weapon.

"The sons of Asaph."

That name we know. We find it in chapter xxvi. verse 1. Asaph was a sweet singer, Asaph was a psalmist, Asaph occurs again and again in the Psalms; so that when we come upon his name in the Book of Chronicles we feel that we had anticipated the coming in of a friend. Is that not a pleasing reflection? But unfortunately this is not the same Asaph. Do not be led away by letters and syllables, for this man is quite another Asaph; not the chief musician Asaph who has done so much for the church. In this instance we had an abbreviation of the man's real name, which was Ebiasaph.\* We ourselves sometimes cut names in two. We describe a man by a variation of the

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\* Not the "Asaph" of the preceding chapter, who was a Gershonite (chap. vi. 39-43), whereas the Korhites were Kohathites, but probably the same person as the "Abiasaph" of Exod. vi. 24, and the "Ebiasaph" of I Chron. vi. 37, and ix. 19, who was an actual son of Korah.—*The Speaker's Commentary*



name his parents gave him. How we leaped when we saw "Asaph," as if we had known him, whereas it was not the man at all. Some very curious instances of this kind occur in Scripture. The most noticeable probably is this, "Judas, not Iscariot." Why that guarding word? We know why. Shall we take up some sweet human name and so use it that men who bear the same name will have to guard themselves against a ruinous identification with us? Have we spoiled a name? When our mother gave it to us it was pure as morning dew; now it is like a drop of black poison: men who carry that name say in the public journals, "We are not to be mistaken for the other man." "Judas, not Iscariot," not the bag-bearer, not the thief, not the traitor; "Judas," but not the bad Judas. There is also another use for the term. Sometimes we have to say, "Asaph, not the chief musician." The deprecation, then, is on the other side. Men have names that have been rendered illustrious, and because they have been burdened with them they have to apologise for their own littleness. This is cruel to children. A parent ought to think much before he calls his child "John Milton," or "Martin Luther," or "Oliver Cromwell," or "John Wesley," or "George Whitefield." Another instance we have in the expression, "James the Less." That would seem to be really an undeserved stigma upon an obscure person; he might have been let alone. But we must have such criticism if we are to be exact in our identifications. Then we read, "the other Mary." There were many Marys, and there was "the other Mary"; each had her distinctions, peculiarities, or excellences. Let us see to it that our name has attached to it some token of which men are not ashamed. We may be spoken of as the suppliant mighty in prayer, the philanthropist generous with both hands, the father that can always find another seat at the table, the mother that will not put an Amen to her prayer until the prodigal is quite home.

"Zechariah . . . a wise counsellor" (xxvi. 14).

Not a musician, but a wise counsellor; no use with firearms, if we must modernise the expression, but great in sagacity; nothing with his hands, but an army with his head. "Zechariah" is in the singular number, and also in the plural number. Let

us take heed of our parsing. There are terms even in English which are both singular and plural, and there is no atom of distinction between the one number and the other, so far as the shape of the name in type is concerned. "Zechariah" was a man, and "Zechariah" was a tribe, a clan, or a guild. We think the word "Guild" a modern invention. Practically, it is in the Bible as everything else is in the Bible; seek, and ye shall find. Zechariah the man could give counsel; he knew what Israel ought to do, for he had understanding of the times; there was no problem too entangled for him to simplify, there was no case that he could not throw light upon; he had that peculiar insight which amounts to inspiration; he was never consulted in vain; when men thought they had a very great question, Zechariah, by one sentence, showed that after all it was a very small problem; and when men supposed themselves equal to the discussion of the problem, by one inquiry Zechariah widened the horizon, and showed them how gifted they were with simple incapability.

Thus in this field of names we have gleaned somewhat. The gleaner must not be mistaken for the reaper; but he would be a careless husbandman who did not glean his fields as well as reap them. So now and again in these biblical studies it is well to go back to do a day's gleaning, and come home in evening twilight to thank God for handfuls that might have been lost. These chapters bristle with names; there are names we can hardly pronounce: the great lesson is that we may be somewhere in God's list. Let each say, Oh, thou who keepest life's book, let me have a place on some page! If I cannot be with the warriors, may I not be with the musicians? If I cannot be with the musicians, may I not be with the porters, the door-openers, the lamp-lighters, of the sanctuary? If I may not be near the king, may I not be near the door? Of what avail is it to be on any list of man's invention and creation if we are omitted from the record on high? There is a book in heaven—a book called the Book of Life; if a man's name be written there, fire cannot burn it. How are names to be written there? Through him who is the life, the blessed eternal Son of God. What are we doing? Great wonders, famous miracles? Rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you, but rather rejoice that your names are written

in heaven. Crush the demon Envy that says, Try to rise from one list into another; do not be content with being a porter, a doorkeeper, when you might be a wise counsellor or a skilled musician. Rather say, The Lord gave me what I have in the way of faculty and talent; I see the number is only one, but a great deal can be done with one talent; as I have only one I cannot spend time in talking to you; I must leave you and get to work, so as to make as much as possible of the one talent. Or, I see the number is only two, but two is plural, and, once in the plural, who can tell where one may end? I will hasten, and double the dowry. In this spirit let us live, crushing envy, dismissing jealousy, contenting ourselves with God's method of election and endowment, because it is to him, and not to man, we must render the last account.

## “HANDFULS OF PURPOSE,”

FOR ALL GLEANERS.

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“... *reigned in his stead.*”—I CHRON.  
i. 44.

This expression occurs again and again in this chapter, and is full of spiritual instruction.—The picture is both gratifying and depressing : so long as the man reigns, we have light, and joy, and music ; as soon as he dies, we have darkness, and sorrow, and silence. Yet when the man dies there comes in the announcement almost at once that some one “reigned in his stead.”—We say the king never dies. What is said of the king may be said of all true institutions and policies : they change their forms, but the essence remains the same, and is always open to re-adaptation according to circumstances.—Never let it be supposed that Providence is limited to any one man in the matter of kingship and dominion. The kings are all living at once, though only one can enjoy the nominal dignity.—We often wonder where the next man is to come from, forgetting that he is standing in our very midst at the time when we are asking the ignorant question.—Men who are reigning should lay to heart the reflection that their reign is to come to an end.—Every man is bound to consider his successor ; it is not enough to vacate an office ; every man should leave behind him a character worthy of imitation, an ex-

ample that will stimulate in all highest directions, and traditions which will almost compel themselves to be respected, being so noble in chivalry, so generous in spirit, and so beneficent in action.—Let the king who reigns take heed, knowing that he will surely die.—Let every man prepare himself to succeed the king—in the family, in the state, in the social circle : we should always be preparing ourselves for some higher office, and the best way of so preparing is to fill with faithfulness the office which we have at present assigned to us.—There is only one king who shall have no successor, and that king’s name is Jesus Christ.—Throughout this book what a multitude of kings have we seen coming and going ; no one man could fill the whole occasion and rule all time, every one drooped and died by reason of human frailty ; but all these transient kings were so many indications of a King who would abide for ever, the King for whom the ages had been waiting, sometimes in meek, and sometimes in almost turbulent expectation ; he shall reign from the river unto the ends of the earth ; of his dominion there shall be no end.—No partial king can be eternal.—The very fact that his kingdom, however large, is limited, is as a sentence of death in the man himself. When he comes who can reign over all, comprehend

all, and hold all in his right hand with the ease of almightiness, he will, by the very fact of his universality of dominion, abide evermore.

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 “*These are the dukes of Edom.*”—I  
 CHRON. i. 54.

Of how small consequence is this announcement to the men of to-day!—Importance, however, is not to be denied simply because it is limited.—Every man must look upon his importance from his own point of view,—a father may be important in a family, and yet may be nobody in the state; a man may be of some importance in one state, and hardly known in the next province.—Then there is an importance which is limited by time.—Men walked according to the light they had.—We are not to blame the dukes of Edom because they were not as intelligent as the children of this day.—If they walked according to the degree of light which was given to them, they faithfully fulfilled their responsibilities.—The great lesson teaches the transitoriness of all human dignity and glory. Where are the dukes of Edom now? Who knows the names of Timnah, Aliah, Jetheth?—Yet we must not mock these names because we do not know them.—How far are our own names known? What will be thought of them in the next century?—Men are not to be estimated by their renown, but by their personal goodness and their local usefulness.—Not every man can handle a state, yet the man who can help us to carry our daily burden may be quite as useful to us as if he had been entrusted with genius of the highest order.—All our words should tend to the encouragement of simplicity, modesty, local utility, and should show the hollowness of mere fame, or splendour, or titular elevation.—In the Christian Church we have come to a

higher order of names than was ever known in secular history.—Men may now be called the sons of God, saints, slaves of Jesus Christ, inheritors of the world of light: let us aspire after these higher titles, for they never perish; we are not born to their enjoyment; verily these are not hereditary dignities, but we are introduced to them by the right of the new birth, by the creation of a spiritual aristocracy.—The titles which men give soon expire: the titles which God confers are vital with his own eternity.—It would be a poor thing to have been a duke of Edom as compared with being a child of pious parentage. if in the one case the dignity has been but a name, and in the other has been a discipline and a stimulus.—Aim after the highest designation.

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 “*Now Sheshan had no sons, but daughters.*”—I CHRON. ii. 34.

Everything therefore would depend upon Sheshan's point of view as to the estimate he placed upon his social position.—If he fixed his attention upon the fact that he had no sons, he might be depressed, he might wonder as to the future, he might be perplexed as to the continuance of his memorial and his name in the tribe to which he belonged.—On the other hand, if he were a man of more cheerful and grateful disposition, he would proceed not to the lamentation of his deficiencies, but to the recognition of his blessings: he would magnify the excellence of his daughters, he would dwell with thankful delight upon their meekness, modesty, gentleness, helpfulness, domesticity.—The principle is larger than the local instance.—Men should always put down after a statement of their deficiencies a statement of their possessions; thus: had no money, but had mental power;—had no external fame, but had great home repute;—

had no genius, but had great common-sense;—had no high connections of a social kind, but enjoyed easy access to heaven in prayer;—had no earthly property, but was rich in ideas and impulses:—was not at the head of a great circle of admirers, but was truly respected and trusted wherever known;—had no health, but had great cheerfulness;—thus we must keep the two sides, so to say, parallel; if we have not one thing, we have another; if we have not feet, we have wings; if we have not wings, we have feet; if we cannot run quickly, we can think rapidly; in a moment our thoughts can be at the ends of the earth, the eagle can outfly us in space, or the lion outrun us, but in mind we are round the earth before they have begun their motion.—Men will act constitutionally in this whole matter. Some men have a great gift for seeing shadows and outlines of foes and beginnings of oppositions; some men bankrupt themselves every month in the year, and live a life of inward toil and anxiety: others are perhaps too hopeful, allowing their imagination and their ambition to make fools of them under some circumstances.—On all these matters we must think seriously, and pray humbly for divine direction.

"*And these are ancient things.*"—I  
CHRON. iv. 22.

A thing is not valuable simply because it is ancient; nor is antiquity any reason why a thing should be undervalued or destroyed.—All the greatest things are in reality ancient. They are not ancient in form, they are ancient in spirit.—Jesus Christ was slain from before the foundation of the world: the Spirit of God is from the beginning; God himself is from everlasting to everlasting.—Whatever had a beginning will have an end, but for the

intervening and all-determining will of God.—Only the eternal past can be the eternal future.—Men should think much before destroying that which is ancient, if the antiquity has been associated with any measure of usefulness. On the other hand, men should be careful not to allow love of antiquity to degenerate into superstition.—True conservatism is the preservation of that which ought not to be destroyed.—False conservatism concerns itself about the preservation of frameworks; true conservatism is anxious only for the perpetuation of spirit and meaning and purpose known to be really good.—All Christians are conservatives in the highest sense.—A man must not be allowed to appropriate the name conservative simply because he would keep a wall standing that is already tottering; he is the real conservative who rectifies the perpendicular, and who rests the wall upon solid foundations; and he is a still larger and deeper conservative who removes the wall altogether if it stand in the way of natural development and healthy progress.—Think of all our things that are ancient, and esteem them with highest regard; as, for example, the Bible, as an ancient book; liberty, as an ancient right; love of knowledge, as a divinely given charter; love of freedom, as a birth-right: there are responsibilities and honours, dignities and functions, that we ought not to change; they were in the world before us, and they will be in the world after us; we should simply magnify them, and fill them with the highest meaning; and so allow them to pass on with added virtue and attractiveness to the generations that are to come. Old age cannot be bought. Men can soon make a ladder but no man can make a tree.—We cannot hasten very perceptibly the growth of a forest; we can build a wall quickly, but time is required to

jewel it with green moss.—In character the element of time must enter largely, or the character will seldom pass the point of mere notoriety and corresponding admiration.—When the character has stood twenty years, thirty, forty, and fifty years men begin to believe in it, and to accord it a well-merited honour.—In malice let us be children; in understanding let us be men.

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*“For there fell down many slain, because the war was of God.”—I CHRON.  
v. 22.*

We should trace the explanation of victories.—There are victories which are but glittering defeats.—No victory is worth having that is not won by moral means, or that does not express a moral right.—Here we have the explanation in the words “the war was of God”; that is to say, it was a good war, or a war on behalf of right principles and right claims; a war which God approved, if not as to its method yet as to its end.—In the Old Testament the Lord is “a man of war.”—Sometimes the people went to battle without him, and then they returned without spoil or song of joy; on other occasions they went with him and at his bidding, and they brought back with them banners unstained and spoil to which they were entitled.—All this is happily changed; war is becoming increasingly hated and dreaded. But there is another war which may be described as a war of God.—We wrestle against spiritual enemies; we are set in battle array against the highest forces of darkness.—If we have invented our own armour, or have manufactured our own piety, or have ordered the battle according to our own supposed genius in war, the eventide will find us overthrown, humiliated, and hopeless.—Are we going a-warfare

at our own charges? Then verily we shall play the fool and bring home with us a fool's reward.—When a man fights against himself, in his lusts, passions, and unauthorised aspirations, he fights a war approved of God, and if he fight that war in the name of God he shall be none other than a victor at the close. When a man fights for the poor, the oppressed, the helpless, he is engaged in a battle over which God holds the banner, and the holding of that banner is the guarantee of triumph, and in that triumph there shall be no stain of malice or selfishness or earthly-mindedness.—We must not limit our wars to ourselves.—There are wars in which we can render valuable assistance in which other men are engaged.—Let the rich man go to the side of the poor man in fighting a battle with poverty, and help him to win in the strife.—We can easily find out wars in which we can render assistance if we look for them, and give ourselves zealously to the cause of human service.—They that be with us when we are good are more than all that can be against us.—If we fight in our own strength our endeavours will be wasted, but if we deliver every blow in the name and strength of God many will be slain.—Slay your sins, your passions, your animosities, your under-selves, and rise to the dignity to which God has called you as his soldiers.—Endure hardness as a good soldier: fight the good fight of faith: be not afraid of the enemy.—O thou poor struggler, God will bring thee to victory, to honour, and to rest, if thou wilt put thy cause into his hands.

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*“... fit to go out for war and battle.”—I Chron. vii. 11.*

This was the estimate of usefulness in the olden time.—Are we entitled to change that estimate even now, living

as we do in the Christian dispensation?—We are only entitled to give new definitions to the words “war” and “battle”; we are not entitled to lower the standard of qualification or fitness for the discharge of life’s duties.—“Fit to go” is an expression which points to the matter of qualification.—Mere age does not make a man fit to sit in the council, or to go forth to the battle, or to assume the position of dignity.—We must undergo discipline, instruction, mortification; we must be humbled and chastened; then we shall know how to rule with well-controlled energy and well-directed capacity.—How many are called to go out who have not undergone preparation!—Sometimes a man’s qualification is merely a paper one; something has been handed to him by his dead ancestors, and he is bound to go out according to the terms of certain written covenants, to which he never consented, and which he can hardly fully understand.—If we are to be fit for our work we must submit to the process needful for our education.—At first that process is hard, but by repetition it becomes easier, and at last it becomes playful.—Strive to enter in at the strait gate.—We do it to obtain an incorruptible crown: how much higher therefore should be our discipline and completer our training than the process which is undergone by the athlete who runs that he may be crowned with ivy or with bay?—Do not go out until you are qualified.—When you are truly qualified you will know the fact by the rising of holy impulses, by the pressure as of an invisible hand urging you on in the right way, the way of divine decree and destiny.—There is a zeal that is not according to knowledge, there is a ruthlessness which cannot win a battle.—We must be so strong as to be quiet; the moment we become the victims of tumult we lose presence of mind, self-control; we strike

without aiming, and we spend our strength for nought.—To-day should always be a preparation for to-morrow; everything we learn should have in it something more than itself.—When the gymnast undergoes his discipline it is that he may use his acquired strength in other and better directions than mere amusement.—Let all eating and drinking, all reading and study, all companionship and travel, have before it a high purpose, a purpose of preparation for battle and race, for conflict and suffering.

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“... very able men for the work of the service of the house of God.”—  
1 Chron. ix. 13.

Religious ability is marked by its own peculiarity.—Men are able in various directions and in various senses.—A man may be a brilliant musician, but a useless ploughman; or he may be great as a ploughman, and utterly useless in the matter of exposition and eloquence.—There is a religious genius, a faculty which knows what Israel ought to do, which notes all circumstances and combinations of circumstances, and knows exactly when the blow should be delivered; there is a genius which knows when to halt, when to move, when to lift the voice into a commanding tone, and when to whisper as if afraid to add pain to the soreness of the heart.—We are not called to ecclesiastical statesmanship in this verse; we are called to the kind of work which we can do best.—There are very able doorkeepers, as well as very able preachers; there are very able administrators, as well as very able expositors: the one cannot do without the other, they are members one of another, and together they constitute the complete body of Christ.—What a gift some men have for the fascination and instruction



of young minds!—Children know them, and hail them, and love them, giving their little hearts to them with all confidence and thankfulness.—Other men cannot teach the children, but they can address men and women in terms that stir the heart and rouse the energy to its highest endeavours.—What we do want in the house of God is ability, that is to say, faculty that can utilise all other men, penetrate into the meaning of all passing events, and tell exactly when work is to be done, and when it is not to be attempted.—Many are willing who are not able; many are able in nine particulars, but fail in the tenth.—Sometimes a whole number of talents is thrust away because of one talent, the talent of using the others is wanting.—We have heard of some men who had not the talent to know how to use their talents.—So there is continually going on great waste in society, and great waste in the Church.—We should call attention to the waste, because in so doing we may be beginning a process remedial.—Probably every man is more or less open to this charge of impairing his own ability.—His vanity defeats his power; his love of praise throws a doubt upon the genuineness of his prayers; his infirmity is magnified above his ability.—Here is another ground on which may be conducted with highest use the process of self-examination.—Men should not be discouraged because of their one point of weakness, but being warned of it they should address themselves to its fortification.

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*“Then David said, This is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of the burnt offering for Israel.”—I CHRON. xxii. 1.*

And yet not a stone of the building was laid!—The reference is to the site

whereon the temple is to be built.—We read, “Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem in Mount Moriah, where the Lord appeared unto David his father” (2 Chron. iii. 1): the literal rendering would be, “which was shewn to David his father,” the place being pointed out by the appearance of angels as the spot on which the temple was to stand.—This is the very spirit of prophecy.—We find all prophets impatient of time and space, and taking the future into their own hands, and dealing with it as if it were the immediate present.—Say they: This is the place, this is the time, this is the means,—a handling of time and space only to be understood by those in whom the spirit of prophecy resides.—There are prophets, and there are those who understand prophets, and both the classes may be said to live upon the same intellectual plane.—Some men are poets, others are only readers and lovers of poetry; yet those who love poetry are in a sense themselves poets, having the poetic instinct but not poetic expression.—We are more than we show ourselves to be in words.—The vividness of David’s representation is singularly instructive, for David already seemed to see the temple and to be in the temple, and to know all the appointments of that sacred pile.—It was the privilege of David to live in the future as if it were present. Is there not a sense in which we can all do this?—May we not even now be in heaven as to all our highest desires and truest sympathies?—Why speak of heaven as in the future, or in the distance?—The apostle did not scruple to say, “Our citizenship is in heaven.”—Jesus Christ did not hesitate to declare that whilst he was upon the earth he was in heaven. And the glorious company of the apostles constantly declared that like Moses they endured as seeing the

invisible, and their thoughts were intent upon a house not made with hands.

*"And David commanded to gather together the strangers that were in the land of Israel; and he set masons to hew wrought stones to build the house of God."*—1 CHRON. xxii. 2.

The "strangers" are the aliens.—We read of them in 1 Kings ix. 20, 21, "And all the people that were left of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, which were not of the children of Israel, their children that were left after them in the land, whom the children of Israel also were not able utterly to destroy, upon those did Solomon levy a tribute of bond-service unto this day."—There is a very pathetic expression in this account of the strangers,—“whom the children of Israel also were not able utterly to destroy.”—Was not the destruction only partial in order to realise a divine providence? Would not such strangers or aliens be useful in the building of the temple?—Whom we are not able to destroy we may be able to employ in holy service, is a doctrine which is not applicable to persons only, but has a distinct reference to emotions, passions, impulses, and sympathies.—We are to hold ourselves in bondage, and often we are to drive ourselves to forced labour, and to become hewers of wood and stone, bearers of burdens, and indeed slaves to our higher manhood.—David did not hesitate to reckon the Canaanite serfs in the census which he took of the people.—In taking the census of a nation we do not only count the king, the statesmen, the military officers, and men of similar rank and position; we count down, even to young children; yea, we do not exclude the cradle itself when we number the people.—There is a higher

as well as a lower census.—For civil and military purposes the infant is of no account, but the statesman looks not at the infant as he is to-day, but at the man as he will be in due process of time.—The magistrate counts life, not years only.—He says the nation is strong to such and such an extent, because he counts the little as well as the great.—A man should take a census of himself in the same way; he is not all genius, intellect, might, faculty; he has his peculiarities, infirmities, his germs of power, his beginnings and possibilities of strength; all this he should reckon when he takes a census of himself, and in reckoning even the least of his elements and faculties he should regard them not as they immediately are, but as what they are in possibility under rightly-accepted divine training.

*"And David prepared iron in abundance for the nails for the doors of the gates, and for the joinings; and brass in abundance without weight."*

—1 CHRON. xxii. 3.

David could hardly keep his hands off the actual building of the temple itself.—We have seen again and again that he went as near to it as he could possibly approach.—It sometimes becomes difficult to say who really did build the temple, so little was left for Solomon to do.—Is it not so with all the temples of civilisation?—Who built the temple of Literature?—Who erected the temple of Science?—Who is the architect and who the builder of the temple of Discovery,—the discovery of arts, sciences, provinces, continents, lakes, and rivers?—The last man is so immediately behind us that we dare not take credit to ourselves for aught we do; so much has been done in preparation that when we speak of the temple we say it was built by the age

or the generation or the spirit of the times.—There is, of course, always one man whose name takes the lead in the higher architecture and erection of temples, but the name of the leader is only symbolical of the multitude of his followers and supporters.—David was content to prepare the way of the Lord ; John was content to be a voice crying in the wilderness ; other men have laboured, and we have entered into their labours.—We say David prepared, and Solomon built, but how could Solomon have built if David had not prepared ?—We do not make our own roads, our own libraries, our own code of laws ; we take the roads that are made, the libraries that are in existence, the laws that are operating, and these we enlarge or amend or enrich or advance upon in some sense, but in reality we do but carry out what older and abler men it may be have prepared to our hands.—Gratitude should hold in loving remembrance all those who have even prepared for the building of the temple.—Think of the fathers and mothers, the statesmen and soldiers, the authors and artists, the preachers and teachers, who have been in this great world-house before us, preparing as it were for our advent and occupation ; we should read our indebtedness on all the grave-stones ; we should see our obligation in old age, and in things that are ready to vanish away.—We should not ruthlessly abrogate the past, but genuinely and philosophically fulfil it.—Jesus Christ himself said that he came not to destroy the law but to fulfil it ; that is, to bring to bud and fruitage the things that had already been sown in the human mind by the action of previous teachers and legislators.—For our encouragement, when our ambition seems to be limited within a sphere which makes us impatient, we should read the words, “And David prepared,” and remember that if a king

could prepare for the building of a temple without actually building it himself, we should look upon every action we do and probably upon every word we speak as contributions towards the erection of a divine house upon the earth.—We read much of the “abundance” with which David prepared ; he prepared iron in abundance, he gathered brass in abundance, he collected cedar trees in abundance ; nothing was begrudged or limited ; throughout the whole there was a presence of generosity and overflowingness, which indicated that the work was undertaken by generous and energetic hands. David’s estimate of the work that was to be done will be seen in the fifth verse.

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“*And David said, Solomon my son is young and tender, and the house that is to be builded for the Lord must be exceeding magnificent, of fame and of glory, throughout all countries.*”—1 CHRON. xxii. 5.

The king did not take a low view of the work that was to be executed.—We expend our strength according to the ideals which it is our purpose to realise.—The man who has not a high ideal of his work will be content with indifference and with doing as little as possible ; on the other hand, the man whose conception of his work is great and overwhelming will account every moment a jewel, every day an opportunity, every man an ally, and he will argue that nothing has been given whilst anything has been withheld.—Solomon was “young and tender” : he cannot have been more than twenty-four or twenty-five years of age.—Some commentators are of opinion that he may have been hardly more than fourteen or fifteen.—The word “young” is a flexible word as used in the Bible ; it is applied to Rehoboam when he was

forty-one; the word “young” may mean a new-born babe as in Exod. ii. 6; or it may mean a young child, a youth, a man in the prime of life.—Solomon calls himself a young child even after he has come to the throne.—We read that “young children” came out and reproached and mocked the prophet Elisha.—We must interpret Biblical words by Biblical usages, a canon of criticism which will save us from a good deal of confusion and misapprehension.—Solomon was not only young, he was “tender,”—the word might be rendered “timid.”—In Dent. xx. 8 we meet with a term which expresses the proper idea—“What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren’s heart faint as well as his heart.”—That word is of further occurrence, wherein we read, “Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead” (Judg. vii. 3).—To the father the son will always be young, and to a heart like David’s, probably every other heart will appear to be timid.—Recognising the characteristics by which Solomon is described by his father, we shall be able to understand better the charge which that father delivered to him as the time of his decease approached.—David refers to the house that is to be builded, and yet as we have seen he has just pointed out the house as if it were actually erected.—The house was to be “exceeding magnifical,” the word “exceeding” relating to height, giving the idea of an upward action, as if story should be upon story, and pile upon pile, until the temple touched the very heavens.—The temple was to be “of fame and of glory throughout all countries,” that is to say, it was to be for a name and for a glory for all the lands.—Attribute what we may to the energy of Oriental fancy, we cannot deny

that the ideal of this house was such as had probably never before challenged the imagination of man.—What will David do in presence of an ideal out-vying all other dreams of ambition or purposes of love?—He gives a reply remarkable for its modesty, and therefore remarkable for its strength.—If he had exhausted himself in words he would have been unable to do much in execution; he therefore says, “I will therefore now make preparation for it.”—All great works are to be prepared for.—Nothing is to be done offhandedly, extemporaneously, perfunctorily; everything is to be regarded as profoundly religious, and as having a claim upon the best attention and the fullest energy we can give.—Many things appear to be done suddenly which really express the action of long processes.—There is of course a climacteric moment, but that moment is the last of a long series.—How profitable it would be if every young life could say at the beginning of its career, My life is to be exceeding magnifical: it is to be a life of intelligence, purity, beneficence, holy activity in all blessed service: I will therefore now make preparation for it.—What school-going we should then have! What attentive reading of initial books! What an eager sympathy with the purpose of every tutor! How little we should then make of difficulties! The work of preparation would be done under the consciousness that the temple was already built.—Is there not a danger of living too much from hand to mouth?—Is there not a temptation rather to conceal the idea than to elevate it into the dignity and invest it with the sanctity of an altar?—Do we not live a life of accident, and are we not content to take things much as they happen, without paying heed to the shape, commodiousness, and final utility of all we are professing to do?—Again and again we must remind ourselves of

our familiar lesson, to read the part in the light of the whole, to construe the discipline of life in the light of the rest of heaven; thus shall we be not driven or impelled, but gently constrained and lovingly allured towards all that is worthy of the name of light and liberty and progress.—David hitherto has been holding speech with himself—we have been reading a monologue; now David proceeds to communicate his whole thought to his son.—“Then he called for Solomon his son, and charged him to build an house for the Lord God of Israel.”—The best commentators place a comma after the word “Lord”; having done so, they read the sentence thus: “build an house for the Lord, the God of Israel.”—Read in this way the emphasis is naturally on the national aspect which God sustained towards Israel.—The house was not to be a house for the pious, the devout, those who cared for temple attendance and temple service; it was in no sense to be an eclectic house, set apart for those who wished to enjoy its privileges; it was to be the national house, the sanctuary of the whole people.—God himself was the king of Israel.—In this sense Israel was both a nation and a Church.—We cannot deny that God does take a view of men in nationalities, and that he does speak of the character of a nation, the duty of a nation, the opportunity of a nation; and this he does without reference to such exceptions as might be represented by individual indifference, rebellion, or even atheism.—The family is a whole, the town is a whole, the nation is a whole. When God handles great corporate bodies in their entirety, and speaks of them without reference to individuality, he has a right to do so.—It is a different thing when men come to make the nation a unit, or even the family a unit, for the purpose of working out some vicious process of political economy, or

even of ecclesiastical administration.—A theocracy is one thing; a democracy is another; in the discussion of all questions related to this aspect of divine providence we must be careful to define our principal terms.

—*“David prepared abundantly before his death.”—I CHRON. xxii. 5.*

David wanted to do something more than prepare, he wanted actually to build the temple.—God tells us where we must stop.—He mortifies ambition, and yet gratifies it.—He will not give us the highest honour of all, yet he will put upon us an honour which contributes to the success of other men.—Some hearts would have been discouraged by what the Lord said unto David; and their discouragement might have expressed itself in some degree of resentment, for they would have said, If we cannot do all, we will do nothing; if we cannot build, we will not prepare; if we cannot have the honour of putting up the temple, we certainly will not assist any other man to erect it.—This would have been peevishness, selfishness, the veriest meanness of soul.—David, on the other hand, consented to the Lord's arrangement, and did all that lay in his power to facilitate the progress of his son.—We should work up to the very moment of our death.—Our last breath should, if possible, help some other man to pray better, or work more, or suffer with a firmer constancy.—Let no man suppose that the world stands still because he dies.—God has always a temple to build, and he will always raise up the builder of it, and yet it pleases him in his condescension to receive our assistance in preparation.—Some men will only take an interest in what they can themselves enjoy; they care nothing for posterity, but rather speak mockingly of it; the

prophetic soul does live in the future, does populate the earth with posterity, and does take an interest in the ages that are yet to dawn.—We do things better to-day by casting our minds forward to the riper periods of civilisation; by foreseeing that the glory of the Lord shall make glad the whole earth, men can work to-day in the twilight with stronger courage and more ardent enthusiasm.—Thus the future may be made to help the present; thus posterity may take part in the affairs of to-day.

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*“And David said to Solomon, My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build an house unto the name of the Lord my God: but the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight.”—I CHRON. xxii. 7, 8.*

How the word of the Lord came to David we do not know. He says the word of Jehovah came upon him.—Possibly he may only be putting into words his own spiritual impressions on a review of his sanguinary career.—We are not to understand that the words were delivered articulately to David, as he listened to a voice from heaven; they may have been so delivered, or an impression may have been wrought upon his mind that these words alone can correctly represent.—In what way soever the communication was made to David, the communication itself is of singular moral value.—Say that the Lord delivered the message immediately in audible words, we have then the doctrine that God will not permit men of blood to end their career as if they had been guiltless of bloodshedding.—He will make a distinction between

them and the work to the execution of which they aspire. Say that David uttered these words out of the depths of his own consciousness, then we have the doctrine that there is a moral fitness of things: that hands stained with blood should not be put forth in the erection of a house of prayer.—There are innumerable difficulties connected with the whole situation, for we have been given to understand that the Lord himself commanded certain of the wars to be undertaken; but what know we of God’s idea of undertaking a war? There may be a war within a war; it may be that God scrutinizes even the motives of warriors, and notes when the warrior degenerates into a mere murderer, or when the warrior begins to thirst for the blood which he has once tasted.—Into these mysteries we cannot enter; it is enough for us to know that God will separate his temple, his house of prayer, from every hand that is destructive of human life, from all that is sanguinary, and from all that is personally or nationally ambitious.—The house of God is to be the house of peace, the sanctuary of rest, a Sabbath building, calm with the tranquillity of heaven, unstained by the vices and attachments of earth.—David submits to this view of the case with a modesty which is truly pious.—Not one word of reproach does he utter against God.—If David could have found an excuse in having received the commandment of God to execute certain wars he would have remembered the giving of that commission, and would have reminded God that as a soldier he was not acting in his own name, but in the name of heaven.—As David quoted no such precedent or authority we may safely conclude that there was something unrecorded in the history which would explain God’s condemnation of David’s sanguinary conduct.—It is not incumbent upon annotators and theologians

to whitewash Old Testament saints ; God himself has permitted their lives to be traced in his book with graphic and even revolting clearness, and nowhere are Old Testament saints so sharply rebuked as in the Old Testament itself.

“ *Behold a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest.*”—I CHRON. xxii. 9.

This is a beautiful expression, as signifying a departure from the ordinary law of heredity, and as indicating the speciality of divine creation.—It would be quite proper to recognise a law of evolution in the succession of families, and indeed it is impossible to deny the operation of such a law, yet, curiously, again and again, with quite remarkable repetition, God undertakes, so to say, to start a new family point, or a new family line.—The time comes when the warrior departs, and the man of peace enters into the household genealogy.—Singularly enough, the genealogy is still one, yet there are specialities about it which seem to proclaim the directing providence of God in certain singular actions, which detach themselves from the common run of events, and create new eras in family history.—This is a forecast which is full of moral instruction ; for example, it shows how God knows every man who is coming into the world, what his character will be, what function he will have to discharge, and what will be the effect of his ministry upon his day and generation.—Solomon could not have come before David, because the day in which David lived was marked by characteristics which he alone could adequately and usefully handle.—By-and-by we shall see that history could not have been inverted even in its smallest details without injury having been done to the indwelling spirit of progress.—We wish that

certain persons were living now, or that certain men now living had lived long ago to have exerted a happy influence upon a remote age : here we speak in our ignorance : the Christian believes that every event is ordered from above, that every man is born at the right time, is permitted to live for a proper period if he be obedient to providence, and that the mission of every man is assigned, limited, and accentuated : all we have to do is to say, “ Lord, what wilt thou have me do ? ” and to obey what we honestly believe to be the voice from heaven.—The prophecy was delivered to David after Solomon's birth, and yet it is delivered as if it were yet to be fulfilled. Again we are reminded that we must make ourselves familiar with the Biblical usage of words.—We have often affirmed the doctrine that we can only understand parts of the Bible by living in the spirit of the whole Bible.—The Bible is more than a book of grammar ; we have said, and we repeat, that the Bible is not a piece of literature, but is a divine revelation, and a divine revelation which must be judged by standards and tests peculiar to itself.—The name of David's successor was to be “ Solomon.” That is the emphatic word. The very word is indicative of peace.—The name was the character.—Yet mark carefully how God does not allow Solomon to be the fount and origin of peace, but rather how Solomon represents the then idea of the divine administration of affairs,—“ I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days.”—So the Lord still keeps everything within his own power and uses even the highest men as his agents and instruments.—The Lord does not only give peace, he gives unrest, tumult ; he is a man of war, he is a God of battles ; his banner is often stained with blood.—We should read history incorrectly if we looked only at its religious side, expressive of content-

ment, dependence, and thankfulness, and regarded that side alone as under the care of God.—The Lord is in every battlefield; in a sense which will be explained when we are able to receive the explanation; the Lord is the author of war, and without tumult he could not have brought in peace: without David he could not have brought in Solomon to rule over his people Israel.

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*“Be strong and of good courage; dread not, nor be dismayed.”—I CHRON. xxii. 13.*

We have read that Solomon was young and tender, young and timid; it would seem as if David, recognising the timidity of his son, specially charged him to cultivate courage, bravery, fearlessness.—This was training up a child in the way he should go.—We are too fond of training our strongest faculties, and thus we are tempted to neglect the weaker side of our nature.—Find out the weak side of a child’s character, and address yourselves assiduously to its cultivation.—We should seek to fill the empty sack, not to overcrowd the full one.—Bring into play the muscles that are most difficult to get at, and do not overtrain those which afford the fairest prospect of immediate results.—Our most backward faculty must be exercised.—When we complain of a weak memory, or a hesitant will, or a defective imagination, we should address ourselves to the cultivation of that which is in special need of culture. On the other hand, what man regards as of the nature of defect and lack, God may account as a special excellence, and even a peculiar qualification for a particular work.—God did not want a man to go to temple building with the air of a warrior, with the port of a hero, with the aggressiveness of one who was about to storm a fortress.—As Solomon advances to his sacred work with a timid air, with

a modesty which hides his strength, we may see the qualities which God most appreciates.—Throughout the whole of human history God has never hesitated to declare that a meek and a quiet spirit is in his sight of great price.—Clothing himself with his eternity as with a vesture, and inhabiting infinity as a dwelling-place, he declares that he will look to the man who is of a humble and a contrite spirit, and who trembleth at his word.—When did the Lord select some towering man to be his agent or instrument in critical periods of history?—Who has not been amazed to see how God will take weak things with which to oppose things that are mighty, and even things that are not, to bring to nought things that are?—When the Son of man came upon the earth, the most conspicuous thing, in the estimation of some observers, was his timidity, his meekness, his almost fear.—For a time he ran away from the face of man, and in protracted solitude prepared himself for the few agonistic years of his ministry; he did not strive, nor cry, nor cause his voice to be lifted up in the streets; he was womanly, gentle, tender, patient, and he concealed his almightiness under his all-pitifulness.—No mistakes are greater than those which are often made about strength.—We forget that moderation is power.—We neglect to admit the full meaning of the doctrine that in proportion as a man is really capable is he profoundly serene; if he were uncertain of his strength he would be turbulent, agitated, impatient, and through his foolish excitement we should discover his self-misgiving. Everywhere God’s servants are called to fearlessness, to strength, to good courage.—Jesus Christ called men in this direction; the Apostle Paul, speaking of every one who would be a faithful servant of the Cross, says, “Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”



*“Now, behold, in my trouble I have prepared for the house of the Lord an hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver; and of brass and iron without weight; for it is in abundance: timber also and stone have I prepared; and thou mayest add thereto.”—I CHRON. xxii. 14.*

For the word “trouble” the margin reads “poverty.”—One commentator reads, “by my strenuous labour I have prepared;” another, “by my toil or pains I have prepared.”—In all these senses there is pathetic meaning.—Say that David prepared out of his poverty, which of course would in his case be a relative term, we have here the spirit of sacrifice.—Say that he prepared by strenuous labour, here is an acceptable spirit of complete devotedness.—Say that it was by toil and pain that he brought the preparation to an end, here we have that self-denial without which there can be no real piety.—We must not measure David’s words literally; an hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver, are terms we cannot accurately estimate.—According to the value of the post-Babylonian Hebrew talent, the gold here spoken of has been calculated to be worth more than a thousand millions of English pounds sterling, and the silver has been calculated to be worth more than four hundred millions.—Do not regard these as arithmetical sums; look upon them as indicating that nothing had been spared, nothing had been withheld in the service of the house of the Lord.—Why will men be so literal in reading the divine word?—The literalist has never made the Bible a book of music and light and true help to the soul.—We must bring something other than grammar to bear upon the interpretation of the divine word.—From the very beginning of the book,

time is treated with indifference, and words are used with a largeness of meaning to which we have become accustomed after long and profound reading of the book itself.—Throughout the Bible this spirit of expansiveness of thought prevails.—So we return to the doctrine that we find the Bible within the Bible, and again and again is proved the utter worthlessness of words as exhaustive symbols.—“Passeth understanding” must be our comment upon many a passage, and yet although we cannot understand in an intellectual sense, we can understand as it were emotionally, our whole soul rising in noble rapture in response to sacred appeals, to heavenly music, to calls which can reach the heart without the medium of words.—How anxious was David to build a house for the Lord!—How willingly and with what ineffable gladness Solomon devoted himself to the execution of his father’s will, and how through all the human planning and preparing there runs a divine decree, the very call of God from heaven!—Is not all this predictive of the uprearing of a temple not made with hands? Is not God himself the great temple builder? What are we but hewers of wood and drawers of water? Squaring the stones, preparing the gold and the silver; yet at the last the servant shall be as his Lord, and they who have toiled faithfully, lovingly, self-sacrificingly, shall not be denied a place of honour in the eternal temple.

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*“So when David was old and full of days, he made Solomon his son king over Israel.”—I CHRON. xxiii. 1.*

We are not to carry our kingships too far, and thus keep out other and stronger men.—Kings should abdicate before they become imbecile; pastors

should not wear out the love of their people by continuing unduly in office.—It is always well to take the opinion of others when it will be given frankly and lovingly as to our ability to continue with vigour and happy effect the work in which we have been long engaged.—Old age overtakes even David, of whom we once read as a youth “ruddy and of a fair countenance.”—Time conquers all.—The silent days and nights eat up our strength, and leave us weak; consume our inheritance, and leave us poor; and are all the while, in every action of deprivation, teaching us mournful but pithy and useful lessons.—Blessed is the man who can bring his son to the throne, not only because he is his son, but because he has a right to the crown, the right of character, wisdom, capacity, and general fitness for high office.—The son takes the crown by hereditary right in many instances; it is far better when he takes it after preparation, and after having proved his character in many trying circumstances.—Israel continued, though David withered and died.—How true this is in all the relations and outlooks of life!—The nation never dies; kings and mighty men, generals and commanders, come and go, but the people, the very heart of the nation, abide from century to century.—The countries have seen many occupants of the throne, but the throne itself abides, the symbol and indeed the fact of continuity.—Solomon has his day of coming, he will also have his day of going.—A great statesman has said there are only two happy days in the life of a cabinet minister, the day on which he takes office and the day on which he leaves it.—Let us have no fear because kings die, because pastors expire, because men of all degrees are known no more in their personality: the one thing we may be sure of is

that the life which they symbolise will be preserved, directed, and perfected in the providence of God.

“*Moses the man of God.*”—I CHRON. xxiii. 14.

A beautiful description of any man.—A possible description of every man.—A needful description of each man if he is to abide in his Father's house for ever.—Some men have attained eminence in godliness.—No renown is to be compared with this, no influence is equal to that which arises from such recognition.—When is a man a “man of God”?—When he believes in God's existence, when he is assured of God's providence, when he has sunk his will in the divine purpose, when he lives and moves and has his being in God.—“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.”—Is there not something suggestive in this continuity of terms?—Moses was the man of God, Jesus was the Son of God, and every believer in Christ may claim his own degree of that same sonship.—Moses was faithful as a servant, Christ was faithful as a Son.—Jesus Christ advances us in nomenclature; once he called us disciples, then he called us servants, then he called us friends: what he will call us when we meet him in heaven, life's conflict over, who can tell? He will then find some new and dearer name for us, and by the bestowal of a new designation he will awaken still warmer love, and bring us to some higher estate of life.—When God gives a name he expresses by it some growth in character.—God's names are not mere appellations, signs by which men are known one from another; they are characters, they are credentials, they are approbations.—There is no

higher title than to be a man of God, a slave of Christ, a temple of the Holy Ghost.—At the time of the writing of this Book of Chronicles, Moses had long been dead, yet still he was remembered by his piety; he might have been called the legislator of Israel, the statesman of Israel, the greatest mind ever known in Israel: yet by none of these designations is he recorded, but by the simple yet grand indication that he was “the man of God.”

“ . . . *their office was to wait on . . .* ”  
—I CHRON. xxiii. 28.

That is enough, if it be accepted in the right spirit.—The men themselves might have complained, saying, We are as good as the sons of Aaron: why should they not wait upon us?—But they recognised a divine appointment and not a human arrangement in all this ministry of the house of God.—The man who opens the door might complain that he is not in the highest places in the church, but in so far as he is a wise man he will say that he too is indispensable to the happy execution of the offices of the sanctuary.—To wait may be an office.—Who shall say that those who wait on us are not necessary to the completeness of our ministry?—Thus the servant in the household may have an indirect place even in the pulpit; thus the wife may be the true co-pastor of her husband; by patience, by sympathy, by foresight, by dealing with many cases as she only can deal with them, the wife may double the pastor's usefulness.—We think of a man being great who is at the front or on the highest seat, but he himself will be the first to acknowledge that he could not have been where he is, and could not do the work that is expected of

him, but for many minor people, assistances, co-operations at home, little attentions and sweet benedictions which find no place in public record.—“They also seive who only stand and wait.”—Our character is tested by the way in which we accept office.—If we are petulant and resentful, ungrateful and negligent, we show that we do not deserve any status in the house of the Lord; if we are faithful over a few things we shall be made ruler over many things—Let us prove our fitness for the highest office by doing well the things which pertain to the lowest.

“ *But Nadab and Abihu died before their father.* ”—I CHRON. xxiv. 2.

This ought to be regarded as unnatural.—What is it that interferes with the regular flow and progress of natural law? The father should die first; the eldest in the family should be first married; the richest should be the kindest; the oldest should be the wisest: yet continually are all these supposed ordinances and laws turned upside down in practical life.—We should make an idol of continuity if we could reckon upon it in all forms and under all conditions. God destroys the monotony of life, and thus he animates men with various impulses, and brings some to reflection who might otherwise be heedless.—Let it be known that every man shall live a certain number of days, and shall die at a well-known time; let it be known that men cannot succeed to office until this day ten years or twenty years; and life will become benumbed, and in many cases monotony will kill ambition, and put an end to healthy preparation.—Instead of this, however, we live in uncertainty; the king may die tomorrow, and the next man may be wanted; the father may pass away to-

night, or the eldest son may die in the morning, and the father may have to follow his first-born to the grave.—Thus God will not allow us to speculate in the future, to tell fortunes, to forecast events and destinies; he will compel us to live, so to say, from hand to mouth, a day at a time, not knowing what a day may bring forth.—Even insecurity may be so sanctified as to become a blessing.—We are always to take heed, to be watchful, to be on our guard; we know not at what hour the King may come; the only thing we are certain of is that he will come; and being certain of this one fact we should strive after needful preparation.—We cannot tell who will die first, but we can all be prepared for death, and the father may be able to rejoice that his son has gone home first, and the son may be able to thank God that his father has completed a beautiful and useful life.

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 "And God gave to Heman fourteen sons and three daughters."—1 CHRON. xxv. 5.

We mistake if we think that the sons and the daughters belonged to Heman alone.—Heman himself would have taken a false estimate of the occasion if he had called these sons and daughters his own in any sense of proprietorship and right of destiny.—It is only in a secondary sense that the child belongs to the human father; the father himself is a child, and every child is God's.—Blessed and beautiful indeed is the dispensation by which even secondary ownership may become inspired with sacrificial love, a love that would give itself away to save the object on which its solitudes are fastened.—We must come to Job's state of mind if we would rightly accept the dispensations of Providence.—Job did not say that the

property and the children were all his own, and that he had indefeasible rights to them; he recognised the higher proprietorship, and was thus enabled to say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."—Think of every child being a gift of God,—a special, direct, immediate presentation from heaven, as a man might cull a flower and give it to a friend, or take a lamb of the flock and present it to some one who would love it and cherish it for the owner's sake.—This is the right view of children; they are God's gifts; parents are God's trustees; we are to hear what the mother of Moses heard when the daughter of Pharaoh spake to her saying, "Take this child away and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages."—This is God's charge to parents: Take this child; it is mine, keep it in my name, train it for my service, instruct it in my law, and when I send for it yield it to me as to an owner who has the right of claim.—The religious interpretation of life always enlarges daily blessings, family mercies, household comforts.—Let a man think that he himself has earned his bread, and has a right to it, without consulting any power, high or low, and the feast will be but a poor satisfaction even of natural hunger: but let a man see in every loaf God's whole system of growth and ministry and sustenance, a condensation of divine providence, and a special gift of divine affection, and instantly the hunger of his soul will be satisfied, and his home will glow as with the presence of holy angels.—It is not enough to recognise Providence in some general way, as giving other people their children, and giving other people their blessings: a direct and special application of the law must be made by every man, and must be recognised in every house; then we shall have earnest piety,

rational devotion, consecration to God founded upon fact and indisputable evidence.

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 “*Out of the spoils won in battles did they dedicate to maintain the house of the Lord.*”—I CHRON. xxvi. 27.

Property may be consecrated to higher uses than those which it was originally intended to promote.—Even the gold of the heathen may enrich the coffers of the Son of God.—What is true of mere property that can be arithmetically estimated is true of institutions, energies, methods, and policies, which can be baptised and sanctified for Christ's use.—We should study the ways of successful enemies, and turn those ways to Christian uses.—Never be afraid to learn even from the enemy; his shrewdness may suggest new methods to us; we should ask why he is successful, on what basis he has proceeded, by what consideration he has been influenced, and taking out of all his policy everything that is narrow and selfish we should use the framework for higher purposes.—When Saul of Tarsus is converted his energy will be dedicated to the house of the Lord; when the eloquent disbeliever is brought to pray he will not leave his eloquence behind him; when the man gifted with song turns his heart to the Christ of God, he will not become silent, but he will bring his music with him, changing only the words, the sentiment, and the purpose, his voice being as eloquent and as fascinating as ever, yea more so, being inspired by a godly enthusiasm.—When the author is converted who has never written concerning God he will bring his inkhorn with him and begin to expatiate on higher themes.—What we have learned from Cicero we may consecrate to Christ.—

What we have been taught in battle we may dedicate to the interests of peace.—What we have heard in the counsels of friendship we may employ in the propagation of the kingdom of Christ.—Blessed be God, within the boundaries of that kingdom there is room for every talent, and there is scope for every way of doing things. The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.—Let us learn all we can from them, and grow in wisdom and in ability to fulfil our destiny.

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 “*But David took not the number of them from twenty years old and under: because the Lord had said he would increase Israel like to the stars of the heavens.*”—I CHRON. xxvii. 23.

David here showed himself to be at once a poet and a saint.—He could have numbered Israel arithmetically, but the remembrance of a promise made by the Lord stayed his hand when he thought of thus limiting the Holy One of Israel.—God's purpose concerning his Church is that it shall be “like to the stars of the heavens”: yet there are men amongst us who love to take the statistics of the Church: so many over twenty-one years of age, and so many under twenty-one years of age; so many old, and so many young; so many rich and so many poor; all this may easily be pushed too far, and statistics may become a misrepresentation of the kingdom of heaven.—When God said he would make Israel like to the stars of the heavens, he superseded arithmetical action, he left arithmetic itself far behind, for it has no figures wherewith to represent the boundlessness of the empire of heaven.—It is enough that we have the Lord's promise that the Church shall prevail.—We might as well take up a seed to see

whether it is growing, as to number the Church in order to see whether God's word is being fulfilled.—As Christian teachers and preachers we rest upon the words, “The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”—David took his rest here, and so he let all numbering beyond a given point cease and determine.—On the other hand, there is a numbering that may be permitted, for the sake of pointing rebukes on the one side, and affording encouragement on the other.—Our doctrine is that we are not to make too much of numbers, for we may be deceived by them either in the way of exaggeration or defect.—The Church of God is to be weighed as well as numbered: for spiritual life relates more to quality than to quantity.—When one man is converted the whole world may be converted at the same time, prospectively and instrumentally.—Let not the Church, therefore, consult its arithmetic, but consult divine covenants and promises, when it would excite its courage, and bring all its powers to their noblest fruition.

“*Joab, the son of Zeruiah, began to number, but he finished not, because there fell wrath for it against Israel.*”—I CHRON. xxvii. 24.

Joab was not a poet; Joab believed in arithmetic; and Joab was conscientious so far, that he worked according to his faculty.—Do not expect from Joab what you expect from David.—This must be held to be the law of judgment throughout all the life and action of the Church.—Inquire into the scope of a man's mind before you pronounce definitely upon his actions.—Joab thought he would be able to finish, simply because he was a great man; but every man is small when pitted against the omnipotence of God.—Why will men betake themselves to doing

wrong work, or even needless work, or work that taxes the attention beyond its power to yield reward? It would seem as if the Lord alone could number Israel.—Even the work we do in the way of numbering is not credited to us. This was notably the case in the instance of Joab, in connection with which we read:—“Neither was the number put in the account of the chronicles of king David.”—So all the numbering went for nothing.—Joab might as well have been dreaming as counting, for his arithmetic found no record in the register of the king.—It is not enough to be busy, we must be busy in the right direction.—We know in commerce that it is not enough to be industrious; we must be industrious under proper conditions, if our industry is to be crowned with satisfactory results.—The Joabs of the Church should never be too warmly encouraged; they are literal, arithmetical, material; they only value what they can handle; whereas the genius of the Church is one of prophecy, spirituality, a sacred dreaming that is higher in value than all philosophy and rational speculation; there is a dreaming that is akin to inspiration.—All we have to do is to attend to the business of the present moment, sow the seed, tell the truth, acknowledge error, and whoso doeth the will of God to him shall the doctrine in due time be revealed.

“*Then David gave to Solomon his son the pattern . . .*”—I CHRON. xxviii. 11.

