



THE EXPULSION FROM THE GARDEN.

From the Painting by Gustave Dore

DESCRIBED AND ANALYZED IN THE SERMONS AND
WRITINGS OF THE

FOLLOWING FAMOUS AUTHORS:

Dwight Lyman Moody.
T. De Witt Talmage.
Joseph Parker.

SUPPLEMENTED BY THE GREATEST POEMS IN PRINT.



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INTRODUCTION.

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BY THE REV. C. B. GILLETTE, PH. D.

It frequently occurs to the devout Bible student and to the earnest Christian that, if he could have had the personal acquaintance of Jesus, and other Bible characters, it would have helped materially in the cultivation of a religious and spiritual life. One feels that, if he could have been a James, or a John, a Martha, or a Mary; if he could have stood by Jesus himself, and listened to the words falling from His lips: observed his life, become acquainted with his thought, and felt that silent, subtle influence emanating from his

personality; such would have been potential factors, aiding one onward and upward in the divine pathway.

So also, but in lesser degree, one regrets the impossibility of personal contact with Elijah, Isaiah, John, Paul, et al. But time has drawn the veil, and we cannot lift it. We must look at them through the varying atmosphere of many generations, and the best we can do is to avail ourselves of the best aids possible, and through them draw as near as possible to these great and good characters, so closely linked with our religious belief and our faith in the Infinite and Eternal.

One of Brooklyn's greatest divines once said, that he had never visited Palestine personally, but by study he had become so thoroughly acquainted with that country, that, should he be left at any point in Palestine at midnight, he would be able to tell in the morning, from the surrounding topography, where he was. [13]

So the editor of this volume has sought the scholars who have been recognized by the world as the leading religious teachers of their age, and culled from their utterances choice selections, respecting Jesus and the "Holy men of old, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

DR. TALMAGE, who, perhaps, more than any other living preacher, has commanded the public ear.

JOSEPH PARKER, who, from his immense intellectual store-house, well filled, has brought out such wonderful thoughts, respecting the Bible Characters.

DWIGHT L. MOODY, who moved the millions, both of this country and Great Britain. What was the source of his power? Not superior scholarship—far from it. Not his general appearance: for that, while not mean, was neither imposing nor inspiring. Not his eloquence; he never depended upon that. What, then, was the source of his power? It was the power of God. The Holy Spirit used him as a means in the conversion of souls.

The editor of this volume then presents you, in this age, when intelligent minds are looking for the greatest and the best, with the best thoughts of these great men, respecting the Christ and other great characters which adorn the pages of the Holy Writ.

C. B. GILLETTE.

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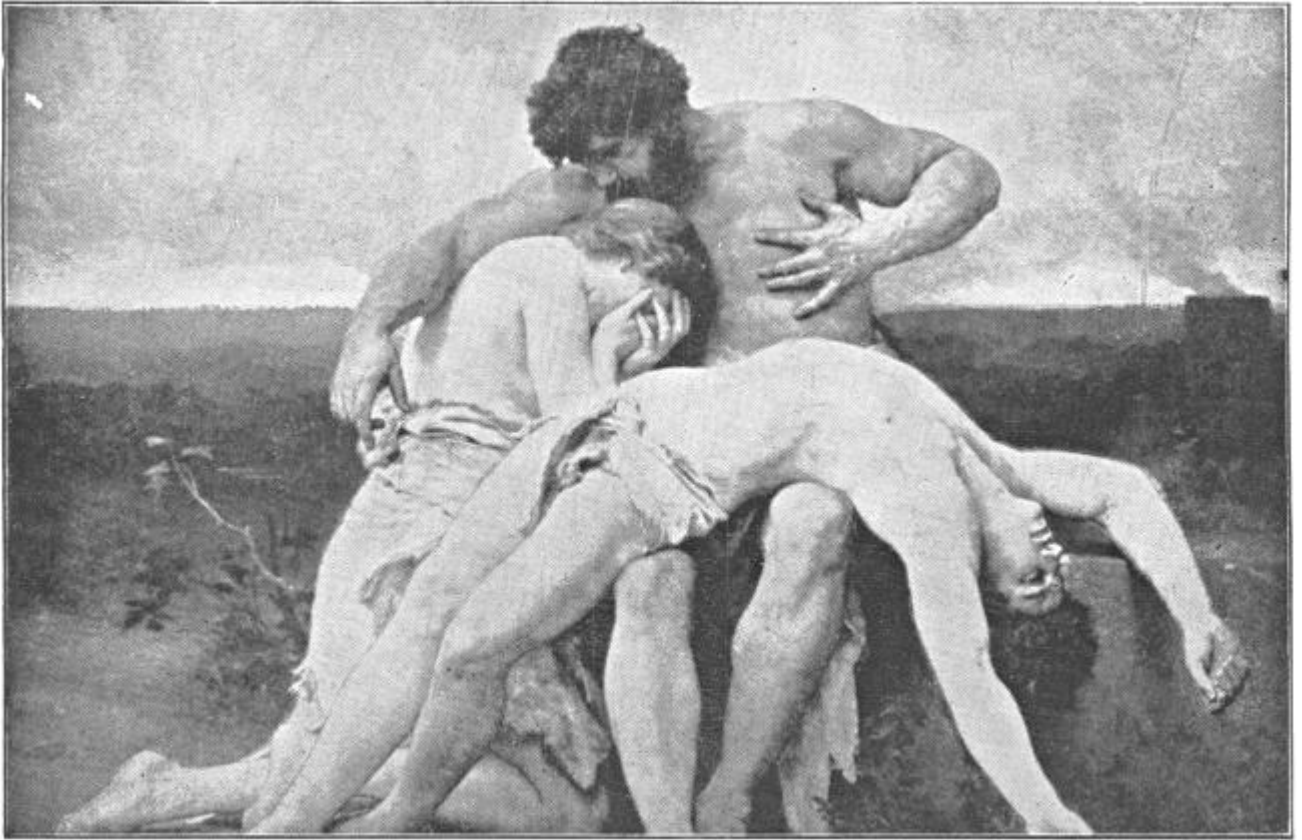
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THE TRIAL OF THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM. Genesis, xxii.



“THE FIRST MOURNERS.”—From the Painting by Bougereau.

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BIBLE CHARACTERS
DESCRIBED IN HIS SOUL-WINNING SERMONS BY THE
WORLD-KNOWN EVANGELIST,
DWIGHT LYMAN MOODY.

ABEL.

Abel was the first man who went to Heaven, and he went by way of blood. So we find it in all the worships of God from the earliest times.

In the story of Abel and Cain we are told: “In process of time it came to pass that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel also brought of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof, and the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering; but unto Cain and his offering He had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.”

Now, we find that Cain brought a bloodless sacrifice—“he brought of the fruit of the ground”—and Abel brought a bleeding lamb. Right on the morning of grace we see here that God had marked a way for men to come to Him, and that way was the way that Abel took, and Cain came to God with a sacrifice of his own, in his own way. Cain, perhaps, reasoned that he did not see why the products of the earth—why the fruit—should not be as acceptable to God as a bleeding lamb. He did not like a bleeding lamb, and so he brought his fruit.

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Now, we do not know how there was any difference between those two boys. Both must have been brought up in the same way; both came from the same parents. Yet we find in the offerings there was a difference between them.

ABRAHAM.

In the twenty-second chapter of Genesis we find the story of Abraham and his only son, Isaac. Abraham was a follower of God, a man who loved and feared God, and He commanded him to make a blood sacrifice.

We read in this chapter that He commanded Abraham to make the sacrifice of his only son. And we read that the next morning the old man saddled his ass and started. He did not tell his wife any thing about it. If he had, she would likely have persuaded him to remain where he was. But he has heard the voice of God, and he obeys the command. He has heard God's wish, and he is going to do it.

So, early in the morning—Abraham did not wait till 10 or 12 o'clock, but went early in the morning—he takes two of his young men with him and his son Isaac, and you can see him starting out on the three days' journey. They have the wood and the fire, for he is going to worship his God.

As Abraham goes on, he looks at his boy and says: "It is a strange commandment that God has given. I love this boy dearly. I do not understand it, but I do know it is all right, for the Judge of all the earth makes no mistakes." An order from the Judge of Heaven is enough for Abraham. [19]

The first night comes, their little camp is made, and Isaac is asleep. But the old man does not sleep. He looks into the face of his sleeping boy, and sadly says: "I will have no boy soon. I shall never see him on this earth again. But I must obey God."

I can see Abraham marching on the next day, and you might have seen him drying his tears as he glanced upon that only son and thought upon what he had been called upon to do. The second night comes; tomorrow is the day for the sacrifice. What a night that must have been to Abraham! Hear him say: "Tomorrow I must take the life of that boy—my only son, dearer to me than any thing on earth—dearer to me than my life."

The third day comes, and as they go along they see the mountain in the distance. Then Abraham says to the young men: "You stay here with the beasts." He takes the wood and the fire, and along with his boy prepares to ascend Mount Moriah, from the peak of which could be seen the spot where, a few hundred years later, the Son of man was offered up.

As they ascend the mountain Isaac says: "Here are the wood and the fire, father. But where is the sacrifice?" This question shows that the boy knew nothing of what was in store. How the question must have sunk down into the old man's heart! And he only answers: "The Lord will provide a sacrifice." It was not time to tell him, and they go on until they come to the place appointed by God, and build the altar, and lay the wood upon it. Every thing is ready, and I can just imagine the old man take the boy by the hand, and, leading him to a rock, sitting down there and telling him how God had called upon him to come out of his native land; how God had been in communion with him for fifty years; what God had done for him. "And now," he says, "my boy, when I was in my bed three nights ago, God came to me with a strange message, in which He told me to offer my child as a sacrifice. I love you, my son, but God has told me to do this, and I must obey Him. So let us both go down on our knees and pray to Him." [20]

After they have sent up a petition to God, Abraham lays Isaac on the altar and kisses him for the last time. He lifts the knife to drive it into his son's heart, when all at once he hears a voice: "Abraham! Abraham! Spare thine only son."

Ah! There was no voice heard on Calvary to save the Son of Man. God showed mercy to the son of Abraham. You fathers and mothers, just picture to yourselves how you would suffer if you had to sacrifice your only son. And think what it must have caused God to give up His only Son. We are told that Abraham was glad. This manifestation of Abraham's faith so pleased God that He showed him the grace of Heaven and lifted the curtain of time to let him look down into the future to see the Son of God offered, bearing the sins of the world.

AHAB.

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There is a familiar saying: "Every man has his own price."

Ahab had his, and he sold himself for a garden; Judas sold himself for thirty pieces of silver, and Esau for a mess of pottage.

Ahab sold himself just to please a fallen woman. And so we might go on—citing the men who have sold themselves. It is easy for us to condemn these men, but let us see if there are not men and women doing the same thing today. How many are selling themselves tonight for naught! It is easy enough to condemn Judas, Herod and Ahab, but in doing this do we not condemn ourselves?

We thought that slavery was hard. We thought it hard that those poor black people should be put upon the block, in the market, and sold to the highest bidder; but what do you think of those men who sell themselves today to evil?

Ahab sold himself to evil, and what did he get?

Elijah was the best friend that Ahab had, but he did not think so; he thought that Elijah was his enemy. Ahab was a religious man—that is, he thought he was. He had 850 prophets. "And what king has more? What king does more for religion than I?" So he would have said. There is a difference between religion and having Christ. There are a great many people that have religion but have no Christ in it—that have not a spark of Christianity.

This man was very religious, but he began wrong. His marriage was his first wrong step. He did not care about the law of God. He wanted to strengthen his kingdom. I can imagine they said: "We have outgrown the laws of Moses. We do not want your God; we have got something better. Here are the nations all around us worshiping Baal, and we will worship Baal."

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Ahab's wife, Jezebel, wanted the patriarchs and the prophets put to death, and they were put to death. Obadiah had a few, but wherever they were found they were put to death. I suppose they said of Elijah: "That man belongs to the old Puritanical school." He was bigoted and narrow. The idea of only worshiping one God! Ahab was willing to turn away from the God of Elijah, but he did not look to have Elijah reprove him, and thus he was his enemy. Many a man who has a good, praying mother thinks that mother is his enemy.

Ahab thought the God of Elijah was not going to carry out His warning. I will leave it to you if the man who warns you of danger is not the best friend you have got. If I saw a man about to walk over a precipice and he was blind and I did not warn him, would not the blood of that man be required at my hands? Would not I be guilty morally? Jezebel hated Elijah, and she disliked him for his warnings. The man who warns you is the best friend that you have got.

Suppose I am going home at night—at midnight—and I see a building on fire and I pass along and say not a word about it, and the occupants are all asleep and I go right home and go to bed, and in the morning I find that fifteen people in that house were burned up—how you would condemn me! And if in preaching the Gospel I do not warn you about your danger—about your sins and God's punishment—what will you say to me when I meet you at the Eternal Throne? I do not want you to think that I am trying to please the people by preaching that the just and unjust will fare alike. You may be successful for a time. Ahab

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had two grand and glorious victories upon the battle field, and he was a very popular man for a while. He built a palace of ivory, and just here I want to speak of one act of that man.

When Ahab's beautiful palace was finished, he found there was a poor man who had a garden near it. This Ahab wanted. And Ahab came to Naboth, the poor man, and wanted him to sell his garden. But Naboth said he could not do so, for it was against the law of his people. Then Ahab said to him: "I will give you a better place than this, and I will give you a better vineyard than this." But Naboth was firm, and would not agree to sell his garden.

Many men would have liked to sell to the king. Such would have said: "We know it is against the law, but he is foolish not to sell to the king."

Naboth said: "God forbid that I should sell."

Ahab returns to his palace, where he pouts like a child. Jezebel notices him, and begins to speak with him. She asks: "What is the matter?" Ahab makes answer like a peevish child: "I want Naboth's garden." And she asks him why he does not take it, and then he tells her. Again she asks:

"Are you not king of Israel?"

"Yes."

"Well! Then why do you not get it? I will get it for you, and it shall not cost you any thing. I will arrange it." [24]

Then Jezebel sent that infamous letter to the truculent elders. Those elders were just as bad as Jezebel. They knew that Naboth served the God of Heaven. The instructions of the letter were followed. The two witnesses said they saw Naboth despise God and the king, and so he was taken out and stoned to death. I can see him kneeling there and the crowds taking up the stones and hurling them at him.

Well, when Ahab goes down to take possession of that vineyard there is a message that had come from the throne of Heaven. God has been watching him. He notices all of us, and there is not a hellish act that has been, or is going to be, committed but God knows about it. Elijah stood before Ahab as the latter went down to that garden, and Ahab got out of his chariot and met him. He knew that Elijah knew all, and he did not like to be reproved. Ill-gotten gains do not bring peace. If you get any thing at the cost of the truth or honor, it will be peace lost for time, and perhaps for eternity.

As he walked through that garden, Ahab looked up and said: "Why, is not that Elijah?" He knew it was, and he knew what it meant. Elijah walks up to him and asks: "Hast thou killed and taken possession?" Ahab answers: "I wonder how he found that out. He knows all about me." And then Elijah said: "In the place where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth they shall lick thy blood."

Then Ahab asked the prophet: "Mine enemy, have you found me out?"

Elijah answered: "Yes. Because you have sold yourself to evil, you will be found out." [25]

A few years before, Ahab had laughed at Elijah, but he now remembered that every thing which Elijah's God had promised had been done, and he could not get these words out of his mind: "In the place where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth they shall lick thy blood." Sometimes just one act, that we can do in a minute, will cost us years of trouble and pain. Little did Ahab think that it was going to cost him his kingdom and cause his whole family to be swept from the face of the earth when he gave the promise to Jezebel to write that letter.

Ahab lived three years after Elijah met him in that garden, and how many times do you suppose those awful words of Elijah came into his mind? He could not get them out of his mind. Jezebel tried to help him, but she could not. He wanted to improve the garden, and no doubt he did improve it; but whenever he walked there the words came to him which Elijah

had spoken. Then the time came for the judgment against Ahab to be carried out, and the Bible tells how it was done.

BARABBAS.

I have often thought what a night Barabbas must have spent just before the day when Christ was crucified.

As the sun goes down, he says to himself: "Tomorrow—only tomorrow—and I must die upon the cross! They will hang me up before a crowd of people; they will drive nails through my hands and feet; they will break my legs with bars of iron; and in that awful torture I shall die before this time tomorrow, and go up to the Judgment with all my crimes upon me."

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Maybe, they let his mother come to see him once more before dark. Perhaps he had a wife and children, and they came to see him for the last time. He could not sleep at all that night. He could hear somebody hammering in the prison yard, and knew they must be making the cross. He would start up every now and then, thinking that he heard the footsteps of the officers coming for him.

At last the light of the morning looks in through the bars of his prison.

"Today—this very day—they will open that door and lead me away to be crucified!"

Pretty soon he hears them coming. No mistake this time. They are unbarring the iron door. He hears them turning the key in the rusty lock. Then the door swings open. There are the soldiers.

Good-by to life and hope! Death—horrible death—now! And after death—what will there be then?

The officer of the guard speaks to him: "Barabbas, you are free!"

He hears the strange words, but they make very little impression on him. He is so near dead with fear and horror that the good news does not reach him. His ears catch the sound, but he thinks it is a foolish fancy. He is asleep and dreaming. He stands gazing a moment at the soldiers, and then he comes to himself.

"Do not laugh at me! Do not make sport of me! Take me away and crucify me, but do not tear my soul to pieces!" Again the officer speaks: "*You are free!* Here—the door is open! Go out—go home!"

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Now he begins to take in the truth. But it is so wonderful a thing to get out of the clutches of the Roman law that he is afraid to believe the good news. And so he begins to doubt, and to ask how it can be.

They tell him that Pilate has promised the Jews the release of one prisoner that day, and that the Jews have chosen him instead of one Jesus of Nazareth, who was condemned to be crucified.

Now the poor man begins to weep. This breaks his heart. He knows this Jesus. He has seen Him perform some of His miracles. He was in the crowd, picking pockets, when Jesus fed the five thousand hungry people.

"What! That just man to die! And I—a thief, a highwayman, a murderer—to go free!"

And in the midst of his joy at his own release his heart breaks at the thought that his life is saved at such a cost.

BARTIMEUS AND ZACCHÆUS.

In the eighteenth chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke you will find Christ was going into Jericho, and as He drew near the gates of the city there was a poor blind man who sat by the wayside, begging people to give him a farthing, and crying out: "Have mercy on a poor blind man!"

This blind beggar met a man who said to him: "I have good news to tell you, Bartimeus."

"What is it?" asked the beggar.

"There is a man of Israel who can give you sight."

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"Oh, no! There is no chance of my ever receiving my sight. I never shall see. In fact, I never saw the mother who gave me birth. I never saw the wife of my bosom. I never saw my own children. I never saw in this world, but I expect to see in the world to come."

"Let me tell you. I have just come down from Jerusalem, and I saw that village carpenter, Jesus of Nazareth; and I saw a man who was born blind, who had received his sight, and I never saw a man who had better sight. He does not even have to use glasses."

Then hope rises for the first time in this poor man's heart, and he says: "Tell me how the man got his sight."

"Oh," says the other, "Jesus first spat upon the ground and made clay, and put it on his eyes, and then He told the man to wash his eyes in the pool of Siloam, and he would receive his sight. More than that, Bartimeus: He does not charge you any thing. You have no fee to pay. You just tell him what you want, and you get it—without money and without price. It does not need dukes, lords or influence. You just call upon Him yourself. And if He ever comes this way, do not let Him go back without your going to see Jesus."

And Bartimeus said: "I will try it. There is no harm in trying it."

I can imagine Bartimeus being led by a child to his seat, as usual, and that he is crying out: "Please give a blind beggar a farthing."

He hears the footsteps of the coming multitude, and he inquires: "Who is passing? What does this multitude mean?" They tell him that it is Jesus of Nazareth passing by. The moment he hears that he says: "Why, that is the man that gave sight to the blind!"

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The moment it reached his ear that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out at the top of his voice: "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy upon me!"

Some of those who went before—perhaps Peter was one of them—rebuked him, thinking the Master was going up to Jerusalem to be crowned King, and did not want to be distracted. They never knew the Son of God when He was here. He would hush every harp in Heaven to hear a sinner pray. No music would delight Him so much. But the blind man still lifted up his voice, and cried louder: "Thou Son of David, have mercy on me!"

This prayer reached the ears of the Son of God, as prayer always will, and they led the poor blind man to Him. Well, when Jesus heard the blind beggar, He commanded him to be brought. So they ran to him, and said: "Be of good cheer. The Master calls you. He has a blessing for you."

When Jesus saw Bartimeus He said: "What can I do for you?"

"Lord, that I may receive sight."

"You shall have it."

And the Lord gave it to him. And now the beggar follows with the crowd, glorifying God. I can imagine he sang as sweetly as Mr. Sankey—and no one can sing more sweetly than he—when he shouted: "Hosanna to the Son of David!" No one sang louder than this one who had received his sight. Then he follows on with the crowd, which we see pressing into the gates of the city. I can imagine, when he gets into the city, he says to himself: "I will

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go down and see Mrs. Bartimeus.” Of course, after all those years of blindness, he had some curiosity to see what his wife looked like.

As he is passing down the street, a man meets him, and turns around and says: “Bartimeus, is that you?”

“Yes; it is I.”

“Well, I thought so, and yet I feared my eyes must deceive me. How did you get your sight?”

“I just met Jesus of Nazareth outside the walls of the city, and I asked Him to have mercy on me; and He gave me sight.”

“Jesus of Nazareth! Is he now in this part of the country?”

“Yes; He is on His way to Jerusalem. He is now going down to the eastern gate.”

“I should like to see Him,” says the man. And he runs straightway down the street. But he can not get a glimpse of Him, being small of stature, on account of the great throng around Him. He runs to a sycamore tree, and says to himself: “If I get up there and hide, without any one seeing me, He can not get by without my having a good look at Him.”

A great many rich men do not like to be seen coming to Jesus.

Well, there he is in the sycamore tree, on a branch hanging right over the highway, and he says to himself: “He can not get by without my having a good look at Him.” All at once the crowd comes in sight. He looks at John. “That is not He.” He looks at Peter. “No, that is not He.” Then he sees One who is fairer than the sons of men. “That is He!” And Zacchæus, just peeping out from among the branches, looks down upon that wonderful—yes, that mighty—God-Man in amazement. [31]

At last the crowd comes to the tree, and it looks as if Christ is going by; but He stops right under the tree. All at once He looks up and sees Zacchæus, and says to him: “Zacchæus, make haste and come down.”

I can imagine Zacchæus says to himself: “I wonder who told Him my name. I was never introduced to Him.” But Christ knew all about him.

Well, He said to Zacchæus: “Make haste and come down.” He may have added: “This is the last time I shall pass this way, Zacchæus.” That is the way He speaks to sinners. “This may be the last time I shall pass this way. This may be your last chance of eternity.” There are some people in this nineteenth century who do not believe in sudden conversions. I should like them to tell me where Zacchæus was converted. He certainly was not converted when he went up into the tree, but he certainly was converted when he came down. He must have been converted somewhere between the branches and the ground.

The Lord converted him right there. People say they do not believe in sudden conversions, and that if a man is converted suddenly he will not hold out—he will not be genuine. I wish we had a few men converted like Zacchæus in London. They would make no small stir. When a man begins to make restitution it is a pretty good sign of conversion. Let men give back money dishonestly obtained in London, and see how quickly people will believe in conversion. Zacchæus gave half his goods to the poor. What would be said if some of the rich men of London did that? Zacchæus gave half his goods all at once, and he said: “If I have taken any thing from any man falsely, I restore him fourfold.” I think that is the other half. [32]

But to get Christ is worth more than all his wealth. I imagine, the next morning, one of the servants of Zacchæus going with a check for £100, and saying: “My master a few years ago took from you wrongfully about £25, and this is restitution money.”

That would give confidence in Zacchæus’s conversion.

BELSHAZZAR.

In the fifth chapter of Daniel we read the history of King Belshazzar. It is very short. Only one chapter tells us all we know about him. One short sight of his career is all we see. He just seems to burst upon the stage and then disappears. We are told that he gave a great feast, and at this feast he had a thousand of his lords, and they were drinking and praising the gods of silver, of gold, of brass, of iron and of wood, out of the vessels which had been brought from the Temple at Jerusalem.

As they were drinking out of these vessels of gold and silver from the house of God—I do not know but it was at the hour of midnight—all at once came forth the fingers of a man's hand and began to write upon the wall of the banquet hall. [33]

The king turns deathly pale, his knees shake together and he trembles from head to foot. Perhaps if some one had told him the time was coming when he would be put into the balance and weighed he would have laughed at him. But he knows the vital hour has come, and that the hand has written his doom in the words: "Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin."

He calls the wise men of his kingdom, and the man who can interpret this will be made the third ruler of his realm, and shall be clothed in scarlet and have a chain about his neck. One after another tried, but the eyes of no uncircumcised man could make it out. Belshazzar was greatly troubled. At last one was spoken of who had been able to interpret the dream of his father, Nebuchadnezzar. He was told if he would send for Daniel the latter might interpret the writing.

So the prophet was brought in, and he looked upon the handwriting. He told the king how his father had gone against God, and how he (Belshazzar) had gone against the Lord of Heaven, and how his reign was finished. And this was the meaning of the mysterious writing:

"MENE—God hath numbered thy kingdom and finished it.

"TEKEL—Thou art weighed in the balance, and art found wanting.

"PERES—Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians."

The trial is over, the verdict is rendered and the sentence brought out. That very night the king was hurled from his throne. That very night the army of Darius came tearing down the streets, and then you might have heard the clash of arms and shouts of war, and might have seen the king's blood mingling with the wine in that banquet hall. [34]

CALEB.

Caleb and Joshua are great favorites of mine. They have got a ring about them. They were not all the time looking for hindrances and obstacles in their way. They got their eyes above them.

You remember how those men were sent forward to spy out the land of Canaan. They had been sent out forty days to go over that land. They went from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob, and thence unto Hebron. And when they reached the "brook of Eshcol they secured a branch with one cluster of grapes, and bare it between two upon a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates and of the figs."

They were gone forty days, and the twelve men brought back what Congress would call a majority and a minority report. Ten men reported that they had gone unto the land to which they were sent, and that surely it flowed with milk and honey. And so God's word was true. They found milk and honey. And they brought along grapes.

But ten of them were full of unbelief. They further reported that they saw giants there—the sons of Anak, which come of the giants. The Hittites, Jebusites, Amalekites and Amorites dwelt there. They were all there, and also those great giants, in whose sight they were as grasshoppers. It was a great war city, and they asked themselves if they looked as though they were able to war with such giants. They said: “We are not able.”

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They undoubtedly brought back maps and charts, and said: “There is the region. It would be monstrous for us to attempt to take it. There are massive iron gates and a great wall, and we are not able to take it. We are defenseless people—without any weapons. We will not be able to overcome those people.”

I can imagine one man said: “Why, I looked up at those giants, and I seemed as a little grasshopper, and I felt as small as a grasshopper. We can not hope to cope with those giants. It is a good land, but we will not be able to go up and possess it.”

Then they began to murmur. It does not take a very great while to get unbelievers to murmuring. But Caleb tried to encourage them. He says to them: “Let us go up at once and possess the land. We are well able to overcome it.”

Even Joshua joined in with Caleb, and they proved two with the faith. To be sure, they were in the minority; but if the Lord is with us we are able to prove a powerful majority over the enemy. They determined to take it, and they wandered across all through Canaan, but the people took up stones, and would have stoned them to death. But “the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation, before all the children of Israel.”

And about three millions of people wandered in the wilderness for forty years, until all the men laid themselves down in the desert grave and were kept out of the Promised Land—all on account of their unbelief. And I believe today that four-fifths of the church is wandering around in the wilderness, far away from the cross of Calvary and the Promised Land. We are able to have victory with God with us.

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Ten men were looking at all those obstacles that this new land presented to them, while these two men—Caleb and Joshua—looked up yonder. And they saw God’s face and remembered the waste in Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, the destruction which was brought upon the Philistines, the water from the flint rock, and they believed that God was able—as He most certainly was—to give them that land He had promised.

DANIEL.

I want to talk about the life of the prophet, Daniel. The word means “God with him”—not the public with him, not his fellow men, but God. Therefore, he had to report himself to God and hold himself responsible to Him.

I do not know just what time Daniel went down to Babylon. I know that in the third year of King Jehoakim Nebuchadnezzar took ten thousand of the chief men of Jerusalem, and carried them captive down to Babylon. I am glad these chief men, who brought on the war, were given into the great king’s hands. Unlike too many of the ringleaders in our great war, they got the punishment on their own heads.

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Among the captives were four young men. They had been converted, doubtless, under Jeremiah, the “weeping prophet” that God had sent to the children of Israel. Many had mocked at him when he lifted up his voice against their sins. They had laughed at his tears and told him to his face—as many say of us—that he was getting up a false excitement. But these four young men listened, and they had the backbone to come out for God.

And now, after they were come to Babylon, the king said a number of the children should be educated, and ordered the same kind of meat and wine set before them that were used in his palace, and that at the end of a year they should be brought before him. Daniel and his three friends were among these.

Now, no young man ever comes to the city without having great temptation cross his path as he enters it. And just at this turning point in his life, as in Daniel's, must lie the secret of his success. This was the secret of young Daniel's success: He took his stand with God right on his entering the gate of Babylon, and cried to God to keep him steadfast. And he needed to cry hard. A law of his and his nation's God was that no man must eat meat offered to idols, but now comes the king's first edict, that this young man should eat the same kind of meat he himself did. I do not think that it took young Daniel long to make up his mind. The law of God forbade it, and he would not do it. "He purposed in his heart"—in his heart; mark this—that he would not defile himself. He did not resolve in his head, but love in his heart prompted him. If some Chicago Christians could have advised Daniel, they would have said to him: "Don't you do it; don't set aside the meat. That would be a species of Phariseism." Oh, yes; they would have insisted to the poor young captive that he should carry out the commandments of his God when he was in his own country, but not there where he was but a poor slave; he could not possibly carry along his own religion down there to Babylon.

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Thank God, this young man would not eat the meat, and, ordering it taken away, he got the eunuch to bring him pulse. And behold, when he came before the king, the eunuch's fears were gone, for the faces of Daniel and the rest of the dear boys were fairer and fatter than any that the king looked down upon. They had not noses—like too many in our streets—as red as if they were just going to blossom. It is God's truth, and Daniel tested it, that cold water, with a clear conscience, is far better than wine.

And the king one day had a dream, and all the wise men were called before him. But they all said: "We can not interpret it; it is too hard." The king, being wroth, threatened them. Still getting no answer, he made an edict that all the wise men should be put to death. And the officers came to Daniel, with the rest of the wise men, but Daniel was not afraid.

I can imagine he prayed to God, falling low on his knees and with his face to the earth, and asked Him for guidance; and then he crawled into bed and slept like a child. We would hardly sleep well under such circumstances. And in his sleep God told him the meaning of the dream. There must have been joy among the wise men that one of their number had found it, and that the king would save their lives. And he is brought before the king, and cries out: "O king, while thou didst lie with thy head on thy pillow, thou didst dream, and in thy dream thou sawest a great image."

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I can imagine, at these opening words, how the king's eyes flashed, and how he cried out with joy: "Yes, that is it—the whole thing comes back to me now."

And then Daniel, in a death-like stillness, unfolded all the interpretation, and told the king that the golden head of the great image represented his own government. I suppose Babylon was the biggest city ever in the world. It was sixty miles around. Some writers put the walls from sixty-five to eighty-five feet high and twenty-five feet wide. Four chariots could drive abreast on top of them. A street fifteen miles long divided the grand city, and hanging gardens in acres made the public parks. It was like Chicago—so flat that they had to resort to artificial mounds; and, again like Chicago, the products of vast regions flowed right into and through it.

This great kingdom, Daniel told the king, was his own; but he said a destroying kingdom should come, and afterward a third and fourth kingdom, when, at the last, the God of Heaven should set up His kingdom.

Daniel lived to see the first kingdom overthrown, when the Medes and Persians came in, and centuries after came Alexander, and then the Romans.

I believe in the literal fulfillment, so far, of Daniel's God given words and in the sure fulfillment of the final prophecy of the "stone cut out of the mountains without hands," that

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by-and-by shall grind the kingdoms of this world into dust, and bring in the Kingdom of Peace. Then will be the Millennium, and Christ will sway His scepter over all the earth.

Well, the king was very much pleased. He gave to Daniel a place near the throne, and he became one of the chief men of the world. His three friends were also put in high office. God had blessed them signally, and He blessed them still more—and that was, perhaps, a harder thing—in keeping them true to Him in their prosperity. Their faith and fortunes waxed strong together.

Time went on, and now we reach a crisis indeed. “Nebuchadnezzar, the king,” we read, “made an image of gold, one hundred and ten feet high and nine feet wide.” It was not gilded, but was solid gold. When Babylon was pillaged the second time a single god was found in the temple that was worth more than two million pounds sterling. The king’s monstrous image was set up in the Plains of Dura, near to the city. I suppose he wanted to please his kingly vanity by inaugurating a universal religion.

When the time came for the dedication I do not suppose Daniel was there. He was probably in Egypt, or some other province, on affairs of the empire. Counselors, satraps, high secretaries and the princes of the people were ordered to hasten to the dedication, and when they should hear the sound of the cornet, flute and psaltery announce that the great idol was consecrated they were to bow down and worship it.

Perhaps they called the ceremony the unveiling of the monument, as we should say. But one command was made certain. At a given signal all the people were to fall to the earth in worship. But in the law of God there is something against that. “Thou shalt have none other gods but Me.” God’s law went right against the king’s. [41]

Would all of us have Daniel’s three friends to do the right thing at any hazard? Would none of us, without backbone, have advised them to just bow down a little, so that no one would notice it, or to merely bow down but not worship it?

The hour came, and Daniel’s friends refused to bow down. They refused utterly to bend the knee to a god of gold. How many cry out in this city: “Give me gold—give me money—and I will do any thing!” Such may think that men in Nebuchadnezzar’s time should not bow down to a golden idol, but they themselves are daily doing just that very thing. Money is their golden image, or position, or golden ambition.

Well, the informers came to the king, and told him that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had stood with unbended knee, and straightway they were hurried before him. The old king, speechless with rage, was gesturing his commands. I can imagine that one last chance was given them, after the king finally regained his voice, and that one of them, probably Meshach, spoke up in a firm but respectful voice that they must obey God rather than man.

At once the raging king cried out: “What is your God that He can deliver you out of our hands?” And in the same breath he screamed a command to bind them hand and foot and cast them into the fiery furnace, and make it seven times hotter than ever. The command was instantly executed, and the flames leaped out from the door and consumed the officers who cast them in. [42]

But Jesus was with His servants as the flames raged about them, and soon word was brought to the king that four men walked about in the flames. Yes, they walked there with Jesus—they did not run—as in a green pasture and beside still waters. And directly the king rushed up and cried: “Ye sons of the living God, come forth.” And behold, even the hair of their heads was not singed. Then the king made a royal edict, that all in his realm should reverence the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

Then the king had a dream, and he was greatly perturbed thereby. This time the particulars of the dream had not gone from him. They stood out vivid and clear in his mind,

as he sent out to fetch the wise men, and called to them to give him the interpretation. But they can not give it.

When he had his first dream he had summoned these same soothsayers, but they had stood silent. And now they stand silent again as the second dream is told them. They can not interpret it. Then once again he sends for the prophet, Daniel, whom he had named after one of his gods, Belteshazzar. And the young prophet comes before the king, and as soon as the king sees Daniel he feels sure that he will now get the meaning.

Calling out from his throne, he tells how he had dreamed a dream, wherein he saw a tree in the midst of the earth, with branches that reached to Heaven, and the sight thereof to the ends of the earth. The beasts of the field had shelter under it, and the fowls of the air dwelt in the boughs thereof. The tree was very fair and had much fruit, and all flesh was fed on it. And then, lowering his voice, he tells how, as he gazed, he saw a watcher and a holy one come down from Heaven, who cried aloud: "Hew down the tree." [43]

"And now," cries the king, "can you tell me the interpretation?"

For a time Daniel stands motionless. Does his heart fail him? The record simply says: "For one hour he was astonished." The ready words doubtless rush to his lips, but he dislikes to let them out. He does not want to tell how the king's kingdom and mind are going to depart from him, and he is to wander forth to eat grass like a beast. The king, too, hesitates; a dark foreboding for a time gets the better of curiosity. But soon he nerves himself to hear the worst, and speaks very kindly: "Do not be afraid to tell me, O Daniel! Let not the dream or its interpretation trouble thee." And at last Daniel speaks: "O king, thou art the man. God has exalted thee over every king and over all the world, but thou shalt be brought low. Thou shalt be driven out from men, and shalt eat grass among the beasts of the field; but thy kingdom—as the great watcher spared the stump of the tree—shall afterward return to thee. Wherefore, O king, break off thy sins by righteousness and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquility."

And straightway the king repented in sackcloth and ashes, and God stayed the doom. But twelve months from that time we see Nebuchadnezzar walking in his palace and boasting: "Is not this my great Babylon that I have built by the might of my power and for the honor of my majesty!" And behold, while he yet spake a voice came from Heaven, saying: "Thy kingdom hath departed." And undoubtedly God then touched his reason, and straightway he ran madly through the gates to eat grass. [44]

But his kingdom had not passed from him forever, and, according to the prophet's word, at the end of seven years—or, possibly, seven months—his reason came back, and he returned to his palace. All his princes and officers gathered about him. Then he immediately sent out a new proclamation, and its closing words show his repentance, and how Daniel had brought this mighty king to God:

"And at the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up mine eyes unto Heaven, and my understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honored Him that liveth forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation.

"At the same time my reason returned unto me, and for the glory of my kingdom mine honor and brightness returned unto me, and my councilors and my lords sought unto me. I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me.

"Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol the King of Heaven, all whose works are truth and His ways judgment, and those that walk in pride He is able to abase."

And then he passes from the stage. This is the last record of him, and undoubtedly he and Daniel now walk the crystal pavement together. That mighty monarch was led to the God of the Hebrews by the faith of this Hebrew slave, and just because he had a religion and dared to make it known. [45]

But now we lose sight of the prophet for a few years, perhaps fifteen or twenty. The next we hear is that Belteshazzar is on the throne—possibly as regent. He is believed to have been a grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. One day he said he would make Daniel the third ruler of the people if he would interpret for him the handwriting on the wall. He was probably second himself, and Daniel would be next to him. Of this prince we have only one glimpse. The feast scene is the first and last we have of him, and it is enough. It was a great feast, and fully a thousand of his lords sat down together. In those days feasts sometimes lasted six months. How long this one lasted we do not know. The king caroused with his princes and satraps and all the mighty men of Babylon, drinking and rioting and praying to gods of silver and gold and brass and stubble—just what we are doing today, if we bow the knee to the gods of this world. And the revelers, waxing wanton, even go into the temple and lay sacrilegious hands on the sacred vessels that had been brought away from Jerusalem, and drank wine from them—drank toasts to idols and harlots. And, undoubtedly, as they are drinking they scoff at the God of Israel.

I see these revelers swearing and rioting when, suddenly, the king turns pale and trembles from head to foot. Above the golden candlesticks, on a bare space on the wall, he sees the writing of the God of Zion. He distinctly sees the terrible fingers. His voice shakes with terror, but he manages to falter out: “Bring in the wise men! Any man who can read the handwriting I will make third ruler of the kingdom.”

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Then the wise men come trooping in, but there is no answer. Not one of them can read it. They are skilled in Chaldean lore, but this stumps them. At last the queen comes in and whispers: “O king, there is a man in the kingdom who can read that writing. When your grandfather could not interpret his dreams he sent for Daniel, the Hebrew, and he knew all about them. Can we find him?”

They did find him, and now we see the man of God again standing before a king’s throne. To the king’s hurried promises of gifts and honors Daniel replies: “You can keep your rewards.” Quietly he turns his eyes on the writing. He reads it at the first glance, for it is his Father’s handwriting. He says:

“Mene—Thy kingdom hath departed from thee.

“Tekel—Thou art weighed in the balance, and art found wanting.

“Upharsin—Thy kingdom is divided. It is given over to the hands of the enemy.”

How these words of doom must have rung through the palace that night!

And the destruction did not tarry. The king recovered himself, banished his fears, and went on drinking in his hall. The mystery and its interpretation were as an idle tale. He thought he was perfectly secure. He had deemed the great walls of Babylon thoroughly safe. But there was Darius besieging the city; the enemy was right upon him. Was that safe? While they reveled, the river Euphrates, that flowed under the walls, was turned into another channel. The hosts of Medes and Persians rushed through, unobstructed, and in a few minutes more battered down the king’s gate and broke through the palace guard into the inmost palace chamber. And the king was slain, and his blood flowed in that banquet hall.

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We are next told Darius took the throne and set over the people 120 rulers, and over these three presidents, of whom Daniel was first. And so we find him in office again. I do not know how long he was in that position. But by-and-by a conspiracy took head among his fellow officers to get rid of him. They got jealous and said:

“Let’s see if we can get this man removed. He has bossed us long enough—the sanctimonious old Hebrew.”