David was determined to do as much as possible towards building the temple.—The temple itself he was forbidden to rear; and yet, whilst obeying the letter of the word, he zealously did his utmost to facilitate the progress of his son.—Some men can only give outlines, hints, suggestions, patterns.—These

men are of great consequence and value in the education of the human mind.—A hint may be a stimulus.—Some men can see a long way through a small rent, and yet they never could make the rent for themselves.—In the Church we have statesmen and politicians—that is to say, men who can grasp the entirety of a case, and men who can only see parts of it, or attend to the detail of the working out of some great scheme.—Solomon can work according to a pattern when he may be destitute of original invention.—We mistake originality when we think that it consists of adaptation of old materials.—As a matter of fact, there is no originality. The only partial originality possible to us is the re-arrangement of old histories, facts, phenomena, inferences: but even this adaptation of what is already well known must not be discarded or despised as a secondary service.—Let it not be supposed that men are doing nothing for the race who write its poems, outline its policies, or sketch new programmes of possible service.—The builder could not proceed without the architect. From a common point of view, the architect may be said to be doing the easy work: seated in his office, and with dainty hands employing himself with clean paper, mathematical instruments, and availing himself of the treasures of knowledge gathered by other men, he might be thought to be doing the playful part of the business: but consult the builder, because the builder alone knows the true value of the architect.—But this is part of an old and vexatious sophism.—Men will value the material more than the spiritual; the manual more than the intellectual.—How long will the time be in coming when men shall see that an idea is of more value than gold, that knowledge is power, and that wisdom is better than strength?—There must

be no undervaluing one of another amongst men, for one man can do what another can not do, or one man can do another kind of work better than he could render some lower service.—Let each operate in his own way.

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“*All this, said David, the Lord made me understand in writing, by his hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern.*”—I CHRON. xxviii. 19.

Thus David would not be a plagiarist.—Instead of saying that his own genius had invented the pattern, he distinctly, as in the 12th verse, said, “The pattern of all that he had by the spirit,” and again, in the 19th verse, “The Lord made me understand.”—In reality there is but one Architect.—The Lord is the builder of all things.—He supplies the material, he inspires the genius, he directs the skill; in short, they labour in vain that build the temple if the Lord be not with them and within them.—Of every man it may be inquired, What hast thou that thou hast not received?—We should look beyond the vessel to the treasure, beyond the instrument to the user of it.—The organ did not build itself; the organ cannot play itself; it must be an instrument used mightily and wisely, yea, with cunning skill, and not a little tender sympathy, by a living soul.—Have we correctly read the plans of God, so far as he has outlined them?—Have we not worked much under them, rather than fully up to all their possibility of meaning and use?—Have we not been afraid to mention all the ideas which God has communicated to us?—We may have feared the people, we may have feared our equals, we may have feared some loss of reputation or remuneration, by

going out of the common way and declaring that God has made a narration to us respecting the enlargement of his purpose or the variation of his providence.—In this way we are to read the Bible.—David would say the same about his Psalms that is said about the patterns of the temple and its contents.—At the end of each psalm he would have written, This is what the Lord made me understand ; or, This is the pattern that I have had by the spirit.—The same may be said of the whole Bible : it is God’s book, it is God’s plan of his earthly sphere, it is God’s outline of providence and redemption.—We have to carry out many details, we have to readjust elements and materials to suit the image and aspect of the times passing over us ; but we must never alter the plan, the essential thought, the ruling purpose of God.—We must not regard the Bible as of human origin ; in every line of it we must see the movement of the Eternal Spirit.

“ . . . the princes and all the people will be wholly at thy commandment.”—I Chron. xxviii. 21.

This is the way to mingle the classes and the masses.—The only equalisation of human society possible or desirable is an equalisation wrought out by holy service—community of effort, united and consolidated sympathy, on behalf of the poor, the helpless, and the outcast.—The service was so great that the prince was as the peasant, and the peasant was as the prince.—In the glory of the mid-day sun all lights of our kindling seem to be equal, because the glory of the sun rules all and excels all : so in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ all his servants seem to be equal ; the wise man is not vain of his wisdom, the strong man makes no account of his strength, the weak man

is not ashamed of his weakness ; all are inspired and dominated by a common exaltation of feeling.—When our spiritual zeal declines we begin to make invidious comparisons ; we speak of great men and little men, leaders and followers : there is a sense in which this distinction will ever hold good, until, under the influence of the purest inspiration, all these differences will be but a variety of unity, and these distinctions themselves will be cited as a proof of the oneness of the Christian Church.—The stars are many, but the heavens are one ; the flowers are innumerable, but they are all warmed and fostered by one common sun.—Let each do what he can ; the first may be last, and the last may be first.—When we are in a right mood of mind we shall be characterised by obedience, we shall know the voice of the leader and respond to it, we shall know the commandment of God, and never hesitate to carry it out.—Princes and people were at liberty to reject the mere inventions either of David or of Solomon, but when David or Solomon became the obvious medium of divine communication the people looked at the message and not at the medium.

“ Furthermore David the king said unto all the congregation, Solomon my son, whom alone God hath chosen, is yet young and tender, and the work is great : for the palace is not for man, but for the Lord God.”—I Chron. xxix. 1.

David was father as well as king, and when the father spoke he exalted the very office which he sustained as sovereign.—The son is always young to the father ; the son becomes doubly filial when the Spirit of God is seen to be working in him with a view to carrying forward the father’s own chosen pur-



poses.—David recognised that the work was greater than the worker.—Solomon was “young and tender,” but the work was “great.”—We must make right uses of our personal circumstances; some would have said, Because I am young and tender, much cannot be expected of me: others, of nobler quality of mind, would say, Being young and tender, the greater shall be the glory of the Lord, because of my littleness, yea, my nothingness.—Even kings should see that the work of life is great.—When men imagine that they are greater than their work, when that work itself is God's, they begin to decrease in strength and to fall away into pitiable humiliation.—The ideal must always be loftier than the actual.—Every David and every Solomon must see that the thing yet to be done is greater than anything that has yet been accomplished.—The great harvest has always to be garnered, the great battle has always to be won, the great love has always to be revealed.—It would seem as if we had never seen high noon yet: the sun must be always on the point of giving us some fuller light, yea, surprising himself into an intenser brilliance.—Thus are we drawn on by fact and by illusion, by common letter and by apocalyptic vision, to higher uses of strength and to nobler anticipations of hope.—Even David could but prepare, and Solomon could but pray: the fire, the inspiration of the energy, must come down from above.—David had a right to exhort, because he had done so much himself—“I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God;” and again, “Because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of mine own proper good, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house.”—David having done this much himself had a right to

inquire what others were doing.—After such a statement as he had just made he had a right to say, “Who, then, is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?”—It is better to set examples than to make speeches; the speeches themselves may be necessary after the examples have been set.

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*“And they with whom precious stones were found gave them.”—I CHRON. xxix. 8.*

Nothing was withheld from the treasure of the house of the Lord.—The people seemed to be inspired by the ambition to find out the very best, and to give it.—All had not precious stones to give, but those with whom they were found parted with them with gratitude and rapture of soul.—There is a giving which is a true getting.—When we put our jewellery into the hand of God it becomes us best.—The reference now need not be to precious stones, to talents of gold and talents of silver, but it may be to genius, it may be to special gifts of mind or body: some men have music, and they ought to give it to the treasure of the house of the Lord; some have sagacity, influence, understanding of the times; some have great inventiveness, some have much actual material gold: every one must give what he has.—What will be the consequence of this consecration of person and property?—That is explained in these words: “Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the Lord; and David the king also rejoiced with great joy.”—After all this giving came gladness, came prayer and praise, came almost heaven itself.—David said to all the congregation, Now bless the Lord your God.—We bless God in giving him what we have, and having given him

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all that was in our hands, our hearts seem to be liberated and enlarged that they may offer still louder and purer praise.—David and the people were conscious that they had done nothing of themselves.—There is no taint of vanity in all this sacrifice of thanks-

giving ; in the midst of it we hear these explanatory words, " All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee."—Such are the inspirations and such are the delights which are open to us as prophets, poets, suppliants, and toilers in the kingdom of God.

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## PRAYER.

**ALMIGHTY GOD,** may the fire upon the altar ever be burning; may we watch lest the fire should decline, and in the morning we should find nothing but cold ashes where the flame should be springing up as if in conscious aspiration and joy. We remember the time when our hearts burned within us; a holy glow sent its fervour through the whole circle of our life, and men knew us by the warmth of our piety and the perfectness of our consecration; they said, Surely these men have been with Christ, and have been caught by the contagion of his enthusiasm. If we have become cold in our piety, broken in our devotion, shattered in our steadfastness, we blame ourselves alone. Thou wilt not forget our threefold enemy,—the world, the flesh, and the devil. Thou knowest well that life is fought out upon a battlefield; that life is no luxury, no day-dream, no walk through scented gardens; how fierce a tumult it is thou knowest, and thou, High Priest of the world, wast tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. Thou knowest the world, every phase of it, every day in its stormy week, and thou canst sympathise with us in the uproar and the conflict and the overwhelming assault. Yet thou canst make heroes upon the battlefield; there thou dost train men: may we take unto us the whole armour of God that we may be able to withstand in the evil day; may we fight bravely, strike strongly, with our whole heart, therefore with our whole arm, and in the end may it be found that by the grace of Christ we have trodden down all our spiritual foes. What burdens we have to carry thou knowest; how long the night often is thou canst tell, for thou dost keep the time in heaven; what weariness, what heart-ache: what tears we shed, what fears distress us, what sudden night hides the gleaming noonday and makes us afraid even in the midst of summer, thou canst tell; for we are naked and open to thine eyes, thou Maker of this mystery of manhood. Let thy Spirit come down upon us like a baptism of fire, and may we know the joy—the tremulous, rapturous joy—of those who put their trust in the living God, and who pray at the altar of the Cross, and have no hope but in the sacrificial blood there shed. Amen.

## THE SECOND BOOK OF CHRONICLES.

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[The kingship of Solomon centres in the building of the temple of the Lord, and the account of that begins in chap. ii. with a statement of the preparations which Solomon made for the accomplishment of this great work, so much pressed upon him by his father, and concludes in chap. vii. with the answer which the Lord gave to his consecrating prayer in a vision. In chap. i. before the history of the temple building, we have an account of the sacrifice at Gibeon by which Solomon inaugurated his reign (vv. 1-13), with some short notices of his power and riches (vv. 14-17); and in chaps. viii. and ix., after the temple building, we have summary statements about the palaces and cities which he built (viii. 1-11), the arrangement of the regular religious service (vv. 12-16), the voyage to Ophir (vv. 17, 18), the visit of the queen of Sheba (ix. 1-12), his riches and his royal magnificence and glory (vv. 13-28), with the concluding notices of the duration of his reign, and of his death (vv. 29, 30). If we compare with this the description of Solomon's reign in 1 Kings i.-xi. we find that in the Chronicle not only are the narratives of his accession to the throne in consequence of Adonijah's attempted usurpation, and his confirming his kingdom by punishing the revolter (1 Kings i., ii.), of his marriage to the Egyptian princess (chap. iii. 1, 2), his wise judgment (chap. iii. 16-28), his public officers, his official men, his royal magnificence and glory (1 Kings iv. 1-5, 14), omitted, but also the accounts of the building of his palace (1 Kings vii. 1-12), of his idolatry, and of the adversaries who rose against him (1 Kings xi. 1-40). On the other hand, the description of the building and consecration of the temple is supplemented by various important details which are omitted from the First Book of Kings. Hence it is clear that the author of the Chronicle purposed only to portray more exactly the building of the house of God, and has only shortly touched upon all the other undertakings of this wise and fortunate king.—KEIL.]

### 2 Chronicles i. 1-12.

1. And Solomon [1 Kings ii. 46] the son of David was strengthened [a favourite expression with the writer of Chronicles. It recurs in chaps. xii. 13; xiii. 21; and xxi. 4. The meaning seems to be simply, "he became firmly settled in his government." Comp. 1 Kings ii. 12, 46] in his kingdom, and the Lord his God was with him [comp. 1 Chron. xi. 9; and see also Gen.

xxxix. 2; Exod. iii. 12; Josh. i. 5; 2 Chron. xv. 9] and magnified him exceedingly.

2. Then Solomon spake unto all Israel, to the captains of thousands and of hundreds [see 1 Chron. xxvii. 1; xxviii. 1], and to the judges [David had made six thousand Levites "officers and judges" (1 Chron. xxiii. 4). The "judge" among the Israelites was always regarded as a high functionary, whose presence was desirable on all occasions of importance], and to every governor ["prince," or "man of rank"] in all Israel, the chief of the fathers.

3. So Solomon, and all the congregation with him, went to the high place that was at Gibeon; for there was the tabernacle of the congregation of God, which Moses the servant of the Lord had made in the wilderness.

4. But the ark of God had David brought up from Kirjath-jearim to the place which David had prepared for it: for he had pitched a tent for it at Jerusalem.

5. Moreover the brazen altar, that Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, had made, he put before the tabernacle of the Lord: and Solomon and the congregation sought unto it.

6. And Solomon went up thither to the brazen altar before the Lord, which was at the tabernacle of the congregation, and offered a thousand burnt-offerings upon it.

7. ¶ In that night [in the night which followed the conclusion of the sacrifice] did God appear [the most important point omitted in Chronicles, and supplied by Kings, is the *conditional* promise of long life made to Solomon (1 Kings iii. 14); while the chief point absent from Kings, and recorded by our author, is the solemn appeal made by Solomon to the promise of God to David his father (v. 9), which he now called upon God to "establish" or "perform"] unto Solomon, and said unto him, Ask what I shall give thee.

8. And Solomon said unto God, Thou hast shewed great mercy unto David my father, and hast made me to reign in his stead.

9. Now, O Lord God, let thy promise unto David my father be established: for thou hast made me king over a people like the dust of the earth in multitude.

10. Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people: for who can judge this thy people [for the decision of difficult cases, which in those days came immediately before the king, great discrimination and experience were requisite in order to distinguish at once right from wrong, and pass a just sentence. How old Solomon was at this time we do not know, scarcely more than twenty years] that is so great?

11. And God said to Solomon, Because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth, or honour, nor the life of thine enemies, neither yet hast asked long life; but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge my people, over whom I have made thee king:

12. Wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee; and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour [The *Speaker's Commentary* upon this says: Remark that the writer says nothing of any promise to Solomon of "long life" which however had been mentioned in the preceding verse among the blessings which he might have been expected to ask. The reason for the omission would seem to lie in the writer's desire to record only what is good

of this great king. Long life was included in the promises made to him (1 Kings iii. 14): but it was granted conditionally, and Solomon not fulfilling the conditions, it did not take effect], such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like.

### SOLOMON'S CHOICE.

"In that night did God appear unto Solomon, and said unto him, Ask what I shall give thee" (v. 7).

WE know that this is a fact. Had it occurred once for all, we might have asked questions about it, but it occurs somewhere every night. God has done, as we have seen frequently in our Biblical studies, many things in the night-time. The darkness and the light are both alike unto him. Night is a geographical term. Even in some places on the earth it is hardly known, and in heaven it is wholly unknown; there is no night there. Here is the crisis of life—the chance! Every man has it. Blessed are they whose eyes are open, whose ears are on the alert; for the opportunity may come at any moment, and the proposal may be made, either in the stillness of night, or amid the uproar and clamour of the busy day. But every soul has its opportunity, its asking-time, its hour when it may say anything to God. We speak sometimes of hours of great spiritual liberty, so that we who are dull of speech, poorly gifted in words, can say what we please, can utter all the desire of the heart, and plead right eloquently with God to fill both our hands with blessings. This is not in us. The ability to pray comes by the inspiration of God. When he asks a question he supplies the answer. God answers prayer because he prays. He answers himself. It is not we who pray; we clamour, we talk ignorantly, we use words, we represent false measures and values of things, and God is pleased to allow us so to talk, taking care that such rude speech is dissolved in high air: but when we *pray* it is he who prayeth in us. There is no mystery about the answering of prayer. A man can answer himself within given limits: God can answer himself without any limits or boundaries. The prayer that is answered is the prayer that is given. Inspired prayer is self-answering prayer. Yet sometimes God allows us to talk much folly to him. Even here providence is educative, and not judicial and chiding. We must

get rid of many things before we can receive the right thing that is to be pronounced in pious language. Observe what an opportunity the king has—"Ask what I shall give thee." God always gives; he so loved the world that he gave—till he had nothing else to give, for he parted with his only Son. So much is lost by men imagining that these great proposals were only given once for all to certain men of unique character and specific office; whereas all that is exceptional in providence is but indicative of the general method. We may turn history into prayer; we may remind God of his own example; we may go before him with chapter and verse, and plead with him book in hand, saying, Thy hand is not shortened that it cannot save; it did this miracle, and wrought this mighty sign and token: renew thy relations with an undeserving world. Sometimes we cannot pray at all; sometimes we are practically blank atheists,—not theoretically; if we were well shaken, really awakened to an average attention, we should disclaim the imputation of being atheistical; but we are practically so many a day; we use high terms, sweet words, pious expressions, but they effect no miracles, they heal not the soul: at other times we can pray without ceasing; when we are told that it is time to arise, we say, Nay: let the sun stand still, and the moon, until we have out all this sweet communion with God. Let us not judge ourselves by the one occasion or by the other, lest in the one case we be swallowed up of despair and in the other be discontented with any spiritual experience short of ecstasy. We speak chidingly and upbraidingly of men who have had what we call their chance and have not availed themselves of it. Should a man come to poverty we review his life and say, He had no opportunity of doing better; he has made the best of his circumstances, and the best is but poor; he deserves sympathy: let us extend our help to him. Or we say, He has had his chance; he might have been as high as most of us; we remember the time when his life was crowned with a gracious opportunity; he was slothful, incapable; he was busy here and there, and the king passed by; and now we do not feel any kindling of real regard and interest in relation to him: he has had his chance, and he can have it no more. God gives every man his opportunity—some in this form, some in that, and some in forms that are not

at all patent except to the man himself. Is it possible that God may sometimes say to the soul, What shall I give thee? The soul should always have its prayer ready, not in mean detail, which always indicates more or less of calculation and selfishness, but in aspiration after God himself. How that prayer works will appear in the sequel.

It must be exciting to listen to Solomon's reply to such a question. Solomon said,—

"Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people: for who can judge this thy people, that is so great?" (v. 10).

In modern language, Solomon prayed to be qualified for his work.\* That was the sublime desire. First he recognised that the work itself was divine—"For who can judge this thy people?" He was not doing atheistic work on supernatural inspiration. Many men would be glad to do that, to use all heaven's light for the purpose of making themselves selfishly secure and comfortable. Many a man would use all the resources of the Church that he might double his individual prosperity. Solomon, on the other hand, recognises the divinity

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\* The first prominent scene in the reign of Solomon is one which presents his character in its noblest aspect. There were two holy places which divided the reverence of the people, the ark and its provisional tabernacle at Jerusalem, and the original tabernacle of the congregation, which, after many wanderings, was now pitched at Gibeon. It was thought right that the new king should offer solemn sacrifices at both. After those at Gibeon there came that vision of the night which has in all ages borne its noble witness to the hearts of rulers. Not for riches, or long life, or victory over enemies, would the son of David, then, at least, true to his high calling, feeling himself as "a little child" in comparison with the vastness of his work, offer his supplications, but for a "wise and understanding heart," that he might judge the people. The "speech pleased the Lord." There came in answer the promise of a wisdom "like which there had been none before, like which there should be none after." So far all was well. The prayer was a right and noble one. Yet there is also a contrast between it and the prayers of David which accounts for many other contrasts. The desire of David's heart is not chiefly for wisdom, but for holiness. He is conscious of an oppressing evil, and seeks to be delivered from it. He repents, and falls, and repents again. Solomon asks only for wisdom. He has a lofty ideal before him, and seeks to accomplish it, but he is as yet haunted by no deeper yearnings, and speaks as one who has "no need of repentance."—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*.



of the call, the divinity of his function ; he says, I am appointed king by God to do God's work, and what I want is not the office only but the ability to administer it with beneficent effect. This man will get an answer presently. He must be answered—he builds himself upon a rock. There is no excitement of invention or ingenuity for the purpose of making some new request, some fanciful and whimsical petition. Solomon falls back upon the eternal commonplace that nothing is lasting that is not wise, nothing is useful that is not good. His prayer, therefore, would be: Connect me with thyself, thou living Fountain ; or, Take up this little life, and make it one of the lamps of thy heaven, which are all fed by the invisible, the infinite Shekinah. Solomon would not be sustained in his vanity, or have his greatness multiplied ; would not be loaded with additional purple, or enriched with increase of crown and gem and jewel : he would have wisdom—the sagacious mind ; not only sagacity, which men may respect but not love, but sagacity steeped in sacred sentiment, the sagacity that doubles itself by the inspiration of sympathy ; he would have the statesman's soul, and the royal soul that lives in others, reading their unuttered desires and responding in advance to the petitions which they are tremblingly formulating. A king should be beforehand. Thus would he be not royal only but almost divine ; for it is God that proposes that man should ask ; it is God who comes down with the gift, and says, Take it. So should it be with all greater souls—leaders, parents, heads of houses, heads of business,—they should have something to say, and they should always say it first. He leads best who is the first to utter the great word of offering, to create the solemn opportunity of life, to tempt the people by gracious suggestion into larger prayer and nobler, more confiding communion. Every man needs divine wisdom in order that he may do well his earthly work. You would light a lamp better if you first asked God to show you how to light it. It is a degrading doctrine which sets up a distinction between the temporalities and the spiritualities of the Church. There are no temporalities ; the copper is to be turned into gold, the gold is to be turned into fine gold ; the simplest labour is to be elevated to the rank and quality of sacrifice. Whatever, therefore, we may be—heads of firms, or

youngest helpers in business ; great geniuses in commerce, or poor dull heads that must have everything taught and can only repeat prayers by rote,—we all need wisdom for the discharge of our daily duty, then business becomes a sacrament ; in the clink of gold there is music of another world, in the exchange and barter of life there is a form of religious intercourse.

How will God treat a prayer like this?—"And God said to Solomon, Because this was in thine heart" I will give thee everything along with it,—“thou hast not asked riches, wealth, or honour, nor the life of thine enemies, neither yet hast asked long life :” all these prayers were already in heaven, uttered by other petitioners. We have said that we have talked selfishly to God ; God here quotes by implication the selfishness by which he had been vainly importuned ; he would seem to say, The prayers that have come up to me have been prayers for riches, wealth, honour, the life of enemies, and long life ; these poor vapid prayers have been sent up to me from time immemorial ; thou hast created a variety in petition, thou hast taken a point of departure ; thou hast really prayed : I am surprised and pleased. So would God be represented by language that would accommodate the occasion with this feeble degree of expression. God himself has confessed to surprise and to grief, and has called upon the universe to share his amazement, because of certain issues. In this instance he quotes all the little prayers that had been offered, and says in effect, Solomon has surpassed all these ; he has made no mention of them ; he has gone for the inclusive blessing ; he has asked the all-involving benefaction, therefore he shall have all the rest :—

“Wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee ; and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like” (v. 12).

“Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.” This was the teaching of a greater than Solomon. Sometimes a short prayer may be a long one. “Think not that ye shall be heard for your much speaking.” God supplements prayers ; the sooner we get done the better, because then we leave God his opportunity ; we take our position as initiators and give God his chance. He accepts

it; he works miracles within the golden opportunity which our faith creates. He does not know where to stop. What a catalogue is this—riches, and wealth, and honour, and promotion beyond all that is known in the history of royalty. We might have had more if we had asked for less. We have made great mistakes in prayer; we have said, Lord, make us strong in body: make our children all good and great men: give us great success in business to-day: create for us friends in all the field of life: and thus we have prayed ourselves out in trifling detail. Had we said, "Lord, not my will, but thine, be done," he would have made our enemies dizzy, so that they could not tell east from west; he would have made them falter in their fulminations; he would have turned their objurgations into blessings; he would have melted their knee-joints, so that they could not have come upon us in fierce assault; he would have made the ground grow gold: but we have been petty, selfish, narrow, trustless. We have thought a prayer was comprehensive in proportion as it omitted nothing. What mistakes are made about comprehensive prayers! There is but one comprehensive prayer—"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven:" or, "Not my will, but thine, be done:" or, "God be merciful to me a sinner." We find here and there in Holy Writ examples of these epitomising, all-including prayers. When we take up one of these and, so to say, send it to heaven by way of the cross, there shall come back to us answers like a great rain on a summer day.

## PRAYER.

**ALMIGHTY GOD, we read of rest, Sabbath rest; it is of rest upon rest. As thou dost give grace upon grace and life upon life, so thou dost give rest upon rest; and that rest we now seek. Thou dost give rest unto them that come unto thee, for they cease from their heavy load and they forget their weariness, and they enter already into heaven's infinite peace. Great peace have they that love thy law. This is not mere silence, or stillness, or quietness, but a great reconciliation of the human with the divine—of our heart with thy will. We long for this rest; without it we are in tumult, in distress, and in great fear, so much so that the night encroaches upon the day, and the winter upon the spring and the very summer itself: but with thy Spirit dwelling in us we rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him; and we hear his coming in the quiet of the night, in the stillness of the sleeping-time, though he come with the noiselessness of a dream, and rise upon us without tumult like a vision. Fill us with thy peace! thy peace passeth understanding; it is not the world's compromise: it is Christ's own tranquillity. We would enjoy Sabbath in the wilderness—rest-time immediately before war, so that in the fight itself we may know the mystery and benediction of peace. We thank thee for all the comfort of the week. Thou hast caused the light to drive away the darkness, and this is Sabbath day: the very clouds are filled with light, and heaven heightens itself for very gladness; behold, the time of the singing of birds has come. May there be music in our life, sweet and noble psalmody in our hearts; may our whole being be lifted up in solemn praise, so that we may live the truly Christian life—the hidden life, the life that glorifies the truth, explaining it where words fail, and conveying to observers and hearers its ultimate meaning. But this is God's miracle: it is not in man to do this: but by the mighty working of thy Spirit it may be done in every one of us—poorest, meanest, lowliest. May we so know Christ that our very laughter shall be the gladness of solemnity, our recreation but a renewal of strength for sacrifice, and all our business a harvesting of stores to be used in doing good. Pity us where we are very weak. Dry our tears where we dare not touch them lest we blind the eyes that shed them. Grant unto us secret communion, unspoken fellowship, signs and tokens which the heart only can discern and apply. Be with all hearts that are full of solicitude, filled with wonders that are fears, and going out in anxieties which trouble the life, sowing it all over as with ice, covering it up in hard frost. Good Lord, send the spring-time into such lives—yea, a taste of bright, sweet summer; and in the house of the Lord may all the battles of the world be forgotten. Give us a large vision of thyself and of thy kingdom; then all our fears shall be**

driven away: we shall see the most obstinate lay down his arms: the farthest-away prodigal turning round and coming home, and those that have given us most sorrow shall begin to give us richest joy. Thou knowest our life—how it comes and goes and flickers; meanwhile, how it looks up into the sky and then looks down into the grave; and how, when we would pluck the fruit, the branch seems to lift itself above the hand. Have mercy upon us! Multiply thy lovingkindness toward us and comfort us with new supplies. Where there is special sorrow let there be special gladness also: where the grave has been dug under the hearthstone, let there be a great filling up of vacant spaces by a renewed and enlarged vision of thyself. Then shall men not seek the living among the dead, but say over their very graves,—Our loved ones are not here: they are risen. We bless thee for bright example, for words remembered with sweet thankfulness, for patience in trial, for heroism in difficulty, and for the gentle charity that added new beauty to life. The Lord remember the bereaved and the sorrow-stricken and the sad, and give them brightness in the night-time—yea, a great multitude of stars, and one brighter than the rest promising early day. Amen.

## 2 Chronicles ii. 1-10.

1. And Solomon determined to build an house for the name of the Lord [the "name of God" in Scripture is nearly equivalent to the presence of God. God is in his name; and what is done to or for his name is done to him], and an house for his kingdom.

2. And Solomon told out threescore and ten thousand men to bear burdens, and fourscore thousand to hew in the mountain, and three thousand and six hundred to oversee them.

3. ¶ And Solomon sent to Hiram the king of Tyre, saying, As thou didst deal [comp. 1 Chron. xiv. 1; 2 Sam. v. 11] with David my father, and didst send him cedars to build him an house to dwell therein, even so deal with me.

4. Behold, I build an house to the name of the Lord my God, to dedicate it to him, and to burn before him sweet incense [Literally "incense of spices." Comp. Exod. xxx. 7, where the burning of such incense—every morning and evening—is commanded as a necessary part of the worship of Jehovah; and see verses 34-36 of the same chapter for the composition of the "incense of spices." The symbolical meaning of the rite is indicated in Rev. viii. 3, 4], and for the continual shewbread, and for the burnt offerings morning and evening, on the sabbaths, and on the new moons, and on the solemn feasts of the Lord our God. This is an ordinance for ever to Israel.

5. And the house which I build is great: for great is our God above all gods.

6. But who is able to build him an house, seeing the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain him? who am I then, that I should build him an house, save only to burn sacrifice before him?

7. Send me now therefore a man cunning to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in iron, and in purple, and crimson, and blue ["Purple, crimson, and blue" would be needed for the hangings of the temple,

which, in this respect, as in others, was conformed to the pattern of the tabernacle (see Exod. xxv. 4; xxvi. 1; etc.), and that can skill to grave with the cunning men that are with me in Judah and in Jerusalem, whom David my father did provide.

8. Send me also cedar trees, fir trees, and algum trees, out of Lebanon: for I know that thy servants can skill to cut timber in Lebanon; and, behold, my servants [see v. 18. Solomon employed 80,000 of his own subjects as woodcutters, who, no doubt, did the coarse work, while the finishing and all the finer work was executed by skilled Phœnicians] shall be with thy servants.

9. Even to prepare me timber in abundance: for the house which I am about to build shall be wonderful great [Literally "great and wonderful" (on the really moderate size of Solomon's temple, see footnote, *post*, p. 174)].

10. And, behold, I will give to thy servants, the hewers that cut timber twenty thousand measures of beaten wheat, and twenty thousand measures of barley, and twenty thousand baths of wine [the barley and the wine are omitted in Kings. *The Speaker's Commentary* gives the opinion of learned commentators explaining the difference in this respect, but holds that it is better to regard the author of Chronicles as filling out the statement which the writer of Kings has given in brief; and to gather from the two passages combined that the return which Solomon made for the timber and the services of the Phœnician workmen consisted of 20,000 cors of wheat, 20,000 cors of barley, \* 20,000 baths of wine, and 20,000 baths of oil, 200 of which (= 20 cors) were of the finest "beaten" oil. The wheat and the fine oil were consumed by the court; the barley, wine, and ordinary oil were applied to the sustenance of the foreign labourers], and twenty thousand baths of oil.

## SOLOMON'S PREPARATIONS.

"And Solomon determined" (v. 1).

LITERALLY: "and Solomon said." The word "said" seems to be quite a small word beside the word "determined," but it is just as good in quality and in music, if we understand it rightly. We have gone backward in the use of words; we try to make up by many words what used to be expressed by one; in this regard, civilisation is not improving, education is enfeebling our expression. In the old time, when

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\* With regard to the relative values of these measures we learn nothing from the Bible, and the data for determining them are both scanty and conflicting. Dr. Angus, in his *Bible Handbook*, gives the following from Arbuthnot's work, as quoted by Horne:—A bath, or ephah, 1 Kings vii. 26; John ii. 6, reduced to English wine measure, was equal to seven gallons, four pints. A homer or kor, Numb. xi. 32; Hos. iii. 2, reduced to English corn measure, was equal to thirty-two pecks.

a man said what he was going to do, he had half done it; he never spoke about it until his mind was made up: now we vapour about what we are going to do, and therefore we seldom do it; our speech has become a variety of the process known as evaporation. In other places, the word rendered "determined" is rendered so as to give energy, full purpose, settled and unchangeable resolution. There was no need for such expression in this case: Solomon was born to do this work. There is no need for the rose to say, Now I am going to be beautiful and fragrant. There is no need for the nightingale to say, Now I have fully made up my mind to be musical and tuneful, and to fill the air with richest expression and melody. The flower was born to bloom, and to throw all its fragrance away in generous donation; the nightingale was made in every bone and feather of it for the sacred singing throat to sing to astonish the world with music. Solomon came into this work naturally, as it were by birth and education. His father could latterly talk about nothing else; the old man nearly built the temple himself, although distinctly told he should not do it; yet he could not let it alone; if he awoke in the night-time it was to consider what the length of the temple should be; and if he suddenly came upon his son Solomon it was to deliver an extra charge as to the building of the holy house. When he wrote to his friends it was to ask for material for the temple. He would speak upon no other subject; when he lay upon his bed for the last time he signed and motioned and talked about the temple that he wanted to build. There is always something we want to do next, and although God has expressly told us that we should not touch the work we cannot keep our hands quite still. We will build in the air if we cannot build on the ground; we will talk, if we cannot actually carve the ivory and prepare the gold. It is infinitely pathetic to watch David in these later hours; he is told that he should not do a thing, and he says, I am sure I will not do it; and then he talks about it, and prepares for it, and offers suggestions respecting it; and if he could get up in the night-time without God seeing him he would in very deed begin to build what he had made up his mind he would not build, because God had told him he should not do it. The wondrous pressure there is upon us! The marvellous bias that our life takes in certain directions which are

forbidden! Would God some understood this a little better! Would God some men would almost try to pray! they might succeed. In one respect it is the hardest, in another it is the easiest of the miracles, but a miracle it is, that a man trained in a mother tongue in his infancy to talk nonsense and frivolity, should actually open his lips in prayer. What greater miracle is there, when it is rightly measured, fully grasped, and really enjoyed? When we say we will build, we ought to have begun to build. The word "determined" is a weak word in comparison with the word "said." A man's word should be his bond; he should not require to speak loudly in order to be believed: when he says in the simplest tone that he has done some miracle of faith, love, service, he should not be required to make oath and say; his word, his whisper should be his oath.

"And Solomon determined to build an house for the name of the Lord, and an house for his kingdom" (v. 1).

That latter expression is not always clearly understood. Solomon built a house for the name of the Lord, and a house for his own residence. That is the prayer in action. This is what true men are always doing. No man can build God's house without building his own at the same time. We have forgotten that immortal inspiring truth,—*"Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."* *"Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine."* No man can give a cup of cold water to a disciple in the name of a disciple without having his reward. Yet we must be on our guard against the subtle play of selfishness even here: for if any man should say he will build his own house by building God's, he will never have a house of his own to live in. There must be no investment of consecration; there must be no folly at the altar. If a man should say he will spend all his life in the church, and let his own house take care of itself, that house will come to ruin. Here we see the play of wisdom; here is the need of sentiment being guarded by discipline: otherwise we shall have life frittered away in an infinite fuss about nothing. Everywhere we must see the wise man; then shall there be a steady preparation,



attention to the perspective of nature and of life, and a response to all those obligations which touch it at every point, and which are intended for its development and education and final consolidation in righteousness. Yet here is the compound action:— Because thou hast asked wisdom and not riches, thou shalt have riches. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you”: therefore, when thou art building my house I will be building thine. We must not have these things taken out eclectically, and set in rows like specimens; we must from all the facts draw the inclusive inference, and that inference must be the basis of our life. God helps those who help him. He never forgets the man who waits in his house; he is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith and labour of love: if you have given him water, he will give you wine; if you have spent a day at his house for his sake, there is no green pasture in all heaven's boundless paradise to which you shall not be welcomed. We never can be before God, greater than God, in gift and eulogy and blessing.

Solomon having begun to build grew in the idea of what was due to God, and he laid down the great principle which underlies all true religious enthusiasm—

“And the house which I build is great” (v. 5).\*

Why is it great? For the sake of vanity, display, ostentation; to make heathen people stare in blankest wonder because of the greatness of thy resources? No—“The house which I build is great: for great is our God.” That is philosophy. He has really now received the wisdom; he talks like a sagacious king; he has

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\* The temple of Solomon was, according to our notions of size, a small building. It was less than one hundred and twenty feet long, and less than thirty-five feet broad; in other words, it was not so large as one of the ordinary parish churches of our own land; much less did it approach to the size of the colossal buildings of Babylon or Egypt. But in Jewish eyes, at the time that it was built, it may have been “great,” that is to say, it may have exceeded the dimensions of any single separate building existing in Palestine up to the time of its erection. It may even have exceeded the size of the buildings which the neighbouring nations had erected to their gods. Ancient worship was mainly in the open air; and temples were viewed as shrines for the Deity and his priests, not as buildings in which worshippers were to congregate. Hence their comparatively small size.—*The Speaker's Commentary.*

seen the reality of things, and how nobly he talks—"the house which I build is great: for great is our God above all gods." That is the explanation of all honest enthusiasm. A volume is needed here, rather than a suggestion:—The house which I build is great; for great is our God: the sacrifice which I offer is great; for great is the God to whom it is offered: the consecration is great; for great is the cross: the missionary toil and effort is great; for great is the love of God which it represents. The religious must always be greater than the material, and must account for the material. However stupendous the temple, we must write upon its portals, Here is One greater than the temple. However magnificent the oblation we lay upon the altar, we should say, The fire that burns it, in every spark, is greater than any jewel we have laid upon the altar to be consumed. Here is a rational consecration. Why do you build your little hut? Because you have a little God. If the hut is all you can build, if it is the measure of your resources, and if all the while you are saying concerning it, Would God it were ten thousand times better than it is! then it shall be as acceptable as was the temple of Solomon. But if you are seeking to evade sacrifice by the plea that God needs not any effort of yours, or is not pleased with any expenditure or display of yours, then renounce your Christian name and preface your surname by the word Iscariot. Let us have no lying in the sanctuary! Let us go out rather into the broad wilderness in the night-time, and babble our lies to the careless winds,—but do not let us tell lies in the house of God! How often has the Christian cause suffered in the village, in the little town, because some man has said he is opposed to display. He is not opposed to the display of his selfishness, he is opposed to the display of some other man's unselfishness. Solomon here must be regarded as the wise man. "The house which I build is great: for great is our God above all gods." Our theology determines our architecture. Our theology determines our expenditure. Search in the garden for a flower for Christ—which will you bring?—the one you can spare the best? Never! He stands there waiting the flower. How your eyes quicken into new expression! What eagerness there is in your whole gait and posture! How you turn the flowers over, so to say, that you may gather the loveliest and the best! and how on the road to

him you pray God that even yet it may grow into some fairer loveliness, and be charged with some more heavenly fragrance.

**Let us take another view of this verse.**

Solomon's conception of his work was great and worthy—"And the house which I build is great"—Why? "For [because] great is our God." Here is more than a local incident; here indeed is the whole philosophy of Christian service. A great religion means a great humanity; a great God means a great worship; a great faith means a great consecration. Solomon's temple therefore was an embodied theology; it was no fancy work, the creation of dainty fingers, meant merely to please an eye that hungered for beauty. Solomon was not gratifying an æsthetic taste when he sent for a man cunning to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in iron, and in purple and crimson and blue; or when he sent for cedar trees, fir trees, and algum trees out of Lebanon: his æstheticism, as we should say in modern phrase, was but an aspect of his theology. The sweet incense was not for a pampered nostril; the ceiling panelled with fir was not merely a picture to look upon; and the gold of Parvaim was not a mere display of wealth, a merely ostentatious show of civic plate. When the house was garnished with precious stones for beauty, and the beams overlaid with gold, and the walls were engraved with cherubims whose wings all but moved, and when the images of the cherubims outstretched their wings one towards the other, and when Jachin and Boaz were reared before the temple, there was but one meaning, one interpretation: so also with the chain, the altar, the mercy seat, the myriad oxen, the ten lavers, the ten candlesticks of gold, the pomegranates, and all the founders' work cast in the clay ground between Succoth and Zeredathah, there was but one purpose, one thought, one answer—the house is great, because the God it is meant for is great. We have forgotten the reason, and therefore we have descended to commonplace—any hut will do for God! This enables us to get rid of a plea that is often adopted by an idle sentimentalism, to the effect that any house, how frail and unpretending soever, will do for divine worship: God does not look for finery; any place, however simple, and however poor, and however small, will do to worship in. So it will, if it be all that the worshippers

can offer; then the offering shall be as the widow's mites, and as the cup of cold water; the gift shall be glorified by the receiver: but where it is the fault of idleness, indifference, avarice, coldness of heart, worldliness, a misgiving faith, it will be as a house without light, a skeleton unblessed and rejected. God will judge between poverty that wants to give, and wealth that wants to withhold. Solomon's policy in temple building was rational. Solomon had a great conception of God, so he, having an abundance of resources, would build no mean house for him. The king of one nation will not receive the monarch of another in a common meeting room, but will have it decorated and enriched, and the metropolis of his country shall yield treasure and beauty, that the eye of the visiting monarch may be delighted with things pleasant to behold. England is not affronted because a foreign Court prepares sumptuously to receive England's Queen but for a moment's interview. There is a fitness in all things. God will meet us under the plainest roof, if it is all we can supply; he will make it beautiful; but if we say, "Any place will do for God," you may make the appointment but he will not be there.

Then Solomon feels that he has begun to do the impossible. We never come to our best selves until we come to this kind of madness. So long as we work easily within our hand-reach we are doing nothing: there must come upon us persuasions that we have undertaken a madman's work if we are to rise to the dignity of our vocation; we must feel that any house we can build is utterly unworthy of the guest who is to be asked to accept the unworthy hospitality.

"Who is able to build him an house, seeing the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain him?" (v. 6).

The man who has that conception will build a house sooner or later; he is under the influence of the right degree and quality of inspiration; he does not come pompously forth from his throne, saying, I will do this with the ease of a king: when he looks upon his wealth he sees only its poverty; when he counts his weapons he counts but so many broken straws. Who can do it? Yet even here Solomon is as wise as ever, for he says, All I can do is to burn sacrifices before him—"save only to burn sacrifice before

him : " it will only be a little useful place after all : when my father and the allied kings and myself and my counsellors have done all that lies in our power, it will simply come to a place to burn sacrifice in. Woe be unto us when we think the house is greater than the God. Yet in this "only," we have all we want. Here is the beginning of piety, here is the dawn of worship, here is the daystar that will melt into the noonday glory. We build God a house, and it is only to sing hymns in, but in the singing of a hymn a man may see Christ ; it is only to hear a brother man explain so far as he can, poor soul, what he reads in the infinite word, but when the infirmer expositor is true to his text a light flashes out of it that dims the sun ; it is only a meeting house where we can lay hand to hand in brotherliness and fellowship, and bow our heads in common plaint and cry and prayer. That is enough. We are not to be discouraged because we can only begin : we should be encouraged because we can in reality make some kind of commencement. Blessed is that servant who shall be found trying to make the best of God's house when his Lord cometh. This is but decency and justice, that we should plainly say in most audible words that we have in God's house received benefits which we could not have received in any other place : what upliftings of heart, what sudden illuminations of mind, what calls from the spirit world ! What a glorious house ! So much so that, amid much frivolity and much merchandise that ends in nothing, we have come back after all to our earliest memories, and men who have fought the world's battles and won them have asked in the eleventh hour of their existence to have sung to them the little hymns which they sung in the nursery. Thus we come home, thus we come back to the starting-point ; we begin with the cradle, and we end with it. We are born into some other world, not at the point of our deceptive illusory greatness, but at the point of our childlikeness when we have little and know how little it is. Let the house of God make this claim for itself, and nothing can destroy it. We do not come to God's house for new revelations, for intellectual excitements and entertainments ; we come to it—save only to burn incense or sacrifice, save only to confess sin, save only to look at the cross, save only to begin our lesson, save only to rehearse our lesson with a view to its more perfect utterance elsewhere : but it is

enough, it is a line to start with. No man can dislodge you out of your simplicity. When your faith becomes a metaphysical puzzle some controversialist may break through and steal it: when it is a sweet rest on Christ, a child's trust in God, moth and rust cannot corrupt, and thieves cannot break through and steal. If we claim too much for the house of God our claim may be disputed and finally extinguished; but if we accept the sanctuary as but a beginning, any temple we can build here as but a doorway into the true temple, no man can take from us our heritage.

Then Solomon falls back and says the best is but poor—

“But who is able to build him an house, seeing the heaven and heaven of heavens \* cannot contain him? who am I then, that I should build him an house” (v. 6).

That is not despair; that is the beginning of greater strength. Solomon once more shows the true wisdom when he says, “save only to burn sacrifice before him”; that is the little I can do, and that I am prepared to do; when the whole house is set up, all I can do is to burn the little incense; I would do more if I could, I would sing like an angel, I would be hospitable as God himself; I would see all mysteries, and solve all problems, and reveal the kingdom to all who wish to see it; but at present I am the victim of limitation, and my whole function comes to incense- or sacrifice-burning: but that little I will do; I shall be here early in the morning and late at night and all the time between; this altar shall smoke with an offering to God. Let us do the little we can do. Our best religious worship here is but a hint:

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\* By the sentence, the heaven and heaven of heavens, that is, the heaven in its most extended compass, cannot contain God, Solomon strikes down all rationalistic assertions that the Israelites imagined Jchovah to be only a finite national god. The infinitude and supramundane exaltation of God cannot be more clearly and strongly expressed than it is in these words. That, however, Solomon was addicted to no abstract idealism is sufficiently apparent from this, that he unites this consciousness of the infinite exaltation of God with the firm belief of his real presence in the temple. The true God is not merely infinitely exalted above the world, has not only his throne in heaven (1 Kings viii. 34, 36, 39; Ps. ii. 4; xi. 4; ciii. 19; Isa. lxvi. 1; Amos ix. 6), he is also present on the earth (Deut. iv. 39), has chosen the temple for the dwelling place of his name in Israel, from which he hears the prayers of his people.—KEIL.

but therein is not only its littleness but its significance. When a man stumbles in prayer, and proceeds in prayer, notwithstanding all stumbling, he means by that effort—Some day I will pray. When a man lays down a religious dogma and says, It is badly expressed; now I have written it I do not like it, because it does not tell one ten-thousandth part of what is in my heart, yet that is the only symbol I can think of or invent or create; well then, let it stand. God will take its meaning, not its literary totality. Looking at it, he will say, It is an emblem, a type, a symbol, a hint, an algebraic sign, pointing towards the unknown and the present impossible. Do what you can, and God will do the rest.

Solomon can do everything himself, we should imagine, because he is so great a man. Probably there never was so great a king in his time and within the world as known to him. Solomon therefore will begin, continue, and end, and make all things according to his own will without the assistance of any one. So we should say, but in so saying we talk foolishly.

“Send me now therefore a man”\* (v. 7).

What, king Solomon wanting a man! Why does he not build the temple himself? No temple should be built by any one man. Blessed be God, everything that is worth doing is done by co-operation, by acknowledged reciprocity of labour. Your breakfast-table was not spread by yourself, although it could not have been spread without you. Thank God there are no mere monographs in revelation. Sometimes we may almost bless God that we cannot identify the authorship of some books in the Bible. It is better that many hands should have written the Book than that some brilliant author should have retired into immortality on the ground of his being the only genius that could have written so marvellous a volume. We do not read Hamlet because William Shakespeare wrote it; we need not care whether Bacon or Shakespeare wrote it: there it is. No one man could have

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\* Solomon, in this his first embassy to Tyre, made an express request for a cunning artificer to be sent him—a request which king Hiram readily granted (see vv. 13, 14). The works of art and instruments prepared by this artificer are described in chap. iv. 11-16.

written what Shakespeare is said to have written. Thank God we are not yet permitted to see omniscience gathered up and focalised in any one genius. All good books are rich with quotations, sometimes acknowledged, and sometimes not acknowledged because unconscious. Every man has a hundred men in him. One queen boasted that she carried the blood of a hundred kings. Solomon therefore sends to Hiram king of Tyre, saying, "Send me now therefore a man." Has Tyre to help Jerusalem? Has the Gentile to help the Jew? Has the Englishman to feed at a table on which the Chinaman has laid something? Are our houses curtained and draped by foreign countries? Wondrous is this thought, that no one land is absolutely complete in itself: we still need the sea; we cannot get rid of ships,—“we will cut wood out of Lebanon, as much as thou shalt need: and we will bring it to thee in flotes by sea to Joppa; and thou shalt carry it up to Jerusalem.” We are not permitted to enjoy the narrow parochial comfort of doing everything for ourselves. When the man comes from Tyre he will be as much a king as Solomon; not nominally, but in the cunning of his fingers, in the penetration of his eye, in his knowledge of brass and iron, and purple and crimson and blue, and in his skill to grave things of beauty on facets of hardness. Every man has his own kingship. Every man has something that no other man has. A recognition of this fact, and a proper use of all its suggestions, would create for us a democracy hard to distinguish from a theocracy, for each man would say to his brother, “What hast thou that thou hast not received?” and each man would say for himself, “By the grace of God I am what I am.”



## PRAYER.

**THE LORD** is in his holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before him. Because thou art holy we are afraid ; because thou art love we take heart again ; through thy love we will advance to thy holiness. We have no answer to thy claim, we have no defence of ourselves against thy righteousness ; but when thou dost bend thyself in tender love, when we feel thy tears drop upon us in pity, we begin to feel that even we, though chief of sinners, may be pardoned at the cross of Christ ; then the day dawns, then the summer wind breathes upon us, and then we feel all heaven coming down with welcomes and assurances of infinite salvation and defence. Such experience we would now enjoy ; we would feel that the temple of God is not made of common clay, that in it there is an altar, and that on the altar there is an ark of the covenant that speaks not of law only, but of grace and mercy, and before that mercy seat we fall, crying, God be merciful unto us sinners. Thy mercy is great, it extendeth over all thy works, it endureth for ever, it becomes tender mercy by long uses and great endurances, and thy kindness becomes loving kindness, the very bloom and fragrance of love : may we enter into the sanctuary of thine heart, and find rest there, having entered by the living door, the living Christ. How precious are thy thoughts unto us ! they are not of the earth earthy ; they fill all heaven, they reveal infinity, they dwell upon the sublimities of the eternal state, and whilst we follow thy thoughts we are lifted up in noblest elevation, and forgetting earth and time and space we see heaven opened, and the whole creation gathered in worship around the feet of Christ. Then thou dost permit us to return from these great sights of glory that we may do a good day's work upon the earth, helping the helpless, leading the blind, blessing those who have none to speak to them the words of comfort ; yea, thou dost permit us to tell somewhat of the glory we have seen. We speak of the risen Christ, the interceding Son of God, the blessed one who is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him. Such has been our elevation, such the clearing of our vision, that we hesitate not to say that we have seen the Son of God and have been transfigured by his likeness. Thou knowest the weariness of earth, the littleness of the cage in which we now work ; thou knowest the limitation of our faculties, and the severity of our discipline, thou knowest our inexperience and infirmity, and thou hast measured all things accordingly, so that the little child may be in thy Church, so that the feeblest voice may contribute some tone to the heightening of thy praise, so that the weakest believer may prove his trust by clinging most closely to the eternal Saviour. Thus thou hast set among the days of time one glad day, resurrection morning, the very zenith and glory of time ; may we enter into its spirit, and be glad : may we feel upon us its sacred

genius, and dwell in triumph, scorning all fear and danger, and looking upon loss as gain, and upon pain as the guarantee of blessing. Thus let thy miracles be multiplied day by day; in our delightful experience may we, finding our centre of rest and trust in the cross of Christ, enjoy the liberty of the universe. Amen.

## 2 Chronicles iii. 1-17.

1. Then Solomon began to build \* the house of the Lord at Jerusalem in mount Moriah, where the Lord appeared unto David his father [rather, "which was shown to David his father"], in the place that David had prepared in the threshing-floor of Ornan [or, Araunah. See 2 Sam. xxiv. 18; 1 Chron. xxi. 18] the Jebusite.

2. And he began to build in the second day [omit "day;" many commentators would also omit "in the second." The verse would then run thus: "And he began to build in the second month in the fourth year of his reign" (comp. 1 Kings vi. 1)] of the second month, in the fourth year of his reign.

3. ¶ Now these are the things wherein Solomon was instructed [*Heb.* founded] for the building of the house of God" [The passage should be thus translated: "Now this is the ground-plan of Solomon for the building of the house of God. The length by cubits after the first measure was threescore cubits, and the breadth twenty cubits.

4. And the porch that was in the front of the house, the length of it was according to the breadth of the house, twenty cubits, and the height was an hundred and twenty [This differs considerably from 1 Kings vi. 2. The true reading is, beyond any reasonable doubt: "And the height was twenty cubits"]: and he overlaid it within with pure gold.

5. And the greater house [*i.e.*, the holy place, or main chamber of the temple, intervening between the porch and the holy of holies] he ceiled with fir tree [rather, "he covered" or "lined." The reference is not to the ceiling, which was entirely of wood, but to the walls and floor, which were of stone, with a covering of planks (see 1 Kings vi. 15-18)], which he overlaid with fine gold, and set thereon palm trees and chains. [The ornamentation of the temple walls with palm trees is noticed in 1 Kings vi. 29. "Chains" are not there mentioned.]

6. And he garnished [*Heb.* covered] the house with precious stones for beauty: and the gold was gold of Parvaim [This word does not occur elsewhere in Scripture. It has generally been taken for the name of a place; but what place is quite uncertain].

7. He overlaid also the house [still the holy place, or great chamber of the temple], the beams, the posts, and the walls thereof, and the doors thereof, with gold: and graved cherubims on the walls.

8. And he made the most holy house, the length whereof was according to

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\* The foundation of the temple was laid in the fourth year of the reign of Solomon, in the month Siv, being the third month of the year 1012 before Christ, 480 years after the departure from Egypt; and it took seven years and a half in building, being completed in the month Bul, the eighth month of the eleventh year of Solomon's reign.

the breadth of the house, twenty cubits, and the breadth thereof twenty cubits: and he overlaid it with fine gold, amounting to six hundred talents.

9. And the weight of the nails was fifty shekels of gold. And he overlaid the upper chambers with gold.

10. And in the most holy house he made two cherubims of image [or, as some think, of movable] work, and overlaid them with gold.

11. ¶ And the wings of the cherubims [comp. 1 Kings vi. 24-27] were twenty cubits long: one wing of the one cherub was five cubits, reaching to the wall of the house: and the other wing was likewise five cubits, reaching to the wing of the other cherub.

12. And one wing of other cherub was five cubits, reaching to the wall of the house: and the other wing was five cubits also, joining to the wing of the other cherub.

13. The wings of these cherubims spread themselves forth twenty cubits: and they stood on their feet, and their faces were inward [Literally, "their faces were toward the house." Instead of looking towards one another, with heads bent downward over the mercy-seat, like the cherubs of Moses (Exod. xxxvii. 9), these of Solomon looked out from the sanctuary into the great chamber, here as elsewhere often called *κατ' ἐξοχήν*, "the house."]

14. ¶ And he made the veil [an important addition to the description in Kings, where the veil is not mentioned] of blue, and purple, and crimson [*i.e.*, exactly the same colours as the veil of the tabernacle (Exod. xxvi. 31)], and fine linen, and wrought [Literally, caused to ascend] cherubims thereon.

15. Also he made before the house two pillars of thirty and five cubits high, and the chapter that was on the top of each of them was five cubits.

16. And he made chains, as in the oracle, and put them on the heads of the pillars; and made an hundred pomegranates, and put them on the chains.

17. And he reared [1 Kings vii. 21] up the pillars before the temple, one on the right hand, and the other on the left; and called the name of that on the right hand Jachin ["He shall establish"], and the name of that on the left Boaz ["In it is strength"].

## THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE.

"Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem in mount Moriah, where the Lord appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite.

"And he began to build in the second day of the second month, in the fourth year of his reign" (vv. 1, 2).

WE do not want commonplace diaries. If diaries were commonplace they could be done without; it is because they are special that they acquire their uniqueness and their value. Who could do without memorable days, hours never to be forgotten, occasions that focalise a lifetime, red-letter days? They help us

to live the rest of the time. The week may be barren, exacting, difficult of management, but a sweet Sabbath, a day right royal in its engagements and in its enjoyments, helps us through the six days with the subtlety, the grace, and the comfort of an inspiration. Have we not all had memorable days?—the day when the boy left home, the second day of the second month, in the fifteenth year of his age. He can never know what emptiness he left behind him. The people he left professed to smile, and laughed a glad laugh, but they had a sore time of it after the boy had left. The day when the young man finds his first friend in business, the head that can direct him, the hand strong enough to give him assurance of protection, the voice all strength and music that charmed his fears away, and gave him consciousness of latent possibilities of his own; the day when the young man got his first practical hold of life and business,—how much he made in his first little profit, his introductory return, the very first sovereign he honestly made by his own wits and energy; he never could have another sovereign with so many shillings in it as that,—it was in the second day of the second month, in the twentieth year of his age. He thought he would send it home to be looked at; he imagined that in the little village he had left that sovereign would create quite a sensation. Yet he dare not trust it out of his sight. Six times a day he examined it to feel that it was real metal and no painted gold: for he made it, his labour won it, and he accepts it as an assurance that God will not forsake him. Do not let all days be alike; save yourselves from so running one day into another as to drop the dignity, the accent, and the significance of special occasions. Nor turn these occasions into opportunities for mere sentimentality. There is another boy leaving home, there is another youth wanting a first friend, there is another struggler panting to win the first prize. By the memory of what you did in the second day of the second month, in the twentieth year of your age, stop, and help him who hath no helper.

“Now these are the things wherein Solomon was instructed for the building of the house of God” (v. 3).

The building of the temple is a striking example of life-building. Instead of saying Solomon began to build a temple, say

Solomon began to build a life, and all that he did will fall into its proper place, and every item in the specification will be useful. It is folly to build a temple if you are not building a life. It aggravates the mischief of life to be doing some good things, and leaving the best things undone. Better do nothing, better be a whole fool and absolute, than be so wise in little points as to turn all the rest of life into practical madness. "Now these are the things wherein Solomon was instructed:" literally, Now this is the ground-plan. So many people are building without a ground-plan. It would seem as if they were attempting to perform the impossibility of building from the top; they have no foundations, no great principles, no settled, vital, unchangeable convictions; there is a brick here, and a stone there, and a beam of wood yonder,—but there is no grand scheme, no grasp, no plan approved by architectural experience. "Solomon was instructed." Then Solomon was not a born builder,—that is to say, a man who needed no instruction, no hint, no apprenticeship, in these things. He was a man who began with instruction. Who does not feel that he is wholly independent of education in the matter of life-building? Man often makes himself the victim of a phrase; so he claims the right of private judgment, the right of individual conscience. Noble words when nobly used, when used wisely in the scheme of life; but if made to minister to conceit, to the individualism which is solitude, and to the solitude which is atheistic, then there is no right in the matter from beginning to end, it is vanity, and wind, and folly. A man is none the worse for having his little book of instructions in his pocket when he goes abroad. The book is not a large one in mere superficies, but who can declare in arithmetical numbers its cubical contents? Every line is a volume; every sentence is a time-bill; every proposition is a philosophy. Even Solomon accepted instruction. It is never wise to be beyond a hint, beyond the counsel of experience, or beyond the encouragement of men who have done a great deal of life-building and who know all the difficulties of the situation.

Solomon began well: what wonder if he continue well! He said he would start life with the dowry of wisdom. Then he could never be poor. Men could spend all the stars if they were

sovereigns: they can never spend the inheritance of wisdom; the more you utilise it the more it becomes; it is a kind of bread which grows in the breaking of it, so that having fed five thousand men you have whole basketfuls of fragments to take up, and you perform the arithmetical miracle of having more at the end than you had at the beginning. Give a spendthrift the universe in golden coins, and he will stand at the other end of it a pauper, and will be wholly unable to tell you how he spent the money. Wisdom is wealth. Knowledge is power. To have a real philosophy of life—not an outward mechanism of it, but a vital conception of its meaning and its purpose—is to be really rich. Men should set themselves down and ask some questions:—What is life? How long is it? How much is there of it? At what counter is this gold to be spent? Were men to ask questions so far-reaching and much-involving there would indeed be a revival of religion, because there would be a revival of common-sense, a revival of practical philosophy, a revival of truest wisdom. But men perish for the want of a plan; they do not know where they begin, or in what course they are going. What wonder if experience has written as its proverb, *The chapter of accidents is the Bible of the fool?* No accidents could happen to Solomon, because he started at the right point; accepted the true definition of life, function, and faculty; and walked in the light of wisdom. If it happened that Solomon should ever trifle with that light, conceal it, modify it, despise it, he would go to the devil. No matter though he had built a thousand temples he would land in perdition if he ceased to walk in the ways of wisdom. No man can build himself up to heaven, however many temples he may build: he must build up from within, build up in the matter of conviction, principles, life, character; he must blossom into purity, he must fructify into love; he must breathe himself into heaven by the power and grace of God. Men are not dragged into heaven against their will: they grow in grace and knowledge and liberty, and they are in heaven almost imperceptibly. Let every man take heed how he useth wisdom, and let him take heed especially who imagines that his feet cannot slip.

Sometimes we wish that we had a rehearsal of life; and that

we might come back and begin at the beginning, and walk in the light of experience. Some men have thought to amend Providence in these arrangements ; thus : suppose a man could live until thirty years of age a kind of rehearsal life, trying life, tasting its various cups, walking in its various ways, ascertaining the key or clue to the labyrinth, and then coming back and beginning, so that we might live after the manner dictated and justified by experience. There is no need of it ; there is something better than experience, something infinitely preferable. What is that something ? Revelation. The whole map is laid out ; every man may tell exactly where he is at any moment. If men will close the specification and begin to build after their own invention, what wonder if they should be ashamed of their own architecture and never trust themselves to the roof of their own building ? If men will close the book, and abandon the instructions and play at being God on their own account, what wonder if we should find them next in a swamp ? Life has been lived, right away down to old age. There is nothing unfamiliar in life ; we find it in infancy, in youth, and in manhood ; in business, in literature, in pleasure ; in selfishness, in nobility ; in misanthropy, in philanthropy ; we find it in old age, we find it struggling with death : what more do we want ? All the sea has been marked out, the chart is plainly written—here is a rock, there a reef, yonder a dangerous whirl of water,—if men will leave the chart at home, and throw the compass overboard, who will pity their fate should they be lost at sea ? The Christian claims that the whole map or chart of life is to be found in the Book of God ; and so it is. There is nothing fantastic in the claim. If there were no spiritual philosophy in it, it overflows with common-sense. It is a treasure-house of experience. So there need be no pensive desire for a trial-trip in the ways of life. All the dead say, they will accompany us ; all hell says that it would come with us if it could to prevent our going to that place of torment. Not only living teachers, frail as ourselves, but the innumerable dead,—wise as philosophy, foolish as madness,—all want to go with the young traveller, and to tell him what waters to drink, what food to avoid, what herbs to pluck for healing, what gates to open upon larger spaces for cultivation and ownership. No man needs go the life-road alone.

Every stone is known, every footprint is identified, and the lifting of a hand is foretold with infinite precision. Everything now is in weights and scales and balances and standards, and no man can be at any uncertainty as to the value of a thought or the issue of a volition. Let revelation take the place of rehearsal.

Solomon had a definite purpose in view,—he was building a temple. Definiteness of purpose economises time, enables strength to issue in the noblest accomplishments; want of definiteness means frivolity, extravagance, or selfishness, or narrowness of policy, certainly it means ultimate disappointment and mortification. We cannot all build the same kind of building. Each man is appointed to carry out his own particular work: let each see that he make his calling and election sure. Sometimes we may be working at various points of the same temple. There is a great law of combination and co-operation, so that every man's work should be of no value in itself, but when all the work is brought together and fashioned in its first and its ulterior meaning, then every man has glory or satisfaction in his own particular contribution. Take any instrument; divide its construction into a dozen sections; let each labour according to his own particular skill and experience: let each hold up the part which he has done, and there is no value in any one part: bring them together by a master hand, bring them into accord, then the angel of music will descend to dwell in that tabernacle, to speak through every door and window, and make a wide circle glad with heaven's joy. So we cannot sometimes tell what we are doing. We have to wait until the master brings all the work together; then some who have been working in the dark, hardly knowing what they have been doing, will see that they have been making unconscious contributions to life's organ, to life's temple. A man will have good reason to know what he is doing if he pay attention to Providence. There need not be so much darkness in the ways of life as is often supposed.

**"And in the most holy house he made two cherubims of image work"**  
(v. 10).

That was bold, yet it was necessary. We must paint, we must have pictures; if we cannot have reds and golds and blues



and subtle mixtures of hue, we must have black and white. It is in us that we should have something beautiful to look at. Solomon had graved or painted cherubims.\* Think of painted wings; what mockeries! wings that never stirred, never fluttered, never warmed themselves in the waiting sun. The Church is full of these wings now, painted wings, painted cherubim. We have not these names, but we have other names that we idolize. We have now painted creeds: how astonishingly hideous they look! they are painted on the walls in blue, shaded with guilt,—“I believe in God.” Is that a painted creed? Yes. A painted wing is an intolerable offence to the imagination, but a painted faith, who can bear it? If it stand there as a mere symbol, it may be beautiful; if it mean that what is painted on the wall is painted with blood in the life, let it stand: the eye may help the fancy and the soul; but if our creed be only painted, it is as a painted wing: you will always find it where you left it—a wing that cannot flutter, much less fly, a wing that is useless in every aspect. The poet says—

“An idler is a watch that wants both hands;  
As useless if it goes as when it stands.”

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\* The cherubim over the ark are described only in three places in the Old Testament—Exod. xxv. 18-20; xxxvii. 7-9; 1 Kings vi. 23; 2 Chron. iii. 10-13; and in those great visions of the priestly prophet Ezekiel (Ezek. i. 4-25; x. 1-22) which have determined the imagery of the Apocalypse. In no case is their form distinctly mentioned, unless, by comparison of Ezek. x. 14, 15 with Ezek. i. 10, it may be inferred to have been the form of a winged bull; whence would be naturally derived the golden calves of the idolatry introduced into Israel in the time of Jeroboam. . . . Whatever the cherubim were, it is certain that they were in no sense representations or emblems of Deity, like the winged figures of Assyria or Egypt, with which they have been often compared. They appear to symbolise the great physical forces of the universe, as guided by superhuman angelic intelligence to serve the supreme will of God. Thus, when first mentioned in Scripture (Gen. iv. 24), the cherubim are associated with “the flaming sword, turning every way, to guard the tree of life”; in Psalm xviii. 10, the Lord is said “to ride upon the cherubim,” and “come flying upon the wings of the wind”; in Ezek. i. 10 the four living creatures, or cherubim, sustain the throne of God, and bear it away upon their wings; in Rev. iv. 6-8; v. 8, 9, the same living creatures unite with the elders, representing the Church of redeemed humanity, in worship of the Lord upon his throne; the representation, therefore, of the cherubim in the temple simply expresses the claim of Jehovah, the God of Israel, of such lordship over all creation as is hymned in the seraphic song of Isa. vi. 3.—*ELLICOTT'S Old Testament Commentary.*

So with our painted faiths. If our creed be not in our heart it will be as a millstone round about our neck. We have painted resolutions. They are the gallery which, if it were to be sold at a pound a foot, would make the Church a millionaire. What resolutions the Church has passed—and forgotten!

Solomon having carried forward the temple so far,

“He reared up the pillars before the temple, one on the right hand, and the other on the left; and called the name of that on the right hand Jachin, and the name of that on the left Boaz”\* (v. 17).

There is wonderful suggestion of strength in a pillar. What dignity, too, that straight line has! Who can look at a pillar and be unmoved? To some blind eyes it is nothing, but to those whose eyes are in their heads, what is signified by its uprightness, its solidity, its obvious utility, its preparedness to stand there and take the risks of the building upon it? Mr. Ruskin says that

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\* There are no features connected with the temple of Solomon which have given rise to so much controversy, or been so difficult to explain, as the form of the two pillars of brass which were set up in the porch of the house. It has even been supposed that they were not pillars in the ordinary sense of the term, but obelisks: for this, however, there does not appear to be any authority. The porch was thirty feet in width, and a roof of that extent, even if composed of a wooden beam, would not only look painfully weak without some support, but, in fact, almost impossible to construct with the imperfect science of these days. Another difficulty arises from the fact that the Book of Chronicles nearly doubles the dimensions given in Kings; but this arises from the systematic reduplication of the height which misled Josephus; and if we assume the temple to have been sixty cubits high, the height of the pillars, as given in the Book of Chronicles, would be appropriate to support the roof of its porch, as those in Kings are the proper height for a temple thirty cubits high, which there is every reason to believe was the true dimension. According to 1 Kings vii. 15, *et seq.*, the pillars were eighteen cubits high and twelve in circumference, with capitals five cubits in height. Above this was (v. 19) another member, called also chapter of lily-work, four cubits in height, but which from the second mention of it in verse 22 seems more probably to have been an entablature, which is necessary to complete the order. As these members make out twenty-seven cubits, leaving three cubits or four and half feet for the slope of the roof, the whole design seems reasonable and proper. If this conjecture is correct, we have no great difficulty in suggesting that the lily-work must have been something like the Persepolitan cornice, which is probably nearer in style to that of the buildings at Jerusalem than anything else we know of.—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible.*

not only must a pillar be strong, it must look strong. That gives men confidence in a public building. A pillar an inch in diameter might be perfectly sufficient for its work, but it does not look sufficient. All God's building is manifestly established, strong, solid; the very gossamer which God weaves is more enduring than a plate of steel. "The foundation of the Lord standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his." And yet on the top of the pillars we find lily-work, little tufts of beauty; so that we must not only have utility, but decoration. Beauty has a great part to play in the ministry of life. Little flowers come and go, but they always come as gospels, and leave behind them a sense of benediction. So it is in great character. Men may be too severe in their righteousness. They may be of that quality which men like to admire through a telescope, but which no little child would ever come near were there any other road to fly away by. Add to your faith until you reach brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness add charity—a great pillar, with a capital of beauty. We cannot live upon severity, we cannot feast upon righteousness; and we cannot live without truth and without uprightness. In Christ we find strength and beauty.

Solomon did one thing which is of infinite significance,—Solomon having finished his building brought up the ark. It was a new building, but it was an old ark. You cannot make two arks. Some things are done once for all. So in life we may have new situations, but the old truth; new churches, but the old Bible. No man may publish a supplement to the Bible: he may plant its acorns, and grow them into oaks; he may sow flowers, and grow them into new paradises of beauty; but a new temple with a new Bible would be an intolerable novelty—it would be too new. See Solomon's temple, which he spoke of in terms that to our modern conceptions of building are almost fabulous, but see within that magical fabric the old ark—the ark that had seen the wilderness and seen the battle, and gone through all the varieties of an eventful fortune; yet there it stood, still the treasure-house of the heart, still the light of the Church, still the security of the spiritual kingdom upon the earth. But even here we find encouragement to persevere, for even here

we may have novelty and antiquity—a new head-dress, but the old philosophies inhabiting the brain, and taking possession and dominion of the soul and ruling it with gentle sway. We may have a new house, larger than the last by many a room, even by story upon story, for our last house was a little one, and our present house is an ample habitation, the one a habitaculum, the other a palace, but in both the old Bible, the old ark, the old commandments, the old mercy-seat. If you had encouragement to proceed, you could build elaborately, and prove your earnestness by your expenditure. Solomon so proved his enthusiasm. He kept back nothing. And he sent to heathen nations to send in all they could gather. But he never sent to them to furnish him with an ark; he never said, If you can find me a new altar, a new God, a new faith, I should be obliged to you. The temple was nothing until the ark was put into it: the church is nothing until the Bible is read in it: then every stone is consecrated, the roof is a sky. So it must be in all life; we must have wisdom to start with, instruction to proceed with, enthusiasm attested by expenditure, strength and beauty, establishment and direction, and within all our novelties we must have the eternal, the unchangeable ark, the verity that submits to no modification, the law that grows into love, the righteousness clothed with garments of mercy. Let men who have hitherto been acting the part that is foolish take up the policy that is wise. Have a programme or ground-plan of life, a brief creed and yet an infinite faith: having some things that cannot be exchanged for gold, and compared with which rubies would be worthless dust. What will the end be of a man who adopts this course? The end will be a living temple, a divine ark,—music, peace, joy, infinite contentment.

## PRAYER.

WE have not come to the mount that might be touched and that burned with fire, but we have come unto mount Zion, the city of the living God, and unto the blood of Jesus. By that holy sacrifice we have all things that are good, the nourishment of our soul, and the education of all our faculties, and our preparation for all things yet to come. Without the cross we have nothing; with thy cross, thou Son of God, we have all things, and we abound. We know that if God spared not his only begotten Son, there was nothing he would not give; no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. We do not accept the cross as the end of God's gifts, but as the seal and pledge of all; because he gave Christ, he will give all things: because Christ died for us, he rose again: if he had died otherwise, he would not have known the resurrection; but now, thou blessed Son of Man, thou art our Priest, our Intercessor, our Advocate and Comforter; thou art able to save unto the uttermost; thine is not a partial power, thou dost possess the resources of almightiness, we are safe in the arms of Christ; no man should be able to pluck the flock out of the Father's hand, for in that hand is all the mystery of omnipotence. So we rest in these sweet doctrines, we abide in the sanctuary of these eternal facts; no storm can reach us, no enemy can expel us from the asylum of the divine protection. We abide with Christ, Christ abides with us; he turns the twilight into noonday, and noonday he increases sevenfold. Thou hast kept the good wine until now; we have never tasted the best which thou hast to give, thou hast always something more, something better, something larger, and towards this fuller possession thou art calling us by every bright event of thy providence, and by every pathetic strain of thy cross: thou hast kept us all these years; there is not a moment that is not a jewel given to us by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Forbid that we should become so familiar with the goodness as to be indifferent to it; may thy mercy be a daily surprise, may the tenderness of the living and loving God amaze us by an unexpected revelation. Thus may we live in sweet excitement, in well-controlled rapture, in that elevation of soul which is the best preparation for the service of others. Enrich us with all wisdom; give us enlargement and penetration of understanding; help thy Church so to read the signs of the times as to know what Israel ought to do, and when thy Church knows its duty may it throw away all fear and selfish calculation, and with the courage of righteousness go forth under the banners of God. For all family life and love and comfort we bless thee; for the laughter of children, for the merriment that knows no anxiety, for all the hope and cheer and gladness of household song, for the table spread in the wilderness, for

the cup which we have not yet exhausted, we bless the Lord with a warm heart and a loud voice: thou hast filled the right hand with plentifulness, and in our left hand is abundance, and on our head is the diadem of grace. Blessing and honour and glory and power and thanksgiving, louder than the roar of seas be unto the living Father, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, for all his compassion and all his protection. Give the old man to feel that in Christ there is no old age that is not the beginning of youth, and give the least child to feel that he is in a world that is warmed by the sun of heavenly love. Enter our sick-chambers, and they shall become disinfected; look upon our dying, and they shall live; smile upon our ill-understood grief, and it shall break forth into dimples of laughter and joy. Be we all holy men, all noble institutions, all blessed endeavours and enterprises to enlarge the illumination of the world and hasten its reconciliation to God. Thus may we ever be in God's temple because we are ever at Christ's cross. Amen.

## 2 Chronicles iv.

1. Moreover he made an altar [the place of this altar was in the great court, as is evident from 2 Chron. vi. 12, 13] of brass, twenty cubits the length thereof, and twenty cubits the breadth thereof, and ten cubits the height thereof.

2. ¶ Also he made a molten sea [a gigantic laver for the ablution of the priests, corresponding to the laver of brass in the tabernacle (Exod. xxx. 18-21; xxxviii. 8)] of ten cubits from brim to brim, round in compass, and five cubits the height thereof; and a line of thirty cubits did compass it round about.

3. And under it was the similitude of oxen [for "oxen" we find in 1 Kings vii. 24, "knops" or "gourds." It is evident that the one word may easily have been mistaken for the other], which did compass it round about: ten in a cubit, compassing the sea round about. Two rows of oxen were cast, when it was cast.

4. It stood upon twelve oxen, three looking towards the north, and three looking towards the west, and three looking towards the south, and three looking towards the east: and the sea was set above upon them, and all their hinder parts were inward.

5. And the thickness of it was an handbreadth, and the brim of it like the work of the brim of a cup, with flowers of lilies [or, like a lily flower]; and it received and held three thousand baths.

6. ¶ He made also ten lavers [according to 1 Kings vii. 38, these stood upon ten brazen stands, *i.e.*, chests provided with carriage wheels. These stands, the artistic work on which is circumstantially described in 1 Kings vii. 27-37, are omitted in the Chronicle, because they are merely subordin to parts of the lavers], and put five on the right hand, and five on the left, to wash in them: such things as they offered for the burnt offering they washed in them; but the sea was for the priests to wash in.

7. And he made ten candlesticks [comp. 1 Kings vii. 49. Whether these ten candlesticks were to supersede the one seven-lighted candlestick made for the tabernacle (Exod. xxv. 31-40; xxxvii. 17-26), or were to be used in addition to it, we are not told. The latter supposition is, however, far

more probable] of gold according to their form [rather, "after their manner," an abbreviated phrase intended to express what is more fully stated in verse 20—"that they should burn *after the manner* before the oracle." There is no allusion to the shape of the candlesticks], and set them in the temple, five on the right hand, and five on the left.

8. He made also ten tables, and placed them in the temple, five on the right side, and five on the left. And he made an hundred basons of gold.

9. ¶ Furthermore he made the court of the priests, and the great court, and doors for the court, and overlaid the doors of them with brass.

10. And he set the sea on the right side of the east end, over against the south.

11. And Hiram made the pots, and the shovels, and the basons [or, bowls]. And Hiram finished [*Heb.* finished to make] the work that he was to make for king Solomon for the house of God;

12. To wit, the two pillars, and the pommels, and the chapters which were on the top of the two pillars, and the two wreaths to cover the two pommels of the chapters which were on the top of the pillars;

13. And four hundred pomegranates on the two wreaths; two rows of pomegranates on each wreath, to cover the two pommels of the chapters which were upon the [*Heb.* upon the face of the] pillars.

14. He made also bases, and lavers [or, cauldrons] made he upon the bases;

15. One sea, and twelve oxen under it.

16. The pots also, and the shovels, and the fleshhooks\* and all their instruments, did Hiram his father [rather, "Hiram his master-workman"] make to king Solomon for the house of the Lord of bright brass.

17. In the plain of Jordan did the king cast them, in the clay ground between Succoth and Zeredathah.

18. Thus Solomon made all these vessels in great abundance: for the weight of the brass could not be found out.

19. ¶ And Solomon made all the vessels that were for the house of God, the golden altar also, and the tables whereon the shewbread was set;

20. Moreover the candlesticks with their lamps, that they should burn after the manner [*i.e.*, "according to the ordinary custom." The law had commanded the burning of a light continually before the vail of the Holy of Holies (Exod. xxvii. 20, 21; Lev. xxiv. 2, 3); and the ordinance had, it appears, been constantly observed] before the oracle, of pure gold;

21. And the flowers, and the lamps, and the tongs [parts of the candlestick mentioned in Exod. xxv. 31-37, 38; the "flowers" being the ornaments of the stem and branches, the "lamps" being the seven lights, and the "tongs" being used for trimming], made he of gold, and that perfect gold;

22. And the snuffers, and the basons, and the spoons, and the censers, of pure gold: and the entry of the house, the inner doors thereof for the most holy place, and the doors of the house of the temple, were of gold.

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\* In v. 11 and in 1 Kings vii. 45, we have "basons" instead of fleshhooks. The Hebrew words are nearly alike, and one or the other is probably a corrupt reading.

## SOLOMON'S SPECIFICATIONS.

SURELY Solomon is doing something? There is a great rush of business, there is a marvellous outline of a specification in this chapter. What a programme it is, taking it altogether, and in the contextual portions; something important must be doing now, something indispensable: kings are busy, princes are bending their necks, people of all statures and ages and faculties are on the alert. "Send me also cedar trees, fir trees, and algum trees, out of Lebanon. . . prepare me timber in abundance: for the house which I am about to build shall be wonderful great." What a host of men! Threescore and ten thousand of them bearers of burdens, and fourscore thousand hewers in the mountain, and three thousand six hundred overseers to set the people at work. Nothing was pinched, nothing was begrudged. The porch was overlaid with pure gold, the greater house was ceiled with fir tree, which was overlaid with fine gold, and thereon were set palm trees and chains; and the house was garnished with precious stones for beauty: and the gold was gold of Parvaim. The house, the beams, the posts, the walls, the doors were overlaid with gold, and on the walls cherubims were graved.

The question we have to ask after reading all this table of luxury is, What does it amount to? That is the subject. What is the use of it all? This is not a merely or roughly utilitarian question; it is a high spiritual inquiry. Nor is the interrogation limited to the house that Solomon built; it applies to the house which every man is building. What is the use of your grandeur? What does it all come to when it is added up and set down in plain utility like an arithmetical statement at the foot? This is an admirable description of many men we know, or of whom we have heard or read: they are all specification. Here is a man who has been five years at Oxford, five years at Edinburgh, five years at Berlin, and he has brought with him innumerable certificates and credentials and assurances that he has passed with success and honour through almost illimitable courses of training. Let us hear him speak. It is well we were told that he had studied at all these universities, for we never should have gathered it from his conversation. Here is a student of æsthetics; a false



colour would kill him ; he understands the relation of one hue to another ; he has been trained to distinguish one tinge from another as if his eye were a jealous microscope. What does it come to outside of colour ? What about his patience, his civility, his chivalry, his courtesy, his sacrifice on behalf of others ? What does it amount to but a painter's specification ? We must have totals, results, positive and beneficial consequences ; else our schools are only helping to extend the veneer, and not the real oak of the world. Here is a man of polish : he would not even call upon a friend except within conventional hours ; nothing would tempt him to pay a visit to his oldest bosom friend without a proper supply of pasteboard and lithography : what does it come to when he must sit up with a dying child, or pinch himself one meal a day that a man in another street may have something for his hunger ? These are penetrating, these are decimating questions ; they hurl down our little card-houses, conventionalities, and æsthetics, and polishes, and certifications, and make us poor indeed, if there be not at the heart of us a Christly polish, a Christly education, a miracle of regeneration and comfort. Take care not to grind the knife all away before you cut a piece of bread with it. What a long time some men have been grinding their knives ! There will be nothing but haft presently ; the blade will have disappeared into or out of the grindstone. What we ought to have from some men when they do come forward ! Should they not have pity upon us and reveal themselves gradually ? Ought they not to pity the gourd, and see that the flash of such lightning as would be emitted by their genius might be dangerous to the frail plant ? What gifts we must have when some men begin to give ! they are going to begin by-and-by.

About all grandeur, about all cedar, and fir and alnum, about all gold of Parvaim, and graved cherubim, and wondrous scholarship, and night and day preparation extending through years, we ask, What is the use of it ? Bring a million bricks into a huge meadow, stack them up, add hundreds of tons of iron, add a mile or two of plate glass, set down colours mixed by the skilled hands of artists : what does it all come to ? It all amounts to a nuisance ; we used to walk through that field until that pile was laid upon it. On the other hand, put the material together, let the architect

lay his mind to the question, and the builder put out his hands, and the glazier do his work, and the artist come to distribute the colours properly, and then out of what was a mere chaotic pile there is shaped a useful home or sacred temple. Get out of your specification ; build something ; do something : better dry a child's tear than lie back half a century in order to get ready to deliver a speech which nobody can understand. When does the decoration become life ? When may we expect those beautiful figures to speak ? Never. The decoration does not make the temple ; the preparation does not make the workman ; he must come out of that, utilising it all and sanctifying it by the grace of God. A man might dress in the robes of the lord chancellor, and actually sit down on the woolsack, and not be a lawyer. This is extremely irritating, that a man cannot by putting on certain robes become learned and influential and reputed as an authority. A fine house cannot make a fine tenant ; a first-class carriage cannot make a first-class traveller ; a man might sit down on a monarch's throne, and not be a sovereign ; he might even look like a king, and be only a clown. Decoration is useless, if it does not express something beyond itself, something spiritual, ideal, transcendental. The picture is nothing if it does not in reality speak, not indeed to the ear of the body, but to the attention of the soul. It is an amusing irony to see some people clothed in purple and fine linen, because there is really no connection between them and their clothes ; we expect them to speak musically, and lo ! their tones fill our mouths as with gravestones. We expect a man to be at least as elegant as his clothes, and when he is not we do not blame the garments ; it is more their misfortune than their fault that they should be where they are. So when we read the specification of temples and palaces we say, What does it amount to ? What is this grandeur worth in helping and blessing the world ? What is civilisation to end in ?

This specification may be taken as a step in the history of civilisation, and according to this outline civilisation probably never reached a higher pitch. Buying and selling luxuries does no general good. That seems to be very singular, but science, reading history, has put that down as a conclusion that cannot be challenged. Specifications of this kind do no good to the

people as a whole. The possession of luxury leads to surfeit. It is on record that at the time of the great French Revolution never was luxury so abundant, never was poverty so extreme. The feast of the great man had no crumbs for the poor man's hunger. The world would never be the richer were half of it turned into ground for the growing of champagne, and were the other half of the world peopled by a thousand men who could consume it all. You never touch the poor through the medium of luxury. You must work upon another line, a line of utility, actual beneficence: through wheat, not through grapes, will you touch the whole world. This is the doctrine of the latest civilisation. Suppose that all over the world men could read and write: what then? Has a man ever asked himself that question seriously? Suppose that all over the world men could play a musical instrument: what then? Suppose that all over the globe men could paint: what then? Suppose that all over the world every man had ten millions of gold a-year: what then? Suppose every man in the world should forget how to walk because he could ride in a chariot of feathers and purple, and be drawn on by six cream-coloured horses: what then? It would be a sad world to live in. There is nothing in civilisation, except as it is controlled, inspired, used by a master's hand for the good of the whole world. I am not sure that every man would be perfectly happy if he could paint a picture; I am not aware that unhappiness is confined to those who cannot read and write. These chapters are parts of a developing civilisation, and we have a right to ask as we pass through them, What is the use of this grandeur? To what purpose will it be turned? What is our education to end in? An educated man who does not turn his education to the benefit of others is an altogether undesirable person. He kills the preacher, because he knows that the man is just educated enough to be able to find fault, and is not sufficiently educated to be able to appreciate. Some persons have been sufficiently trained to be annoyed by the mistakes of other people, but not sufficiently developed to see even in those mistakes the beginning of possible excellences. Herein is that saying true,—

"A little learning is a dangerous thing;  
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring."

What is true of a little learning is true of what may be termed the larger learning, were it not in reality little by its very largeness, because it is not put out to use. You will never know the talent you have until you begin to spend it. Talent grows by expenditure; wealth increases by distribution. When a man keeps his talent and does not use it, the act of unfaithfulness recoils upon himself and assures his position in nothing but in outer darkness. To complete the material we must ascend into the spiritual. All outward civilisation is mockery if it help not towards and if it do not express an inward refinement. It is sad to think how some houses are greater than their occupiers; it is shameful to see a man outshone by his own malagony. A man should always be greater than anything he has. The architect who draws out one specification, should always be able to draw out a much larger one. The great engineer Brunel was asked if there were not impossibilities to engineering, and he said, "There is only one." What is that? "Want of money." Give Brunel money, and he would make a way up to the moon, or try to do it. A man ought never to have a book in his library that does not express a want of the soul. Yet some men order their libraries by the square foot, and have them bound "uniformly." A book should be part of its owner; he should feel himself half naked if any volume were taken from its shelf.

Even Solomon's temple was nothing until it was consecrated; then it became sacred, a touchstone by which men might try their spiritual quality, an entrance gate into heaven. It is the same with all other phases and aspects and uses of life. A man is nothing until he is utilised. How many unfulfilled prophecies there are in human life. A boy has taken all the prizes, he has brought them all home, shaken them out of his lap, and you never hear any more of him. What are his prizes? Reproaches, rebukes: by his prizes he shall be condemned. Another boy is of slower growth, and all he has brought home from school is—himself. But you cannot look at that square head without expecting that by-and-by you will ask, "Where are the nine that took the prizes?" That boy you cannot keep down; he grows; when he is asleep he is growing, and one day he will be king. We must be judged by the result. A man may know

many languages, and never say a word worth hearing in any of them.

What is the use of grandeur, what is the purpose of education, what is the outcome of all this gathering of material? Oh Solomon, oh Hiram, say what meaneth this accumulation of cedar, and fir, and algum, and gold, and colours? and they reply, The meaning is a temple. The temple is built, God accepts it, and therefore the civilisation is justified and crowned. What is the use of your gathered gold? You will want a larger safe. What a glorious idea to have a house that is all safe; the front door iron, and the windows iron, and the roof iron, so that everything within it should be protected. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." Have a hundred banks that grant no passbooks and are utterly without cheque forms: have a hundred families to whom you send a portion whenever you can; they cannot recompense thee, but thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just. Drop thy silver fork as it puts that last lump of luxury into thy gluttonous mouth; sell it, give it to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven. Sacrifice is but a superstition until the heavens accept it by fire. We should only gather that we may scatter. If any man gather the wheat of the world and lock it up in garners and see men starve, his eyes should be torn out.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we believe in thy Son Jesus Christ our only Saviour, infinite in power, and infinite in grace, thine only begotten Son that dwelt in the bosom of the Father. He became flesh, and dwelt among us: and he told us that if we prayed unto thee we should receive answers great, tender, ample. We rest upon his word, we are sure that he who was the truth told us that which is true, and will not change his word, or add to it, or take away from it; we stand upon it, and watch and treasure it. Thy Son told us to ask, and we should receive: what shall we ask? We will simply ask that thy will be done, that is all prayers in one cry. We know not what we need, we only know what we want: but what we want is but the thought of our thoughtlessness, what we need is real. Thou knowest what we need: some need poverty, affliction, bereavement, chastening of pride, rebuke of of vanity; some need comfort, cheer, encouragement, a whispering of love that can revive the heart; some need greater grace; all need more of thy Holy Spirit. What we need do thou give in thy Son's name, for thy Son's sake, and at thy Son's cross. That is the altar at which we pray; it is sprinkled with redeeming blood, it is the mystery of creation, it is the one way to heaven because to pardon and to peace. We pray then, Thy will be done. Make us strong enough to bear the doing of it: it may trouble us much; it may blind us when we are looking at beauty, it may deafen us when we are listening to the voice that charms us most: still, Thy will be done. Thou hast shown thy children great and sore trouble; but each has come out of the cloud or the storm, saying, It was good for me that I was afflicted: before I was afflicted I went astray. Thou hast given some of thy children great power and honour and means of many kinds: may they realise their stewardship, and act as the trustees of Christ. Bless all noble hearts, prosper all noble purposes, send a blight upon all deceit and vanity, and as for all wickedness do thou drive it down to hell. Amen.

## 2 Chronicles v.

1. Thus all the work that Solomon made for the house of the Lord was finished: and Solomon brought in all the things that David his father had dedicated [see 1 Chron. xviii. 8-10, 11; xxii. 3-5, 14-16; xxviii. 14-18; xxix. 2-5. The accumulation was enormous], and the silver, and the gold, and all the instruments, put he among the treasures of the house of God.

2. ¶ Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the chief of the fathers [rather, "the chief of the clans (father-

houses)"] of the children of Israel, unto Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the city of David, which is Zion.

3. Wherefore all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto the king in the feast which was in the seventh month.

4. And all the elders of Israel came; and the Levites took up the ark.

5. And they brought up the ark, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and all the holy vessels that were in the tabernacle, these did the priests and the Levites bring up.

6. Also king Solomon, and all the congregation of Israel that were assembled unto him before the ark, sacrificed [were sacrificing] sheep and oxen, which could not be told nor numbered for multitude.

7. And the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the Lord into his place, to the oracle of the house, into the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubims:

8. For the cherubims spread forth their wings [rather, "and the cherubims were spreading forth wings"] over the place of the ark, and the cherubims covered the ark and the staves thereof above.

9. And they drew out the staves of the ark, that the ends of the staves were seen [rather, "and the staves were so long that the tips of the staves were seen"] from the ark before the oracle; but they were not seen without. And there it is unto this day.

10. There was nothing in the ark save the two tables which Moses put therein at Horeb, when the Lord made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of Egypt.

11. ¶ And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place: (for all the priests that were present [that could be found, those present in Jerusalem at the time] were sanctified [had sanctified or purified themselves, for the purpose of taking part in the ceremony (1 Chron. xv. 12)] and did not then wait by course:

12. Also the Levites which were the singers, all of them of Asaph, of Heman, of Jeduthun, with their sons and their brethren, being arrayed in white linen [comp. 1 Chron. xv. 27], having cymbals and psalteries and harps [These were the proper instruments of the Levites who formed the temple choir (see 1 Chron. xv. 28; xvi. 5; xxv. 1-6)]; while trumpets seem to have been reserved for the priests (see Numb. x. 8; 1 Chron. xv. 24; xvi. 6; 2 Chron. vii. 6; xiii. 12-14)], stood at the east end of the altar, and with them an hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets:)

13. It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one ["And the trumpeters and singers, together as one man, sang with one voice of praise"] to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of musick, and praised the Lord, saying, For he is good [for this common liturgical form see 1 Chron. xvi. 34-41]; for his mercy endureth for ever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord;

14. So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God.

**THE WORK FINISHED.**

"Thus all the work that Solomon made for the house of the Lord was finished" (v. 1).

THAT word "finished" often occurs in the Bible. It would be a profitable exercise for the young, and indeed for persons of any age, to collate the passages in which the word "finished" occurs. Sometimes it points to a very imperfect result; sometimes it does not quite mean what we understand by finishing; and sometimes it seems to exhaust all imagination. In one instance it covers up the universe with darkness, and makes the strongest man as the weakest. Jesus cried, "It is finished." We can finish some things. Whatever we can finish is pitifully worthless. Solomon no sooner put up the temple than he began to take it down. That is always so. We scarcely take the scaffolding away from a new house before the elements begin to eat off the roof. We are scarcely born until we die. The loveliest decoration is conquered by the smoke; yet the smoke is not violent. There are some buildings that are never finished. We never finish our life-building; the life-temple goes up evermore,—let every man take heed how he buildeth. Do not suppose that you can finish your education. In the higher education you only finish that you may begin; you close one book as a pledge of your qualification to open another. How, as boys at school, we used to be discouraged by this process of advancement! Having closed the arithmetic, who was willing with his whole heart to open his algebra? Many persons could have comfortably left school without beginning it at all. But there is always a higher aspect of things to apprehend and apply. The table ends at twelve times twelve, but not multiplication. That is where you got wrong; you made "multiplication-table" into one word, whereas it is two: the table, the finished thing, the square, ended with a kind of rhythmic propriety at twelve times twelve; you could imagine that prosaic poet thinking he had rung quite a chime of bells when that notion came into his head; he thought it was a good point to stop at. But multiplication goes everywhere; it is at home in astronomy as certainly as in agriculture. The table you may have left behind, but not its



interpretations. Even within that table itself all multiplication is found. There is no tree that is not in the seed; there is no multiplication that is not in the table: there is no revelation of God that is not in the Bible; all providence is there, all history, all poetry, all spiritual dreaming, all that the heart can pray for. Heaven dawns in the Bible. So we can never finish reading the word of God. Solomon could finish his temple, but he could not finish the written record; it never ends, or it ends as the days end. How do the days close? To begin again. Each day the sun says as he westers in the golden clouds, not "Farewell," but only "Good-bye: we meet again presently; meanwhile, sleep well!" So with the Bible; when we have read it we want to read it. We can imagine a man who has never begun it not wanting to begin it, but who can imagine a man who is saturated with the spirit of the book that can be patient with any other book? You have read a commentary, say, on the Book of Job; the only way to get over the commentary is to read Job himself. No matter who the commentator may be, when he has finished his little nothings, you have only to go back to the book itself to feel that the man has been only fluttering, not flying. Thus the Bible is its own witness, its own continual prophecy, its own eternal promise. You can never finish love. If you can finish it, you never began it. Love grows. There are some persons who have run out of that passion and sunk into earthliness and coldness. Then they never knew the inspiration of love. It cannot die; it enlarges with the enlarging heart, it mellows with the swiftly adding years, it changes its tone, its voice somewhat; what was once firm, trumpet-like, may sink into hesitation, and experience some oppressiveness of breath, but it is still there, only waiting till heaven's gate fly back, that it may recover its youth and revel in its immortality. Solomon could finish his temple. Then it was not worth beginning, except for temporary purposes. So, we have just seen, he himself regarded it. Once he nearly gave up the whole idea of building it; he said, What can I do? The heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain him. At that point it was one of two things: either surrender of the idea, as men surrender an impossibility; or such an access of inspiration as seemed to touch the very fulness of the power of God.

Another thing that Solomon finished was the furnishing of the ark,—“there was nothing in the ark save”—and after that word comes the only thing that could really fill the ark; that is to say, there was nothing in the little chest but everything—“save the two tables which Moses put therein at Horeb, when the Lord made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of Egypt” (v. 10). “There was nothing save”—that is to say, there was nothing except, and behold the exception is as God himself, for power, righteousness, grace, mercy; for the lid of the chest was the propitiation, the mercy seat, the symbol of the eternal pity. Why not learn this lesson in the development of life? Let us hear some good father talk, and he will give us the music of the passage in the variation of personal experience. Speaking of his boy he says, He has nothing to start the world with save—a good education. That is enough, if the term may be accepted in its full sense,—nothing save a good education, save intelligence and the spirit of learning, which is greater than any learning itself can ever be; nothing save a desire to know, to inquire, to investigate, to accumulate wisdom. That boy will do; let him go; the world will know the step of its conqueror. Why did you say, “nothing save”? Simply because your sordid mind would fix itself upon the paltriest idea in the world, namely, that unless a boy has money he has nothing. When he has money he may be a pauper. Give him a good education; add two more years to it; he will thank you by-and-by; at present he will chafe a little perhaps, because when we are about sixteen to seventeen years of age what can possibly be added to us? If our father took great pains about us he could not add a cubit to our stature. If you gave your boy all the stars of heaven he would get through them and be a pauper at the last. But give him a mind that knows how to use its own faculties, an education that is really broad, vital, generous, sympathetic, and he will come back after his harvesting rich with riches no thief can steal. So the statement may be varied thus: My boy will start the world with nothing save a good character. Then he may be said to have ended the world as well as started it. What is a good character? Not a good appearance, not good clothing, not a polite outfit that can be carried in the hand: but a good character means in its fullest significance, a heart in sympathy with

righteousness, a soul that scorns dishonour, a sense of justice and chivalry that will evermore vindicate itself in the estimation of the noblest judgment. Religiously, if you can add that element, good character means love of God, love of Christ, submission to the rule of God the Holy Ghost; a continual living in the eternal. Does your boy start with nothing save all that? He starts in a way that means honour, highest success, heaven, immortality.

“The house was filled with a cloud,\* even the house of the Lord; so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God” (vv. 13, 14).

Thus are all ministries reduced to insignificance and nothingness by the realised glory of the divine presence. Temples and altars, ritual and song, all come comparatively to nothing, when God himself consciously, almost visibly, appears in his house. What would the temple have been without this “cloud”? Just what the sky would be on a starless night—a great gloom, a tremendous frown. So it is with our life-building. Unless the house of our life is owned by the living God, dwelt in by him, illumined and sanctified by his presence, it comes to nothing, it is an empty house—the emptier because of its very grandeur. Sometimes we can bear a really solitary chamber, we can fill it with images created by fancy; but to be in a grand house, full of nothing but magnificence, without a tuneful voice, without a footfall, without a sympathetic presence,—and the very grandeur becomes an oppression: we had been happier in the wilderness, we might have had the liberty of the open-air, but in such a house

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\* The bright Shekinah of the divine presence, at once cloud and fire—which had been the sign of the presence of God on Sinai (Exod. xxiv. 15-18) and had hallowed the consecration of the tabernacle (Exod. xl. 34, 35)—now similarly descended on the temple, as a sign of its acceptance with God. In the visions of Ezekiel the same glory is seen, first filling the house of the Lord, and then departing from it, as polluted by manifold idolatry (Ezek. x. 4-18). Its return to the restored temple is solemnly promised by Haggai (chap. ii. 7, 9) in distinct reference to the coming of the Messiah; and it is declared that it shall be even greater than in the magnificence of Solomon's temple. The symbol clearly implies a revelation of divine glory, as it is seen, not in the unveiled brightness of heaven, but in the glorious cloud of mystery; through which it must always be seen on earth, and which, indeed, is all that the eye of man can bear to contemplate. Out of that glory comes the only revelation which can be distinct to man—the voice or the word of the Lord (Deut. iv. 12).—*ELLCOTT'S Old Testament Commentary.*

we have imprisonment aggravated by splendour. The furniture does not make the house; it is love that turns the house into a home. What, a great ostentatious life, without real principle, solid conviction, visible apprehension of things infinite and eternal!—say, has any skeleton ever risen from a churchyard more ghastly and hideous than that? Nothing but outside, nothing but leaves, nothing but paint, nothing but elaborate decoration, nothing but a tinted lie! No matter how poor the house is if there be love in it: every chamber is magical, every window looks southward, every bird hovers over it just to bless it with one trill. What if we have surrounded ourselves with an impressive environment, and there be nothing in our souls, of pure love, honest trust, brave endeavour day by day to be better men? It is nothing but vain pomp, rich enough, golden enough, beautiful enough, but an æsthetic falsehood. When a man is all outside what can be done with him? When he is nothing until he has his clothes on, when he is absolutely less than a cipher until he is ringed and jewelled, what is the worth of him in plain figures, in arithmetical symbols? **What does he come to? He comes to nothing.**

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, our joy is that the tabernacle of God is with men upon the earth; it is not far away in the inaccessible heavens; it is here, close at hand, amongst our own houses, making all other habitations, if they will be so made, holy, and doors into heaven. May we understand so much of thy providence as will enable us to see that every place is praying ground, that not in this mount nor yet at Jerusalem shall men worship the Father, but everywhere men, with honest hearts, may address the throne of the heavenly grace. God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. May our hearts hold communion with heaven; may it be easy to us, by reason of reverent familiarity, to pray to the living God through the living Christ, that so we may receive grace to help in time of need, and all mercy for the recovery of our souls from sin. We have heard of the cross of Christ, and we know that thy love was manifested therein as nowhere else; we have seen the dying Son of God, we have heard his expiring cry, we have listened to the appeals of his infinite heart; now may we enter into the mystery of his shed blood, and know the joy of pardon, the rapture of liberty. We have seen somewhat of thy way, and we are glad: we have been touched by the divine power, no longer are we in bondage; we stand before God as free men, having been released by the gracious and mighty power of the Son of God. We commit ourselves to thy tender care; thou knowest what is best for us: we know that we cannot carry all the burden of life, but thou canst reduce the burden, or thou canst increase our strength. Teach us that nothing happens by chance, that we are under the rule and government of a good Father, and that all things are meant for our purification, for our mental enlightenment, for our spiritual refining, and at the end we shall praise thee for processes we could not understand. We would have no will but thine; thou seest to-day, and to-morrow, and the third day, and all time lies nakedly before thy vision: why should we interrupt thy processes, or question thy providence, or kick against the pricks? We will say, God knoweth, God is wise, God is love, God will not suffer anything to befall us to our harm: not our will, but God's, be done. Upon all men let thy blessing rest—upon the old man who is nearing the end of the journey; upon the busy man who is full of plan and enterprise and strenuous endeavour; upon the young man whose life is all passion and enthusiasm and hope; and upon the little child, who lives the blessed life of unconsciousness; upon all estates, classes, and conditions of men let the divine blessing fall like a plentiful rain. This prayer we pray in the Name that is above every name. This weakness of speech we hide in the almightiness of Christ. Amen.

**2 Chronicles vi.****SOLOMON'S DEDICATORY PRAYER.**

"Then said Solomon, The Lord hath said that he would dwell in the thick darkness" ["gloom of clouds" (Exod. **xx.** 21; Deut. iv. 11; Psa. xviii. 9)] (v. 1).

**T**HAT is the true conception of God at a given point in our spiritual education. Clouds and darkness are round about him, righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne: the light is darkness. Thus we are in the Christian sense agnostics. Our brightest thinking hardly amounts to the beginning of dawn. When we are most reverential we are most humble; when we are most perfectly sure that we have hold on God we are also most perfectly confident that no understanding can search him, no mental capacity can hold him; he loves the darkness because he loves us; he wears the darkness as a robe that he may not blind us with excess of light, as the atmosphere is the darkening of the sun. We are indebted to intermediate agencies and actions always, to a kind of natural priestliness and intercession that will not allow us to come face to face with essential glories and essential sublimities. The light dwells in a tent made for it, and comes to us as we are able to bear it. If we cannot see this darkness-covered Father we can see his Son Jesus Christ. The apostle said so plainly: we cannot see God, but we see Jesus: we see the express image of his Person; we see Godhead atmosphered, so to say, to suit our vision and our capacity. Now and then the incarnate God, the eternal Son, flashed upon us his light, and we were for the moment blinded. When we thought we could be familiar with him one outray of his glory made us feel that we were in danger of trespassing. Say not that God dwelleth in thick darkness, or in the gloom of clouds, for the purpose of keeping us away from him; it is rather for the purpose of drawing us to him. Love is subtle, inventive, ever fertile in arrangement, and in the creation of opportunities; and love delights in the mystery of condescension. The stoop of God is the supreme miracle of God. Draw near unto him; he will not confound you by the outshining of his unclouded glory:

come as near the Shekinah as God himself has permitted, and when you are lost in merely intellectual thought about God, go in heart thought to Jesus Christ, and he will make your heart burn within you as he opens to you the Scriptures.