And then he was so impracticable, they could not do any thing with him. There were plenty of collectors and treasurers, but he kept such a close eye on them that they only made their salaries. There was no plundering of the government with Daniel at the head. He was

president of the princes, and all revenue accounts passed before him. I can overhear the plotters whispering: “If we can only put him out of the way, we can make enough in two or three years to retire from office, have a city house in Babylon and two or three villas in the country—have enough for all our days. We can then go down to Egypt and see something of the world. As things now are, we can only get our exact dues, and it will take years to get any thing respectable. Yes, let us down this pious Jew.” [48]

Well, they worked things so as to get an investigating committee, hoping to catch him in his accounts. But they found no occasion for fault against him. If he had put any relatives in office it would have been found out. If he had been guilty of peculation, or in any way broken the unalterable statutes of the kingdom, it would have come to light. What a bright light was that, standing alone in that great city for God and the majesty of law!

But at last they struck on one weak point, as they called it—he would worship no one but the God of Israel. The law of his God was his only assailable side. The conspirators reasoned in their plotting:

“If we can only get Darius to forbid any one making a request for thirty days except from the king himself, we shall trap him, and then we can cast him among the lions. We will take good care to have the lions hungry.”

And the hundred and twenty princes took long council together. “Take care,” they said; “you must draw up the paper which is to be signed by the king with a deal of care and discretion. The king loves him, and he has influence. Do not speak of the movement outside this meeting. It might come to the ears of the king, and we must talk to the king ourselves.”

When the mine is all ready, the hundred and twenty princes come to the king and open their business with flattering speech. Naturally, we hear these men saying: “King Darius, live for ever!” They tell him how prosperous the realm is, and how much the people think of him. And then they tell him, in the most plausible way that ever was, that if he would be remembered by children’s children to all ages, just to sign this decree. It would be a memorial of his greatness and goodness for ever. And the king replies graciously: “What is the decree you wish me to sign?” Casting his eye over the paper, he goes on: “I see no objection to that.” In the pleasure of granting a request he thinks nothing of Daniel, and the princes carefully refrain from jogging his memory. And he asks for his signet ring, and gives the royal stamp. The edict has become one of the laws of the Medes and Persians, that alter not. It reads: “Any man that worships any God but me for thirty days shall be cast into the lions’ den.” [49]

The news spreads all through the city, and quickly gets to the ears of Daniel. I can imagine some of them going to the prophet and advising him about the edict, saying: “If you can only get out of the way for a little time—if you can just quit Babylon for thirty days—it will advance your own and the public interest together. You are the chief secretary and treasurer; in fact, you are the chief ruler in the government. You are an important man and can do as you please. Well, now, just you get out of Babylon. Or, if you will stay in Babylon, do not let them catch you on your knees. At all events, do not pray at the window toward Jerusalem. If you must pray, close that window, pull down the curtain and put something in the keyhole.”

I can imagine how that old prince, Daniel, now in his gray hairs, would view such a proposition—that he desert his God in his old age. All the remonstrances that must have been made fell dead. He just went on praying as usual three times a day, with his face toward Jerusalem. This old prophet found plenty of time to pray, though secretary and treasurer of the most important empire of the world. And besides his own business, he had to attend, doubtless, to much belonging of right to those hundred and twenty. But he would never have been too busy or ashamed at a prayer meeting to stand up for God. [50]

Daniel had a purpose, and he dared to make that purpose known. He knew whom he worshiped. The idea of looking back to church records of long ago to see whether a man has professed religion is all wrong. In Babylon they knew whom Daniel believed on. These hundred and twenty knew the very day after the passage of the edict. He knows they are watching near his window when the hour comes for prayer. He can see two men close at his side, and he knows they are spies. Perhaps they may be taking down every word he says for the papers.

The moment comes, and Daniel falls on his knees. In tones even louder than ever he makes his prayer to the God of Israel, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He does not omit to pray for the king. It is right to pray for our rulers. The reason they are not better, oftentimes, is just because we do not pray for them.

And now the spies rush to the king and say, “O Darius, live for ever! Do you know there is a man here in your kingdom who will not obey you?”

“Will not obey me? Who is he?”

“Why, that man Daniel.”

And the king says: “I know he will not bow down and worship me. I know that Daniel worships the God of Heaven.” [51]

Then the king sets his heart to deliver him, all the day, from those hundred and twenty men. But they come to him and say: “If you break your law, your kingdom will depart. Your subjects will no longer obey you. You must drive him to the lions’ den.”

So Darius is compelled to yield, and at last he gives the word to have Daniel sent away and cast into the den of lions. These men take good care to have the den filled with the most hungry beasts of Babylon. He is thrown headlong into the den, but the angel of God flies down, and Daniel lights unharmed on the bottom. The lions’ mouths are stopped. They are as harmless as lambs. The old prophet, at the wonted hour, drops on his knees and prays, with his face toward Jerusalem, as calmly as he did in his chamber. And when it gets later he just lays his head on one of the lions and goes to sleep. Undoubtedly no one in all Babylon sleeps more sweetly than does Daniel in the lions’ den.

In the palace, the king can not sleep. He orders his chariot, and early in the morning rattles over the pavement and jumps down at the lions’ den. I see the king alight from his chariot in eager haste, and hear him cry down through the mouth of the den: “O Daniel, servant of the living God! Is thy God, whom thou reverest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?”

Hark! Why, it is a resurrection voice! It is Daniel, saying: “My God is able. He hath sent one of His angels, and hath shut the lions’ mouths.”

I can see them now just embrace each other, and together they jump into the chariot and away they go back to the palace to breakfast. [52]

I want to say something further about Daniel. I want to refer to how an angel came to him, and, as we read in the twelfth chapter of Daniel, told him he was a man greatly beloved. Another angel had come to him with the same message. It is generally thought this last angel was the same one spoken of in Revelations—first chapter and thirteenth verse—as coming to John when banished to the Isle of Patmos. People thought he was sent off there alone, but he was not; the angel of God was with him.

And so with Daniel. Here, in the tenth chapter and fifth verse, he says: “Then I lifted up mine eyes, and behold, a certain man clothed with fine linen, and otherwise arrayed as God’s messenger, who cried: ‘O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words which I speak unto thee, and stand upright, for unto thee am I now sent.’”

It was Daniel's need that brought him from the glory land. It was the Son of God right by his side in that strange land. And that was the second time when the word came to him, saying he was greatly beloved. Yes, three times a messenger came from the throne of God to tell him this. I love to speak of that precious verse in the eleventh chapter—the thirty-second verse: “The people that do know their God shall be strong and do exploits.” I also love to speak of the twelfth chapter and second and third verses: “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt; and they that be wise shall shine as the stars of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.” [53]

This was the angel's comfort to Daniel, and a great comfort it was. The fact with all of us is that we like to shine. There is no doubt about that. Every mother likes her child to shine. If her boy shines at school by reaching the head of his class, the proud mother tells all the neighbors, and she has a right to do so. But it is not the great of this world that will shine the brightest. For a few years they may shed bright light, but they go out in darkness, without an inner brightness. Supplying the brightness, they go out in black darkness.

Where are the great men who did not know Daniel's God? Did they shine long? Why, we know of Nebuchadnezzar and the rest of them scarcely a thing, except as they fill in the story about these humble men of God. We are not told that statesmen shall shine; they may, for a few days or years, but they are soon forgotten. Look at those great ones who passed away in the days of Daniel. How wise in council they were! How mighty and victorious over hundreds of nations! What gods upon earth they were! Yet their names are forgotten—written only in the grave. Philosophers, falsely so-called—do they live? Behold men of science—scientific men they call themselves—going down into the bowels of the earth, digging away at some carcass and trying to make it talk against the voice of God! They shall go down to death, by-and-by, and their names shall rot.

But the man of God shines. Yes, he it is who shall shine as the stars for ever and ever. This Daniel has been gone for 2,500 years, but still increasing millions read of his life and actions. And so it shall be to the end. He will only be better known and better loved; he shall ever shine the brighter as the world grows older. Of a truth, they that be wise and turn many to righteousness shall shine on, like stars, to eternity. [54]

DAVID.

You know how David fell. No man rose so high and fell so far, I think. God took him from the sheepfold and put him upon a throne. He took him from obscurity and made him king of Israel and Judea; gave him lands in abundance, and would have given him more if he had wanted them. He was on the pinnacle of glory, and honored among men.

But one day, while looking out of a window, he saw a woman with whom he became enamored. He yielded to the temptation, and ordered her to be brought into the palace, and committed the terrible sin of adultery. After that, as is the case with all men who commit a sin, he had to commit another to cover it up, so he laid plans to kill her husband, and ordered him to be put in a position in the ranks of his army so that he could be killed.

Months rolled away, and one day Nathan came into the palace of the king. I can imagine that David was glad to see him. Nathan began to tell him about two men who dwelt in a certain city. The one was rich, the other poor; one had herds and flocks, and the other had only a little ewe lamb, and he went on to tell how this rich man seized this ewe lamb, all that the poor man had, and slew it. I can see the anger of David as it flashed from his eye when he heard the story, and he cried: “As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die.” He turned to Nathan, and in tones of thunder demanded who the man was. “Thou art the man.” This was the reply of Nathan. David had convicted himself. “The man [55]

who did this thing shall die.” Then the Lord said: “I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, because thou hast kept this thing secret.”

Soon after this the hand of death was put upon that house. Not only did death enter David’s house, but it was not long before his eldest son committed adultery with his sister, and another committed murder—murdered his own brothers, and went off into a foreign land into exile. Then he got up a rebellion and drove the king from the throne, and at last died and was buried like a dog, and they heaped stones upon his resting place. “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” David committed adultery, and so did his son; David committed murder, and his son did the same. He was paid back in his own coin. He learned the truth of this passage: “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

ELIJAH.

Let us go to Carmel for a few minutes.

King Ahab had forsaken the God of Israel, and all the court people and “upper ten” had followed his example. But there was an old prophet out in the mountains, to whom God said: “Go to Ahab, and tell him the heavens shall be shut up and there shall be no rain.”

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Away he goes to the wicked king. He bursts in upon him like a clap of thunder, gives his message and hurries away.

I suppose Ahab laughed at the old prophet. “What! No more rain? Why, the fellow must be crazy.”

Pretty soon the weather gets very dry. The earth is parched, and begins to crack open. The rivers have but little water in them, and the brooks dry up altogether. The trees die; all the grass perishes, and the cattle die, too. Famine—starvation—death! If rain does not come pretty soon, there will not be a live man or woman left in all the kingdom.

One day the king was talking with the prophet, Obadiah.

You see, he did have one good man near him, along with all the prophets of the false god. Almost anybody likes to have one good man within reach, even if he is ever so bad. He may be wanted in a hurry some time.

“See here, Obadiah!” says King Ahab. “You go one way and I will go another, and we will see if we can find some water somewhere.”

Obadiah has not gone a great way before Elijah bursts out upon him.

“O Elijah! Is that you? Ahab has been hunting for you everywhere, and could not find you. He has sent off into all the kingdoms about, to have them fetch you, if you were there.”

“Yes; I am here,” says Elijah. “You go and tell Ahab I want to see him.”

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“I dare not do that,” says Obadiah, “for just as soon as I tell him you are here, the Spirit will catch you away and take you off somewhere else, and then the king will be very angry, and maybe he will kill me.”

“No,” says Elijah. “As the Lord liveth, I will meet Ahab face to face this day.”

So Obadiah hurries off to find Ahab, and tells him he has seen the prophet.

“What! Elijah?”

“Yes.”

“Why didn’t you bring him along?”

“He would not come. He says he wants you to come to him.”

Ahab was not used to have people talk that way to him, but he was anxious to see the prophet, so he went. And when he sees Elijah he is very angry, and asks:

“Art thou he that troubleth Israel?”

“Not at all,” says Elijah. “You are the man that is troubling Israel—going off after Baal, and leading ever so many of the people with you. Now, we have had enough of this sort of thing. Some people are praying to God and some are praying to Baal, and we must have this question settled. You just bring all your prophets and all the priests of Baal up to Mount Carmel, and I also will come. We will make us each an altar, and offer sacrifice on it; and the god that answereth by fire, let Him be God.”

“Agreed,” says Ahab. And away he goes to tell his priests and get ready for the trial.

I fancy that was a great day when this question was decided.

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All the places of business were closed, and everybody was going up to Mount Carmel. There must have been more people on Mount Carmel than there are today at the races.^[A] A better class of people, too.

[A] This was said on Derby Day, in Opera House, Haymarket, London.

There were eight hundred and fifty of the prophets and priests of Baal altogether. I fancy I can see them all, going up in a grand procession, with the king in his chariot at their head.

“Fine-looking men, aren’t they?” says one man to another, as they go by. “They will be able to do great things up there on the mountain.”

But there Elijah marched, all alone—a rough man, clad in the skins of beasts, with a staff in his hand. No banners, no procession, no great men in his train! But the man who could hold the keys of Heaven for three years and six months was not afraid to be alone.

Now, Elijah says to the people: “How long will ye halt between two opinions? Let the priests of Baal build them an altar and offer sacrifice, but put no fire under, and I will do the same; and the god that answereth by fire, let Him be God.”

So the priests of Baal build their altar.

I am sure that, if God had not held him back, Satan would have brought up a little spark out of hell to set that sacrifice on fire. But God would not let him.

Then they begin to pray: “O Baal, hear us! O Baal, hear us!”

Elijah might have said: “Why haven’t you prayed to Baal for water this dry weather? You might just as well have asked him for water as for fire.”

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After a long time they begin to get hoarse.

“You must pray louder than that, if you expect Baal to hear you,” says the old prophet. “Maybe he is asleep. Pray louder, so as to wake him up.”

Poor fellows! They haven’t any voice left. So they begin to pray in blood. They now cut themselves with knives, and lift their streaming hands and arms to Baal. But no fire comes down.

It is getting toward sundown.

The prophet of the Lord builds an altar. Mind you, he does not have any thing to do with the altar of Baal. He builds an entirely different one, on the ruins of the altar of the Lord, which had been broken down.

“We will not have any one saying there is any trick about this thing,” says the prophet. So they bring twelve barrels of water and pour over the altar. I do not know how they managed to get so much water, but they did it.

Then Elijah prays: “O God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel.”

He did not have to pray very loud. God heard him at once, and down came the fire. It burnt up the sacrifice—burnt up the wood—burnt up the water—burnt up the very stones of the altar. Jehovah is God; nobody can halt any longer.

Ah, but some of you say: “I, too, would have decided for God if I had been on Mount Carmel that day.” But Calvary is far more wonderful than Carmel. The sacrifice of Christ on the cross is more wonderful than the sacrifice which was burnt on that altar. [60]

GIDEON.

I believe this man Gideon was called an enthusiast in the camp of Israel. The very idea of his going out to meet a hundred thousand men with pitchers and lanterns! How many people would have said: “The man has gone clean mad.” Yes, he was an enthusiast; but the Lord was with him.

If we lean upon ourselves we will have failure, but if we lean upon the arm of God we will see how swiftly God will give us victory. God wants the glory, and no flesh shall glory in His stead. Look at what He said to Gideon.

Gideon had called in an army of thirty-two thousand men. The Lord said to him: “You have too many men. If I give you victory, Israel will vaunt themselves against Me, saying: ‘My own hand hath saved me.’ You can not work with so many, because I must have the glory. Just say to all that are fearful: ‘Depart if you want to.’”

So Gideon proclaimed, in accordance with God’s command, saying: “Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from Mount Gilead.” And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand, and there remained ten thousand.

I can imagine that Gideon became a little scared at first. Only ten thousand left! But the Lord came again, and said: “Gideon, you have got too many men. If I work with them, you will take the glory.” So he brought down the people unto the water, and the Lord said unto Gideon: “Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink.” [61]

Three hundred lapped and ninety-seven hundred wheeled out of line. I can imagine they were like many Christians. What can God do with those who are like those of Gideon’s army who were full of fears and doubts? Look at the reduction in that great army. But three hundred men with the Almighty! Three hundred men that side with God can be a power for God. Three hundred like Gideon’s men will move any city. What a routing there was before that band! They fly like chaff before the wind. Do not call any thing small of God.

ITTAI.

I will read a few verses in the fifteenth chapter of Second Samuel, beginning at the nineteenth verse:

“Then said the king to Ittai, the Gittite: ‘Wherefore goest thou also with us? Return to thy place, and abide with the king; for thou art a stranger, and also an exile.

“‘Whereas, thou camest but yesterday, should I this day make thee go up and down with us? Seeing I go whither I may, return thou, and take back thy brethren. Mercy and truth be with thee.’

“And Ittai answered the king, and said: ‘As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be.’ [62]

“And David said to Ittai: ‘Go, and pass over.’ And Ittai, the Gittite, passed over, and all his men, and all the little ones that were with them.

“And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over. The king also himself passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over, toward the way of the wilderness.”

What must have been the feeling of David when he got outside the city and found this foreigner and stranger out there with six hundred men, ready and willing to go with him! He had had three men who sat at his table, and in the hour of trial, in the hour of trouble, they had deserted him. It is in the time of darkness that we find out our friends. You find then who are your friends.

Now, David was in trouble, and here was this Ittai standing right by him. How that must have cheered the heart of the king! He had been driven from the throne by Absalom, and the whole kingdom seemed to be going with Absalom. Absalom and those who were with him were planning to take the life of David, but here we find this stranger—this man Ittai—just following David; and when David told him to go back, see what he says. I think it is one of the sweetest things in the whole life of David:

“Then said the king to Ittai, the Gittite: ‘Wherefore goest thou also with us? Return to thy place, and abide with the king; for thou art a stranger, and also an exile.

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“Whereas, thou camest but yesterday, should I this day make thee go up and down with us? Seeing I go whither I may, return thou, and take back thy brethren. Mercy and truth be with thee.”

Here was a man who was attached to a person. That was the point I wanted to call your attention to. We are living, I think, in the day of shams. There are a good many people who are attached to creeds, denominations and churches. They are attached to this and to that, instead of a person. Creeds and churches are all right in their places, but if a man puts them in the place of the Savior and the personal Christ, then they are but snares. He would be willing to give up every thing but Christ in the hour of trouble, and if he is attached to Christ he will be able to say: “Wherever Thou goest I go.” David had nothing to offer this man. There he was—barefooted and leaving the throne. Ittai was attached to the man.

David was every thing to Ittai, and life was nothing. No man had better friends than David had in his day. What we want is to be attached to the Lord Jesus Christ as Ittai was attached to David.

JACOB.

The key to all Jacob’s difficulties will be found in the twentieth chapter of Matthew. It is the story of the laborers in the vineyard. The thought is in the second verse. The first men hired agreed to the bargain. The men would not go until the owner of the vineyard had made a bargain with them. He told them that he would pay them what was right. They got a penny. He gave them the lawful wages. They probably asked: “And is this all you are going to give us?”

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Jacob was all the time making bargains.

The Christians who are making bargains with the Lord do not get as much as those who trust Him. It does not pay to make bargains with the Lord.

Jacob is a twin brother of most of us. Where you find one Joseph or one Daniel you will find a hundred Jacobs. We are not willing, all of us, to take God at His word and trust Him. There is a strong contrast between the character of Joseph and Jacob. The one trusted God implicitly, but Jacob wanted to trust Him no farther than he could see God. There would have been a great deal of murmuring if Jacob had been thrown into jail in Egypt.

No doubt Jacob got much of his weakness from his mother. There was a division in that home. Isaac favored Esau, and Rebekah favored Jacob. Such dissensions are just the thing to stir up the old Adam in the man. A mother and a father have no right to take this course. Rebekah plans continually to keep Jacob at home. The very thing that Rebekah tries to achieve, in that she fails. By nature Esau was the better of the two. If such a mean and contemptible nature as Jacob's can be saved, then there is hope for all of us.

The Lord promised to Jacob from the bottom of the ladder what he should have. Jacob gets up and says: "If God will be with me and keep and clothe me, then shall the Lord be my God." What a low and contemptible idea he had! God had promised him all from Dan to Beersheba. [65]

That is the difficulty with the people at the present time. If God will bless us in our basket and store, we shall have Him for our God. We find Jacob after this in Haran, driving bargains all the time, and the worst of it is he gets beat every time. He had to work seven years for his wife, and then gets another woman in her place. He is paid back in his own coin. We must not think that God will allow us to deceive without punishing us for it. Jacob forgot all the vows which he made at Bethel, but God did not forget His. Some of God's promises are unconditional. The promise which He made at Bethel was unconditional.

God chose Jacob rather than Esau. Some people say that God hated Esau before he was born. This is not the teaching of Scripture, even though one of the minor prophets long years after mentioned it. God says to Jacob after he had been in Haran for so many years: "I am the God of Bethel. Arise and dwell there."

Jacob ought to have been proud, and should have left Haran like a prince, but instead he steals away like a thief. He starts off, and his uncle and father-in-law pursue. God took care of him. God was determined to keep His vows, and there is no doubt that, had not God interfered, Jacob would have been slain.

We find that Jacob stays behind, like a miserable coward, after he had sent his effects away. A man out of communication with God is a coward always.

There was a man who wrestled with Jacob. He was Christ. When did Jacob prevail? When his thigh was out of joint all he could do was to hold on and get the blessing. The man who is the lowest down is the man whom God lifts up the highest. The man that has the greatest humility will be the most exalted. [66]

A great many say that Jacob was a different man. Would to God his thigh had been left out of joint, so that there was no more of the flesh in him. The next thing, we find Jacob and Esau embracing, and we would suppose that he would be filled with gratitude. But no. He goes down to Shechem and builds an altar and calls it by a high-sounding name. Jacob in Shechem, with this altar with a high-sounding name, was no better than he was in Haran without an altar. He built an altar, finally, at Bethel. He said that he would go to Bethel and build an altar to his God, as if the Shechem altar was no altar. He called it El-Bethel. Just the moment he came to Bethel the Lord God met him.

The next thing we hear is the saddest episode in the career of Jacob—the death of Rachel, his favorite wife. His sons go back to Shechem, and hunt up the old idols. His sons bring him back news from there that his most dearly loved son was dead. Do you see how Jacob begins to reap the harvest of the sins of his early days? For twenty long years he mourned that beloved boy. He deceived his own father, and his own sons, in turn, deceived him.

What a bitter life! What was Jacob's dying testimony to Pharaoh? It would take ten thousand Jacobs to get one convert like Pharaoh. "Few and evil," said Jacob, "have my days been." He started with a lie in his mouth. He died in exile. He died in Egypt—not in the land which God had promised him. He would not let God choose for him. He was saved by fire—or, as Job said, by the skin of his teeth. [67]

JACOB'S SONS.

Look at the sons of Jacob. Look at them when they took away their brother, and after they had delivered him into slavery see them coming back. How much they must have suffered with their secret during those twenty years! What misery they must have endured as they looked, during all those years, at their old father sorrowing for his son, Joseph! They knew the boy had not been killed. They knew he was in slavery.

For twenty years the sin was covered up, but at last it came back upon them. God had, in the meantime, been doing every thing for Joseph. He had raised him nearly to the throne of Egypt.

A famine struck the land of the father, and the old man sent his sons down into Egypt to purchase corn. God was at work. He was making these men bring their own sin home to themselves. Their consciences smote them, and they confessed, in the presence of Joseph, that their sin had found them out. Twenty years after it was committed that sin was resurrected, and they were brought face to face with it. "He that covereth his sin shall not prosper."

JOHN THE BAPTIST.

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I want to call your attention to John, the forerunner of Christ. On hearing the news of the death of the king Joseph brings Jesus back to Nazareth, and there He remained for thirty years.

I once read of the founder of the Russian Empire going down to a Dutch sea port as a stranger and in disguise, that he might learn how to build ships and return home and impart this knowledge to his own subjects. People have wondered at that. But this is a far greater wonder, that the Prince of Glory should come down here and learn the carpenter's trade. He was not only the son of a carpenter, but He was a carpenter Himself. His father was a carpenter, and He was a carpenter, too, for we read that they brought it up against Him that He was a carpenter. We read:

"And when He was come into His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said: 'Whence hath this man this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son?'"

Right here is one lesson that we ought to learn, and that is, when Christ was here He was an industrious man. I have often said on this platform that I have never known a lazy man to be converted. If one ever was converted, he soon gave up his laziness. I tell you that laziness does not belong to Christ's Kingdom. I do not believe a man would have a lazy hair in his head if he was converted to the Lord Jesus Christ. If a man has really been born of the Spirit of Christ, he is not lazy. He wants to find something to do, and no kind of manual labor is degrading. It is honorable. If our Master, who is the Prince of Peace and the King of Glory, could leave Heaven and come down here and work as a village carpenter, let us not think that manual labor is beneath our notice. Let us be willing to go out and work. If we can not find what we want, let us do what we can. If we can earn only twenty-five cents a day, let us earn that rather than do nothing. We not only want something to occupy our hands, but also our minds.

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But this is not the point of the lecture this morning. I want to go back to those two wonderful men.

The thirty years have rolled away, and it is now time that this wonderful Messiah should come unto the nation. The Scriptures have been fulfilled, and the first sound we hear of His coming is that strange voice crying in the wilderness.

Those thirty years that have just expired were as nothing to the nation. Undoubtedly, the rumors about those two children, which created a great sensation at the time, had died out. The story of the shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem had gone out of popular recollection—faded away. The story of this child being brought into the Temple, and that old man and that old woman coming in there just at the time—that wonderful scene had faded away. Many who were in the Temple at that time had gone. Zacharias and Elizabeth had passed away, and the Roman Empire had also died, after sending out a decree that the country should be taxed. Herod was also dead.

A great change had taken place in thirty years. You just carry your minds back through thirty years, and see how many who stood with you thirty years ago—with whom you were acquainted—have gone, and are sleeping in their graves. [70]

If the Holy Ghost had not come after Christ went to Heaven, the story of His death and His resurrection would have been forgotten as soon as His birth and His life. No doubt about that. It is that which has kept the memory of Christ in the world, and His name so fresh and fragrant. The Holy Ghost has come down here to keep in our minds the glory and beauty of Christ. Now, we find His forerunner comes.

Matthew says: “In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness.”

Mark says: “The voice of one crying in the wilderness.”

Luke says: “The word of God came unto John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness.”

John’s account is: “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.”

The last prophet had closed up his prophecy by saying that John should come before the Messiah, and that he should be the herald who would come to introduce Him. Now, these four evangelists all take up their pens, and they all notice it.

You know, if you let any four men write up any one thing, they will not all write about it alike. Why, when men went to the Centennial, at Philadelphia, not any four of them wrote about it alike. Let a man come in here, and let any four of us look at him. One will get a side view of him, one a front view, and so on; and no two of the four will see him alike. [71]

So these evangelists wrote about John, but not one of the four used the same language. You know, it was said he was to be like Elijah. Well, he looked like him, dressed like him, and his preaching was like him.

He came suddenly and unexpectedly upon the world, and it was not long before his voice rang clear through the whole nation, and the whole nation was stirred. He stood between the two dispensations. He was the last prophet the new dispensation was to have. They had had some mighty prophets—wonderful men; but this man was to be the last one.

Now, we find this man standing there, as it were, between these two dispensations; and when he commenced to preach his preaching was very much like that of Elijah. He was a reformer. His cry was: “Repent! Reform!”

But if he had stopped there his reform would have died out with him. A great many reformations die out with the reformers because they cry out: “Repent! Repent! Reform! Reform!” but they do not get any farther than that. Thank God, John had something else to tell them. He did not stop at “Repent! Repent!” He kept telling them there was One coming mightier than himself. Undoubtedly that was what thrilled the nation. Talk about sensation! There was never a nation moved as that one nation was moved by John the Baptist.

In these days, if certain persons want to stir a town or city, they need to influence the leading men of that city to stand around them, help them and pray for them. But there stood John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness, without any influence of your committee. He did not have Mr. Sankey to sing for him to draw out the people. He stood there upon the [72]

banks of the Jordan alone, preaching the glorious tidings that the Messiah was coming after him, and he probably was preaching this to the lowest beggar in the land.

There John was in the wilderness, dressed like his predecessor, Elijah. There he was, preaching in the wilderness; and just bear in mind, it was not any milk-and-water preaching. He gave the message just as God gave it to him. I suppose, if he had some of the Christians of the present day there, they would have said: "Do not be so bold; be mild about it. Don't you know you must use a little moderation about this? Come, John! If you talk against these Pharisees they will cut your head off."

But that did not enter his mind. It was not what they wanted. It was what God gave him to deliver; and if any man just takes the message and delivers it as God gives it to him, I tell you God will stand by him. He is going to succeed—mind that. He may be unsuccessful at first; his labor may seem to be unprofitable for a time, and people may turn away. But the time will come when his words will cut deep down into their hearts and lead them to salvation.

Then the people began to tremble. They had no newspapers then to print the sermons; they had no telegraph wires to flash them over the country. But one man just took the matter up and passed it to the next, and so on, and very soon it was spread over the whole country.

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"There he is," they said, "dressed just like Elijah, with his leathern girdle and his raiment of camel's hair." He comes out about 9 o'clock in the morning, and there he stands on the banks of the Jordan, and there he continues his talk. Day after day he is seen there, and his cry is: "Repent! Repent!" And that was his appeal.

Well, it is not very long before every city, town and village has heard of this wonder. John preached the law just as it was given him, and as a specimen of his preaching just read this. See how bold he was:

"Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him: 'O generation of vipers!'"

O generation of vipers! Pretty hard talk, wasn't it? I don't know as you could get many people into this Tabernacle by such talk as that. But he knew what he was doing. He knew they hated his Master. He knew that, away down in their hearts, they were at enmity with God. Read a little farther, and see what he said:

"O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

"Bring forth, therefore, fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves: 'We have Abraham to our father.' For I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham."

He knew the men pretty well. I do not know where he had been all these thirty years. But he had found out the human heart. He had found out human nature pretty well. And those people undoubtedly said: "We belong to the seed of Abraham. We are the descendants of Abraham. We do not need to be converted. We have got the law from Moses, and we obey that. Let these poor dogs of Gentiles be converted. It is not for us."

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And that is just the doctrine now.

"We do not need to be converted. John a first-rate reformer? Oh, yes; but that does not touch us. We go to church regularly. It is for these publicans and harlots. That kind of preaching is not for us. Oh, it is all good enough—all very good."

And no doubt they would put up a Tabernacle for them—for the harlots and drunkards to go to.

"Oh, no! That preaching is not for us. It is good enough for them, but we do not need to go. We are the seed of Abraham. We belong to Moses, and we are not such bad men. What

do you mean by conversion? We do not need to be born again. What do we need to be born again for? We pay our debts. We are good men.”

See? That same old spirit. Eighteen hundred years have rolled away, and you find human nature the same. John knew them pretty well.

“I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.”

You need not flatter yourselves that you are better than the other people. God can make children right out of these stones, and make them the seed of Abraham.

“And now, also, the ax is laid unto the root of the tree; every tree, therefore, which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.

“And the people asked him, saying: ‘What shall we do, then?’”

See! They had an inquiry meeting, right there on the banks of the Jordan.

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“He answereth, and saith unto them: ‘He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.’

“Then came, also, publicans to be baptized, and said unto him: ‘Master, what shall we do?’

“And he said unto them: ‘Exact no more than that which is appointed you.’

“And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying: ‘And what shall we do?’ And he said unto them: ‘Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages.’”

Now, that was his preaching up to the time that Christ came. As I said before, it was: “Repent! Repent! Reform! Reform!” And you may tell these men they ought to do better; but if you do not tell them how, you can not save them. Now, we find here, in this fifteenth verse, that they were looking for something more:

“And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ or not, John answered, saying unto them all: ‘I, indeed, baptize you with water; but One mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose. He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.

“Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff He will burn with fire unquenchable.’

“And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people.”

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Now, what a chance there was for John to have let self come in! When people were wondering in their hearts if he was not the true Messiah—if he was not Christ—he might have been tempted to come out and say he was more than himself—that he was Christ. But there was this commendable trait about John: He never preached up self.

He was preparing the nation to receive the Lord of Glory. He had come merely to introduce Him. He was nothing. Just as a man comes and introduces a friend to you, he barely introduces him and steps aside. He does not put himself forward.

So John introduces the Son of God, and then begins to fade away, and soon is gone. He had not come to introduce himself, but to preach Christ.

And let me say, right here, that this is the very height of preaching. When they begin to wonder who he is, he just comes right out and says: “I am not Jesus. I am only just one sent to introduce Him. I have come for that purpose. I have not come to preach up myself, but Him that is mighty to save.”

And then we find that while his star was just at its height, while he was just about at the zenith of his glory, while people were flocking in from the towns and villages to hear him, the chief rulers of Jerusalem send down a deputation to inquire what this religion meant.

They appointed some influential men to find him out, and they said to him: “We have been sent by the chief priest of Jerusalem to find out who you are. Are you Christ?” And John answered: “No.” “Well, who are you? Are you this man or that man?” “No.” “Are you this prophet or that prophet?” “No.” “Well, who are you?”

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Did he say: “I am Jesus”? No. “Merely Mr. Nobody—merely a voice crying in the wilderness.”

What a message that was to send back to Jerusalem! He was not trying to put himself forward. He was all the time trying to get out of self. In the nineteenth verse and first chapter of John we read:

“And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him: ‘Who art thou?’

“And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed: ‘I am not the Christ.’

“And they asked him: ‘What, then? Art thou Elias?’ And he saith: ‘I am not.’ ‘Art thou the prophet?’ And he answered: ‘No.’

“Then said they unto him: ‘Who art thou? That we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?’

“He said: ‘I am the voice of One crying in the wilderness. Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet, Esaias.’

“And they which were sent were of the Pharisees.

“And they asked him, and said unto him: ‘Why baptize thou, then, if thou be not Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?’

“John answered them, saying: ‘I baptize with water; but there standeth One among you whom ye know not. He it is who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose shoe’s latchet I am unworthy to unloose.’

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“These things were done in Bethabara, beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.”

Now, this was the day, I say, when John was at the very zenith of his glory; but see how noble he stood. He did not take any honor or glory to himself, and in two different places he declared that he knew not this Stranger that he was the herald of—his Messiah.

Some are trying to make out that this was all planned by John and Jesus, that he should say he did not know Him. But he declares in two places that he did not know Him. They were brought up in two extremes of the country—one in the northern part of it, Nazareth, and the other at Hebron.

Talk about eloquence! John was one of the most eloquent men, I suppose, that ever lived. He was the herald of God, and when the nation was in a terrible state of excitement, and the chief priests of Jerusalem, and even the king himself, went to hear him.

There he stood on the banks of the Jordan. I can see the men and women on both sides of the river—little children, mothers with their babes in their arms—all intensely excited and leaning forward to catch what he says. “Now,” says John, “if you believe what I say, that if you have broken the law given at Sinai you have sinned, to be forgiven you must repent and come down into this Jordan, and I will baptize you in the name of the God of Hebron.”

The people went in by scores and hundreds, and there he baptized them. And as he stood there baptizing them I can imagine about twenty thousand people hanging upon his lips. There was a man came down through the crowd. I can imagine that John was a man who looked as though he was more like a mountain eagle, but his wings seemed to droop. That eye which had been so keen and so severe on the Israelites when he called them a generation of vipers became lusterless, his face fell and he shook his head, as this Stranger came.

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I suppose, as He came walking along toward John, God revealed the fact to him and said: “This is My Son. This is the Savior of the world. This is the Prince of Peace.” And when John saw Him he quailed before Him, and he said: “I have need to be baptized of Thee.”

What excitement! How it must have thrilled the audience as John drew back and said: “I have need to be baptized of Thee.” John knew Him. John at once recognized Him. He knew He was the promised One of the law. John said: “I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?” But Jesus said unto him: “Suffer it to be so now, that the law may be fulfilled.” Now, what excitement as these two men went down into the river together!

Oh, if Jordan could speak it could tell some wonderful stories! Wonderful scenes have taken place there. Naaman had gone into that river and washed, and had come forth clean. Elijah, going up with his mantle, struck the water and went over dry-shod, as also did Elisha after Elijah had ascended. But a more wonderful scene was taking place in Jordan than ever took place before. It was of transcendent interest to all mankind.

Our Lord was going down into Jordan to be baptized, and He was going to come up on resurrection ground. So He goes down with John the Baptist, and the moment He was baptized and came up out of the water the heavens were opened unto Him, and the Spirit of God descended upon Him like a dove, and alighted upon Him. Heaven witnessed the scene. God the Father spoke then. He broke the silence of ages. The God of the Old Testament was the Christ of the New. And he heard a voice from Heaven, saying: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

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Some one says that was the first time God could look down on the world since Adam fell and say that He was well pleased. In Hebrews, tenth chapter and seventh verse, we read:

“Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of Me) to do Thy will, O God.”

He was the Son that was born above. The heavens opened and the Holy Ghost descended upon Him. The Spirit of the Lord came down on Him, and God owns Him and recognizes Him.

Now, there is another thought to which I want to call your attention. John’s preaching changed. But he was not like many men of the present day, who want to reform the world without Christ, who set a good example and tell men to sign pledges and to do this or that, and to trust in their own strength.

The moment John got his eye on Christ he had one text: “Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.” That is how you are going to get rid of your sins. Says John: “I bear record of this in the Son of God.” And he told his disciples: “Now, you follow Him. Go with Him.”

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One afternoon, as he sat there with his disciples, he said: “Behold the Lamb of God!” And they left him to follow Jesus—two of his own disciples. I tell you that is something which you do not like to do—to make your friends leave you; to preach them away—your own congregation. But now this man begins to ask his disciples to leave him. “Why,” said he, “I tell you I am not worthy to just unloose His shoes. He is more worthy than I am. Follow Him.” He began to preach up Christ. “He must increase; I must decrease.”

Some of his disciples came to him one day and said: “You know that Man you baptized over there in the Jordan? Well, more men are coming to Him than are coming to you.” That was jealousy—envy rankling in those men’s bosoms. But what did John say? “I told you that I was not He. Why, He must increase, and I must decrease. That’s right, I would rather see the crowd flocking to hear Him.”

John, I think, was terribly abused by some one. He was cast into prison. Then he sent two of his disciples to inquire of Christ if He was the true Messiah, or must he look for another. I do not know, but I have an idea that he wanted his disciples to leave him and go over to Jesus. So he called two of his most influential disciples and told them: “Now, you go and

ask Him if He is the true Messiah.” I can not believe in John’s faith wavering; but, if he was wavering, he took the very best way, and sent those men to ask the Savior.

I see his deputation arrive, and when Jesus had finished preaching these disciples come up and say: “Our master has sent us to ask if You are the true Messiah? Or, shall he look for another?”

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Jesus goes on healing the sick, causing the lame to leap, giving sight to the blind, making the deaf to hear, and after He had gone on performing these miracles He said to John’s messengers: “You go back and tell your master what you have seen and what you have heard. Go back and tell John that the blind see; that the deaf hear; that the lame walk, and that the poor have the Gospel preached to them.”

When John heard that, in prison, it settled all his doubts. His disciples believed, and the poor had the Gospel preached to them. That was the test, and then John’s disciples, one after another, left him. And now we find him thrown into prison. There he is, in prison—awaiting his appointed time.

Just bear in mind that God had sent him. His work was done. He had only just come to announce the Savior—only for that object. Some think that Christ’s treatment of John was rather hard—in fact, harsh; but the greatest tribute ever paid to any man was paid by Jesus to John.

“But what went ye out to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses.

“But what went ye out to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.

“For this is he of whom it is written: ‘Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.’

“Verily, I say unto you: ‘Among them that are born of women there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist; notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he.’”

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There was none greater than this same John. Our Savior knew that John was going first. He knew that He was soon to die, and that John would have to come to Him; that they would soon be together in Glory, and then they could talk matters over; that John must sink out of sight, and the Lord of Glory must be the central object.

Jesus and John were like the Sun and Moon in comparison with the stars. All the prophets were like the stars in comparison with those two men. There was no prophet like John. None born of woman was greater. Moses was a mighty prophet. Elijah was the son of thunder, and a great and mighty prophet; and so was Elisha. But they were not to be compared with John.

What a character! He lost sight of himself entirely. Christ was uppermost; Christ was the all-in-all with him. He was beheaded outside the Promised Land. He was buried in Moab, somewhere near where Moses was laid away. The first and last prophet of that nation were buried near together, and there they lie, outside the Promised Land; but their bodies, by-and-by, will be resurrected, and they will be the grandest and most glorious in God’s kingdom.

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JOSHUA.

Joshua was a man who walked by faith, and you will find the key to his character in three words—courage, obedience and faith.

Courage, obedience and faith. And he dared to be in the minority.

Now, friends, there are very few men at the present time who like to be in the minority. They always want to be in the majority. They want to go with the crowd. But when a man

has laid hold of the Divine nature of God, and has become a product of the Divine nature, he is willing then to go against the crowd of the world and be numbered with the minority.

Where Joshua met the God of Israel first we are not told. We do not catch a glimpse of him until the man is about forty years old. The first sight we get of Joshua is as he comes up out of Egypt. We are told that after Moses had struck the rock in Horeb and the children of Israel had drank the water that came out of that rock—and that rock was typical of Christ and of God's pure throne—Amalek came out to fight them, and after they had got a drink of this pure water they were willing to meet him.

We find that Joshua's first battle was successful, and that his last one was successful. He never knew what defeat was. He was successful because he believed in the Lord God of Heaven—because he had perfect faith in God. Moses went up into the mountain to pray, and while he was praying Joshua was down fighting Amalek. And when Moses held up his hand Israel prevailed, and when he let down his hand Amalek prevailed. [85]

“And Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands—the one on the one side and the other on the other side—and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.”

His hands were up until Amalek was defeated.