We have watched Solomon building his temple, and we have praised the architecture and have wondered at the lavish expenditure, and have said, Is this the consummation, the whole purpose, the sum-total of the first imagination of the structure? and we have now come to see that the whole house was built to accommodate the glory. Not until the glory cloud filled the temple did it become a house of God. Let this be a lesson to all church-builders. Your painted windows, and gilded columns, and majestic roofs, are nothing until the living Spirit comes into the sanctuary, and lifts it to its true level, invests it with a worthy purpose, fills it with an all-illuminating presence. The house is built for God, and until God comes it is but a structure of calculated matter: when he comes every stone glows and every corner of the house becomes a sacred refuge, and the whole temple becomes as it were part of heaven. Solomon himself became quite a new man after this process. He prayed for wisdom at the outset, and he has verified the answer to prayer by the wonderful structure which he put up. But the blessing did not end in architectural skill; that great proof of the blessing given to Solomon is to be found in the prayer which he prayed at the dedication of the temple. No man could have prayed that prayer without help. This we should have said about it in all honesty if we had found it in Sanscrit; if we had exhumed it out of Indian libraries, it would have been due to the author to have said, You never dreamed that dream; it was a vision of God. Read the prayer from beginning to end, and say if this be not so, How majestic in conception! how beautifully eloquent in expression! how wise, how tender, how patriotic, how philanthropic! how it grows and swells and abounds in all elements of spiritual sympathy! Probably there is no such prayer in all literary records. If ever that prayer be excelled it will be by the Son of God alone, and his excelling of it will be by contrast rather than by comparison. There is not a selfish word in it. It is not a Jew's prayer; it is a man's prayer. The Old Testa-

ment abounds in Jewish prayers, aspirations, and patriotic desires; but now and again a man arises even in the Old Testament who seems to speak all languages—the great cosmopolitan heart. Yet this prayer is Jewish enough. The patriot is here, as well as the suppliant. He remembers the people; he knows their wants; he understands their wandering, weary, restless life, their ambitions that come and go like nightmares; and he prays for them with a right royal apprehension of all their need. But there is also a great world-wide, all-time-including reference in it, which redeems the prayer from being a merely Jewish monologue breathed into the heavens.

“Moreover concerning the stranger,\* which is not of thy people Israel, but is come from a far country for thy great name's sake, and thy mighty hand, and thy stretched out arm; if they come and pray in this house; then hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for; that all people of the earth may know thy name, and fear thee, as doth thy people Israel, and may know that this house which I have built is called by thy name” (vv. 32, 33).

We need not ask whether such a prayer is inspired. Its humanity is its divinity. Who teaches prayers like this? Who is not limited to his own house, his own nation, his own language? How thrilling when a man, by any means—for we will not hold controversy upon pedantic terms—lifts the prayer to a new level and speaks the universal tongue! How wondrous the miracle when one so far away in the darkness of history effected that one touch of nature which makes the whole world kin! The stranger likes to be prayed for. Even an atheistical stranger in a far

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\* Upon this prayer, Keil remarks: Solomon assumes as certain that foreigners will come and worship before Jehovah in his temple; even Moses himself had allowed the foreigners living among the Israelites to offer sacrifice at the temple (Numb. xv. 14, *et seq.*) and the great Name and the arm of the Lord that had manifested itself in deeds of omnipotence, had become known in the times of Moses to the surrounding nations (Exod. xv. 14; xviii. 1; Josh. v. 1). . . . The strong hand and the outstretched arm are connected together as a standing expression for the wondrous manifestations of the divine omnipotence in the guidance of Israel, as in Deut. iv. 34; v. 15, etc. . . . There are no cases on record of the worship of foreigners in connection with Solomon's temple, though there are in connection with the temple built after the captivity (*vide* Josephus, *Ant.* xi. 8, 5, that of Alexander the Great; xii. 2, 5, *et seq.*; that of Ptolemæus Philadelphus; and 2 Macc. iii. 2, 3, that of Seleucus).



country, in an inhospitable climate, might be touched to the quick if he heard some poor soul say as he passed by in weariness—God help him! A cry like that would bring the old home back again, the old mother, the old school-days, the little household prayers. We need these pathetic parentheses in life just to keep the usual level right, to lift it out of commonplace and vulgarity into true novelty, and enrich it with somewhat of heaven's own colour. Any book that cares for the stranger is a good book; any book that speaks a word for little helpless children is an inspired book; any book that undertakes the cause of down-trodden woman, and says "You shall be down-trodden no more, you shall be treated with righteousness and equity, with consideration and tenderness," came from heaven—from the only heaven one would care to go to; a book so charged with solicitude with reference to all human conditions was written by God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost. All the Deity in the universe is concentrated on this holy passion for human souls. We know now whether Solomon's prayer was answered; we know he was enriched with replies from heaven. He flows in his expression like a fountain; he never wearies. His is not the eloquence that becomes stale, the poor surface water that is dried up in sudden evaporation by a hot sun. His eloquence sprang from the rock and represented the fountains of eternity. This is what we mean by answered prayer: we mean an enlarged manhood, an ennobled nature, a purified passion, a sublimated enthusiasm, patriotism expanding into philanthropy. If you bring any other answer to prayer, it must be rejected at the altar. It is an illegitimate reply; some spectre dropped it from a passing cloud; it is not the throb of eternity, it has no relation to the oracle divine. There are answers to prayer that are most detestable—though in very deed they be no answers at all, but mockeries, supposed answers; they have resulted in greater narrowness, intenser bigotry, unholier sectarianism, and wrapping round of the tiny soul with some stolen rag supposed to be a garment let down from heaven. No! Let all honesty say No! Let all wisdom and all justice concur in saying No! God had nothing to do with an answer like that. Show broader charity, nobler philanthropy, greater care for others, sacrificial industry in all the ways of good-doing, then we shall know,

without your so saying, that you have communed with heaven and received an answer from God.

“If they sin against thee, (for there is no man which sinneth not,) . . .” (v. 36).

What marvellous moral penetration is revealed in one little sentence in this prayer! “If they sin against thee”—then comes a parenthesis—“(for there is no man which sinneth not).” All that in a parenthesis! A solemn judgment upon the human world in so many—rather, in so few little words. Solomon has become a theologian, without theological narrowness and bitterness. It was a wonderful thing for a man like Solomon to say. It is a comprehensive judgment. “There is no man which sinneth not”—no king, no potentate, no ruler, no father, no child, no heart that has not its wandering, its aberration, its hunger after evil, its thirst for hell. A wondrous tragedy is this human life; for a long time so plain and simple and fluent, and then suddenly more terrible than a volcano, more cruel than any wild beast of the jungle, more difficult than any perplexity that ever afflicted the human mind. A man who prays so begets our confidence, because we feel he knows human nature. It is thus where the preacher must lay his hold upon public attention—by showing that he has read the human heart, that he knows it in all its trickery, and concealment, and genius of hypocrisy; and that he knows it in all its unconfessed infirmity and bitterness and load of grief. There must be something in word or tone or look which means—That man understands me; he has lived a good deal of his life on a battlefield; he has not studied Christianity at a library window, he has wrestled with evil, and flung the monster. It is thus that the Scriptures lay their gracious hold upon all men; they know the human heart in all its outgoing, in all its purpose, in all its mystery of good and evil, and in this garden of the Lord is a herb for healing, is fruit for hunger, is beauty for fancy, is music that can at once lull the soul and thrill it with momentary passion.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, the vineyard is thine ; all souls are thine ; thou art the one owner. We have nothing that we have not received ; when we look upon our possessions we say, Whose image and superscription is this ? and, lo ! we find thy name there, and thy claim. So thou hast given, and thou mayest take away—Oh, teach us to say, Blessed be the name of the Lord ! Thou hast set us some hard things to do ; we cannot do them all at once ; we have to suffer much, and suffer long before we can say some words thou hast taught us to say in prayer. We are trying to pray, but yet we cannot pray the one prayer that is never denied ; we are struggling towards it, we want to say it ; we count the words, and weigh them, and wonder about them, but we cannot say them with the heart ; we want to say with the whole soul, Not my will, but thine, be done. If thou wilt teach us to say this we shall know that thou hast done the last of thy miracles, thou mighty Son of God. We bless thee that this is thy prayer, O Christ ; thou didst say it, thou didst punctuate it with blood, thou didst utter it in groaning, but in groaning thou didst triumph ; in thy sorrow was the beginning of thy joy. Help us to know that the Lord reigneth, that there is but one supreme will, that our business is to discover what that will is and to obey it, simply, lovingly, trustfully : may there be no questioning in our hearts as to its righteousness and goodness and usefulness ; may there simply be a desire, burning and pure, to do God's will in Christ's name and in Christ's great strength. Amen.

## 2 Chronicles vii.

### THE DIVINE RESPONSE.

“Now when Solomon had made an end of praying” (v. 1).

**I**N praying there is no end. Pray without ceasing. It is the only thing we can do endlessly, unless it be things that are vitally related to itself, as request of knowledge, love of truth, and love of God. But we end for the time being. We cannot always morally and audibly continue to pray ; the poor flesh could not stand it, the brain would rebel, and call for rest. Blessed be God, there is a praying that is not praying in words. That is the great praying. The soul delights in it ; it is without the fatigue and the temptation of bodily exercise ; it is, so to say, an exhalation of the soul, a continual rising of the whole

nature Godward, starting at the cross, resting at the throne. Solomon's prayer itself is a prayer without an end. Never until a greater than Solomon came, was such a prayer offered upon the earth : how pathetic, how tender, how comprehensive ! How like a king, how like a friend ! How august, how simple, is the man when he prays ! He was never afraid of the Gentiles. We have seen that he sent to Tyre for a man to help him. In his prayer he says, "Moreover, concerning the stranger." What a gospel enters there ! How the heavens seem to palpitate with the fulfilment of evangelical prediction and promise ! Concerning the man who was not of the house of Israel,—if he, poor soul, should come to this house and pray, let the tears of thy pity fall upon him : he is only a stranger to us, he is not a stranger to thee. Peter was long in learning that lesson ; Solomon seemed to grow it in the garden of his heart ; it was planted there by the Lord, who has trees of his right hand planting everywhere. The prayer is majestic in thought, noble in expression, comprehensive in solicitude, but how seldom it drops into pathos deeper than "concerning the stranger." Strangers want help, attention, civility, hospitality ; it is bad enough to be a stranger, but to be made to feel our strangeness is a heavy calamity. There are hospitable walls that receive us in a way that makes us forget that we are strangers, that give us a touch of the inner masonry, that bring heart to heart in loving consolidation. The Christian Church is nothing if it forget the stranger. Your church is not a church, but a pit of rottenness, if you exclude anybody from it. Write your nefarious creed ; scratch with a villain's finger your putrid dogmas ; for they are such if they are not associated with a sympathy broad as Christ's, a solicitude about the far-away and the prodigal tender as the spirit of the cross. Never be great in excommunication : never be superbly grand in telling people to go away from the church : make the prodigal feel that if there is any place on earth where he might hope for rest, it would be in Christ's Church-home, in Christ's wondrous, immeasurable, hospitable sanctuary.

Do you think you have exhausted prayer ? Then you have never prayed. There is a temptation at a certain point of life to give up prayer. There are persons who suppose themselves

to have outgrown the necessity of intercession. There are persons who suppose themselves to have outgrown everything; the wonder is that such marvellous outgrowth should not receive more honour and homage. There are persons who have outgrown their first principles, their early enthusiasms, their beginnings of Christian consecration; there are those who have outgrown the old house Bible, there are some who have outgrown the sanctuary. They look in now and then: what condescension! What sublime humility! Grow in the right direction; grow upward, and see how high it is.

Here we have prayer consciously answered—

“And the Lord appeared to Solomon by night [this is implied, though not directly stated, in Kings, where we hear that ‘the Lord appeared to Solomon . . . as he had appeared unto him at Gibcon’ (1 Kings ix. 2), which was ‘in a dream by night’ (*ib.* iii. 5)], and said unto him,\* I have heard thy

\* This vision of the Lord presents a remarkable contrast with that recorded (1 Kings vi. 11-13) while the temple was in building. Then all was promise and encouragement; now, not only is warning mingled with promise, but, as in Solomon's own prayer, the sadder alternative seems in prophetic anticipation to overpower the brighter. In this there is (as has been often remarked) a striking exemplification of the austere and lofty candour of the inspired narrative, sternly contradicting that natural hopefulness in the hour of unexampled prosperity, which would have shrunk from even entertaining the idea that the blessing of God on the temple should be frustrated, and the glory of Israel should pass away. It is notable that, in its reference to the two parts of the promise to David, there is a subtle and instructive distinction. As for the temple, now just built in fulfilment of that promise, it is declared without reserve that, in case of unfaithfulness in Israel, it shall be utterly destroyed, and become an astonishment and a proverb of reproach before the world. But, in respect of the promise of the perpetuity of David's kingdom—the true Messianic prediction, which struck the key-note of all future prophecies—it is only said that Israel shall be “cut off from the land” and so “become a proverb and a byword” in captivity. Nothing is said to contradict the original declaration, that, even in case of sin, the mercy of God would chastise and not forsake the house of David (2 Sam. vii. 13, 14; Psalm lxxxix. 30-37). So again and again in prophecy captivity is denounced as a penalty of Israel's sin; but the hope of restoration is always held out, and thus the belief in God's unchanging promise remains unshaken. The true idea is strikingly illustrated by the prophet Amos (ix. 9-11): “I will sift the house of Israel, among all nations . . . yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth . . . I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof.”—*ELLCOTT'S Old Testament Commentary.*

prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice [a phrase occurring nowhere else in the Old Testament]" (v. 12).

Thus stands the case. The Old Testament is full of this familiarity with the divine coming and going. Have we changed our expression, or have we changed the reality of the case? For we are now ashamed to say we have had a visitation from God. Were a man to say now that he saw God last night he would be laughed at; hands would be significantly held up, and men would exchange the masonry of signs, to indicate that the person must be pitied and tenderly considered. Where is the change? Is it in phraseology or in substance? Are we ashamed to say that we prayed and got an answer? If we are ashamed then we neither prayed nor received a reply. Men who have been with God are never ashamed to say so. One sight of him nerves the seer with courage that cannot be abashed. When a poor child comes from a little country village where everything is upon a small scale, and where pence are treasured like silver, the child is astonished when it comes to larger places, to towns and cities, and beholds a broader civilisation: the child then opens its mouth in wonder, and its eyes in mute amazement; everything looks so large, so grand: but when a man has once seen the stars, not with the look of an ox, but with the look of an astronomer, you cannot show him anything astonishing on earth; the earth itself is a little fleck of mud, which might be brushed off the coat of the universe, and never be missed. It is thus with our communings of an intellectual and spiritual kind. All things are wonderful to ignorance. Wonder indeed is the sign of ignorance. Where there is no ignorance there is no wonder. Knowledge looks on with calm apprehension, with the familiarity of old acquaintanceship. When we hold communion with God we fear no man. The preacher who has not brought his sermon from heaven fears the critic, the little fool that knows nothing but words, the prickly little pedant who can hardly sit down without hurting himself: but when a man has come from God, he feels that he has a message tender, gracious, mighty, all-comprehending, a gospel of love which he must deliver with emphasis and zeal.

We now approach some awful words: who dare read them?

The Lord speaks of Israel, and says what he will do to Israel under certain circumstances—

“But if ye turn away, and forsake [and keep not] my statutes and my commandments, which I have set before you, and shall go and serve other gods, and worship them; then will I pluck them up by the roots [*i.e.*, your children (comp. Deut. xxix. 27)] out of my land which I have given them; and this house, which I have sanctified for my name, will I cast out of my sight, and will make it to be a proverb and a byword among all nations” (vv. 19, 20).

This is not like God: judgment is his strange work; mercy is his delight. But when he begins he will make an end. He will pluck Israel up by the roots. There would be men who are twice dead, plucked up by the roots, and the roots are fit only for burning. We do not know what God's burning means. Let us take care how we exclude the penal element from our theology and from our contemplation of the future. If there is no hell, there is no heaven. Do not imagine that we can grow independently of God. The plants cannot grow independently of the dew, the rain, the light, the warmth; if they try, they will surely perish. We can only live as we live in God, as we live in Christ, as we are branches in the vine. The vine will never be plucked up by the roots. Our Christ is an eternal Saviour. But if any branch that is in him bear not fruit after pruning, who shall say what will follow? It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God; not that he is arbitrary in judgment, but that his universe is constructed upon principles, and is animated and ruled by laws that sting when they are violated. They are wondrous laws—sabbatic, evangelic, loving, redeeming, when obeyed, understood, followed, honoured. But let any man try to cross God's law, and he will never return from that fool's journey. It is one of two things: either we have to fall upon the stone, Christ, and be broken; or the stone will fall upon us, and grind us to powder. We hear the crash of that grinding—**may we never know it!**

## PRAYER.

HELP us to spend our life according to thy will, thou Creator of man. Thou knowest how many temptations assail our life, and how prone we are to go downwards: thy grace alone can sustain us, and perfect thy will within our spirit. Thus we come to thee every day, as men come for bread; we cannot live without thee; thou art not our occasional joy, thou art our everlasting necessity. In God we live and move and have our being. Thus God is known to us through Jesus Christ, Son of man, Son of God, by his teaching, his example, his cross, his death, resurrection, and intercession. We cannot see thee, and live, but we can see Jesus Christ thy Son, and listen to his words, and receive his testimony, and walk by his doctrine, and trust ourselves to the mystery of his cross. Thou didst lay upon him the iniquity of us all. He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: we cannot understand this, but we feel in moments of agonised need that this Gospel alone can touch our deepest life and bring our souls into the light of hope; because the doctrine has thus released us from the dominion of fear and the prison of darkness, we know it to be in very deed our God. Thou hast taught us that by their fruits shall we know trees and men: by their fruits do we know thy doctrines, for they help us and bless us, with richest comfort they make us wise and strong; and we know still further that the doctrine is of God, because it compels us towards discipline and service and sacrifice on behalf of others. For such a revelation we bless thee; every day it vindicates its divinity by its action in life; we profess the cross, we assume the sacred name,—may we vindicate our title to its use by the simplicity of our motive and the nobleness of our service. As for broken hearts, thou alone canst heal them; as for men who are sitting down amid the ruins of their fortunes, and beholding their ambitions wrecked at their feet, thou only canst give wisdom and strength in the hour of weariness and unutterable sorrow. Help every man to find the right way, and to walk in it steadfastly; disappoint every man who has set a trap for others, or who has digged a pit for the feet of his fellow pilgrims; if any man's mind be set on mischief, the Lord send a blight upon his memory, that he may not recollect his own purposes of iniquity. May every house be dear to thee, in proportion to the sickness or weakness or old age or infancy which it encloses; visit every room of the house, make the feast divine, turn the burial into a resurrection, but specially lean over the bed where old age lies, or where infancy begins to wonder at the mystery of life, and let thy blessing abide there, a light, not a fire, a blessing that can be understood by the thrilling



of the heart with new and sudden joy. O Lord Jesus, come, take up thine abode in all the house, so that we cannot open a door without finding a welcome from thyself. Amen.

## 2 Chronicles viii.

1. And it came to pass at the end of twenty years [the twenty years date from the commencement of the temple in the fourth year of Solomon's reign, seven years having been devoted to the construction of the temple, and thirteen to the building of the royal palace. (See 1 Kings vi. 37, 38: vii. 1; and ix. 10)], wherein Solomon had built the house of the Lord, and his own house,

2. That the cities which Hiram had restored [literally, which Hiram gave] to Solomon [1 Kings ix. 11-13] Solomon built them [rather, rebuilt or repaired them. Their bad condition may have been one of the reasons why they were rejected by Hiram], and caused the children of Israel to dwell there.

3. And Solomon went [marched (2 Sam. xii. 29)] to Hamath-zobah, and prevailed against it.

4. And he built Tadmor in the wilderness [that is, Palmyra, in the wilderness, on the traders' route between the coast and Thapsacus on the Euphrates. That Solomon was the founder of Palmyra is the tradition of the country to this day], and all the store cities, which he built in Hamath.

5. Also he built [fortified] Beth-horon the upper, and Beth-horon the nether, fenced cities, with walls, gates, and bars;

6. And Baalath, and all the store cities [according to 2 Chron. xxxii. 28, the store-cities were places for collecting stores of provisions; when they were situated on the great trade-roads they were no doubt intended to relieve the wants of travellers and their beasts of burden] that Solomon had, and all the chariot cities, and the cities of the horsemen, and all that Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem, and in Lebanon, and throughout all the land of his dominion.

[It is worthy of note that in the above section no mention is made of the fortification of Jerusalem, and the building of Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer, which last city had been taken by Pharaoh, and given by him to his daughter, Solomon's wife (See 1 Kings ix. 15, 16)].

7. ¶ As for all the people that were left of the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which were not of Israel,

8. But of their children, who were left after them in the land, whom the children of Israel consumed not [were not able to exterminate], them did Solomon make to pay tribute until this day.

9. But of the children of Israel did Solomon make no servants for his work; but they were men of war, and chief of his captains [*Heb.* captains of his knights; which appears to be incorrect. Read, "his captains and his knights" or "aides-de-camp," as in Kings], and captains of his chariots and horsemen.

10. And these were the chief of king Solomon's officers ["captains of the

overseers," or "prefects," *i.e.*, chief overseers, or inspectors of works], even two hundred and fifty, that bare rule over the people.

11. ¶ And Solomon brought up the daughter of Pharaoh out of the city of David unto the house that he had built for her : for he said, My wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because the places are holy, whereunto the ark of the Lord hath come. [See footnote, *post*, p. 229].

12. ¶ Then [after the consecration of the temple] Solomon offered [not once, but habitually; according to the prescriptions of the Mosaic law (v. 13)] burnt offerings unto the Lord on the altar of the Lord, which he had built before the porch,

13. Even after a certain rate [the Hebrew is ambiguous; the meaning probably is "day after day"] every day, offering according to the commandment of Moses [see Exod. xxix. 38; Numb. xxviii. 3, *et seq.*], on the sabbaths, and on the new moons, and on the solemn feasts, three times in the year, even in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles.

14. ¶ And he appointed, according to the order of David his father, the courses of the priests [comp. 1 Chron. xxiv.] to their service, and the Levites to their charges [see 1 Chron. xxv. 1-6], to praise and minister before the priests, as the duty of every day required : the porters [see 1 Chron. xxvi. 1-19] also by their courses at every gate : for so had David the man of God [this phrase, so common in Kings, is rare in Chronicles, and is applied only to Moses (1 Chron. xxiii. 14), David, and one other prophet (2 Chron. xxv. 7-9)] commanded.

15. And they departed not from the commandment of the king [David] unto the priests and Levites concerning any matter, or concerning the treasures.

16. Now all the work of Solomon was prepared [rather, "thus was all the work of Solomon completed," or "set in order," as the same word is translated in 2 Chron. xxix. 35] unto the day of the foundation of the house of the Lord, and until it was finished. So the house of the Lord was perfected.

[*The Speaker's Commentary* points out that this verse sums up in brief the whole previous narrative on the subject of the temple, which began with chap. ii. Solomon's work "unto the day of the foundation" was the subject of that chapter; his work subsequently has been related in chapters iii.-viii.]

17. ¶ Then went Solomon to Ezion-geber, and to Eloth, at the sea side in the land of Edom.

18. And Hiram sent him by the hands of his servants ships, and servants that had knowledge of the sea; and they [the servants, not the ships] went with the servants of Solomon to Ophir, and took thence four hundred and fifty [in Kings "twenty," one or other of the two texts has suffered from that corruption to which numbers are liable] talents of gold, and brought them to king Solomon.

### SOLOMON: BUILDER AND STATESMAN.

"And it came to pass at the end of twenty years, wherein Solomon had built the house of the Lord, and his own house, that the cities which Hiram had restored to Solomon, Solomon built them, and caused the children of Israel to dwell there" (vv. 1, 2).

**S**OLOMON was not content to build the house of the Lord alone. This is a remarkable circumstance, as illustrating the spirit which is created and sustained by all truly religious exercises. It would have been ambition enough for any man religiously uninspired to have erected one such edifice as the temple. Most men are contented to do one thing, and to rest their fame upon its peculiar excellence. Solomon having completed the house of the Lord, and his own house, began to build the cities which Hiram had restored to him, and to cause the children of Israel to dwell there. A religion that ends only in ceremony building is little better than a superstition. No man can be zealously affected in the interests of the Church without having his whole philanthropic spirit enlarged and ennobled, so that he may become a builder of cities as well as a builder of churches. It must be remembered, on the other hand, that he who builds a synagogue really helps to build the town in which it is located. A synagogue or temple or church is not to be looked upon in its singularity, as if it were so many walls, with so many doors and windows; a church is a representative institution, through which should flow rivers that will fertilise all the districts of the city,—rivers of knowledge, rivers of charity, rivers of brotherhood, rivers of co-operation, so that men should turn to the church, assured that every rational and healthy expectation would be satisfied by its provisions.

"And Solomon went to Hamath-zobah, and prevailed against it. And he built Tadmor in the wilderness, and all the store cities, which he built in Hamath. Also he built Beth-horon the upper, and Beth-horon the nether, fenced cities, with walls, gates, and bars; And Baalath, and all the store cities that Solomon had, and all the chariot-cities, and the cities of the horsemen, and all that Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem, and in Lebanon and throughout all the land of his dominion" (vv. 3-6).

Solomon, having completed for the time being the measure of building upon which his mind was set, went forth to war.

It would seem as if in ancient days kings could not be satisfied to dwell at peace. Even Solomon, whose very name signifies peace, had in him the military spirit, characteristic of his race and time; it was in him indeed as the word of the living God; Solomon did not go forth to war for the sake of war; he believed he was obeying a divinely implanted instinct, or carrying out to the letter some divinely written law. Blessed be God, we have no such war to undertake. It does not follow therefore that our days are to be spent in indolence, or in the contemplation which exists without activity or beneficence. There is always an enemy to be fought; in our days a subtle lurking enemy, prowling in the darkness, crying loudly and defiantly even at noonday, pursuing the young, mocking the aged, taunting everything that is young and beautiful; by a thousand names is this enemy known, and in a thousand guises he walks forth; yet by whatsoever name known, or by whatsoever disguise concealed, he is the enemy of the Lord, and every Solomon who builds a temple for God should feel called upon to go forth and do away with this energetic and cruel giant: now his name is ignorance, now vice, now fashion, now drunkenness, now oppression, now selfishness; but though he may change his name, his nature he can never change, it is alien from God, it is without tenderness, without nobility, without love. The whole Church of the living God should go forth to war, and return not until the enemy is slain.

Having passed through another military period, Solomon began once more to build; he built Tadmor, and all the store cities; he built Beth-horon upper and lower, and fenced cities with walls, gates, and bars. A busy time it was in the reign of Solomon. But even all this building is not without its suggestion of corresponding evil. Why were the cities fenced? Why the gates? Why the bars? We have instances of the same kind in our own civilisation, silent witnesses against the honesty of the society in which we live. Every bolt upon the door is a moral accusation; every time we turn the lock we mean that there is an enemy outside who may endeavour to violate the sanctity of the house. We forget sometimes the moral suggestiveness even of our commonest institutions and

plans of procedure. Every precaution that is taken for our preservation implies the presence of hostile elements in society. It would seem as if nature and society alike required us to protect ourselves against them. The mischievous fact is that men who most sedulously protect themselves against the irruptions of nature, or uncalculated tempests and fires, and the men who protect themselves against accident and mishap of every kind, often fail to defend themselves against the more tremendous dangers that threaten and assault the soul. A man may be prudent about the preservation of his house, and careless respecting the cultivation of his mind. Thou wicked and slothful servant, out of thine own mouth I condemn thee! If men would apply the same degree of common-sense to departments distinctively moral and spiritual that they apply to the general affairs of life, what religious solicitude would be developed, what a marvellous revival would characterise the action of the whole Church! But still the spiritual is underestimated; the unseen is undervalued; the distant conceals its magnitude: if our eyes could see things in their reality, and take in all their proportion and their colour, the whole basis of life would be changed, the whole action of life would be lifted to a new level.

Solomon may be taken in this instance as representing the great doctrine that men should seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and afterwards attend to minor matters, or even leave those minor matters to the adjustment of providence. Taking the chapter as a whole, it represents Solomon as first most anxious about the temple, giving himself wholly to its erection, occupying his thoughts night and day, turning everything to account in its relation to the temple; and then, having finished that marvellous structure, he was prepared to descend to other levels and do the commoner work which lay to his hand. Many persons leave the temple half-finished: what wonder if they go out to the war and return wounded and disabled? Our religious purposes are broken off: what wonder if our political ends pierce us and sting us by way of retribution? Seek first the kingdom of God, attend first to the building of the temple, apply the soul in the very dawn of the day to the

highest religious concerns; then if the remainder of the day should prove a battlefield, the victory shall be on the side of holiness, or if it should prove to be a field calling to tillage, or ground inviting us to build, the eventide should see us contented because our labour has been honest and abundant.

“But of the children of Israel did Solomon make no servants for his work; but they were men of war, and chief of his captains, and captains of his chariots and horsemen” (v. 9).

The statesmanship of Solomon is as distinctly proved by this arrangement as by anything we have yet seen in his whole policy. Solomon knew that one man was not as good as another, however much democratic philosophy may have endeavoured to prove the contrary. One man is a genius, and another man is a slave, an imitator, a hewer of wood; very serviceable, and in fact indispensable, but not adorned with the very highest excellence and dignity of mind. Solomon made a distribution of classes, saying in effect, some men can do the drudgery, some men can dig and build, some can pull down and take away and prepare for the exertions of others: the higher class of men can think and direct, they are inspired with the genius of administration, they are men of powerful mind, of fertile resources in government and war; I must therefore make the best of the material at my disposal, not getting great men to do small work, or setting small men to fail in great work.

Adaptation is the secret of success: for want of knowing this how many men fail in life! There are employers who are making themselves little better than toilers, when they might by an expenditure of money apparently distinctly not economical, greatly assist the progress and solidity of their fortunes. A man may be industrious in a way which involves the absolute frittering and humiliation of his energies. We are to be careful not only to be industrious, but industrious about the right things and in the right proportion. A man might slave himself to death in cutting down wood or in throwing away stones, but if some other man of inferior mental faculty could be employed to do that work the superior man

should turn his attention to other and nobler pursuits, and thus with apparently less expenditure of strength he might be doing immeasurably greater good. A thought may sometimes be more valuable than a victory in war. It is possible indeed that the victory might be dependent upon the thought, might be its result and expression. Until we understand the metaphysics of life in some practical way we shall mistake the range and the degree of industry proper to individuals. When we do get hold of the metaphysical idea of personal and social responsibility, we shall see that a man may be doing much who is apparently doing little or nothing, and that many a man may be doing quite an inconsiderable service who is apparently carrying all the world before him. There is more in this conception of society than may at first be obvious. Men are inexplicably prone to undervalue the spiritual and the intellectual; we say "inexplicably" because a moment's consideration will show that action is only the embodiment of thought, and that he who can think best can most thoroughly start, inspire, and control the action of mankind. If the thinker is not to degrade himself to the level of a drudge, neither is the drudge to attempt to force his way to positions for which he is not qualified. Nothing is mean that is not meanly done. The Canaanites might be useful as the Israelites in their own way. With the eye of a statesman, with the inspiration of a genius, Solomon saw that he must distribute and classify men, and set each man to do what he was most fit for. We must have this arrangement even in the Church of Christ. Some men are doorkeepers and lamplighters by right of birth and election, for by many qualifications they are called to such useful offices: other men are qualified for the leading of public worship, and the direction of spiritual studies; the one class is not to decry or underrate the other, but all are to remember that there may be unity in diversity, and that without the diversity some portion of the most necessary work would be left undone.

"And these were the chief of king Solomon's officers, even two hundred and fifty, that bare rule over the people" (v. 10).

Even Solomon could not do all the work himself. Society is so constituted that there must be grades of official relation-

ship and responsibility. The greater the king, the abler must his ministers be; the larger the work, the more competently qualified must be all who are engaged it: little men may do for little work: little children may watch little gates: but the Church has undertaken to evangelise the whole world, to leave no language unsanctified, no clime unvisited, no heathenism unassailed; a Church with such a policy, animated by such a purpose, should be a great Church, and should call to its aid all that is strongest in intellect, all that is most penetrating in sagacity, all that is most inspiring in imagination, and all that is most unselfish in sacrifice. Yet, though the officers be many, the sovereign is one. It was not the throne that was divided; it was the work that was distributed. Herein is the perfection of society, that it shall find unity in variety, and variety in unity, and that the many shall revolve around the one, as smaller lights may revolve around a central sun. Nor must the sovereign around whom all the lights revolve be fickle, arbitrary, and so eccentric as to be beyond the lines of a rational calculation: he must represent the steadfastness of law, he must incarnate the continuity of the holiest thought; men must know where to find him on moral questions; how perplexed soever he may be in understanding, or in the handling of mechanical instruments and effects, men will know that his conscience always repeats the word of the living God, and always renews its purity and its judicial faculty by communion with the Most High.

“And Solomon brought up the daughter of Pharaoh out of the city of David unto the house that he had built for her: \* for he said, My wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because the places are holy whereunto the ark of the Lord hath come” (v. 11).

We may take this as an instance of punctilious morality. We are not able to understand all that was involved in the

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\* Concerning the daughter of Pharaoh taking possession of the palace which King Solomon built for her, Bertheau makes this comment:— Compare 1 Kings ix. 24, where the event is but briefly referred to, though the notices in chapters iii. 1 and ix. 16 had already prepared the way. Hitherto the author of the Chronicles has not mentioned Pharaoh's daughter, nor have we any account of the conquest of the city of Gezer by Pharaoh, who gave it to his daughter as her dowry. And here he merely observes in a very cursory manner, when speaking of the buildings, that Solomon



incident. We are evidently in the presence of conscience working under some eccentric law or suggestion. Yet here is a conscience, and by so much the action of Solomon is to be respected. He will not have any place or institution even ceremonially defiled. He will go back to precedents, he will consult the genius of history, he will preserve the consistency of the royal policy. Solomon felt that the ark of the Lord had sanctified every locality into which it had come, and that a broad distinction must always be maintained between heathenism and Judaism; between the idols of pagan lands, and the Spirit of the living God. In these matters Solomon's wisdom was displayed as certainly as in the greater concerns of State and Church; we are to remember that at the beginning Solomon was endowed with the spirit of wisdom and of a sound mind. The Lord quickened his sagacity, gave him that marvellous insight which enabled him to penetrate into the interiors and cores which were hidden from the scrutiny of other men. We are therefore to give Solomon credit for being at once wise and conscientious; we are to see in his action the working of a tender conscience; even though he may be appeasing his conscience by some trick or ceremony, yet he is showing us the working of the moral nature within the kingly breast. Yet there is a point to be noted here which is common to human experience: why should Solomon have married the daughter

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also built a house for Pharaoh's daughter, because he regarded it as improper that a woman should live in the house of David, "for they are holy (the plural must refer to the different rooms in David's house) because the ark of Jehovah had come to them." According to 1 Kings iii. 1, Solomon brought Pharaoh's daughter into the city of David, that is, no doubt, into that palace which was formerly inhabited by his father and after his death by himself, that she might dwell there till he had completed his other buildings and his own house. Hence the queen was afterwards to live in his own house, from which it follows that "the house which he had built for her" formed part of Solomon's own house, a portion, that is, of his royal palace. The statement in 1 Kings iii. 1 requires the information in chap ix. 24 to render it complete. We have then in the Book of Kings a full account of the entrance of the king's daughter into the house which Solomon had built for her. The Pharaoh referred to here was *Psusennes* the last king of the twenty-first dynasty (the Tanitic).—In 1 Kings ix. 24, the words "Solomon built Millo then" follow immediately upon the account of the house for Pharaoh's daughter; but they are omitted by our historian.

of Pharaoh? Why should he have, in the first instance, placed himself in so vital a relation to heathenism? Are there not men who first plunge into great mistakes, and then seek to rectify their position by zealous care about comparatively trifling details? Do not men make money by base means, and then zealously betake themselves to bookkeeping, as if they would not spend money except in approved directions? Are there not those who have steeped their hearts in iniquity, and yet have washed their hands with soap and nitre? There is nothing more misleading than a conscience that does not rest upon a basis of reason. We are to beware of the creation of a false conscience, or a partial conscience, or a conscience that operates only in given directions, but that makes up for sins of a larger kind by ostentatious devotion at the altar of detail and ceremony and petty ritual.

"Then Solomon offered burnt offerings unto the Lord on the altar of the Lord, which he had built before the porch, even after a certain rate every day, offering according to the commandment of Moses, on the sabbaths, and on the new moons, and on the solemn feasts, three times in the year, even in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles" (vv. 12, 13).

Solomon was great in burnt offerings.\* Do not men sometimes make up in burnt offerings what they lack in moral consistency? Is not an ostentatious religion sometimes the best proof of internal decay? It ought not to be so. The hand and the heart should be one, the outward and the inward should correspond, the action should be the incarnation of

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\* The ceremonial of the burnt offering is given in detail in the Book of Leviticus. The animal was to be a male unblemished, either a young bullock, ram, or goat, or, in case of poverty, a turtle-dove or pigeon. It was to be brought by the offerer "*of his own voluntary will,*" and slain by himself, after he had laid his hand upon its head, to make it his own representative, on the north side of the altar. The priest was then to sprinkle the blood upon the altar [It is clear that in this ceremony the burnt offering touched closely on the propitiatory or sin-offering; although the solemnity of the blood-sprinkling in the latter was much greater, and had a peculiar significance. It is, of course, impossible that the forms of sacrifices should be rigidly separated, because the ideas which they enshrine, though capable of distinction, are yet inseparable from one another], and afterwards to cut up and burn the whole victim, only reserving the skin for himself. The birds were to be offered similarly, but not divided. (See Lev. i.; vii. 8; viii. 8-21, etc).—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible.*

the thought. We are not always to look upon the ceremonial action of the Church as indicative of its real spirituality. Sometimes men make a great noise in order that they may conceal a courage that is giving way. The poet represents the boy as whistling in the churchyard to keep his courage up. There may be men who speak loudly in order to drown the inward voice which is accusing them of cowardice. It is beautiful to look upon the Church engaged in much church-building, and in great strenuous endeavours against public sin; yet we must never forget that all this may possibly coexist with internal loss, decay, corruption. All action does not spring from life. Sometimes we try to make up by complex mechanism what is wanting in real vitality. Here, however, we must not fall into a spirit of angry criticism or thoughtless and wanton accusation, but remit the inquiry to every man's conscience and to the conscience of every Church. Blessed is the day when the work of the Church is abundant because the spirit of the Church is holding high fellowship with God. Grand is the spectacle of a Church working because a Church is praying! When we are most frequently on our knees in communion with God we should be most frequently in the battlefield fighting openly under his banner, and proclaiming his name as the name of the King of nations. It is often easier to offer a burnt offering than to do some deed of moral heroism. It may be pleasanter to go to the altar in order to perform a religious ceremony, than to go up to an offended brother and fall down before him in token of broken-heartedness on account of wanton offence against his honour or his feeling. Here again we must come back upon the discipline of self-examination, and let every man stand or fall by the result of that penetrating scrutiny.

## 2 Chronicles ix.

1. And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, she came to prove Solomon with hard questions [or, riddles. A very pointed sentence, indicating a deeper truth and leading to thought. (Comp. Ezek. xvii. 2.) This wisdom, couched in apothegms and riddles, in which Solomon not only distinguished himself, but had an encounter with Hiram of Tyre, was quite a familiar exercise with the Arabs] at Jerusalem, with a very great company, and camels [bearing the products of her land] that bare spices [the spices of Arabia were famous in all ages. Sheba is mentioned in Exek. xxvii. 22 as trafficking with Tyre "in chief of all spices, and precious stones, and gold"], and gold in abundance, and precious stones: and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart.

2. And Solomon told her all her questions: and there was nothing hid from Solomon which he told her not ["not of the mysteries of religion and of the worship of God, but only of questions, the meaning of which lay not on the surface, but was deeply hidden; for it was not Solomon's religious character, but his wisdom, that brought her to Jerusalem."—KEIL].

3. And when the queen of Sheba had seen the wisdom of Solomon, and the house that he had built,

4. And the meat of his table, and the sitting [*Heb.* standing] of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel; his cupbearers [or, butlers] also, and their apparel; and his ascent by which he went up into the house of the Lord; there was no more spirit in her.

### THE QUEEN OF SHEBA.

"The queen of Sheba . . . came to prove Solomon with hard questions" (v. 1).

SOLOMON grows in influence, in glory. As we had already said, whether he may yet play the fool remains to be seen. Praise no man until he is dead. In the meantime we can only speak in modified compliments even when treating the case of Solomon. But he certainly advanced in social status of a moral kind. He was visited by the queen of Sheba.\*

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\* The visit of the queen of Sheba to Solomon, although not strictly commercial, rose out of commercial intercourse. The territory of Sheba, according to Strabo, reached so far north as to meet that of the Nabathæans, although its proper seat was at the southernmost angle of Arabia. The very

The queen of Sheba is a model to all inquirers. It was not enough for her to have heard of the fame of Solomon and to have admired him at a distance as a unique genius; her admiration excited her interest, and even her suspicion, and being a woman of penetrating mind she desired to put riddles and enigmas whereby she could test the proverbial wisdom of Solomon. This is what the Bible itself asks for; in effect the Bible says, Prove me, put me to the test, under all circumstances of triumph, joy, need, fear, and see if I have not within me a better answer than can be found in any other book. This is the criticism to which Jesus Christ is always willing to submit himself. It is his complaint that we do not ask him questions enough, the assumption of course being that all inquiries are put in a reverent and faithful spirit. There is a question-asking to which the Bible will pay no heed, and there is a question-asking which Christ will regard as impious and frivolous. Whatever we really want to know with our hearts, whatever is necessary for us to know, Jesus Christ is willing to answer. When we bring our riddles and enigmas to Christ, they must be riddles and enigmas that express the very agony of desire. To our speculation or curiosity Christ may have nothing to say, or if he condescend to speak to us it may be in tones of rebuke and repulse. Do not be afraid to put hard questions to Christ. The queen of Sheba did not put any flippant questions to Solomon; she rather sought out the most difficult inquiries which it was possible to propound. The

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rich presents made by the queen show the extreme value of her commerce with the Hebrew monarch; and this early interchange of hospitality derives a peculiar interest from the fact that in much later ages—those of the Maccabees and downwards—the intercourse of the Jews with Sheba became so intimate, and their influence, and even power, so great. Jewish circumcision took root there, and princes held sway who were called Jewish. The language of Sheba is believed to have been strongly different from the literate Arabic; yet, like the Ethiopic, it belonged to the great Syro-Arabian family, and was not alien to the Hebrew in the same sense that the Egyptian was; and the great ease with which the pure monotheism of the Maccabees propagated itself in Sheba, gives plausibility to the opinion that even at the time of Solomon the people of Sheba had much religious superiority over the Arabs and Syrians in general. If so, it becomes clear how the curiosity of the southern queen would be worked upon by seeing the riches of the distant monarch, whose purer creed must have been carried everywhere with them by his sailors and servants.

meaning of this is that we are to ask the very hardest questions which our soul wishes to have answered, always remembering that there are some questions which need not be answered in time, and which indeed could not be answered to our present incomplete or depraved capacity and power. It is on the literary record of the world that Jesus Christ has had more hard questions put to him than any other teacher ever had. Properly considered, it may be impossible to put any easy questions to Christ within the range of the scope which his mission fills. Even were we to put what appears to us a simple question, he would show us that there are no simplicities in human thought and human education; he would instantly take up the filament and thread of our inquiries and connect these with the very centre and life of the universe. The simplest flower is rooted on the earth, and the earth is rooted in the sun, and the sun and his whole system are rooted in some higher relations of things. Thus all processes and organisations go back to the eternal throne; so the violet in its retirement and modesty may claim to be part of the household and treasure of God. Let it never be supposed that hard questions are to be put only outside the Bible, that profound, exciting discussion is not possible within the four corners of revelation; the contrary is the fact: outside the Bible, the Church, outside everything that is involved and signified by the name of Christ, there is nothing but superficiality, evanescence, and the merest trifling. The Church of God should be full of the brightest minds, of the very greatest intellects, that ever led the civilisation of the world. No man need go out of the Bible or out of the Church to find the best food for the mind, or to discover problems most worthy of human intellect and genius. It is recorded that Solomon told the queen all her questions, and there was nothing hid from Solomon which he told her not. The queen was astounded by what she heard and what she saw. She declared that the half had not been told her. This is precisely the result of gospel inquiry. When men enter into the purpose of Christ, and begin to comprehend what it is that Christ wants to do in the world, they are filled with holy amazement, acknowledging at once not only the tenderness of his pity, but the vastness of his mind, and the comprehensive range of his outlook. Statesmen

have been more astounded by his propositions than any other men; great warriors and conquerors have stood in simple astonishment before the revealed policy and purpose of the Son of God; the greater the minds the greater the tributes which have been paid to Jesus Christ. Without going into what may be called the piety or the sentiment of his claim, the mere idea that he purposes the sovereignty of the world, the government of all men, through all time, and through all the generations, is a conception which invests his mind with claims to be considered as amongst the greatest statesmen, leaders, and rulers of the world. There was about Solomon something indicative of greatness: his palace was great, the temple was great, the service of which he was the centre was elaborate and costly; the meat of his table, the sitting of his servants, the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel; his cupbearers also, and their apparel; and his ascent by which he went up into the house of the Lord; all indicated great pomp and splendour. So surrounded, Solomon required to be mentally gifted, intellectually brilliant, in order to preserve in any suitable degree the harmony between himself and his kingly state. It was different with Jesus Christ; he had not where to lay his head; in his environment there was nothing but bareness, poverty, simplicity; this also was in exquisite harmony with the fitness of things, for Jesus Christ set up claims with which nothing could compare that is of an earthly kind. It was better that no attention should be attracted by his surroundings, that he should stand forth in an almost naked simplicity before the ages, and that, dispensing with all accessories, he should fix the attention of the world upon his mind, his purpose, his love. In a palace education we should expect refinement and intellectual resources of many kinds; but in the cottage at Nazareth, and in all the homes of Christ, if we had found anything to account for his greatness, it would have by so much detracted from our religious amazement; the background of his material poverty seemed but to show in greater vividness the wealth of his spiritual nature. Bring all your questions to the Son of God. Go and tell Jesus everything, and ask him everything; in a childlike, tender, loving, patient spirit, put all your inquiries to the condescending Son of man, and you will find when he replies to you that you will be constrained to

exclaim, "Behold, the one half of the greatness of thy wisdom was not told me : for thou exceedest the fame that I heard."

5. And she said to the king, It was a true report which I heard in mine own land of thine acts, and of thy wisdom :

6. Howbeit I believed not their words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it : and, behold, the one half of the greatness of thy wisdom was not told me : for thou exceedest the fame that I heard.

7. Happy are thy men, and happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and hear thy wisdom.

8. Blessed be the Lord thy God, which delighted in thee to set thee on his throne, to be king for the Lord thy God : because thy God loved Israel, to establish them for ever, therefore made he thee king over them, to do judgment and justice.

9. And she gave the king an hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices great abundance, and precious stones: neither was there any such spice as the queen of Sheba gave king Solomon.

["These words," says Canon Barry, "are clearly from some contemporary document. They breathe at once the spirit of Oriental compliment, and a certain seriousness of tone, as of a mind stirred by unusual wonder and admiration. It is worth notice that they touch but lightly on external magnificence and prosperity, and go on to dwell emphatically on the wisdom of Solomon as a wisdom enabling him to do judgment and justice, and as a gift from Jehovah, his God. The acknowledgment of Jehovah, of course, does not imply acceptance of the religion of Israel. It expresses the belief that he, as the tutelary God of Israel, is to be held in reverence, proportionate to the extraordinary glory which he has given to the nation" (see 1 Kings v. 7)].

That is an honest verdict ; that is a fair, magnanimous judgment. The utility of it is in the fact that this would be the verdict of every other religion that came, so to say, to visit Christianity. Change the term from Solomon to Christ, from the queen of Sheba to the heart of the pagan world ; and that heart come honestly to see for itself, to listen to Christ,—not to contend with him or to interrupt him, but simply to yield itself to the spell of his eloquence,—what would the verdict be ? Precisely the verdict of the queen of Sheba in reference to the wisdom of Solomon. Other religions would say, We have our greatness, we have our wisdom, we have our morality, we are thankful for what our religion has done for our nation, we are not ashamed of it. India has no occasion to be ashamed of its religion. There are teachings in Confucius, the great philosopher of China, which any man might be proud to quote and to apply to his own daily conduct. Yet when they came to



visit Christ they would listen, they would say, He does not look like what he claims to be; there is no beauty that we should desire him; he is a root out of a dry ground; he is without form or comeliness; his face is marred more than any man's: yet he talks wondrously:—Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the poor in spirit: for their's is the kingdom of heaven. Except a man be converted and become as a little child he cannot see the kingdom of God. He took up little children in his arms and blessed them, and said, Of such is the kingdom of heaven. He said he gave his flesh for the hunger of the world, and his blood for its thirst. He said he came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them. He took the bearded Pharisees and shook them all with moral indignation, and called them hypocrites. He went with sinners, and sat down with them, and made their houses sanctuaries. He said to the lost, Go, and sin no more: begin again to-morrow morning, and nothing shall be said about yesterday. Never man spake like this man! Buddha, Confucius, and all the Oriental writers, and all the dreamers of ethics, would say, He is a wondrous man: his words are gracious; not only are his words gracious, but his tone—for the tone is the man, not the word—his tone is a mystery of wisdom and love.

“And king Solomon passed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom” (v. 22).

We are not to understand by “all the earth” what is signified by that definition now: we are to understand rather that in relation to all the known kings of his time, Solomon was head and chief. What was meant by “the earth” is defined in v. 26—“And he reigned over all the kings from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and to the border of Egypt.” That Solomon should have been elevated to this supremacy is in fulfilment of the divine promise. When God sets his mind upon a man that he may give to that man elevation, dignity, honour and dominion, who can set bounds to the divine appointment? If the passage had read, “King Solomon passed all the kings of the earth in riches,” it would have been a poor display of vanity. What is it that one man should have ten thousand horses more than another man? What is it that one kingly

crown should weigh many ounces of gold more than another kingly crown? All this is external, ostentatious, and transitory. The passage, however, proceeds to add wisdom to riches, and therein the honour of Solomon is complete. Solomon was not only a man of knowledge,—which any man may be by careful reading and patient inquiry and study; Solomon's was a wealth of wisdom, knowledge, made practical and available, knowledge turned to account; a kind of intellectual seed coming to bud and blossom and ample fruitfulness. Wisdom is better than knowledge. The wise man takes in all circumstances, constructs events so as to make of them an edifice that should lead him correctly to infer the ability, character and purpose of the Architect of history. Many a man has knowledge who has not wisdom. Some have knowledge who cannot communicate it, so it becomes a mere selfish luxury; others have knowledge that is so imperfect as to be worse than ignorance, hence such men deal in half truths which are no better than sophisms and even falsehoods. True wisdom is large, comprehensive in its outlook; at once microscopic and telescopic, seeing the small and near, the vast and distant. The wise man cannot always move at a very eager or violent pace; he has many things to look at which fools or superficial thinkers do not see; he has a thousand calculations to make which do not enter into the reckoning of the popular mind; he is therefore obliged to refer his judgments to time, and to reap his honours after he has passed through this scene of life. In this matter many wise men have suffered; they have been misunderstood, they have been imperfectly represented, and in not a few instances they have been unable adequately to explain themselves, for they seemed to have passed beyond the immediate currency of words, and to have required a special language for the utterance and illustration of their thought and meaning. If Solomon was so great, what should be said of him who described himself as "One greater than Solomon"? Jesus Christ did not hesitate to use these words, and we know that he never threw words away, or used them in any false or vicious sense. It would seem as if we must first understand Solomon before we can understand Christ. As the queen of Sheba was overpowered and overwhelmed by what she saw, so we are to estimate all previous

history, especially as that history culminates in its brightest characters, its noblest heroes, its wisest Solomons; then advancing to Christ we hear him distinctly say that he is greater than all that went before. This very claim would seem to involve his right to be worshipped as the Son of God. When a teacher declares himself to be greater than Jonah, greater than Solomon, greater than Moses, who can he be? Is it enough to look upon him simply as a good man? Does it satisfy the religious imagination to give him a place by himself and offer to him unique distinctions? Does it not rather seem to be right to acknowledge that he proceeded forth and came from God, and that he brought with him glory from a state of existence immeasurably older than earth and time and the limitations by which we are bounded and defined? Without saying in so many words that he was God, Jesus Christ so affected the mind and the imagination of men as to throw them into a state of bewilderment which could only be cleared away by the distinct acknowledgment that in him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

"And Solomon slept with his fathers, and he was buried in the city of David his father: and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead" (v. 31).

This seems to be a lame and impotent conclusion. Yet it distinctly sets forth the common humanity of this most extraordinary and brilliant king. Literally the passage means, Solomon lay down with his fathers.\* He might hardly be recognised from the humblest of them. The sun dies at evening with scarcely a reminder of the glory which shone from him at mid-day. On the last day of his life, Solomon in weakness and decrepitude was hardly to be discriminated from the humblest of the kings that had gone before him. A marvellous difference is discovered in the case of Jesus Christ. We might not at first understand

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\* Solomon did not live to a very great age, since he was not more than twenty years old when he ascended the throne. Whether Solomon turned to the Lord again with all his heart, a question widely discussed by the older commentators, cannot be ascertained from the Scriptures. If the Preacher (*Koheleth*) is traceable to Solomon so far as the leading thoughts are concerned, we should find in this fact an evidence of his conversion, or at least a proof that at the close of his life Solomon discovered the vanity of all earthly possessions and aims, and declared the fear of God to be the only abiding good, with which a man can stand before the judgment of God.—KEIL.

what he meant when he said he was greater than Solomon, but if we follow him to his cross, and his grave, and afterwards to his resurrection, we shall find that this King of kings did not sleep with his fathers, for fathers in the ordinary sense he had none; he rose from the dead, he vanquished the grave, he led captivity captive; and as he went up into heaven, we might have heard him say, Behold, a greater than Solomon is here. A mournful and pensive thing it is to read through all the history of kings: that they came, and reigned, and slept. And so the splendid monotony rolls on—they came, they reigned, they slept. The mightiest and most brilliant of the host of the kings of the earth came, and reigned, and slept; but of the King of kings, and Lord of lords, we read that he rose again the third day from the dead, and went up into glory that he might sit on the right hand of God. If this be a piece of mere imagination it is the sublimest effort of the human mind. It was no ordinary genius that could begin at Bethlehem, and work its way through all the political, social, educational, theological differences and difficulties, and yet not leave its hero until he died upon the cross, and was buried in the tomb; and should go on the third day to find the grave empty, and should see the descending cloud coming to receive him as into a chariot that he might be conveyed into heaven. If it was a dream it was the grandest dream that ever entranced the brain of man. We believe that it was an historical fact, a distinct revelation of the purpose of eternity, a blessed manifestation of the thought and love of God, and, therefore as we watch the amazing scene, with all its light and shadow, its beauty, its grief, its joy, its tragedy, its triumph, we say concerning him who is the central figure in it all, "My Lord and my God."

## PRAYER.

**ALMIGHTY GOD, how can we praise thee when thy mercy is our theme?** Our song cannot rise to the height of that great appeal. Thy mercy endureth for ever: how can we with the voice of a moment praise the gifts of an eternity? Whatever thou doest is done as from the unbeginning time; thou doest nothing at the moment to be measured by the moment, to end within the moment; thou dost always work from the centre of eternity: so every touch of thine is an infinite contact, every word of thine holds every other word thou didst ever speak: how can we praise thee with sufficiency of music, elevation of soul, or power of expression? We fail, but failing modestly we succeed, for then our weakness is our strength, and what we would do if we could is taken as if we had done it all: and thus again thy mercy repeats itself and glorifies its own tenderness. We know that thou dost live, we need not any man to testify of God, for our own lives are witnesses, our recollections are prophecies, psalms, histories, our whole life is the Old Testament written over again, and the New Testament written once more, so that when we read thy book in the light of our own life we read in a light that is double, the descending light and the internal light, and we see light in thy light, and are filled with a marvellous glory. Let thy book be unto us its own witness; we would that no man should defend it, but that it should be left to speak its own word, in its own way, at its own time; then shall the end be a more thankful and grateful acceptance of the benefaction of God. We constantly yearn after the living One; we have tasted life, and therefore we cannot die: why didst thou give us this longing for immortality? It was that thou mightest satisfy us with the thing we long for. We can never go back to death; we have touched Christ, we have seen the cross. We have felt the power of the Son of God within our hearts, and now in great triumph we exclaim, Christ hath abolished death: O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Whether death come to us in one form or another, whether it be the grave of the body, or the grave of fortunes and ambitions, it is all one, an overthrown and humiliated foe. We give ourselves into thy hands; let us not die a dishonourable death; we are prepared for a death in poverty, but not in shame; we are ready, if it be thy will, to carry the cross, but not the cross of the thief or the felon, but the cross of one who would die with his Lord. Grant unto us such vision of thyself, and of the wholeness and meaning of thy providence, as shall give us calmness when the mountains are carried into the midst of the sea. They are mountains we have trusted to, we have often climbed their sunny slopes, and rejoiced in their nobleness; but if it be thy will to pluck them up by the roots and waste them in the sea, God's will

be done : there is nothing of eternity in them, there is no loss really in such a forfeiture : give us the heart that clings to God, and let all buildings go if they will. As for our time upon the earth, it is a handful of days, a little curling vapour in the air ; our days are swifter than a post, yea, they are like a weaver's shuttle, there is no abiding in them : why are they inspired with this spirit of haste and urgency ? It is because they want to take us quickly into the better time, the larger world, the completer life. Here men become infidels, unbelievers, atheists, mockers, because the day is so short there is no time to do anything in ; we are interrupted, and broken in upon, and our purposes are shattered, and so we let our faith go ; and the little, hurrying eager days would take us swiftly into the eternal state, where we shall have the opportunity to see God on his own scale, and to study God with the advantage of an infinite calmness. Teach us that all things are in thy hands : why should we fret or murmur, or weep hot tears ? The Lord gave, and if the Lord hath taken away, he will bring back again a greater abundance ; thou canst grow a thousand harvests in the year, we can hope but for one. We fall into thy hands, King, Lord, Father, Saviour ; and there we are in heaven. This and all other prayers we say in the sweet name of Christ, the name to sinners dear. Amen.

## 2 Chronicles x.

1. And Rehoboam went to Shechem : for to Shechem [the chief city of Ephraim, of ancient dignity, even from patriarchal times, as of singular beauty and position] were all Israel come to make him king.

2. And it came to pass, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who was in Egypt, whither he had fled from the presence of Solomon the king, heard it, that Jeroboam returned out of Egypt.

3. And they sent [*i.e.*, "they had sent." This is given as the reason why he had returned] and called him [to the assembly. (Comp. 1 Kings xii. 20)]. So Jeroboam and all Israel came and spake to Rehoboam, saying,

4. Thy father made our yoke grievous : now therefore ease thou [lighten] somewhat the grievous servitude of thy father, and his heavy yoke that he put upon us, and we will serve thee [they were acting within their right. To demand a removal, or alleviation of their burdens, was perfectly compatible with a loyal willingness to "serve" the new king].

5. And he said unto them, Come again unto me after three days. And the people departed.

6. ¶ And king Rehoboam took counsel with the old men that had stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, saying, What counsel give ye me to return answer to this people ?

7. And they spake unto him, saying, If thou be kind to this people, and please them, and speak good words to them, they will be thy servants for ever.

8. But he forsook the counsel which the old men gave him, and took counsel with the young men that were brought up with him, that stood before him.

9. And he said unto them, What advice give ye that we may return

answer to this people, which have spoken to me, saying, Ease somewhat the yoke that thy father did put upon us ?

10. And the young men that were brought up with him spake unto [*Heb.* with] him, saying, Thus shalt thou answer [The advice of the young men is the language of the arrogant self-confidence which mistakes obstinacy for vigour] the people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it somewhat lighter for us [Literally, "And thou lighten from upon us"]; thus shalt thou say [speak] unto them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins.

11. For whereas my father put a heavy yoke [*Heb.* laded] upon you, I will put more to your yoke : my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions [Probably (like the Roman *flagellum*) a whip, the lash of which is loaded with weights and sharp points].

12. So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day, as the king bade, saying, Come again to me on the third day.

13. And the king answered them roughly [hardly] ; and king Rehoboam forsook the counsel of the old men.

14. And answered them after the advice of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add thereto : my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.

15. So the king hearkened not unto the people : for the cause was of God [Literally, "it was a turning *or* turning-point (of events) from with God"], that the Lord might perform his word, which he spake by the hand of Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

16. ¶ And when all Israel saw ["Now all Israel had seen"] that the king would not hearken unto them, the people answered [returned] the king, saying, What portion have we in David ? and we have none inheritance in the son of Jesse : every man to your tents [this war cry was not new. (2 Sam. xx. 1)], O Israel : and now, David, see to thine own house. So all Israel went to their tents. [In these words, with which the Benjamite Sheba had proclaimed sedition and rebellion against David in the land (2 Sam. xx. 1), is expressed the deep-rooted aversion to the royal house of David so strongly, that it is manifest the revolt had a deeper cause than the pretended oppression of Solomon, since it had its proper ground only in the old jealousy of Judah, suppressed indeed under Solomon, but still not utterly extinguished, which resulted again from the untheocratic disposition of these tribes, from their disloyalty to Jehovah.—KEIL.]

17. But as for the children of Israel that dwelt in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them.

18. Then king Rehoboam sent Hadoram ["Adoram" in Kings] that was over the tribute ; and the children of Israel stoned him with stones [The sight of the man who had been the taskmaster of their oppression, stirred the multitude to a fresh burst of fury, venting itself in his murder] that he died. But king Rehoboam made speed to get him up to his chariot, to flee to Jerusalem.

19. And Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day [Neither the compiler of Kings nor the chronicler saw fit to alter a phrase which no longer applied to the political circumstances of their own day (Comp. 1 Chron. iv. 41, 43 ; v. 26)].

## REHOBOAM.

“And Rehoboam went to Shechem : for to Shechem were all Israel come to make him king. And it came to pass, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who was in Egypt, whither he had fled from the presence of Solomon the king, heard it, that Jeroboam returned out of Egypt. And they sent and called him. So Jeroboam and all Israel came and spake to Rehoboam, saying, Thy father made our yoke grievous ; now therefore ease thou somewhat the grievous servitude of thy father, and his heavy yoke that he put upon us, and we will serve thee ” (vv. 1-4).

**A** CAUSE so stated must succeed. There will be difficulty, but the end is assured. The reasonable always triumphs, due time being given for the elucidation of its purposes, and the manifestation of its real spirit. Violence can have but a short day ; the tempest cries itself to rest. The speech of this man was a speech strong in reason.—“Ease thou somewhat the grievous servitude of thy father, and his heavy yoke that he put upon us, and we will serve thee.” They wanted ease for service, for loyalty. Where there is no ease how can there be homage, thankfulness, devotion, or any of the high qualities of patriotism ? How tempted men are, who are not themselves disquieted, to tell other people to bear their burdens uncomplainingly ! We ought to hear what they have to say who feel the iron. Our inquiry should be, How does it suit you ? What is the effect of the piercing iron upon the soul ? How does manhood bear the heel of oppression ? The sufferers should sometimes be admitted to the witness-box. There is a danger lest our personal comfortableness should disqualify us for judging the case of downtrodden men. Wherever there is weakness the Christian Church should be found ; wherever there is reasonableness the Christian sanctuary should offer hospitality. The Christian sanctuary ceases to be the tabernacle of God amongst men when it shuts its door upon the cries of reason, the petitions of weakness, the humble supplications of those who ask for nothing exaggerated, but simply ask to have their misery mitigated somewhat, that their loyalty may be of a larger and better quality. The names are ancient, but the circumstances may be painfully modern. It is the peculiarity of the Bible that it is always getting in our way. It has a word upon every subject. Is there



anything more detestable than that a man who has his own way seven days a week, whose footsteps are marked by prosperity, whose very breathing is a commercial success, should stand up and tell men who are bleeding at every pore to be quiet and contented, and not create disturbance in the body politic? If Jeroboam had come with a petition conceived in another tone it ought to have been rejected; it would have been irrational, violent, contemptuous: but the reasonableness of the request will insure its victory in the long run. How easy it is to think of Rehoboam as the foolish son of a wise father! But are we not unjust to the son in so regarding him? Was Solomon the wise man he is often made out to be? The answer would be Yes—and No. There was no greater fool than Solomon; and he attained his supremacy in folly because there was no man so wise. "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" If he had not been son of the morning some shallow pit might have held him; but being son of the morning, and detaching himself from the gravitation of God, the pit into which he falls is bottomless. Pliny says no man can be always wise. That is true philosophically, and experimentally; for all men have vulnerable heels, or are exposed to temptations to lightness of mind, amounting in some instances almost to frivolity; they are also the subjects of a singular rebound, which makes them appear the more frivolous because when we last saw them they were absorbed in the solemnity of prayer. Solomon himself is not wise in this matter of government. The history shows that the people were appealing, not against Rehoboam, who had yet had no opportunity of proving his quality as a king, but against his father—"Thy father made our yoke grievous." We are prone to copy the defects of our ancestors and our idols rather than their excellences. We are tempted in wrong directions. Folly has often more charms for us than wisdom. When Diogenes discoursed of philosophy the people turned away from him—but when he began to play frivolous music, or to sing frivolous songs, the crowds thronged upon him, and he said, "Ye gods! how much more popular is folly than wisdom!" Even there he spoke as a philosopher. A man may crowd the hugest building on the earth by folly: it is impossible in the overwhelming

majority of cases to fill a church with a prayer-meeting. "Ye gods! how much more popular is folly than wisdom!" must be the verdict of many a sad-hearted man, whose words are light, whose discourses are revelations, but who is not listened to by the folly-adoring mob.

Rehoboam made a cautious reply, and therein he began well; he said to the petitioners: "Come again unto me after three days." This looked hopeful. King Rehoboam utilised the interval by taking "counsel with the old men that had stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, saying, What counsel give ye me to return answer to this people? And they spake unto him,"—as old men ought to speak, with a quaintness that amounted to pathos,—"saying, If thou be kind to this people, and please them, and speak good words to them, they will be thy servants for ever." Rich is the king whose old men talk in such a strain! They were patriots and philanthropists and philosophers; they were Christians before the time. Marvellous is the power of kindness. They will do most in life who are most considerate. They may be charged with sentimentalism by those who do not understand the power of human feeling, but they will be credited with philosophy by men who understand the genius of sympathy. What a message would this have been to return to the complaining people! When a king speaks "good words" they seem to be better than if spoken by other lips; when a king is kind he seems to add to his kindness by his very kingliness; the stoop of his condescension redoubles the value of his benefaction. If, when the people returned after three days, Rehoboam had spoken so, the welkin would have rung with the resonant cheers of a delighted, thankful, because emancipated, people. We have opportunities of this kind: let every man know that in proportion to his kindness will be the quality and the durability of his influence. Kindness is not weakness. It takes omnipotence to be merciful, in the largest degree and fullest quality of the term. He to whom power belongs holds in his other hand the angel whose name is Mercy.

\* But he [Rehoboam] forsook the counsel which the old men gave him, and took counsel with the young men that were brought up with him, that stood before him. And he said unto them, What advice give ye that we

may return answer to this people, which have spoken to me, saying, Ease somewhat the yoke that thy father did put upon us?" [Showing that he understood the message of the people perfectly: he correctly represented the popular will, and therefore he increased his own responsibility, because he was not the victim of ignorance.] "And the young men that were brought up with him spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou answer the people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it somewhat lighter for us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. For whereas my father put a heavy yoke upon you, I will put more to your yoke: my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions" (v. 8-11).

Woe to the nation whose young men talk so! A young oppressor is an infant devil. Young men talking so will ruin any occasion. This may appear to be a very advanced policy, a very spirited policy, home and foreign. It *is* a spirited policy: but what is the name of the spirit that inspires it? There are many spirits. "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God." Yet there is something inspiring about this tone of the young men. This is making the nation take its proper place at the council-board of empires; this is making the country bloated in its ambition. What will the end be? Does a controversy of this kind begin in a question, and end in an answer? Or is there a reply? Are there such things in history as retorts, reprisals, rebounds, consequences? Let it be known, and laid down as the basis-principle of all action, social, ecclesiastical, and imperial, that there is no right of tyranny. Oppression has no veritable and reputable credentials. Men are not at liberty to take counsel whether they shall be gentle or ungentle. The law is unwritten, because eternal, that even righteousness must be administered in mercy. It might be supposed that the king had taken a most patriotic course in consulting the old and the young. He had done nothing of the kind: he had omitted to consult him who had called his house to the royalty. Rehoboam should have consulted the Kingmaker whose throne is on the circle of the earth, and whose sceptre toucheth the horizon, and whose will is the law of monarchy and commonwealth. All human consultation is a species of under-counsel, valuable within proper limits, and right as recognising the education, the intelligence, and the political instinct of the times; but all consultation to result in profoundest

wisdom must be intensely, almost exclusively, religious. Kings should talk to their King. The greater the man the nearer should he stand to God; yea, he should be within whisper-reach of the Lord of lords, asking him in every crisis of national history what Israel ought to do, what the country ought to answer, what is the will of heaven. Rehoboam answered the people roughly, and forsook the counsel of the old men—"So the king hearkened not unto the people." The gospel never gives liberty to oppression. Employers may adopt this course if they please, but they will find it end in ruin. We must recognise the difference between employing cattle and employing men. A parent may adopt this course if he pleases, but his children will chastise him, sting him, with many a disappointment; or if he live not to see the wreck of their manhood, they will execrate his unfragrant memory. We ought to admit nothing into our policy, social, commercial, ecclesiastical, national, that does not live by virtue of its righteousness and nobleness; then we may face the light of day, and abide the coming of the great audit with perfect calmness, knowing that with what judgment we have judged we shall be judged. If we were in circumstances such as Jeroboam represented, if we were bearing heavy yokes, if we were steeping our pillows in our tears, if sleep forsook us because of pain, and if we heard that Christian ministers had been made aware of our distress, and had risen to say, We will inquire for you, and sympathise with you, and do what we can to mitigate your pain,—should we answer, Keep to your praying and your hymn-singing, and let our sufferings alone? Never! We would thank God that Christian ministers were so like their Master who came to undo heavy burdens and let the oppressed go free. The Christian minister who meddles with every thing but humanity is—a phenomenon.

The world has been educated by oppression. The Lord himself has used it as an instrument in his hands. A curious expression occurs to this effect in the fifteenth verse,—

**"For the cause was of God."**

Rehoboam had not taken him into account, but the Lord took the matter into his own hand: the Lord sent a strong delusion

upon the man that he might believe a lie. If the Lord were working within four measurable corners the whole proportion of his ministry upon the earth would be altered, and everything related to it would undergo appropriate changes; but the Lord is working upon an infinite circle; all things work together; the ministry of the universe is a ministry co-operative, and is not to be understood in parts and sections, but can only be understood by those who take in the whole circumference on which the Almighty operates: and that cannot be done here and now, it can only be seen when we are taken to a sufficient altitude, and he alone can take us to that altitude, and give us the vision we need, in order to complete our judgment. Meanwhile, here is a history in human development—"the cause was of God." Joseph was sent down to Egypt by the Lord. The Saviour of the world was not murdered by the Jews, except in a secondary and transient sense; he was delivered up from before the foundation of the world that he might make on the universe an infinite impression and reveal to the universe the law of life and the law of sacrifice. The Lord sends judicial blindness upon people even now, so that they claim to be sincere, upright, patriotic: but the Lord is working his own end and purpose. It is not for us to say who is or is not judicially blinded; there we should perpetrate a great mistake; it is for us to recognise the operation of the law, and in proportion as we feel that it may be ourselves who are infatuated, we ought to pause, and wonder, and pray. There is, however, one standard by which we may come to a judgment all but infallible: if we are impelled towards persecution, towards the impoverishment of others, towards contempt in relation to the weak and the helpless, we may lay it down as certain that we are not inspired by the spirit of love, which is the Spirit of God. If our movement is towards trust, liberty, leniency, philanthropy, beneficence, we are entitled to believe that this is the very logic of love, the rigorous reasoning of piety itself. This will apply to nations, to families, to employers, to all men to whom is remitted the question, Shall the policy be severe, or shall it be clement and hopeful?

Rehoboam will be punished: have no fear of that. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." You

can make your whips thongs of scorpions, but upon your own back shall the lacerating lash be laid ; you can play the fantastic trick before high heaven and make the angels weep, but the bitterness shall be yours ; the triumphing of such a policy is short, the end of it is everlasting punishment. What could we do without such laws as these ? They are the very ribs of the universe, the very security of society, the corner-stone on which God's fabric rests. We are not the subjects of accidents, the changing whims of statesmen ; we are not dependent upon general elections for the grand issue of things : the Lord reigneth ! Let us be true, and calm. One thing is certain amid all the conflicts of history, all the attritions and collisions of most vehement controversy, and that is, that the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ alone can rectify all relations, bring into rulership and eternal dominion the spirit of truth and love and mercy. We can but daub the wall with untempered mortar ; we can but say, Peace, peace, where there is no peace. Only the gospel of Jesus Christ can get at the heart of things ; deal with causes, fountains, origins, and purify the spring of all life. Here the Saviour is gentle in his might, mighty in his gentleness ; he says, " Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again " : you must start afresh ; there must not only be new doings, there must be a new doer ; there must not only be an improvement in habit, there must be a regeneration in soul. When the soul is right the hands will take to the new policy with skill that might have been learned in heaven and that is inspired by the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, may we keep thy law, and walk in thy statutes, and be strong because of uprightness, and prosperous because of integrity. Spirit of the Living God, Spirit of Truth, Spirit of Light, dwell with us to this intent; then shall our whole heart be God's, there shall be no corruptness in our spirit, there shall be no frivolity in our speech, there shall be no selfishness in our solicitude, but our lives shall be consecrated unto the living God as with a perpetual oath. We thank thee for all thy law, for its severity and its gentleness; and its gentleness doth lure us to obedience. May we understand the purpose of thy law, and not shrink from it as from a hard thing, but rather say, This is our Father's word, it is the bidding of mercy, it is the sovereignty of love, it is the way of wisdom eternal. If we have come to this spirit of obedience, it is because we have been with Jesus and have learned of him: by nature we are wrathful, selfish, obdurate; if we have been softened, and brought into loyalty of desire, and partly into loyalty of action, this is a miracle of the cross, this is a triumph of the Son of God, wondrous indeed in our eyes. Show us more and more that obedience is mastery, that to submit is to conquer, that to be at one with God is to have all things under our feet. Reveal unto us the mystery of life day by day: show us nothing of to-morrow; we then should fall under the burden, and should lose all hope and heart. Come to us day by day, a breath at a time, a moment at once, and let not the intolerable light of accumulation burn and annihilate our vision. Help us to carry life's burdens bravely, hopefully, patiently; help us to count tears amongst our treasures; enable us to kiss the smiting rod, because it is wielded by a Father's hand; and when the burden and the rod are lost in the completeness of Christian manhood we shall praise God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, in one unbroken, unending song. Amen.

## 2 Chronicles xi.

### DIVINE INTERPOSITION.

HERE is a king who has made all his arrangements with regard to a certain issue, and as he stands in full equipment for his work it will be instructive to look upon the figure which he makes in history.

“And when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he gathered of the house of Judah and Benjamin an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men,

which were warriors, to fight against Israel [a number which does not appear too large according to 2 Sam. xxiv. 9], that he might bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam" (v. 1).

Everything is thus set in order, and if heaven helps men who help themselves, there can be no doubt as to the issue of this costly and portentous arrangement. Why does he lose time? With a hundred and eighty thousand chosen men at his command, why does he halt? He might strike, and in one blow win the victory: why does he not uplift his arm, and deliver the fatal and successful blow? Are there some things in life that are not seen? Are there forces that have no definite presence to the naked eye? Are there misgivings of heart? Are there spiritual impressions amounting almost to revelations? There must be: and all these spectral influences have had a wonderful effect upon human action, and upon the whole circle and movement of human progress. Let us call them impressions, curious feelings, incalculable forces; let us strip them of every taint of religious appearance and significance; still, there they are, and they must be accounted for, or left foolishly without any account or exposition. The Bible does not hesitate about the matter. With the frankness of honesty it tells the whole tale. The Bible is never afraid to mention the name of God. Truly it would appear as if it were the only book where he was at home. Other books apologise for him: introduce him with pomp that cannot be real; revere him with worship that must be artificial: but within the sanctuary of the inspired volume God comes and goes and moves with familiarity, with condescension, and yet ever so as to make men think more than they can say.

The explanation, therefore, is to be found in the second verse,—

"But the word of the Lord came to Shemaiah [a prophet who is not mentioned again] the man of God, saying, . . . Ye shall not go up" (vv. 2, 4).

Pity it is that God seems to allow us to go to such lengths, and then stops us just at the last moment. Everything has been completed, every sword has been whetted, every bayonet has been pointed, every ounce of powder has been flasked; and then he says, Stand still: return to your homes: this is a warfare not



appointed in heaven, this is a controversy not signed by the name divine: return, and in silence repent of your folly. It is not a pity that such should be the case, although we have so said as a point of introduction. There is a pity in the arrangement, but it is not on the side of God. It is a pity that we did not consult God before we called the army together. He will be consulted at one end; he wishes to be consulted at the beginning, but if we will not consult him there we must consult him at the end. It is impossible but that the divine will must prevail. "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths:" not, Mark out thy path, create for thyself a way, and when thou hast walked every mile of it ask his approbation upon it,—be not surprised if then he turn suddenly round, and say in the stunned ear, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." Our preparations amount to nothing if they are not inspired. All our education comes to smoke and wind if it be not an education derived from the altar and enriched with the wisdom of God. Send out a hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men from academy and college and university, loaded with the blank cartridges of ten thousand certificates and testimonials: if the Lord is not in it he will send them all back again until he calls for their aid. Go not a-warfare at your own charges; run not the race in your own strength; take unto you the whole panoply of God, and gird yourselves in God's presence before running one step professedly on God's business. These great rebukes help us to understand a good deal of the solemnity of life. If the rebukes were little the lessons would be superficial. God allows us therefore to build the tower a long way up. If he overturned the first line or two of bricks we should think nothing of it: he permits us to rear the scaffold and to build quite up in the air, and to really begin to think that we may land in heaven; and then he throws down tower and scaffold and builders, and makes the men who thought themselves wise babble in foreign tongues. It is when he allows us to go a long way on the road, and then turns us back, that we begin to think—happy we if we begin to pray.

**"Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren" (v. 4).**

Accommodating this expression, we may profitably reflect upon

the impiety and the crime of brother fighting with brother in any of the relations of life. This is not a mere question of controversy, interchange of opinion, or conflict of judgment; all this is permissible between the dearest friends; the fighting that is meant is a fight of the soul, a mutual hatred, a deadly animosity, a thirst for each other's blood. We see the vividness of this exhortation when we limit it to two brothers according to the flesh; then how horrible the fratricidal war, how detestable is the spirit that tears one heart out of the embrace of another; thus through the individual we proceed to the race, and through the race even in its social relations we proceed to that higher brotherhood which is independent of place and time and which best represents God's idea of humanity. It is the province of Christ to show that all men are brethren; terms that have been belittled or narrowed or confined within their easily measurable bounds are taken up by Christ and amplified into their proper meaning and responsibility. Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? He that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother. Jesus Christ does not come to make little narrow relations of human nature; all these he regards in their proper magnitude and at their proper value, but he seeks to extend the meaning of that which is eternal and local so as to include that which belongs to the whole race and to all lands and times. The first murder was fratricidal. Murder is always a supreme wickedness against God, but when it is the murder of brother by brother it reaches a height of aggravation and perfidy, for which there are no adequate words. The exhortation against fratricidal conflict in a natural or political sense acquires additional significance and pathos in all its moral and spiritual applications. How pitiable is the aspect presented to outsiders when one Christian communion is in conflict with another, and especially when the conflict arises out of differences which are comparatively microscopic and trivial. We are continually exhorted to love as brethren. Jesus Christ makes our mutual love into an argument or a persuasive, desiring in his intercessory prayer that all his disciples might be one, in order that the world seeing their unity might glorify the God of all. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." "If a man

say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar ; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen ?” When the observing world sees the love manifested by the Church of Christ, it may not be able to understand metaphysical theology, or to accept formulated opinion and dogma, but it will be constrained to say, See how these Christians love one another : these men have been with Christ, and have learned of him. Thus it lies within the power of all men to contribute somewhat to the practical and persuasive argument of Christianity.

“So they strengthened the kingdom [not only in an addition of physical strength to the southern kingdom, but in an increase to its moral vigour] of Judah, and made Rehoboam the son of Solomon strong, three years [*i.e.* during the first three years of Rehoboam’s reign. In the fourth year an apostacy took place, which neutralised all the advantages of the immigration (see chap. xii. 1). In the fifth the apostacy was punished by the invasion and success of Shishak (xii. 2)]; for three years they walked in the way of David and Solomon” (v. 17).

Is it about that time that men’s strength gives way, and they begin to long for some other path ? Is there about a three-years’ staying power in the strongest of us ? Does the strength give out then ? and do apostles who watch us say, “Ye did run well ; who did hinder you ?” For three little years they walked in the way of David and Solomon. We do not despise the three years, but we are tempted to wonder at the men who could have three years’ approximate good character, and then turn away again. We wonder at the man who can abstain three years from drinking “liquid damnation,” and then can begin again his evil course. We do wonder at a man who can read and think and study three years, and then run and join the weltering society of fools. How is it with the soul in this matter of three years ? The first year was difficult, the second less difficult, the third was comparatively without difficulty : was it when the difficulty ceased that the old desire returned ? Was it when we were about to master the pain of discipline and enter into the liberty of franchise that we bethought us of the flesh-pots of Egypt, and yearned and hungered and thirsted for things forbidden ? We thought surely that three years would see an end of the devil within us. Is he dead or only sleeping ? Are we

just as corrupt as we ever were, only the varnish is thicker? Better be severe and real in our inquiry, and get at facts, than look only at the polish, and not understand the nature of the heart which is thus bedizened and befooled.

There is such a thing as temporary good behaviour; but by temporary good behaviour many men have attained to good conduct that has been permanent. There have been trembling men who have taken some holy pledge for three months. They were not to be sneered at, but to be encouraged. Had we driven them to take the pledge for life, they could not have signed the oath, but they crawled and crept before they stood up to walk: at the end of the three months, friends have said, Why not renew the pledge, say for six months? and the temporariness of the bond has been the success of the appeal. Have not some parents said to sons, Promise to attend the church for one twelve months? Have we not heard a godly parent say, My son has promised to attend the Christian service for one year? and has not the parental countenance beamed with sacred radiance as the promise has been announced? We are, therefore, to conduct ourselves with moderateness and great delicacy of feeling towards men who have said they would try the way to heaven for a year. Who can tell what may happen in that sunny year? Who knows what flowers may be found by the roadside, what birds may sing in the balmy air, what new friendships may be made, what new desires may be inspired and consolidated? Let us have hope in those who have taken a pledge to be better, though in some mechanical way only for three days, three months, three years. A critical time it is no doubt when the last day has come of the allotted space. How hearts at home have quaked, lest that last day should be the farewell of household peace and love and trust! The case has been so delicate that not a word could be said regarding the lapse of time: perhaps the man who took the solemn oath does not know it is the last day, and who would tell him that his time is about expiring? for he is not a prisoner longing to be released, but a free man afraid that his liberty may be violated or abridged. How many poor hearts have sunk in deadly fear lest when the pledge—be it what it may—having been honourably

fulfilled as to time, may be abandoned as to discipline! Three years of experimental goodness ought to be three years of personal consolidation. To get three years ahead of the enemy ought to be a great advantage. The doctors say that it requires three years to get drink really out of a man's system, and no man is safe until he has quite passed the line of three years; then the last flickering ember may have died; then the angels may say, Another free man! Are we nearing the lapse of our holy pledge? Is any parent afraid lest to-morrow may see his eldest son, his first-born child, going back to bondage! These critical times in life are the making of life when they are really seized aright as to their spirit and highest significance. Sometimes we have to share the burden of those whom we encourage in temporary goodness. Have we not heard a friend say joyously, that if we promised to take the pledge along with him he would take it? But the friend had no need of pledges—a strong, wise, clear-headed man, who knew exactly the measure and reckoning of things; yet he said, I will be a kind of surety for him; it may be that my sacrifice will have an influence upon his probity, and thus a weak man may be nursed into a strong one. “By all means save some;” by no means ever sneer at a man who wants to be better if even for twenty-four hours.

## PRAYER.

THY will be done. Death is not in thee, thou living One. There is no grave in heaven; there is no night there—much less death; even the first shadow is not allowed to darken the land,—how, then, shall the great death-gloom spread over it, and fill it with sevenfold night? In thy land of rest there is no night, no death, no sin, no sea, no need of the candle, no need of the sun nor of the moon: for the Lamb is the light thereof. He said, “I am the light of the world.” He is the light of all worlds, and the light of all ages, and in him is no darkness at all. We call him, Lord, Saviour, Son of man, Son of God, God the Son,—the express image of that which is to us invisible. We desire that thou, Father of us all, wouldst take into thy care all our life. We mismanage all things: we kill the flowers that we pluck; it is in God only to do that which is for ever good and right. Not our will, but thine, be done: put us upon the mountain, or locate us in the vale,—where thou wilt, thou knowest our number upon thine own register: thou knowest where to find us: how to send the angels to us, and how to increase the light as our vision is able to bear it. We would live and move and have our being in God. The Lord hear us at the cross; and to our poor speech, full of sin and need, and always of supplication for something more, do thou listen in the name of Jesus, and answer in the mystery of the love of his cross; so that, where our prayer fails, thine answer may be multiplied; and where speech and song and adoration abound, may thy reply much more abound. Amen.

## 2 Chronicles xii. 1-12.

1. And it came to pass, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom [rather, “when Rehoboam’s kingdom had been established”], and had strengthened himself [when he had become strong], he forsook the law of the Lord.

[On this point the narrative in Kings is the fuller of the two. There we (*Speaker’s Commentary*) are told that the apostacy of Rehoboam and his people consisted in their setting up high places, images, and groves, and in their encouragement of “Sodomites” and other Gentile abominations (1 Kings xiv. 23, 24)].

2. And it came to pass, that in the fifth year of king Rehoboam Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, because they had transgressed [The writer speaks, of course, from a divine, not a human point of view. Shishak’s motive in coming up was to help Jeroboam, and to extend his own influence], against the Lord [“for they had been unfaithful to Jehovah”].

3. With twelve hundred chariots [probably round numbers; a rough estimate], and threescore thousand horsemen: and the people were without number that came with him out of Egypt; the Lubims, the Sukkiims, and the Ethiopians.

[Upon this verse, Canon BARRY says: Rather, Lybians, Sukkiyans, and Cushites (without the definite article). These were "the people"—*i.e.*, the footmen. The Lybians and Cushites are mentioned together as auxiliaries of Egypt in Nah. iii. 9. (Comp. chap. xvi. 8.) The Sukkiyans are unknown, but the LXX. and Vulg. render *Troglodytes*, or cave-dwellers, meaning, it would seem, the Ethiopian Troglodytes of the mountains on the western shore of the Arabian gulf (comp. *Sukkô*, "his lair," Psalm x. 9).]

4. And he took the fenced cities [those very cities which Rehoboam had fortified as bulwarks against Egypt (chap. xi. 5-12)] which pertained to Judah, and came to Jerusalem.

5. ¶ Then came Shemaiah the prophet to Rehoboam, and to the princes of Judah, that were gathered together to Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said unto them, Thus saith the Lord, Ye have forsaken me, and therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak.

6. Whereupon the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves; and they said, The Lord is righteous [they acknowledged, that is, the justice of the sentence which had gone forth against them].

7. And when the Lord saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the Lord came to Shemaiah, saying, They have humbled themselves: therefore I will not destroy them [comp. the repentance of Ahab (1 Kings xxi. 17-29) and that of the Ninevites (Jonah ii. 5-10) which produced similar revocations of the divine decrees that had been pronounced by the mouth of a prophet], but I will grant them some deliverance [rather, deliverance for a short space]: and my wrath shall not be poured out [or, pour itself out, wreak itself] upon Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak. [The destruction of Jerusalem was reserved for the hand of Nebuchadnezzar.]

8. Nevertheless they shall be his servants [Rehoboam had not merely to make a sacrifice of treasure to obtain peace. He had to accept the suzerainty of Egypt], that they may know my service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries [*i.e.*, "that they may be able to contrast the light burthen of the theocracy with the heavy yokes of a foreign monarch"].

9. So Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, and took away the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house; he took all: he carried away also the shields of gold which Solomon had made.

10. Instead of which king Rehoboam made shields of brass, and committed them to the hands of the chief of the guard, that kept the entrance of the king's house.

11. And when the king entered into the house of the Lord, the guard came and fetched them, and brought them again into the guard chamber.

12. And when he humbled himself, the wrath of the Lord turned from him [in fulfilment of the promise of v. 7] that he would not destroy him altogether: and also in Judah things went well.

### THE IDOLATRY OF REHOBOAM.

“And it came to pass, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom, and had strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the Lord, and all Israel with him” (v. 1).

**A**N accursed word is that sometimes—“established,” or “strengthened,” or prospered, or succeeded. It was the mark of the place where we turned hellward. We prayed when we were poor; we went to the sanctuary when we were weak. Who can stand fatness and sunshine all the year round? Who can understand the meaning of prosperity? Who can be modest, and great? Who can be humble, and rich? Who can be prayerful, and successful in business? The story thus comes to us with modernness of aspect and detail quite startling. Where are the rich? How delicate in health they became when their riches multiplied! How sensitive to cold when they rolled round in gorgeous chariot drawn by prancing and foaming steed! How short-tempered when they became long-pursed! What a change in their public prayers when they became the victims of social status and reputation! All the spirituality fled away from the prayer; the words were mechanically correct, and the sentences followed one another with some sequence; but the bloom, the fragrance, the tender delicate spirituality was gone. A man cannot have been three years wise, and then have returned to old courses, without his return being marked by aggravations of evil. The last state of the man is worse than the first. “The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.” To have been half way to heaven, and then to have been thrown down—what agonies of recollection! What a temptation to drown the agonising memory in any dissipation that will permit us to bathe in its depths! Is it possible for a man who has once tasted the heavenly gift, and who has turned away from the divine table, ever to be brought back again? “With men this is impossible: but with God all things are possible.” In that word “possible” find the gospel which many a despairing heart needs as hunger needs bread.

**The Lord explains his way amongst men,—**



"It came to pass that in the fifth year of king Rehoboam . . . [that the Lord punished him—with this explanation] . . . because they had transgressed against the Lord" (v. 2).

How religious the Bible is! We should now say men are punished because they have transgressed the laws of nature: men are suffering physically because they have transgressed the laws of health; men are in great weakness because they have tempted debility, and brought it upon themselves by neglect or by indulgence. Even atheists have explanations. They cannot treat life as a piece of four-square wood, the whole of which can be seen at once; even they have laws, ministries, spectral actions, physiological explanations: it would seem as if the Bible gathered up all these and glorified them with a divine name, and said, This is the Lord's doing: he has laid hold of the sinner, he has arrested the transgressor, the grip of eternity is upon the neck of sinful time. There is no reason to surrender this frankness or to conceal this divine and spiritual action in life.

How did the Lord propose to punish Rehoboam and his kingdom? He said he would leave them in the hands of a certain man,—

"Then came Shemaiah the prophet to Rehoboam, and to the princes of Judah, that were gathered together to Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said unto them, Thus saith the Lord, Ye have forsaken me, and therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak" (v. 5).

That is all. But what an all it is!—I have left you, abandoned you, handed you over: how can I give thee up? How can I cut thee off? How can I smite thee? Yet there is no alternative sometimes but to shut the door in the prodigal's face, sometimes to tell him that his home is no longer at his service, sometimes to tell him that the old altar burns with a fire that will consume him should he draw nigh. Solemn words—"therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak"; and when God leaves a people in the hand of the enemy, the hand of the enemy is by so much strengthened, because of the weakness of the people who are left. This is the explanation of national disaster, and of many elements and features connected with national history. We are seeking in mean politics for an explanation of this or that tremendous suffering, awful destitution, sense of orphanage:

whereas the explanation of it lies in the sanctuary that is above ; God has handed over his people to the hand of the enemy for a time.

“So Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, and took away the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king’s house ; he took all : he carried away also the shields of gold which Solomon had made.\* Instead of which king Rehoboam made shields of brass, and committed them to the hands of the chief of the guard, that kept the entrance of the king’s house” (vv. 9, 10).

How deterioration walks in the steps of wickedness ! Poor Rehoboam puts up brass instead of gold ! He might have had all vessels of finest gold, gold seven times refined ; but he failed, he fell back in a tremendous apostacy, and now that he wants shields he must have them made of brass. See how deterioration follows all character that goes down in its religious aspect. This deterioration marks the whole progress of human development. What songs we used to sing ! How sweet in praise, how lofty in thought, how sacred in emotion ! And now the song dies on our palsied and mumbling lips. How we used to preach— with what burning passion, with what apostolic zeal, with what divine fury and madness ! And now we apologise for referring to the kingdom of heaven ; and the cross, once our boast and glory, we have written all over with “ laws of nature,” “ laws of mind,” “ laws of progress,” “ revelations of obedience” : it used

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\* Shishak was a king of Egypt contemporary with Jeroboam, to whom he gave an asylum when he fled from Solomon (1 Kings xi. 40). This was indicative of his politic disposition to encourage the weakening of the neighbouring kingdom, the growth of which under David and Solomon was probably regarded by the kings of Egypt with some alarm. After Jeroboam had become king of Israel, and probably at his suggestion, Shishak invaded the kingdom of Judah, B.C. 971, at the head of an immense army ; and, after having taken the fortified places, advanced against Jerusalem. Satisfied with the submission of Rehoboam, and with the immense spoils of the Temple, the king of Egypt withdrew without imposing any onerous conditions upon the humbled grandson of David (1 King xiv. 25, 26 ; 2 Chron. xii. 2-9). Shishak has been identified as the first king of the twenty-second or Diospolitian dynasty, the Sesonchis of profane history. His name has been found on the Egyptian monuments in the form of Sheshonk. He is said to have been of Ethiopian origin, and it is supposed that, with the support of the military caste, he dethroned the Pharaoh who gave his daughter to Solomon (1 Kings iii. 1).

to be associated with mysterious blood; it used to be a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness: now it is a shadow in history, a spectre in the night-time of speculation: an uneasy, weird, unwelcome thing on the disc of progress. Is it not so with regard to all personal service? How ardent we once were! How devoted to the house of God, how punctual in attendance, how zealous in worship! How we longed for the hour of praise to double itself, for the sun to stand still and the moon, that we might have long intercourse with the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost! Now how soon we become restless; how we long to be released, how patience becomes sensitive, and yields in angry surrender, because too much tried! You never bring gold for brass when you leave God. The prodigal never brings any treasure back with him; he comes back naked, hungry, starved; he comes back a gaunt skeleton, without touch of quality or worth; a beggar, a mendicant, a suppliant that dare hardly pray, for he would seem to have no right in language when he has fouled and despoiled all thought. When Rehoboam returns he will bring with him a shield of brass in place of a shield of gold; when men go away intellectually from the Bible this is what they do—they bring back brass for gold; when they leave the Bible morally they bring back brass for gold; when they leave sympathetically they bring back artifice for inspiration, mechanics for vital communion. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." There is a providence ruling all things; a great retributive law is at work in the universe. Men cannot do wrong, and the Lord leave them unpunished. "Whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him." A serpent is on the other side of every hedge that God has planted. If we would enlarge our liberty by violating the hedge we shall be serpent-bitten. Let all human history say if this be not so.

"And when the king entered into the house of the Lord, the guard came and fetched them, and brought them again into the guard chamber. And when he humbled himself, the wrath of the Lord turned from him, that he would not destroy him altogether: and also in Judah things went well" [literally, "Moreover in Judah there were good things"] (vv. 11, 12).

**We are called upon to observe the relation and progress of events, and to inquire into the moral reasons which explain either**

their ill-going or their happy advancement. We often speak of things going well in too narrow a sense, simply meaning that property increases, that health is continued, and that the whole outward environment is comfortable and satisfactory. That is not a proper estimate of the whole question. Things can only go well when the heart goes well. In proportion as we are right with God we shall feel that all things are ours. The world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are ours; and we are Christ's; and Christ is God's. Things may be going well externally whilst the very life is being poisoned or eaten out by some deadly cancer. When the king humbled himself the wrath of the Lord turned from him, and he would not destroy him altogether. Then it is added, "also in Judah things went well," the very structure of the sentence implying that what was a moral explanation in the one case was a moral explanation in the other. When the king humbled himself, the wrath of the Lord turned; then comes the word "also," signifying that the thought of the Chronicler is still advancing along the same moral line, implying that in Judah also there was humbleness of mind, and a tender longing after God; so that all things within the kingdom went well. Things go well when they are right: contentment comes after obedience: a triumphant death comes after a faithful and consecrated life: an abundant harvest follows a seed-time that has been carefully studied and turned to its full degree of advantage. When things do not go well we should inquire into moral reasons: why this affliction, why this loss, why this discontentment, why this bitterness of soul? Do not spare the inquiries; use them as spears, and thrust them into the heart, for out of such faithful self-dealing will come the humbleness, the penitence, the brokenheartedness, which are always followed by pardon, restoration, and spiritual harmony.

## PRAYER.

**ALMIGHTY** God, may we ever see thy hand working amongst us, shaping our life, pointing out our course, and writing for us lessons which we should lay to heart. We think all things move of themselves; we forget the inner life, the divine spring, the infinite purpose which lies behind and within all things seen and known. To be brought back to feel that thou art within the whole, working out a sovereign purpose, is to be deeply religious, is to be made solemn, calm, thankful, hopeful. We forget that there is a centre, a life, a throne; hence we become frivolous, and self-trustful, and self-idolatrous: when we remember the one, true, living, eternal God, we bethink ourselves, and come near to praying; when we see Jesus Christ seated upon the mountain, and hear him talking great words of life and wisdom and truth, we begin to ask solemn questions, and as we draw nearer to the Son of God we feel that he has yet somewhat to say unto us tenderer than we have yet heard; at the last he tells us as much as we can bear,—he is going to lay down his life, and take it again; for a moment he will die, for ever he will live, and whilst he lives he will pray for the sons of men. Thus we are taken to great heights, we see distant horizons, far-away glittering pinnacles of cities infinite and everlasting, and we despise the earth, so small, so dark, only room in it for a grave. Our whole thought has been lifted up by thy Son: never man spake like this man! He knows what is in man; he touches the heart, he inspires the whole being, he subdues and sanctifies the will, he creates us anew in his own image, and we are his workmanship, bearing upon us everywhere traces of his infinite skill and power and wisdom. We are the sons of God. Once we did not know this, for we were prisoners of darkness, worshippers of ourselves, dead in trespasses and in sins, lost; but we have seen a great light, a marvellous light; we now know that we are thy workmanship, thy creatures, thy friends, thy sons, and we wish to love thee with deepest love evermore. Now, therefore, we see other things in their right light; we know their weight, their value; we estimate them properly; they are no longer worthy of our day-and-night quest; they have their uses, their conveniences, but we would so take them up as to mean to set them down again; we would throw our whole love in all its tenacity only around the cross of Christ. We see somewhat now of the mystery of life; there is light on the edges thereof, presently there will be light at the very centre, a great glory, and God shall be magnified in the revelation; we shall come to know the meaning of darkness and pain, uphill travelling, long night watching; hot, awful tears; heartache, penitence, contrition; all the mystery and tragedy of life; and in the harvest, infinite, golden, we shall thank God for the pain of the seedtime. Receive all our thanks, from the household hearth

where we have seen thy mercy, in life given and life spared, and life restored and life blessed. Hear the little nursery hymn, in which children sing what they do not understand, but who will one day come to feel all its sweet meaning. Listen to the sighing of those that are ill at ease, to whom day is night, and night is sevenfold in darkness, and all life is a huge burden or a sharp pain. Make us wise, true, noble, gentle, charitable; give us those eyes of sanctified affection which see excellence and not defect in the character of others. Arrest all evil men in evil courses; drive them back in shame, and make them think of God and truth and heaven. Help all good men in noble toil; may their courage never go down, may their hope be as a burning lamp, and may their inspiration be renewed day by day. Be with those in trouble on the sea; with wandering ones in lands far-away; with missionaries trying to turn difficult language into heavenly music by filling it with the gospel of Christ. Thus the Lord put his arms around the little world, and say to us in tones of comfort, the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof, and his the fulness of the sea. Amen.

## 2 Chronicles xiii. 1-12.

1. Now in the eighteenth year of king Jeroboam began Abijah to reign over Judah.

2. He reigned three years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Michaiah ["Maachah the daughter of Abishalom;" in Kings, which is doubtless correct. "Michaiah," which is elsewhere a man's name, is a corruption of Maachah] the daughter of Uriel of Gibeah. And there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam.

3. And Abijah set the battle in array [began the battle (1 Kings xx. 14)] with an army of valiant men of war, even four hundred thousand chosen men: Jeroboam also set the battle in array against him with eight hundred thousand chosen men, being mighty men of valour.

4. ¶ And Abijah stood up upon mount Zemaraim [not elsewhere mentioned; and it is uncertain (*Speaker's Commentary*) whether we ought to connect it with the city of the same name noticed in Joshua among the towns allotted to Benjamin (Josh. xviii. 22). The mountain seems to have lain south of Beth-el (see v. 19), upon the border of the two kingdoms. It has not yet been identified] which is in mount Ephraim [the hill country of Ephraim], and said, Hear me, thou Jeroboam, and all Israel;

5. Ought ye not to know [literally, is it not to you to know?] that the Lord God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever [Abijah omits to notice that the gift of the kingdom to David was conditional. "If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them, their children also shall sit upon thy throne for evermore" (Ps. cxxxii. 12. Compare Ps. lxxxix. 30-32)], even to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt [*i.e.*, a sacred and inviolable covenant (see Numb. xviii. 19.)]?

6. Yet Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the servant [the subject] of Solomon the son of David, is risen up, and hath rebelled against his lord.

7. And there are gathered unto him vain men [*i.e.*, "low fellows," "persons of the baser sort." (Comp. Judg. ix. 4; 2 Sam. vi. 20)] the children of Belial, and have strengthened themselves against Rehoboam the

son of Solomon, when Rehoboam was young and tenderhearted [rather, a youth and soft of heart, fainthearted], and could not withstand them [did not show himself strong or firm].

8. And now ye think to withstand the kingdom [literally, "to show yourselves strong before the kingdom"] of the Lord in [through] the hand of the sons of David [the meaning is, the kingdom which Jehovah holds by the instrumentality of the house of David, as his earthly representative (see 1 Chron. xxix. 23)]; and ye be a great multitude, and there are with you golden calves [Canon BARRY thus paraphrases: "And therefore you believe yourselves assured of divine aid, in addition to the strength of numbers. But your trust is delusive, for Jeroboam *made* the objects of your fond idolatry (see Isa. xlv. 9-17); and you have superseded the only lawful worship of Jehovah (v. 9), which Jeroboam made you for gods.

9. Have ye not cast out [banished (Jer. viii. 3)] the priests of the Lord, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites, and have made you priests after the manner of the nations of other lands? so that whosoever cometh to consecrate himself with a young bullock and seven rams [We (*Speaker's Commentary*) should have expected "a bullock and *two* rams," as this was the offering which God had required at the original consecration of the sons of Aaron (Exod. xxix. 1; Lev. viii. 2). But it appears that Jeroboam, for reasons of his own, enlarged the sacrifice, and required it at the consecration of every priest], the same may be a priest of them that are no gods.

10. But as for us, the Lord is our God, and we have not forsaken him; \* and the priests, which minister unto the Lord, are the sons of Aaron, and the Levites wait upon their business:

11. And they burn unto the Lord every morning and every evening [for the daily sacrifice, see Exod. xxix. 38-42; for the "sweet incense," or, incense of spices, Exod. xxx. 7] burnt sacrifices and sweet incense: the shewbread also set they in order upon the pure table [another reading is: "and a pile of bread is on the pure table, and the golden lampstand and its lamps they have to light every evening. (See Exod. xxv. 30, 37; Lev. xxiv. 5-7)]; and the candlestick of gold with the lamps thereof, to burn every evening: for we keep the charge of the Lord our God; but ye have forsaken him [the observance of these details of ritual is called "keeping the charge of Jehovah" (see Lev. viii. 35), and neglect of them is "forsaking" him].

12. And, behold, God himself is with us [literally, And behold there are with us at the head the God and his priests, and the trumpets of alarm to sound alarm against you (see Numb. x. 9; xxxi. 6). The trumpets were "the divinely appointed pledges that God would remember them in war"], for our captain, and his priests with sounding trumpets to cry alarm against you. O children of Israel, fight ye not against the Lord God of your fathers; for ye shall not prosper.

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\* Comp. 1 Kings xv. 3, "He walked in all the sins of his father," "his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God." But that passage is by no means incompatible with the present as some have asserted. What Abijah here states is surely true—viz., that Judah had maintained the Levitical priesthood, and its associated worship. And the following words prove

### THE IDEAL ABIJAH.

WE forget Abijah's character in his eloquence. He carries a spell with him. Judging from this speech, one would suppose him faultless, entirely noble in every aspiration and impulse, and sublimely religious and unselfish. The whole Abijah is not here. This is the ideal Abijah. Who ever shows himself wholly upon one occasion? Who does not sometimes go forth in his best clothing? We must read the account of Abijah which is given in the Kings before we can correctly estimate the Abijah who talks in the Chronicles.\* It is, perhaps, encouraging that whilst men are upon the earth they should not be so dazzlingly good as to blind their fellow-men. Yet it is pitiful to observe how men can be religious for the occasion. Nearly all men are religious at a funeral: few men are religious at a wedding. Abijah has a great cause to serve, and he addresses himself to it not only with the skill of a rhetorician but with the piety of a mind that never tenanted a worldly thought. God knows the whole character: how bright we are in points, how dark in many places; how lofty, how low: knowing all, he

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this to be his meaning: "And the priests which minister unto the Lord *are the sons of Aaron*; and the Levites wait upon their business" (literally, are in the work"). The work of the service of Jehovah could be duly performed by none but Levites.—CANON BARRY.