There is only one thing against Joshua. He was opposed to the preaching of Eldad and Aminidab. He did not like to see Eldad and Aminidab out there preaching in the camp, because they did not belong to the Apostolic body. So he says to Moses: “I wish you would rebuke Eldad and Aminidab for preaching in the camp. I do not want them to preach there.”

But Moses said: “No! I will not rebuke Eldad and Aminidab. That's just what we want. I wish to God there were more of them.”

After Moses rebuked Joshua we never hear him complaining any more about Eldad and Aminidab. That is the only thing on record against him. The next thing we hear of is the matter of those twelve spies, and I will pass over that. You remember how they came back, and Joshua and Caleb were the only two out of the twelve that dared to bring in a minority report. But now the forty years' wilderness journey is over, and during all those forty years you can not find any place where Joshua or Caleb ever murmured or complained. They were not of that kind.

Now, as I said, the forty years' wilderness journey is over, and Moses is about to leave. He went up into Mount Nebo, and “God kissed away his soul and buried him.”

Then Joshua was commanded to take charge of the army. The word of the Lord came to him, saying: “Joshua, arise and go over this Jordan. Moses, my servant, is dead.” [86]

There was no president, no general, no marshal about it. There was no title at all, but just merely: “Joshua, arise and go over this Jordan.” Now, Joshua just obeyed, and here you will find the secret of his wonderful success. He did just what the Lord told him to do. He did not stand, like many people would have done, and say: “I don't know how I am going to get these people over. Hadn't you better wait, Lord, until the next day? How am I to get these three million people over this angry flood? Hadn't we better wait until the waters recede?”

No! Joshua did not say that. He had got his command from God: “Arise and go.” When the Lord gave orders, that was enough. He had got His word, and he brings these children of Israel down in sight of the swollen stream. Faith must be tried. God will not have people whom He can not try.

Joshua brings them there in three days, in sight of the angry flood, with not a word of murmuring. If he had brought them there forty years before, what murmuring there would have been! We will get trained—every one of us.

They had had their faith tried in those forty years in the wilderness, and now they murmured not. There was not a word of complaint. But forty years before they would have

asked, when they had got opposite Jericho: “What is He going to do? How are we going to get over? We’ve got to have a bridge or a pontoon. And even if we get over, they will see us and defeat us. They will slay us here on the bank of Jordan. Guess we had better turn around and go back.”

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That is about what they would have said, what they would have tried, and what they would have done forty years before. But now Joshua tells the people that the priests are to walk out in front of them, and that the moment the priests touched the water—the moment the soles of their feet touched the water—the water was to be cut off.

There was faith for you! When those seven men took up the ark God was with them, and the moment the soles of their feet touched the water the waters were cut off, and they passed into the middle of the stream and put down the ark.

That ark represented the Almighty. He was in the ark, with the ark right there in the midst of death—for Jordan is death and judgment—right in the middle of the stream. He held that stream in the palm of His hand. And now the people pass beyond—three millions of them.

You can hear their solemn tread. Not a word said on their march through death and judgment until Joshua led them on to Resurrection Ground. After he had got them all over, he told twelve men—one from each tribe—to take each a stone and set them up where the priests stood, so that when their children asked “What mean ye by these stones?” they could tell how the Almighty brought them through dangers into the Promised Land.

Now, after they had placed their stones, the ark was brought up out of the Jordan, and the waters rolled off. Instead of moving right on at once to Jericho, the children of Israel stopped to keep the Passover. They were in no hurry. They were willing to worship God. They kept the Passover, and after that they started for Jericho. Jericho was shut off, undoubtedly, and surely the hearts of those people were filled with fear. Here the children of Israel had come to their country and their God had brought them through the Red Sea with an out-stretched arm. Surely there was a strange God among them. Jericho had no such God as that. He had defended them and led them, and had given them light and life after that.

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But now Joshua just takes a walk around the walls of Jericho. God had ordered him to take it, and he must. And as he was walking around, viewing the walls of Jericho, all at once a man stood right in front of him with a drawn sword right over him, and God said: “No man can be able to stand before you all the days of your life.” And Joshua steps right up to him, and asks: “Art thou for us or for our adversaries?” The stranger answered: “I am captain of God’s host, come to lead you to victory.”

Then Joshua fell on his face, and God talked with him. How many men of the present time would have laughed at Joshua if they had been in Jericho! How much sport they would have made of him! If there had been a Jericho Herald, what articles would have come out! The idea of taking the city in that way! The ark was to come out, and the priests were to blow rams’ horns. That was very absurd, wasn’t it? Rams’ horns!

Well, the seventh day came, and they were up quite early in the morning. Here were these seven men blowing their rams’ horns, and the people going around for the seventh time. At the end of the seventh time Joshua says: “Shout, for the Lord has given you the city.” They shout, and down tumble the walls of the city. Then they went up and entered Jericho, and every man, woman and child of that city perished. God had given the order, and His commands were obeyed.

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Now they move on to Ai. You know, after a victory is gained over some large town they attack and take the little outlying towns. So, in this case, they moved right on to Ai. Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, and they came back and told him that just a few thousand men could take Ai; and they go up and are repulsed. Then Joshua rends his clothes and falls on his face, and asks God what the fault was. He knew the fault was in the camp—not God’s.

When they went into Jericho they were told not to touch one solitary thing. But there was Acham, who saw a nice garment—perhaps he thought it would be a nice dress for his wife. He also saw two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold, and he coveted all these things and took them. He hid them, but he could not conceal them. He had to confess that he had sinned against the Lord God of Israel. Those men of Ai were so humbled that they could not stand before the Lord.

After leaving Ai, we read that Joshua came to Mount Ebal, and there a wonderful thing took place. On one side, on the slope of Mount Gerizim, were half of the children of Israel, and on the other side, on the slope of Mount Ebal, were the other half. There were three million people gathered there, and the whole law of Moses was read over to them. [90]

It was a solemn sight. Moreover, all the law of God was read—not a part, but the whole. Joshua read the blessings and cursings. He did not stand up there like some one reading a moral essay and say that they must be good for they were going into the Promised Land; that there were blessings for them, and said nothing about the curses. No; he did not do that. He read all.

It says here, in the eighth chapter: “And all Israel and their elders and officers and their judges stood on this side the ark and on that side, before the priests, the Levites, which bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, as well the stranger as he that was born among them; half of them over against Mount Gerizim and half of them over against Mount Ebal, as Moses, the servant of the Lord, had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel. And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the book of the law.”

Now, mark that. “He read all the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the book of the law.” If Joshua had been like many of the present day, he would have said to himself: “I will read the blessings, but not the cursings. I do not believe God is going to curse a man if he does wrong, so I will read the blessings and omit the cursings.” But, thank God, he read the whole law—the blessings and the cursings. He did not keep back any thing. “And there was not a word of all that Moses commanded which Joshua read not.” Thank God for such a man! That is the kind of men we want nowadays—men who will not cut the Bible to pieces like the king who took out his penknife and said: “I don’t like that; cut that out. I don’t like this; cut this out.” So they cut and slashed the Bible until very little was left. [91]

The thirty-third verse of the eighth chapter says they were all there—“as well the stranger as he that was born among them.” You see, Joshua made no distinction. He read to the stranger as well as to those that were of the children of Israel. It was all read.

And now Joshua is ready to move on. The law had been read, they had worshiped their God, and they were ready to move on. Undoubtedly the nations throughout that land had heard how this solemn assembly had met on the mountain side and the law had been read. Now they are ready to move on again. They had been there about three days.

Some one now comes to Joshua with startling news. The messenger begins with the question: “Joshua, have you heard that there is a confederacy formed to oppose you? Instead of meeting one man you are to meet five. They are coming down from the mountains with great regiments of giants. Why, the mountains are full of the sons of Anak—full of giants—and some of them are six feet high. Why, they are so big that they would scare our own men to death. Why, one man came out and just shook his little finger at our men, and scared them out of their lives. There was not a man who dared to meet them. The whole land is full of giants. Do you know that they have formed a confederacy? Five kings are coming down against you with hordes of these giants.” [92]

I see the old warrior. He does not tremble at all. He had received the word of God: “Joshua, be of good courage. No man shall be able to stand against you.” He moved on in

his godly armor and in the name of his God, and he routed his adversaries. The hour was growing late, and he commanded Sun and Moon to stand still, and they obeyed him. So there were two days in one. He found the five kings hid away in a cave, and he took them out and hanged them. He took thirty-one kings and kingdoms. He just took that land by faith.

Now, some people ask: “What right had he to come over and take that land?” If you will read the fourth verse of the ninth chapter of Deuteronomy, you will see what right he had. “Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the Lord thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying: ‘For my righteousness the Lord hath brought me in to possess this land.’ But, for the wickedness of these nations, the Lord doth drive them out from before thee.”

That is why He drove them out. Their cup of iniquity was filled, and God just dashed it to pieces. When any nation’s cup of iniquity is full, God sweeps them away.

Now, mark the Scripture: “Not for thy righteousness or for the uprightness of thine heart dost thou go to possess their land; but, for the wickedness of these nations, the Lord thy God hath driven them out from before thee, and that He may perform the word which the Lord swore unto thy fathers—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” “Understand, therefore, that the Lord thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiff-necked people.”

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They were a stiff-necked people. It was not for the righteousness of the children of Israel that the Lord gave them this land. He hated these nations on account of their wickedness.

Now, Joshua has overcome them and driven them from the face of the earth, and this brings out one noble trait in his character. When he came to divide up the land, Joshua took the poorest treasure himself, that he might be near the ark. And there, on Mount Ephraim, he died at the ripe old age of one hundred and ten years. During all those years not a man was able to stand before him. See the contrast between his dying testimony and that of Jacob! Jacob’s self-reproach was: “Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.” He had a stormy voyage.

Look and see this old warrior going to rest. He had tried God forty years. He had heard the crack of the slave driver’s whip, down there in Egypt. But probably he had a praying mother, who talked to him about this King of the Hebrews, about the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, and he believed in that God. When Moses came down into Egypt he found this young man just in the prime of his life. Joshua recognized in Moses that he was an instrument of the Almighty, and that the King of the Hebrews had sent him there to deliver His people.

Joshua had tried God forty years in the wilderness, and when eighty years old he was called into the Promised Land. He had tried God thirty years in Canaan, and now, at the age of one hundred and ten, the aged and invincible warrior is going home. But he is not going to die like an infidel. He knows he is about to die, and he calls for all the tribes of Israel and their elders. These come up from the tribe of Benjamin, the tribe of Simeon, the tribe of Zebulun, and so on; and they are gathered at Shiloh, to be there to hear the old prophet and patriarch.

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That man of God speaks, and what does he say? What is his dying testimony? How we all linger around the couch of our dying friends! How anxious we are to get their last words!

Well, let us turn back. What are the last words of this man who has tried God and proved God? These are the words: “I am going the way of all the earth; and ye know in your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you. All are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof.”

Not one good thing has failed! God has kept His word. God has made His word good. “Not one good thing hath failed.” What a dying testimony! How glorious! In the beautiful

sunset light the old warrior sank away, like he was going to sleep. In the dusk of a beautiful Summer's evening he passed away. There is the old man's dying testimony. He could tell the people of God. He was the only one left. The rest had gone. Moses had sunk into his desert grave, and the other leaders of the tribe of Israel had passed away. But now he was going to die in the Promised Land. [95]

Truly, he was a man of courage, obedience and faith.

LOT.

One reason why I take up this character is because I believe he is a representative man, and perhaps there is no Bible character that represents so many men of the present day as Lot of Sodom.

Where you can find one Abraham, one Daniel or one Joshua you can find a thousand Lots.

Lot started out very well. He got rich, and that was the beginning of his troubles. He and Abraham, his uncle, went down to Egypt, and they came out of Egypt with great wealth. The next thing we hear of is strife among their herdsmen.

But Lot could not get up a quarrel with Abraham. Abraham said to him: "You are my nephew, and I can not quarrel with you; but take your goods and go to the right and I will go to the left, or I will go to the right and you go to the left." And they separated.

Right here Lot made his mistake. He should have said, in reply to Abraham: "No, uncle! I don't want to leave you. The Lord has blessed me with you, and I do not wish to leave you." But, if he had been determined to leave his uncle, he should have asked Abraham to choose for him. Instead of that, he lifted up his eyes and saw the well watered plains of Sodom, and that decided him.

No doubt Lot was very ambitious; he probably wanted to become richer. Perhaps there was a little spirit of rivalry toward his uncle. He wanted to excel Abraham in worldly goods—to become rich faster. So he saw and determined upon the well watered plains of Sodom. If he had asked Abraham he would not have gone there. If he had asked God, Lot would never have entered Sodom; no man ever goes into Sodom by God's advice. He determined for himself, and pitched his tent toward Sodom. I do not know how long Lot lived upon those well watered plains, but no doubt the men of those days said of him when he had settled down: "There is a shrewd man; he is a smart man. Why, I can predict that in a very short time he will be a wealthier man than his uncle, Abraham. Look at these well watered plains. Why, he is a great deal better off than is Abraham now." [96]

Lot is in a position in which he can soon become a rich man. How long he remained on those plains I do not know, but the next thing we know is that he got into Sodom. We are told that Sodom was very wicked. Lot lived near it, and he went into it with his eyes open, for he knew all about it. The wickedness of Sodom was coming up to God. He was going to destroy it soon. Do you think, if Lot had asked Him, He would have permitted the nephew of Abraham to enter that city?

All the years that Lot was in Sodom we do not read that he had any family altar. He must have known it meant ruin for his family to take them in there. But he did not look at that. It was business that took him there. He might have said: "Well, I've got a large family. I've got a great many dependent upon me, and I must get rich faster; so I will go into Sodom. Business is the first consideration, and it must be attended to." So he goes into Sodom, and the next thing we hear he is in trouble. Sodom had got a war on hand, and when he went into the city he was forced to take its side. In the war he was taken captive. It is a great mercy he was not killed in battle. [97]

The first thing Abraham did when he heard of his nephew's trouble was to set out after him. When Lot was captured in battle he was liable to be taken into slavery, and his children also. He might have died in slavery if Abraham had not gone after him. But Abraham takes his servants and sets out and overtakes the warriors who had taken Lot captive, and brought him back, with all the property that had been taken.

Now, you would think Lot would have kept out of Sodom. You would expect to hear of his saying: "I have had enough of Sodom; I will not go near it again." You would think that men, when they get into this and that difficulty and affliction, would keep out of Sodom; but they will not. It is one of the greatest mysteries to me why men will remain in their Sodom when they have continual trouble.

So Lot went back. Probably he said: "I've lost a great deal, and I must go back and try to recover it. I must go back and make it up for my children." And he prospered in Sodom.

If you had gone into Sodom before these angels came down you would probably have found that no man had got on so well. If they had a Congress, perhaps they sent him to represent Sodom, because no man had done better in business. That is the way of the world. Possibly they might have made him Mayor of Sodom. If you could have seen his "turnout," it would have been one of the very best. Mrs. Lot must have moved in the most select society of the city. The Misses Lot were looked upon as the most fashionable people there. They got on well.

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Perhaps Lot was a judge and had great influence. When the angels got to the gate they might have heard of the Honorable Judge Lot. It sounded pretty well. He might have owned many corner lots. He might have owned many buildings with "Lot" printed all over them, and on account of his property he might have been a very high man in Sodom. That is the way the world looks at it. No doubt the dispositions of those people were exactly as they are today. Human nature has been pretty much the same always.

But time rolls on, and Lot, while sitting at the gate one evening, saw two strangers upon the highway. They are coming toward Sodom. Likely these Sodomites did not know them, but twenty years before Lot had been in the company of Abraham, and he had seen these men at his uncle's house—had seen them sitting at his uncle's table. So he knew these angels when they approached, and he bowed down and worshiped them; he bowed down to the ground, and then invited them into his residence. But it was a sink of iniquity, and they would not enter in. Lot pressed his invitation upon them, and finally they accepted.

The news was soon noised around the streets that he had two strangers there, and it was not long before a crowd was around the door, and wanted to know whom he had inside.

[99]

Lot came out and endeavored to pacify them, but he was met with the derisive query: "Who made this fellow a judge over us?" He was dragged back into the house, and the door was shut against the mob. His influence was gone. He had been in the city twenty years and had not made a convert.

I suppose Lot lived in a marble front house there, and his heart was away from God. Then these men said to Lot: "Whom have you got here beside yourself? What is your family? Have you got any others beside yourself in this town?"

Well, the father and mother had to own up that they had married their children to some of the Sodomites. That was the result of his going into the city. You go into the world and live like the world, and see what the result will be. How many fathers and mothers are now mourning on account of marrying their sons and daughters to Sodomites! Marrying them to death and ruin!

These angels said to Lot: "If you have got any, get them out of this place, for God is determined to burn it up. Tell them this, and if they will not come, escape for your lives and leave them, for He will surely destroy the city."

Now, all these twenty years we do not know that Lot ever had a family altar. He could not call his children around him and pray to his God. They had all become identified with Sodom and its people.

Look at that scene. There are the men at the outside of the door, groping about to find it, and the door opens and Lot starts out to tell his son-in-law of the coming destruction. I can see the old man, head bowed down, passing through the streets of Sodom at midnight. [100]

He goes to a house and knocks. No sound; all are asleep. He knocks again, and likely shouts at the top of his voice; and the man gets up and opens the window. He puts his head out and asks:

“Who’s there?”

“Lot, your father-in-law.”

“What has brought you out of bed at this hour? What’s up?”

“Why, two angels are at my house, who say that God is going to destroy Sodom and every one who shall remain here.”

“You go home and get to bed.”

They mock Lot. He has lost his testimony. They all think he is deluded.

I can see him now, going off to another daughter’s house. I know not how many daughters Lot had. He might have had as many daughters as Job. He goes to them, and they mock him, too.

There is that old man, in that midnight hour, plodding along those streets of Sodom to urge them to flee from the city, and they mock him. He had been long enough with Abraham to know that every thing that came from God could be relied upon.

Now he starts back home. You can see him—his head bowed down, his long white hair flowing over his bosom and tears flowing from those aged eyes! The world calls him a successful man; but what a miserable end is his! Look at him tonight! He had achieved his ambition, and was wealthy. He obtained what he longed for, but with it came leanness of soul. [101]

Next morning the angels take him by the hand. He and his wife and two daughters are led out of the city. And they lingered. How could they do otherwise than linger, when they had left their sons and daughters in the city and knew they would be destroyed?

Yes, they linger. I do not blame them. They had, probably, a faint hope that the threatened storm might be stayed, and they could get their children out. But the angels took them by the hand and hastened them out of the city.

Poor mother! Ah, how sad when God came in judgment! I can see that mother hesitating, but God orders her not to look back. “Flee for your life; escape or you will be destroyed.” “No man having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Mrs. Lot gets out of Sodom, but she looks back, and judgment falls upon her. And I believe that the condition of Lot’s wife is the condition of millions today. They have come out of Sodom, but their hearts are in the world. They ask: “Have I to give up the world? Have I to give up all and follow Christ?” They linger and look back, and judgment will fall upon them.

We are told in the Scriptures that the people were eating, drinking, buying and selling, planning and building until the very moment Lot went out of Sodom. Perhaps not a man in all Sodom took any account of his going out. It might have got rumored around that he was going because he believed the city was about to be destroyed, but no man believed it. His sons and daughters did not believe what their father said to them, and the Son of God says [102]

they were all destroyed—great and small, learned and unlearned, rich and poor. All alike perished.

Bear in mind that if you live in Sodom destruction will come upon you. The world may call you successful, but the only way to test success is to take a man's whole life—not the beginning nor middle, but the whole of it. If a man is in Sodom, he will find at last the fruits of his life to be

“Nothing but leaves—nothing but leaves.”

Lot spent his life in gaining worldly goods for his children, and he lost all and his children besides.

How many men of the present day can only say they have the same object in view that Lot had. They went into the city to make money. They have built no family altar. They recognize only two things—money and business. They say: “My sons may become gamblers and drunkards and my daughters may go off into ungodly society and marry drunkards and make their lives miserable; but I want money, and I will have all I wish if I get it.”

My friends, was Lot's life a successful one? It was a stupendous failure. Let us not follow in the footsteps of this man Lot. Let us keep out of Sodom.

[103]

MARTHA.

There was a woman right in the midst of this darkness, when many disciples left Him, who came forward and invited Him to her home—a woman by the name of Martha.

I can imagine Martha coming from Bethany, one day, and going into the Temple, in Jerusalem, to worship. The great Galilean Prophet came in, Who spake as never man spake, and she listened to His words. And as the words came from His lips they fell upon Martha's ears, and she says: “Well, I will invite Him to my house.”

It must have cost her something to do that. Christ was unpopular. There was a hiss going up in Jerusalem against Him. They called Him an impostor. All the leading men of the nation were opposed to Him. They said He was Beelzebub, the Lord of filth. They charged that He was an impostor and a deceiver. And yet Martha invites Him to her home. I hope there will always be some Martha to invite Him to her home, to be her guest. He will make that home a thousand times better than it ever was before.

Martha invited Him home with her. We read of His going often to Bethany. The noblest, best and grandest thing Martha ever did was to make room in her home for Jesus Christ. That one act will live for ever. Little did she know, when she invited the Son of God to become her guest, who He was; and when we receive Jesus into our hearts little do we know who He is. It will take all eternity to find out who He is.

There was a dark cloud then over that home in Bethany, but Martha did not know it. Neither did Mary see that cloud. It was fast settling down upon that home. It was soon going to burst upon that little family. The Savior knew all about it. He saw that dark cloud coming across that threshold.

[104]

We read that Jesus often lodged there. But a few months after He became their friend and guest, Lazarus sickened. The fever laid hold of him. It might have been typhoid fever.

You can see those two sisters watching over their brother. The family physician is sent for to Jerusalem, and he comes out and does every thing he can to restore Lazarus to health; but he sinks lower and lower. Some of us know what it is when the doctor comes in and feels

the pulse, begins to look very serious and takes you into another room, away from the patient, and tells you it is a critical case.

Martha and Mary passed through that experience. There was no hope, and Lazarus must die. They felt that if Jesus was only here He would rebuke this disease. He might prevent death from taking away our only brother. They sent a messenger a good ways off to tell Jesus His friend was sick, and this was the message:

“He whom Thou lovest is sick.”

They do not ask Him to come. They knew Jesus loved Lazarus, and that He would come if it was for their good. The messenger at last returned. He found Christ and delivered his message. When he got back, he found that the cloud had burst upon that little home, and Lazarus was dead and buried.

I see those two sisters as they gather around the messenger, eagerly plying him with questions. They asked: “Did you find Him?” [105]

“Yes, I found Him.”

“What did He say?”

“He said the sickness was not unto death, and He would come and see him.”

Now, for the first time, I see faith beginning to stagger. Mary asks the messenger:

“Are you sure you understood Him? Did He say the sickness was not unto death?”

“Yes.”

“Are you quite sure?”

“Yes.”

“Well, that is strange. If He is a prophet He should have known that Lazarus was dead. Sure Elijah would have known it. If He was a prophet, He must have known it. You had not been away from the house an hour before Lazarus died. He was dead when you met Him.”

“Well, that is what He told me. He said He would come here and see him.”

I see those two sisters as they kept watching for that Friend to come and comfort them. How long those nights must have seemed, as they watched and waited! I can imagine they did not sleep through the night, but listened to hear a footfall. The next day they watched, and He did not come. The second night passed, and He did not come. The third day came, and He did not come. The fourth day comes, and the messenger returns and says: “Martha, Jesus and His apostles are just outside the walls of the city. He is coming on toward Bethany.” Martha runs out to meet Him, and says: “If Thou hadst been here my brother had not died. Thou wouldst have kept death away from our dwelling.” [106]

Jesus answered her: “But thy brother shall rise again.”

“Yes, I knew that,” says Martha. “I know Lazarus will rise again, for he was such a good brother. He will rise at the resurrection of the just.”

Jesus had probably taught them of the resurrection. He answered Martha: “I am the resurrection of the just. I carry the keys with Me. I have the keys to death and the grave.” Then He asks: “Where is Mary? Go call her.”

They ran and told Mary that Jesus was there. Mary met Jesus with the words of Martha:

“If Thou hadst been here my brother had not died.”

“Thy brother shall rise again. Where have you laid him?”

“Come and see.”

And they led the way. Look at that company moving along toward the grave yard. These two sisters are telling about the last words and last acts of Lazarus. Perhaps Lazarus left a loving message for Jesus. You know what that is. When you go to see friends who are mourning, how they will dwell upon the last words and the last acts of the departed ones! You see Martha and Mary weeping as they went along toward the grave, and the Son of God wept with them.

Jesus said to His disciples: “Take away the stone.”

Again the faith of those sisters wavered, and they said: “Lord, by this time he stinketh, for he has been dead four days.” They did not know who their Friend was. When the disciples rolled away that stone Christ cried in a loud voice to His old friend: [107]

“Lazarus, come forth.”

Then Lazarus leaped out of that same sepulcher and came forth. Some old divine has said it was a good thing that Jesus singled out Lazarus, for there is such power in the voice of the Son of God that the dead shall hear His voice, and if He had not called for Lazarus by name all the dead in that grave yard would have come forth.

Little did Martha know whom she was entertaining when she invited Christ into her home. The world has been sneering at Martha ever since. But it was by far the grandest, sublimest and noblest act of her life.

MEPHIBOSHETH.

There is a story in the Books of Samuel—away back as far as the time of the kings of Israel—which will help us to understand the Gospel. It is about a man of the name of Mephibosheth.

You remember what a hard time David had when Saul was hunting him to kill him—just as men hunt for game.

Well, one day David and his good friend, Jonathan, were taking a walk together in the fields. Saul was very angry, and was bent on killing David; but his son, Jonathan, was looking out for a chance to save him.

The fact had been revealed to Jonathan that David was to be king after Saul’s death, instead of himself, but this did not lessen his love for David. That must have been a real friendship which could stand this sort of thing. [108]

After they had agreed upon a sign by which David was to know whether it was safe for him to stay around the court of the king, where he could see his friend once in a while, or whether he must leave, and go off into the cave of Adullam, Jonathan says to him:

“David, it has been revealed to me that you are to be king after my father. Now, I want you to promise me one thing. When you come to the throne, if any of the house of Saul are alive, I want you to be good to them, for my sake.”

“I will do that, of course,” said David. So he made a solemn covenant to that effect, and then he went away to the cave of Adullam, to get out of the way of Saul, who was bound to kill him if he could.

But God took care of David. You never can kill or harm a man if God is taking care of him.

About four years after that, David heard that there had been a great battle over by Mount Gilboa, and that the Philistines had beaten back the Israelites with great slaughter, and that Saul and Jonathan were both dead. So he got his men together, and went out after the enemies of the Lord and of Israel; and it was not a great while before he had turned the tables on them, and set up his kingdom at Hebron.

It must have been pretty near fourteen years after that before David remembered his promise to his old friend, Jonathan. It is a great deal easier to make promises than to keep them. How many broken vows has God written down against you? [109]

But one day King David was walking in his palace at Jerusalem, where he had removed his capital, and all at once he happened to think of that promise. It is a good thing God does not forget His promises that way.

“That’s too bad,” mused David. “I had forgot all about that promise. I have been so busy fighting these Philistines and fixing things up that I have not had time to think of any thing else.”

So he called his servants in great haste, and asked: “Do any of you know whether there is any of Saul’s family living?”

One of them said there was an old servant of Saul’s by the name of Ziba, and maybe he could tell.

“Go and tell him I want him, right away.”

Pretty soon Ziba appeared, and King David asked: “Do you know whether there is anybody of the house of Saul in my kingdom?”

Ziba said there was one he knew of—a son of Jonathan, by the name of Mephibosheth.

Jonathan! How that name must have smitten King David! One of the sons of his old friend living in his kingdom for as much as fourteen years, and he had never known it! What would Jonathan think of him for forgetting his promise that way?

“Go, fetch him!” says David. “Go quickly. Tell him I want him. I want to show him the kindness of God.”

Now, where do you suppose Mephibosheth was all this time? Why, he was down at Lo-debar. Did you ever hear of that place? If you are a sailor, did you ever come across that port? When you have traveled on the railway, did any of you ever stop at that station? [110]

Ah, yes! That is where the whole human race are until they come to Christ for salvation—away down at Lo-debar, which means “a place of no pasture.”

The king is in haste to keep his promise now. I see them hurrying off. Maybe they take the king’s own chariot, and rattle away to find this son of Jonathan.

When they reached the little out-of-the-way place, I fancy there was a great commotion.

“Where is Mephibosheth? The king wants him.”

Poor fellow! When he heard this announcement he hung his head. He was afraid the king wanted to kill him because he was of the house of Saul, his old enemy.

“Don’t be afraid,” said the servants. “The king says he wants to show you the kindness of God. He is in a great hurry to see you, so get ready and jump right into the chariot. Don’t you see the king has sent his own chariot to fetch you?”

It did begin to look as if the king meant no harm to him.

But poor Mephibosheth had another difficulty. He was lame in both feet. He was a little fellow when King David came to the throne, and an old servant, who was afraid that all the house of Saul would be killed, took him up and ran away to hide him. Somehow he managed to drop the lad, and lamed him in both feet.

And now I can see poor Mephibosheth looking down at his feet. Maybe his toes turned in, or he was club-footed. And he says to himself: “I am not fit to go to the king. I am a poor cripple. I am not fit to be seen among the tall and handsome servants of the palace in Jerusalem.” [111]

“Never mind your lame feet, Mephibosheth; so long as the king sends for you, it is all right.”

So they take him up and put him in the chariot, and start for Jerusalem on a run.

As soon as the king sees him he takes him in his arms and cries out:

“O Mephibosheth! The son of my dear old friend, Jonathan! You shall have all that ever belonged to the house of Saul, and you shall live with me here, in the palace.”

Some people think that Mephibosheth, like certain low-spirited Christians, after he went to live with the king, must have been all the time worrying over his lame feet. But I do not think so. He could not help it, and if David did not mind it, it was all right. So, I think that when he dined with David in state, with the great lords and ladies all around him, he just stuck his club feet under the table, and looked the king right in the face.

MOSES.

Moses was about to leave the children of Israel in the wilderness. He had led them up to the borders of the Promised Land. For forty long years he had been leading them in that wilderness, and now, as they are about to go over, Moses takes his farewell. He said a great many wise and good things on that memorable occasion. [112]

There was not a man on the face of the earth at that time who knew as much about the world and as much about God as did Moses. Therefore, he was a good judge. He had tasted of the pleasures of the world. In the forty years that he was in Egypt he probably sampled every thing of that day. He tasted of the world—of its pleasures. He knew all about it. He was brought up in the palace of a king, a prince. Egypt then ruled the world, as it were.

Moses had been forty years in Horeb, where he had heard the voice of God—where he had been taught by God—and for forty years he had been serving God. You might say he was God’s right hand man, leading those bondmen up out of the land of Egypt and out of the house of bondage into the land of liberty, and this is his dying address—you might say, his farewell address. This is the dying testimony of one who could speak with authority and one who could speak intelligently.

If you have not read that farewell address of Moses, you will find it in the last few verses of Deuteronomy. I advise you to read it. You are reading a great many printed sermons. Suppose you read that. Why, there is as much truth in that farewell address of Moses as there is in fifteen hundred printed sermons at the present time. Let me just give you a few verses:

“Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O Earth, the words of my mouth.

“My doctrine shall drop as the rain; my speech shall distill as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass. [113]

“Because I will publish the name of the Lord. Ascribe ye greatness unto our God.

“He is the Rock; His work is perfect. For all His ways are judgment; a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He.

“They have corrupted themselves; their spot is not the spot of His children. They are a perverse and crooked generation.

“Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise? Is not He thy Father that hath bought thee? Hath He not made thee and established thee?

“Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations. Ask thy Father, and He will show thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee.

“When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.

“For the Lord’s portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance.

“He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness. He led him about; He instructed him; He kept him as the apple of His eye.”

There are two or three sermons in that last verse.

“As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings, so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.

“He made him ride on the high places of the Earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and He made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock.”

[114]

And so Moses went on and finished his sermon, and God called him off into the mountain. He went up into Mount Nebo, and there God showed him, from the top of Pisgah, that land which he could not possess; showed him the land from Dan to Beersheba.

Then “God kissed away his soul and buried him.”

NAAMAN.

Naaman was a successful, valiant and noble man. But he was a leper—and that spoiled him.

What a blight that must have cast on his path! It must have haunted him day and night.

He was a leper, and there was no physician in Syria who could help him. It was an incurable disease, and I suppose he thought he would have to go down to the grave with that loathsome ailment.

We read that several companies had gone down to the land of Israel and brought back to Syria some poor captives. Among them was a little girl, who was sent to wait on Naaman’s wife. I can imagine that little maid had a praying mother, who had taught her to love the Lord, and when she got down there she was not ashamed to own her religion. She was not ashamed to acknowledge her Lord.

One day, while waiting on her mistress, I can think of her saying: “Would to God your husband was in Samaria. There is a prophet in that country who would cure him.” [115]

“What! A man in Israel who can cure my husband? Child, you must be dreaming. Did you ever hear of a man being cured of leprosy?”

“No. But that is nothing. Why, the prophet in Samaria has cured many persons worse than your husband.”

And perhaps she told her about the poor woman who had such an increase of oil, and how her two boys were saved from slavery by the prophet, and also how he had raised the child of that poor woman from the dead, adding: “If the prophet can raise anybody from the dead he can cure your husband.”

This girl must have had something about her to make those people listen to her. She must have shown her religion in her life. Her life must have been consistent with her religion to

make them believe her.

We read that Naaman had faith in her word, and he went to the king and told him what he intended to do. And the king said: “I will tell you what I will do. I will give you a letter to the king of Israel. Of course, if any cure is to be effected, the king will know how to obtain it.”

Like many men nowadays, they believed, if a thing was to be got, it was to be got from the king, and not from his subjects. So you see this man starting out to the king of Israel with all his letters and a very long purse. I can not find, just now, how much it was, but it must have been something like \$500,000. The sum was a very large one, likely. He was going to be liberal. He was not going to be small. [116]

Well, he got all his money and letters together and started. There was no small stir as Naaman swept through the gates of Syria that day with his escort. He reaches Samaria, and sends a messenger to the king, announcing his arrival. The messenger delivers the letter to the king, and the first thing he does is to open the letter and begin to read it.

I can see his brow knit as he goes on.

“What is this? What does it mean? This man means war. This Assyrian king means to have a war with me. Who ever heard of such a thing as a man cured of leprosy?”

And the king rent his mantle.

Every one knew something was wrong when the king rent his mantle, and the news spread through the streets that they were on the eve of a war. The air was filled with rumors of war; everybody was talking about it. No doubt the news had gone abroad that the great general of Assyria was in the city, and he was the cause of the rumors, and by-and-by it reached the prophet Elisha that the king had rent his mantle, and he wanted to know the cause. When he had heard what it was he just told the king to send Naaman to him.

Now you see the major-general riding up in grand style to the prophet’s house. He probably lived in a small and obscure dwelling. Perhaps Naaman thought he was doing Elisha a great favor by calling on him. He had an idea that he was honoring this man, who had no influence or position. So he rides up. A messenger is sent in to announce Major-General Naaman of Damascus. But the prophet does not even see him. He just tells the servant to say to his master: [117]

“Go and wash in Jordan seven times.”

When the messenger comes to Naaman and tells him this, he is as mad as any thing. He considers it a reflection upon him—as if he had not kept his person clean.

“Does the man mean to insinuate that I have not kept my body clean? Can’t I wash myself in the waters of Damascus? We have much better water than they have here. Why, if we had the Jordan in Syria we certainly would look upon it as a ditch. The idea—wash in that contemptible river!”

Naaman was as full of rage as he well could be, but suddenly he said: “Behold, I thought.”

That is the way with sinners; they always say they thought. In this expression we can see that Naaman had thought of some plan, and had marked out a way for the Lord to heal him.

Keep this in mind: “My ways are not your ways, nor my thoughts your thoughts.” If you look for the Lord to come in one direction, He will come in another direction. “My ways are not your ways,” thought the leper. No man gets into the kingdom of God until he gives up his thoughts. God never saves a man until he gives up his own thoughts and takes up God’s.

Yes, Naaman thought the moment the prophet knew he was outside he would come out and bow and scrape, and say he was glad to see such a great and honorable man from Syria.

Instead of that, he merely sent him the peremptory prescription: “Go wash in Jordan seven times.” [118]

When we were in Glasgow we had an employer converted, and he wanted to get a man in his employ to come to our meetings, but he would not come. If he was going to be converted, he would not be converted by those meetings. You know, when a Scotchman gets an idea into his head he is the most stubborn man you can find. He was determined not to be converted by Moody and Sankey. The employer argued and pleaded with this man, but he could not get him to come to the meetings then being held.

Well, we left Glasgow, and got away up to the north of Scotland—in Inverness—and the employer sent his stubborn friend up there on business, thinking he might be induced to go into the meetings. One night we were singing “On the Banks of That Beautiful River,” and he happened to be passing. He wondered where the sweet sounds were coming from. He came into the meeting, and I happened to be preaching that evening on the very text: “I Thought.”

The stubborn man from Glasgow listened attentively, and soon did not know exactly where he was. He was convicted—he was converted—and he became a Christian. Verily, a man must yield his own way to the way of the Lord.

Now, you can see all along that Naaman’s thoughts were altogether different from those of God. He was going to get the grace of God by showing favors—just as many men now believe they can buy their way into the kingdom of God. But we can not purchase the favor of Heaven with money. If you get a seat in Heaven, you must accept salvation as a gift. [119]

Naaman had another thought. He believed he could get what he wanted by taking letters to the king—not to the prophet. The little maid told him of the prophet, yet he was going to pass the prophet by. He was too proud to go to the prophet. But pride, if you will allow me the expression, got a knock on the head on this important occasion.

It was a terrible thing for him to think of obeying by going down to the Jordan and dipping seven times. He had got better rivers in Damascus, in his own wisdom, and he queries: “Can’t I wash there, and be clean?” Naaman was angry, but when he got over it he listened to his servants.

I would rather see people get angry than see them go to sleep. I would rather see a man get as angry as possible at any utterance of mine than to see I had sent him to sleep. When a man is asleep there is no chance of reaching him, but if he is angry we may get at him. It is a good thing for a man to get angry sometimes, for when he cools off he generally listens to reason.

So Naaman’s servant came to him and said: “Suppose Elisha had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it?”

Probably, had Elisha told Naaman to take cod liver oil for ten years, he would have willingly done it. If he had told Naaman he wanted as much money as the leper brought along, that would have been all right. But the idea of literally doing nothing—just to go down into Jordan and wash himself! It was so far below his calculations that he thought he was being imposed upon by some charlatan. [120]

But Naaman’s sensible servant said to him: “If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? Hadn’t you just better go down and wash in Jordan?”

Possibly, Naaman answered: “If I go down into Jordan and am not cured, what will my enemies say of me when I get back to Damascus?”

But he was influenced by the servant, and he went. That was one good point in Naaman’s character—he was influenced by an humble messenger. A good many people will not accept a messenger unless he is refined and cultured and educated. But it is the message you want—not the messenger. It would be the message I would want. And so it was with Naaman.

She was a little Hebrew girl who first told him to go to Samaria, and now he was told to wash by his servant. So Naaman goes down and dips into the waters. The first time he rose he said: "I would just like to see how much my leprosy has gone." He looks, but not a bit has left him. "Well, I am not going to get rid of my leprosy in this way; this is absurd."

But the servant persisted. "Do just as the man of God tells you; obey him."

And this is just what we are told to do in the Scriptures—to obey Him. The first thing we have to learn is obedience. Disobedience was the pit Adam fell into, and we must get out of it by obedience.

Well, Naaman goes into the water a second time. If some Chicago Christians had been there, they would certainly have asked, sneeringly: "Well, how do you feel now?" [121]

He did not see that he was any better, and down he went a third time; but when he looked himself over, he saw just as much leprosy as ever. Down he goes a fourth, fifth and sixth time. He again looks at himself, but not a speck of leprosy is removed.

Naaman now chides his servant. "I told you so! Look at me! I am just the same as ever."

"But," says the servant, "you must do just what the man of God tells you to do—go down seven times."

Naaman takes the seventh plunge, and comes out. He looks at himself. Behold, his flesh is as that of a little child. He says to his servant:

"Why, I never felt as good as I do today. I feel better than if I had won a great battle. Look! I am cleansed! Oh, what a great day this is for me! The leprosy has gone."

The waters to him had been as death and judgment, and he had come out resurrected—his flesh as that of a little child. I suppose Naaman got into his chariot, and away he went to the man of God. He had lost his temper; he had lost his pride; he had lost his leprosy.

That is the way now. If a man will only lose his pride, he will soon see his leprosy disappear; leprosy will go away with pride. I believe the greatest enemies of men in this world are unbelief and pride.

Naaman drives back to the man of God, and takes his gold and silver. He offers him money. "I do not want your money," replies the prophet. If Elisha had taken money, it would have spoiled the beautiful story. Naaman had to take back every thing he brought from Damascus except his leprosy. [122]

PETER.

The first glimpse that we catch of Peter is when Andrew brought him to the Savior. That is John's account. That is when he became a disciple; but he did not leave every thing then and follow Christ. He waited until he got another call.