\* The writer in Kings takes a much worse view of Abijah's character than we (SMITH'S *Dictionary*) find in the Chronicles. From the first Book of Kings we learn that Abijah endeavoured to recover the kingdom of the Ten Tribes, and made war on Jeroboam. No details are given, but we are also informed that he walked in all the sins of Rehoboam (idolatry and its attendant immoralities, 1 Kings xiv. 23, 24), and that his heart "was not perfect before God, as the heart of David his father." In the second Book of Chronicles his war against Jeroboam is more minutely described, and he makes a speech to the men of Israel, reproaching them for breaking their allegiance to the house of David, for worshipping the golden calves, and substituting unauthorised priests for the sons of Aaron and the Levites. He was successful in battle against Jeroboam, and took the cities of Bethel, Jeshanah, and Ephraim, with their dependent villages. . . . Nothing is said by the writer in Chronicles of the sins of Abijah, but we are told that after his victory he "waxed mighty, and married fourteen wives," whence we may well infer that he was elated with prosperity, and, like his grandfather Solomon, fell during the last two years of his life into wickedness, as described in Kings. Both records inform us that he reigned three years.



judges correctly, and his mercy is his delight. Sometimes it would seem as if judgment were forgotten in the abundance of his clemency, in the river of his tears. "Our God is a consuming fire:" yet "God is love." As man is manifold, so is God manifold. Neither God nor man is to be judged by one aspect, or one attribute, or one quality; we must comprehend, so far as we may be able, the whole circuit of character and purpose before we can come to a large and true conclusion. But as we have to do with the ideal Abijah, let us hear what he has to say in his ideal capacity; we will forget his faults whilst we listen to the music of his religious eloquence.

Abijah comes before us like a man who has a good cause to plead. He fixes his feet upon a mountain as upon a natural throne, and from its summit he addresses a king and a nation, and he addresses his auditors in the sacred name of "the Lord God of Israel." He will not begin the argument at a superficial point, or take it as starting from yesterday's new raw history, history hardly settled into form; he will go back, and with great sweep of historical reference he will establish his claim to be heard.

"Ought ye not to know that the Lord God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, even to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt?" (v. 5).

The binding covenant, the covenant that even pagans would not break. If you have eaten salt with a man you can never speak evil of him with an honest heart; you must forget your criticism in the remembrance of the salt. You are at liberty to decline intercourse and fellowship and confidence; you are perfectly at liberty to say, I will have nothing to do with thee in any association whatsoever; but you cannot be both friend and enemy, you cannot eat salt with a man and smite him in the face, or wound him in the heel, or hurt him in any way, at any time, in any line or point. That was pagan morality! We are fallen a long way behind it in many cases: for what Christian is there who could not eat all the salt a man has, and then go out and speak about him with bitterness, plunder him, frustrate his plans, anticipate him in some business venture, and laugh at him over his misplaced confidence? Abijah recognised the perpetuity of

the covenant. The kingdom was given to David for ever—if not in words, yet in spirit; if chapter and verse cannot be quoted, yet the whole spirit of the divine communion with David meant eternity of election and honour. It is right to hold up the ideal covenant; it is right that even men who themselves have broken covenants should insist that covenants are right. We must never forget the ideal. Our prayers must express our better selves. A dying thief may pray. Again and again we have to fall back upon the holy doctrine that a man is not to be judged in his character by the prayers which he offers, inasmuch as his prayers represent what he would be if he could.

Abijah having to deal with a perpetual covenant charges Jeroboam with breaking it—

“ Yet Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the servant of Solomon the son of David, is risen up, and hath rebelled against his Lord ” (v. 6).

All rebellion is wrong, unless it arises from a sense of injustice, untruthfulness, dishonesty. No man has a right to dissent from the national Church unless his dissent be founded upon conscience, a right conception of the nature of the kingdom of Christ upon the earth, which leads him to say to certain men, Stand off! No part of the empire has a right to arise against the central authority, of which itself constitutes a part, merely for the sake of expressing political prejudice or selfish design. Every rebellion must be put down that cannot justify itself by the very spirit and genius of justice. Separation becomes schism when it merely expresses a whim, an aversion, of a superficial or technical kind; and every rebellion is wickedness, is born of the spirit of the pit, that cannot justify itself by appeals to justice, nobleness, liberty, God. Yet our rebellions have made our history. We should have been in slavery but for rebellion. The rebels are the heretics that have created orthodoxy. We owe nothing to the indifferent, the languid, the selfish, the calculating, the let-alone people who simply want to eat and drink and sleep and die. That they were ever born is either an affront to nature, or the supreme mystery of human life. Abijah, therefore, is perfectly right when he insists upon mere rebellion being put down: but when rebellion expresses the spirit of justice and the spirit of

progress, the new revelation, the new day, all the Abijahs that ever addressed the world can only keep back the issue for a measurable period.

The accusation of Abijah was that Jeroboam had "gathered unto him vain men, the children of Belial," for "vain men" read "sons of worthlessness," empty fellows, who will join any mob that pays best; men who will cheer any speaker for half-a-crown an hour, and put out anybody on any plea on any side for extra remuneration. Where do these men come from? Whose language do they speak? Whose image and superscription do they bear? They are in every country; they worship in the sanctuary of mischief, they bow down at the altar of selfishness; they know not what they do: they will make a cross for a day's wages. Evil company follows evil men. Worthless fellows are soon dissatisfied with the company of righteousness; the intercourse becomes monotonous, suffocating. A bad man could not live in heaven. It is not in the power of mercy to save men from hell; for they carry hell with them; they *are* perdition.

Who can wonder if desecration followed in the steps of worthlessness?

"Have ye not cast out the priests of the Lord, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites, and have made you priests after the manner of the nations of other lands? so that whosoever cometh to consecrate himself with a young bullock and seven rams, the same may be a priest of them that are no gods" (v. 9).

Let them bring the offering, and then they may become priests and do what they please at altars that have no foundations, the incense of which is a cloud that heaven will not absorb. William Rufus declared that Church bread was sweet bread. How many men have eaten Church bread who ought to have died of hunger! What responsibility attaches to some people in this matter! Church bread ought never to be given away, ought never to be dishonoured with the name of a "living." No man should be in the Church who could not make five times the money out of it that he ever made in it; it should be felt that if he put forth all his power, both his hands, his whole mind and strength, he could be the greatest man in the commonwealth. Jeroboam would admit any one to the altar; he would make room if there

was none ; he would cast out a priest of the Lord to make room for a priest of Belial. This is the accusation which Abijah brings against Jeroboam and his company of rebels.

Now he turns to state his own case ; he tells us what he and his people are :—

“ But as for us, the Lord is our God, and we have not forsaken him ; and the priests, which minister unto the Lord, are the sons of Aaron, and the Levites wait upon their business : and they burn unto the Lord every morning and every evening burnt sacrifices and sweet incense ; the shew-bread also set they in order upon the pure table ; and the candlestick of gold with the lamps thereof, to burn every evening : for we keep the charge of the Lord our God ; but ye have forsaken him ” [The observance of these details of ritual is called “ keeping the charge of Jehovah ” (see Lev. viii. 35), and neglect of them is “ forsaking ” him (see ver. 10, *ante*, p. 268)] (vv. 10, 11).

What a character he gives himself ! Let us remember that we are dealing with an ideal man, and not with the real personality. Take this, however, as an ideal representation, how perfect it is in every line ! “ The Lord is our God : ” We have a sound and vital theology ; we have a clear upward look, no cloud conceals the face divine ; no idols have we, no images of wood, no pillars, no groves, no high places where idolatry may be performed as an entertainment. The man reasons well ; he insists upon having corner-stones in any edifice or argument he puts up ; when he accuses, he goes back to the covenant of salt ; when he claims a right position, he claims that it is a theological one : he holds the right God. Losing the right theology, we lose all the detail along with it. When the conception of God is wrong, no other conception can be right. It is only bold, because it is true, to say, that if a man has not—not the right God, but—the right desire after the right God, he cannot keep correct weights and scales ; the custom house, the inland revenue, the excise,—call it what you please,—may to some extent keep him up to the right mark, but in his soul he takes in every customer that comes near him ; if he does not he loses sleep. This applies to the so-called heathen as well as to the Christian. It is not necessary that a man should have a clear and perfect revelation of God, but that in his heart he feels that he is a creature, not a creator ; a subject, not a sovereign ; that he is under responsibility, and not above

it: in that proportion only can he deal righteously and nobly with his fellow men.

"And the priests, which minister unto the Lord, are the sons of Aaron, and the Levites wait upon their business" (v. 10).

Here is apostolic succession before the time of the invention of the term. Here is an excellent pedigree, a most complete genealogy:—our priests are in the Aaronic line, and the Levites know their business, and keep to it; everything is in order in our Church. That is beautiful, and that is right; we need not shrink from adding, that is necessary. We must have nothing to do with men who are not in the Aaronic and apostolic succession; they must not occupy our pulpits, they must not be allowed to make pulpits of their own; no man must sell them wood or stone with which to construct a pulpit; they must be forbidden by the genius of law from ever preaching or attempting to preach. When we let go the doctrine of apostolic succession we let go a vital treasure and blessing. We may differ as to our definition of "apostolic succession," but surely there can be no difference among frank and enlightened hearts and minds as to what apostolic succession is. No man is in the apostolic succession who is not in the apostolic spirit, and no man is out of the apostolic succession who is animated by the spirit of the apostles. That is not a spirit which is conferred by the tips of any fingers: that is the gift of God.

Do you see your calling, brethren? God hath chosen you. What a Church is God's! not a Church of waxworks, all made at one factory, and all charged for in one invoice; but living men, characterised by innumerable individualities, some broad as the firmament, others beautiful and tender as little flowers that can only grow in the fullest sun-warmth; some military in argument and in discipline, others mighty, persuasive in pathos and sympathy and tenderness. There is no monotony in God: one star differeth from another star in glory: no two blades of grass are microscopically identical: there is a common likeness in the worlds and in the sub-economies of nature, but the more penetrating our vision is made by mechanical and scientific aids the more wondrous in difference are discovered to be the very things which are supposed to be identical. We must

never allow the apostolic succession to be handed about without its being accompanied by the apostolic spirit. Every man is in the apostolic succession who believes in the apostles, who follows them as they followed Christ, and who would know nothing among men but Jesus Christ and him crucified.

“And they burn unto the Lord every morning and every evening burnt sacrifices and sweet incense: the shewbread also set they in order upon the pure table; and the candlestick of gold with the lamps thereof, to burn every evening” (v. 11).

At that time piety was mechanical. It could not be otherwise. God never forces history. The days come, each with its own burden and its own blessing, its own dawn and its own apocalypse. We cannot have to-day what is due to-morrow. God's seasons move in measured revolution, and come to us in orderly and timely procession, and no man can hasten them by lighting his camp fire, or striking his matches, or kindling his little inflammable powder. We cannot imitate the sun. Some have tried to mimic the stars: but where is the image of the sun that the sun has not obliterated by one mid-day look? The time came when all these ordinances were set aside; there was to be no more burning, there was to be no morning sacrifice and evening sacrifice, and sweet incense, or shewbread, or candlestick of gold and lamps thereof for evening burning.—“Ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: but ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.” So we may misuse history by going back and making that necessary which has already been abrogated. We may thus ill-treat the day of rest, by measuring it and weighing it in Jewish scales. We may cast a cloud over the day of jubilee that comes every week, by measuring its beginning

and its ending by Jewish arithmetic: we may make the whole week sabbatic by Christian consecration. There will always be ordinances, because whilst man is in the body he needs external helps, collateral assistances and auxiliaries; he is not always equally awake, he is not always equally spiritual; he needs the communion of saints, the coming together in holy fellowship, all the associations of a sacred time and a sacred place, and through the active yet subtle ministry of these he comes to feel that he is in touch with God. "Here in the body pent" we need such aids as can penetrate our prison and minister to the liberty of the soul.

Now Abijah says, as a kind of climax—

"And, behold, God himself is with us for our captain, and his priests with sounding trumpets to cry alarm against you. O children of Israel, fight ye not against the Lord God of your fathers; for ye shall not prosper" (v. 12).

How steadfastly he abides by the altar! He cannot be tempted one step from the throne of God. His appeal is sublime because it is religious. It is historically religious—"The Lord God of your fathers." It would seem to be a solemn thing to cut off oneself from all the currents of history, to bury our fathers over again in a deeper grave, yea to bury them at night-time, so that when the morning came we could not tell where they were interred. Abijah will have a historic line. He maintains the doctrine of philosophic and personal heredity and organic unity: he will insist upon it that the men of his day represented the men of dead generations, and were to do what they would have done had they then lived. Not only was it historically religious, but it was religion accentuated by motives, such as act most powerfully upon human conduct—"for ye shall not prosper." That appeal they could understand! The double appeal constitutes God's address to men. He is bound to point out consequences, though he would not have life built upon them. There is no other way of getting at certain people than by telling them that if they believe not they shall be—damned! They are so curiously and fearfully made that only hell can excite their attention. The preacher does not declare this doctrine of fire, or mere penalty, for the sake of revealing God and acting upon human thought and conduct. He knows it is an appeal more or

less tinctured with possible selfishness: he cannot but despise the man who asks for heaven simply because he has smelt the fire of hell. But the Christian preacher will begin where he can. He has to do with all classes and conditions of men. All men do not occupy the highest point of thought, do not approach the kingdom of heaven from the noblest considerations, and he is the wise pastor, he has the great shepherd-heart, who receives men by night, by day, through the gate of fear, through the portals of love: who keeps the door ajar for men, not knowing when they may come home. He is but a poor preacher, and he knows it, who bids people come to God that they may get to heaven; but he is aware that some people can only understand through the medium of such terms, if ever; and he only hopes for them that by experience they may eventually rise to a nobler level, and desire God for God's own sake. He only is in the Spirit of Christ who would pray as much, give as much, suffer as much, if he knew he had to die this night, and be blotted out for ever, as he would do and give if he knew he were this night going into everlasting glory. To be good in order to buy heaven is not to be good. To be religious in order to escape hell is not to be religious. Yet we must always so judge human nature as to provide for people who can only act through fear, and through love and hope of reward. Their education will be continued and completed, and some day they will look back upon their infantile beginning and pity themselves. The great thing, however, is to begin. If we are afraid of hell, let us ask great questions. If we are in hope of heaven, let us begin to do great services. Hell and heaven have nothing to do with it in reality, but they have to do a great deal with it initially and instrumentally and educationally.

What was the upshot of the war? Who needs inquire? When omnipotence goes forth to war, what can be the issue of the battle? When God takes his glittering sword, and his hand lays heavy in judgment,—can grasshoppers stand before him? Oppose a wooden fence to a boundless conflagration, and you may act almost rationally—most rationally—as compared with those who set a grasshopper to oppose the march of God.



## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we know that thou art our Father in heaven, that thou dost take care of us day by day, that we have nothing that we have not received, that every good gift and every perfect gift cometh down from the Father of light—we know this, and it is our life's one great joy. We stand in this truth, and are firm and glad. Our peace flows like a river whilst our faith lays hold upon God. Thou art our Father: we are thy children. Thou dost not deny us, nor leave us, nor disavow us; but with continual affection and care thou dost claim and keep us every one. We are prodigals indeed; still thou dost keep the house for us, and for our return thou dost wait with all the patience and eagerness of undying love. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; yet still thou art our Father, looking for us, waiting for us, seeking and saving us every day. Behold us in thine house: may we now see a light above the brightness of the sun—the full shining of God's infinite love—chasing away all darkness, filling the whole space with tender light, and giving us to feel that the bright creation is the house of God and the gate of heaven. Open the gates we have often tried but cannot open. Make friends for us in the great world. When we go out to fight life's battle may we fight it under the banner of righteousness. Keep us every one. We fall into thy hands, we have no fear; we know nothing of to-morrow because thou dost know all about it, and thou wilt charge it with light and blessing and duty as thou pleasest, and not withhold from us the strength needful to bear its burden. We pray at the cross, in sight of the sacrificial blood, and we trust our poor prayer to the infinite intercession of our Saviour and Priest in heaven. Amen.

### 2 Chronicles xiv., xv.

“And Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God” (xiv. 2).

### ASA: LIFE AND LESSONS.

ASA was a good king of Judah; he “did that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God.” Not only “good and right” because these might be variable terms. There are persons who set themselves to the presumptuous and impious task of settling for themselves, what is “right” and what is “good.” In the case of Asa, he did not invent a

righteousness, nor did he invent a goodness which he could adapt to his own tempers, ambitions, and conveniences: he was right and good and "did that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God." Whilst the land had peace, Asa set to work and built walls and towers and fences, and did all that he could for the good of his country. Zerah, an Ethiopian warrior, did not understand silence. He mistook quietness for languor; he made the vulgar mistake of supposing that quietness was indifference. He did not know that repose is the very highest expression of power. So he brought against Asa, king of Judah, no fewer than a million soldiers—"a thousand thousand" \*—to us a large number, to the Orientals quite a common array. What was to be done? Asa did not shrink from war, though he never courted it. He must meet the foe in battle. Before doing so he must pray:

"And Asa cried unto the Lord his God, and said, Lord, it is nothing with thee to help [rather, "it is alike to thee to help the powerful or the weak"—thou canst as easily, *i.e.*, help the weak as the strong] whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go [comp. 1 Sam. xvii. 45] against this multitude. O Lord, thou art our God; let not man [or, mortal man] prevail against thee" (xiv. 11).

Having risen from their knees, they launched themselves against the Ethiopians, and were mighty as men who answer straw with steel. They fought in God's name and for God's cause, and the thousand thousand of the Ethiopians were as nothing before the precise and terrific stroke of men who had studied war in the school of God. †

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\* *The Speaker's Commentary* says: This is the largest collected army of which we hear in Scripture: but it does not exceed the known numbers of other Oriental armies in ancient times. Darius Codomannus brought into the field at Arbela a force of 1,040,000 (Arr. "Exp. Alex." iii. 8). Xerxes crossed into Greece with certainly above a million of combatants. Artaxerxes Mnemon collected 1,260,000 men to meet the attack of the younger Cyrus. (Xen. "Anab," i. 7, § 12.)

† The defeat of Zerah (*Ibid.*) is one of the most remarkable events in the history of the Jews. On no other occasion did they meet in the field and overcome the forces of either of the two great monarchies between which they were placed. It was seldom that they ventured to resist, unless behind walls. Shishak, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander, Ptolemy I., were either unopposed or only opposed in this

Asa, then, began upon a good foundation; he established himself upon a great principle. That is what all young people especially should take to heart right seriously. To such we say: do not make an accident of your lives—a thing without centre, purpose, certitude, or holiness. Regard it as a trust from God. Be right in your great foundation lines, and you will build up a superstructure strong, after the nature and quality of the foundation upon which you build. Do not snatch at life. Do not take out an odd motto here and there and say, "This will do for the occasion." Life should be deeply laid in its bases, strongly cemented together in its principles, noble in its convictions; then it can be charitable in its concessions and recognitions. On what is your life based? What is the point at which you are aiming? If you have no broad foundation, no solid rock, no complete purpose and policy, then you are adventurers, speculators, and the turn of the wheel will mean your present or ultimate ruin.

"And he [Asa] took courage, and put away the abominable idols [abominations] out of all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and out of the cities which he had taken from mount Ephraim, and renewed the altar of the Lord" (xv. 8).

Let us not trifle with the occasion by suggesting that we have no idolatries to uproot, no heathen groves to examine, to purify, or to destroy. That would indeed be making light of history, and ignoring the broadest and saddest facts of our present circumstances. The world is full of little gods, man-made idols, groves planted by human hands, oppositions and antagonisms to the true theism of the universe. We are so apt to think that the idols are a long way off, far beyond seas; or that they existed long centuries ago and spoke languages now obsolete

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way. On the other occasion on which they took the field—which was under Josiah against Necho—their boldness issued in a most disastrous defeat (2 Chron. xxxv. 20-24). Now, however, under Asa, they appear to have gained a complete and most glorious victory over the entire force of Egypt, or of Ethiopia wielding the power of Egypt. . . . All fear of Egypt as an aggressive power ceases; and the Israelites learn instead to lean upon the Pharaohs for support. (2 Kings xvii. 4, xviii. 21; Isa. xxx. 2-4, etc.) Friendly ties alone connect the two countries; and it is not till B.C. 609 that an Egyptian force again enters Palestine with a hostile intention.

or forgotten. Nothing of the kind; they live here, they build to-day. Our gods are a million strong. We do not call them gods, but we worship them none the less. Luck, Accident, Fortune, Fashion, Popularity, Self-indulgence—these are the base progeny of idols that did once represent some ideal thought and even some transcendental religion. Idolatry has retrograded; polytheism has gone quickly backward. To worship the sun!—Why, there is reason in it; verily, sometimes he looks as if made to be worshipped, to be hailed with song and to be followed with adoring wonder in his infinite course of illumination. But we worship accident, fortuitous circumstances, probabilities. We calculate at the counter of our gods—where the men we often mock fell down and dumbly worshipped what they did not understand. Theirs the nobler idolatry! having in it a touch of heavenly philosophy. Asa said, in effect, “We must be right about our gods before we can be right with one another.” That is true teaching. With a wrong theology we never can have a thoroughly sound and healthy economical system. To be wrong in our conception of God is to be wrong in every point in the line of our thinking. The points themselves may be apparently sustained by great force of reasoning and great witness of concurrent facts; but when connected with their starting point they are vitiated by the mistake which was originally made. Looking on all human history we find that the conception of God—any god—which any people have held, has ultimately determined their fortunes. We rest on this philosophy. We believe in a God of righteousness, purity, mercy; a Father-God, loving all, redeeming all, caring for each as if each were an only child; patient with us, careful about us, studying our littlenesses, and making our infirmities the starting-points of new beneficences. We cannot be true to that conception of God, and have along with it a morality that we can palter with, and duties with which we can trifle. The conviction of a theology so massive, so substantial, so rational, will make itself felt in every pulsation of individual thought and social relationship.

**This was the corner-stone upon which Asa built his great and gracious policy. What was the effect of it upon other**

people? We find that the effect then was what it must always be :—

“They fell to him out of Israel in abundance [comp. chap. xi. 16], when they saw that the Lord his God was with him” (xv. 9).

Such is the influence of a great leadership. If Asa had been halting, the people would have halted too. Asa was positive, and positiveness sustained by such beneficence begets courage in other people. “They fell to him out of Israel in abundance”—that is, they came over to him and were on his side. They ranked themselves with Asa; they looked for his banner and called it theirs, “when they saw that the Lord his God was with him.” Nations perish for want of great leaders. Social reforms are dependent to a large extent upon the spirit of the leadership which has adopted them. The Church is always looking round for some bolder man, some more heroic and dauntless spirit, who will utter the new truth, if any truth can be new—say rather, the *next* truth; for truth has always a next self, a larger and immediately-impending self, and the hero, who is also martyr, must reveal that *next* phase of truth and die on Golgotha for his pains. Can we not, in some small sense, be leaders in our little circles, in our business relations, in our family life, in our institutional existence? Many people can follow a tune who cannot begin one. That is the philosophy we would unfold and enforce. You would suppose from the immediate answer to the leader that any man in the whole thousand could have begun the tune—the reality of the case being, that the leader alone, perhaps, might be able to start it; yet, the moment his clear, dominating tone is heard, a thousand men took it up as if they had begun it. It is so in morals. Many persons can feel a speech who cannot make one. That is the secret of true speaking. So the reporter does not report the speech only; he reports the whole proceedings. Hence the interruptions are as essential to the understanding of a meeting as is the eloquence itself. We must know who applauded, where they applauded, how much they applauded; so that, having read the reporter's notes, we know what a thousand men or more felt and said, for every hearer in a great and responsive audience is as truly a speaker as is the one man who gives

articulation to the common sentiment of the multitude. We want leaders—men who will have the courage to say now and then, "Let us pray." The people are waiting for good leadership. They know the shepherdly voice when they hear it; "There is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding," and you might have had a more unanimous following if your leadership had been less marked by ambiguity and equivocation. Your family might have been more united if to firmness you had added grace—if to grace you had added firmness. Regard all leaders with prayerful hopefulness in so far as they want to do good and to be good. Sympathise with them, say to Asa, even the king, "What thou hast done thou hast well done; in God's name we bless thee for the purification of the land and for the encouragement of all noble things."

Asa showed the limits of human forbearance and human philosophy. He broke down in the very act of doing that which was right because he went too far. He made a covenant and the people made it along with him.

"And they entered into a covenant\* to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul; that whosoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel should be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman" (xv. 12, 13).

That is the danger. You cannot make men religious by killing them, by threatening them, by inflicting upon them any degree of penalty. Do not force a child to church. Lead it; lure it; make the church so bright and homelike and beautiful that the child will eagerly long for the time to come when the door will be opened. We conquer by love. The Christian cause advances, not by persecution but by charity; not even by argument but

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\* Solemn renewals of the original covenant which God made with their fathers in the wilderness (Exod. xxiv. 3-8) occur from time to time in the history of the Jews, following upon intervals of apostacy. This renewal in the reign of Asa is the first on record. The next falls three hundred years later, in the reign of Josiah (2 Kings xxiii. 3; 2 Chron. xxxiv. 31). There is a third in the time of Nehemiah, mentioned in Neh. x. 28-39. On such occasions, the people bound themselves by a solemn oath to observe all the directions of the Law, and called down God's curse upon them if they forsook it.—*The Speaker's Commentary.*

by love. Controversy has done nothing for the truth compared with what has been done by holiness, purity, nobleness, patience, and the quiet heroisms which can only be accounted for by the existence of deep and real religious convictions.

Asa was impartial. There was a touch of real grandeur about the man. He would not even allow his mother to keep an idol. The queen had an idol of her own "in a grove."

"And also concerning Maachah the mother of Asa the king,\* he removed her from being queen, because she had made an idol in a grove: † and Asa cut down her idol, and stamped it and burnt it at the brook Kidron' (xv. 16).

Thus ruthlessly Asa disestablished that little royal church. See how burningly in earnest the man was; and what a man will do when his earnestness is fervent! He knows nothing about fathers, mothers, partialities, or concessions. He says, "Light is the foe of darkness, and you cannot have any little dark corner of your own. This light must find you out, chase away every shadow and purify every secret place in human life and thought." Many men fail to follow Asa just at that point. They are great reformers upon a public scale; but their own houses are stables that need to be cleansed. They are quite

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\* "*Maachah the mother of Asa the king*"—i.e., his grandmother. (See chap. xiii. 2; and 1 Kings xv. 13.) Others have supposed that Maachah the mother of Abijah, and Maachah the "mother" of Asa, were different persons, the former being the daughter of Absalom, the latter the daughter of Uriel of Gibeah. There are really no grounds for this. Maachah, the mother of Abijah, enjoyed the rank of queen-mother not only during his short reign of three years, but also during that of her grandson Asa, until deposed by him on account of her idolatry.—Canon BARRY in ELLIOTT'S *Old Testament Commentary*.

† The original word for "idol"—only found here and in 1 Kings xv. 13—appears to signify a "horrible abomination" of some monstrous kind; and instead of "in a grove," we should read "for an asherah," the wooden emblem of the Canaanitish deity (on which see 1 Kings xiv. 22). There seems little doubt that some obscene emblem is meant, of the kind so often connected with worship of the productive powers of nature in ancient religions, substituted, as a still greater abomination, for the ordinary asherah. Clearly the act of Maachah was one of so flagrant a kind, that Asa took the unusual step, on which the historian here lays great stress, of degrading her in her old age from her high dignity, besides hewing down her idol, and burning it publicly under the walls of Jerusalem.—*Ibid.*

violent progressists in all national matters ; but the moment they go home and shut the house-gate upon themselves they fall into all kinds of confusion and tumult and false relationship. "Now," said Asa, in effect, "what is good for the public is good for the individual ; what is good for the subject is good for the queen. Cut down the queen's idol, cut down the queen's grove ; and when you have got the little god, stamp on it, burn it, throw the ashes into the brook ; and because the queen no longer repents of her idolatry, she must leave her throne." We want more men of that kind. They will have uncomfortable lives, they will not be popular men ; they will be fools according to the world's arithmetic, they will be madmen in the estimation of cold minds ; but they are God's sons, children of the light, born not of men, not of blood, but born of God, born in heaven.

Let us consider this man's case well, and apply it to ourselves. We must have no persecution, no threatening, no driving ; only prayer, reasoning, hope, love ; inform the mind, guide the reason, multiply the schools, double the circulation of all good books, inspire the affections, purify the very source and spring of the will ; and our victories will not be so many coarse and costly destructions, but will be as the triumph of light over darkness, fair as the morning and beneficent as the summer.



## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we pray thee for the true vision. Blessed are the pure in heart : for they shall see God. We cannot see thee otherwise. This way is thine own, it is therefore best, and we pray to be led in it like little children. We want to see God. We would see thee every day, we would walk with thee, and talk with thee, and be thy friends ; we need not see death because of our companionship with thee, but breathe ourselves into heaven : but we do not understand what it is to see thee ; our idea is wrong, our whole thought has gone astray, we are fools before heaven. Thou art in us, thou art round about us, thou art in every flower that blooms, and in every star that burns, and in every wind that breathes over the earth. Why do we not see thee, and love thee ? wait for thee, and never go out without thee ? The heart of man is stubborn, his eyes are blind, and his will has strayed away in deserts and foreign lands. Oh that some mighty one might be sent to us to speak the right word in the right tone, to hurl upon us the great thunder, or speak to our aching hearts in the still small voice,—anyhow, that we may see and feel the living God. Thou art in our life, thou art giving it shape and tone and colour and meaning ; thou art raising up men, and putting down men, and altering the face of the earth ; and behold we wonder, but seldom pray. This is the Lord's doing, all this shaping and directing and toning life, and it is marvellous in our eyes : but our hearts do not receive the revelation with openness and frankness and joy. We have heard of thee through Jesus Christ thy Son, who said if we saw him we saw thyself. This was wondrous, we did not know its meaning ; but we listened, and read and thought, and lo, a new day dawned upon our minds, and before we were fully aware the whole heaven was alight with a new glory, and from that time we have spoken of the marvellous light ; we have said, Jesus Christ brought life and immortality to light ; he has made everything beautiful with light ; God is light. May we therefore continue to study the words of Jesus Christ thy Son, and may his Spirit be in us, and may we be led from the doctrine to the sacrifice, from the infinite gospel to the infinite atonement, which is its very centre and glory ; may we be led to the cross of Christ, symbol of misery and weakness and yet made into the symbol of immortal victory and eternal rest. Lead us day by day ; lead us into all truth ; sanctify us by thy word : thy word is truth ; may it dwell in us, rule in us, be a light in our understanding, and a fountain of consolation in our hearts, and may our whole life be shaped and directed by the Spirit of the living word. Help us to bear life's burdens, sometimes so heavy, sometimes too heavy ; help us in the restless night to meditate lovingly upon God ; help us in the long uphill work to put our

confidence in the Almighty. Dry our tears when they blind us to any beauty, but multiply them like a river when they help us to see thee better. Amen.

### 2 Chronicles xv.

“And the Spirit of God came upon Azariah [the same expression as in Numb. xxiv. 2. (Comp. 2 Chron xx. 14; xxiv. 20)] the son of Oded [by some identified with Iddo, the prophet and historian of the two preceding reigns]” (v. 1).

### INSPIRATION AND ACTION.

**S**UCH words as these should make us solemn, and glad. Here is the eternal force, the Spirit of God; here is the transitory medium, the individual man upon whom that force so suddenly and graciously acted. God is still here, man is still here: why should inspiration cease? Men still depend upon the living God for instruction, truth, law, guidance; and men are still made in the image and likeness of God; they are the very elect and chosen of the heavenly One: why should he turn his back upon them, and withhold from them the living air, which, breathing through their souls, should purify and ennoble every faculty? There is no reason why inspiration should cease; there is, on the other hand, every reason why inspiration should continue and abound. Dangers will of course arise in connection with a proposition of this kind, but the proposition is not the less true because the dangers are many and serious. Man can pervert any thing. He would defile the heavens if he could touch them; he has killed all the flowers—he would put out the stars if his wicked fingers could get at them. We are not, therefore, to be alarmed by the suggestion of danger, perversion, and the like, when we state the great and noble doctrine of the continuity of divine inspiration in human history. Accidents may have changed, but that great organic line continues—the substance of revelation, the illumination of mind, the preparation of heart, the subduing and sanctification of will, the sudden creation of light amid the cloud and storm of life. We ourselves are witnesses to these divine and beneficent interpositions. Here is the greatest event in human experience, signified and expressed by these few words—“The Spirit of God came upon Azariah.” There is no mistaking it when it does come upon a man. Thunderbolts are not easily mistaken for feathers, for puffs of summer wind; they bring

with them an impression that is easily remembered. It is so with inspiration. The whole sky is lighted up suddenly as if by a fiat; every faculty enlarges, burns, and becomes eager for action in beneficent directions; all proportions are altered instantaneously; great things become small, insignificant things are charged with great meanings; time dies like a bubble in the air, and nothing is so present to the imagination and the whole consciousness as eternity. Let this inspiration come in what form it may, the impression is the same. Say it comes in the form of what is known as "conversion." We thus introduce the word because it is falling into disuse. We are practically ashamed of it. Shame be to us, like a scorching fire on the cheek, that we should so hesitate to use the greatest word in personal experience. When a man is converted all things become new; the heavens are so much higher, yet so much nearer; the earth so much lovelier and more useful for spiritual ends, being enriched with symbols and types, and hints, endless and beautiful ineffably. Our whole relation to one another also is changed; we love—do we?—our enemies; we pray for them which spitefully use us and persecute us. That is the ideal purpose of conversion, and even if we half turn the other cheek, it is miracle enough for this cloudy grey of life, it exhausts what manhood is now realised by the strongest of us, and is accepted of God as the beginning of a new manhood. The inspired man makes his own impression, undertakes his own work, dictates his own terms of commerce with men, comes suddenly, speaks loudly, clearly, sweetly, commandingly; he seldom hints, he declares, he reveals; he is blessed with that great gift Authority. "When Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." The words did not half die on his lips; his doctrines did not come with apologies; his great propositions did not ask to be allowed to come into the economies and philosophies of the day; they stepped down from above and brought their own credentials with them. They would have been less if the speaker had been less, but he being above them superscribed them with authority which the people willingly and unanimously acknowledged. The inspired man is fearless. Asa the king is nothing to him, because

he has been with the living God. As we have often seen, everything depends upon the point of origin, as to whether we are surprised or afraid by anything upon the earth: where do we come from? Whom did we see last? The last presence that the prophet saw was the Presence of God; therefore Asa became but a common man; if Asa had first been seen, he might have over-awed the prophet, who was the son probably of a poor man, or a man unknown. When a man comes from heaven, even the metropolis of a land is a very small gathering of very small stones. Nothing is great to him who has been closeted with God—great in any sense that can overpower his moral impulses, or quench his moral convictions. The inspired man is a qualified man. He knows what he is about. Other men labour and fret, and writhe under the burden they have to carry. His power expresses itself in perfect ease; he is in no hurry; he is calm, because he is great; he is masterful, because he is wise; he has lived and moved and had his being in God. Men are variously qualified. Some are only qualified by education—the poorest of all qualifications. To-day we worship the idol that is called Culture. If a man knows twenty languages he is called a man of culture—though he never say one word worth hearing in any of them. There are men who could read through the Bodleian Library, and forget it; there are others who could have read through the Alexandrian Library, and have been suffocated, overweighted. Yet that is the fetish we worship to-day—the examination-paper, the certificate written by a man who can write nothing but what he copies. This kind of instruction we are thankful for up to a given point. There is another kind of qualification that deserves the name of Inspiration. In our coldness we may call it insight, a species of intuition; we may warm to such a tepid degree as to call it genius, but the real holy, blessed name is Inspiration,—the life that has been bathed in heaven, expending itself upon earth in the cheering, directing, healing, and uplifting of mankind. Education labours: Inspiration flies. Education discovers by long processes, and then announces in halting terms what it has discovered: inspiration comes at the other end, and brings it straight down from heaven, and affirms it with all the frankness of honesty, and all the holy positiveness of personal experience.

We need all kinds of inspiration in the Church, all kinds of qualification; the one must not condemn the other in scornful terms. There are hewers of wood, and drawers of water, and men who have talent to shape a pillar, and, having shaped it in uprightness, to crown it with the mystery of curvature and colour. The whole ministry thus becomes one, and must be recognised as such.

The inspired man has a message to deliver. The model may well be taken from the speech of Azariah—

“Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The Lord is with you while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you [comp. 1 Chron. xxviii. 9, and Jer. xxix. 13]; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you” (v. 2).

A very intelligible message; an eternal proposition. If ye seek me, ye shall surely find me—if ye have rent, not your garments, but your hearts. “Them that honour me, I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.” No other law is possible. There is nothing dogmatic or arbitrary about this declaration; it roots itself in reason, and grows up towards the sun in firmest fellowship, because it belongs to the household of light. We cannot shake ourselves clear of this bondage; we may deafen ourselves to the proposition; we may turn away from it in irrational hilarity; we may fill our ears with multiplied noises; we may create a pagan Pentecost of our own: but there comes a time, one quiet, solemn hour, in which we call ourselves fools, and ask to be permitted to pray. Let all experience verify this. No man can succeed who is not on the side of God. The word “succeed” is here used in its largest signification. He does not succeed who gathers a table which he cannot enjoy, who piles up luxuries until they become the merest commonplaces of daily life. A man may easily out-build and out-decorate himself; he may look round to see where he can put something more. Is there an end of furnishing, decorating, table-spreading, wine-drinking, banqueting? There is, and it comes quite soon; nature says, Enough: and if we insult her we pay the penalty of satiety, and she binds us with a tremendous tyranny to realise the consequences of our misdoing. Let this declaration of Azariah be the foundation-stone of life, and what wisdom we shall see!

How we shall start everything from the divine point! How we shall take everything into the sanctuary, and hold it up to the light, and look what it is like when the sun shines upon it, and shines through it! How many things we shall put away as worthless and vile! What new libraries we shall purchase and delight in! What new associations we shall initiate and enjoy! The whole horizon would be cleared, and every man according to his capacity would be living a wise, honest, healthy, godly life. Fight about theological terms as we may, this great moral revelation abides, waits the lulling of the storm, and then utters itself with quiet and royal solemnity—"The Lord is with you, while you be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you." We cannot run into the darkness and enjoy the sunlight. No man can take the sun with him into the darkness: the terms are contradictory, the relations are impossible. No man can cut himself off from the currents of eternity, and maintain his duration. For a time he may seem to live as ever—just as the train goes after the engine has been detached, spending the impulse of momentum, but having no power of origination in itself; when its little stock of force is exhausted, there it stands, and it can never move again. Let this proposition enter into the memory, take its place in the heart, ascend the throne of life, and rule it with a sceptre of light.

Here is a picture of the utterest destitution in spiritual life :—

"Now for a long season Israel hath been without the true God [rather, Many a time hath Israel been without the true God. Israel here is used generally for the whole people of God; and the reference is especially to the many apostacies in the days of the Judges (Judg. iii. 7, 12; iv. 1; vi. 1; viii. 33; x. 6), which were followed by repentance and deliverance], and without a teaching priest [The Israelites had never been without priests of one kind or another; but there had been occasions when none of their priests taught them the true doctrine], and without law" [see Judg. xvii. 6; xxi. 25] (v. 3).

The long season referred to was a period of thirty years. The inspired man, therefore, had great space to work in. It is because of the length of the dearth, therefore, that the very first sign of harvest or abundance is welcomed like a descending heaven. George Whitefield would be no preacher to-day. The world is

full of preachers. Many men think they can preach, when other people do not agree with them. Israel had been for thirty years in religious darkness: when a spark of fire was struck, what an effect it had! England was sunk in indifference when the great revival began, and what a revelation it was from heaven! How the Bible became a new force, a new book, an uncalculated energy; how men's minds were stirred, how persecution raged, and how prayer defied persecution, and ennobled itself at the very fires that were meant to consume its piety! When religion becomes a commonplace there can be no revival. When every man supposes himself to know everything that can be known, instruction is impossible. A preacher can only, like George Whitefield, attain an immortal celebrity, because he appears at a time when he is the contrasting figure; he is unlike everything else, and his speech is unlike all other speech; it is his uniqueness that ensures his fame. "Without the true God,"—then Israel had false gods? Yes, innumerable gods even Israel acquired, notwithstanding the commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me!" It is not a commandment that can keep man at home. No bill of stipulations can convert your children and make them filial. We may have a time-bill for the action of the whole day, but the world was never yet saved by commandments. Israel trampled ten of them under foot, and we have trampled ten thousand. We can do despite unto the Spirit of grace; we can insult God! Any child can close his eyelids, and shut out the sun—God's minister, God's angel, coming with the Gospel of light; yet the little child can close its eyes and practically say, *Avaunt!* I will never give thee house-room. It would not be a child if it could not say so. We should not be able to pray if we could not blaspheme. "Without a teaching priest,"—not an ornament, not a ceremonialist, but a teaching priest. A man whose business it was to expound the law and make the people understand it. So they preached in the olden time; they took the law syllable by syllable, explained it word by word, and sentence by sentence; they analysed it, took it member from member; they put it together again and hurled it upon the people like a bolt from heaven. They had naught else to expound, because they thought nothing else worthy of exposition. We are lost in details. Any man

may now get up a lecture, if he has great quoting power. It is almost impossible not to get up a lecture; the temptations are innumerable, and in many cases irresistible. But there is only one lecture worth delivering, only one speech really worth listening to, and that is the speech that begins in eternity, sweeps down upon time, leaves behind it immortal lessons, and ascends to the fountain of origin. Surely, one would say, if men could speak words from heaven, they would be thronged, they would be almost mobbed on the streets by people hungering and thirsting for the living God, crying, Give us bread! or we die; water! or we perish of thirst. It is not so. We have outlived God; we have forgotten the Most High. Miracles are common-places. All miracles must become such. The things that alarmed us once, alarm us no longer; the things that delighted us once, no longer fascinate us. What are miracles to one race are the commonest domestic economies to others. The missionary says that if you go to any savage tribe and strike a match, the whole tribe will fall flat down on the earth instantly. That is not a matter of romance; that is a matter of certified fact. But strike another, and then a third; strike a match every day for a week, and not a man in the tribe would pay the slightest attention to it. When God made the stars, who can tell what sensation was created through the universe! Now he may make any number, and we are surprised that he does not make more. Jesus Christ wrought miracles, and the people said, It was never so seen in Israel—Do another! They told one another about the miracles, and wanted to make a demonstration of them, but he said, "There shall no sign be given to you, ye blind generation." The great fear, therefore, is that, having the true God, and the teaching priest, and the law, we may get so accustomed to them as to become not receivers but critics. The world is choked with critics. The Church is poisoned with criticism. Imagine men going to the well for water, and imagine them going in a professional capacity, each being an analytical chemist. You never got any water from an analytical chemist; there was always lead in it—"·ooooo"; and as for the bread, you would never eat a mouthful if you first consulted the analytical chemist; and there is no place in the wide world so disagreeable to live in as next door to an



analytical chemist. Send for water by people who are thirsty, and who know the value of it, and after you have quenched your thirst you can do what you like with the analytical chemist. But it is so now with the Church. We go as theological chemists; we do not go with broken hearts, contrite spirits, yearning souls, crying, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" We take measures, we examine colours, we speak of the proportion of the discourse, and its weight here, its bulk there; we take a homiletic view of it: but no man can live long upon homiletics. Better be in earnest—"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: 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."—Better demand the great substantial gospel of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ and his cross. Insist upon that. How can it become a commonplace? Surely it will sing a new song every day, and show a new countenance to us every morning, and charm us with some unsuspected delight, hour by hour, and as the day closes we will say, Thou hast kept the good wine until now. Lord, I have heard of thy greatness and thy goodness, and the beauty and largeness of thy gospel; but the half hath not been told me.

"And they swear unto the Lord with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets [The acclamations of the people, accompanied by the loud blasts upon trumpet and clarion, naturally enhanced the solemnity of the oath]. And all Judah rejoiced at the oath: for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire; and he was found of them: and the Lord gave them rest round about" [No state ventured to attack the powerful monarch who had defeated the vast levies of Egypt; and Asa on his part was apparently of a peaceful disposition] (vv. 14, 15).

It is pleasant now and again to be caught within the range of genuine human and religious excitement. There is an excitement that is vicious, but every blessing may be turned into a curse, and we are not to turn away from the blessing because it can by vicious hearts be depraved. Excitement of a genuine kind, balanced by intelligence, inspired by gratitude, sparkling with tears of the heart, is almost essential to our higher spiritual education. It is beautiful to notice how this kind of excitement

operates in the direction of personal enlargement of ministry. The people could not be content with their own voices. This self-impatience has to do with the development of our best nature. We want sometimes we cannot tell what, but it is something beyond. We are sure there must be instruments and ministries which, if we could seize them, would multiply our personality and crown our weakness with ineffable strength. What do we find here?—"A loud voice," and "shouting:" but that would not do alone. Men will have assistance; in this instance the assistance came in the form of trumpets and cornets, and if they could have laid their hands upon them, they would have had the whirlwind, and the thunder, and all heaven's resources to express the love that burned with holy glow in their excited and grateful hearts. We must take care how we undervalue revivals, excitements, various ranges and qualities of spiritual enthusiasm. Such enthusiasm would be distasteful to us if our poor souls were not in the same key. What can be less welcome, less harmonic than great religious excitement and gladness when we ourselves are sunk in worldliness, and in sordidness of the most pitiable description? Then such excitement becomes a rebuke, a judgment, a chastisement; we would close our ears, and run away from it, and call it sensational, unhealthy, undesirable; and thus we would tell falsehoods to our own souls. On the other hand, what a mistake it would be to suppose that there can be no spiritual life, of the highest and purest, and tenderest kind, apart from a loud voice, and shouting, and trumpets and cornets; the truth is not exhaustively stated by either one experience or another. Whatever man can feel may indicate a further necessity in the instruments of his education. Whatever can most centrally touch his heart is essential to his spiritual culture. Let us rest assured of this, that if there is a danger on the side of excitement, there is a deadlier danger on the side of indifference. When men talk about religious quietness, and peacefulness, and restfulness, let them be careful lest they be abusing terms, or lest they be excusing themselves from sacrifices and endeavours that would call up dormant faculties, slumbering or neglected powers. It is easy for indifference to complain of excitement: it is easy for excitement to undervalue a quietness that cannot express itself in

kindred enthusiasm. There is a middle line in life, but that middle line in life would become monotonous if we could not occasionally ascend, yea, and vary our progress, for then, after such association and variation, we return to the great average scheme and thought of life with recruited power, with renewed and sanctified hope. How poor is the condition of the soul that is never, so to say, maddened by religious inspiration! Such a soul cannot believe the Bible except in the narrowest and most superficial sense. The Bible is never quiet; when it seems to be peaceful it is then expressing the last result of momentum, energy, force, terrific impulse. The earth is at rest because the earth never stops. Do not mistake death for peace; do not mistake indifference for restfulness; and never imagine that you can live in nothing but excitement: the foam, the froth, makes but a poor banquet for necessitous and hungering souls. Who would obliterate red-letter days from the history of the Church? What a cavity would be left if we took Pentecost out of the New Testament! As we perused the sacred record, in the absence of that baptismal day, we should feel that something was wanting; not something little, impoverished, but something great and affluent and mighty. Every soul should have its pentecostal day. We need it to fall back upon sometimes when the devil is heavy upon us; we say, when he lays his tremendous stroke upon our souls, This will certainly overwhelm us, there is no answer to this; then our soul is reminded of the pentecostal time when we were real Christians, if but for one moment. We cannot obliterate that moment from our recollection. There was a time when we saw God; it was but a moment, a flash, an unmeasurable period of time, but the sight is an everlasting recollection, and ought to be a steadfast and inexhaustible inspiration.

## PRAYER.

**ALMIGHTY** God, thou art the Lord and Master; we are thy creatures: grant unto us the spirit of obedience, that we may do thy will with delight and readiness, and count it the only possible heaven upon earth. We rejoice that we are in the body which thou thyself hast constituted; thou hast made us such members as seemed best to thy wisdom: let each accept his lot, and be thankful; it is enough to be in the body, to have been chosen by God for that position: may we receive our election herein, and recognise the good hand of God, and live in a spirit of thankfulness, and be always ready to do the Lord's will. Thou knowest how peculiar we are, in that we sometimes consult ourselves; we ask ourselves what we should prefer, what would be easiest or pleasantest; we do not always consult the cross, the sacrifice, the point of agony. Help us to know that we have no law in ourselves; we are not authorities; we are creatures, not creators; we are under government, and if we would live wisely we must live obediently; may our obedience have a divine origin, a divine motive, then shall it have a divine reward. Help us to go through life in a spirit of thankfulness; may we live in the spirit of Christ, then we shall count the cross as but a stopping-place on the way to eternal glory. Dry our tears when they are hot and large; help us to bear life's burdens when our poor little strength gives way, and at all times and in all things may we show that we are the sons of God by displaying a filial obedience. This we say, every word of it, at the cross; the one altar where no prayer was ever lost. Amen.

## 2 Chronicles xvi.

1. In the six and thirtieth year of the reign of Asa Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah, and built Ramah [or properly, "the Ramah"—("elevation")]; it is mentioned in Josh. xviii. 25, as a city of Benjamin, situated about five miles north of Jerusalem], to the intent that he might let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah.

2. Then Asa brought out silver and gold out of the treasures of the house of the Lord and of the king's house, and sent to Ben-hadad king of Syria, that dwelt at Damascus, saying,

3. There is a league [rather, Let there be a league] between me and thee, as there was between my father and thy father: behold, I have sent thee silver and gold; go, break thy league with Baasha king of Israel, that he may depart from me.

4. And Ben-hadad hearkened unto king Asa, and sent the captains of his

armies against the cities of Israel; and they smote Ijon, and Dan, and Abel-maim, and all the store cities [see *ante*, chap. viii. 6, p. 222] of Naphtali.

5. And it came to pass, when Baasha heard it, that he left off building of Ramah, and let his work cease.

6. Then Asa the king took all Judah; and they carried away the stones of Ramah, and the timber thereof, wherewith Baasha was building; and he built therewith Geba and Mizpah.

7. ¶ And at that time Hanani the seer [the only mention of him, unless he was the father of Jehu the seer, who prophesied against Baasha (1 Kings xvi. 1-4, 7), and Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. xix. 2)] came to Asa king of Judah, and said unto him, Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the Lord thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand.

8. Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? yet, because thou didst rely on the Lord, he delivered them into thine hand.

9. For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars [as peace had been the reward of Asa's earlier faith (chaps. xiv. 5; xv. 5), so his want of faith was now to be punished by a period of war and disturbance].

10. Then Asa was wroth with the seer, and put him in a prison house [or, "in the stocks," literally, House of the stocks (Jer. xx. 2; xxix. 26). Compare Ahab's treatment of Micaiah (1 Kings xxii. 26, 27)]; for he was in a rage with him because of this thing. And Asa oppressed [Job xx. 19; comp. 1 Sam. xii. 3] some of the people the same time.

11. ¶ And, behold, the acts of Asa, first and last, lo, they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel.

12. And Asa in the thirty and ninth year of his reign was diseased in his feet [Asa's malady began two years before his decease (see v. 13). It is generally supposed to have been gout; but this is really uncertain], until his disease was exceeding great; yet in his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians [it is not the fact that he consulted physicians, but the manner in which he relied on physicians that is here condemned—undue reliance upon the aid obtainable from man].

13. ¶ And Asa slept with his fathers, and died in the one and fortieth year of his reign.

14. And they buried him in his own sepulchres, which he had made for himself in the city of David. [Asa had had his own private tomb excavated for himself (and his family) in the city of David, possibly because it was necessary to increase the number of the royal tombs], and laid him in the bed which was filled with sweet odours and divers kinds of spices prepared by the apothecaries' art: and they made a very great burning for him [(chap. xxi. 19; Jer. xxxiv. 5). This was customary at the funerals of kings; the peculiarity in this case was the large quantity, and perhaps the rare quality of the spice burnt].

**ASA REBUKED BY HANANI.\***

“Behold, I have sent thee silver and gold; go, break thy league with Baasha king of Israel, \* that he may depart from me” (v. 3).

WE often say that circumstances develop men; probably the gold and the silver developed the disposition of Asa, for if he had not had these treasures he could not have sent such a message to Ben-hadad.\* It never occurs to some minds that money has any relation to their purposes or their duties. In the days of Asa it was often thought sufficient to be able to buy oneself out of a difficulty. What is it that Asa sets in opposition the one to the other? Silver on the one hand, and a league on the other! Money,—and oath! A bribe,—and conscience! Gain,—and honour! These are the things which Asa opposed to one another without a blush and without a tremor, for in his message to the king of Syria there is no sign of reluctance or hesitation. Probably Asa would not have been indisposed to give Baasha himself money. Asa had a policy or a purpose which he wished to work out, and it was of no consequence to him what stood in his way; if any difficulty could be removed by fair means or foul, he was prepared to destroy that difficulty. Have we come to a better state of mind? Is ours a purer code of honour? Do we ever call upon money to help us out of difficulties created by leagues, covenants, and the obligations of conscience? The use of money is very subtle. It is not limited by the obvious acts of buying and selling, exchange or barter; it often operates at great distances, and in ways hardly to be described in terms: appetites are created, temptations are set to work, possibilities ply the wakeful imagination, and a diseased moral nature says that although the means be not good, yet the end will sanctify them. Here is at once a necessity and room for caution. Money can only touch the very lowest levels of life; it ought never to be allowed to touch the nobler considerations attached to human duty and service. “The love of money is the root of all evil,” not the money itself, but the love of it, which excludes and modifies nobler affections; when money becomes the supreme consideration the whole range

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\* See Notes, *post*, p. 305.

and quality of nature, intellectual and moral and spiritual, must go down into deep abasement.

“And Ben-hadad hearkened unto king Asa” (v. 4).

Did he hearken unto the king, or did he hearken unto the chink of the gold? Would he have been as obliging to Asa if the proposition had been unaccompanied by money? Did Ben-hadad blind himself to the real motive which ruled him? All these questions are necessary on account of the degeneracy of human nature, specially on account of that peculiar selfishness which so adapts itself to our constitution as almost to appear a generous impulse. Ben-hadad listened with the ears of covetousness. Ben-hadad inclined his ambition into a listening attitude. Probably Ben-hadad would have rebelled against Asa if Baasha could have offered a larger bribe. Is there a word here about honour, about obligation, about treaty duties? Not a syllable. Ben-hadad would seem to have been almost waiting for a message from Asa, so compliant is he, so ready to fall into the hands of the king, and to oblige a brother sovereign. How money blinds us to duty and to responsibility! How easily we follow the base lure, and wake to find that we have played the fool! On the other hand, we cannot conceal the difficulty of listening to the voice of duty, principle, religious obligation, and the purest personal and social honour: this indeed is the line of discipline, every point of which requires watching with jealous eagerness. So far as we are concerned, it is impossible to fulfil all the moral obligations of life, if we had nothing to draw upon but our own little strength. At this point we are enriched with the promises of Christ, that the Holy Spirit shall abide with us, and comfort us, strengthen and direct our whole life, and lead us as we are able to bear into all the fulness and glory of truth. If any man lack wisdom, lack firmness, lack sense of honour, lack the ready instinct which instantaneously tells him what to do, let him ask of God, and he shall have whatever he needs given to him liberally, without upbraiding or grudging. Thus we are called upon to connect our lives with the life eternal, and to bring to bear upon our judgment the wisdom of the Divine and Infinite. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will direct thy paths; take no step in life, however short and simple, without consulta-

tion with the Father that is in heaven. Never get into the habit of thinking that any act is insignificant, any policy is superficial, any decision is of small consequence ; attach large importance to every thought and breath of life, and thus keep within the sanctuary which chastens, enriches, and ennobles all moral manhood and spiritual activity. We must listen either to Asa the tempter, or to the Spirit that bids us be true, honest, and upright : the two appellants are continually addressing our attention ; the one is plausible, apparently generous, both hands are filled with bribes ; the other is stern, direct, royal : inspired by a spirit of discipline and continually insisting that the reward of virtue is in the doing of it : to one or other of these appellants we must return an affirmative reply. Blessed is the man who can resist the devil, and happy he ten thousand times who can accept the will of truth and honour and duty, and walk in its way, though it be steep and difficult.

“And at that time Hanani the seer came” (v. 7).

This is always the awkward element in life, this religious personage, this religious appeal, this personal chiding, this mighty assault upon the conscience. Could not the whole process have been accomplished without the intervention of Hanani ? No. God will never allow his ministers to be dispensed with. Sometimes they come in personal form, sometimes they appear to us under the guise of events, difficulties, trials, appeals to our inmost nature ; but in what form soever they come, we may rely upon meeting them sooner or later ; they will chide us, interrogate us, submit us to piercing cross-examination, and will not be put aside by excuses, by selfish pleas, by inadequate reasoning : they will insist upon going into the vitality of every question, and drawing from us an answer not from our imagination or our conceit, our ambition or our selfishness, but directly from the conscience itself. In this way the Bible becomes a great minister of Providence. The bad man dare not open the Bible anywhere, for he finds it full of fire and brimstone, full of judgment and wrath, abounding in indignation, because of his wrong doing. Let him open the Bible even in the Psalms, and he will find the very songs of the Church turn into thunder and lightning : let him appeal to the prophets, and they will



clothe themselves with the garment of judgment and vengeance; let him next make an attempt upon Jesus Christ and the apostles, and he will find that they will burn with fury against all wrong thinking and wrong doing. It should be so with the Christian pulpit. No bad man should be able to listen to a sermon without quailing, and without acknowledging that he is the man who is specifically addressed by the minister of God. Every society should be so constituted as to exercise a prophetic function, and so as to drive out of its midst the man who has evil policies, corrupt intentions, and selfish purposes to realise. No bad man should feel himself to be at rest in any household, any society, any Church, any commonwealth. The very stones of the field cry out against him, the flowers shrink away from his approach as from a blighting wind, the birds are silent in the hedges and the trees that he may pass by rebuked; in short the bad man should feel himself called upon by all nature and all society to consider his ways and renounce his evil thought and act.

**"Asa was wroth with the seer" (v. 10).**

What folly was this! As if seers spoke out of their own imagination, or told something which they had seen in a dream of their own invention. The seers could only tell what they had seen, what they had heard, what they had received from heaven by way of message to kings and peoples. We see human nature develop in this action of Asa. We find fault with the preacher who tells us how far wrong we are, and how distant we are from the centre of light and truth; we find fault with the book that will not support our evil policies; we turn away from our children whose sweet look is a reproach. We think if we chastise the prophets we have destroyed the prophecy. That is the fatal error which all men commit. The minister may be put in prison, but the ministry advances in all its moral sternness, and all its spiritual dignity, as well as in all its tender benevolence. Though Hanani were killed, yet the word of the Lord would roll on steadily to its fullest realisation. Thus we must look upon the prophecies of Scripture, and thus we must look upon the denunciations pronounced upon evil by Jesus Christ and his apostles. The

cross did not end the ministry of Christ; in a very noble sense it only began it, it made its largest possibilities draw near to fulfilment; it gave to its scope an enlargement possessed by no other religious thought: when we are persecuted for righteousness' sake, it is not righteousness that suffers, except in some temporary degree; the word of the Lord abideth for ever: no punishment inflicted upon its ministers, churches, or organisations can for one moment touch the truth itself,—on it goes like a swelling flood, or like a brightening day, or like a procession of warriors advancing, not only to battle but to victory. The littleness of the king was seen in this attempt to smite the prophet. When Asa approached Ben-hadad he went with money in his hand, but when he approached Hanani he went with a rod and with the key of a prison: in the one case he had to deal with a yielding nature, susceptible to the lowest temptations; in the other he knew that money was of no use, and that a bribe offered to Hanani would but call down upon his own head louder thunders. We see the difference between Ben-hadad and Hanani in this particular, namely, that Asa treated one of them in a manner that appeared to be handsome but was in reality base, and he treated the prophet in a manner that was really base, but that on its upper side, and in its most enduring aspects, involved a tribute and a compliment to the man's incorruptible honesty.

“He [Asa] sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians” (v. 12).

The Lord will not have such rivalry. If it is a question of not the Lord, but the physicians, the physicians shall forget their own names, and prescribe the wrong medicines, and conduct the patients down to death; if it is the physicians with the Lord, then they shall have skill in mineral and plant and singular compound, and in all their searching they shall have the learning which assists in the healing of mankind. Everything depends upon the arrangement of our blessing. We may so use even providential arrangements as to transform them into instruments of danger and punishment. There is not one word said against the physicians here; it is only because the king put the physician instead of the Lord that the Lord smote him so that recovery was impossible.

We are not forbidden to make what we can of this world : it is when we set this world in a false relation, when we exaggerate or destroy its proportions, that we are made to suffer loss, and that we are brought to painful humiliation. We are not taught to despise the good things of this life, but if we say, They are enough, we need not go further, this should satisfy us to-day and to-morrow,—then they shall turn to gravel-stones in our mouth, then shall they become poison within us, and the things that might have been blessings and comforts will by an impious dissociation from fountal springs become to us bitterness intolerable, and disappointment sharp and deadly as an empoisoned sting. What use are we making of men, of things, of providential events, of the blessings of this life ? Do we receive the things that are sent to us as symbols, or as sum-totals ? Blessed is he who lives in the symbolic reception of all blessings ; and blessed still more is he who reads everything symbolically : thus should we be delivered from finality, from narrowness, from bigotry ; we shall see the tree in the root, and we shall see the full corn in the ear the moment the blade pierces the generous soil. So with our physicians, teachers, friends ; if we make them the be-all and the end-all, we shall be disappointed ; if we accept our ministers as our priests, and say, We will go no further, they know all that is necessary to be known, we will pin our faith to them, what they say we will repeat, it will be enough,—then shall God rend us, and destroy us in his hot anger : but if we say, Ministers are servants of Christ sent to help us in our need ; they may be elder brethren, or in some respects stronger brethren, or by reason of their devotion of time to these matters they may know a little more than we know ; we will accept them as God's servants ;—then shall all intercourse with teaching life be a means of illumination and a means of grace ; we shall have both Lord, and the physician ; both Christ, and the minister, and shall look upon human instrumentality as but an under aspect of the divine government. Here physicians, teachers, leaders, have a lesson to learn ; they should know themselves to be but men. If Asa was so foolish as to turn away from the Lord and to go to the physicians, the physicians ought to have known better than to have received him ; and

if ministers are approached as if they were popes and priests, and as if they carried the key of the kingdom of heaven, they should stand up, and in glowing resentment repel an idolatry that is at once irrational and blasphemous. A man of education, of large mind, of rich resources of memory, ought to be able to tell men when they are going too far in their human confidence. To sit and receive tribute that ought to be given to God has never been approved in any age of the development of the Judaic or Christian dispensation: on the contrary, it has been denounced, and the Herods who have sat and listened to fulsome tributes have been given over to rottenness and pestilence and death.

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### NOTES.

**HANANI:** a prophet under the reign of Asa, king of Judah, by whom he was seized and imprisoned for announcing that he had lost, from want of due trust in God, an advantage which he might have gained over the king of Syria (2 Chron. xvi. 7). The precise occasion of this declaration is not known. This Hanani is supposed to be the same who was father of another prophet, named Jehu (1 Kings xvi. 7); but circumstances of time and place seem adverse to this conclusion.

**BAASHA:** the son of Ahijah, and third king of Israel. He instigated a conspiracy against Nadab, the son of Jeroboam, and having slain him, took possession of his throne. His reign was that of a restless, warlike, and ungodly prince. Constantly at war with the king of Judah, he at one time advanced almost to Jerusalem, and reduced its king to such extremities, that he had to call to his aid Ben-hadad, king of Syria, who, by attacking the territory of Baasha, compelled him to retire from Judah. The town of Ramah, which he had begun to build in order to blockade the king of Judah, was demolished by the latter after his retreat, and the materials used to build the towns of Mizpeh and Geba. He lived at Tirzah, where also he was buried (1 Kings xv. 16; xvi. 6; 2 Chron. xvi. 1-6).

**BEN-HADAD:** the king of Syria, who was subsidised by Asa, king of Judah, to invade Israel, and thereby compel Baasha (who had invaded Judah) to return to defend his own kingdom (1 Kings xv. 18). This Ben-hadad has, with some reason, been supposed to be Hadad the Edomite who rebelled against Solomon (1 Kings xi. 14, *et seq.*).

## PRAYER.

God hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell upon the face of the whole earth. Thou art the maker of us all, thou mighty God. Behold, we are the workmanship of thy hand, we are the fashioned ones of thy skill and wisdom. Thou didst make man in thine own image and likeness, in the image and likeness of God didst thou make man; if we have not recognised that image it is because we have lost it ourselves: when thou, O Christ, Son of man, dost dwell in us, then we shall see in every other man a brother, a friend, and yearn over those that are far away with tender solicitude, akin to the pity of the cross. This is the miracle of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Son of man, Son of Mary, the Wonderful One, whose name cannot be sounded as to its wisdom. We bless thee if we know aught of true love of mankind; wherein our selfishness has been modified, wherein it has been almost destroyed, we see the supreme miracle of grace. Mighty One, continue the out-working of this wonder, until we shall recognise unity in diversity, until distance is morally destroyed, and until the nations fall into each other's embrace by the impulse and inspiration of brotherhood. Break down all middle walls of partition; take away everything that makes man hostile to man; bring in the sabbath of universal peace, and thus perform the crowning miracle of the cross. Amen.

## 2 Chronicles xvii. 1-9.

1. And Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his stead, and strengthened himself against Israel.

[Jehoshaphat ascended the throne in the fourth year of Ahab (1 Kings xxii. 41), probably after that monarch had contracted his alliance with the royal family of Sidon, and before he was engaged in war with Syria. It was thus not unnatural that he should begin his reign by strengthening himself against a possible attack on the part of his northern neighbour.—*The Speaker's Commentary.*]

2. And he placed forces [comp. chap. xi. 12] in all the fenced cities of Judah, and set garrisons [or "governors" (comp. 1 Kings iv. 7, 19)] in the land of Judah, and in the cities of Ephraim, which Asa his father had taken.

3. And the Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David [The LXX. and several Hebrew MSS. omit "David." The real meaning of the writer is, that Jehoshaphat followed the example set by his father Asa in his earlier years], and sought not unto Baalim ["And sought not the Baals." The Baals were different local aspects of the sun-god. Jehoshaphat was not seduced into this worship, though in his day it overspread almost the whole kingdom of Israel];

4. But sought to the Lord God of his father, and walked in his commandments, and not after the doings of Israel.

5. Therefore the Lord stablished the kingdom in his hand [comp 2 Kings xiv. 5]; and all Judah brought to Jehoshaphat presents [this word often means tributary offerings; but here it denotes the voluntary gifts of loyal subjects]; and he had riches and honour in abundance.

6. And his heart was lifted up [usually the phrase has a bad meaning, (as in Deut. viii. 14; 2 Chron. xxvi. 16; Ps. cxxxi. 1, etc.); but it is evident that it must be taken differently here. The marginal reading is right: "his courage rose high," or "he grew bold"] in the ways of the Lord: moreover he took away the high places and groves out of Judah.

7. ¶ Also in the third year of his reign he sent to his princes [rather, he sent his princes] even to Ben-hail, and to Obadiah, and to Zechariah, and to Nethaneel, and to Michaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah.

8. And with them he sent [rather, were the] Levites, even Shemaiah, and Nethaniah, and Zebadiah, and Asahel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehonathan, and Adonijah, and Tobijah, and Tobadonijah, Levites; and with them Elishama and Jehoram, priests.

9. And they taught in Judah, and had the book of the law of the Lord [the Pentateuch—nearly, if not quite, in the shape in which we now have it] with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught [among] the people.

## THE REIGN OF JEHOSHAPHAT.

And Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his stead, and strengthened himself against Israel" (v. 1).

**I**N succeeding to that throne of Israel Jehoshaphat simply followed the course of a law, but in strengthening himself against Israel he indicated a personal policy. How definitely the statement reads! There is no doubt or hesitation in the mind of Jehoshaphat as to the course which ought to be pursued. He did not simply think that he would strengthen himself against Israel; he had not a merely momentary vision of a possible fortification against the enemy; he actually carried out his purpose, and thus challenged northern Israel. On the other hand, how peaceful is the declaration that is here made! There is not an aggressive tone in all the statement. Innocent Jehoshaphat simply "strengthened himself against Israel," that is to say, he puts himself into a highly defensive position, so that if the enemy should pour down from the north Jehoshaphat would be secured against his assaults. Everything, therefore, depends upon the point of view which we take of this policy. But the thing

which history has made clear is that a man often lays down a policy before waiting the issue of events which would determine its scope and tone. All this was done by Jehoshaphat before he connected himself by marriage with the northern dynasty. A marriage may upset a policy: a domestic event may alter the course of a king's thinking, and readjust the lines of a nation's relation to other kingdoms. The wise man holds himself open to the suggestion and inspiration of events. No man is as wise to-day as he will be to-morrow, provided he pay attention to the literature of providence which is being daily written before his eyes. Our dogmatics, whether in theology or in state policy, should be modified by the recollection that we do not now know all things, and that further light may show what we do know in a totally different aspect. Our policy, like our bread, should, in a sense, be from day to day. When men are omniscient they may lay down a theological programme from which departure would be blasphemy; but until they are omniscient they had better write with modesty, and subscribe even their best constructed creeds with reservations which will leave room for providence.

“And the Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim” (v. 3).

The Lord was not with Jehoshaphat because he strengthened himself against Israel, nor because he placed forces in all the fenced cities of Judah, and set garrisons in the land of Judah and in the streets of Ephraim. Not one of these little triumphs is referred to as affording God a basis for the complaisant treatment of the new king. As ever, the Lord's relation to Jehoshaphat was determined by Jehoshaphat's own moral condition. A very beautiful expression is this—“he walked in the first ways of his father David,” that is to say, in the former or earlier ways of David as contrasted with David's later conduct. Some have found here a tacit allusion to David's greatest sin which he committed when he was advanced in life. A somewhat mournful thing it is that a man's first ways should be better than his last. The other relation would seem to be the one which reason would approve and God would specially honour, namely, that a man's old age should be the ripest and best part of his conduct, rich with wisdom, strong with experience, and chastened by many a

pensive recollection. Sad when you have to go back to a man's youth to find his virtues or his most conspicuous excellences; but most beautiful when a man's earlier mistakes are lost in the richness and wisdom of his later conduct. God keeps his attention fixed on all the parts of a man's life, and he observes which of those parts is most esteemed by the man's own successors. Happy is that father whose whole example is worthy of imitation; yet more than human is he the whole of whose life is without stain or flaw. Jehoshaphat's conduct in this matter is the more notable because of the constant observation of mankind that it is easier to follow the evil than to imitate the good. When imitation enters into a man's life he is prone to copy that which is inferior, and to leave without reproduction that which is lofty and disciplinary. In this instance Jehoshaphat sets an example to the world. His conduct too is represented negatively as well as positively—"and sought not unto Baalim." The word "Baalim" is in the plural number, and the literal reading might be, "Jehoshaphat sought not the Baals," the Baals being different local aspects or phases of the sun-god. It is to be specially noted that the term Baal includes an aspect even of Jehovah himself; that is to say, Israel had degenerated so far as to suppose that in worshipping Baal they were worshipping at least one phase of the true God. We must not mix up our religion with our irreligion, our prayers with our idolatry, our heavenliness with our worldly-mindedness: the whole arrangement must be clean and pure from one end to the other, inasmuch as one taint may cause the whole process of our religious thought and service to become deteriorated and valueless. It is often difficult to abandon a popular custom. More people might be in favour of Jehoshaphat strengthening himself against Israel than in returning to the first ways of David and abandoning the altar of the Baals. History and religion are always considered in their separate distribution. There are politicians who would vote for a war, who would on no account surrender a superstition. On the other hand, there are men who pride themselves on being free of the influence of superstition, who would willingly enter into the most sanguinary wars for the extension of empire or the glory of some particular throne. In Jehoshaphat we seem to come into contact with a complete character, in other words, a man who in every



point was equally strong, a man of foresight, a man of reverence, a man of an honest heart, a man who felt that idolatry and true worship could not co-exist in the same breast.

“But sought to the Lord God of his father, and walked in his commandments, and not after the doings of Israel” (v. 4).

We must be prepared for singularity if we are genuinely prepared to be good. Let a man settle it with himself in prayerful solitude whether he means to walk with God or to identify himself with the spirit and customs of his age. Jehoshaphat laid down a clear programme for himself, and followed it out with patient and faithful industry. “The Lord God of his father” was not a mere term in a crowd; it was the object of daily search and quest; Jehoshaphat inquired for him, and operated constantly upon the doctrine: Ask, and it shall be given you; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Nor was Jehoshaphat’s religion merely speculative, that is to say, an intellectual quest after an intellectual God; whatever was speculative in the mind and service of Jehoshaphat was sustained and ennobled by a solid moral element, forasmuch as Jehoshaphat “walked in God’s commandments,”—he read the decalogue, he studied God’s word, he would take no action, personal, regal, or social, that was not first examined and approved in the light of the divine statutes. All this might have been comparatively easy if Jehoshaphat had started at an independent point; but at such a point no man can start, for he must take up the age as he finds it, and must first disembarass himself from all the stipulations and claims of custom, usage, and popular superstition: Jehoshaphat sought not after the doings of Israel; he set himself up in this respect against the kingdom; he was not afraid of peculiarity; in a word, Jehoshaphat’s religion was characteristic, that is to say, it had lines, points, and colours of its own, about which there could be no reasonable mistake. What is our religion? Do we intellectually assent to the existence and sovereignty of one God, and then degenerate into self-worship? Do we admit that there must be an ultimate morality, a philosophy of conduct founded upon eternal metaphysics; and then do we measure our own behaviour by the canon of custom? These are questions that **search the heart**, and no man can answer them for his brother.

What became of all this noble conduct arising out of this high religious conception? We shall see in the following verse,—

“Therefore the Lord stablished the kingdom in his hand: and all Judah brought to Jehoshaphat presents; and he had riches and honour in abundance” (v. 5).

Whatever was doubtful about the ascent of Jehoshaphat to the throne was removed, and the king was enabled to realise his power; when he closed his hand upon the royal sceptre he found that he was not grasping a shadow but a reality. There are times when men become fully conscious of their influence, and of their proper social position; happy are they if in this consciousness they detect a prevaillingly religious element, which constrains them to acknowledge that honour and wealth, power and dignity, are the gifts of God. Is not this an anticipation of the Saviour's great doctrine—“Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you”? Jehoshaphat did not seek riches and honour; he sought to the Lord God of his father, and walked in the divine commandments, and as a result he enjoyed all that kings delight in as indicating strength and pomp, renown and influence.

“And his heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord: moreover he took away the high places and groves out of Judah” (v. 6).

The expression “his heart was lifted up” is an awkward one. The lifting up of the heart signifies increase of pride, a sensation of vanity, a desire to gratify personal ambition, and to make an idol of his will. In this instance the marginal reading is to be preferred—“was encouraged;” or otherwise, “his courage rose high;” and again, it has been rendered, “Jehoshaphat grew bold,” that is to say, he was not a timid reformer, or a timid worshipper, a trimmer or a time-server in any sense; he was a heroic worshipper of the living God; when he saw that reform was necessary he went forward with a steady step and an energetic hand. We should call Jehoshaphat a man of conviction, and a man who had the courage of his convictions; altogether this is the outline of a noble personage, a born king, a man who has a right to the purple and the sceptre. When such men ascend thrones nations should be glad and rejoice with a great joy, for their character is grander than their office, and their

spirit is the best guarantee of the elevation and utility of their regal policy. Becoming conscious of his power, knowing that his kingdom was established from on high, Jehoshaphat not only did not seek the Baals himself, but he took away the high places and groves out of Judah. Jehoshaphat was not content with a merely personal religion; he could not convert the hearts of his people, but he could destroy all the symbols of unholy worship. Men are only required to do that which lies within their power. A proprietor may not be able to make people sober, but he can forbid the introduction of temptations to drunkenness; a parent may not be able to subdue the spirit of pride, but he can in many instances limit the means of gratifying it. There are reforms which are open to us all, in personal custom, in social habit, it may be even in imperial ways; let each Jehoshaphat seize his opportunity and magnify it.

All this would have been comparatively in vain but for another step which Jehoshaphat took. In the third year of his reign he sent to his princes—that is to say, he sent his princes—and he sent Levites, all of whose names are given; and he sent also two priests, Elishama and Jehoram, and their business was purely educational.

“And they taught in Judah, and had the book of the law of the Lord with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people” (v. 9).

This was a mixed commission, partly civil, partly ecclesiastical. The men here mentioned are otherwise unknown. We identify them as educational reformers, or reformers who operated through the medium of education; they were not warriors, destroyers, revolutionists, but men who addressed the mind and the understanding and the conscience, and caused men to know that the true law was from above and not from beneath. The book which the commission had in hand was the Pentateuch, or the law of Moses. This was known to be the law which alone could touch all the vital necessities of the commonwealth. Again and again we are constrained to admit that there is a law beyond man, above man, in a sense apart from man; men are not driven within themselves to find a law, an instinct, or a reason; they have a written statute, an authoritative declaration, a book

which Christian teachers do not hesitate to describe as a revelation, and to that they call the attention of men. If the teacher were teaching out of his own consciousness he would be but an equal, often exposing himself to the destructive criticism of his more advanced and penetrating scholars ; but the teacher takes his stand upon a book, upon the Book, the Bible, a revelation which he believes to be divine and final. Say what we will, the effect of Bible teaching must be judged by its fruits. Where are the nations that are most distinguished for wide and varied intelligence, for large and exhaustive sympathy, for missionary enterprise, for philanthropic institutions, and for all the elements which give grace and beauty to social existence ? The question should admit of definite reply ; the facts are before men ; let them judge fearlessly and honestly, and we need have no apprehension concerning their verdict. Wherever the word of the Lord has had free course superstition has been chased away, human slavery has been abolished, every instance of intolerance, injustice, unkindness has felt the influence of holy thought ; in all these matters discussion should be limited strictly to facts. Thus kings can help nations, not by forcing education, not by attempting to rule opinion, not by setting up standards of orthodoxy to fall short of which is to incur penalty ; but by spreading education, by extending light, by cultivating a spirit of inquiry, and by a generous multiplication of all the instrumentalities needed for the destruction of ignorance. What may come of this we are not supposed at this moment to know. Meanwhile, let us be thankful that we are face to face with a man who has conviction, courage, independence, high patriotic and generous impulse, and let us hope that his end may be as beautiful as his beginning was promising.

## 2 Chronicles xviii. 7.

“I hate him; for he never prophesied good unto me, but always evil.”

### HATED FOR THE TRUTH'S SAKE.

A HAB king of Israel is the speaker, and the speech was made to Jehoshaphat king of Judah. The name of the hated man was Micaiah. Four hundred men had told the king of Israel to go up to Ramoth-gilead, but somehow Jehoshaphat felt that he would like additional testimony. That was indeed a strange thing on the part of the king of Judah. When four hundred prophets have said, Go, why should there be any desire to hear what any other man may have to say? Are not four hundred witnesses enough? Are they not even more than enough, when, instead of being merely witnesses, they are also prophets, men who have an official standing in their country, and who may be supposed to have a large reputation to lose? One would imagine there could be but one answer to this inquiry; yet we know the contrary by our own experience. Though we may have heard many voices, yet we feel that we have not heard the truth: there has been a great noise, but no music; we have been dinned by much clatter, but no word has got hold of our judgment nor prevailed intelligently and honestly over our conscience. Jehoshaphat said in effect—There is a hollow sound in these voices; I miss the clear honest ring of simplicity and truth; the men themselves do not seem to believe their own message,—is there another man somewhere who will speak to us in a sober and earnest way? Consider what it is in the consciousness of man which enables him to throw doubt upon the testimony of four hundred witnesses. It may serve some of the looser purposes of frivolous controversy to sneer at what has been called the “verifying faculty” in man, but after all does not consciousness testify to the fact that there is within us a power, faculty, function, ministry,—call it by what

name we please,—which does know the truth when it hears it, and which responds to it intelligently, if not always, alas, sympathetically and obediently? Great boast is made of unanimity, but Jehoshaphat came upon a unanimity which he felt to be hollow and worthless. The voice of the people is not always the voice of God; but in such cases it may be doubted whether it is really the voice of the people, whether it is not an assumed voice, a piece of pious or impious affectation, created for the purpose of meeting the necessities of a particular set of circumstances. When the people really do speak out of their hearts, it is not too much to say that to a large extent they substantially represent a higher mind and will than their own.

In the whole picture presented by the text there is a wonderfully vivid outline of the very life which is round about us to-day: the accidents are different but the substantial truth is the same. For example, what an appalling illustration is here of the fact that men love to be flattered and encouraged even at the expense of everything holy and true. Ahab was satisfied so long as the prophet ran along the current of his own will. When men agree with us we think they are inspired; when they sanction our plans we look upon them as messengers sent from heaven to comfort us with special revelations: so we cannot get away from the self centre; we judge everything by our own feeling and relation to it; we have not denied ourselves, crucified ourselves, obliterated ourselves; our self-vanity is full of vitality, and is open to every impression that may be made upon it of a flattering and encouraging nature. It is almost impossible for a man to stand really outside of himself under great crises, and to judge of his own position as he would judge of the position of another man. It is this impossibility which invests spiritual communion with God with its highest importance, and elevates prayer to its loftiest usefulness. “A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so:”—(corruption has thus seized the very fountains of life,—the prophets and the priests have gone down like a common horde, and there is none left to stand up as a living witness and an immovable

monument in relation to the truth :)—“ which say to the seers, See not ; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits : get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.” Is there any deeper depth in depravity ? The peculiarity of this depravity is that men actually tell lies to themselves : they know that what they are encouraging is direct and absolute falsehood, yet so thoroughly are they under the tyranny of evil that they prefer to have lies told rather than truth, and to live upon lies rather than to ask for the bread of reality. All this might appear to us to be romantic history ; we should say that the state of things herein declared is simply impossible, but here our own experience would contradict us : if we search into the depth of our motive, and put our innermost selves to a crucial test, we cannot refrain from admitting that we do delight to hear smooth things, although we may have great questioning of heart with regard to their certainty and truthfulness. The immediate pleasure predominates over every other sensation. Our vanity is so gratified that our moral criticism remains unawakened, or if awakened is completely disarmed and is indeed made a party to the treachery by which we ourselves are overthrown. “ The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.” We require to be watched at the very fountain of our being, because as the priest and the prophet were overthrown so may the priest and the prophet in our own nature be deposed. By “ the priest and the prophet ” understand our highest affections, our noblest understandings, our divinest instincts and yearnings ; even all these may be betrayed, seduced, and led away into utter ruin. We are not to think of priest and prophet as men or officers standing in a certain transient relation to the Church or to human life ; we are rather to think of them as typifying the highest and noblest faculties of our own being, and then to accept the warning that even these may tell us lies and delight in our complete collapse and shame.

What a vivid illustration we have here of the sublime function of an incorruptible truth-teller. This is not Micaiah's first appearance before the king. He had established a reputation as

a God-fearing and truth-speaking man, and therefore Ahab's denunciation was in reality Micaiah's highest praise. Ahab knew that there was yet one man by whom inquiry might be made of the Lord. It is always the four-hundred-and-first prophet that we fear : the great multitude of prophecies within us will probably consent to sustain the plea of our vanity and the purpose of our ambition ; but there is one prophet that we are afraid to consult. Let us say that the name of that prophet is Conscience, and then how true it is that there remains yet one more prophet whom we may consult ; but we fear that prophet because of his fearlessness, we bow before him because of his moral dignity, we are burned by his presence because he looks at us like a fire of judgment. Ahab had had much experience of Micaiah, and he knew that nothing would turn him away from what he believed to be the truth. "I hate him ; for he never prophesied good unto me, but always evil." Micaiah was consistent in his veracity and courage. Every temptation lay in the other direction : Ahab was rich, Micaiah was poor ; Ahab was the king, and Micaiah was but a subject, or a stranger, or a wayfarer ; Ahab would have accounted no gift too great that would have pacified Micaiah or hired him in his service. Where the temptation is so great there must be a wonderfully strong counterbalancing force. What was it that outweighed all the considerations of vanity, promotion and ease and wealth on the part of Micaiah ? It was his incorruptible love of truth. He was possessed by a greater passion. He was under the dominion of God. He had seen truth in such visions of majesty and loveliness as to blind him to all other attractions. Micaiah, therefore, was right at the heart of things ; he knew nothing about compromises and concessions ; he knew nothing of finding the common ground on which controversial parties could meet, and at least feign reconciliation and unanimity. Unless truth bulks so largely and gloriously in our estimation as to make all other things contemptible we should be continually subject to overpowering temptations. When we see the sun at mid-day we have no need, nor have we any inclination, to light candles of our own ; the glory of the sun is sufficient, and we feel that to attempt any rivalry is to subject ourselves to self-contempt. It is even so with the lustrous sun of truth ; it fills all heaven ; it falls blessedly upon



every point and into every corner and valley of human life, and to tempt us under such feeling with untruth is really to ask us to dishonour ourselves, to take off the crown and throw it in the mire, and to sell ourselves into the most contemptible and abominable slavery. If we speak from the point of calculation we should inevitably be overthrown. We must only speak from the point of absolute truth, and then our speech should be with emphasis and decision, and the finality of its tone should be such that the enemy will hardly dare to attempt any more to lure us from the paths of rectitude and honour. It was a solemn moment for the king when he said to Micaiah, "Shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear?" When Micaiah answered, Ahab knew that there was mockery in his tone. The words of Micaiah were words that suited the king's vanity, but the tone showed that he was only trying the king's temper and not really revealing the kingdom of heaven. The king, therefore, said to him again, "How many times shall I adjure thee that thou say nothing but the truth to me in the name of the Lord?" A fine stroke of ostentatious hypocrisy; it would seem as if Ahab were suddenly seized with a desire to hear the truth and speak the truth, and for the moment he appeared to triumph over Micaiah; but in his heart of hearts he knew that in asking for the truth he really desired a lie. Micaiah had been warned that all the other prophets had spoken to the king according to the royal pleasure, and they besought Micaiah that his word should be like one of theirs, and that he should speak good. The interview ended disastrously for Micaiah, so far as worldly circumstances were concerned. The king said, "Take ye Micaiah, and carry him back to Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son; and say, Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I return in peace." Even this message, uttered in the hearing of Micaiah, did not quell the prophet's courage, for he added as he turned away, "If thou certainly return in peace, then hath not the Lord spoken by me"; and then turning to the people he said, "Hearken, all ye people." Who was the true king on that occasion? Is kingliness a question of pomp and circumstance? or is it a question of character, moral ability, and high spiritual ambition

and determination? Men saw the crown on Ahab's head, but angels saw the crown on the head of Micaiah. He is most a king who is most like God. All other kings will be deposed, but they who reign with Christ shall reign for ever and ever, because his kingdom is a kingdom of righteousness and his dominion is ordered in equity.

Micaiah should represent to us the function of the truth-speaker in every age. Were there a Micaiah in every pulpit, no wicked man would be quite easy in the sanctuary; he would feel that the prophet's eye was upon him, and that the criticism of the prophet was passing over the whole line of his life with a searching glance, and that his whole conscience, nature, purpose, and service were being brought under the candle of the Lord. It could not have been a personally pleasant thing to Micaiah to beard the king of Israel. Nor is it a pleasant thing for any minister of truth to stand up and tell wicked men of their wickedness, and tear off the mask from the face of hypocrisy and expose the ghastliness of concealed features. We are not called to an easy ministry. What is true of the public ministry is true also of all private companionship, criticism, and oversight. We are not gentle to our friends when we conceal our judgment of their wrong-doing: we are most truly friendly when we are most truly austere in demanding that the highest moral standard should be attained, and that only words of truth should be spoken and acts of piety be done. "Am I therefore become your enemy," said Paul, "because I tell you the truth?" He is an enemy who tells us that all is safe when he knows that the foundations are insecure; he is the basest of foes who lulls us into slumber when he knows that the flames are leaping upon all that we hold valuable. The truth-speaker will always create great opposition, but he is the safety of society. What a hard life he lives! How he is always misunderstood! How others are promoted over his head, and he is regarded as rough, rude, vulgar, blatant! It was so with the Son of God: he died at the hand of his murderers because he told them the truth. It is the destiny of the truth to be sacrificed, to be crucified, in every corrupt age. How much then do we need divine inspiration, daily and continual encouragement from heaven, to hold on in a

course which invites the arrows of the enemy, and to abide faithful to policies and lines of conduct which lead to temporary impoverishment, misunderstanding, and even severe penalty !

What a striking instance is this of the Lord giving up a man to the devices of his own wicked heart, and letting him take his own ruinous way ! We read of people to whom the Lord gave the desire of their heart, but at the same time he sent leanness into their soul. The king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead. Four hundred men had said, Go up ; and one man had said, Refrain from going up. The king of Israel, true to his character, was fertile in invention and suggestion and cunning device ; said he unto Jehoshaphat, " I will disguise myself, and will go to the battle ; but put thou on thy robes." For a time the ruse succeeded. When the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, " It is the king of Israel. Therefore they compassed about him to fight ; but Jehoshaphat cried out : " he could be no party to the lie. For a time he accepted it as a military device, but the moment came when he must speak the truth, either through the pressure of conscience or through the weakness of cowardice. Then the Lord helped him, and God moved the captains of the chariots to depart from Jehoshaphat. Then there came the man who " drew a bow at a venture "—that inevitable man—that inevitable bow—that uncalculated force, or accident, or venture, which no man can define—the thing that is always occurring in life ; and the result was that he " smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness." " And the battle increased that day." " The king of Israel stayed himself up in his chariot against the Syrians until the even." Even Ahab was not without military bravery and personal courage. He stayed himself up as bravely as he could until the time of the shadows, " and about the time of the sun going down he died." Thus the truth is always vindicated. The war was begun with great pomp and ostentation ; probably Ahab never looked more radiant than when he went forth with Jehoshaphat to battle against the Syrians ; everything seemed to be in favour of the four hundred prophets, and Micaiah the truth-speaker was hurried off to prison to eat the bread of affliction, and drink the water of affliction. But truth stands

evermore. Micaiah said that Ahab would not return in peace, and Ahab never returned.\* How mocking a thing it is to have

\* Micaiah was the son of Imlah, a prophet of Samaria, who, in the last year of the reign of Ahab, king of Israel, predicted his defeat and death, B.C. 897. The circumstances were as follows:—Three years after the great battle with Ben-hadad, king of Syria, in which the extraordinary number of 100,000 Syrian soldiers is said to have been slain, without reckoning the 27,000, who, it is asserted, were killed by the falling of the wall at Aphek, Ahab proposed to Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, that they should jointly go up to battle against Ramoth-gilead; which Ben-hadad was, apparently, bound by treaty to restore to Ahab. Jehoshaphat, whose son Jehoram had married Athaliah, Ahab's daughter, assented in cordial words to the proposal; but suggested that they should first "inquire at the word of Jehovah." Accordingly, Ahab assembled four hundred prophets, while in an open space at the gate of the city of Samaria, he and Jehoshaphat sat in royal robes to meet and consult them. The prophets unanimously gave a favourable response; and among them Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made horns of iron as a symbol, and announced, from Jehovah, that with those horns Ahab would push the Syrians till he consumed them. For some reason which is unexplained, and can now only be conjectured, Jehoshaphat was dissatisfied with the answer, and asked if there was no other prophet of Jehovah at Samaria? Ahab replied that there was yet one—Micaiah, the son of Imlah; but in words which obviously call to mind a passage in the *Iliad* (i. 106), he added, "I hate him, for he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." Micaiah was, nevertheless, sent for; and after an attempt had in vain been made to tamper with him, he first expressed an ironical concurrence with the four hundred prophets, and then openly foretold the defeat of Ahab's army and the death of Ahab himself. And in opposition to the other prophets he said, that he had seen Jehovah sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him, on his right hand and on his left: that Jehovah said, Who shall persuade Ahab to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead; that a Spirit came forth and said that he would do so; and on being asked, Wherewith? he answered, that he would go forth and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all the prophets. Irritated by the account of this vision, Zedekiah struck Micaiah on the cheek, and Ahab ordered Micaiah to be taken to prison, and fed on bread and water, till his return to Samaria. Ahab then went up with his army to Ramoth-gilead; and in the battle which ensued, Ben-hadad, who could not have failed to become acquainted with Micaiah's prophecy, uttered so publicly, which had even led to an act of public, personal, violence on the part of Zedekiah, gave special orders to direct the attack against Ahab, individually. Ahab, on the other hand, requested Jehoshaphat to wear his royal robes, which we know that the king of Judah had brought with him to Samaria (1 Kings xxii. 10); and then he put himself into disguise for the battle; hoping thus, probably, to baffle the designs of Benhadad, and the prediction of Micaiah—but he was, nevertheless, struck and mortally wounded in the combat by a random arrow. See 1 Kings xxii. 1-35; and 2 Chron. xviii.—the two accounts in which are nearly word for word the same.—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible.*

our own way for a little time, and then to be brought into desolation as in a moment! How we can be flattered by outward circumstances! If we take an inventory of our life at some given moment we could make out a very rich record: we could say, Look at the property: houses, and land, and cattle, and men-servants, and maid-servants, and gardens, and orchards; look at the troops of friends; listen to the deafening applause: does not all this show that the prophecy which foretold our ruin was a delusion or a lie? But the inventory is taken too soon. We must call no man happy until he is dead; not until the sum-total of things has been completed do we see events in their reality. "Be sure your sin will find you out." "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished." The word of the Lord shall be accomplished in all its terribleness, although ten thousand may arise to attempt its prevention, and all men combine to say that they will build out the judgments of heaven. The great lesson is that nothing is real that is not according to the divine nature; nothing is true but truth; nothing is everlasting but that which is righteous. Oh that men were wise, that they would consider these things! Better have temporary poverty and final wealth, than have temporary wealth and everlasting poverty. We can accept life in one of two ways: we can begin by seizing all chances, accepting all flatteries, availing ourselves of all assistance, and thus mounting up the pride; or we can begin by prizing understanding above rubies, and truth above all precious stones; by digging for wisdom as for silver, and by searching for holiness as for the great prize of heaven,—according to this second way we shall meet wolves and lions, and ravenous beasts of every name; we shall set the whole world in cruel hostility against us, but the word of the Lord stands, that they who love truth and righteousness shall be brought into everlasting security and heavenly blessedness.

## PRAYER.

WE have come to the living water. Lord, evermore give us this water, for it alone can quench the thirst of the soul. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness : for they shall be filled. The river of God is full of water. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. We have hewn out unto ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water. We ourselves condemn them : we know we ought not to have done this, and having done it, we have but shown our own folly. Now we come to the living well. Every preacher thou hast sent into the world has returned again to thyself, saying,—“Vanity of vanities ; all is vanity.” Knowing this, we come to our Father’s house, where there is bread enough and to spare : and we would eat at his bidding, and be satisfied with his bounty. O that we were always wise !—then we should have no care, no burning, fretful anxiety consuming the life and making us writhe in pain ; we should now be in heaven : we should now be reading the deeper things of the revelation of God : we should now be lifted up into that holy unconsciousness that cannot tell whether it is in the body or out of the body, for the whole creation glows like heaven. But we are still upon the earth, and in the earth, building upon the earth, struggling upon the earth. Truly thou didst make man out of the dust of the ground. We know it : we have the testimony in ourselves ; we feel how soon we go back to the earth whence we came, how we love it like a nativity, and hasten back to it with the force of gravitation. But surely thou didst breathe into our nostrils the breath of life. We are not all earthly ; we have in us some fire of the heavenly, some presence of the divine. May we live in the direction of that higher consciousness, aspiring to the light, growing in grace, struggling towards God ; yea, though the struggle be most vehement and sometimes unequal because of the power of the enemy and the weakness of the flesh, yet may our purpose be towards the heavens, and our intention be fixed upon God. We praise thee for as many as have known Christ spiritually, and have been grafted into the true Vine, and have grown up into heaven—gone away from us for a little time, but still in the Vine, and bearing fruit beyond the line of human sight—richer fruit, glowing with a deeper purple, pregnant with a richer wine. May we grow up after them, and, in thine own due time, may the branches intermingle in the heavens,—still in the Vine, still bearing fruit—yea, much fruit, making glad the heart of God. We praise thee for all hints of heaven : we need them every one, for the night is very long, and there is always room for another star in the great cloud. We bless thee for all hints and thoughts and poems and types

of heaven; we thank thee for all calls to nobler life, and for all exhortations in the direction of immortality. These things help us: they make us strong; they turn our very weakness into a higher quality of power; we bless thee for them: they are true gifts of heaven. Come to us, thou radiant One, and drive away the last shadow that clings to our life as if it might make a concealment for sin; let the whole temple of our soul be filled with the light of God. Help us in all good purposes, in all intentions that express themselves in the direction of faith and hope and love. Help us to stir up the gift that is within us; may ours be lives of consecrated energy, given to our Father's business, returning to the temple because it is our Father's house. Speak to each as each most needs thy voice. Some are heavy with sleep, and they require the thunder to arouse them; and some are so tired and weary utterly that even a breath of wind might carry them away; thou knowest how to speak to such. Thou givest the tongue of the learned to thy teachers and preachers, that they may speak a word in season to them that are weary. Help the man who is struggling with his worst self; may he throw the foe in the wrestling and stand up in Christ's strength, twice a man. Be with all who are planning new adventures of a right kind—who are thinking of going from home, enlarging their companionships, exchanging vows of soul and love. Be with all who are taken away into the upper chamber, curtained in with shadows, to whom the Sabbath itself is a dull day for want of the public altar, and the common prayer, and the universal psalm; heal and bless and comfort; and, if thou wilt not bring back again to common paths, open a great white gate upon the skies—a gate of light, a portal of glory,—that they who are going upward may hold the earth and time in holy contempt. The Lord hear us and help us to love him more in Christ, to cling to the cross with tender expectation, and to look confidently to him who is dying upon it for the blood which cleanseth from all sin, for the atonement which holds in its reconciling mystery all the sinner needs, and all that justice demands. We say our prayer in the name of him once crucified, now crowned. Amen.

## 2 Chronicles xviii. 19.

“And the Lord said, Who shall entice Ahab king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?”

### THE ENTICEMENT OF AHAB.

HOW singular, how tragical is the experience of life! For example, who could have expected to find in history such an inquiry. Strange words are imputed to the divine Speaker. There is a mystery in every interpretation of these words. Probably the minimum of mystery is to be found in the interpretation which boldly accepts the doctrine that there cannot be evil in the city without the Lord having done it. The mistake is to call it evil, in any final and inclusive sense. If it ended in itself, then the word “evil” might not be too superficial a term

to employ in its description : but the evil is but evil momentarily. Do not interrupt the divine literature at a comma or a semicolon ; the Lord may need to work not only to-day and to-morrow, he may ask for part of the third day ; he has always done so, and not until he has concluded the whole process himself are we entitled to venture to form any judgment of God's purpose and meaning in life. We have no hesitation in accepting the doctrine that God leads men into temptation. All the endeavours that have been made to strike that petition out of the Lord's prayer would seem to be utter failures. Jesus Christ was driven of the Spirit to be tempted of the devil in the wilderness. Here again the admonition stands in all its proper force, namely, that we are not to interrupt the Almighty in his speech or in his action : to-morrow we shall see what is invisible, to-morrow shall bring an adequate light, and when the glory shines upon the mystery it will be found that everything has been conceived in infinite wisdom and sanctified by infinite grace. Your poverty may be from the Lord. The number of graves you have dug in the churchyard is not accidental ; it may be but a transcript of what was written before the earth was formed. You must live in the sanctuary of the eternal if you would have calm in storm, if you would have a table spread in the wilderness, if in a frowning inhospitable rock you would find a home radiant with the presence and affluent with the benediction of God.

“Entice” ; not even persuade, certainly not force, or overwhelm, or unduly urge, or violently overcome, but “entice,”—a step at a time, a beckoning of the finger in directions that seem to be lighted up with sweet flowers, and made tuneful by songs of birds ; a very little at once, so that familiarity may be produced by a finely graduated process of descent. A man may resent the idea that he is under any process of enticement ; because the process is so gradual, so gentle, so utterly wanting in anything that is apparently aggressive and violent : but unless we are under the ministry of God's grace we are being enticed in the other direction ; unless we are able to keep up to the rule of discipline we have lost ground ; if we are not as far on to-day as we were yesterday we have failed in duty, and we have parted with some of our strength to do the duty that will come upon us



to-morrow. We cannot stand still and go forward at the same time. Enticement is the deadly plague of life. The lying spirit has a subtle tongue ; he does not proceed with broad dogmatic propositions, he has nothing of a violent nature to suggest or propose ; it is, to the end of the line, to the turning of the corner, to the ascent of the hill ; it is resting awhile, then walking awhile, or returning, and reascending,—the liar by our side all the while watching the pulsation of the soul that he may know how the enticement is proceeding. Life itself is a temptation : to live is to die. How often have we laid down the doctrine that to be is to be in pain. This is the mystery of life. Life without pain would be life without joy ; life without winter would be life without summer ; heaven would be a surprise to us of an unwelcome kind if we had not made acquaintance with temptation and sin and sorrow whilst we were upon the earth.

What then is our duty in view of this varied experience ? Here we have men shouting with a loud voice, playing upon cornets and trumpets, and uttering themselves in ecstatic enthusiasm because of their love of God ; and then we have men turning away from the Lord, and seeking ministries which without him are worse than useless ; and then we have that discipline in life which is best described by the word enticement. “ My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.” That power is always at our disposal. We are able to say, No. But we must not say it tremulously, hesitatingly, as if half-surrendering the argument ; we must say it with unction, with passion, with a tone that is itself a battle. May not the word enticement be used in a better sense ? May not men entice one another to do good ? What is the meaning of the word enticement there ? It is that there is to be no attempt at force or violence, in any form or in any degree. Church-going is not to be a matter of task and penalty. It should be the joy of the child to go to church. Sweet little children should ask on the Lord's day morning, Is this not the promised day, when we shall hear music, and see the flowers of the kingdom of heaven ?—a day when all may feel that this earth is but a door opening upon paradise and rest ? We cannot flog men into virtue. We may flog them because of vice ; but to go into virtuous courses, to accept the ministry of purity and nobleness,

this comes of the consent of the heart. How, then, is this consent to be obtained? Here again we come upon the old evangelical doctrine, and there is none better, that all this ministry is the action of the Holy Ghost upon the life. Why should men trouble themselves by endeavouring to enlarge the sphere of instruction instead of accepting the instruction which is made possible to them? Thus, there are many who insist that the poets are inspired. That is not the question; the immediate question before us, as pupils in God's school, is, What are we to do with the moral injunction and inspiration of the Holy Scripture? There may be more Isaiahs in the world than we have ever heard of, but what are we going to do with the Isaiah we are quite sure about? There may be transcendentalists, spiritualists, noble psychological seers, who can see farther than the Apostle John ever saw; meanwhile, do not let us lose the advantages which the Apostle John contributes to our education and our comfort. There may be a better kind of bread in some parts of the world than we know of: fool is he who would say that and neglect to eat the bread that is provided for him when he is dying of hunger. This is what we mean, therefore, by a dogmatic position; we have certain truths, injunctions, and instructions laid before us, and they are so proportioned to human life, and so adapted to human necessity, that whosoever walks according to their teaching will have strength and rest and hope of a kind which the world can neither give nor take away. Understand that we do not say there is not another Bible in the world; we only say we have not yet found it. Far be it from us to assert that there is not a heart that can love infinitely more than the heart of Christ ever loved; but we have never heard of it, we have never seen it; we are not going to be delighted by conjectures and speculations when there stands before us a Man whose heart is all tenderness, who receives sinners, and who leads all men into the kingdom of heaven. Do not so live in an imaginary gallery of inconceivable dignities as to forget that there standeth One among you, the Son of God, who meanwhile offers the heart all it can receive of pardon and pureness and liberty.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thine eye is upon all men; there is nothing hidden from thy judgment; all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do: this is our supreme joy, and this is our supreme dread; when our hearts are rising towards thee our delight is to know that thou art looking on, and drawing us toward thyself with new love and new power; but when our hearts are going astray from righteousness and truth and light, the onlooking of God is the plague of our life. Work in us so mightily by thy Holy Spirit that we shall be thy children, sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty, always desiring to ascend to things heavenly and enjoy communion with our Father; then shall thine onlooking eye make our day, thy presence shall be our defence, and thy comfort shall enlarge and delight our souls. Thou hast stretched out thine hand towards us in offers and welcomes; the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost: we are lost, we need to be sought; Son of God, Shepherd of the Universe, come after us, recover us from our wandering, and bring us home again! We bless thee that the door stands open for returning men; thou dost open the door, it is the door of our Father's house, it is written all over with the welcomes of our Father's love; if we are outside, it is because of our perversity; and if we are within the door, by the grace of God we are where we are. Direct us in all the affairs of our life; when we do wrong, smite us; when we attempt to turn away to conceal the wrong we have done, send thy prophet after us to make our faces burn with shame; and in all things by gain and loss, by health and affliction, by hope and by fear, bring us onward and upward in our life course. Meet us every morning at the cross; every night bring us to the cross; at mid-day may we find shelter within the shadow of the cross; we have no other hope, we have no other joy; other hope and joy we need not; in Christ we have all things, yea we have unsearchable riches. Let thy blessing be with us, then our poverty shall be wealth, our failure in life shall be our truest success, and all our victories shall be purged of vanity and cleansed of all earthliness, and shall be as crowns set upon our head by the Lord of life. Baffle every bad man, turn his counsel to confusion; when he has dug his pit, may he fall into it himself, and when his arm is stretched out to smite weakness may he never be able to take it in again. The Lord be with all good men: make them courageous, fearless, confident, resolute, and zealous, and may their way be prosperous, may every step they take elicit blessings from the hearts of men whom they help and honour and enrich. The Lord hear us in these things, seeing they are loud up in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord, and seeing that they are poured out of our hearts on Calvary, at the foot of the cross, where prayer was never lost. Amen.

## 2 Chronicles xix. 1-4.

1. And Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem [A contrast with the fate of Ahab is suggested. (Comp. chap. xviii. 27, 34; and *ibid.* 16)].

2. And Jehu, the son of Hanani the seer [the seer whose father had suffered for his reproof of Asa (chap. xvi. 7-10), and who had himself already witnessed against Baasha, king of Israel (1 Kings. xvi. 1-7)], went out to meet him [unto his presence (1 Chron. xii. 17; chap. xv. 2)], and said to king Jehoshaphat [the prophets never shrink from facing the highest representatives of earthly power (comp. 1 Kings xxi. 20)], Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? [And haters of Jehovah lovest thou?] therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord [See the same phrase in 1 Chron. xxvii. 24. In the case of David, the divine wrath was embodied in pestilence; with regard to Jehoshaphat the following chapters show that his land suffered invasion and his fleet shipwreck; his posterity was evil, and came to an evil end].