I think we all can learn a lesson right here—that it is not every one who is called to be a disciple of Jesus that is called to leave his occupation and become His follower entirely. I believe there are many self-made preachers—man-made preachers—and this is the reason why so many fail. No man who was called by God has ever failed, or has ever broken down in the ministry; but when a man runs before he is sent, I believe he will fail.

Now, we are called to be His disciples—all called to follow Him—but we are not all called on to give up our occupations and devote all our time to the ministry. I have men come to me constantly who say they have been raised up, and want to give up their business and their worldly occupation and go into the work of the Lord entirely; but I never advise a man to go into the ministry. I think I never advised a man to give up his occupation, and to go out into the vineyard of the Lord and go to work. It is too high a calling, it seems to me,

for men to be influencing one another to go into it. If a man will only wait until God calls him—be sure that God sends him—then success will crown his efforts. [123]

Now, we find, in the fifth chapter of Luke, and also in the fourth chapter of Matthew, where Peter got his calling. He was out with his partners and others, fishing, when Jesus came along and told them to cast their net, or to launch out into the deep and cast their net into the sea.

“But,” says Peter, “we have toiled all night and caught nothing.”

“Nevertheless,” commanded Jesus, “let down your nets.”

At the word of God they did so, and were successful, and when they got ashore they found Jesus had called them to be His disciples. Just open your Bible at the fifth chapter of Luke:

“And it came to pass that, as the people pressed upon Him to hear the word of God, He stood by the lake of Gennesaret, and saw two ships standing by the lake; but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets.

“And He entered into one of the ships, which was Simon’s, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And He sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.

“Now, when He had left speaking, He said unto Simon: ‘Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.’

“And Simon, answering, said unto Him: ‘Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless, at Thy word I will let down the net.’

“And when they had done this, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes, and their net broke. [124]

“And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.

“When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying: ‘Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.’

“For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken.

“And so, also, were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon: ‘Fear not. Henceforth thou shalt catch men.’

“And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed Him.”

You see, it says Christ just said to them: “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” And no one was more successful in the world, in catching men, than Peter. And if you will just follow the Lord and believe in Him, He will make you fishers of men. Now, some may wonder why it was that God did not call them when they had their nets empty. Why did the Lord just give them a draught of fish and then tell them to leave it?

Now, it seems to me that He did so because He wanted them to leave something. There are a good many of us willing to be disciples of the Lord if it does not cost any thing. If they can just swing their bag across their back with the fish in it and follow Jesus, then they are willing to follow Him, and to be His disciples. So Jesus wanted them to give up something. They might have said: [125]

“We have been fishing a great while in the lake, business is pretty poor, and we might as well give up the business and go into this.”

But no! The Lord did not call them until after they attained success. Now, after they scored a business success, He put the test to these men whether they were willing to give up their nets and follow Him.

Sometime after that, Peter says: “We have left every thing to follow Thee.” What did Peter leave? Why, a few old broken nets! And it is just so now. People leave a few old broken nets, and then say to the Lord: “We have left every thing to follow Thee.”

The next glimpse we catch of Peter is when he takes on the character of a doubter. You will find, if you read it over, that it is our own experience right over again. Peter got to doubting.

In the fourteenth chapter of Matthew, beginning at the twenty-second verse, you will find these words:

“And straightway Jesus constrained His disciples to get into a ship, and to go before Him unto the other side, while He sent the multitudes away.

“And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up into a mountain apart to pray; and when the evening was come He was there alone.

“But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves; for the wind was contrary.

“And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.

“And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying: ‘It is a spirit.’ And they cried out for fear. [126]

“But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying: ‘Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.’

“And Peter answered Him and said: ‘Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water.’

“And He said: ‘Come.’ And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water to go to Jesus.”

Now, that took faith. The idea of his just letting go the boat, and stepping down into the water! Why, that required faith. And there are a great many men today willing to become Christians if they can only just see how they are going to walk. They want to walk by sight. They do not want to walk by faith. It took faith for Peter to let go of the boat and take the first step on the water, but the Lord had bid him to do it, and he just did it; but after he began to sink he began to doubt, and called on the Lord to save him.

“But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying: ‘Lord, save me.’”

See! He began to sink when he took his eyes off his Master. Peter did not trust in Him. He did not have perfect faith.

Now, the Lord says in Isaiah, twenty-sixth chapter and third verse:

“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee.”

Peter did not have perfect faith, because his mind was not stayed on Christ; he did not trust in Him. If Peter had trusted in the Lord he would not have sunk. The ship was in the midst of the sea; the wind was blowing quite a gale, and the waves were rolling high, and Peter began to tremble and doubt, and down he went. And a good many Christians follow his example. When it gets dark, when the wind begins to blow, and when the water rolls high about them, they begin to doubt—and down they go. [127]

Some one says if Peter had as long a preamble to his prayer as most people, he would have been forty feet under water before he got through praying for what he wanted. Now, just read a little farther:

“And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand, and caught him, and said unto him: ‘O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?’”

But I want to pass rapidly over this portion of the Word of God, and get at something which, perhaps, may be of more help to us than any thing here. In the sixteenth chapter of Matthew, twenty-fourth verse, we find that Peter was willing to confess Christ as the Son of the living God. Many men want to be disciples of Christ, but they are not willing to confess Him.

“Then said Jesus unto His disciples: ‘If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.’”

To go home and tell your friends that you want to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ requires much moral courage. But it required more then than it does now, for the Jews said any man who should confess Christ should be cast out of the synagogue.

“When Jesus came into the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying: [128] ‘Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?’”

“And they said: ‘Some say that Thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias or one of the prophets.’”

“He saith unto them: ‘But whom say ye that I am?’”

And Peter—he generally spoke first—speaks out and says:

“‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.’”

“And Jesus answered and said unto him: ‘Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in Heaven.’”

See! Jesus blessed Peter right there, and I have yet to find the first man and the first woman who are willing to confess Christ who will not say that God has blessed their souls after they have confessed Him.

Now, let me call your attention to another scene in the life of Peter. He got to be a sort of a—well, I may say a sort of “high church” man. He belonged to the “high church.” He was a sort of Ritualist. He had got this idea that Christ was the same as any other saint; that He was to be put on a level with some of the rest of the saints. He did not make any distinction.

In the ninth chapter of Luke we find that Jesus took His disciples and went up into a mountain to pray. We begin at the twenty-eighth verse:

“And it came to pass about eight days after these sayings, He took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray.

“And as He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment was [129] white and glistering.

“And, behold, there talked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elias.

“Who appeared in glory, and spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.

“But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep; and when they were awake, they saw His glory, and the two men that stood with Him.

“And it came to pass, as they departed from Him, Peter said unto Jesus: ‘Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles—one for Thee and one for Moses and one for Elias’—not knowing what he said.”

Peter wanted to put Jesus on a level with Moses and Elias. To be sure, Moses was a mighty man. He went into the mountain and took the law from the Lord God of Heaven, and Elias was a representative of the prophets and a mighty man; but when Peter wanted to put them on a level with the God-man—with Jesus—what took place? Why, there came a cloud which over-shadowed them. God caught them right away. God would not have them placing Moses and Elias on a level with His Son. He is above the angels of Heaven; and we

find over here, in the last chapter of the Bible, and in almost the last verse in it, that John was guilty of the same thing—of worshiping angels. It says over here, in the twenty-second chapter and eighth verse of Revelations:

“And I, John, saw these things and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things.

[130]

“Then saith he unto me: ‘See thou do it not; for I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book. Worship God.’”

Now, if Jesus was not the God-man—if He was not God in the flesh—then you and I are guilty of idolatry; we are breaking the first command: “Thou shalt have no other God before Me.”

But when Jesus came down here, He said: “Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” And He never rebuked any one for worshiping Him. But John fell down and worshiped that angel, and the angel refused to let him; and when Peter wanted to put Elias and Moses on a level with Christ, God the Father spoke and said: “This is my beloved Son. Hear ye Him.”

No matter about Elias now. No matter about Moses now. Hear Jesus. He is the one that God wants all of us here to worship.

Now, some one says we can not know, down here, whether we are safe or not. Well, we have an assurance right here:

“Then Simon Peter answered Him: ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.

“‘And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.’”

I will now call your attention to Peters faults. If you will just turn over here into the twenty-second chapter of Luke, you will find there a fault. Begin at the thirty-third verse of the twenty-second chapter of Luke, and you will find the following:

[131]

“And he said unto him: ‘Lord, I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison and to death.’

“And He said: ‘I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow, this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest Me.’

“And He said unto them: ‘When I sent you without purse and scrip and shoes, lacked ye any thing?’ And they said: ‘Nothing.’”

Now, here we find Peter’s fault of self-confidence. That was really his besetting sin, and when the Lord told him that the cock should not crow twice before he had denied Him thrice, he ought to have believed the words of Christ and cried for help; but no, he was very self-confident. “Why,” says he, “if the rest of the disciples deny You, I will not deny You.”

Peter not only declared he would not deny Jesus, but he even tried to make the other disciples worse by comparison. If you meet a man full of conceit and self-confidence, you may look for that man’s downfall.

Men who have stood the highest, in Scripture, have often fallen on their strongest point.

Moses was noted for his humility. Right there he fell. He got angry instead of being humble, and fell through lack of humility.

Elijah was noted for his boldness. Right there he fell. Why, he stood on Mount Carmel and defied the whole nation. He stood there alone. He seemed to be the boldest man in the whole nation. But after a while he got word that Jezebel was going to take his life, and then he lost all his boldness and got scared at the threat of a woman.

[132]

There was Samson, who was noted for his strength. He lost his hair, wherein his strength consisted, but he recovered it. They cut off his hair, but they did not remove the roots, and it

grew out again.

Abraham was noted for his faith. But he got into Egypt, and denied his wife.

There was only one time, I am told, that Edinburgh Castle was ever taken by the enemy, and that was done by climbing on the back rocks. The rocks were so steep the besieged did not believe the enemy could get in that way, but that was just where they got in.

I used to think when I had been a Christian ten or twelve years I should be so strong that there would be no danger of my ever being tempted, but I find that I was blind. I have more temptations now than I ever had before, and it takes twenty times as much grace to keep me now as at first. Let every man take heed, lest he fall. We can not tell how quickly we may fall if we are not kept by the grace of God.

Peter had to learn this lesson before he went out to preach to others. He was kept by the grace of God, if he could not keep himself. Well, I have got right here two faults of the apostle. When the Lord told him he should deny Him thrice, he ought to have trembled and cried: "Lord, keep me from denying Thee!" But, no! He said: "Lord, I am not going to deny You, if the rest do." Just see where he stands. He stands on a slippery place, and it will not be long before he will be down. Self-confidence leads many men to their fall.

We must keep very humble and keep our eyes on the Master, and see that we do not go to sleep. If we do get asleep, then it won't be long before we deny Him. And so we find that when Christ was down in the garden, sweating great drops of blood, He knew He was hastening to death on the cross. [133]

Peter went to sleep. And when Jesus came back He said: "Why sleep ye? Rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." Peter had been with the Lord three years, but he had to sleep.

The next that happens, for that second step down, we find that Peter fights in the flesh. When they came to arrest Christ, Peter took out his sword and cut off the servant's ear. That servant was the only person who had suffered through the followers of Christ up to that time. Peter cut the ear off, but it did not stay off long, for it got back in just about five minutes.

Jesus cried out: "Peter, put up your sword. If I wanted to defend Myself, I could call seventy thousand angels down; I could call legions of angels down; I could defend Myself if I wanted to." But, no; He did not do that. He had to rebuke Peter, to put a thorn in his flesh.

The next thing Peter did was to follow Jesus afar off; that is the next step. When a man gets away from the Savior, then it won't be long before he follows Him afar off. You know Peter said, at first, he would keep close to Him. "I will stand by You; I am willing to die with You," he had said. But now Peter changed his mind, and he followed Jesus afar off.

Well, the next thing, we find that Peter is in bad company. That is another step down. He had got, by this time, down pretty low. [134]

A young lady comes in, looks at Peter, and says: "This man is one of His disciples."

"No, I am not; no, not I," says Peter.

The maid cries out at him in perfect amazement—for perhaps she had heard him preach some time—and she says: "You *are* one of His disciples."

"Oh, no; no, not I."

He did not know Jesus, who was right there inside, where he could see him; and yet this man, who was so bold, did not know Him.

Another man comes to Peter and says: "You are one of His disciples."

"No, Sir—not I. I don't know Him—no Sir." You see, he had got a good ways off.

The man says: "You are."

“No; I am not.”

About an hour after Peter has denied Him, another man came around and said: “You are one of His disciples.”

“No; I am not.”

“Oh, but you are. Your speech betrays you.”

Peter had been with the Master three years, and he talked a different language from those men; and you who have been with God two or three years know that you talk better than you did before.

This man said: “You are one of those.” And Peter began to curse and swear, and said he never knew Him.

How did the Lord call him back? Although Satan had been at work on him for hours and hours, yet the Lord did call him back. The Lord asked him: “Peter, is it true that you have forgotten Me so soon? Do you remember, when we walked together by the sea, how I saved you? Do you remember the time I called you again? Do you remember the wonderful sermon that I preached on the mount? Is it true, Peter, that you do not know me?” [135]

He might have said these things to Peter, but He did not. He just gave him one look—and what a look that was! It was a look of love, a look of tenderness, a look of pity, a look of peace.

He flashed upon Peter.

Peter remembered what he had done to the Lord. Then the cock crew, and Peter went out and wept bitterly. No one on Earth knows how Peter suffered in those hours that Christ was laid in the tomb. What hours they must have been to him! I can imagine that he did not eat any thing; that he did not sleep; that he spent those hours praying that the Lord might be given back to him.

At last Sunday morning comes—that blessed morning—and the first thing Peter hears is that Christ has risen. And He sent word to Peter—one of the most touching things He did. Just let me read from the sixteenth chapter of Mark and the seventh verse:

“But go your way, tell His disciples and Peter that He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him, as He said unto you.”

Oh, how tender! I don’t know but if He had said “Go back and tell My disciples,” Peter would have said: “I am no disciple; I have forfeited my right as such.” But Jesus said: “Tell My disciples and Peter.” Tell Peter; put his name in; don’t leave him out. [136]

We are told that Christ had an interview with Peter, and they met alone. No one ever told us what took place, but I can imagine how Peter felt. Like the woman that we read about in the seventh chapter of Matthew, He restored him to salvation and then sent him out to preach.

But when the twelve were at meat together the Lord turned to Peter and asked: “Lovest thou Me more than these?”

How those words must have cut down into Peter’s heart! Jesus wanted to see whether his conceit had been taken out. That was hard, you know. He could not get any thing out of Peter. Peter did not say a word. Again the Lord asked: “Peter, lovest thou Me more than these?”

He was a broken and empty vessel, and must be filled.

Then Jesus gave Peter his commission: “Go, feed my sheep; preach the Gospel to all the world.”

This is a sweet thought, that after Peter had denied the Lord, He took him back and used him!

SAUL.

I have been speaking on the Prodigal Son, but now I want to take up another man—a much harder case than the prodigal, because he did not believe he needed a Savior.

You need not have talked a great while to that prodigal before you could have convinced him that he needed a Savior. It is easy to reach a prodigal's heart when he reaches the end of his rope. [137]

The man of whom I shall now speak stood high in the estimation of the people. He stood, as it were, at the top of the ladder, while the prodigal was at the bottom. This man was full of self-righteousness, and if you had tried to pick out a man in Jerusalem as a hopeless case, so far as accepting Jesus of Nazareth as a Savior, you would have picked out Saul. He was the most utterly hopeless case you could have found.

I would sooner have thought of the conversion of Pilate than of this man. When they were putting to death the martyrs to the cross he had cheered on the murderers; but, in spite of all this, we find the Son of God coming and knocking at his heart, and it was not long before he received Him as his Savior.

You can see Saul as he goes to the chief priests of Jerusalem, getting the necessary documents that he might go to Damascus—that he might go to the synagogue there and get all who were calling upon the Lord Jesus Christ cast into prison. He was going to stamp out the teachers of the New Gospel.

One thing that made him so mad, probably, was that when the disciples were turned out of Jerusalem, instead of stopping they went all around and preached.

Philip went down to Samaria, and probably there was a great revival there, and the news had come from Damascus that the preachers had actually reached that place.

This man Saul was full of zeal and full of religion. He was a religious man, and no doubt he could say a prayer as long as any one in Jerusalem. He had kept the laws faithfully, and been an honest and upright man. The people then would never have dreamed of him being in need of a Savior. Many persons today would say of Saul: "He is good enough. To be sure, he does not believe in Jesus Christ; but he is a good man." [138]

And there are many people today who do not believe in Him. They feel if they pay their debts and live a moral life they do not need to be converted. They do not want to call upon Him; they want to get Jesus and all His teachings out of the way, as Saul wanted to do. That is what they have been trying to do for eighteen centuries. Saul just wanted to stamp them out at one swoop. So he got the necessary papers, and away he went down to Damascus.

Suppose, as he rode out of the gate of Jerusalem on his mission, any one had said to Saul: "You are going down to Damascus to prosecute the preachers of Christ, but you will come back a preacher yourself." If any man had said this, his head would not have remained on his shoulders five minutes. Saul would have protested: "I hate Him—I abhor Him. That is how I feel."

Yes, Saul wanted to get Christ and His disciples out of the way. He was no stranger to Christ. He knew His working, for, as Paul said to Agrippa: "This thing was not done in a corner." He knew all about Christ's death. Probably he was acquainted with Nicodemus and the members of the Sanhedrim who were against Christ. Perhaps he was acquainted with Christ's disciples, and with all their good deeds. Yet he entertained a malignant hatred for the Gospel and its propagandists, and he was going down to Damascus to put all those Christians in prison. [139]

You see Saul as he rides out of Jerusalem with that brilliant escort, and away he goes through Samaria, where Philip was. He would not speak to a Samaritan, however. The Jews detested the Samaritans. The idea of speaking to an adulterous Samaritan would have been repulsive to Saul. So he rode on, proudly, through the nation, with his head raised, breathing slaughter to the children of God.

Damascus was about 138 miles from Jerusalem, but we are not told how long he took for that journey.

Little did Saul think that, nineteen hundred years after, in this country, then wild, there would be thousands of people gathered just to hear the story of his journey down to Damascus.

He has arrived at the gates of the city, and is not yet cooled off, as we say. He is still breathing revenge. See him as he stands before that beautiful city.

Some one has said Damascus is the most beautiful city in the world, and we are told that when Mohammed came to it he turned his head away from it, lest the very beauty of it would take him from his God.

So this young man comes to Damascus, and he tells the hour of his arrival. He never forgets the hour, for it was then that Christ met him. He says: "I saw in the way a light from Heaven above the brightness of the sun." He saw the light of Heaven, and a glimpse of that light struck him to the ground. From that light a voice called: "Saul! Saul!" Yes, the Son of God knows his name. Sinner, God knows your name. He knows all about you. He knows the street you live in and the number of your house, because He told where Ananias lived when Paul went there. [140]

"Saul! Saul! Why persecutest thou Me?"

How these words must have gone down into his soul! He stopped. The words were to him. Could Saul give any reason when the question was put to him: "Why persecutest thou Me?" Can any sinner give a reason for persecuting Christ?

I can imagine some of you saying: "I never persecute Christ. I have a great many sins. I swear often—sometimes drink; but I always speak respectfully of Christ." Do you? Do you never speak disrespectfully of His disciples and God's children?

When Christ asked Saul that question He might have added: "I lived on Earth thirty years, and I never did you any hurt or injury; I never even injured your friends. I came into the world to bless you. Why persecutest thou Me?"

When this question was put to Saul He supplemented it by saying: "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." You and I would not have had any compassion upon Saul if we had been in Christ's place. We would have said the hardship is upon the poor Christians in Damascus. But the Lord saw differently.

In those days, when people did not drive their camels with whips, they had a stick with a sharp piece of steel at the end, called a prick, and with this the animal was goaded. Hence the point of the saying is obvious.

SIMEON.

[141]

The Lord was one day at Jerusalem, and a banquet was given him by Simeon.

There was a banquet table in the house, arranged according to the fashion of that day. Instead of chairs for the guests, the guests sat reclining on lounges.

Well, it was just one of these repasts that our Lord sat down to, along with the wealthy Simeon and his many guests. But no sooner had He entered than a certain woman followed Him into the house. She fell down at His feet, and began to wash them with her tears.

It was the custom in those days to wash one's feet on entering a house. Sandals were worn, and the practice was necessary.

This woman had got into the house by some means, and, once inside, had quietly stolen up to the feet of the Savior. In her hand was a box; but her heart, too, was just as full of ointment as the box she carried. And there was the sweetest perfume as she stole to His feet.

Her tears started to fall down on those sacred feet—hot, scalding tears, that gushed out like water. She said nothing while the tears fell, and then she took down her long black hair and wiped His feet with the hair of her head. And after that she poured out the ointment on His feet.

At once the Pharisees began to talk together. How, all through the New Testament, these Pharisees kept whispering and talking together!

They said, shaking their heads: "This Man receiveth sinners. Were He a prophet, He would know who and what manner of woman this is that touches Him, for she is a sinner." [142] No prophet, they insisted, would allow that kind of a woman near him, but would push her away from him.

But Jesus read their thoughts, and quickly rebuked them. He said: "Simeon, I have something to say to thee."

Simeon answered: "Master, say on."

"Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water to wash my feet; but she has washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss, but this woman, since I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with ointment thou didst not anoint, but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment."

Simeon was like many Pharisees nowadays, who say: "Oh, well! We will entertain that minister if we must. We do not want to, for he is a dreadful nuisance; but we will have to put up with him. It is our duty to be patronizing."

Well, the Master said more to His entertainer, as follows:

"There was a certain creditor which had two debtors. One owed 500 pence and the other 50 pence, and when he had nothing to pay——"

Mark that, sinner; the debtor had nothing to pay. There is no sinner in the world who can pay any thing to cancel his debt to God. The great trouble is that sinners think they can pay—some of them 75 cents on the dollar, some even feel able to pay 99 cents on the dollar, and the one cent that they are short they believe can be made up in some manner. That is not the correct way; it is all wrong; you must throw all the debt on God. Some few, very likely, will only claim to pay 25 cents on the dollar, but they are not humble enough, either; they can not begin to carry out their bargain. Why, sinner, you could not pay one-tenth part of a single mill of the debt you are under to God. [143]

Now, it is said in this parable the debtors could not pay their creditor any thing; they had nothing to give, and their creditor frankly forgave them both.

"Now, Simeon," the Master asked, "which should love that man the more?"

"I suppose," was the reply, "he that was forgiven the more."

"You have rightly judged. This woman loves much because she has been forgiven much." And Jesus went on to tell Simeon all about her. I suppose He wanted to make it plainer to Simeon, and He turned to the poor woman and said:

"Thy sins are forgiven; go in peace."

All her sins were forgiven—not simply part of them; not half them, but every sin from the cradle up. Every impurity is blotted out for time and eternity.

Yes, truly, she went out in peace, for she went out in the light of Heaven. With what brightness the light must have come down to her from those eternal hills! With what beauty it must have flashed on her soul!

Yes, she came to the feet of the Master for a blessing, and she received it.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

[144]

We are told that as Jesus stood with His disciples a man, a lawyer, stood up and tempted Him.

The lawyer asked Jesus this question:

“Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

He asked what he could do to inherit eternal life—what he could do to buy salvation.

Jesus answered his question by asking another question: “What is written in the law? How readest thou?”

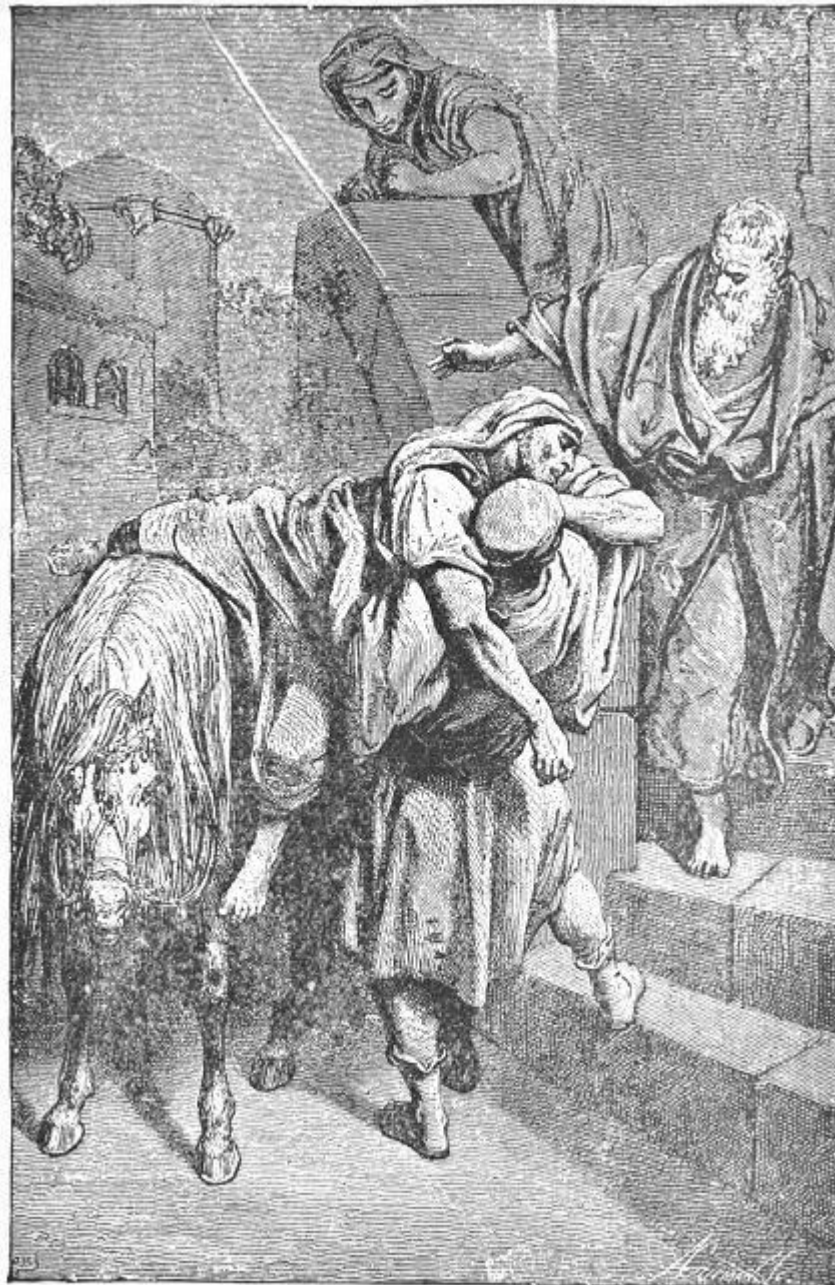
To this the lawyer answered:

“Thou shalt love the Lord God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself.”

“Thou hast answered right. But who is ‘thy neighbor?’”

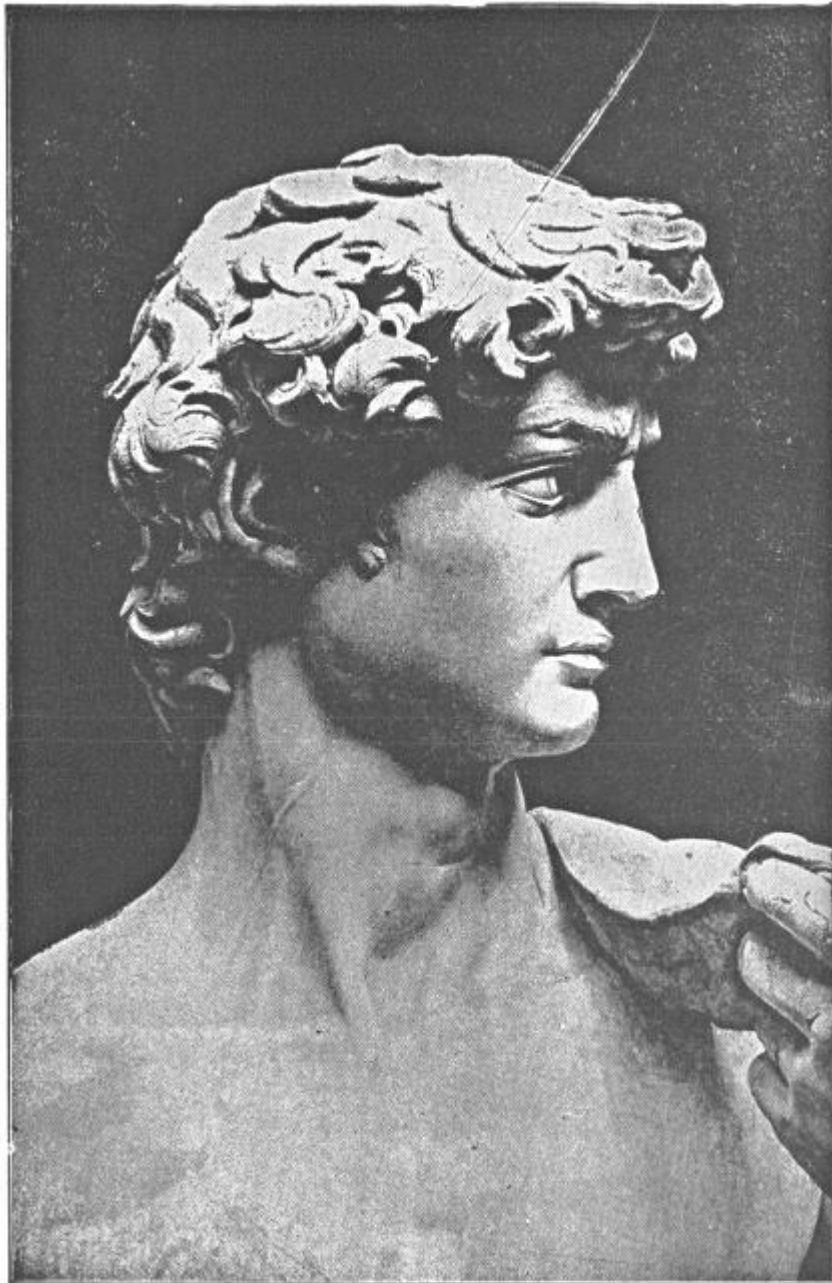
Then Jesus drew a vivid picture, which has been told for the last eighteen hundred years, and I do not know any thing that brings out more truthfully the wonderful power of the Gospel than this story. It is the story of the man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and who fell among thieves.

Jerusalem was called the City of Peace. Jericho and the road leading to it were infested with thieves. Probably it had been taken possession of by the worst of Adam’s sons.



THE ARRIVAL OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN AT THE INN

From the Painting by Gustave Dore.



DAVID.—From Statue by Angelo

I do not know how far the man got from Jerusalem toward Jericho, but the thieves had come out and fallen upon him, and had taken all his money, stripped him of his clothing and left him wounded. I suppose they left him for dead. [145]

By-and-by, a priest came down the road from Jerusalem. We are told that he came by chance. Perhaps he was going down to dedicate some synagogue or preach a sermon on some important subject, and had the manuscript in his pocket.

As he was going along on the other side, he heard a groan. He turned around, and saw the poor fellow, lying bleeding on the ground, and pitied him. He went up close, took a look at him, and said: "Why, that man is a Jew! He belongs to the seed of Abraham. If I remember aright, I saw him in the synagogue last Sabbath. I pity him; but I have too much business, and I can not attend to him."

He felt a pity for him, and looked on him, and probably wondered why God allowed such men as were those thieves to come into the world. Then he passed by.

There are many men just like this priest. They stop to discuss and wonder why sin came into the world, and look upon a wounded man, but do not stop to pick up a poor sinner—forgetting the fact that sin is in the world already, and must be rooted out.

Soon another man came along, a Levite, and he also heard the groans of the robbers' victim. He, too, turned about and looked upon him with pity. He felt compassion for him. He was one of those men that, if we had him here, we would probably make an elder or a deacon. He looked at the suffering man and said: "Poor fellow! He is all covered with blood! He has been badly hurt; he is nearly dead; and they have taken all his money and stripped him naked! Ah, well; I pity him." He would like to extend help, but he, too, has very pressing business; and so he passes by on the other side. But he has scarcely got out of sight when another one comes along, riding on a beast. He heard the groans of the wounded man, and went over and took a good look at him. [146]

The traveler was a Samaritan. When he looked down he saw the man was a Jew.

Ah, how the Jews looked down upon the Samaritans. There was a great, high partition wall between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Jews would not allow them in the Temple; they would not have any dealings with them; they would not associate with them.

I can see him coming along that road, with his good, benevolent face; and as he passes he hears a groan from the poor fellow. He draws in his beast, and pauses to listen. "And he came to where he was."

This is the sweetest thing, to my mind, in the whole story.

A good many people would like to help a poor man if he was on the platform—if it cost them no trouble. They want him to come to them. They are afraid to touch the wounded man; he is all over blood, and they will get their hands soiled.

And that was just the way with the priest and the Levite. This poor man, perhaps, had paid half of all his means to help the service in the Temple, and might have been a constant worshiper; but they only felt pity for him.

This good Samaritan "came to where he was," and after he saw him he had compassion on him. That word "compassion"—how sweet it sounds! The first thing he did on hearing him cry for water—the hot sun had been pouring down upon his head—was to go and get it from a brook. Then he goes and gets a bag, that he had with him—what we might call a carpet-bag or a saddle-bag in the West—and pours in oil on his wounds. Then he says to himself: "The poor fellow is weak." So he goes and gets a little wine. He has been lying so long in the burning sun that he is nearly dead now—he had been left half dead—and the wine revives him. [147]

The good Samaritan looks him over, and sees all the wounds that need to be bound up. But he has nothing to do this with. I can see him now, tearing the lining out of his coat, and with it binding up his wounds. Then he takes him up and lays him on his bosom until he is revived, and, when the poor fellow gets strength enough, the good Samaritan puts him on his own beast.

If the Jew had not been half dead he would never have allowed the Samaritan to put his hands on him. He would have treated him with scorn. But he is half dead, and he can not prevent the good Samaritan treating him kindly and putting him on his beast.

Did you ever stop to think what a strong picture it would have been if the Samaritan had not been able himself to get the man on the beast—if he had needed to call any assistance?

Perhaps a man would have come along, and he would have asked him to help him with the wounded man.

"What are you?"

"I am a Samaritan."

“You are a Samaritan, are you? I can not help you—I am a Jew.”

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There is a good deal of that spirit today—just as strong as it was then. When we are trying to get a poor man on the right way—when we are tugging at him to get his face toward Zion—we ask some one to help us, but he says: “I am a Roman Catholic.”

“Well,” you say, “I am a Protestant.”

So they give no assistance to one another.

The same spirit of old is present today. The Protestants will have nothing to do with the Catholics; the Jews will have nothing to do with the Gentiles. And there was a time—but, thank God, we are getting over it—when a Methodist would not touch a Baptist nor a Presbyterian a Congregationalist; and if we beheld a Methodist taking a man out of the ditch, a Baptist was sure to ask:

“What are you going to do with him?”

“Take him to a Methodist church.”

“Well, I’ll have nothing to do with him.”

A great deal of this has gone by, and the time is certainly coming when, if we are trying to get a man out of the ditch, and they see us tugging at him, and we are so faint that we can not get him on the beast, they will help him. And that is what Christ wants.

Well, the Samaritan gets him on his beast, and says to him:

“You are very weak, but my beast is sure-footed; he’ll take you to the inn, and I’ll hold you.”

He held him firmly, and God is able to hold every one He takes out of the pit. I see them going along the road, he holding him on, and he gets him to the inn. He gets him there, and he says to the inn keeper:

[149]

“Here is a wounded man; the thieves have been after him; give him the best attention you can; nothing is too good for him.”

I can imagine the good Samaritan as stopping there all night, sitting up with him, and attending to his every need. And the next morning he gets up and says to the landlord:

“I must be off; I leave a little money to pay you for what the man has had, and if that is not enough I will pay what is necessary when I return from my business in Jericho.”

This good Samaritan gave this landlord twopence to pay for what he had got, and promised to come again and repay whatever had been spent to take care of the man, and he had given him, besides, all his sympathy and compassion.

Jesus tells this story in answer to the lawyer who came to tempt Him, and showed that the Samaritan was the neighbor.

Now, this story is brought out here to teach church-goers this thing: It is not creed or doctrine that we need so much as compassion and sympathy.

THE LEPER.

See that poor leper! Do you know what an awful thing leprosy is? A disease so terrible that it separates its victim from all the world, and makes him an outcast, even from his home. Every one is afraid of him. His disease is so contagious that to touch him or even to breathe the air near him is dangerous; and so these poor, afflicted wretches have to go away and live in cave or desert all alone.

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They sit by the wayside afar off, calling to the passers-by for charity—who sometimes throw them a piece of money and hurry off, lest they also come into that terrible plight.

Here is a poor man who finds the marks of what he thinks is this terrible disease upon his body. According to the law, he must go to the priest and be examined.

Alas! The priest says it is leprosy—nothing else.

Now the poor man, with broken heart, turns away from the Temple. He goes to his house, to say good-by to his wife and to take his children in his arms once more before he goes away to spend the long years in the wilderness alone, or with other lepers like himself, until death shall come to deliver him from his sufferings.

What a sorry house is that! Surely, this is worse than death itself.

He goes out of his door with no hope of ever entering it again. He walks the street by himself, and if any one comes near he lifts up his voice in that mournful cry:

“Unclean! Unclean!”

Out of the gates of the city he goes, away from all his friends and acquaintances, carrying with him the sorrow of separation and the seeds of death.

One day he sees a crowd passing along the road, but he dares not go near enough to inquire what it is. All at once he happens to think it may be that Prophet of Nazareth whom [151] he had heard of—that same Man that, people said, could open the eyes of blind men, make lame men to walk, and who had even raised the son of the widow from death, over there at Nain. If only He were passing! At any rate, he will take the chances, and cry out after Him; and so he shouts, at the top of his voice:

“Have mercy upon me!”

All the rest of the crowd are afraid of him, but Jesus, who is in the midst, hears some one calling; and, just as He always did when any one wanted any thing of Him, He stopped to find out what it was.

He is not afraid of the leper; and so, while the rest of the crowd stand apart by themselves, He calls the poor fellow up to Him, and asks him what he wants.

The leper, with his heart full of anxious hope, makes answer:

“Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.”

Jesus says: “I will; be thou clean.”

A strange sense of health and strength comes suddenly over the man. He looks at his hands, and finds the leprosy all gone. He begins to pour out his heart in thanks to Jesus, who sends him away to the priests, saying: “Go, show thyself to the priests, and offer the gift that Moses commanded.”

Now, I seem to see that cleansed leper, hurrying off to show himself to the priest, to be pronounced cured, according to the law; and then hastening to his little home, to see his wife and children once more. He bursts into the house, weeping for joy. He stretches out his [152] arms to his wife and little ones, saying: “I am clean! Jesus did it—Jesus of Nazareth.”

THE PENITENT THIEF.

I am going to take for my text, this morning, “A Man”—the last one that Jesus saved before He returned to Heaven.

The fact that Jesus saved such a man at all ought to give every one of us much hope and comfort. This man was a thief—a highwayman and murderer, perhaps—and yet Christ takes him with Him when He ascends to glory; and if Jesus is not ashamed of such a man, surely no class of sinners need to feel that they are left out.

It is a blessed fact that all kinds of men and women are represented among the converts in the Gospels, and almost all of them were converted suddenly.

Very many people object to sudden conversions, but you may read in the Acts of the Apostles of eight thousand people converted in two days. That seems to me rather quick work. If all the Christians before me this morning would only consecrate themselves to the work of Christ, they might be the means of converting that number before the week is out.

Let us look at Christ hanging on the cross, between two thieves—the Scribes and Pharisees wagging their heads and jeering at Him, His disciples gone away, and only His mother and one or two other women in sight to cheer Him with their presence, among all this concourse of enemies—relentless and mocking enemies.

Hear those spiteful Pharisees calling out to Jesus: “If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross, and we will believe on Thee.” And the account says that the two thieves cast the same in His teeth. [153]

So, then, the first thing that we know of our man is that he is a reviler of Christ. You might reasonably think that he ought to be doing something else at such a time as this; but, hanging there in the midst of his tortures, and certain to be dead in a few hours, instead of confessing his sins and preparing to meet the God whose laws he had broken all his life—instead of that, he is abusing God’s only Son. Surely, this man can not sink any lower until he sinks into hell!

The next thing we hear of him, he appears to be under conviction. Nobody is ever converted until he is convicted.

In the twenty-third chapter of Luke we read:

“And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on Him, saying: ‘If Thou be the Christ, save Thyself and us.’ But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying: ‘Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss.’”

What, do you suppose, it was that made this great change in this man’s feelings in these few hours?

Christ had not preached him a sermon—had given him no exhortation. The darkness had not yet come on; the Earth had not opened its mouth; the business of death was going on as usual; the crowd was still there, mocking and hissing and wagging their heads; and yet this man, who in the morning was railing at Christ, is now confessing his sins. [154]

“We indeed justly.”

No miracle had been wrought before his eyes. The Son of God had not come down from the cross. No angel from Heaven had come to place a glittering crown upon His head, in place of the bloody crown of thorns.

What was it, then?

I will tell you what I think it was. I think it was the Savior’s prayer:

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

I seem to hear this thief talking with himself in this fashion:

“What a strange kind of man this must be! He says He is King of the Jews; and the superscription on His cross says the same thing. But what sort of a throne is this? He says He is the Son of God. Why does not God send down His angels, and destroy all this great gathering of people that are torturing His Son? If He has all power now, as He used to have when He worked those miracles they talk about, why does He not bring out His vengeance, and sweep all these wretches into destruction? I would do it in a minute, if I had the power. Oh, if I could, I would open the Earth, and swallow up these tormentors!

“But this man prays to God to ‘forgive them.’

“Strange! Strange! He must be different from the rest of us. I am sorry that I said one word against Him when they first hung us up here. What a difference there is between Him and me!

“Here we are, hanging on two crosses—side by side; but all the rest of our lives we have been far enough apart. I have been robbing and murdering, but He has been visiting the hungry, healing the sick, and raising the dead. Now these people are railing at us both. What a strange world is this! [155]

“I will not rail at Him any more. Indeed, I begin to believe He must be the Son of God; for, surely, no son of man could forgive his enemies this way.”

That is what did it, my friends.

This poor man had been scourged and beaten and nailed to the cross, and hung up there for the world to gaze upon; and he was not sorry for his sins one single bit—did not feel the least conviction on account of all that misery. But when he heard the Savior praying for His murderers that broke his heart.

I remember to have heard a story, somewhere, of a bad boy that had run away from home. He had given his father no end of trouble. He had refused all the invitations that his father had sent him to come home and be forgiven, and help to comfort his old heart. He had even gone so far as to scoff at his father and mother.

But one day a letter came, telling him his father was dead, and they wanted him to come home and attend the funeral.

At first he determined he would not go, but then he thought it would be a shame not to pay some little show of respect to the memory of so good a man after he was dead; and so, just as a matter of form, he took a train and went to the old home.

He sat through all the funeral services, saw his kind old father buried, and came back with the rest of the friends to the house, with his heart as cold and stony as ever. But when the old man’s will was brought out to be read, the ungrateful son found that his father had remembered him along with all the other members of the family in the will, and had left him an inheritance with the others, who had not gone astray. [156]

This broke his heart.

It was too much for him, that his old father, during all those years in which he had been so wicked and so rebellious, had never ceased to love him.

That is just the way our Father in Heaven does with us. That is just the way Jesus does with people who refuse to give their hearts to Him. He loves them in spite of their sins, and it is the love which, more than any thing else, brings hard-hearted sinners to fall upon their knees.

Now, this thief on the cross confessed his sins. A man may be very sorry for his sins; but, if he does not confess them, he has no promise of being forgiven. The thief says: “We are suffering justly.” I never knew any man to be converted until he confessed.

Cain felt bad enough over his sins, but he did not confess.

Saul was greatly tormented in his mind, but he went to the Witch of Endor rather than to the Lord.

Judas felt so bad over the betrayal of his Master that he went out and hanged himself; but he did not confess—that is, he did not confess to God. He came back and confessed to the priests, saying: “I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.” It was of no use to confess to them; they could not forgive him. What he should have done was to confess to God; but instead of that, he rushed out and hanged himself. [157]

How different is the case with the penitent thief! He confesses his sins to Christ, and Christ has mercy on him at once.

Just here is one of the great difficulties with many people. They do not like to come up face to face with their sins. They do not like to own that they are sinners. They excuse themselves in every way. They think they are not very bad sinners; that there are a great many worse than they are; and so they try to cover up the great fact that this penitent thief confesses openly. My friends, you never will be saved, so long as you try to cover up your sins.

We have heard a great deal about the faith of Abraham and the faith of Moses; but this man seems to me to have had more faith than any of them. He stands at the head of his class.

God was twenty-five years toning up the faith of Abraham; Moses was forty years getting ready for his work; but this thief, right here in the midst of men who rejected Him—nailed to the cross and racked with pain in every nerve, overwhelmed with horror, and his soul in a perfect tempest—still manages to lay hold upon Christ, and trust in Him for a swift salvation. His heart goes out to the Savior. How glad he would be to fall on his knees at the foot of that cross, and pour out his prayer to Him who was hanging on it! But this he can not do. His hands and feet are nailed fast to the wood; but they can not nail his eyes, nor his heart. He can, at least, turn his head, and look upon the Son of God; and his breaking heart can go out in love to the One who is dying beside him—dying for him, and dying for you and me. [158]

And what did Jesus say in answer to his prayer?

That prayer was a confession of Christ. He calls Jesus “Lord,” and begs to be remembered in His kingdom. That must be a kingdom in Heaven—for, surely, there was no chance of a kingdom on Earth, as matters looked at that time.

Christ fulfilled His promise to the thief:

“Whoso confesseth Me before men, him will I confess before my Father and the holy angels.”

He looks kindly upon him, and says:

“Today thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.”

And now the darkness falls upon the Earth; the Sun hides itself; but, worse than all, the Father hides His face from the Son. What else is the meaning of that bitter cry?

“My God! My God! Why hast Thou forsaken Me?”

Ah! It had been written:

“Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.”

Jesus is made a curse for us. God can not look upon sin; and now His own Son is bearing, in His own body, the sins of the world; and so He can not look upon Him.

I think that was what was heaviest upon the Savior’s heart, away there in the Garden, when He prayed: “If it be possible, let this cup pass away from Me.”

He could bear the unfaithfulness of His friends, the spite of His enemies, the pain of His crucifixion and the shadow of death. He could bear all these. But when it came to the hiding of His Father’s face, that seemed almost too much for even the Son of God to bear. But even this He endured for our sins; and now the face of God is turned back to us, whose sins had turned it away, and looking upon Jesus, the sinless One, He sees our souls in Him. [159]

In the midst of all His agony, how sweet it must have been to Christ to hear that poor thief confessing Him! He likes to have men confessing Him.

Do you remember His asking Peter: “Who do men say that I am?”

Peter answered: “Some people say You are Moses; some people say You are Elias, and some people say You are one of the old prophets.”

He asked again: “But, Peter, who do you say that I am?”

And when Peter said “Thou art the Son of God,” Jesus blessed him for that confession.

And now this thief confesses Him—confesses Him in the darkness. Perhaps it is so dark he can not see Him any longer; but he feels that He is there beside him.

This poor thief did as much for Christ in that one act as if he had lived and worked for Him fifty years. That is what Christ wants of us—to confess Him; in the dark as well as in the light, and when it is hard as well as when it is easy. For He was not ashamed of us, and carried our sins even unto death.

Just look for a minute at the prayer of this penitent thief.

He calls Jesus “Lord.” That sounds like a young convert. “Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.” Not a very long prayer, you see, but a prevailing prayer. [160]

Some people think they must have a form of prayer—a prayer book, perhaps—if they are going to address the Throne of Grace properly. But what would that poor fellow do with a prayer book up there—hanging on the cross, his hands nailed fast to the wood? Suppose it were necessary that some minister or priest should pray for him, what is he going to do? There is nobody there to pray for him, and he is going to die within a few hours. He is out of reach of help from men, but God has laid help upon One who is mighty, and that One is close at hand.

Then look at the answer to his prayer. The supplicant received more than he asked. He only asked to be remembered when Christ came into His kingdom. But Christ said to him: “I will take you right up with Me into My kingdom today.”

The Savior wants us all to remember Him in His old kingdom—to remember Him in the breaking of bread and in the drinking of wine—and then He will remember us in the new kingdom.

Just think of this, my friends. The last the world ever saw of Christ He was on the cross. The last business of His life was the saving of a poor penitent thief. That was a part of His triumph; that was one of the glories attending His death.

No doubt Satan said to himself: “I will have the soul of that thief, pretty soon, down here in the caverns of the lost. He belongs to me; he has belonged to me all these years.”



JACOB, TENDING FLOCKS OF LABAN.—From the Painting by Gustave Dore.



MOSES, BREAKING THE TABLES OF THE LAW

From the Painting by Gustave Dore.

But Christ snapped the fetters of his soul, and set him at liberty; Satan lost his prey. “The Lion of the tribe of Judah” conquered the lion of hell. [161]

You know that in the British colonies, before the day of Wilberforce, there used to be a great many slaves; but that good man began to agitate the question of setting them free; and all the slaves in the colonies, when they heard of it, were very anxious to hear how he was getting along. They knew the bill was before Parliament, and with them it was a question next to that of life itself.

But in those days there were no telegraphs and no steamships. The mails went by the slow sailing vessels. They would be from six to eight months in making the voyage to some of the more distant of the colonies. The slaves used to watch for the white sails of British ships, hoping to hear good reports, and also fearing they might hear bad ones.

There was a ship that had sailed immediately after the Emancipation Act had been passed and signed by the king; and when she came within hailing distance of the boats that had put off from the shore at the port of her destination, the captain could not wait to deliver the message officially, and have it duly promulgated by the government; but, seeing the anxious men standing up in their boats, eager for the news, he placed his trumpet to his mouth, and shouted with all his might:

“Free! Free!”

Just so the angels shouted when this poor bondman of Satan’s, almost in the jaws of the pit, was taken in hand by the Savior Himself; delivered from the bondage of darkness into the liberty of His dear Son! Free—free from sin—free from the curse of the law—free, too, in a short time, from the bonds of the flesh. [162]

What a contrast! In the morning he is led out a condemned criminal; in the evening he is saved from his sins. In the morning he is cursing; in the evening he is singing hallelujahs with a choir of angels. In the morning he is condemned by men as not fit to live on Earth; in the evening he is reckoned good enough for Heaven.

Christ was not ashamed to walk arm-in-arm with him along the golden pavements of the Eternal City.

He had heard the Savior’s cry: “It is finished.” He had seen the spear thrust into His side. Jesus had died before his very eyes, and hastened before him to get a place ready for this first soul brought from the world after He had died.

You have heard of the child that did not like to die and go to Heaven, because he did not know anybody there. But the thief had one acquaintance—even the Master of the place. He calls to Gabriel, and says:

“Prepare a chariot; make haste! There is a friend of Mine hanging upon that cross. They are breaking his legs; he soon will be ready to come. Make haste and bring him to Me.”

And the angel in the chariot sweeps down the sky, takes up the soul of the poor penitent thief, and hastens back again to glory; while the gates of the city swing wide open, and the angels shout their welcome to this poor sinner—“washed in the blood of the Lamb.”

And that, my friends, is just what Christ wants to do for every sinner. He wants to save you. That is the business on which He came down from Heaven. That is why He died; and if He gives such great and swift salvation to this poor thief on the cross, surely He will give you the same deliverance, if, like the penitent thief, you will repent, confess and trust in the Savior. [163]

Somebody says that this man “was saved at the eleventh hour.” I do not know about that. Perhaps it was the first hour. It might have been the first hour with him, I think. Perhaps he never knew Christ until he was led out to die beside Him. This may have been the very first time he had ever learned the way of faith in the Son of God.

But how many of you gave your hearts to Christ the very first time He asked them of you? Are you not farther along in the day than even that poor thief?

A little while ago, in one of the mining districts of England, a young man attended one of our meetings, and refused to go from the place till he had found peace in the Savior. The next day he went down into the pit, and the coal fell in upon him; and when they took him out he was broken and mangled, and had only about two or three minutes of life left in him. His friends gathered about him, saw his lips moving, and, bending down their ears to catch his words, this was what they heard him say: “It was a good thing I settled it last night.”

Begin now to confess your sins, and to pray the Lord to remember you when He cometh into His kingdom.

[164]

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN.

In this first parable we are told that men ought to pray always and everywhere; that prayer should not be left to a few in the churches, but all men ought to pray.

Jesus gives us a picture, so that we may understand in what spirit we ought to pray.

Two men went up to the Temple—one to pray to himself and the other to pray to God.

I think it will be safe to divide the audience into two bodies, and put them under these two heads. However, whether we divide the audience or not, we come under these two heads—those who have the spirit of the publican and those who have the spirit of the Pharisee.

You can find that the entire community may be correctly divided into these two classes. The spirit of the prodigal and the spirit of an elder brother are still in the world; the spirits of Cain and Abel are still in the world, and these two are representative men.

One of them trusted in his own righteousness and the other did not have any trust in it, and I say I think all men will come under these two heads. They have either given up all their self-righteousness—renounced it all and turned their backs upon it—or else they are clinging to their own righteousness; and you will find that these self-righteous men that are ever clinging to their own righteousness are continually measuring themselves by their neighbors.

“I thank God that I am not as other men are.”

This was the spirit of that Pharisee, and this is the spirit today of one class in this community, and the other class comes under the head of this other man. [165]

Let us look at the man Christ pictured first.

It is evident that he was full of egotism—full of conceit—full of pride; and I believe, as I have said before on this platform, that is one of the greatest enemies the Son of God has today, and I believe it keeps more men from the kingdom of God than any thing else.

Pride can grow on any soil, in any climate. No place is too hot for it, and no place is too cold for its growth. How much misery it has caused in this world! How many men here are kept from salvation by pride!

Why, it sprung up into Heaven, and for it Lucifer was cast out; by pride Nebuchadnezzar lost his throne. As he walked through Babylon he cried: “Is not this a great Babylon which I have built?” And he was hurled from his throne.

How many men that have become drunkards, who are all broken up—will gone, health gone—and yet are just as full of pride as the sun is of light! It will not let them come to Christ and be saved.

A great many live like this Pharisee—only in the form of religion; they do not want the wheat—only the husk; they do not want the kernel—only the shell.

How many men are today just living on empty form! They say their prayers, but they do not mean any thing.

Why, this Pharisee said plenty of prayers, but how did he pray? He prayed to himself. He might as well have prayed to a post. He did not pray to God, who knew his heart a thousand times better than he himself did. He thought he knew himself; he forgot that he was a sepulcher, full of dead men’s bones; forgot that his heart was rotten, corrupt and vile; and he comes and spreads out his hands and looks up to Heaven. [166]

Why, the very angels in Heaven veil their faces before God as they cry: “Holy, holy, holy!”

But this Pharisee comes into the Temple and spreads out his hands, and says:

“Lord, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are. I fast twice a week.”

He set before God what he had done in comparison with other men, and was striking a balance and making out God to be his debtor, as thousands are doing today; and then he says: “I give one-tenth of all I possess.”

I suppose if he was living in Chicago now, and we had gone to him and asked him for a donation to help put up this Tabernacle, he would have said:

“Well, I think it will do good; yes, I think it will. It may reach the vagabonds and outcasts—I do not need it, of course—but if it will reach that class it will do good. I will give \$50, especially if you can get it in the morning papers—if you can have it announced: ‘John Jones gave \$50 to build the Tabernacle.’”

That is the way some of the people give donations to God’s cause; they give in a patronizing way. But in this manner God will not accept it. If your heart does not go with your gift, God will not accept it.

This Pharisee says: “I give one-tenth of all that I have; I keep up the services in the Temple; I fast twice a week.”

He fasted twice a week, although once was only called for, and he thought because of this he was far above other men. A great many people nowadays think because they do not eat meat on Fridays, but only fish, they deserve great credit, although they go on sinning all the week. [167]

Look at this prayer! There is no confession there. He had got so bad, and the devil had so covered up his sins, that he was above confession.

The first thing we have to do when we come to God is to confess. If there is any sin clustering around the heart, bear in mind we can have no communion with God. It is because we have sin about our hearts that our prayers do not go any higher than our head. We can not get God’s favor if we have any iniquity in our hearts.

People, like the Pharisee, have only been educated to pray. If they did not pray every night their consciences would trouble them, and they would get out of bed and say their prayers; but the moment they get off their knees, perhaps, you may hear them swearing.

A man may just as well get a string of beads and pray to them. It would do him as much good.

This Pharisee’s prayer showed no spirit of contrition; there was no petition; he did not ask any thing from God. This is a queer kind of prayer:

“Lord, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are—extortionate, unjust, adulterous—or even as the poor publican.”

Not a petition in his prayer. It was a prayerless prayer—it was downright mockery. But how many men have just got into that cradle and been rocked to sleep by the devil!

A short time ago I put this question to a man:

“Are you a Christian?”

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“Of course I am; I say my prayers every night.”

“But do you ever pray?”

“Didn’t I tell you I prayed?”

“But do you ever pray?”

“Why, of course I do; haven’t I said so?”

I found that he prayed, but he only went through the form, and, after a little, I found that he had been in the habit of swearing.

“How is this?” I asked. “Swearing and praying! Do your prayers ever go any higher than your head?”

“Well, I have sometimes thought that they did not.”

My friends, if you are not in communion with God your prayers are but forms; you are living in formalism, and your prayers will go no higher than your head.

How many people just go through the form! They can not rest unless they say their prayers. How many are there with whom it is only a matter of education?

But this Pharisee trusted in his own righteousness; he ignored the mercy of God and the love of Jesus. He was measuring himself by his own rule. Now, if you want to measure yourself, do it by God’s law—by God’s requirements.

A great many people have a rule of their own, by which they measure themselves, and by that rule they are perfectly ready and willing to forgive themselves.

So it was with this Pharisee. The idea of coming to God and asking His forgiveness never enters his mind.

While talking to a man—one of those Pharisees—some time ago, about God and the need of Christ, he said to me:

“I can do without Christ; I do not want Him. I am ready to stand before God any time.” [169]

That man was trusting in his own righteousness.

Now, take a good look at this Pharisee. You know, I have an idea that the Bible is like an album. I go into a man’s house, and, while waiting for him, I take up an album from a table and open it.

I look at a picture.

“Why, that looks like a man I know.”

I turn over and look at another.

“Well, I know that man.”

By-and-by, I come upon another.

“Why, that man looks like my brother.”

I am getting pretty near home. I keep turning over the leaves.

“Well, I declare! Here is a man who lives in the same street I do. Why, he is my next-door neighbor.”

Then I come upon another, and I see—myself.

My friends, if you read your Bibles, you will find your own pictures there. It will just describe you.

Now, it may be there is some Pharisee here tonight. If there is, let him turn to the third chapter of John, and see what Christ said to the Pharisee:

“Except a man be born again, he can not enter the kingdom of God.”

Nicodemus, no doubt, was one of the fairest specimens of a man in Jerusalem in those days, yet he had to be born again, else he could not enter into the kingdom of God.

“But,” you may say, “I am not a Pharisee. I am a poor and miserable sinner—too bad to come to Him.” Well, turn to the woman of Samaria, and see what He said to her.

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See what a difference there was between that publican and that Pharisee. There was as great a distance between them as between the Sun and the Moon.

One was in the very highest station, and the other occupied the very worst station. One had only himself and his sins to bring to God, and the other was trying to bring in his position and his aristocracy.

I tell you, when a man gets a true sight of himself, all his position and station and excellences drop.

See this prayer:

“I thank God.”

“I am not.”

“I fast.”

“I give.”

“I possess.”

Why, if he had delivered a long prayer, and the copy had been put into the printers’ hands, they would have had to send out for some “I’s.”

“I thank God,” “I,” “I,” “I.”

When a man prays—not with himself, but to God—he does not exalt himself; he does not pass a eulogy on himself. He falls flat down in the dust before God. In that prayer you do not find him thanking God for what He had done for him. It was a heartless and prayerless prayer—merely a form.

I hope the day will come when formal prayer will be a thing of the past. I think the reason why we can not get more people out to the meetings is because we have too many formal prayers in the churches. These formal Christians get up, like this Pharisee, and thank God that they are better than other men; but when a man gets a look at himself he comes in the spirit of the publican.

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You see this Pharisee standing and praying with himself, but God could not give him any thing. He was too full of egotism—too full of himself. There was no religion in it. God could not bless him.

Now, for a moment, take a look at that poor publican. Just give his prayer your attention.

There was no capital “I” there—no exalting of himself. “God be merciful to this Pharisee; God be merciful to the other people who have injured me; God be merciful to the church members who have not been true to their belief.”

Was that his prayer?

Thank God, he got to himself. “God be merciful to me, a sinner.” It was very short. He had got his eye upon himself; he saw that his heart was vile; he could not lift his eyes to Heaven. But, thank God, he could lift his heart to Heaven.

There is not a poor publican in the audience tonight but can send up this prayer. No matter what your past life has been—no matter if it has been as black as hell—if you but send up the prayer it will be heard. He did not buy his own righteousness; and God heard his appeal.

Spurgeon, speaking of that publican, said he had the soundest theology of any man in England. He came before God, struck his hand on his heart, and cried: “God be merciful to me, a sinner.”

Think of that poor widow at Nain.

She is an old woman now; and her only son, who is the staff of her life, is sick.

How she watches him; sits up all night to see that he has his medicine at the right time; sits by his bedside all day, fanning him, keeping away the flies, moistening his parched lips with water!

Every thing he asks for she brings.

The very best doctor in Nain is sent for; and when he comes and feels the pulse of the young man and looks at his tongue, he shakes his head; and then the poor woman knows there is no hope for her boy.

What an awful thought!

“My son—my only son—must die! What will become of me then?”

Sure enough, the doctor is right; and in a little while the fever comes to its crisis, and the poor boy dies, with his head upon his mother's bosom.

The people come in and try to comfort the bereaved mother; but it is of no use. Her heart is broken; and she wishes she were dead, too.

Some of you know what it is to look your last upon the faces of those you love. Some of you mothers have wept hot tears upon the cold faces of your sons.

Well, they make him ready for burial; and when the time comes, they celebrate the funeral service, and place him on a bier to carry him away to the grave.

What a sad procession!

Just as they come out of the city gates, they see a little company of thirteen dusty-looking travelers, coming up the road. [173]

There is One among them who is tall and far fairer than the sons of men.

Who can He be?

He is moved with compassion when He sees this little funeral procession; and it does not take Him long to find out that this woman who walks next the bier is a poor widow, whose only son she is following in sadness to the grave.

He tells the bearers to put down the bier; and while the mother wonders what is to be done, He bends tenderly over the dead man, and speaks to him in a low and sweet voice:

“Arise!”

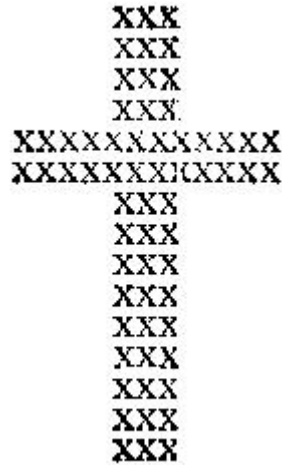
And the dead man hears Him. His body begins to move; the man that was dead is struggling with his grave clothes; they unbind them, and now he sits up.

He leaps off the bier, catches sight of his mother, remembers that he was dead and is now alive again. He takes his mother in his arms, kisses her again and again, and then turns to look at the Stranger who has wrought this miracle upon him.

He is ready to do any thing for that Man—ready to follow Him to the death. But Jesus does not ask that of him. He knows his mother needs him; and so He does not take him away to be one of His disciples, but gives him back to his old mother.

I would have liked to see that young man re-entering the city of Nain, arm-in-arm with his mother. What do you suppose he said to the people, who looked at him with wonder? [174] Would he not confess that Jesus of Nazareth had raised him from the dead? Would he not go everywhere, declaring what the Lord had done for his dead body?

Oh, how I love to preach Christ, who can stand over all the graves, and say to all the dead bodies: "Arise!"



ROCK OF AGES.

[175]

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee!
Let the water and the blood
From Thy riven side which flowed
Be of sin the double cure—
Cleanse from guilt and make me pure.

In my hand no price I bring;
Simply to Thy cross I cling.
Naked—come to Thee for dress;
Helpless—look to Thee for grace;
Foul—I to Thy fountain fly;
Cleanse me, Savior, or I die!

Not the labors of my hands
Can fulfill Thy law's demands.
Could my zeal no respite know—
Could my tears for ever flow—
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone!

While I draw this fleeting breath,
When my eye-strings break in death,
When I soar to worlds unknown,
See Thee on Thy judgment throne—
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee!

WHERE HE LEADS I'LL FOLLOW.

[176]

Sweet are the promises, kind is the word—
Dearer far than any message man ever heard!
Pure was the mind of Christ—sinless I see;
He the great example is, and pattern for me.

Where He leads I'll follow—
Follow all the way!
Where He leads I'll follow—
Follow Jesus every day!

Sweet is the tender love Jesus has shown—
Sweeter far than any love that mortals have known!
Kind to the erring one, faithful is He;
He the great example is, and pattern for me!

Where He leads I'll follow—
Follow all the way!
Where He leads I'll follow—
Follow Jesus every day!

List to His loving words: "Come unto Me."
Weary, heavy-laden, there is sweet rest for thee!
Trust in His promises—faithful and sure;
Lean upon the Savior, and thy soul is secure.

Where He leads I'll follow—
Follow all the way!
Where He leads I'll follow—
Follow Jesus every day!

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BIBLE CHARACTERS
AS DEPICTED BY THE BRILLIANT AND NOTED PREACHER,
T. DE WITT TALMAGE.

ATHALIAH

Grandmothers are more lenient with their children's children than they were with their own.

At forty years of age, if discipline be necessary, chastisement is used; but at seventy, the grandmother, looking upon the misbehavior of the grandchild, is apologetic and disposed to substitute confectionery for whip.

There is nothing more beautiful than this mellowing of old age toward childhood. Grandmother takes out her pocket handkerchief and wipes her spectacles and puts them on, and looks down into the face of her mischievous and rebellious descendant, and says:

"I don't think he meant to do it; let him off this time; I'll be responsible for his behavior in the future."

My mother, with the second generation around her—a boisterous crew—said one day: “I suppose they ought to be disciplined, but I can not do it. Grandmothers are not fit to bring up grandchildren.”

But here we have a grandmother of a different hue.

I have been at Jerusalem, where the occurrence that I shall describe took place, and the whole scene came vividly before me while I was going over the site of the ancient Temple and climbing the towers of the king’s palace. [178]

Here is old Athaliah, the queenly murderess.

She ought to have been honorable. Her father was a king. Her husband was a king. Her son was a king. And yet we find her plotting for the extermination of the entire royal family, including her own grandchildren.

The executioner’s knives are sharpened; the palace is red with the blood of princes and princesses. On all sides are shrieks, and hands thrown up, and struggle and death groan. No mercy! Kill! Kill!

But while the ivory floors of the palace run with carnage and the whole land is under the shadow of a great horror, a fleet-footed woman—a clergyman’s wife, Jehosheba by name—stealthily approaches the imperial nursery, seizes upon the grandchild that had, somehow, as yet escaped massacre, wraps it up tenderly but in haste, snuggles it against her, flies down the palace stairs—her heart in her throat, lest she be discovered in this Christian abduction.

Get her out of the way as quickly as you can, for she carries a precious burden—even a young king.

With this youthful prize she presses into the room of the ancient Temple, the church of olden time, unwraps the young king and puts him down, sound asleep as he is, and unconscious of the peril that has been threatened; and there for six years he is kept secreted in that church apartment.

Meanwhile, old Athaliah smacks her lips with satisfaction and thinks that all the royal family are dead. [179]

But the six years expire, and it is now time for the young Joash to come forth and take the throne, and to push back into disgrace and death old Athaliah.

The arrangements are all made for political revolution. The military come and take full possession of the Temple, swear loyalty to the boy Joash, and then stand around for his defense. See the sharpened swords and burnished shields! Every thing is ready.

Now Joash, half affrighted at the armed tramp of his defenders, scared at the vociferation of his admirers, is brought forth in full regalia. The scroll of authority is put into his hands, the coronet of government is put on his brow, and the glad people clap and wave, huzza and trumpet.

Athaliah is aroused, and asks:

“What is that? What is that sound over there in the Temple?”

She hurries out to see, and on the way they meet her and say:

“Why, haven’t you heard? You thought you had slain all the royal family, but Joash has come to light.”

Then the queenly murderess, frantic with rage, laid hold on her mantle and tore it to tatters, and cried out until she foamed at the mouth:

“You have no right to crown my grandson. You have no right to take the government from my shoulders. Treason! Treason!”

While she stood there, making this cry, the military started for her arrest, and she took a short cut through a back door of the Temple and ran through the royal stables; but the battle-axes of the military fell on her in the barn-yard, and for many a day, when the horses were being unloosed from the chariot after drawing out young Joash, the fiery steeds would snort and rear while passing the place, as they smelt the taint.

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The first thought which I hand you from this subject is that the extermination of righteousness is an impossibility.

When a woman is good she is apt to be very good, and when she is bad she is apt to be very bad; and this Athaliah was one of the latter sort. She would exterminate the last scion of the house of David, through whom Jesus was to come. There was plenty of work for embalmers and undertakers. She would clear the land of all God-fearing and God-loving people. She would put an end to every thing that could in any wise interfere with her imperial criminality.

Athaliah folds her hands and says: "The work is done; it is completely done."

Is it?

In the swaddling clothes of that church apartment are wrapped the cause of God and the cause of good government.

That is the scion of the house of David; it is Joash, the Christian reformer; it is Joash, the friend of God; it is Joash, the demolisher of Baalish idolatry. Rock him tenderly; nurse him gently.

Athaliah, you may kill all the other children, but you can not kill him. Eternal defenses are thrown all around him, and this clergyman's wife, Jehosheba, will snatch him up from the palace nursery, and will run up and down with him into the house of the Lord, and there she will hide him for six years, and at the end of that time he will come forth for your dethronement and utter obliteration.

[181]

DAVID.

David, the shepherd boy, is watching his father's sheep.

They are pasturing on the very hills where afterward a Lamb was born of which you have heard much—"the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

David, the shepherd boy, was beautiful, brave, musical and poetic. I think he often forgot the sheep in his reveries. There in the solitude he struck the harp-string that is thrilling through all ages. David the boy was at work gathering the material for David the poet and for David the man.

Like other boys, David was fond of using his knife among the saplings, and he had noticed the exuding of the juice of the tree; and when he became a man he said: "The trees of the Lord are full of sap."

David the boy, like other boys, had been fond of hunting the birds' nests, and he had driven the old stork off the nest to find how many eggs were under her; and when he became a man he said: "As for the stork, the fir trees are her house."

In boyhood he had heard the terrific thunder storm that frightened the red deer into premature sickness; and when he became a man he said: "The voice of the Lord maketh the hinds to calve."

[182]

David the boy had lain upon his back, looking up at the stars and examining the sky, and to his boyish imagination the sky seemed like a piece of divine embroidery, the divine fingers working in the threads of light and the beads of stars; and when he grew up he wrote:

“When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers.”

When he became an old man, thinking of the goodness of God, he seemed to hear again the bleating of his father’s sheep across many years, and to think of the time when he tended them on the Bethlehem hills, and he cries out: “The Lord is my shepherd.”

There is one scene in the life of David that you may not have pondered.

You have seen him with a harp, playing the devil out of Saul; with a sling, smashing the skull of Goliath; with a sword, hacking to pieces the Philistines; with a scepter, ruling a vast realm; with a psalm, gathering all nations into doxology.

But now we have David playing the fool.

He has been anointed king, yet he is in exile and is passing incognito among the Gathites. They are beginning to suspect who he is, and they say:

“I wonder if this is not the warrior, King David? It looks like him. Is not this the man about whom they used to make poetry, and about whom they composed a dance, so that the maidens of the city, reeling now on one foot and now on the other, used to sing: ‘Saul has slain his thousands, but David has slain his tens of thousands’? Yes, he is very much like David; he must be David; he is David.” [183]

David, to escape their hands, pretends to be demented; and he said within himself:

“If I act crazily, then these people will not injure me. No one would be so much of a coward as to assault a madman.”

So, one day, while these Gathites are watching King David with increased suspicion, they see him standing by the door, running his hands meaninglessly up and down the panels—scrabbling on the door as though he would climb up, his mouth wide open, drooling like an infant.

I suppose the boys of the streets threw missiles at him, but the sober people of the town said:

“This is not fair. Do you not see that he has lost his reason? Do not touch this madman. Hands off! Hands off!”

So David escaped. But what an exhibition he made of himself before all the ages!

There was a majesty in King Lear’s madness after Regan and Goneril, his daughters, had persuaded him to banish their sister, Cordelia, and all the friends of the drama have been thrilled with that spectacle.

The craziness of Meg Merrilies was weird and imposing, and formed the most telling passage in Sir Walter Scott’s “Guy Mannering.”

There was a fascination about the insanity of Alexander Cruden, who made the best concordance of the Bible that the world ever saw—made it between the mad houses.

But there was nothing grand, nothing weird, nothing majestic, nothing sublime about this simulation on the part of David. Instead of trusting in the Lord, as he had trusted on other occasions, he gathers before him a vast audience of all generations that were to come, and, standing on that conspicuous stage of history, in view of all the ages, he impersonates the slavering idiot. [184]

Taking the behavior of David as a suggestion, I wish to show you how many of the wise, the brave and the regal sometimes play the fool. Those men as badly play the fool as did David who, in any crisis of life, take their case out of the hand of God.

David, in this case, acted as though there were no God to lift him out of the predicament. What a contrast between his behavior, when this brave little man stood up in front of the giant ten feet in height, looking into his face, and this time, when he debased himself and

bedraggled his manhood by affecting insanity in order that he might escape from the grip of the Gathites! In the one case, he played the hero; in the other case, he played the fool.

There came a time when David fled from his pursuers. The world runs very fast when it is chasing a good man. The country is trying to catch David, and to slay him. David goes into the house of a priest, and asks him for a sword or spear with which to defend himself.

The priest, not being accustomed to use deadly weapons, tells David that he can not supply him; but suddenly the priest thinks of an old sword that had been carefully wrapped up and laid away—the very sword that Goliath formerly used. He takes down that sword, and while he is unwrapping the sharp, glittering and memorable blade it flashes upon David's mind that this is the very sword that was used against himself when he was in the fight with Goliath, and David can hardly keep his hand off it until the priest has unwound it. [185]

David stretches out his hand toward that old sword, and says: "There is none like it; give it me." In other words: "I want in my own hand the sword that has been used against me, and against the cause of the Lord." So it was given him.

Here passes through these streets, as in imagination I see him, a wonderful man. Can it be that I am in the very city where lived and reigned David—conqueror, king and poet? David—great for power and great for grief!

He was wrapped up in his boy, Absalom, who was a splendid boy, judged by the rules of worldly criticism. From the crown of his head to the sole of his foot there was not a single blemish. The Bible says that he had such a luxuriant shock of hair that, when once a year it was shorn, what was cut off weighed over three pounds.

But, notwithstanding all his brilliancy of appearance, he was a bad boy, and broke his father's heart. He was plotting to get the throne of Israel. He had marshaled an army to overthrow his father's government.

The day of battle had come; the conflict was begun. David, the father, sat between the gates of the palace, waiting for tidings of the conflict.

Oh, how rapidly his heart beat with emotion! Two great questions were to be decided—the safety of his boy and the continuance of the throne of Israel.

After a while a servant, standing on the top of the house, looks off, and he sees some one running. He is coming with great speed, and the man on top of the house announces the coming of the messenger. [186]

David watches and waits, and as soon as the messenger from the field of battle comes within hailing distance the father cries out. Is it a question in regard to the establishment of his throne? Does he say: "Have the armies of Israel been victorious? Am I to continue in my imperial authority? Have I overthrown my enemies?" Oh, no.

There is one question that springs from his heart to his lip, and springs from the lip into the ear of the besweated and bedusted messenger flying from the battle field—the question:

"Is the young man—Absalom—safe?"

When it was told to King David that, although his army had been victorious, his son had been slain, the father turned his back upon the congratulations of the nation, and went up the stairs of his palace, his heart breaking as he went, wringing his hands sometimes, and then again pressing them against his temples, as though he would press them in, crying:

"O Absalom! My son! My son! Would to God I had died for thee, O Absalom! My son! My son!"

Stupendous grief of David, resounding through all succeeding ages!

[187]

DEBORAH.

A text of five words, and four of them one and the same, is found in the fifth chapter and twelfth verse of Judges: “Awake, awake, Deborah; awake, awake!”

It seems that the men of Israel had lost their courage. Trampled into the dust by their oppressors, the cowards had not spirit to rise.

Their vineyards destroyed, their women dishonored, their children slain, the land was dying for a leader worthy of the cause.

A holy woman by the name of Deborah saw the desolation, and, putting her trust in the Lord, sounded the battle-cry, and by the help of General Barak launched into the plain ten thousand armed men.

The Canaanites, of course, came out with a larger force. They came out against Israel with nine hundred iron chariots, each of these iron chariots having attached to the sides of it long and sharp scythes, so that when these engines of war were driven down to battle, each one of the nine hundred was ready to cut two great swaths of death.

But, when God gives a mission to a woman, He also gives her strength and grace to execute it.

The nine hundred iron chariots of the Canaanites could not save them. They fly! They fly—horse and horseman, chariot and charioteer, officers and troops—in one wild and terrific overthrow. Sisera, their leader, is so frightened in the conflict that he can not wait until his team turns around. He leaps from the chariot and starts, full run, for the mountains.

Then this epic of the text was composed to celebrate the grand womanly triumph: [188]
“Awake, awake, Deborah; awake, awake!”

DORCAS.

Impressed as I am with the mosque at Joppa, the first I ever saw, and stirred as I am with the fact that this harbor once floated the great rafts of Lebanon cedar from which the Temple at Jerusalem was builded, Solomon’s oxen drawing the logs through this very town on the way to Jerusalem, nothing can make me forget that this Joppa was the birthplace of the sewing society that has blessed the poor of all succeeding ages in all lands.

The disasters to Joppa when Judas Maccabæus set it on fire and when Napoleon had five hundred prisoners massacred in this neighborhood can not make me forget that one of the most magnificent charities of the centuries was started in this seaport by Dorcas—a woman who with her needle embroidered her name ineffaceably into the beneficence of the world.

I see her sitting in the village home. In the door way and around about the building, and even in the room where she sits, are the pale faces of the poor.

She listens to their plaint.

She pities their woe.

She makes garments for them, and she adjusts the manufactured articles to suit the bent form of this invalid woman and to that cripple who comes crawling upon his hands and knees. She gives a coat to this one and sandals to that one. With the gifts she mingles prayers and tears and Christian encouragement. [189]

Then she goes out to be greeted on the street corners by those whom she has blessed, and all through the way of her walk the cry is heard: “Dorcas is coming!”

The sick look up gratefully in her face as she puts a hand on the burning brow, and the lost and the abandoned start up with hope as they hear her gentle voice, as though an angel had addressed them; and as she goes out the lane, eyes half put out with sin think they see a halo of light about her brow and a trail of glory in her pathway.

That night a half-paid shipwright climbs the hill and reaches home. There he sees his little boy well clad, and he asks: "Where did these clothes come from?" They tell him: "Dorcas has been here."

In another place, a woman is trimming a lamp; Dorcas brought the oil.

In another place, a family that had not been at table for many a week are gathered now, for Dorcas brought them bread.

But there is a sudden pause in that woman's ministry. They say: "Where is Dorcas? Why, we have not seen her for many a day. Where is Dorcas?"

Then one of these poor people goes up and knocks at the door, and finds the mystery solved. All through the haunts of wretchedness the news comes:

"Dorcas is sick!"

No bulletin flashing from the palace gate, telling the stages of a king's disease, is more anxiously waited for than the news from this sick benefactress. Alas for Joppa! There is weeping and wailing. That voice which has uttered so many cheerful words is now hushed; that hand which had made so many garments for the poor is cold and still; that star which had poured light into the midnight of wretchedness is dimmed by the blinding mists that go up from the river of death. [190]

In every God-forsaken place in that town; wherever there is hunger and no bread; wherever there is guilt and no commiseration; wherever there is a broken heart and no comfort—there are despairing looks, streaming eyes and frantic gesticulations as they cry:

"Dorcas is dead!"

They send for the apostle, Peter. He edges his way through the crowd around the door, and stands in the presence of the dead. What expostulation and grief all about him!

Here stand some of the poor people, who show the garments which this good woman had made for them. Their grief can not be appeased.

Peter, the apostle, wants to perform a miracle. He will not perform it amid the excited crowd, so he kindly orders that the whole room be cleared. The door is shut against the populace.

The apostle stands now with the dead. Oh, it is a serious moment, you know, when you are alone with a lifeless body! The apostle gets down on his knees and prays, and then he comes to the lifeless form of this one all ready for the sepulcher, and in the strength of Him who is the resurrection he exclaims:

"Tabitha, arise!"

There is a stir in the fountains of life; the heart flutters; the nerves thrill; the cheek flushes; the eye opens; she sits up! [191]

We see in this subject Dorcas the disciple, Dorcas the benefactress, Dorcas the lamented, Dorcas the resurrected.

If I had not seen that word disciple in my text, I yet would have known this woman was a Christian. Such music as that never came from a heart which is not both chorded and strung by Divine grace.

Before I show you the needle-work of this woman, I want to show you her regenerated heart—the source of a pure life and of all Christian charities.

I wish that the wives and mothers and daughters and sisters of this congregation would imitate Dorcas in her discipleship. Before you sit with the Sabbath class, before you cross the threshold of the hospital, before you carry a pack of tracts down the street, before you enter upon the temptations and trials of tomorrow, I charge you, in the name of God and by the turmoil and tumult of the Judgment Day, O women, that you attend to the first, last and greatest duty of your life—the seeking for God and being at peace with Him.

Now, by the courtesies of society, you are deferred to, and he were far less than a man who would not oblige you with kind attentions; but when the trumpet shall sound, there will be an uproar, and a wreck of mountain and continent, and no human arm can help you. Amidst the rising of the dead, and amidst the boiling of the seat and amidst the live, leaping thunders of the flying heavens, there will be no chance for these courtesies. [192]

But, on that day, calm and placid will be every woman's heart who has put her trust in Christ; calm, notwithstanding all the tumult, as though the fire in the heavens were only the gildings of an autumnal sunset—as though the peal of the trumpet were only the harmony of an orchestra—as though the awful voices of the sky were but a group of friends bursting through a gateway at eventime with laughter, and shouting: "Dorcas the disciple!"