3. Nevertheless ["Yet the divine wrath will not pursue thee to destruction, for there are good things found in thee." (So chap. xii. 12; comp. also 1 Kings xiv. 13)], there are good things [chap. xvii. 4, 6] found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves [thou hast consumed (*or* exterminated) the Asherahs. (Deut. xiii. 6; 2 Kings xxiii. 24.) So Asa had done (chap. xvii. 4)] out of the land, and hast prepared [*or* directed. The contrary was said of Rehoboam (chap. xii. 14)] thine heart to seek God.

4. And Jehoshaphat dwelt at Jerusalem: and he went out again [*Heb.* he returned and went out] through the people from Beer-sheba to mount Ephraim, and brought them back unto the Lord God of their fathers.

## FAITHFUL EXPOSTULATIONS.

“AND Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace,” not in peace of soul, or in contentment of mind, but, literally, in wholeness; or, as we should say in English, safe and sound: he had been engaged in an unholy war in alliance with a most wicked man; that wicked man had been slain in the battle, but Jehoshaphat returned in peace, in wholeness, without scar or wound or mark of injury. It is important to mark this distinction, lest we should imagine that a man can go out and fight with whom he pleases, and carry out all his own will, and come back with the seal of divine peace impressed upon his mind and heart. This is only a physical wholeness, a bodily immunity from danger. Jehoshaphat did not figure well in the war; he was thought to be the king of Israel, and the soldiers of the opposing king had received instructions not to think of great or small, but to fight only with the king, so they gathered around

the chariot of Jehoshaphat, and in the moment of supreme danger he cried out, and he was sent away, coming to Jerusalem in peace, without having sustained any bodily injury. A whole skin after a war is about the worst medal a soldier can wear. Let Jehoshaphat have his little enjoyment, and we shall see what came of it.

“And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him” (v. 2).

How comfortably we should proceed but for these seers! If there were no religion in the world, how admirably we could get along! If we did not strike our feet against the altar we might walk straightforwardly on courses of selfishness and worldliness. If suddenly the whole cloud outlook did not take the shape of a great white throne we could preserve a completer equanimity. But there are prophets, there are religious critics, there are spiritual censors, and we cannot bribe them into silence. They are not afraid of kings. A truly spiritual man should not be afraid of anybody. Religion should never give way; true spiritual feeling, high spiritual illumination, should always be at the front. The man who can pray as he ought to pray should never feel the blush of shame upon his cheek, or the trembling of weakness in his knees, in the presence of earth's mightiest sons. What has this man to fear? Nothing. Why does Jehoshaphat listen to him? Because he cannot help it. We are bound sometimes to be our best selves. Occasionally conscience will assert its dominion, and the least attentive ears must incline themselves in an attitude of listening. If there were no Sabbath day, how we could riot in all manner of evil, and have a whole seven days' week at it! If there were no church, no sanctuary, no stone finger pointing upwards eternally to brighter and higher things, we could do better behind the counter, in the way of business, in the calculated relationships which are dignified by the name of society. Why will seers meet us? Why will Jehu always come when we do not want to see him? He may not be a speaking man, he is a *looking* man. Christ said some of his most eloquent things by looking them. Sometimes he had a grief which could not be expressed in words, but could only be written in the scorching fire of an indignant countenance. Once he broke a man's heart by looking at him.

There are looks that have yet to come upon us, and they will burn us like hell. So it would be more comfortable if there were no affliction, no loss, no fluctuation of fortune, if every time we went out we brought sheaves back. Yet sometimes we come loaded with darkness, and when we seek our profit we thrust our eager fingers into nothingness.

How critical are these prophets! We cannot put them off with general phrases; they will take our words to pieces, they are gifted in moral as in literal analysis; they hold each syllable up between their eyes and the sun that the light may shine well through what they are looking at. A wave of the hand will not dismiss them, or if they be dismissed in grief or in anger the sound of their retreating footsteps is itself a judgment, a thing that the memory cannot shake off, a sound hollow as the grave. They are not only so critical, they are so audacious; they are not afraid of a millionaire, of a king, of all kings, of a congregated body. They will assail us as we are sitting down to the feast, they like to choke our hunger; they will speak to us over the frothing flagon, and intoxicate with a deadlier alcohol. They will not be shut out by our folding doors, by our guards, constabulary, or military; they will whisper to the king as he goes to his throne, and say, "Thou hast offended God." Could we but get rid of these pests! If there were no preachers to listen to, and no prophets who preached to themselves, if we could have nothing but music and dancing and profit and health and sunshine, what a changed world it would be! But such is not the constitution of things; we are constrained therefore to look at facts and realities of the grimmest kind, we are compelled to own that life is a tragedy. Even if there were no religion, there would remain conscience in a certain degree or form; if even there were no preacher there would be an internal monitor, saying to us now and again, What doest thou? and these monitors—call them prophets, seers; call them by abstract names, as conscience, reason, judgment—will insist upon following us all through life and meddling with everything. We live under criticism. Blessed is that man who hears his own inward voice, and listens to it; he may have to blanch before the accuser, he may have to end his terror in prayer. If there were no such hindrances on the

way, the lawyer might go home and quietly smile over his misled and impoverished client; the merchant might go home congratulating himself that he had taken the purse of some other man along with him; the liar might return to his rest, praising his eloquent falsehood; the base man, who has taken advantage of the weak, the helpless, the homeless, might say, Who knows? Who cares? I only am master, there is no God, no death, no judgment, no hell, I will do to-morrow as I have done to-day. But we cannot take our food quietly, thankfully, and enjoyingly, because there is a demon whispering over the shoulder, there is a spectre touching the throat as we swallow the glutinous viands, and there is in the air something that spoils the feast. God has set these things about us for our education, for our control; he has tethered us to certain centres, and given us permission of a limited kind, which we call freedom, but which in reality is but an enlarged enslavement.

“And Jchu said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord?” (v. 2).

We know the kind of man with whom Jehoshaphat had been allied. Baser man probably never lived; in some respects he prefigured the Iscariot of a later day: There was nothing too bad for that king to do. The reference therefore here is not to difference of opinion, but to difference of character. “What communion hath Christ with Belial?” None; not because there is some intellectual difference between them, but because they do not belong to the same moral zone. “The liar,” said a zealous saint in Old Testament times, “shall not dwell in my presence.” We are to have nothing to do with men who delight in wickedness. Find a man who is given to injustice, and we are called upon to hate his injustice as an unpardonable offence against right and against society. Find a man who is the victim of his passions, and we are bound to hate his sensuality. Thus we are warned in the direction of character, not in the direction of opinion. Besides, coming to this matter of opinion, whose is right? How long will it be right? Opinion has a history, and that history has proved beyond all things that opinion develops, enlarges, purifies itself, corrects its judgments, enlarges its outlooks, and reverses its verdicts. Your opinion

to-day about many things is not what it was a quarter of a century ago. Who is right in opinion? Who has any authority in opinion? Who can say to another, You must follow my judgment and not your own? Blessed be God, there is no man who is charged with that wicked and foolish authority. But find a man who breaks the commandments, who violates all social sanctities, who laughs at morality, who tramples virtue under foot, and we are called upon, whatever our opinion may be, to repel him, to dissociate ourselves from him by the breadth of an immeasurable chasm.

“Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord” (v. 2).

Jehoshaphat was punished because of his wicked alliances: his land was invaded, his fleet was wrecked, his posterity was of an evil kind. We cannot understand why this should be so, except we have this doctrine to guide us, that God must in some way at some point get hold of the human race. The question is infinitely larger than can be settled by our judgment. When actions are lifted up into a judicial sphere, and are treated by God in his judicial capacity, God is not dealing with the individual or the individual family alone, he is exemplifying the morale of his government before all ages. Better for us not to sit in judgment upon things we have never seen, quantities we cannot comprehend, and issues and consequences we cannot measure. Men can find their rest only in this sublime doctrine, that when all comes to all it will be found that God is love. We are not asked now to empanel ourselves and constitute ourselves into a jury; all the parties are not before us, all the questions cannot be expounded to us, all the perplexities cannot be disentangled; we therefore happily escape the responsibilities of juryship, and accept the rock-doctrine, the granite-foundation, that he who has made so beautiful a universe will not belie himself by moral confusion, but at the end his righteousness shall outshine the sun's, and as for his love, it shall be softer, purer, tenderer than all the dewy morning, than all the rain that ever baptised the tender herb.

“Nevertheless, there are good things found in thee” (v. 3).

Here is an instance of the compassion and tender criticism of God. The criticism of heaven is never ruthless; that is to say,



it is never inconsistent with reason, and justice, and fairness, of every kind. The Lord will analyse a man's disposition and a man's character, and will assign to him all that is due. "There are good things found in thee": what man is wholly bad? Surely in the very worst of men there are excellences, and it ought to be our delight to consider these, and, where possible, with due regard to justice, to magnify them, and to call the man's attention to them. A man may take heart when he sees some of his best points, and he may fail in hope when nothing is held before him but his infirmity and his blameworthiness. Here is a lesson for parents, here also is a lesson for magistrates, and here is instruction for teachers and monitors of every name and position. Tell a boy that he has done something well. We are too much afraid of what we call flattery, forgetting that flattery is a lie: but we are called upon simply to state the truth, and to state it with affection and emphasis, that it may become an encouragement to hearts that are very easily cast down. Recognise everything that is good in a man, and tell him that if he can be good up to this point it is perfectly possible for him to be good up to the further point, and urge him by tender appeal to attempt the higher grade; and he may take heart when you speak to him thus with apostolic hopefulness and Christlike sympathy. Suppose the character of a man to be divisible into seven parts; it is perfectly possible for six of those parts to be what is called by the seer "good." Is a man whose character is good to the extent of six-sevenths to be pronounced a bad man? Is there not a spiritual arithmetic which looks into majorities and minorities of a moral kind? Will God then at last drive away from him men who have had six good points out of seven? From which point will he begin his judgment? That is a solemn question. We may be helped by a reference to our own action in the matter. It would seem a cruel issue that a man who has six good points out of seven should be driven into outer darkness because of the lack of the seventh excellence. Will God count us, attribute by attribute, excellence by excellence, and will he set the evil on one side, and the good upon the other, and strike an average, and report to us the balance of his audit? How do we do? As business men suppose a man be recommended to you in these terms: This man has seven qualities, and six of

them are really admirable ; the only thing about him is that you cannot trust him with money ; he has excellent temper, wonderful patience, great kindness, his energy is hardly to be surpassed, and as for his quickness of apprehension and rapidity of execution too much cannot be said ; but he is a thief. Would you take him ? Six points are good out of seven : Will you go by the majority or by the minority ? Another man is also good in six points, admirable ; the only fault he has is that you cannot believe a word he says ; you think that it is hard for a man to be condemned because of one point when six are good. Will you take him into your business ? There is a minority greater than any majority can be. That is the doctrine which we have omitted when we have been criticising eternal providence and wondering about the issues of human action. Whatever is done on a human plane cannot of course measure what is done upon the eternal disc, the infinite line, but we get peeps of God through our humanity : "Like as a father . . . so the Lord" is an analogical argument, which is not only permitted but employed in inspired writ. So we may put the question to ourselves, whether we would admit to our confidence a man who has six good qualities out of a sum-total of seven when the seventh quality strikes at the very root of things, and is needful to the very cohesion of society. One thing is certain—God will be just. Sometimes good things are mere accidents in a man's character ; they come to him through birth, they are part of his education, he has never seen anything but courtesy, civility, and unselfishness, and he has been called upon from his earliest days to display certain virtues and certain graces : but let him live his life, and he will show you where his vulnerable point is. Achilles had a heel not dipped in the all-protecting stream. No man is stronger than his weakest point. Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. Amongst ourselves it is right that we should say of one another, "He is a good man, take him on the whole." But what is the meaning of the reservation ? What is it that is reserved ? Is it a grace, a posture that may be taught by a hired master ? Or is it a morality the want of which turns the whole being into a bog on which you cannot rest with sense of security ? What is it that is wanting ? must be our continual question. On the other hand, let us never

forget that God does not allow a single excellence of character to escape his attention.

Then comes the great vital doctrine that we are not to be changed in points. Human character is not a question of isolated aspects, of self-complete phases ; human character is a spiritual entity, a spiritual reality, and according to its central quality will be all the circumference which touches society at a thousand points. Better be right at the soul, than be conventionally right and socially acceptable, either because of negativeness or simple inoffensiveness. A man is what he is in his soul. Has God touched your soul ? Have you asked him to touch it ? How does God touch soul ? By soul. How can spirit be born again ? By Spirit. Not by education ? Never by education. Education is a temptation, education is a mockery, education is a tribute to your vanity ; it may be the mischief and the ruin of your life. The great change is mysterious, subjective, internal, of the mysterious nature of God's own Spirit : "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Your little excellences are like jewels which you can take off and lay down and resume again to-morrow, but a man's soul, by which is meant a man's character, his real disposition, that must be a re-creation of God. So let us go to our Father with a heart-prayer, and say, "Create in me a clean heart, O God ; and renew a right spirit within me." And let us understand by what agency all this is done—not merely intellectually comprehend it, but let us know of a surety that there is only one way revealed in the Scriptures by which a man can become a new man. Is it possible for a man to throw off his old self and become a new creature in Christ Jesus ? That is the miracle which the gospel was sent not only to proclaim but to accomplish. No man can come into vital connection with Christ Jesus without throwing off his old self. It is impossible to approach the cross, and yet keep our selfishness, our love of sin, our ignorance, and our folly : To want to see and touch the cross is the beginning of the new life. If you propose to yourselves to analyse the metaphysics of regeneration, I cannot assist you. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the

Spirit." This is partially true of intellectual birth, intellectual emancipation : we cannot tell when the meaning of words really came to us ; it is impossible in many cases to put down upon a record the moment at which we said, Eureka ! We found the blessing, the liberty, the new life, so suddenly as to do away with the encumbrance and weight of time. Let every man take heart therefore in this, that if he wants to be good he is beginning to be good ; and there is no need to be ashamed of saying that every upward desire we form is a creation of the Holy Spirit of the living God. Why not ? The Holy Spirit is everywhere. Every flower that opens in the springtime is a creation of the divine energy, a signification of the divine presence, a pledge of some further revelation. What is there to be ashamed of in saying that every upward look, every heavenward desire, is the gift of God, the work of the Spirit, the miracle of the Holy Ghost ? And what is there to be ashamed of in saying that having tried to get rid of sin we never succeeded in the spiritual endeavour, but at the moment we saw the cross and felt its power sin died, and our whole life was filled with the ineffable grace and the unutterable peace of God ? I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation. Cease to think of your little moralities as sufficient, cease to count the beads of your good-doing, as if you were laying on virtue before God, and remember that character is not a question of good things, numerable, and distinct, and valuable, but is a question of the soul. As the soul is the man is. And none can touch the soul redeemingly, regenerately, but God the Holy Ghost.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, there is none like thee ; other rocks are not as our Rock, our enemies themselves being judges. Thou doest as thou wilt in the armies of heaven and among the children of men ; none can stay thine hand. Mercy and judgment belong unto the Lord our God. Our song is tremulous because we remember the mercies of heaven, and noble because we remember the judgments of God. Our song shall be of judgment and mercy ; unto thee, O Lord, will we sing. Thou dost cause a light to arise in darkness to them that are upright ; thou leadest the blind by a way that they know not ; thou findest bread where men expected to die of hunger, and thou openest deep rock-springs in places where men said there was no water. Thy miracles are daily. The signs and the tokens of God are written upon the whole heaven and upon the whole earth. Give us eyes to see ; give us ears to hear ; give us hearts to understand ; then shall the whole space around us be living with the divine Presence, radiant with the divine light, a very sanctuary and temple of God. We bless thee for the morning ; its dew is pure, its light is full of hope, it brings new strength to bear upon new duties. May we be early with God in the opening day, high on the mountain-top ere the sun is well-risen ; and thus rising a great while before day, may we rule the time with a master's hand, distributing its affairs skilfully, and perceiving its engagements and duties with the keenness of an apt mind. We bless thee for sleep, because it makes labour easy ; we thank thee for rest, because we can toil the better after sitting a while ; we bless thee for sanctuary hours, because they make the sun stand still and the moon to pause until life's great battles be brought to victory. The Lord keep us, seal us with his own signature, and preserve us in Christ, Son of God, Son of man, the atoning, redeeming, priestly Christ, and acknowledge us amid the universe in the great time of judgment, so that we, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, may enter into holy habitations. Amen.

### 2 Chronicles xx.

“The battle is not yours but God's” (v. 15).

### WHOSE IS THE BATTLE ?

JEHOSHAPHAT, the fourth king of Judah, was a man of high religious character, of much zeal in the right way, and of true and noble instinct in all political and religious controversy. Yet there was in his character a remarkably weak side ; this man,

like many others, had a vulnerable heel. There was in him what is exceedingly interesting and precious in personal character and social intercourse, but what is not always in such good place in a king or public man—a strong vein of amiability. Amiability may lead to many and grievous faults. Under certain circumstances the king of Judah was too easily persuaded. When he fell into the hands of the impious and crafty Ahab, who occupied the rival throne of Israel, he too readily succumbed to his seductive power. Jehoshaphat fell a good deal into the hands of Ahab, and it was probably not unnatural, when it is considered that Jehoshaphat's eldest son married Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab. So the tenderest bonds of society may harden into the chains of the worst slavery. Having been schooled by Ahab, Jehoshaphat joined his successor Ahaziah, who also did, according to the history, very wickedly. Jehoshaphat and Ahaziah went into a ship-building partnership, which ended disastrously, the ships being all broken and never able to reach Tarshish. Jehoshaphat then joined Joram, the next king of Israel, in an expedition against Moab, and then there opens a most tragic and exciting history. The war exasperated the Moabites, and impelled them to retaliate upon a great scale. Their kinsmen, the Ammonites, the Syrians, and the Edomites, combined in one tremendous offensive alliance, and, entering Judah, openly defied Jehoshaphat its king.

All this hostility of the Moabites developed to the full the deeply religious nature of Jehoshaphat. He feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. The towns of Judah hastened to Jerusalem; the whole nation became as the heart of one man. When the concourse assembled, under circumstances so touching, so terrible, Jehoshaphat the king stood in the midst of his people in the house of the Lord, before the new court, and offered the following sublime appeal to heaven:—

“O Lord God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee? Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend [Historically, this is

the first use of this remarkable expression, which is repeated by Isaiah (xli. 8.) and St. James (ii. 23)] for ever [see Gen. xiii. 15; xvii. 8, etc.]? And they dwelt therein, and have built thee a sanctuary therein for thy name, saying, If, when evil cometh upon us, as the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house, and in thy presence (for thy name is in this house), and cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help. And now, behold, the children of Ammon and Moab and mount Seir, whom thou wouldest not let Israel invade, when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them, and destroyed them not; behold, I say, how they reward us, to come to cast us out of thy possession which thou hast given us to inherit. O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee" (vv. 6-12).

A king's prayer for his people in the time of national disaster. There was one spokesman, but he pleaded for the whole nation. All Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives and their children. It was a nation in extremity; yet in the crisis of its peril, it showed the sublimity of child-like trust in the merciful and Almighty God of heaven.

After Jehoshaphat had concluded his prayer, a strange scene occurred. There fell upon one man in the company of Jehoshaphat the Spirit of the Lord, and instantly, with a voice like the trump of God, he said:

"Be not afraid [These were words familiar to the people, and connected with several great deliverances (Deut. i. 21; Josh. i. 9, etc.,)] nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's. . . . Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord [The prophet used words almost identical with those which Moses had addressed to the Israelites on the shores of the Red Sea immediately before the destruction of Pharaoh's host (Exod. xiv. 13), thus indicating that the deliverance would now, as then, be wholly from God] (vv. 15, 17).

There can be no doubt that this shows to men, in the most graphic and impressive form, the value of the religious element in national affairs. We have a common saying, much lauded, "Trust in God, and keep your powder dry." That saying is not entirely without foundation in common sense; it comprehends a large amount of prudence. No doubt that, as used by certain men, it is a very sensible thing to say. At the same time, it is not in the mouth of every man so admirable an injunction after all. It will not bear (as used by the men now specially referred to) examination in the light of an incident like this. If we trusted

God more we should give him greater scope for intervention. We have taken everything upon ourselves. We have mounted a gun wherever we could; we have worked with the desperation of atheists. Many a time, indeed, we have asked God to bless our arms; but when did we ask him to bless our simple, child-like, holy trust? It is perfectly possible for a saying like the popular expression which has just been quoted, to be used as the expression of a sneer. It is very possible for the expression also to cover a latent atheism. We are not so fanatical as to deny the use of means, and we would resent the charge of seeking peace at any price, and succumbing to overwhelming circumstances. But we do hold this, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, that if we gave God more scope, he might more obviously interpose in our national affairs. Of one place it was said, "He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief."

If we take our own affairs upon our own shoulders, work like atheists, and if only when we are in extremity, begin to pray, we cannot wonder that God should allow us oftentimes to be smitten with our own weapons, and to feel how poor a thing it is to depend entirely upon our own sagacity and power. Here we have Judah in obvious peril; we have the king standing in the holy place, invoking the presence and care of God. What does God do under such circumstances? He set the men who had come to fight Judah one against another.

"And when they [the people of Jehoshaphat] began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments\* against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah, and they were smitten.† For

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\* Literally, "liers in wait." *The Speaker's Commentary* says: "These liers in wait have been regarded either (1) as Jews placed in ambush by Jehoshaphat; (2) as Edomites who intended to act against the Jews, but by mistake attacked the Moabites and Ammonites; or (3) as angels employed by God to confuse the host and cause its destruction. The last of these three explanations is alone in harmony with the general narrative.

† The marginal translation is better—"and they slew one another." The angelic liers-in-wait so confused the minds, or senses, of the confederate host that its component parts turned their swords one against another. First the Moabites and Ammonites united to destroy the Edomite contingent, and then these two allies engaged in a fierce conflict, and fought till nearly every man perished.—*Ibid.*



the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Scir utterly to slay and destroy them, and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Scir, every one helped to destroy another" (vv. 22, 23).

[Upon this passage Canon BARRY, in *ELLCOTT'S Old Testament Commentary*, remarks:—The marvellous result, marvellously predicted, was brought to pass by a perfectly natural sequence of events, just as was Elisha's prophecy of plenty to famine-stricken Samaria, though at the time when it was uttered fulfilment seemed impossible, unless the Lord were to "make windows in heaven" and pour down supplies from thence by a visible miracle. In neither case was the course of events foreseen by the prophet, but only their issue. (See 2 Kings vii.)]

God turned the armies one upon another—turned them against themselves—and the army that came out to fight Jehoshaphat committed suicide. God hath many ways at his disposal of which we know nothing. We look at the things that are seen and temporal; we make calculations; we depend upon things that are visible and substantial; we eliminate the spiritual element and supernatural consideration, and it is possible to be atheists in practice whilst we are religious in mere sentiment. God can touch the reason of men; God can touch the eyes of men, so that a man shall mistake his brother for an enemy; God can send a blight upon this tremendous host—and these great, wonderful, mighty, boastful, and tremendous powers may be withered like the grass under the touch of the Almighty. Very possibly some nations do require nothing short of the physical sword. Very likely nothing else would meet their case—they must have social humiliation. Let us admit all that, and still it remains true, that they who have God as their captain, have victory as the sure result.

"The battle is not yours, but God's." Let us remember that, through all the strife, and contention, and unrest, and apprehension, which falls to every lot. It rebukes our selfishness; it humbles our powers; it shows us that patience and trust are better than edged weapons and engines of destruction.

In the training of our highest life we want principles as well as detailed laws. A law may apply to a particular point. Law may be merely local and temporary. In addition to laws which relate to the details of life, and which are exceedingly admirable for daily use and reference, we want great principles which

encompass all time, touch all circumstances, which never vary in their value, and which are always certain in their application. We do not deny that a man may be clever, sagacious, inventive, full of resources as respects daily difficulties and daily trials, without having any deep religious life. But such men, as it were, may be all the while living from hand to mouth. Having no fontal spring, nor any sure place from which they can draw water all the year round, whatever may be their conditions and schemes, they are simply shrewd, sagacious men. Full of maxims, proverbs, and precepts, they want the solidity, the grasp, the grander light and mystery of love, which can only be given to men in proportion as they lay hold of great religious principles, which do not change according to policies or situation or climate or conditions or circumstances of any kind, but which go right through to the end of a man's life, and which rejoin him in eternity as surely as they ever came unto him. Now this is the one principle referred to. The battle of life is not yours, but God's. God is far more concerned about us than we can be about ourselves. We make a great deal of fuss about our position. We make all the noise, but he does all the work. We make tumult and demonstration, and show great anxiety and great distraction, and, after all, our Father which is in heaven, and who is looking down upon our daily strife, is really more concerned in our highest welfare than we can be ourselves. We see portions of things. We see edges of life. We mistake the fraction for the whole number; we mistake the decimal for the integer. He sees the whole circle of relations, proportions, and bearings of the inward parts of our life; and when we think him least careful to us, he may at that very moment be preparing for us, for our enjoyment and strength, some of his richest and best gifts.

In the culture of our highest life we must regard extremity as one phase of divine discipline. Jehoshaphat was driven into a corner. He said openly in the hearing of his people, "We have no might against this great host." We have no resources of our own in this critical, terrible emergency, but "our eyes are upon thee." And have we not reason to be thankful for the extremities into which we have been driven? So long as we had one single

inch on which we could stand, we have been self-reliant, boastful, and almost atheistically hopeful. So long as we have had one hair's breadth that we could call our own, we have said, Even yet we may work this thing out and right the mystery ourselves; and it was not until that hair's breadth was taken away from us and we were altogether in extremity that we began to feel how terrible a thing it would be if there were no God in the heavens, and if no Father's heart were brooding over the earth. It was when business became imperilled, impoverished, we began to cry out for the living God. It was when physicians had given us up, and our best friends had bidden us adieu, that we began to think whether there was not, after all, some secret in religion we had not yet known, and some safety in piety of which we had been up to that time heedless. And so in many relations of life we have found in extremity what we never found in prosperity, and our weakness has become our strength. And in the consolidation of our highest life we must remember that repose, not strife, is the last result of piety. We want most succour when we are most effusive. We are only half-trained and probably ill-trained men, so long as we show the signs of anxiety, fear, suspicion, apprehension about the future. Repose, quietness, is the last phase of the highest life. Rest is the ultimate condition of motion. If the earth were to go one mile less in a thousand years she would stagger in her course: her velocity is her safety, and the last result of her motion is rest, and so it must be with us. The true test of our growth is the depth and reality of our rest and repose. When fear comes upon a nation, in proportion to the depth of piety in that nation will be its calmness. Is there some great cloud lowering and darkening over our dwelling place? In proportion to our piety will be the depth, calm, and placidity of our hearts. We shall not be going about here and there, rushing hither and thither, as if depending upon ourselves. We shall feel the time has now come in which our strength is to stand still, and in which we shall be most happy doing nothing. That is a hard lesson for some natures to learn—for men who believe in what they term variety, for men of energy, men of great enthusiasm of spirits. It is a difficult lesson to learn that strength is to stand still and patiently wait for the coming of God. **Calmness is not weak-**

ness; rest does not display want of ability. Men do not stand still in a true sense of that term, simply because they have nothing they can do; but they stand still with most grace, with complete and impressive dignity, when they are simply waiting for the coming down of God to their rescue.

In the text we find encouragement :

(1) For all who are trying to live in the fear and love of God under discouraging circumstances. Their business associations are worldly; the influence of these associations is chilling, depressing. To such the message is: "The battle is not yours, but God's." They that be with you are more than all that can be against you. If you are trusting in God, God will work out his victories in your experience; but if you take the case into your own hands, and manage your own affairs in your own way, God will very likely leave you to see how poor are your best resources and how fruitless is your utmost vigour. Your strength is in the power of Almighty God!

(2) For all who are bearing Christian protest against evil. There is a time in which men can do nothing else but protest; a time when fighting ceases, and what man does amounts to nothing; when all that a man can do is to set himself as the prophet commanded Jehoshaphat to do. "Set yourselves, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you." You know what the meaning of this doctrine is. Many a time you would like to go forward into battle and strife, to challenge men to open fight, to test the power of your arms as against their arms, and yet it cannot be done. You know, also, what it is to be in circumstances where everything is dead against you. If you speak you are put down; if you offer to move you are driven back. You are one in a multitude, and your feeble voice is drowned by the voice of opposition. Under such circumstances you can but set yourselves; your face may be in the right direction, your protest may be sound, though you cannot go forward into battle and win victories. From this we have to learn the power of faithfulness and the strength of reliance upon God.

(3) For all who are undergoing severe temptation. Some are beset from time to time by temptations of a special severity. What, then, are we to consider that the whole answer is in the

heart? Are we not to take into account God's watchfulness over our life? Are we to forget the great doctrine, that in these matters of temptation and trying discipline, the battle is not ours, but God's? Then we come to the doctrine that God is more careful for the salvation of our hearts than we can ever be ourselves. His whole sympathy is with us in the struggle, his whole resources are at our command. When the fight goes most terribly against us, there is nothing in his heart that he is not willing to communicate in the time of our spiritual extremity.

(4) For all who are labouring for the good of the world. There are some who have undertaken to do what they can for the evangelisation of all nations. Some are missionaries, some Sunday school teachers, some ministers of the gospel, others are heads of houses who are doing their utmost to bring other men to a knowledge of the Lord and obedience in his way. Others are engaged in various ways for the extension of light, purity, and peace. What is our guarantee? Is it in our wit, our own strength, our own power of endurance? No; "The battle is not yours, but God's." What is our hope that the world will one day be subdued to the sceptre of Jesus Christ? It is not in the number of our instrumentalities; it is not in the number of men we send forth into the field to do the Lord's work. What is our guarantee that from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same there shall be one kingdom, and the king of that empire shall be the crucified Christ? What is our hope? It is this. The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it: "The battle is not yours, but God's." And when we go up to fight, he will work out the victory.

(5) To all who are engaged in controversy on behalf of Christian doctrine. It is to be feared that we sometimes exclude God from our Christian controversies. There is a danger of thinking it is a battle of one man against another. There is a good deal of striving for mere victory in words. The anxiety of the Church is oftentimes the disgrace of the Church. If our faith in the living God were what it ought to be we should rest very calmly in the midst of all doctrinal controversy and contention. Are we told that all science is against faith—that some man has made a very wonderful discovery which will have a hostile effect upon Christian position and Christian service? What becomes

us under such intelligence? Anxiety, whimpering, and weakness? Not at all! The battle is not ours, but God's. If any man has succeeded in discovering anything that will throw a light upon any portion of Christian revelation, or that will destroy any portion of Christian revelation, let us receive it with calmness. Be calm in receiving bad intelligence, and do not jump at conclusions which are against the history of the ages and the history of the Church. Let us wait patiently if men are working in this corner or that, in this field or in yonder field. Wait until they get their results put together; till they make a complete case; because after all the battle is not ours but God's, and these men cannot get beyond God's kingdom for any evidence and for any results wherever they are, high as heaven, deep as hell, down in the sea or flying in the air upon the wings of the morning. They are still within the boundaries of the divine empire, and if God is sending any message by them, let us wait patiently till they tell it all, till they tell it in their best manner and let us quietly and nobly take it into our devoutest consideration. Our anxiety is our disgrace; our fear is a charge, an accusation against God himself. If we had to defend everything, and to fight everything in our own strength and for our own ends, the case would be perfectly different; but when God says to us, "Ye have the treasure in earthen vessels, the excellency of power is of God and not of man,"—when he teaches us that we are servants and not masters, creatures and not creators, with no grasp of eternity,—it becomes us patiently to wait, to stand still, and to see the salvation of the Lord.

Let us dwell upon this word continually in all our endurances. Let us, as Christian thinkers, Christian workers, Christian sufferers, take it into the family, into commerce, into politics, and into all the relations of life,—remembering that where there is a contest between right and wrong, virtue and vice, heaven and hell, nobleness and ignobleness, generosity and meanness, The battle is not ours, but God's. It is God's fight and it will be God's victory. Resting upon great principles like these, delivering ourselves from the ignominious captivity of little details and petty laws, let us rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him!

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thou art always giving thyself to us. We live and move and have our being in God. We were made in the image and likeness of our Creator, and we feel this to be so, though not always. Sometimes we feel that we belong to the angels and to heaven, to some far-away but lost home; sometimes we feel we have no right to think of thy heavens, so high are they and pure, and unlike our life: yet we bless thee for a better thought, for an uplifted feeling, for a sacred emotion, and for an ever-ennobling aspiration. Encourage us in all our quest after thyself; give us to feel that thou hast made us for thyself, and that only in thee can we find the completion and crown of our being. We delight to pray at the cross; when we feel that there is an open way between ourselves and our Father, then how the heart warms and expands, and how the tongue pours forth all its praises, and psalms, and wants, and confessions! Give us this holy liberty, and we ask no larger freedom; to talk to God, to commune with God through his only begotten and well-beloved Son, God the Son—surely this is liberty, this is joy, this is immortality. Help us to read the signs of the times; enable us to distinguish between hypocrisy and sincerity; may we not look upon the Pharisee but upon the hypocrite; and then in other cases not upon the hypocrite, but upon the sincere man: grant unto us this spiritual penetration, this power of distinguishing between right and wrong: surely this is a gift of the Holy Ghost. Make our weariness less by making our strength more; turn our sighings into hymns of praise; and as for our tears, may they be as telescopes through which we see afar, and know that there is much beyond yet to be realised and enjoyed. We pray at the cross, we confess our sins at the cross; without the cross we are without hope, but with the cross we defy sin and death. Amen.

## 2 Chronicles xx. 25.

“And when Jehoshaphat and his people came to take away the spoil of them, they found among them in abundance both riches with the dead bodies, and precious jewels [Literally, vessels of desirable things, *i.e.*, costly articles; a phrase only met with here], which they stripped off for themselves [Or, ‘and they spoiled them,’ *i.e.*, the enemy (Comp. Exod. iii. 22)], more than they could carry away [Literally, ‘until there was no loading or carrying’]: and they were three days in gathering [*i.e.*, taking away; plundering. Comp. Judg. viii. 24-26 (the spoils of Midian)] of the spoil, it was so much.”

**PLUNDERING THE DEAD.**

**W**E speak pathetically against robbing the dead; but how can the dead be robbed? Probably there is hardly a more humiliating revelation of our boasted human nature than the spectacle which this incident presents. What are Jehoshaphat and his people doing? Taking away the dead bodies tenderly that they may bury them under the greensward, and set up memorial stones as if to preserve the recollection of brave men? Nothing of the kind. Jehoshaphat and his people have come to take what they can get of jewels, stripping off the jewels from the dead flesh, "more than they could carry away." Can man, noble man, generous, gifted man, in whom alone the lamp of genius is lighted, do that? We must not say that other men could do it, if what other men have done we have done. We have committed every theft that ever was perpetrated, and every murder. Until we get to know that in the vitality of its meaning, we shall be ruined by our own respectability. No respectable man, as such, can be saved. It is in vain that we mourn over the crucifixion of Christ, when we are guilty of the very deed. If we mourn because we did it, then in our mourning there is the beginning of redemption, pardon, release from remorse, and pledge of heaven. There is nothing historical in morals, in any sense that relieves the contemporary reader. We are parties to all the moral history of the race. "There is no man so bad as I am," should be the accusation which every man brings back upon himself. "My name," let him say to his boasting pharisaic self, "my name is Barabbas—Iscaiot." That is the difficulty of all Christian teaching and praying and direction. The pastor is cursed with the burden of having to tell every man that consults him that he is a respectable person. Starting with that lie, what can any pastor do? So we shudder politely, as if in subtle vindication of our own magnanimity, at the idea of Jehoshaphat and his people taking the jewels from dead fingers. What sin any man ever committed that any other man may be brought to do. There is no man that liveth, and sinneth not. When a man imagines that he never could have done such and such a thing, he is going to do it



almost immediately. This is the devil's trump, this is how he gathers all our little cards into his keeping: let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

There are pious people who would scruple to rob the dead, who are spending all their time in robbing the living. Our feeling is very eccentric and incalculable in its action. There are men who would do some things in the light they would never do in the dark, and in the darkness things they would never do in the light; and some men would do in Lent what they never would do out of Lent, and out of Lent what they never would do in Lent,—as if Lent were part of the calendar of eternity! How difficult to be good all the year round, in and out, through and through, just as good in one field as in another! This is impossible now, but if we are aiming in that direction, resolutely persevering along that line, who knows but that some day there may be what to our ignorance will appear to be a sudden access of strength, and out of our childhood we shall pass into our manhood? It is not difficult to conceive of persons of a certain marvellous constitution wondering that people should go into a battlefield for the purpose of taking jewels off the hands of dead soldiers, and yet these very people who so wonder are robbing their fathers and mothers and relations and clients and customers and patrons all the year round. Should not the dead body protect the jewels? There comes a different rule of estimate into our thinking, so that the soldier who would have hailed his brother soldier with salutes truly military and courteous will, when he is down and dead, take the ring off his finger. How brave some persons are when the adversary is dead! How singularly military and chivalrous some people are the day after the battle! This matter of robbery is a very subtle one. Will a man rob God? Certainly, night and day: for God is a Spirit. We are theists in doctrine, we are atheists in practice: we are orthodox intolerably in metaphysics, and as heterodox as the devil in action.

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, mercifully save us from the counsels and devices of wicked men: they lie in wait to deceive us, and to turn our profession of righteousness into an instrument of evil; but thou canst enable us to discover their intent and bring discomfiture and humiliation upon them. May we be saved from all morally incongruous partnerships, how profitable soever they may appear to be: help us in all such things mightily to resist the devil. Help us to feel the blessedness of bearing a distinct testimony on behalf of truth; and if we are called to suffer for it, may we surely know the enduring riches of an honourable poverty. Help the young who have put their trust in thee to cut off the right hand and to pluck out the right eye rather than bring discredit upon the name of the Holy Saviour. If they have thoughtlessly entered into relations which are condemned by thy word, give them such strength and grace as will enable them, in the right spirit and the right manner, to put away from them all evil things. May the spirit of crucifixion be magnified even to rapture and triumph in their souls, and by the power of the one blessed cross may they beat down the forces that would work their destruction. Teach us all the divine meaning of suffering; show us that our loss is our gain, if we endure it for Christ's sake; reveal the glory that gathers around the head of every cross which is borne in the Spirit of the Son of God. O Son of God, Child of the Virgin, coming to us in a strange loneliness, yet accompanied by singing angels, teach us that all loneliness which is brought upon us by love of things pure, and noble, and lovely, will be succeeded by the blessed companionship and perfect joy of heaven. Blessed Son of the Eternal Father! as thou wast separate from sinners, so may thy followers be; not in pharisaical self-love and self-honour, but in all meekness, quietness, and charity. Deepen our distaste for things that are merely earthly; refine our affections, and gather them as undivided homage offered to thyself. Teach us as thou wilt. Break our ships in pieces; send a whirlwind to smite the four corners of our banqueting halls; kindle a fire in our palaces; send a plague upon our flocks and a blight upon our fields; do these things, if thou so pleasest, only save our souls, and take not thy Holy Spirit from us! Let the Father hear us, let the Son show himself mighty on our behalf, let the Holy Ghost baptize us with fire. Amen.

## 2 Chronicles xx. 37.

“Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the Lord hath broken thy works.”

## EVIL COMPACTS.

THESE words were spoken concerning Jehoshaphat, who "walked in the way of Asa his father, and departed not from it, doing that which was right in the sight of the Lord." He was a man of mature life, being thirty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty-five years in Jerusalem. Notwithstanding the ripeness of his experience, and his really substantial character, he entered into a ship-building speculation with "Ahaziah king of Israel, who did very wickedly." Jehoshaphat and Ahaziah was the name of the royal firm of ship-builders. There is, of course, nothing wrong in ship-building, yet this firm soon fell into adversity. The ships were made—they were intended to go to Tarshish\*—but God broke † them in pieces, and gave as his reason the fact that Jehoshaphat had entered into alliance with a bad partner,—“because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the Lord hath broken thy works.” This is the ancient case which we proceed to modernize. We have partnerships, associations, and divers kinds of contracts in our own time, and it may be well to learn how far God takes notice of our business and our doings generally, lest we also have our ships broken, and our commerce laid in ruins.

Some partnerships are inexplicable. We have seen some strange associations. A church officer, who has led the devotions

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\* The author of Kings calls these ships "ships of Tarshish," but says they were "to go to Ophir for gold." As they were built on the shores of the Red Sea, they certainly cannot have been intended to trade with Tartessus, in Spain; for to transport ships across an isthmus more than one hundred miles broad is a thing unheard of in antiquity. There may, however, possibly, have been a second Tarshish on the shores of the Indian Ocean or the Persian Gulf, since the Phœnicians had trading establishments in this quarter, and were in the habit of repeating their local names. Or the author of Chronicles may perhaps have misunderstood the expression "ships of Tarshish"—which merely meant ships of a certain make and size—and have changed it into "ships to go to Tarshish," without suspecting that the two expressions were not equivalent.—*The Speaker's Commentary.*

† The ships were wrecked in the immediate neighbourhood of Ezion-geber (1 Kings xxii. 48). Ahaziah, it appears from Kings, attributed the disaster to unskilfulness on the part of Jehoshaphat's sailors, and proposed to fit out another joint fleet, and man it in part with his own subjects. But Jehoshaphat, accepting the disaster as a judgment, declined the offer.—*Ibid.*

of the church, has been known to enter into partnership with a grovelling man who never hesitated to use profane language in the warehouse; a generous supporter of good institutions has associated with a man who would have sold his own father if he could have made money by the transaction. And men have wondered who have not known how two could walk together except they were agreed, and who have gone upon the principle that light could have no communion with darkness. Probably there are explanations of the difficulty. It may be very convenient to have a partner who can make promises which he never intends to fulfil; it may smooth some parts of the commercial path to have an associate who can tell lies; it may be profitable to have an ally who can stoop to pick money out of the gutter, and who can wriggle round awkward corners, and use words which admit of two different constructions. All this may be very convenient and profitable, but how about the righteousness of it? How does it look in the light of the sanctuary? Is it honest, true, lovely, pure? Of course it will be said that business is business, and religion is religion, that there is a distinction between the merchant and the man. Very well. Let us admit that, there remains this question: when the merchant is damned for his wicked deeds, where will the man go? A man cannot serve the devil with one hand and God with the other. Where is the evidence that a man may have two characters, as he may have two coats? The principle of ill-associated partnerships works in two ways: the professing Christian finds it convenient to be able to remit all questionable work to the man who has made away with his conscience and honour, and the said man finds it very satisfactory to point to his professing partner as a proof and pledge that all is straightforward and upright. But is this as it ought to be? Do not let us slur over the question; let us face it steadily, honestly—with earnest intent to know the right and wrong of the case. You may say, that as partners you do not know each other except in a purely business light; you are strangers until you meet in business; you have no two pursuits in common; your tastes are marked by the strongest differences. That explanation does not touch the point. A man cannot leave his character at home when he goes to business. **The character is the man himself; he cannot leave himself**

behind. We are not referring to some trifling eccentricity of habit, or this particular taste or that; but to the quality, so to speak, of the man's very soul and life; and we marvel exceedingly, and cannot understand how light and darkness, right and wrong, heaven and hell, can enter into business relations.

The young should take this lesson thoroughly to heart. You have your associations yet to form, you have to lay out your life to the best advantage, and it is more than possible that you may be tempted by the dazzling prospects which disingenuous men will not fail to paint for you. Explanations of difficulty will certainly be forthcoming; your conscientious scruples will be contemptuously pooh-poohed. You will be told that in these times men must set their sails according to the wind, and must do as other people do, if they would save themselves from bankruptcy and ruin in general. Let the example of Jehoshaphat be a warning to you. There is something of infinitely greater consequence in the world than making a fortune. What you have to settle first and foremost is, the moral basis on which you are proceeding; you must get the full consent of your judgment, and heart, and conscience before you give yourself up to any commercial course, and, having obtained such consent, according to the law of infinite righteousness, it should be a matter of very small moment to you whether you reach what is known in the world as the point of success, or whether you see little or nothing by way of result of your labour. Wealth is not everything; nay, more—a man's wealth may actually be a man's worst poverty. The curse of God rests upon all ill-gotten wealth. You may say that your part of the business is done with uprightness, and with an honest desire to keep the whole law of equity as between man and man, but this explanation is worse than a frivolous excuse when it is offered as a plea for bad partnerships. You are responsible for more than yourself in such a case; so long as you are identified with a man who can speak an untrue word or do a mean deed, you must of necessity be implicated in the whole of his vicious course. Beware of making refined distinctions. It is one thing to have a genius for drawing delicate lines as between yourself and your partner, and another to convince him who sees the heart and tries the reins of the

children of men that you are not making a convenience of such distinctions, and gilding the works of unrighteousness. Look at the ship-building speculation at Ezion-geber. The partners were men of immense resources, of the highest social position ; their ships were actually built and prepared for the voyage, but God determined that they should never reach their destination ; and when God commands the winds and the general forces of nature to beat against any man's speculation, it is utterly hopeless in such cases to fight against God. Have God for your partner, if you would make your business, in the highest sense of the term, honourable and successful. "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

The principle of the text is expansive enough to include other subjects of equal importance with that which we have just discussed. For example, the subject of Marriage is fairly within the scope of its application. "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" "What concord hath Christ with Belial?" It is hardly needful to point out that much of the happiness of human life depends upon the marriage unions which are formed. It is one thing to view the subject of marriage in the light of passion or convenience, and another to regard it as an institution by which human life may be developed and trained to the highest uses and enjoyments. We do not hesitate to lay down the broad principle that where there is incongruity of religious conviction between man and woman, happiness of the deepest and purest kind is entirely out of the question. This principle is impartial in its application, having equal reference to the woman as to the man, and to the man as to the woman. Take the case of a young woman who has deep religious convictions and sympathies : she has been trained under religious influences, her habits have been identified with the sanctuary from very early life ; she has taught in the schools, she has served in connection with many agencies of the Church, and altogether her name has become honourably associated with benevolent operations ; she is sought in marriage by a young man who has no religious convictions or sympathies, who, in fact, is worldly-minded, grovelling, earthly ; he may, indeed, be a man of education, of literary refinement, of good social position, of

captivating address ; nay, more—he may be a man against whom society is unable justly to point the finger of reproach. Whenever he is known he is respected for many social excellences. Viewed in a strictly worldly sense, the young man may be pronounced an eligible candidate for the lady's hand, yet, in the presence of such conditions, we do not hesitate to assert that happiness of the highest kind is impossible in such a connection. There must, on the woman's part, be more or less of sacrifice of the convictions and sympathies which have distinguished her whole life. Her religious emphasis will be modified ; more or less of a chill will subdue her Christian zeal ; her works of benevolence will be in some degree impaired ; there may not be any great outward difference in her manner, but her soul must have felt the desolation of an impoverishing influence. We have to consider, not what she is, so much as what she might have been, had she been united in marriage to one of kindred sympathy. To what an intense glow of love would her religious fervour have been increased ! With what accelerated rapidity she might have moved in the ways of godliness ! There would have been no secret force drawing her heart in the wrong direction ; the whole atmosphere in which she lived would have been favourable to the development of Christian graces, and she would have abounded in all holy fruitfulness as a follower and servant of Jesus Christ. We will not dwell upon cases in which there is direct opposition as between husband and wife on religious questions ; but prefer to take an instance in which the woman is a decided Christian in her convictions and habits, and where the man is accounted respectable in a worldly sense. There may never be a harsh word spoken on his part, he may never oppose any of his wife's inclinations, yet, by his own indifference, by his self-enjoyment, by his absence from her companionship when she is seeking the culture of her highest nature, he is, in reality, encountering her with a very dreadful hostility. And here we would impress upon the young who have yet to form their social relationships the necessity of their being at one with each other upon all vitally important questions, if they would really be, not outwardly, but inwardly, sincerely, enduringly happy. You are not to look at physical beauty, at social position, or at personal charms, strictly in themselves considered ; all these have their place, and an

important place it undoubtedly is ; but under all these considerations there lies the great question, What about the heart ? If the heart is not right, if the supreme affection be not divine, the whole life will be one continuously downward course, ending in mortification, disgust, and ruin. We know the ordinary excuse that is made when the Christian marries one who has no devotional sympathies : the generous, hopeful, self-sacrificing woman openly avows her belief that in a very little time she will be able to bring her intended husband to a right decision ; she knows (poor creature ! ) that there is something good in him ; she has heard (O mocking ear ! ) him say words which she construed into a noble intention on his part ; she is sure all will be right by-and-by ; a little patience, a little humouring, and a little instruction—then all will be right ! This is the dream of her love, the inspiration of her ill-directed hope, but it will prove an imposition—a deceit—a lie ! Granted that in one case out of a thousand events do prove better than expected ; we are not to be governed by exceptions, but by principles ; we must get away from the accidental to the essential ; and so long as right is right, we are bound to stand by it, how painful soever, how tormenting or destructive soever, the consequences. “ Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers : for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness ? and what communion hath light with darkness ? and what concord hath Christ with Belial ? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel ? ” “ Because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. ” “ Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils. ” “ Ye cannot serve God and mammon. ”

The principle of the text will still further permit an earnest word about evil companionship generally. “ My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause ; let us swallow them up alive as the grave ; and whole, as those that go down into the pit : we shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil : cast in thy lot among us ; let us all have one purse : my son, walk not thou in the way with them ; refrain thy foot from their path : for their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood. ” Amongst



worldly men, no one will deny that there may be many flattering and alluring attractions which work mightily upon the imagination and affections of the young. The devil can come to a man in many disguises. He does not always come, so to speak, as the devil pure and simple, but often brings with him a robe of light, and adapts himself to the condition, pursuits, and tastes of his intended victim. It is not to be supposed that any young man who regularly attends public worship is prepared to identify himself with the drunkard, swearer, or thief; of course, no young man is prepared to go to such lengths at once; but the point to be insisted on is this, that if the moral tone of the party seeking our companionship be not right, there must of necessity be a descent into depth after depth of moral degradation. True, you will declare your intention of turning back when you feel that you are going too far. This is a fool's decision. You forget that every step you take on the wrong road involves on your part a loss of power to retrace your way. The man is not the same man after he has gone a mile on the devil's highway. He has lost force; he has gone down in the volume and quality of his manhood; and when he thinks that it is now time to turn round and come back, he will find that his way has been hedged up behind him, and that in all probability there is no way of escape. "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful." Let no young person persuade himself that, though his companions may not be all he could wish, yet he is exerting a recovering influence upon them; we dare not say that your influence is not for their advantage; neither dare we assert that they are not exerting upon you a deep and deadly, though a remote and subtle, influence. Where one good young man succeeds in recovering an evil companion, many young men succumb to the treacherous influences which are brought to bear upon them by vicious associates. It is not necessary to be the bosom companion of a man who is evil-minded in order to save him; you are rather to stand at a distance and to speak from an elevation; you are not to descend to the same moral level with him; you may be found in his society, yet you may be separate from him,

as Jesus Christ himself was "separate from sinners." Your laugh at an indecent joke may be a sanction to foul thoughts; your silence in the hearing of profane language may give some countenance to evil-speaking; your want of heroism may be regarded as an encouragement by those who have set themselves to do mischief. Even those who are related to you by nature are to be avoided, when they would invite you towards evil. There is a higher relationship than that of mere blood; even were your own father to tempt you to do that which is unrighteous, you are to resist him, and flee from him as an enemy. "If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou nor thy fathers; namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; thou shalt not consent unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him." From these words, and from others that might be quoted bearing in the same direction, we see that the position of the Christian is to be one of the utmost distinctness. "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." This is the difficulty which every young Christian has to encounter at the very outset of his career, and throughout the whole of his Christian service and testimony. He is not only to avoid the appearance of evil himself, but he is to lift up his voice against those who serve the devil. He is called to be a witness for the truth; he is to lift up his voice, and to say distinctly what is wrong and what is right, and to fight the battles of the Lord against the mighty. He is not only then to abstain from evil companionships and confederacies; much more is required. It is needful that every man should distinctly define his Christian ground, and should constantly utter a testimony against all unrighteousness, and in favour of the things that are true and pure, honest and lovely.

Let us learn this lesson, that "though hand join in hand, the

wicked shall not be unpunished." We may imagine that gathering ourselves together in great numbers, by taking counsel one of another, and by some system of unanimous co-operation, we may be able to set ourselves successfully against the divine government; but God challenges the nations of the earth, and contemptuously defies them. "Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces: and give ear, all ye of far countries: gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces." There is no need to recall the instance in which "the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech," and in which men set themselves to do great things by way of protecting their interests from supernatural interposition; we remember that they carried their tower to a certain height, and that God came down and scattered them abroad, and confounded their language, and made them so that they could not understand one another's speech. He will surely do this again if we combine to oppose his way. All our commercial partnerships will be examined; all our social relationships will be subjected to inexorable judgment; all our companionships will be sifted by the divine visitation; none shall be able to stay the wrath of God, when he comes to judge the earth by the light of his infinite and incorruptible holiness. Better stand alone than be found in the association of evil men. Better never hear a friendly voice than be allured by the deceits of evil men! Better be found in unpitied loneliness, yet with a conscience void of offence, than lift up our heads amongst the most influential and illustrious servants of the devil.

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