Would to God that every Mary and every Martha would this day sit down at the feet of Jesus!

Further, we see Dorcas the benefactress.

History has told the story of the crown; the epic poet has sung of the sword; the pastoral poet, with his verses full of the redolence of clover-tops and arustle with the silk of the corn, has sung the praises of the plow. I tell you the praises of the needle.

From the fig-leaf robe prepared in the Garden of Eden to the last stitch taken last night on some garment for some church fair, the needle has wrought wonders of kindness, generosity and benefaction. It adorned the girdle of the high priest; it fashioned the curtains in the ancient Tabernacle; it cushioned the chariots of King Solomon; it provided the robes of Queen Elizabeth; and in high places and in low places, by the fire of the pioneer's back-log and under the flash of the chandelier—everywhere, it has clothed nakedness, it has preached the Gospel, it has overcome hosts of penury and want with the war-cry of: "Stitch, stitch, stitch!" The operatives have found a livelihood by it, and through it the mansions of the employers have been constructed. [193]

Amidst the greatest triumphs in all ages and lands, I set down the conquests of the needle.

I admit its crimes; I admit its cruelties. It has had more martyrs than the fire; it has butchered more souls than the Inquisition; it has punctured the eye; it has pierced the side; it has struck weakness into the lungs; it has sent madness into the brain; it has filled the potter's field; it has pitched whole armies of the suffering into crime, wretchedness and woe.

But, now that I am talking of Dorcas and her ministries to the poor, I shall speak only of the charities of the needle.

This woman was a representative of all those women who make garments for the destitute, who knit socks for the barefooted, who prepare bandages for the lacerated, who fix up boxes of clothing for Western missionaries, who go into the asylums of the suffering and destitute bearing that Gospel which is sight for the blind and hearing for the deaf, and which makes the lame man leap like a hart, and brings the dead to life with immortal health bounding in their pulses.

What a contrast between the practical benevolence of this woman and a great deal of the charity of this day!

Dorcas did not spend her time planning how the poor of Joppa were to be relieved; she took her needle and relieved them. She was not like those persons who sympathize with

imaginary sorrows, and go out in the street and laugh at the boy who has upset his basket of cold victuals; nor was she like that charity which makes a rousing speech on the benevolent platform, and goes out to kick the beggar from the step, crying: "Hush your miserable howling!" [194]

The sufferers of the world want not so much theory as practice; not so much tears as dollars; not so much kind wishes as loaves of bread; not so much smiles as shoes; not so much "God bless you!" as jackets and frocks. I will put one earnest Christian man, who is a hard worker, against five thousand mere theorists on the subject of charity.

There are a great many who have fine ideas about church architecture who never in their lives helped to build a church. There are men who can give you the history of Buddhism and Mohammedanism who never sent a farthing for the evangelization of the adherents of those religions.

There are women who talk beautifully about the suffering in the world who never had the courage, like that of Dorcas, to take up the needle and assault it.

I am glad that there is not a page of the world's history which is not a record of feminine benevolence. God says to all lands and peoples: "Come, now, and hear the widow's mite rattle down into the poor-box."

The Princess of Conti sold all her jewels, that she might help the famine-stricken. Queen Blanche, wife of Louis VIII. of France, hearing that there were some persons unjustly incarcerated in the prisons, went out and took a stick and struck the door, as a signal that all might strike it; and down went the prison door, and out came the prisoners. Queen Maud, the wife of Henry I., went down amidst the poor and washed their sores, and administered to them cordials. Mrs. Retson, at Matagorda, appeared on the battle field while the missiles of death were flying around, and cared for the wounded. [195]

But why go so far back? Why go so far away?

Is there a man or woman in this house who has forgotten the women of the sanitary and Christian Commissions? Has any one forgotten that, before the smoke had gone from Gettysburg and South Mountain, the women of the North met the women of the South on the battle field, forgetting all their animosities while they bound up the wounded and closed the eyes of the slain? Have you forgotten Dorcas, the benefactress?

I come now to speak of Dorcas the lamented. When death struck down that good woman, oh, how much sorrow there was in Joppa!

I suppose there were women living in Joppa possessing larger fortunes; women, perhaps, with more handsome faces; but there was no grief at their departure like this at the death of Dorcas. There was not more turmoil and upturning in the Mediterranean Sea, dashing against the wharves of that seaport, than there were surgings to and fro of grief in Joppa because Dorcas was dead.

There are a great many who go out of life and are unmissed. There may be a very large funeral; there may be a great many carriages and a plumed hearse; there may be high-sounding eulogiums; the bell may toll at the cemetery gate; there may be a very fine marble shaft reared over the resting place. But the whole thing may be a falsehood and a sham.

By this demise the Church of God has lost nothing; the world has lost nothing. It is only a nuisance abated; it is only a grumbler ceasing to find fault; it is only an idler stopped yawning; it is only a dissipated fashionable parted from his wine cellar—while, on the other hand, no useful Christian leaves this world without being missed. The Church of God cries out like the prophet: "Howl, fir tree, for the cedar has fallen." Widowhood comes and shows the garments which the departed had made. Orphans are lifted up to look into the calm face of the sleeping benefactress. Reclaimed vagrancy comes and kisses the cold brow of her [196]

who charmed it away from sin, and all through the streets of Joppa there is mourning—mourning because Dorcas is dead.

I suppose you have read of the fact that when Josephine was carried out to her grave there were a great many men and women of pomp and pride and position that went out after her; but I am most affected by the story of history that on that day there were ten thousand of the poor of France who followed her coffin, weeping and wailing until the air rang again, because when they lost Josephine they lost their last earthly friend.

Oh, who would not rather have such obsequies than all the tears that were ever poured in the lachrymals that have been exhumed from ancient cities! There may be no mass for the dead; there may be no costly sarcophagus; there may be no elaborate mausoleum. But in the damp cellars of the city, and through the lonely huts of the mountain glen, there will be mourning—mourning because Dorcas is dead.

I speak to you of Dorcas the resurrected. The apostle came to where she was, and said: [197] “Arise!” And “she sat up.” In what a short compass the great writer put that: “She sat up!”

Oh, what a time there must have been when the apostle brought her out among her old friends! How the tears of joy must have started! What clapping of hands there must have been! What singing! What laughter! Sound it all through that lane! Shout it down that dark alley! Let all Joppa hear it! Dorcas is resurrected!

You and I have seen the same thing many a time—not a dead body resuscitated, but the deceased coming up again after death in the good accomplished. If a man labors up to fifty years of age, serving God, and then dies, we are apt to think that his earthly work is done. No! His influence on Earth will continue till the world ceases. Services rendered for Christ never stop.

Here is a Christian woman. She toils for the upbuilding of a church through many anxieties, through many self-denials, with prayers and tears, and then she dies. It is fifteen years since she went away. Now the Spirit of God descends upon that church; hundreds of souls stand up and confess the faith of Christ.

Has that Christian woman, who went away fifteen years ago, nothing to do with these things? I see the flowering out of her noble heart. I hear the echo of her footsteps in all these songs over sins forgiven—in all the prosperity of the church. The good that seemed to be buried has come up again. Dorcas is resurrected.

After a while all these womanly friends of Christ will put down their needles for ever. After making garments for others, some one will make a garment for them; the last robe [198] which we shall ever wear—the robe which is for the grave.

You will have heard the last cry of pain. You will have witnessed the last orphanage. You will have come in worn out from your last round of mercy. I do not know where you will sleep, nor what your epitaph will be; but there will be a lamp burning at that tomb and an angel of God guarding it, and through all the long night no rude foot will disturb the dust. Sleep on—sleep on! Soft bed, pleasant shadows, undisturbed repose! Sleep on!

EHUD.

Ehud was a ruler in Israel. He was left-handed, and, what was peculiar about the tribe of Benjamin, to which he belonged, there were in it seven hundred left-handed men; and yet, so dextrous had they all become in the use of the left hand, the Bible says they could sling stones at a hair's breadth and not miss.

Well, there was a king by the name of Eglon, who was an oppressor of Israel. He imposed upon them an outrageous tax.

Ehud, the man of whom I first spoke, had a divine commission to destroy that oppressor. He came, pretending that he was going to pay the tax, and asked to see King Eglon. He was told the king was in the Summer house, the place to which his majesty retired when the heat was too great to sit in the palace. This Summer house was a place surrounded by flowers, springing fountains and trees—the latter filled with warbling birds.

Ehud entered the Summer house, and said to King Eglon that he had a secret errand with him. Immediately all the attendants were waved out of the royal presence. King Eglon rises up to receive the messenger. Ehud, the left-handed man, puts his left hand to his right side, pulls out a dagger, and thrusts Eglon through until the haft went in after the blade. Eglon falls. [199]

Ehud comes forth to blow a trumpet of right amidst the mountains of Ephraim; and a great host is marshaled, and proud Moab submits to the conqueror, and Israel is free.

I learn first, from this subject, the power of left-handed men. There are men who, by physical organization, have as much strength in their left hand as in their right hand; but there is something in the writing of the fifteenth verse of the third chapter of Judges that implies Ehud had some defect in his right hand, which compelled him to use the left.

Oh, the power of left-handed men! Genius is often self-observant, careful of itself, not given to much toil, burning incense to its own aggrandizement; while many a man, with no natural endowments, actually defective in physical and mental organization, has an earnestness for the right, a patient industry, an all-consuming perseverance, which achieve marvels for the kingdom of the Lord. Though left-handed as Ehud, they can strike down a sin as imperial as Eglon.

But I do not suppose that Ehud, the first time he took a sling in his left hand, could throw a stone a hair's breadth, and not miss. I suppose it was practice that gave him the wonderful dexterity.

Go forth to your spheres of duty, and do not be discouraged if, in your first attempts, you miss the mark. Ehud missed it. [200]

ESAU.

Esau had the birthright given him.

In the olden times this meant not only temporal but spiritual blessing.

One day Esau took this birthright and traded it off for something to eat. Oh, the folly! But let us not be too severe upon him, for some of us have committed the same folly.

After Esau had thus parted with his birthright, he wanted to get it back. Just as though you, tomorrow morning, should take all your notes and bonds and government securities, and should go into a restaurant, and in a fit of restlessness and hunger throw all those securities on the counter and ask for a plate of food, making that exchange.

This was the exchange Esau made.

He sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, and he was very sorry about it afterward; but "he found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."

There are sins which, though they may be pardoned, are in some respects irrevocable; and you can find no place for repentance, though you seek it carefully with tears. After wasting forty years, you can not get back the neglected advantages of boyhood and youth.

FELIX AND DRUSILLA.

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A city of marble was Cesarea—wharves of marble, houses of marble, temples of marble. This being the ordinary architecture of the place, you may well imagine something of the splendor of Governor Felix’s residence.

In a room of that palace—floor tessellated, windows curtained, ceiling fretted, the whole scene affluent with Tyrian purple, and statues, and pictures, and carvings—sat a very dark-complexioned man by the name of Felix, and beside him sat a woman of extraordinary beauty, whom he had stolen by breaking up another’s domestic circle.

She was only eighteen years of age, a princess by birth, and unwittingly waiting for her doom—that of being buried alive in the ashes and scoria of Mount Vesuvius, which in sudden eruption, one day, put an end to her abominations.

Well, one afternoon Drusilla, seated in the palace, weary with the magnificent stupidities of the place, says to Felix:

“You have a very distinguished prisoner, I believe, by the name of Paul. Do you know he is one of my countrymen? I should very much like to see him, and I should very much like to hear him speak, for I have heard so much about his eloquence.

“Besides that, the other day, when he was being tried in another room of this palace, and the windows were open, I heard the applause that greeted the speech of Lawyer Tertullus, as he denounced Paul. Now, I very much wish I could hear Paul speak. Won’t you let me hear him speak?” [202]

“Yes,” said Felix, “I will. I will order him up now from the guard room.”

The clank of a chain is heard coming up the marble stairway, there is a shuffle at the door, and in comes Paul—a little old man, prematurely old through exposure—only sixty years of age, but looking as though he were eighty.

Paul bows very courteously before Governor Felix and the beautiful woman by his side. They say:

“Paul, we have heard a great deal about your speaking. Give us, now, a specimen of your eloquence.”

Oh, if there ever was a chance for a man to show off, Paul had a chance there!

He might have harangued them about Grecian art, about the wonderful water-works which he had seen at Corinth, about the Acropolis by moonlight, about prison life in Philippi, about “What I Saw in Thessalonica,” or about the old mythologies.

But, instead, Paul said to himself: “I am now on the way to martyrdom, and this man and woman will soon be dead; so this is my only opportunity to talk to them about the things of eternity.”

And, just there and then, there broke in upon the scene a peal of thunder. It was the voice of Judgment Day speaking through the words of the decrepit apostle. As the grand old missionary proceeded with his remarks, the stoop begins to go out of his shoulders, and he rises up, and his countenance is illumined with the glories of a future life, and his shackles rattle and grind as he lifts his fettered arm, and with it hurls upon his abashed auditors the bolts of God’s indignation. [203]

Felix grew very white about the lips. His heart beat unevenly. He put his hand to his brow, as though to stop the quickness and violence of his thoughts. He drew his robe tighter about him, as under a sudden chill. His eyes glare and his knees shake, and, as he clutches the side of his chair in a very paroxysm of terror, he orders the sheriff to take Paul back to the guard room.

“Felix trembled, and said: ‘Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.’”

I propose to give you two or three reasons why I think Felix sent Paul back to the guard room and adjourned this whole subject of religion.

The first reason was: He was unwilling to give up his sins. He looked around; there was Drusilla. He knew that, when he became a Christian, he must send her back to Azizus, her lawful husband; and he said to himself: "I will risk the destruction of my immortal soul sooner than I will do that."

Delilah sheared the locks of Samson; Salome danced Herod into the pit; Drusilla blocked up the way to Heaven for Felix.

Another reason why Felix sent Paul back to the guard room and adjourned this subject was: He was so very busy. In ordinary times he found the affairs of state absorbing, but those were extraordinary times. The whole land was ripe for insurrection. The Sicarii, a band of assassins, were already prowling around the palace, and I suppose he thought: "I can not attend to religion while I am so pressed by affairs of state." It was business, among other things, that ruined his soul. [204]

Aye, with thousands of the present day, it is the annoyance of the kitchen, and the sitting room and the parlor—the wearing economy of trying to meet large expenses with a small income. Ten thousand voices of "business" drown the voice of the Eternal Spirit.

GALLERY OF CHARACTERS.

I see the Gallery of the Prophets and Apostles.

Who are those mighty ones up yonder? Hosea, Jeremiah, Daniel, Isaiah, Paul, Peter, John and James.

There sits Noah, waiting for all the world to come into the ark.

Moses is waiting till the last Red Sea shall divide.

Jeremiah is waiting for the Jews to return.

John of the Apocalypse is waiting for the swearing of the angel that Time shall be no longer.

Glorious spirits! Ye were howled at; ye were stoned; ye were spit upon. They have been in this fight themselves, and they are all with us. Daniel knows all about lions. Paul fought with beasts at Ephesus. For Joseph, a pit; for Daniel, a wild beast den; for David, dethronement and exile; for John the Baptist, a wilderness diet and the executioner's ax; for Peter, a prison; for Paul, shipwreck; for John, desolate Patmos; for Vashti, most insulting cruelty.

In that gallery, prophetic and apostolic, they can not keep their peace. Daniel cries out: [205] "Thy God will deliver thee from the mouth of the lions!" David exclaims: "He will not suffer thy foot to be moved." Isaiah calls out: "Fear not! I am with thee. Be not dismayed." Paul exclaims: "Victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

I see the Angelic Gallery. There they are. There is the angel that swung the sword at the gate of Eden, the same whom Ezekiel saw upholding the throne of God, and from which I look away, for the splendor is insufferable. Here are the guardian angels. That one watched a patriarch; this one protected a child. That one has been pulling a soul out of temptation. All these are messengers of light. Those drove the Spanish Armada on the rocks. This turned Sennacherib's living hosts into a heap of one hundred and eighty-five thousand corpses. Those, yonder, chanted the Christmas carol over Bethlehem, until the chant awoke the shepherds. These, at Creation, stood in the balcony of Heaven, and serenaded the new-born world wrapped in swaddling clothes of light.

And there, holier and mightier than all, is Michael, the archangel. To command an earthly host gives dignity; but this one is leader of the twenty thousand chariots of God, and of the ten thousand times ten thousand angels.

I think God gives command to the archangel, and the archangel to the seraphim, and the seraphim to the cherubim, until all the lower orders of Heaven hear the command and go forth on the high behest.

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GIDEON.

The seventh chapter of the Book of Judges contains a detailed report of the strangest battle ever fought.

God had told Gideon to go down and thrash the Midianites, but his army is too large; for the glory must be given to God, and not to man. And so proclamation is made that all those of the troops who are cowardly, and want to go home, may go; and twenty-two thousand of them scampered away, leaving only ten thousand men.

But God says the army is too large yet; and so He orders these ten thousand remaining to march down through a stream, and commands Gideon to notice in what manner these men drink of the water as they pass through it. If they get down on all-fours and drink, then they are to be pronounced lazy and incompetent for the campaign; but if, in passing through the stream, they scoop up the water in the palm of the hand and drink, and pass on, they are to be the men selected for the battle.

Well, the ten thousand men march down into the stream, and the most of them come down on all-fours, and plunge their mouths, like a horse or an ox, into the water and drink; but there are three hundred men who, instead of stooping, just dip the palm of their hands in the water and bring it to their lips—"lapping as the dog lappeth."

Those three hundred brisk, rapid and enthusiastic men are chosen for the campaign. They are each to take a trumpet in the right hand and a pitcher in the left hand, and a lamp inside the pitcher; and then at a given signal they are to blow the trumpets, throw down the pitchers and hold up the lamps. So it was done.

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It is night. I see a great host of Midianites, sound asleep in the valley of Jezreel.

Gideon comes up with his three hundred picked men, and when every thing is ready the signal is given, and they blow the trumpets, throw down the pitchers and hold up the lamps.

The great host of Midianites, waking out of a sound sleep, take the crash of the crockery and the glare of the lamps for the coming on of an overwhelming foe; and they run, and cut themselves to pieces, and most horribly perish.

The lessons of this subject are very spirited and impressive. This seemingly valueless lump of quartz has the pure gold in it. The smallest dewdrop on the meadow at night has a star sleeping in its bosom, and the most insignificant passage of Scripture has in it a shining truth. God's mint coins no small change.

HEZEKIAH.

Luxurious living is not healthy. The second generation of kings and queens and of lords and princes is apt to be brainless and invalid.

The second crop of grass is almost always short.

Royal blood is generally scrofulous. You will not be surprised, then, to hear that King Hezekiah had disorders which broke out in a carbuncle, virulent and deathful. The Lord told him he must die.

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But Hezekiah did not want to die. He turned his face to the wall, so that his prayer would not be interrupted, and cried to God for his life.

God heard the prayer and answered it, saying: "Behold, I will heal thee." But there was human instrumentality to be employed.

This carbuncle needed a cataplasm. That is a tough word that we use to show how much we know. If in the pulpit we always used words the people understood, we never should have any reputation for learning.

Well, this carbuncle needed a cataplasm, which is a poultice. Your old mother, who doctored her own children in the time when physicians were not as plentiful as they are now, will tell you that the very best poultice is a fig, and that was what was used upon the carbuncle of King Hezekiah. The power of God, accompanied by this human instrumentality, cured the king.

In this age of discovery, when men know so much it kills them, and write so wisely it almost kills us, it has been found out that prayer to God is a dead failure. All things are arranged according to inexorable law.

Ah, my friends, have we been so mistaken? Does God hear and answer prayer, or does He not? Why come out with a challenge in this day, and an experiment, when we have here the very experiment?

Hezekiah was sick unto death; he prayed for his life; God heard him, and added fifteen years to that lifetime. The prayer saved him, the lump of figs applied being merely the God-appointed human instrumentality.

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JEHOIAKIM.

We look in upon a room in Jerusalem. Two men are there.

At the table sits Baruch, the scribe, with a roll of parchment and an iron pen in his hand. The other man is walking the floor, as if strangely agitated.

There is an unearthly appearance about his countenance, and his whole frame quakes as if pressed upon by something unseen and supernal.

This is Jeremiah, in the spirit of prophecy. Being too much excited to write with his own hands the words that the Almighty pours upon his mind about the coming destruction of Jerusalem, he dictates to Baruch, the scribe. It is a seething, scalding, burning denunciation of Jehoiakim, the king, and a prophecy of approaching disasters.

Of course, King Jehoiakim hears of the occurrence, and he sends Jehudi to obtain the parchment and read its contents.

It is winter. Jehoiakim is sitting in his comfortable winter house, by a fire that glows upon the hearth and lights up the faces of the lords, princes and senators who have gathered to hear the reading of the strange document.

Silence is ordered. The royal circle bend forward to listen. Every eye is fixed.

Jehudi unrolls the book gleaming with the words of God, and as he reads Jehoiakim frowns; his eye kindles; his cheek burns; his foot comes down with thundering indignation.

King Jehoiakim snatches the book from Jehudi's hand, feels for his knife, crumples up the book, and goes to work cutting it up with his penknife. Thus God's book was permanently destroyed, and the king escaped.

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Was it destroyed?

Did Jehoiakim escape?

In a little while King Jehoiakim's dead body is hurled forth to blacken in the sun, and the only epitaph that he ever had was that which Jeremiah wrote:

“Buried with the burial of an ass.”

To restore the book which was destroyed, Baruch again takes his seat at the table, while Jeremiah walks the floor and again dictates the terrible prophecy.

It would take more penknives than cutler ever sharpened to hew into permanent destruction the Word of God. He who shoots at this eternal rock will feel the bullet rebound into his own torn and lacerated bosom.

When the Almighty goes forth armed with the thunderbolts of His power, I pity any Jehoiakim who attempts to fight Him with a penknife.

That Oriental scene has vanished, but it has often been repeated. There are thousands of Jehoiakims yet alive who cut the Word of God with their penknives.

King Jehoiakim showed as much indignity toward the scroll when he cut one way as when he cut the other. You might as well behead Moses as to behead Jonah. Yes, Sir, I shall take all of the Bible or none. Men laugh at us as if we were the most gullible people in the world for believing in the genuineness of the Scriptures; but there can be no doubt that the Bible, as we have it, is the same—no more, no less—as God wrote it.

As to the books of the New Testament, the great writers of the different centuries give complete catalogs of their contents. Polycarp, Ignatius and Clemens Romanus, in the first century, give a catalog of the New Testament books; Tertullian and Justin Martyr, in the second century; Cyprian and Origen, in the third century; Augustine, Jerome and Eusebius, in the fourth century. Their catalogs of the different books of the New Testament silence the suggestion that any new books could have been stealthily put in. [211]

As to the books of the Old Testament, Christ sanctioned them by recommending them to the Jews. If any part of the Old Testament had been uninspired, Christ would have said: “Search the Scriptures—all except that Book of Jonah,” or “Search the Scriptures, except the Book of Esther.” When Christ commends to all the canon of the Old Testament Scriptures, He affirms its genuineness.

There never could have been any interpolations in the Bible, for the Jews were constantly watching, and there were men whose lifetime business it was to attend to the keeping of the Scriptures unadulterated.

JEHU.

Joram, wounded in battle, lies in a hospital at Jezreel. The watchman, standing in the tower, looks off and sees against the sky horsemen and chariots.

A messenger is sent out to find who is coming, but he does not return. Another messenger is sent, but with the same result. [212]

The watchman, standing in the tower, looks off upon the advancing troop, and gets more and more excited, wondering who are coming. But long before the cavalcade comes up, the matter is decided.

The watchman can not descry the features of the fast approaching man, but he exclaims:

“I have found out who he is. The driving is like the driving of Jehu, the son of Nimshi; for he driveth furiously.”

By the flash of that one sentence we discover Jehu's character. He came with such speed not merely because he had an errand to do, but because he was urged on by a headlong disposition, which had won him the name of a reckless driver, even among the watchmen.

The chariot plunges until you almost expect the wheels to crash under it, or some of the princely party to be thrown out, or the horses to become utterly unmanageable. But he always goes so; and he becomes a type of that class of persons to be found in all communities, who in worldly and in religious affairs may be styled reckless drivers.

To this same class belong all those who conduct their worldly affairs in a headlong way, without any regard to prudence or righteousness. The minister of Christ does not do his whole duty who does not plainly and unmistakably bring the Gospel face to face with every style of business transaction. We have a right, in a Christian manner, to point out those who, year by year, are jeopardizing not only their welfare, but the interests of many others, by reckless driving.

As a hackman, having lost control of a flying span, is apt to crash into other vehicles, until the property and lives of a whole street are endangered, so a man driving his worldly calling with such loose reins that, after a while, it will not answer his voice or hand, puts in peril the commercial interests of scores or hundreds. [213]

There are today in our midst many of our best citizens who have come down from affluence into straitened circumstances, because there was a partner in their firm, or a cashier in their bank, or an agent representing their house, or one of their largest creditors, who, like Jehu, the son of Nimshi, was a furious driver.

When I see in the community men with large incomes, but larger outgoes, rushing into wildest undertakings, their pockets filled with circulars about gold to be found in Canada and lead in Missouri and fortunes of all sorts everywhere, launching out in expenditures to be met with the thousands they expect to make, and with derision dashing across the path of sober men depending upon their industry and honor for success, I say: "Here he comes, the son of Nimshi, driving furiously."

When I see a young man, not content gradually to come to a competency, careless as to how often he goes upon credit, spending in one night's carousal a month's salary, taking the few hundred dollars given him for getting a start in the purchase of a regal wardrobe, lazy or ashamed to work, anxious only for display, regardless of his father's counsel and the example of the thousands who, in a short while, have wrecked body, mind and soul in scheming or dissipation, I say: "Here he comes, the son of Nimshi, driving furiously."

When this world gets full power over a man, he might as well be dead. He is dead! When Sisera came into the house of Jael, she gave him something to drink, and got him asleep on the floor. Then she took a peg from the side of her tent, and with a mallet she drove the peg through the brain of Sisera into the floor. So the world feeds and flatters a man, and when it has him sound asleep it strikes his life out. [214]

JESUS AT EMMAUS.

Two villagers, having concluded their errand in Jerusalem, have started out at the city gate, and are on their way to Emmaus, the place of their residence.

They go with a sad heart. Jesus, who had been their admiration and their joy, had been basely massacred and entombed.

As with sad face and broken heart they pass on their way, a stranger accosts them. They tell him their anxieties and bitterness of soul. He, in turn, talks to them, mightily expounding the Scriptures. He throws over them the fascination of intelligent conversation. They forget the time, and notice not the objects they pass, and, before they are aware, have come up in front of their house.

They pause before the entrance, and attempt to persuade the stranger to tarry with them. They press upon him their hospitalities. Night is coming on, and he may meet a prowling wild beast, or be obliged to lie unsheltered from the dew. He can not go much farther now. [215]

Why not stop there, and continue their pleasant conversation? They take him by the arm, and they insist on his coming in, addressing him in the words: "Abide with us; for it is toward evening."

The candles are lighted. The tables are spread. Pleasant sociabilities are enkindled. They rejoice in the presence of the stranger guest. He asks a blessing upon the bread they eat, and he hands a piece of it to each.

Suddenly, and with overwhelming power, the thought flashes upon the astonished people: "He is the Lord!" And as they sat in breathless wonder, looking upon the resurrected body of Jesus, He vanished. The interview was ended. He was gone.

The journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus will soon be ended. Our Bible, our common sense and our observation reiterate this fact in tones that we can not mistake, and which we ought not to disregard.

JOB.

Job had it hard. What with boils and bereavements and bankruptcy, and a fool of a wife, he wished he was dead; and I do not blame him.

His flesh was gone, and his bones were dry. His teeth wasted away until nothing but the enamel seemed left. He cried out: "I am escaped with the skin of my teeth."

There has been some difference of opinion about this passage. St. Jerome and Schultens [216] and Doctors Good, Poole and Barnes have all tried their forceps on Job's teeth. You deny my interpretation, and ask: "What did Job know about the enamel of the teeth?"

He knew every thing about it. Dental surgery is almost as old as the Earth. The mummies of Egypt, thousands of years old, are found today with gold filling in their teeth. Ovid, Horace, Solomon and Moses wrote about these important factors of the body.

To other provoking complaints, I think Job had added an exasperating toothache, and, putting his hand against the inflamed face, he said: "I am escaped with the skin of my teeth."

A very narrow escape, you say, for Job's body and soul; but there are thousands of men who make just as narrow escape for their soul. There was a time when the partition between them and ruin was no thicker than a tooth's enamel; but, as Job finally escaped, so, thank God, have they.

Paul expresses the same idea by a different figure when he says that some people are "saved as by fire."

A vessel at sea is in flames. You go to the stern of the vessel. The boats have shoved off. The flames advance; you can no longer endure the heat on your face. You slide down on the side of the vessel, and hold on with your fingers, until the forked tongue of the fire begins to lick the back of your hand, and you feel that you must fall, when one of the life-boats comes back, and the passengers say they think they have room for one more. The boat swings under you—you drop into it—you are saved.

So some men are pursued by temptation until they are partially consumed, but, after all, [217] get off—"saved as by fire."

But I like the figure of Job a little better than that of Paul. With God's help, some men do make narrow escape for their souls, and are saved as "with the skin of their teeth."

JONAH.

God told Jonah to go to Nineveh on an unpleasant errand. He would not go. He thought to get away from his duty by putting to sea.

With pack under his arm, I find him on his way to Joppa, a seaport. He goes down among the shipping, and says to the men lying around on the docks: “Which of these vessels sails today?”

A sailor answers: “Yonder is a vessel going to Tarshish. I think, if you hurry, you may get on board her.”

Jonah steps on board the rough craft, asks how much the fare is, and pays it. Anchor is weighed, sails are hoisted, and the rigging begins to rattle in the strong breeze of the Mediterranean.

Joppa is an exposed harbor, and it does not take long for a vessel to get out on the broad sea. The sailors like what they call a “spanking breeze,” and the plunge of the vessel from the crest of a tall wave is exhilarating to those who are at home on the deep.

But the strong breeze becomes a gale—the gale a hurricane. The affrighted passengers [218] ask the captain if he ever saw any thing like this before. He answers:

“Oh, yes. This is nothing.”

Mariners are slow to admit danger to landsmen.

But, after a while, “crash!” goes the mast, and the vessel pitches so far “a-beam’s-end” that there is a fear she will not be righted. The captain answers few questions, but orders the throwing out of boxes and bundles and so much of the cargo as they can get at.

At last, the captain confesses there is but little hope, and he tells the passengers they had better begin praying. It is seldom that a sea captain is an Atheist. He knows there is a God, for he has seen Him at every point of latitude and longitude between Sandy Hook and Queenstown. Captain Moody, commanding the Cuba, of the Cunard line, at Sunday service led the music and sang like a Methodist.

The captain of this Mediterranean craft, having set the passengers to praying, goes around the vessel, examining it at every point. He descends into the cabin to see whether, in the strong wrestling of the waves, the vessel has sprung a leak, and he finds Jonah asleep.

Jonah had had a wearisome tramp, and had spent many sleepless nights about questions of duty, and he is so sound asleep that all the thunder of the storm and all the screaming of the passengers disturb him not.

The captain lays hold of him, and begins to shake him out of his unconsciousness with the cry: “Don’t you see that we are all going to the bottom? Wake up and go to praying, if you have any God to go to. What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God—if so [219] be that God will think upon us—that we perish not.”

The remainder of the story I will not rehearse, for you know it well. To appease the sea, they threw Jonah overboard.

The devil takes a man’s money, and then sets him down in a poor landing place. The Bible says Jonah paid his fare to Tarshish. But see him get out. The sailors bring him to the side of the ship, lift him over “the guards,” and let him drop with a loud splash into the waves. He paid his fare all the way to Tarshish, but he did not get the worth of his money. Neither does any one who turns his back on his duty and does that which is not right.

The worst sinner on shipboard, considering the light he had, was Jonah. He was a member of the Church, while they were heathen. The sailors were engaged in their lawful calling—following the sea. The merchants on board, I suppose, were going down to Tarshish to barter. But Jonah, notwithstanding his Christian profession, was flying from duty. He was sound asleep in the cabin. Oh, how could the sinner sleep?

If Jonah had been told, one year before, that any heathen sea captain would ever waken him to a sense of danger, he would have scoffed at the idea; but here it is done. So now—men in strangest ways are aroused from spiritual stupor.

If, instead of sleeping, Jonah had been on his knees confessing his sins from the time when he went on board the craft, I think God would have saved him from being thrown overboard. But he woke up too late. The tempest is in full blast, the sea is lashing itself into convulsions, and nothing will stop it now but the overthrow of Jonah. So Jonah was cast overboard. [220]

JOSEPH.

The Egyptian capital was the focus of the world's wealth. In ships and barges, there had been brought to it: From India, frankincense, cinnamon, ivory and diamonds; from the North, marble and iron; from Syria, purple and silk; from Greece, some of the finest horses of the world and some of the most brilliant chariots; and from all the Earth, that which could best please the eye, charm the ear and gratify the taste.

There were temples aflame with red sandstone, entered by gateways that were guarded by pillars bewildering with hieroglyphics, wound with brazen serpents and adorned with winged creatures—their eyes, beaks and pinions glittering with precious stones.

There were marble columns blooming into white flower buds; there were stone pillars, at the top bursting into the shape of the lotus when in full bloom.

Along the avenues—lined with sphinx, fane and obelisk—there were princes who came in gorgeously upholstered palanquin, carried by servants in scarlet, or else were drawn by vehicles, the snow-white horses, golden-bitted and six abreast, dashing at full run.

There were fountains from stone-wreathed vases climbing the ladders of the light. You would hear a bolt shove, and a door of brass would open like a flash of the sun. The surrounding gardens were saturated with odors that mounted the terrace, dripped from the arbors and burned their incense in the Egyptian noon. [221]

On the floors of mosaic the glories of Pharaoh were spelled out in letters of porphyry, beryl and flame. There were ornaments twisted from the wood of the tamarisk, embossed with silver breaking into foam. There were footstools made out of a single precious stone. There were beds fashioned out of a crouched lion in bronze. There were chairs spotted with the sleek hide of the leopard. There were sofas footed with the claws of wild beasts, and armed with the beaks of birds.

As you stand on the level beach of the sea on a Summer day, and look each way, there are miles of breakers, white with the ocean foam, dashing shoreward; so it seemed as if the sea of the world's pomp and wealth in the Egyptian capital for miles and miles flung itself up into white breakers of marble temple, mausoleum and obelisk.

This was the place where Joseph, the shepherd boy, was called to stand next to Pharaoh in honor.

What a contrast between this scene and his humble starting—between this scene and the pit into which his brothers threw him! Yet Joseph was not forgetful of his early home; he was not ashamed of where he came from.

The bishop of Mentz, descended from a wheelwright, covered his house with spokes, hammers and wheels; and the king of Sicily, in honor of his father, who was a potter, refused to drink out of any thing but an earthen vessel. [222]

So Joseph was not ashamed of his early surroundings, or of his old-time father, or of his brothers. When the latter came up from the famine-stricken land to get corn from the Egyptian king's corn crib, Joseph, instead of chiding them for the way they had maltreated

and abused him, sent them back with wagons, which King Pharaoh furnished, laden with corn; and old Jacob, the father, was brought back in the very same wagons, that Joseph, the son, might see him and give him a comfortable home all the rest of his days.

Well, I hear the wagons, the king's wagons, rumbling down in front of the palace. On the outside of the palace, to see the wagons depart, stands Pharaoh in royal robes; and beside him stands Prime Minister Joseph, with a chain of gold around his neck, and on his hand a ring given by Pharaoh to him, so that any time he wanted to stamp the royal seal upon a document he could do so conveniently.

Wagon after wagon rolls on down from the palace, laden with corn, meat, changes of raiment and every thing that could aid a famine-stricken people.

I see aged Jacob, one day, seated in the front of his house. He is probably thinking of his absent boys (for sons, however old they get, are never to a father any more than boys); and while he is seated there, he sees dust arising, and he hears wagons rumbling, and he wonders what is coming now, for the whole land had been smitten with the famine, and was in silence.

But after a while the wagons have come near enough, and he sees his sons on the wagons, and before they come quite up, they shout: [223]

“Joseph is yet alive!”

The old man faints dead away. I do not wonder at it. The boys now tell the story how that the boy, the long-absent Joseph, has got to be the first man in the Egyptian palace.

While they unload the wagons, the wan and wasted creatures in the neighborhood come up and ask for a handful of corn, and they are satisfied.

One day the wagons are brought up, for Jacob, the old father, is about to go to see Joseph in the Egyptian palace.

You know, it is not a very easy thing to transplant an old tree; and Jacob has hard work to get away from the place where he has lived so long. He finally bids good-by to the old place, and leaves his blessing with the neighbors; and then his sons steady him, while he, still determined to help himself, gets into the wagon—stiff, old and decrepit.

Yonder they go—Jacob and his sons, his sons' wives and their children, eighty-two in all—followed by herds and flocks, which the herdsmen drive along. They are going out from famine to luxuriance; they are going from a plain country home to the finest palace under the sun. Joseph, the prime minister, gets into his chariot and is driven down to meet the old man. Joseph's charioteer holds up the horses on the one side; the dust-covered wagons of the emigrants stop on the other.

Joseph, instead of waiting for his father to come, leaps out of the chariot and jumps into the emigrants' wagon, throws his arms around the old man, and weeps aloud for past memories and present joy. [224]

The father, Jacob, can hardly think it is his boy. Why, the smooth brow of childhood has now become a wrinkled brow—wrinkled with the cares of state—and the garb of the shepherd boy has become a robe royally bedizened!

But as the old man finally realizes that it is actually Joseph, I see the thin lip quiver against the toothless gum, as he cries out: “Now let me die, since I have seen thy face; behold, Joseph is yet alive!”

LAZARUS.

We stand in one of the finest private houses of the olden time. Every room is luxurious. The floor—made of stones, gypsum, coal and chalk, pounded together—is hard and

beautiful. From the roof, surrounded by a balustrade, you take in all the beauty of the landscape.

The porch is cool and refreshing, where sit the people who have come in to look at the building, and are waiting for the usher. In this place you hear the crystal plash of the fountains.

The windows, reaching to the floor and adorned, are quiet places to lounge in; and we sit here, listening to the stamp of the horses in the princely stables.

Venison and partridge, delicate morsels of fatted calf, and honey, figs, dates, pomegranates and fish that only two hours ago glided in the lake, and bowls of fine sherbet from Egypt—these make up the feast, accompanied with riddles and jests that evoke roaring laughter, with occasional outbursts of music, in which harps thrum and cymbals clap and shepherd's pipe whistles. [225]

What a place to sit in!

The lord of the place, in dress that changes with every whim, lies on a lounge, stupid from stuffed digestion. His linen is so fine, I wonder who washed it and who ironed it. His jewels are the brightest, his purple the rarest.

Let him lie perfectly quiet a moment, until we take his photograph. Here we have it:

“A certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day.”

How accurate the picture! You can see every pleat in the linen and every wrinkle in the shirt. What more could that man have? My lord, be happy!

After a while he leans over the balustrade, and says to a friend in shining apparel:

“Look at that fellow—lying at my gate! I wonder why the porter allows him to lie there. How disgusting! But our dogs will be let out of the kennel very soon, and will clear him out.”

Yes, they bound toward him. “Take hold of him!” cries the rich man from the balustrade.

The dogs go at the beggar with terrible bark; then take lower growling; then stop to yawn; and at the coaxing tone of the poor wretch, they frisk about him, and put their soft, healing tongues to his ulcers, driving off the flies and relieving the insufferable itch and sting of wounds which could not afford salve or bandage.

Lazarus has friends at last. They will for a while keep off the insults of the street, and will defend their patient. That man is far from friendless who has a good dog to stand by him. Dogs are often not so mean as are their masters. They will not be allowed to enter into Heaven, but may they not be allowed to lie down at the gate? John says of the door of Heaven: “Without are dogs.” [226]

But what is the matter with that beggar? He lies over, now, with his face exposed to the sun. Lazarus, get up! He responds not. Poor fellow, he is dead!

Two men appointed by the town come to carry him out to the fields. They dig a hole, drop him in and cover him up. People say: “One more nuisance got rid of.”

Aha! That is not Lazarus whom they buried; they buried only his sores. Yonder goes Lazarus—an angel on his right hand, an angel on his left, carrying him up the steep of Heaven—talking, praising, rejoicing. Good old Abraham stands at the gate, and throws his arms around the new comer.

Now Lazarus has his own fine house, and his own robes, and his own banquet, and his own chariot; and that poor and sickly carcass of his, that the overseers of the town dumped

in the potter's field, will come up at the call of the archangel—straight, pure and healthy—corruption having become incorruption.

Now, we will go back a minute to the fine Oriental house that we spoke of. The lord of the place has been receiving visitors today, as the doorkeeper introduced them.

After a while there is a visitor who waits not for the porter to open the gate, nor for the doorkeeper to introduce him. Who is it coming? Stop him there at the door! How dare he come in unheralded? [227]

He walks into the room, and the lord cries out, with terror-stricken face:

“This is Death! Away with him!”

There is a hard thump on the floor. Is it a pitcher that has fallen? An ottoman upset? No. Dives has fallen. Dives is dead.

The excitement in town is great. The grooms rush from the barns to see. All the great folk of the neighborhood, who used to sit at his dinners, come in. The grocer from whom he got his spices, the butcher from whom he got his meats and the clothier from whom he got his garments come to find out all about it.

The day of burial has arrived. Dives is carried down out of his splendid room, and through the porch into the street. The undertaker will make a big job of it, for there is plenty to pay. There will be high eulogies of him pronounced, although the Bible represents him as chiefly distinguished for his enormous appetite and his fine shirt.

The long procession moves on, amid the accustomed weeping and howling of Oriental obsequies. The sepulcher is reached. Six persons, carrying the body, go carefully down the steps leading to the door of the dead. The weight of the body on those ahead is heavy, and they hold back. The relics are left in the sepulcher, and the people return.

But Dives is not buried there.

That which they buried is only the shell in which he lived. Dives is down yonder in a deeper grave. He who had all the wine he could drink asks for a plainer beverage. He wants water. He does not ask for a cupful, nor even for a teaspoonful, but “just one drop,” and he can not get it. [228]

He looks up and sees Lazarus, the very man whom he set his dogs on, and wants him to put his finger into water and let him lick it off.

Once Lazarus wanted just the crumbs from Dives' feast; now Dives wants just a drop from Lazarus' banquet. Poor as poor can be! He has eaten his last quail's wing. He has broken the rind of his last pomegranate. Dives the lord has become Dives the pauper. The dogs of remorse and despair come not with healing tongue to lick, but with relentless muzzle to tear. Now Dives sits at the gate in everlasting beggary, while Lazarus, amid the festivities of Heaven, fares sumptuously every day.

You see that this parable takes in the distant future, and speaks as though the resurrection were passed and the body of Lazarus had already joined his spirit, and so I treat it.

Well, you see a man may be beggared for this life, but be a prince in eternity. A cluster of old rags was the entire property of Lazarus. His bare feet and his ulcered legs were an invitation to the brutes; his food the broken victuals that were pitched out by the housekeeper—half-chewed crusts, rinds, peelings, bones and gristle—about the last creature out of which to make a prince—yet for eighteen hundred years he has been one of the millionaires of Heaven. No more waiting for crumbs. He sits at the same table with the kings of eternity, himself one of them. What were the forty years of his poverty compared with the long ages of his royalty? [229]

Let all the Christian poor be comforted. Your good days will be after a while. Stand it a little longer, and you will be all right. God has a place for you among the principalities. Do not be afraid of the dogs of distress, for they will not bite; they will help to heal. Your poverty may sometimes have led you to doubt whether you will have a decent funeral. You shall have grander obsequies than many a man who is carried out by a procession of governors and senators. The pall-bearers will be the angels that carried Lazarus into Abraham's bosom. The surveyors have been busy. Your eternal possessions have been already laid out by God's surveyors, and the stake that bounds the property on this side is driven into the top of your grave, and all beyond is yours.

You can afford to wear poor clothes now, when for you in the upper wardrobes is folded up the royal purple. You can afford to have coarse food here, when your bread is to be made from the finest wheat of the eternal harvests. Cheer up! Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

See, also, that a man may have every comfort and luxury here, and yet come to a wretched future. It is no sin to be rich. It is a sin not to be rich, if we can be rich honestly. I wish I had five hundred thousand dollars—I suppose I might as well make it a million. I see so much suffering and trial every day that I say, again and again, I wish I had the money to relieve it.

But alas for the man who has nothing but money! Dives' house had a front door and a back door, and they both opened into eternity. Sixty seconds after Dives was gone, of what use were his horses? He could not ride them. Of what use were his rich viands? He could not open his clenched teeth to eat them. Of what use were his fine linen shirts, when he could not wear them? [230]

The poorest man who stood along the road, watching the funeral procession of Dives, owned more of this world than did the dead gormandizer. The future world was all the darker because of the brightness of this.

That wife of a drunken husband, if she does wrong and loses her soul, will not find it so intolerable in hell as others, for she has been in hell ever since she was married, and is partially used to it.

But this rich man, Dives, had every thing once—now nothing. He once had the best wine; now he can not get water. He had, like other affluent persons of the East, slaves to fan him when he was hot; now he is being consumed. He can afford no covering so good as the old patches that once fluttered about Lazarus as he went walking in the wind.

Who among my hearers will take Dives' fine house, costly plate, dazzling equipage and kennel of blooded dogs, if his eternity must be thrown in with it?

NOAH.

Noah did the best and the worst thing for the world. He built an ark against the deluge of water, but he also introduced a deluge against which the human race has ever since been trying to build an ark—the deluge of drunkenness. [231]

In the opening chapters of the Bible we can hear his staggering steps.

Shem and Japhet tried to cover up the disgrace, but there is Noah—drunk on wine at a time in the history of the world when, to say the least, there was no lack of water.

Inebriation, having flooded the world, has never receded.

Abigail, the fair and heroic wife who saved the flocks of Nabal, her husband, from confiscation by invaders, goes home at night and finds him so intoxicated she can not tell him the story of his narrow escape.

Uriah came to see David, and David got him drunk, and paved the way for the despoliation of his household.

Even the church bishops needed to be charged to be sober and not given to too much wine; and so familiar were the people of Bible times with the staggering and falling motions of the inebriate, that Isaiah, when he comes to describe the final dislocation of worlds, says: "The Earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard."

OTHNIEL.

The city of Debir was the Boston of antiquity—a great place for brains and books.

Caleb wanted it, and he offered his daughter Achsah as a prize to any one who would [232] besiege or storm and capture that city.

It was a strange thing for Caleb to do; and yet the man who could take the city would have, at any rate, two elements of manhood—bravery and patriotism.

Besides, I do not think that Caleb was as foolish in offering his daughter to the conqueror of Debir as thousands in this day who seek alliances for their children with those who have large means, without any reference to moral or mental acquirements.

Of the two evils, I would rather measure happiness by the length of the sword than by the length of the pocket-book. In one case there is sure to be one good element of character; in the other, there may be none at all.

With Caleb's daughter as a prize to fight for, General Othniel rode into the battle. The gates of Debir were thundered into the dust, and the city of books lay at the feet of the conquerors.

The work done, Othniel comes back to claim his bride. Having conquered the city, it is no great job for him to conquer the girl's heart; for, however faint-hearted a woman herself may be, she always loves courage in a man. I never saw an exception to that.

The wedding festivity having gone by, Othniel and Achsah are about to go to their new home. However loudly the cymbals may clash and the laughter ring, the parents are always sad when a fondly cherished daughter goes away to stay; and Achsah, the daughter of Caleb, knows that now is the time to ask almost any thing she wants of her father.

It seems that Caleb, the good old man, had given as a wedding present to his daughter a [233] piece of land that was mountainous, and, sloping southward toward the deserts of Arabia, it was swept by some very hot winds. It was called "a south land."

But Achsah wants an addition of property; she desires a piece of land that is well watered and fertile.

Now, it is no wonder that Caleb, standing amid the bridal party, his eyes so full of tears because his daughter was going away that he could hardly see her at all, gives her more than she asks. She said to him: "Thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water." And he gave her the upper springs and the nether springs.

That passage occurs in the fifteenth chapter of the Book of Joshua, nineteenth verse, but I never saw it till a little while ago; and as I came upon it I said: "If God will give me grace, I shall preach a sermon on that before long."

The fact is that, as Caleb, the father, gave Achsah, the daughter, a south land, so God gives to us His world. I am very thankful that He has given it to us.

But I am like Achsah in the fact that I am not satisfied with the portion. Trees, flowers, grasses and blue skies are very well in their places; but he who has naught except this world for a portion has no portion at all. It is a mountainous land, sloping off toward the desert of

sorrow, swept by fiery siroccos. It is “a south land”—a poor portion for any man who tries to put trust in it.

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PAUL.

The Damascus of Bible times still stands, with a population of 135,000 people. It was a gay city of white and glistening architecture, its minarets and crescents and domes playing with the light of the morning sun; embowered in groves of olive, citron, orange and pomegranate; a famous river plunging its brightness into the scene—a city by the ancients styled “a pearl surrounded by emeralds.”

A group of horsemen are advancing upon that city. Let the Christians of the place hide, for that cavalcade coming over the hills is made up of persecutors.

Their leader is small of stature and unattractive in some respects, as leaders sometimes are insignificant in person—witness the Duke of Wellington and Dr. Archibald Alexander. But there is something very intent in the eye of the man at the head of this troop, and the horse he rides is lathered with the foam of a long and a quick travel of 135 miles. He cries “Go ’long” to his steed, for those Christians must be captured and must be silenced, and that religion of the cross must be annihilated.

Suddenly the horses shy off, and plunge until their riders are precipitated. Freed from their riders, the horses bound snorting away.

You know that dumb animals, at the sight of an eclipse or an earthquake, or any thing like a supernatural appearance, sometimes become very uncontrollable.

A new sun had been kindled in the heavens, putting out the glare of the ordinary sun. Christ, with the glories of Heaven wrapped about Him, looked out from a cloud and the [235] splendor was insufferable, and no wonder the horses sprang and the equestrians dropped.

Dust-covered and bruised, Saul attempts to get up, shading his eyes with his hand from the severe luster of the heavens, but unsuccessfully, for he is struck stone blind as he cries out: “Who art Thou, Lord?”

Jesus answered him:

“I am the One you have been chasing. He that whips and scourges those Damascine Christians whips and scourges Me. It is not their back that is bleeding; it is Mine. It is not their heart that is breaking; it is Mine. I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest.”

From that wild, exciting and overwhelming scene there rises up the greatest preacher of all ages—Paul; in whose behalf prisons were rocked down, before whom soldiers turned pale, into whose hand Mediterranean sea captains put control of their shipwrecking craft, and whose epistles are the advance courier of the Resurrection Day.

I learn, first, from this scene that a worldly fall may precede a spiritual uplifting. A man does not get much sympathy by falling off a horse. People say he ought not to have got into the saddle if he could not ride. Those of us who were brought up in the country remember well how the workmen laughed when, on our way back from the brook, we suddenly lost our ride. At the close of the great Civil War, when the army passed in review at Washington, if a general had toppled from the stirrups it would have been a national merriment.

Here is Paul on horseback—a proud man, riding on with government documents in his pocket, a graduate of a most famous school in which the celebrated Dr. Gamaliel had been a professor, perhaps having already attained two of the three titles of the school: Rab, the first; Rabbi, the second; and was on his way to Rabbak, the third and highest title. [236]

I know from Paul’s temperament that his horse was ahead of the other horses. But without time to think of what posture he should take, or without any consideration for his

dignity, he is tumbled into the dust. And yet that was the best ride Paul ever took. Out of that violent fall he arose into the apostleship. So it has been in all the ages, and so it is now.

You will never be worth any thing for God and the Church until you lose fifty thousand dollars, or have your reputation upset, or in some way, somehow, are thrown and humiliated. You must go down before you go up.

Joseph finds his path to the Egyptian court through the pit into which his brothers threw him.

Daniel would never have walked amid the bronze lions that adorned the Babylonish throne if he had not first walked amid the real lions of the cave.

Paul marshals all the generations of Christendom by falling flat on his face on the road to Damascus.

Men who have been always prosperous may be efficient servants of the world, but will be of no advantage to Christ. You may ride majestically seated on your charger, rein in hand, foot in stirrup, but you will never be worth any thing spiritually until you fall off. They who graduate from the School of Christ with the highest honors have on their diploma the seal of a lion's muddy paw, or the splash of an angry wave, or the drop of a stray tear, or the brown scorch of a persecuting fire. [237]

In nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of the thousand there is no moral or spiritual elevation until there has been a thorough worldly upsetting.

Again, I learn from the subject that the religion of Christ is not a pusillanimous thing. People of this day try to make us believe that Christianity is something for men of small caliber, for women with no capacity to reason, for children in the infant class, under six years of age, but not for stalwart men.

Look at this man who is mentioned in the ninth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Do you not think that the religion that could capture such a man as that must have some power in it?

Paul was a logician; he was a metaphysician; he was an all-conquering orator; he was a poet of the highest type. He had a nature that could swamp the leading men of his own day, and, hurled against the Sanhedrim, he made it tremble.

Paul learned all he could get in the school of his immediate vicinity; then he went to a higher school, and there mastered the Greek and the Hebrew, and also perfected himself in belles-lettres, until in after years he astonished the Cretans, the Corinthians and the Athenians by quotations from their own authors.

I have never found any thing in Carlyle or Goethe or Herbert Spencer that could compare in strength or in beauty with Paul's Epistles. I do not think there is any thing in the writings of Sir William Hamilton that shows such mental discipline as you find in Paul's argument about justification and the resurrection. I have not found any thing in Milton finer in the way of imagination than I can find in Paul's illustrations drawn from the amphitheater. [238]

There was nothing in Robert Emmet pleading for his life, or in Edmund Burke arraigning Warren Hastings in Westminster Hall, that compared with the scene in the court room when, before robed officials, Paul bowed and began his speech, saying: "I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day."

I repeat the assertion that a religion that can capture such a man as that must have some power in it. It is time people stopped talking as though all the brains of the world were opposed to Christianity. Where Paul leads we can afford to follow.

I am glad to know that Christ has in the different ages of the world had in His discipleship a Mozart and a Handel in music; a Raphael and a Reynolds in painting; an

Angelo and a Canova in sculpture; a Rush and a Harvey in medicine; a Grotius and a Washington in statesmanship; a Blackstone, a Marshall and a Kent in law.

The time will come when the religion of Christ will conquer all the observatories and universities, and then, through her telescope Philosophy will behold the morning star of Jesus, and in her laboratory see that “all things work together for good,” and with her geological hammer discover the “Rock of Ages.”

Instead of cowering and shivering when the skeptic stands before you and talks of religion as though it were a pusillanamous thing, take your New Testament from your pocket and show him the picture of the intellectual giant of all the ages, prostrated on the road to Damascus, while his horse is flying wildly away. Then ask the skeptic what it was that frightened the one and threw the other. [239]

Oh, no! It is no weak Gospel. It is a most glorious Gospel. It is an all-conquering Gospel. It is an omnipotent Gospel. It is the power of God and the wisdom of God unto salvation.

Jesus and Paul were boys at the same time in different villages, and Paul’s antipathy to Christ was increasing. He hated every thing about Christ. He was going down then with writs in his pockets to have Christ’s disciples arrested. He was not going as a sheriff goes—to arrest a man against whom he has no spite—but Paul was going down to arrest those people because he was glad to arrest them. The Bible says: “He breathed out slaughter.” He wanted them captured, and he also wanted them butchered.

It was particularly outrageous that Saul should have gone to Damascus on that errand. Jesus Christ had been dead only three years, and the story of His kindness, generosity and love filled all the air. It was not an old story, as it is now. It was a new story. Jesus had only three Summers ago been in these very places, and Saul every day in Jerusalem must have met people who knew Christ, people with good eyesight whom Jesus had cured of blindness, people who were dead and had been resurrected by the Savior, and people who could tell Paul all the particulars of the crucifixion—just how Jesus looked to the last hour—just how the heavens grew black in the face at the torture. He heard that recited every day by people who were acquainted with all the circumstances, and yet in the fresh memory of that scene he goes out to persecute Christ’s disciples, impatient at the time it takes to feed the horses at the inn, not pulling at the snaffle, but riding with loose rein—faster and faster. [240]

Truly, Paul was the chief of sinners. No outbreak of modesty when he said that. He was a murderer. He stood by when Stephen died, and helped in the execution of that good man. When the rabble wanted to be unimpeded in their work of destroying Stephen, and wanted to take off their coats but did not dare to lay them down lest they be stolen, Paul said: “I will take care of the coats.” So they put their coats down at the feet of Paul, and he watched them, and he watched the horrid mangling of glorious Stephen.

Is it not a wonder that when Paul fell from the horse he did not break his neck—that his foot did not catch somewhere in the trappings of the saddle, and he was not dragged and kicked to death? He deserved to die—miserably, wretchedly and for ever—notwithstanding all his metaphysics, eloquence and logic.

It seems to me as if I can see Paul today, rising up from the highway to Damascus, brushing off the dust from his cloak and wiping the sweat of excitement from his brow, as he turns to us and all the ages, saying:

“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.”

If it had been a mere optical illusion on the road to Damascus, was not Paul just the man to find it out? If it had been a sham and pretense, would he not have pricked the bubble? He was a man of facts and arguments, of the most gigantic intellectual nature, and not a man of hallucinations; and when I see him fall from the saddle, blinded and overwhelmed, I say there must have been something in it. [241]

I have been reading this morning, in my New Testament, of a Mediterranean voyage in an Alexandrian ship. It was in the month of November.

On board that vessel were two distinguished passengers—one, Josephus, the historian, as we have strong reasons to believe; the other, a convict, one Paul by name, who was going to prison for upsetting things—or, as they termed it, “turning the world upside down.”

This convict had gained the confidence of the captain. Indeed, I think that Paul knew almost as much about the sea as did the captain. He had been shipwrecked three times already, and had dwelt much of his life amid capstans, yardarms, cables and storms, and he knew what he was talking about.

Seeing the equinoctial storm was coming, and perhaps noticing something unseaworthy in the vessel, he advised the captain to stay in the harbor. But I heard the captain and the first mate talking together. They say, in effect:

“We can not afford to take the advice of this landsman, and he a minister. He may be able to preach very well, but I do not believe he knows a marlinespike from a luff tackle. All aboard! Cast off! Shift the helm for headway. Who fears the Mediterranean?”

They had gone only a little way out when a whirlwind, called Euroclydon, made the torn sail its turban, shook the mast as you would brandish a spear, and tossed the hulk into the heavens. Overboard with the cargo! It is all washed with salt water and worthless now, and there are no marine insurance companies. All hands, ahoy, and out with the anchors! [242]

Great consternation comes on crew and passengers. The sea monsters snort in the foam, and the billows clap their hands in glee of destruction. In the lull of the storm I hear a chain clank. It is the chain of the great apostle as he walks the deck or holds fast to the rigging amid the lurching of the ship. The spray drips from his long beard as Paul cries out to the crew, in tones of confidence:

“Now, I exhort you to be of good cheer, for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God—whose I am and whom I serve—saying: ‘Fear not, Paul. Thou must be brought before Cæsar; and lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.’”

Fourteen days have passed, and there is no abatement of the storm. It is midnight. Standing on the lookout, the man peers into the darkness, and, by a flash of lightning, sees the long white line of breakers, and knows they must be coming near to some country, and fears that in a few moments the vessel will be shivered on the rocks.

The ship flies like chaff in the tornado. They drop the sounding line, and by the light of the lantern they see it is twenty fathoms. Speeding along a little farther, they drop the line again, and by the light of the lantern they see it is fifteen fathoms. Two hundred and seventy-six souls within a few feet of awful shipwreck! [243]

The managers of the vessel, pretending they want to look over the side of the ship and undergird it, get into the small boat, expecting in it to escape; but Paul sees through the sham, and he tells them that if they go off in the boat it will be the death of them.

The vessel strikes! The planks spring! The timbers crack! The vessel parts in the thundering surge! Oh, what struggling for life! Here they leap from plank to plank. There they go under as if they would never rise, but, catching hold of a timber, they come floating and panting on it to the beach.

Here strong swimmers spread their arms through the waves until their chins plow the sand, and they rise up, and ring out their wet locks on the beach. When the roll of the ship is called, two hundred and seventy-six people answer to their names.

Paul was the most illustrious merely human being the world has ever known. He walked the streets of Athens and preached from yonder pile of rocks, Mars Hill.

Though more classic associations are connected with Athens than with any other city under the sun—because here Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Demosthenes, Pericles, Herodotus, Pythagoras, Xenophon and Praxiteles wrote, chiseled, taught, thundered or sung—yet, in my mind, all those men and their teachings were eclipsed by Paul and the Gospel he preached there and in the near-by city of Corinth. Standing yesterday on the old fortress at Corinth, the Acro-Corinthus, out from the ruin at its base arose in my imagination the old city—just as Paul saw it.

I have been told that, for splendor, the world beholds no such wonder today as that ancient Corinth, standing on an isthmus washed by two seas—the one sea bringing the commerce of Europe, the other sea bringing the commerce of Asia. [244]

From her wharves, in the construction of which entire kingdoms had been absorbed, war galleys with three banks of oars pushed out and confounded the navy yards of all the world.

Huge handed machinery, such as modern invention can not equal, lifted ships from the sea on one side and transported them on trucks across the isthmus and sat them down in the sea on the other side.

The revenue officers of the city went down through the olive groves that lined the beach to collect a tariff from all nations. The youth of all peoples sported in her isthmian games and the beauty of all lands sat in her theaters, walked her porticos and threw itself upon the altar of her stupendous dissipations. Column, statue and temple bewildered the beholder. There were white marble fountains into which, from apertures at the side, there gushed waters everywhere known for health-giving qualities. Around these basins, twisted into wreaths of stone, there were all the beauties of sculpture and architecture; while standing, as if to guard the costly display, was a statue of Hercules of burnished Corinthian brass. Vases of terra cotta adorned the cemeteries of the dead—vases so costly that Julius Cæsar was not satisfied till he had captured them for Rome. Armed officials paced up and down to see that no statue was defaced, pedestal overthrown or bas-relief touched.

From the edge of the city the hill held its magnificent burden of columns and towers and temples (one thousand slaves waiting at one shrine), and a citadel so thoroughly impregnable that Gibraltar is a heap of sand compared with it. Amid all that strength and magnificence Corinth stood and defied the world. [245]

Oh, it was not to rustics who had never seen any thing grand that Paul preached in Corinth. They had heard the best music that had come from the best instruments in all the world; they had heard songs floating from morning porticos and melting in evening groves; they had passed their whole lives among pictures and sculpture and architecture and Corinthian brass, which had been molded and shaped until there was no chariot wheel in which it had not sped, and no tower in which it had not glittered, and no gateway that it had not helped to adorn.

Ah, it was a bold act for Paul to stand there amid all that and say:

“All this is nothing. These sounds that come from the Temple of Neptune are not music, compared with the harmonies of which I speak. These waters rushing in the basin of Pyrene are not pure. These statues of Bacchus and Mercury are not exquisite. Your citadel of Acro-Corinthus is not strong, compared with that which I offer to the poorest slave who puts down his burden at that brazen gate. You Corinthians think this is a splendid city; you think you have heard all sweet sounds and seen all beautiful sights. But, I tell you, eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.” Following up Paul’s line of thought, we may say the Bible, now, is the scaffolding to the rising Temple, but when the building is done there will be no further use for the scaffolding. [246]

PHARAOH.

One of the most intensely interesting things I saw in Egypt was Pharaoh of olden times—the very Pharaoh who oppressed the Israelites. The inscription on his sarcophagus and the writing on his mummy bandages prove beyond controversy that he was the Pharaoh of Bible times. All the Egyptologists and the explorations agree that it is the old scoundrel himself.

Visible are the very teeth with which he gnashed against the Israelitish brick makers. There are the sockets of the merciless eyes with which he looked upon the over-burdened people of God. There is the hair that floated in the breeze off the Red Sea. There are the very lips with which he commanded the children of Israel to make bricks without straw.

Thousands of years afterward, when the wrappings of the mummy were unrolled, old Pharaoh lifted up his arm as if in imploration; but his skinny bones can not again clutch his shattered scepter. He is a dead lion.

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PONTIUS PILATE.

At about seven o'clock in the morning, up the marble stairs of a palace and across the floors of richest mosaic and under ceilings dyed with all the splendors of color and between snowbanks of white and glistening sculpture, passes a poor, pale and sick young man of thirty-three years, already condemned to death, on his way to be condemned again. Jesus of Nazareth is His name.

Coming out to meet him on this tessellated pavement is an unscrupulous, compromising, time-serving and cowardly man, with a few traces of sympathy and fair dealing left in his composition—Governor Pontius Pilate.

Did ever such opposites meet? Luxury and pain, selfishness and generosity, arrogance and humility, sin and holiness, midnight and midnoon.

The bloated-lipped governor takes the cushioned seat, but the prisoner stands, his wrists manacled. In a semicircle around the prisoner are the Sanhedrists, with eyes flashing and fists brandished, prosecuting this case in the name of their religion.

The most bitter persecutions have been religious persecutions, and when Satan takes hold of a good man he makes up by intensity for brevity of occupation. If you have never seen an ecclesiastical court trying a man, then you have no idea of the foaming infernalism of those old religious Sanhedrists.

Governor Pilate cross-questions the prisoner, and he finds right away that he is innocent; so he wants to let him go. His caution is also increased by some one who comes to the governor and whispers in his ear. The governor puts his hand behind his ear, so as to catch the words almost inaudible.

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These whispered words are a message from Claudia Procula, his wife, who has had a dream about the innocence of this prisoner and about the danger of executing him, and she awakens from this morning dream in time to send the message to her husband, who was at that hour on the judicial bench.

And what with the protest of his wife, the voice of his own conscience and the entire failure of the Sanhedrists to make out their case Governor Pilate resolves to discharge the prisoner from custody.

But the intimation of such a thing brings upon the governor an equinoctial storm of indignation. They will report him to the emperor at Rome. They will have him recalled. They will send him up home, and he will be hanged for treason, for the emperor has already a suspicion in regard to Pilate, and that suspicion does not cease until Pilate is banished and commits suicide.

So Governor Pontius Pilate compromises the matter, and proposes that Christ be whipped instead of assassinated. So the prisoner is fastened to a low pillar, and on his bent and bared back come the thongs of leather, with pieces of lead and bone intertwined, so that every stroke shall be the more awful.

Christ lifts Himself from the scourging with flushed cheek and torn and quivering and mangled flesh, presenting a spectacle of suffering in which Rubens, the painter, found the theme for his greatest masterpiece.

But the Sanhedrists are not yet satisfied. They have had some of the prisoner's nerves lacerated; but they want them all lacerated. They have had some of his blood; now they want all of it, down to the last corpuscle. [249]

So Governor Pontius Pilate, after all this merciful hesitation, surrenders to the demoniacal cry:

“Crucify him! Crucify him!”

But the governor sends for something. He sends a slave out to get something. Although the constables are in haste to take the prisoner to execution, and the mob outside are impatient to glare upon their victim, a pause is necessitated.

Yonder it comes—a wash basin. Some pure, bright water is poured into it, and then Governor Pilate puts his white and delicate hands into the water and rubs them together, and then lifts them dripping, for the towel fastened at the slave's girdle, while he practically says:

“I wash my hands of this whole homicidal transaction. I wash my hands of this entire responsibility. You will have to bear it.”

Behold in this that ceremony amounts to nothing, if there are not contained in it correspondences of heart and life.

It is a good thing to wash the hands. God created three-fourths of the world water, and in that act commanded cleanliness; and when the ancients did not take the hint, He plunged the whole world under water, and kept it there for some time.

Hand washing was a religious ceremony among the Jews. The Jewish Mishna gave particular directions how that the hands must be thrust three times up to the wrist in water, and the palm of the hand must then be rubbed with the closed fist of the other. [250]

All that was well enough for a symbol, but here is a man in the case under consideration who proposes to wash away the guilt of a sin which he does not quit and of which he does not make any repentance. Pilate's wash basin was a dead failure.

Ceremonies, however beautiful and appropriate, may be no more than this hypocritical ablution. In infancy we may be sprinkled from the baptismal font, and in manhood we may wade into deep immersion, and yet never come to moral purification. We may kneel without prayer and bow without reverence, and sing without any acceptance. All your creeds, liturgies, sacraments, genuflections and religious convocations amount to nothing unless your heart-life go into them.

When that bronzed slave took from the presence of Pilate that wash basin he carried away none of Pilate's cruelty, wickedness or guilt.

Nothing against creeds; we all have them—either written or implied. Nothing against ceremonies; they are of infinite importance. Nothing against sacraments; they are divinely commanded. Nothing against rosary, if there be as many heartfelt prayers as beads counted. Nothing against incense floating up from censer amid Gothic arches, if the prayers be as genuine as the ceremony is sweet. Nothing against Epiphany, Lent, Ash Wednesday, Easter, Good Friday, Whitsuntide or Palm Sunday, if these symbols have behind them genuine repentance, holy reminiscence and Christian consecration.

But ceremony is only the sheath to the sword; it is only the shell to the kernel; it is only the lamp to the flame; it is only the body to the spirit. The outward must be symbolical of the inward. Wash the hands, by all means; but, more than all, wash the heart. [251]

Behold, also, as you see Governor Pontius Pilate thrust his hands into his wash basin, the power of conscience. He had an idea there was blood on his hands—the blood of an innocent person, whom he might have acquitted if he only had the courage.

Poor Pilate! His conscience was after him, and he knew the stain would never be washed from the right hand or the left hand; that, until the day of his death, though he might wash in all the lavers of the Roman Empire, there would be still eight fingers and two thumbs red at the tips.

Alas for this Governor Pontius Pilate! That night, after the court had adjourned and the Sanhedrists had gone home and nothing was heard outside the room but the step of the sentinel, I see Pontius Pilate arise from his tapestried and sleepless couch and go to the laver and begin to wash his hands, crying: “Out! Out, crimson spot! Tellest thou to me and to God and to the night my crime? Is there no alkali to remove these dreadful stains? Is there no chemistry to dissolve this carnage? Must I to the day of my death carry the blood of this innocent man on my heart and hand? Out, thou crimson spot!”

Against the disappointing and insufficient laver of Pilate’s vice, cowardice and sin I place the brazen sea of a Savior’s pardoning mercy!

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QUEEN OF SHEBA.

What is that long procession approaching Jerusalem? I think, from the pomp of it, there must be royalty in the train. I smell the breath of the spices which are brought as presents, and I hear the shout of the drivers, and I see the dust-covered caravan, showing that they come from far away. Cry the news up to the palace:

“The Queen of Sheba advances.”

Let all the people come out to see. Let the mighty men of the land come out on the palace corridors. Let King Solomon come down the stairs of the palace before the Queen has alighted. Shake out the cinnamon and the saffron, the calamus and the frankincense, and pass it into the treasure house. Take up the diamonds until they glitter in the sun!

The Queen of Sheba alights.

She enters the palace.

She washes at the bath.

She sits down at the banquet.

The cup bearers bow. The meat smokes. The music trembles in the dash of the waters from the modern sea. Then she rises from the banquet, walks through the conservatories, gazes on the architectural marvels, and asks Solomon many strange questions. Thus she learns about the religion of the Hebrews, and then and there she becomes a servant of Jehovah.

The Queen of Sheba is overwhelmed. She begins to think that all the spices that she brought, and all the precious woods which are intended to be turned into harps and psalteries and into railings for the causeway between the Temple and the palace and the \$1,800,000 in money—she begins to think that all these presents amount to nothing in such a palace; and she is almost ashamed that she has brought them, and she says within herself: [253]

“I heard a great deal about this place and about this wonderful religion of the Hebrews, but I find it far beyond my highest anticipations. I must add more than 50 per cent to what

has been related. It exceeds every thing that could have been expected. The half was not told me.”

What a beautiful thing it is when social position and wealth surrender themselves to God! When religion comes to a neighborhood, the first to receive it are the women. Some men say it is because they are weak minded. I say it is because they have quicker perception of what is right, more ardent affection and capacity for sublimer emotion.

After the women have received the Gospel, then all the distressed and the poor of both sexes—those who have no friend except Jesus. Last of all come the greatly prospered. Alas, that it is so!

Do you know where Sheba was? Some say it was in Abyssinia; others say it was in the southern part of Arabia Felix. In either case it was a great way off from Jerusalem. To get from there to Jerusalem the Queen of Sheba had to cross a country infested with bandits and go across blistering deserts.

Why did not the Queen of Sheba stay at home and send a committee to inquire about this new religion, and have the delegates report in regard to that religion and wealth of King Solomon? She wanted to see for herself and hear for herself. She could not do this by work of committee. She felt that she had a soul worth ten thousand kingdoms like Sheba, and she wanted a robe richer than any woven by Oriental shuttles, and she wanted a crown set with the jewels of eternity. [254]

Bring out the camels. Put on the spices. Gather up the jewels of the throne and put them on the caravan. Start now—no time is to be lost. Goad on the camels. When I see that caravan—dust-covered, weary and exhausted—trudging on across the desert and among the banditti until it reaches Jerusalem, I say: “There is an earnest seeker after truth.”

SALOME.

This is the anniversary of Herod’s birthday. The palace is lighted. The highways leading thereto are all ablaze with the pomp of invited guests. Lords, captains, merchant princes, and all the mighty men of the land are coming to mingle in the festivities.

The table is spread with all the luxuries that royal purveyors can gather. The guests, white robed and anointed and perfumed, come and sit at the table.

Music! The jests evoke roars of laughter. Riddles are propounded. Repartee is indulged. Toasts are drank. The brain is befogged. The wit rolls on into uproar and blasphemy. They are not satisfied yet. Turn on more light. Pour out more wine. Music! Sound all the trumpets. Clear the floor for a dance. Bring in Salome, the beautiful and accomplished princess. The door opens, and in bounds the dancer. The lords are enchanted. Stand back and make room for the brilliant gyrations. These men never saw such “poetry of motion.” Their souls whirl in the reel and bound with the bounding feet. [255]

Herod forgets crown and throne and every thing but the fascinations of Salome. All the magnificence of his realm is as nothing compared with the splendor that whirls on tiptoe before him. His body sways from side to side, corresponding with the motions of the enchantress. His soul is filled with the pulsations of the feet and bewitched with the taking postures and attitudes more and more amazing.

After a while Herod sits in enchanted silence, looking at the flashing, leaping, bouncing beauty, and as the dance closes and the tinkling cymbals cease to clap and the thunders of applause that shook the palace begin to abate, the enchanted monarch swears to the princely performer:

“Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me I will give it thee, to the half of my kingdom.”

Now, there was in the prison at that time a minister of the Gospel by the name of John the Baptist, and he had been making a great deal of trouble by preaching some very plain sermons. He had denounced the sins of the king and brought down upon him the wrath of the women of the royal household.

At the instigation of her mother, Salome takes advantage of the extravagant promise of the king, and says: "Bring me the head of John the Baptist on a dinner plate."

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Hark to the sound of feet outside the door and the clatter of swords! The executioners are returning from their awful errand. Open the door. They enter and present the platter to Salome.

What is on this platter?

A new glass of wine to continue the uproarious merriment? No. Something redder and far more costly—the ghastly, bleeding head of John the Baptist. The death glare is still in the eyes; the locks are all dabbled with gore; the features are still distressed with the last agony.

Salome, this enchantress who had whirled so gracefully in the dance, bends over the awful burden without a shudder. She gloats over the blood, and with as much indifference as a waiting maid might take a tray of empty glassware out of the room after an entertainment Salome carries the dissevered head of John the Baptist, while all the banqueters shout with laughter. They regarded it as a capital joke that in so easy and quick a way they have got rid of an earnest and outspoken minister of the true Gospel.

Well, there is no harm in a birthday festival. All the kings from Pharaoh's time had celebrated such occasions, and why not Herod? No harm in kindling the lights. No harm in spreading the banquet. No harm in arousing music. But from the riot and wassail that closed the scene of that day every pure nature revolts.

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SAUL.

The Amalekites thought they had conquered God, and that He would not carry into execution His threats against them.

They had murdered the Israelites in battle and out of battle, and had left no outrage untried. For four hundred years this had been going on, and they said: "God either dare not punish us, or He has forgotten to do so."

Let us see.

Samuel, God's prophet, tells Saul to go down and slay all the Amalekites, not leaving one of them alive; also to destroy all the beasts in their possession—sheep, ox, camel and ass.

Hark! I hear the tread of two hundred and ten thousand men, with monstrous Saul at their head, ablaze with armor, his shield dangling at his side, holding in his hand a spear, at the waving of which the great host marched or halted.

The sound of their feet, shaking the Earth, seems like the tread of the great God, as, marching in vengeance, He tramples nations into the dust.

I see smoke curling against the sky. Now there is a thick cloud of it, and now I see the whole city rising in a chariot of smoke, behind steeds of fire.

Saul has set the city ablaze.

The Amalekites and Israelites meet; the trumpets of battle blow peal on peal, and there is a death hush.

Then there is a signal waved; swords cut and hack; javelins ring on shields; arms fall from trunks and heads roll into the dust. Gash after gash, the frenzied yell, the gurgling of throttled throats, the cry of pain, the laugh of revenge, the curse hissed between clenched

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teeth—an army’s death groan. Stacks of dead on all sides, with eyes unshut and mouths yet grinning vengeance.

Huzza for the Israelites! Two hundred and ten thousand men wave their plumes and clap their shields, for the Lord God has given them the victory.

Yet the victorious warriors of Israel are conquered by sheep and oxen.

God, through His prophet, Samuel, told Saul to slay all the Amalekites, and to slay all the beasts in their possession; but Saul, thinking that he knows more than God, spares Agag, the Amalekitish king, and five droves of sheep and a herd of oxen that he can not bear to kill.

Saul drives the sheep and oxen down toward home. He has no idea that Samuel, the prophet, will discover that he has saved these sheep and oxen for himself.

But Samuel comes and asks Saul the news from the battle. Saul puts on a solemn face—for there is no one who can look more solemn than your genuine hypocrite—and he says: “I have fulfilled the commandment of the Lord.”

Samuel listens, and he hears the drove of sheep a little way off. Saul had no idea the prophet’s ear would be so acute.

Samuel says to Saul: “If you have done as God told you, and have slain all the Amalekites and all the beasts in their possession, what meaneth the bleating of the sheep in mine ears and the lowing of the oxen, that I hear?”

Ah! One would have thought that blushes would have consumed the cheeks of Saul. No, [259] no! He says the army—not himself, of course, but the army—saved the sheep and oxen for sacrifice; and then they thought it would be too bad, anyhow, to kill Agag, the Amalekitish king.

Samuel takes the sword, and he slashes King Agag to pieces; and then he takes the skirt of his coat, in true Oriental style, and rends it in twain—as much as to say:

“You, Saul, just like that, shall be torn away from your empire, and torn away from your throne.”

In other words, let all the nations of Earth hear the story that Saul, by disobeying God, won a flock of sheep but lost a kingdom.

A hypocrite is one who pretends to be what he is not, or to do what he does not. Saul was only a type of a class. When the fox prays, look to your chickens.

Do not be hypocritical in any thing; you are never safe if you are. At the most inopportune moment, the sheep will bleat and the oxen will bellow.

SOLOMON.

What is that building out yonder, glittering in the sunshine? Have you not heard?

It is the House of the Forest of Lebanon. King Solomon has just taken to it his bride, the princess of Egypt. You see the pillars of the portico and a great tower, adorned with a thousand shields of gold, hung on the outside of the tower. Five hundred of the shields of gold were manufactured at Solomon’s order, and five hundred were captured by David, his father, in battle. See how they blaze in the noonday sun! [260]

Solomon goes up to the ivory stairs of his throne between twelve lions in statuary, and sits down on the back of the golden bull, the head of the bronze beast turned toward the people.

The family and attendants of the king are so many that the caterers of the place have to provide every day one hundred sheep and thirteen oxen, besides the birds and the venison. I hear the stamping and pawing of four thousand horses in the royal stables.

They were important officials who had charge of the work of gathering the straw and the barley for all these horses.

King Solomon was an early riser, tradition says, and used to take a ride out at daybreak; and when in his white apparel, behind the swiftest horses of all the kingdom and followed by mounted archers in purple, as the cavalcade dashed through the streets of Jerusalem I suppose it was something worth getting up at five o'clock in the morning to look at.

Solomon was not like some of the kings of the present day—crowned imbecility. All the splendor of his palace and retinue was eclipsed by his intellectual powers. Why, he seemed to know every thing. He was the first great naturalist the world ever saw. Peacocks from India strutted the basaltic walks, and apes chattered in the trees and deer stalked the parks, and there were aquariums with foreign fish and aviaries with foreign birds; and tradition [261] says these birds were so well tamed that Solomon might walk clear across the city under the shadow of their wings as they hovered and flitted about him.

King Solomon had a great reputation for the conundrums and riddles that he made and guessed. He and King Hiram, his neighbor, used to sit by the hour and ask riddles, each one paying in money if he could not answer or guess the riddle.

The Solomonic navy visited all the world, and the sailors, of course, talked about the wealth of their king, and about the riddles and enigmas that he made and solved.

Solomon had at his command gold to the value of £680,000,000, and he had silver to the value of £1,029,000,377. The Queen of Sheba made him a nice little present of £720,000, and King Hiram made him a present of the same amount.

If Solomon had lost the value of a whole realm out of his pocket, it would hardly have been worth his while to stoop down and pick it up.

He wrote one thousand and five songs. He wrote three thousand proverbs. He wrote about almost every thing. The Bible says distinctly he wrote about plants, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall, and about birds and beasts and fishes.

No doubt he put off his royal robes, and put on the hunter's trappings, and went out with his arrows to bring down the rarest specimens of birds; and then with his fishing apparatus he went down to the streams to bring up the denizens of the deep, and plunged into the forest and found the rarest specimens of flowers. He then came back to his study and wrote [262] books about zoology, the science of animals; about ichthyology, the science of fishes; about ornithology, the science of birds; about botany, the science of plants.

Did any other city ever behold so wonderful a man?

His fame spread abroad, and Queen Balkis, away to the south, heard of it. She sent messengers with a few riddles that she would like to have Solomon solve and a few puzzles which she would like to have him find out.

She sent to King Solomon, among other things, a diamond with a hole so small that a needle would not penetrate it, asking him to thread that diamond. Solomon took a worm and put it at the opening in the diamond, and the worm crawled through, leaving the thread in the diamond.

This queen also sent a goblet to Solomon, asking him to fill it with water that did not pour from the sky, and that did not rush out from the earth. Immediately the wise man put a slave on the back of a swift horse and galloped him around and around the park until the horse was nigh exhausted, and from the perspiration of the horse the goblet was filled.

She also sent King Solomon five hundred boys in girls' dress and five hundred girls in boys' dress, wondering if he would be acute enough to find out the deception. Immediately Solomon, when he saw them wash their faces, knew from the way they applied the water it was all a cheat.

Queen Balkis was so pleased with the acuteness of Solomon that she said: “I will just go and see him.”

Yonder it comes—the cavalcade—horses and dromedaries, chariots and charioteers, jingling harness and clattering hoofs, and blazing shields, and flying ensigns, and clapping cymbals. [263]

The place is saturated with perfumes. She brings cinnamon, saffron, calamus, frankincense and all manner of sweet spices. As the retinue sweeps through the gate the armed guards inhale the aroma. “Halt!” cry the charioteers, as the wheels grind the gravel in front of the pillared portico of the king. Queen Balkis alights in an atmosphere bewitching with perfume. As the dromedaries are driven up to the king’s storehouses and the bundles of camphor are unloaded, and the cinnamon sacks and the boxes of spices are opened, the purveyors of the palace discovered, so the Bible relates: “Of spices, great abundance; neither was there any such spices as the Queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.”

Well, my friends, you know that all theologians agree in making Solomon a type of Christ and making the Queen of Sheba a type of every truth seeker, and I take the responsibility of saying that all the spikenard, cassia and frankincense which the Queen of Sheba brought to King Solomon are mightily suggestive of the sweet spice of our holy religion.

THE GENTILE MOTHER.

It was a Sabbath afternoon in the Belleville parsonage. I had been trying for two years to preach, but to me the Christian life had been nothing but a struggle. I sat down at the table, took up my Bible, and asked for divine illumination; and it poured like sunlight upon my soul through the story of the Syro-Phenician woman. [264]

This woman was a mother, and she had an afflicted daughter. The child had a virulent, exasperating and convulsive disease, called the possession of the devil.

The mother was just like other mothers; she had no peace as long as her child was sick. She was a Gentile, and the Jews had such a perfect contempt for the Gentiles that they called them dogs. Nevertheless, she comes to Christ, and asks Him to help her in her family troubles. Christ makes no answer. The people become afraid there is going to be a “scene” enacted, and they try to get the woman out of Christ’s presence; but He forbids her expulsion. Then she falls down and repeats her request.

Christ, to rally her earnestness, and to make His mercy finally more conspicuous, addresses her, saying: “It is not meet to take the children’s bread [that is, the salvation appointed for the Jews] and cast it to dogs”—the Gentiles. Christ did not mean to characterize that woman as a dog. That would have been most unlike Him, who from the cross said: “Behold thy mother.”

His whole life was so gentle and so loving, He could not have given it out as His opinion that that was what she ought to be called; but He was only employing the ordinary parlance of the Jews in regard to the Gentiles. Yet that mother was not to be put off, pleading as she was for the life of her daughter. She was not to be rebuffed; she was not to be discouraged. She says:

“Yea, Lord, I acknowledge I am a Gentile dog; but I remember that even the dogs have some privileges, and when the door is open they slink in and crawl under the table. When the bread or the meat sifts through the cracks of the table or falls off the edge of it, they pick it up, and the master of the house is not angry with them. I do not ask for a big loaf; I do not ask even for a big slice; I only ask for that which drops down through the chinks of the table—the dogs’ portion. I ask only the crumbs.” [265]

Christ felt the wit and the earnestness and the stratagem and the faith of that woman. He turns upon her and says:

“You have conquered Me. Your daughter is well now. Go home, mother; but before you get there she will come down, skipping out to meet you.”

There I see the mother going. She feels full twenty years younger now. She is getting on in life, but she goes with a half run. Amid an outburst of hysterical laughter and tears they meet. The mother breaks down every time she tries to tell it. The daughter is before her, with cheeks as rosy as before she fell in the first fit. The doctors of the village prophesy that the cure will not last, because it was not according to their prescription. But I read in the oldest medical journal in the world: “The daughter was made whole from that very hour.”

This story shows you Jesus with His back turned. That woman came to Him and said: “Lord, spare the life of my child; it will not cost You any thing.” Jesus turned His back. He threw positive discouragement on her petition. Jesus stood with His face to blind Bartimeus, to the foaming demoniac, to the limping paralytic, to the sea when He hushed it, and to the grave when He broke it; but now He turns His back. [266]

I asked an artist if he ever saw a representation of Jesus Christ with His back turned. He said no. And it is a fact that you may go through all the picture galleries of London, Dresden, Rome, Florence and Naples, and you will find Christ with full face and profile, but never with His back turned. Yet here, in this passage, He turned away from the woman.

ZACCHÆUS.

Zacchæus was a politician and a tax gatherer. He had an honest calling, but the opportunity for “stealings” was so large that the temptation was too much for him.

The Bible says that Zacchæus was “a sinner”—that is, in the public sense. How many fine men have been ruined by official position! It is an awful thing for any man to seek office under government unless his principles of integrity are deeply fixed. Many a man, upright in an insignificant position, has made shipwreck in a great one. So far as I can tell, in the city of Jericho this Zacchæus belonged to what might be called the “ring.”

They had things their own way, successfully avoiding exposure—if by no other way, perhaps by hiring somebody to break in and steal the vouchers.

Notwithstanding his bad reputation, there were some streaks of good about Zacchæus— as there are about almost every man. Gold is found in quartz, and sometimes in a very small percentage. [267]

Jesus was coming to town. The people all turned out to see Him. Here He comes—the Lord of Glory—on foot, dust-covered and road-weary, limping along the way, carrying the griefs and woes of the world. Christ looks to be sixty years of age, when He is only about thirty.

Zacchæus was a short man, and could not see over the people’s heads while standing on the ground; so he got up into a sycamore tree that swung its arm clear over the road.

Jesus advanced amid the wild excitement of the surging crowd. The most honorable and popular men of the city are looking on, and are trying to gain His attention. But Jesus, instead of regarding them, looks up at the little man in the tree, and says:

“Zacchæus, come down. I am going home with you.”

All regretted to see such choice of company.

Zacchæus had mounted the sycamore tree out of mere curiosity. He wanted to see how this stranger looked—the color of his eyes, the length of his hair, the contour of his features, the height of his stature.

I see Christ entering the front door of the house of Zacchæus. The King of Heaven and Earth sits down; and as He looks around on the place and the family, He pronounces the

NEARER, MY GOD, TO THEE.

Nearer, my God, to Thee—
Nearer to Thee!
E'en though a cross it be
That raiseth me,
Still all my song shall be:
Nearer, my God, to Thee—
Nearer to Thee!

Though, like a wanderer,
The sun gone down,
Darkness be over me,
My rest a stone,
Yet in my dreams I'd be
Nearer, my God, to Thee
Nearer to Thee!

There let the way appear
Steps unto Heaven;
All that Thou sendest me
In mercy given!
Angels to beckon me
Nearer, my God, to Thee—
Nearer to Thee!

Then, with my waking thoughts
Bright with Thy praise,
Out of my stony griefs
Bethel I'll raise;
So, by my woes, to be
Nearer, my God, to Thee—
Nearer to Thee!

Or if, on joyful wing
Cleaving the sky—
Sun, Moon and stars forgot—
Upward I fly,
Still all my song shall be:
Nearer, my God, to Thee—
Nearer to Thee!

ABIJAH.

We forget Abijah's character in his eloquence. He carries a spell with him. Judging from his 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 but the ideal Abijah. Who ever shows himself wholly upon any one occasion? Who does not sometimes go forth in his best clothing?

We must read the account of Abijah which is given in the Book of Kings before we can correctly estimate the Abijah who talks in the Book of Chronicles.

It is, perhaps, encouraging that while 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; but few men are religious at a wedding. [270]

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 judges correctly, and His mercy is His delight. 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 while 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. In II. Chronicles, thirteenth chapter and fifth verse, Abijah asks:

"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?"

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 can not be both friend and enemy. You can not 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. [271]

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 recognized the perpetuity of the covenant. The kingdom was given to David for ever—if not in words, yet in spirit; if chapter and verse can not be quoted, yet the whole spirit of the divine communion with David meant eternity of election and honor. 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.

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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.”

All rebellion is wrong, unless it arises from a sense of injustice, untruthfulness or 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 can not justify itself by the very spirit and genius of justice. Separation becomes schism when it but 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 can not justify itself by appeals to justice, nobleness, liberty and 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 is 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.

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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 a half-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 and 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 and 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? Abijah asks:

“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?”

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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 dishonored 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 Abijah 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.” [275]

What a character Abijah 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, and 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, and 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 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 the right desire after the right God he can not 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. [276]

“And the priests, which minister unto the Lord, are the sons of Aaron, and the Levites wait upon their business.”

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; every thing 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, nor 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 has chosen you. What a Church is God's! Not a Church of wax-works, all made at one factory, and all charged for in one invoice; but living men, characterized 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 persuasive in pathos, sympathy and tenderness. [277]

There is no monotony in God. One star differeth from another 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 shew-bread also set they in order upon the pure table; and the candlestick of gold with the lamps thereof, to burn every evening.”

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 can not have today what is due tomorrow. 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. [278]

We can not 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 shew-bread and 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 first-born, 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 while 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. [279]

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.”

How steadfastly Abijah abides by the altar! He can not 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. [280]

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 tintured with possible selfishness. He can not 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 really 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. [281]

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, instrumentally and educationally.

What was the upshot of the war? Who needs to inquire? When Omnipotence goes forth to war, what can be the issue of the battle? God takes out 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.

The writer in the Book of Kings takes a much worse view of Abijah's character than we find in the Book of Chronicles. From the first Book of Kings we learn that Abijah endeavored 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—and that his heart “was not perfect before God, as the heart of David, his father.” [282]

In the second Book of Chronicles Abijah's war upon 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 worshiping the golden calves, and substituting unauthorized priests for the sons of Aaron and the Levites. He was successful in the 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 Solomon, his grandfather, fell during the last two years of his life into wickedness, as described in Kings. Both records inform us that he reigned only for the period of three years.

AHAB.

God is the time-keeper. He says: “Now.” We wonder we can not go just when it is convenient to ourselves. We think we see the exact juncture when it would be right to go, but if we went just then a serpent would bite us on the road.

We want to go to Heaven, but God says: “Not yet.”

We want to begin the battle, but God says: “Wait.” [283]

In the eighteenth chapter of the first Book of Kings we read:

“And it came to pass, after many days, that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying: ‘Go, show thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the Earth.’ And Elijah went to show himself unto Ahab. And there was a sore famine in Samaria.”

Think of waiting “many days” and doing nothing! But what if waiting be the best working? What if we can best do every thing by simply doing nothing? There is a time to stand still and see the salvation of God.

Mark another thing in these verses. The Lord said “Go,” and Elijah went. Not Elijah “objected,” Elijah “reasoned,” or Elijah “pointed out the difficulties,” but simply Elijah “went.”

That is the true ideal of life.

Always be ready.

Contrast with this the case of Jonah. Elijah had no fear of Ahab. He who fears God can not fear man. If you go up to your duties in your own strength, you will find them difficult; if you come down upon them from high communion with God, you will find them easy.

The governor of the house of Ahab was called Obadiah. The word Obadiah means “servant of Jehovah,” and it would seem to have been a true description of the man, for we read that “Obadiah feared [or revered] the Lord greatly.”

It is possible for a man to be very bad in one direction and very tolerant in another. It was so in the case of Ahab. He was the worst of the kings of Israel, yet he kept a governor over his house who feared the Lord greatly. [284]

The Lord causes the most wicked men to pay His religion the homage which is due to its excellence. A bad king employs a good governor. He who himself disobeys Jehovah yet engages a servant who fears the Lord greatly. The thief likes an honest man for steward. The

blasphemer likes a godly teacher for his child. The great speculator prefers an unspeculative man for book-keeper. It is thus that virtue has many unconscious votaries.

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

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

In the same character may be met great faith and great doubt. Obadiah risked his life to save fifty of the prophets of the Lord, yet dare not risk it, without first receiving an oath, for the greatest prophet of all! This mixture we find in every human character. "How abject, how august, is man!" [285]

In Ahab, Obadiah, Elijah and Jezebel we see a fourfold type of human society. There is the speculator, the godly servant, the far-seeing prophet and the cruel persecutor.

Society has got no farther than this today. The Ahabs of the age are leading us away into speculation that ends in idolatry and in infinite provocation of the Lord; the Obadias of the age are still praying, and serving God, and saving even the worst households from the wrath of Heaven; the Elijahs of the age are still hurling their divine thunders through the corrupt and stagnant air, and piercing with lightning shafts the gloomy and threatening future; and the Jezebels of the age are still narrow, bitter, indignant, vengeful and sanguinary.

O wondrous combination! So checked, so controlled, by invisible but benignant power! Speculative error has its counterpart in actual cruelty, and patient worship has its counterpart in daring service.

We sometimes hear that Ahab was a covetous man. Are we quite sure that the charge is just and that it can be substantiated?

This charge is based on the affair of Naboth's vineyard. How could Ahab be covetous? He proposed terms, saying:

"Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house, and I will give thee a better vineyard than it; or, if it seems good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money." [286]

The terms do not, upon the face of them, appear to be unreasonable or inapplicable. Surely this is not mere covetousness, if covetousness at all. The vineyard was close to the palace, and that fact was assigned as a reason for wishing to open negotiations concerning its transfer. But do we not sometimes too narrowly interpret the word covetousness? It is generally, at least, limited to money. When a man is fond of money, wishes to add to it, and is not scrupulous as to the means by which he seeks to enhance his fortune, we describe him as covetous. The term is perfectly applicable in such a case.

But the term "covetous" may apply to a much larger set of circumstances, and describe quite another set of impulses and desires.

We may even be covetous of personal appearance; we may be covetous of popular fame, such as is enjoyed by other men; we may be covetous in every direction which implies the gratification of our own wishes; and yet, with regard to the mere matter of money, we may be almost liberal.

This is an astounding state of affairs.

A man may be liberal with money, and yet covetous in many other directions. Sometimes, when covetousness takes this other turn, we describe it by the narrower word, "envy." We say we envy the personal appearance of some; we envy the greatness and the public standing of others.

But under all this envy is covetousness.

Envy is in a sense but a symptom; covetousness is the vital and devouring disease. Under this interpretation of the term, therefore, it is not unfit or unjust to describe Ahab as a covetous man. [287]

Look at his dissatisfaction with circumstances. He wishes to have "a garden of herbs." That is all. He is king of Israel in Samaria; but there is one little thing of which he has not yet possessed himself, and until he gets that in his hand he can not rest well. There is a dream that troubles him; there is a nightmare which makes him afraid to lie down to sleep.

Look at what he has. Who can measure it? Who can run through the enumeration of his possessions? Who can take an exhaustive inventory of all the riches of the king of Israel?

But there is one little corner that is not his, and he wants it, and until he can get it all the rest goes for nothing.

The great Alexander could not rest in his palace at Babylon because he could not get ivy to grow in his garden. What was Babylon, or all Assyria, in view of the fact that this childish king could not cause ivy to grow in the palace gardens?

Ahab lived in circumstances; he lived in the very narrowest kind of circumstances. As a little man, he lived in little things, and because those things were not all to his mind it was impossible for him to be restful or noble or really good.

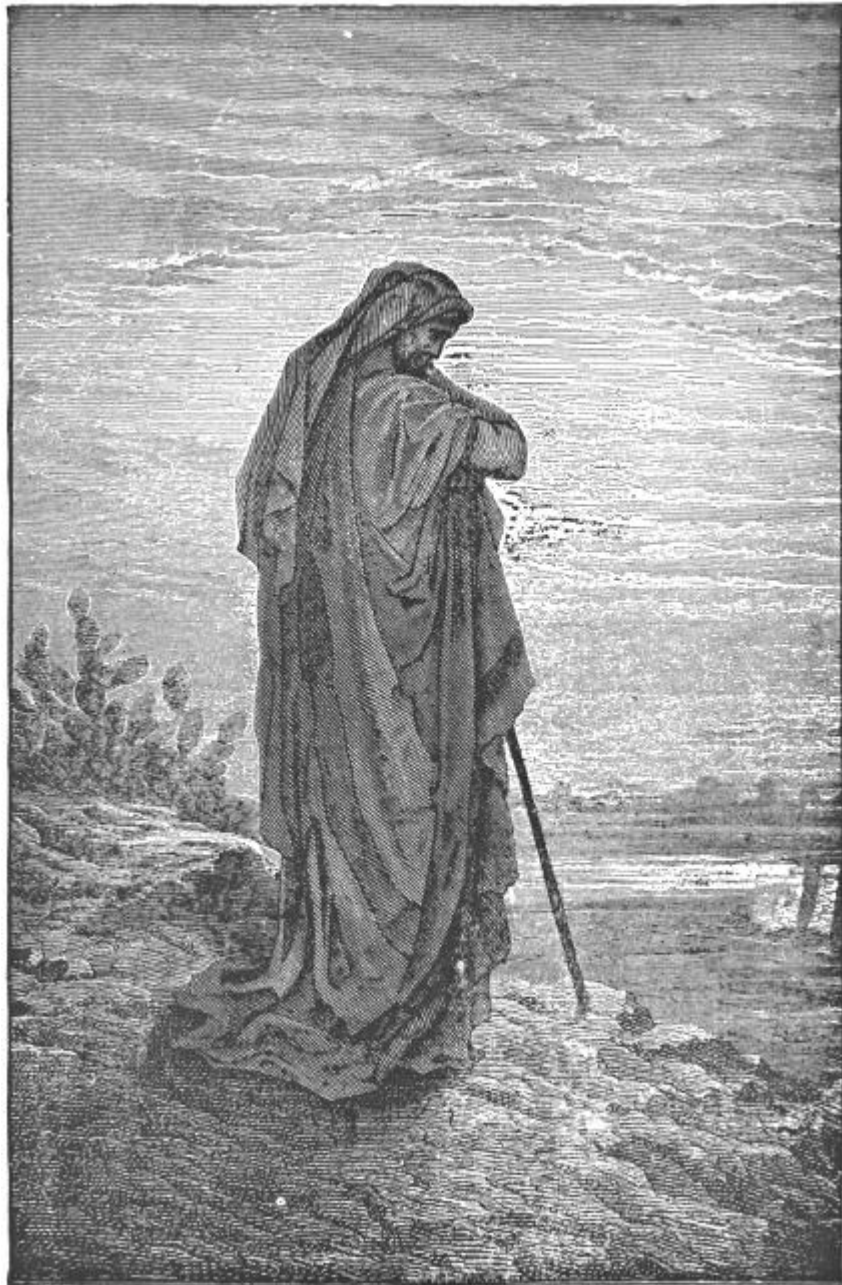
Once let the mind become dissatisfied with some trifling circumstance, and that fly spoils the whole pot of ointment. Once get the notion that the house is too small, and then morning, noon and night you never see a picture that is in it, or acknowledge the comfort of one corner in all the little habitation. The one thing that is present in the mind throughout all the weary hours is that the house is too small. [288]

Once get the idea that the business is undignified, and you go to it late in the morning and leave it early in the afternoon, neglecting it between times; you are also ashamed to speak of it, and will not throw your whole heart and soul during business hours into its execution.

Once get the notion that the neighborhood is unfashionable, and it goes for nothing that the rooms are large and airy, that the garden is one of the best you ever had, that there is ample scope for a rich library, that all the neighbors are men of peculiar intelligence and goodness. All go for nothing, because the tempter has said: "This neighborhood is not a fashionable quarter of the town, and when people come to know that you are living here they will lose confidence in you and respect for you."

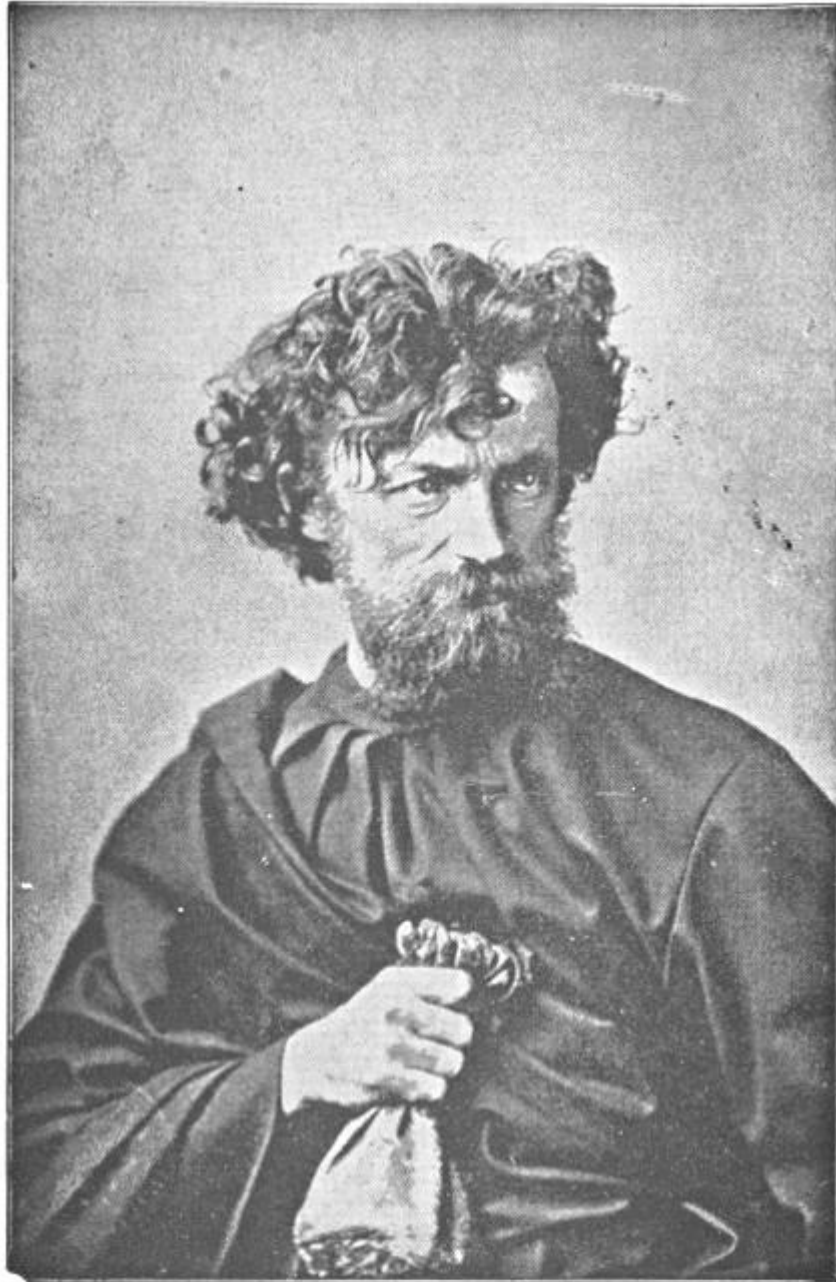
If we live in circumstances, we shall be the sport of events; we shall be without dignity, without calmness, without reality and solidity of character. Let us, therefore, betake ourselves into inner thoughts, into spirituality of life, into the soul's true character, into the very sanctuary of God. There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

Then notice in Ahab a childish servility to circumstances.



THE PROPHET AMOS.

From the Painting by Gustave Dore.



THE DESPAIR OF JUDAS.

From a Photograph of the Character in the Passion Play.

“Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased ... and he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread.” [289]

Yet he was the king of Israel in Samaria! He actually had subjects under him. He was in reality a man who could give law, whose very look was a commandment, and the uplifting of his hand could move an army. Now we see him surely at his least. So we do, but not at his worst.

All this must have an explanation. We can not imagine that the man is so simply childish and foolish as this incident alone would describe him. Behind all this childishness there is an explanation. What is it?

We find it in the twenty-fifth verse:

“But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel, his wife, stirred up.”

That explains the whole mystery. The man had sold himself to the devil. And men are doing that self-same thing every day.

If it were a transaction in the market place—if the auctioneer were visibly interested in this affair, if he could call out in audible tones “So much is the price, and the man is about to take it,” people would shrink from the villainous transaction.

But this is an affair which does not take place in the open market or in the open daylight. It is not conducted in words. If the men involved in such transactions could speak the words, the very speech of the words might break the spell and destroy the horrible infatuation. But the compact is made in darkness, in silence, in out-of-the-way places. It is an understanding unwritten, rather than an agreement in detail signed in the presence of witnesses. It is a mystery which the heart alone can understand, which even the preacher can not explain in terms, but he can only throw himself upon his own consciousness, and throw others upon their consciousness, and call for a united testimony to the fact that it is possible to sell one’s very soul to evil. [290]

Now we understand King Ahab better. We thought him but little, frivolous of mind, childish and petty, without a man’s worthy ambition; but now we see that all this was only symptomatic, an outward sign, pointing, when rightly followed, to an inward and mortal corruption.

Now, let us look at the case of Naboth and the position which he occupied in this matter.

Naboth possessed the vineyard which Ahab is said to have coveted. Naboth said: “The Lord forbid.” He made a religious question of it. Why did he invoke the Eternal Name and stand back, as if an offense had been offered to his faith? The terms were commercial; the terms were not unreasonable; the approach was courteous, and the ground given for the approach was not an unnatural ground. Why did Naboth stand back as if his religion had been shocked?

The answer is in the Book of Numbers, thirty-sixth chapter and seventh verse:

“So shall not the inheritance of the children of Israel remove from tribe to tribe; for every one of the children of Israel shall keep himself to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers.”

So Naboth stood upon the law.

In Ezekiel we read:

“Moreover, the prince shall not take of the people’s inheritance by oppression, to thrust them out of their possession; but he shall give his sons inheritance out of his own possession, that My people be not scattered every man from his possession.” [291]

So Naboth was not answering haughtily or resentfully. He was answering both solemnly and religiously. When money was offered for his fathers’ inheritance, he spurned the offer. There are some things, blessed be God, we can not pay for.

When Ahab said “I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it” he knew not of what he was speaking. There can be no better vineyard than the vineyard of the fathers; there can be no vineyard equal to the vineyard that is sown with history, planted with associations, solemnized and endeared by a thousand precious memories. There ought to be some things which we can not barter. Surely there ought to be some things which we should never try to sell.

Verily, when we hear propositions made to us that money shall be given in exchange for certain things, our whole soul should rise in horror and indignation, and repel the approach of a barter which itself expresses an infinite, because a most spiritual, injustice. So Naboth’s position was strong, and he had the courage to answer the king in these terms.

Kings must submit to law. Kings ought to be the subjects of their own people. Ahab was taught that there was a man in Samaria who valued the inheritance which had been handed

down to him. Have we no inheritance handed down to us—no book of revelation, no day of rest, no flag of liberty, no password of common trust? Do we inherit nothing? Did we make the age as it is, and is civilization a creature of our own fashioning? And are we not bound to hand on to others what was handed to us intact and unpolluted? [292]

Let us live in a sacred past, and regard ourselves as trustees of many possessions, and only trustees, and as bound to vindicate our trust and have an ample acquittal at the last.

So Ahab lay down upon his bed, turned away his face, and would eat no bread. But there is a way of accomplishing mean desires. There is a way of obtaining what we want. Take heart! There is a way of possessing oneself of almost whatever one desires. There is always some Merlin who will bring every Uther-Pendragon what he longs to have; there is always some Lady Macbeth who will show the thane how to become king. There is always a way to be bad. The gate of hell stands wide open; or, if apparently half closed, a touch will make it fly back, and the road is broad that leads to destruction.

Jezebel said she would find the garden or vineyard for her husband. She taunted him. “Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? Arise and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry. I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth, the Jezreelite.” Jezebel threw into the word “govern” a subtle and significant emphasis.

How will she proceed? She will be ceremoniously religious; she will proclaim a fast. O thou sweet, white, pure religion, thou hast been forced into strange uses! “Proclaim a fast;” [293] lengthen your faces; mimic solemnity; promise your hunger an early satisfaction, but look as if you were fasting.

It is a sure sign of mischief when certain men become serious. The moment they appear to be religious the devil is just adding the last touch to the building which he has been putting up within their souls. When they talk long words—when they speak about responsibility, obligation, duty, conscience, compulsion of conviction—they are walking over tessellated pavement into the very jaws of hell.

They do not mean their words; they do but use them. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.”

First of all, then, be ceremoniously religious, Jezebel; then trample down truth. “Set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying: ‘Thou didst blaspheme God and the king.’” Falsehood is always ready. A great black lie is always willing to be loosed and to be set going in the minds of men to pervert them and mislead them. It is always open to the bad heart to speak the untrue word. Nor is the untrue word always frankly and broadly spoken. If so, it could be answered in some cases.

The false word is hardly spoken at all; it is uttered in a whisper. Falsehood is made to use signs and gestures; even silence is made to bear witness to falsehood. Truly, again we may say: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” Tell a lie big enough about any man, and it will be difficult, if not impossible, to do away with the consequences of the false accusation. People will always be found to say: “There must be something in it; [294] it may not be just as rumor has it, but surely a statement of that kind never could have been invented. Allowing a good deal for exaggeration, there must be something in it.”

Nor is it always possible to get even righteous men to purge their minds of that damnable sophism. Men who ought to stand up and say “There is nothing in it” hang down their heads, and with a coward’s gesture let the lie pass on.

This is how men insult the Son of God, and crucify the Man of truth. They will not be thorough, bold and fearless, and make the enemy ashamed of himself for either having invented or repeated a falsehood. Nor may the man escape because he says he heard the lie. Tell him he may have heard it, but he is yet responsible for repeating it. He may have no control over the hearing, but the moment he repeats it he adopts it, and renders himself amenable to the Eternal Righteousness.

Make the very law an instrument of injustice! First charge this man with blasphemy and treason, and then take him out and stone him, that he may die! Do not give him time to speak; do not ask for his defense; do not give him an opportunity of interrogating the witnesses. But who would cross-examine two “sons of Belial?” Better almost to die than to taint the hands and eyes with the touch and look of such children of blackness!

“Then they carried him [Naboth] forth out of the city, and stoned him with stones, that he died.” It is all over! Jezebel did this. Jezebel—a woman, a king’s wife—did this. High position goes for nothing when the heart is wrong. Great influence means great mischief when the soul is not in harmony with the spirit of righteousness. [295]

Is Naboth quite dead? Yes, he is dead. Take the vineyard—take possession of it instantly. Now grow herbs, and grow them plentifully. The vineyard is now at liberty—take it. “Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth, the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.” But who is that looms in the distance? Is it Naboth? No.

How comes this man to be here just now—aye, just now? How the end is marked off into points, and how does providence reveal itself at unexpected times and in ways unforeseen! Who is this? He looks stern. He has an eye of fire. His lips are shut as if they could never be opened. He does but look.

Who is he? “Elijah, the Tishbite.” He has a message:

“Thus saith the Lord: ‘Hast thou killed, and also taken possession?’ ... Thus saith the Lord: ‘In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine.’”

A sad walk!

Ahab went down to take possession of a vineyard, and a death warrant was read to him! After all, it is safe to live in this universe; there is law in it, there is a genius of righteousness, there is a Force that moves on toward noble issues.

“And Ahab said to Elijah: ‘Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?’ And he answered: ‘I have found thee; because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord.’” Ahab went out to take possession of a garden of herbs, and there he stands face to face with righteousness—face to face with honor—face to face with judgment. [296]

Now take the vineyard. He can not! An hour since the Sun shone upon it, and now it is black as if it were part of the midnight which has gathered in judgment.

There is a success which is failure. We can not take some prizes. Elijah will not allow us. When we see him we would that a way might open under our feet that we might flee and escape the judgment of his silent look.

In the Septuagint version the twentieth chapter of the first Book of Kings immediately precedes the twenty-second. The three years without war is a period which is reckoned from the peace which was so rashly made by Ahab with Ben-hadad.

It is clear that Ben-hadad has recovered his independence, and is probably in a position of superiority. It is certain that he has not restored Ramoth-gilead, as he had promised to do, and his reconstructed army now seems to him to be sufficient to encounter successfully the united hosts of Israel and Judah. In the forty-second verse of the same chapter we have seen how Ahab was rebuked for allowing the enemy to escape.

It has been supposed that this conduct on the part of Ahab may have been due partly to compassion and partly to weakness. The judgment of the Lord was, however, expressed in the severest terms:

“Because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people.” [297]

In the third verse we see these words signally fulfilled. The king of Israel seems to have a good cause when he said to his servants: "Know ye that Ramoth, in Gilead, is ours, and we be still, and take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria?" On this occasion Ahab entered into an alliance with Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, for the purpose of taking back the city which belonged to Israel. Jehoshaphat made a deferential as well as a friendly reply, but insisted upon the fulfillment of a religious condition. Jehoshaphat would make inquiry at the word of the Lord.

Thereupon four hundred prophets were gathered together, and with one consent they advised that the attack should be made upon Ramoth-gilead. Surely this was enough to satisfy the judgment and the conscience of the most religious man, yet Jehoshaphat was not content with the unanimous reply which four hundred prophets had returned.

"There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding."

All external unanimity goes for nothing when the conscience itself dissents from the judgment which has been pronounced. There is a verifying faculty which operates upon its own responsibility, and which can not be overpowered by the clamor of multitudes who eagerly rush down paths that are forbidden. Even when imagination assents to the voice of the majority, and when ambition is delighted with the verdict of the prophets, there yet remains the terrible but gracious authority of conscience. Through all the clamor that authority makes its way, and calmly distinguishes between right and wrong, and solemnly insists that right shall be done at all hazards and in view of all consequences. [298]

A vital lesson rises here to all who are anxious to know the right way under difficult circumstances. It is not enough to have great numbers of authorities on our side; so long as the conscience remains unsatisfied all other authorities are "trifles light as air."

Jehoshaphat was uneasy, therefore, notwithstanding the prophets had said: "Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king." He inquired: "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might inquire of him?" The word which Jehoshaphat used was the great word, Jehovah. It was not enough for him to use a religious or sacred term. He must have the prophecy identified with the awful name, Jehovah; then it would come with final authority.

The king of Israel knew that there was another man whose very name signified "Who is like Jehovah?" Ahab frankly admitted that he hated Micaiah because he never prophesied good concerning him, but always evil.

Observe the madness of Ahab's policy, and note how often it is the policy which we ourselves are tempted to pursue. We suppose that if we do not consult the Bible we may take license to do what seems good in our own eyes, and we imagine that by ignoring the Bible we have divested it of authority. We flatter ourselves that if we do not listen to an exposition of the divine word we shall be judged according to the light we have, forgetting the solemn law that it is not according to the light we have that we are to be judged, but according to the light we might have if we put ourselves in right relations to the opportunities created for us by divine providence. [299]

We know that if we go to hear a certain preacher he will insist upon "righteousness, temperance and judgment to come;" and, supposing that we already know every thing that he will say, we turn away from him and listen to men who do not profoundly treat vital subjects, or press home upon the conscience the terrible judgments of God.

What is this but closing our eyes to light, and supposing that darkness is safety? What is this ostrich policy but one that ought to be condemned by our sense as well as shrunk from by our piety?

Our duty under all critical circumstances is to go to the truth-teller, and to get at the reality of things at all costs. Where the truth-teller disturbs our peace and disappoints our ambition, we ought surely to learn that it is precisely at that point that we have to become

self-rectifying. The truth-teller is only powerful in proportion as he tells the truth. Officially, he is nothing; his power is simply the measure of his righteousness.

But do not men love to be flattered, even in courses of evil? Is it not pleasant to go to forbidden war amid the huzzas of thoughtless and irresponsible multitudes?

Jehoshaphat, however, was a just man, and as such he protested against the sin of the king of Israel, saying: "Let not the king say so." Jehoshaphat being so bent upon a complete judgment of the case, Micaiah was sent for. The king of Israel wished to overawe the despised prophet by the pomp and circumstance under which he was introduced to the royal presence. "The king of Israel and Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, sat each on his throne, having put on their robes, in a void place in the entrance of the gate of Samaria," and, to increase the impressiveness of the occasion, all the prophets prophesied before the kings. [300]

A singular addition was made to the surroundings of the occasion which was intended to impress the imagination and stagger the courage of the despised Micaiah. A man bearing the name of Zedekiah ("righteousness of Jehovah") made him horns of iron. The use of symbolical acts is quite common in biblical history. We have already seen Abijah engaged in acts of this kind. He "caught the new garment that was on him and rent it in twelve pieces, and said to Jeroboam: 'Take thee ten pieces.'"

The enthusiasm of Zedekiah inflamed all the other prophets to the highest point of excitement, and they shouted as with one voice:

"Go up to Ramoth-gilead, and prosper; for the Lord shall deliver it into the king's hand."

In this instance the prophets, overborne by the enthusiasm of Zedekiah, actually ventured to use the name of Jehovah, which had not been used in the first instance. The excitement had passed the point of worship and had become more nearly resembling the frantic cry that was heard on Mount Carmel: "O Baal, hear us."

Is it possible that there can be found any solitary man who dare oppose such unanimous testimony and complete enthusiasm?

The messenger who was sent to call Micaiah was evidently a man of considerate feeling and who wished the prophet well. Seeing that the words of the prophets had all declared good unto the king with one mouth, the messenger wished that Micaiah should for once agree with the other prophets, and please the king by leaving undisturbed their emphatic and unanimous counsel. [301]

Thus the voice of persuasion was brought to bear on Micaiah, and that voice is always the most difficult to resist. The temptation thus addressed to Micaiah was thus double in force. On the one hand, there were the pomp and the terror of the king who had sold himself to do evil, and who would shrink from the infliction of no cruelty that would express his unreasoning and unlimited anger; on the other hand, there was the good will of the messenger, who wished Micaiah to escape all danger and penalty, and for once to take the popular side. Micaiah's reply is simply sublime: "As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak."

The humility of this answer is as conspicuous as its firmness. Its profound religiousness saves it from the charge of being defiant. Micaiah recognizes himself merely in the position of a servant or medium, who has nothing of his own to say; who is not called upon to invent an answer or to play the clever man in the presence of the kings. He was simply as a trumpet through which God could blow His own blast, or a pillar on which God would inscribe his own message, or a voice which God would use for the declaration of His own will. It is unjust to attribute obstinacy or any form of self-will or self-worship to Micaiah. If he had consulted his natural inclination alone, he would have sought favor with the king, and the logical effect of his subsequent position would have been that Ahab would have endeavored for ever to silence him by constituting him the prince and leader of the four [302]

hundred prophets. Micaiah said, in effect, what was said centuries afterward: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels."

Micaiah lived in God, for God, and had nothing of his own to calculate or consider. Until preachers realize this same spiritual independence, they will be attempting to accommodate themselves to the spirit of the times, and even the strongest of them may be betrayed into connivances and compromises fatal to personal integrity and to the claims of truth.

Now came the critical moment. Now it was to be seen whether Micaiah was to be promoted to honor, or thrust away in contempt and wrath. It is easy to read of the recurrence of such moments, but difficult to realize them in their agony. Yet these are the moments which make history in its sublimest lines.

It is not too much to say that there have been points of time at which if certain men had given way the whole economy of the world have been wrecked.

The king addressed himself to the prophet, saying: "Shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we forbear?" The answer of Micaiah must have been a surprise to all who heard it, for he said: "Go, and prosper; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king."

This is an answer which can not be understood in print. It was evident, however, that Ahab was in no doubt as to its meaning, for the tone of the prophet was a tone of almost contemptuous irony. If King Ahab had taken Micaiah's literal answer, he would have gone forth to the battle comforting himself with the thought that he was carrying out the will of Heaven; but he knew in his own soul that Micaiah was not uttering that which expressed the reality of the case. With anger the king said unto him: "How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the Lord?"

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Then Micaiah replied in symbolic language, the full meaning of which was vividly clear to the mind of Ahab; for, turning to Jehoshaphat, he said: "Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil?"

Thereupon Micaiah charged the whole band of prophets with being under the inspiration of a lying spirit, and thus he put a stigma upon their judgment and extracted from it every particle of dignity and authority.

But this was not to be borne, for Zedekiah went near and smote Micaiah on the cheek and taunted him as being the only prophet in Israel. Micaiah had to bear the sarcasm conveyed in the inquiry: "Which way went the Spirit of the Lord from me to speak unto thee?"

Micaiah, like a true prophet, leaves his judgment to the decision of time. He will not stoop to argue, or to exchange words either of anger or of controversy; he simply says that Zedekiah will one day see the meaning of the whole prophecy, and until that day controversy would be useless.

Micaiah had to pay for his intrepidity. He was carried unto Amon, the governor of the city, and to Joash, the king's son, and was to be put in prison and fed with the bread of affliction and with the water of affliction until Ahab returned in peace.

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Micaiah thus disappears from history. Of his fate we know nothing; but there can be no difficulty in forecasting it a cruel death. Micaiah knew well the meaning of the king's message. It may be difficult for the commentator to explain the expression, "bread of affliction and water of affliction," but Micaiah knew the full meaning of the terms, and yet, while their cruel sound was in his ears, he looked at the king and said: "If thou return at all in peace, the Lord hath not spoken by me."

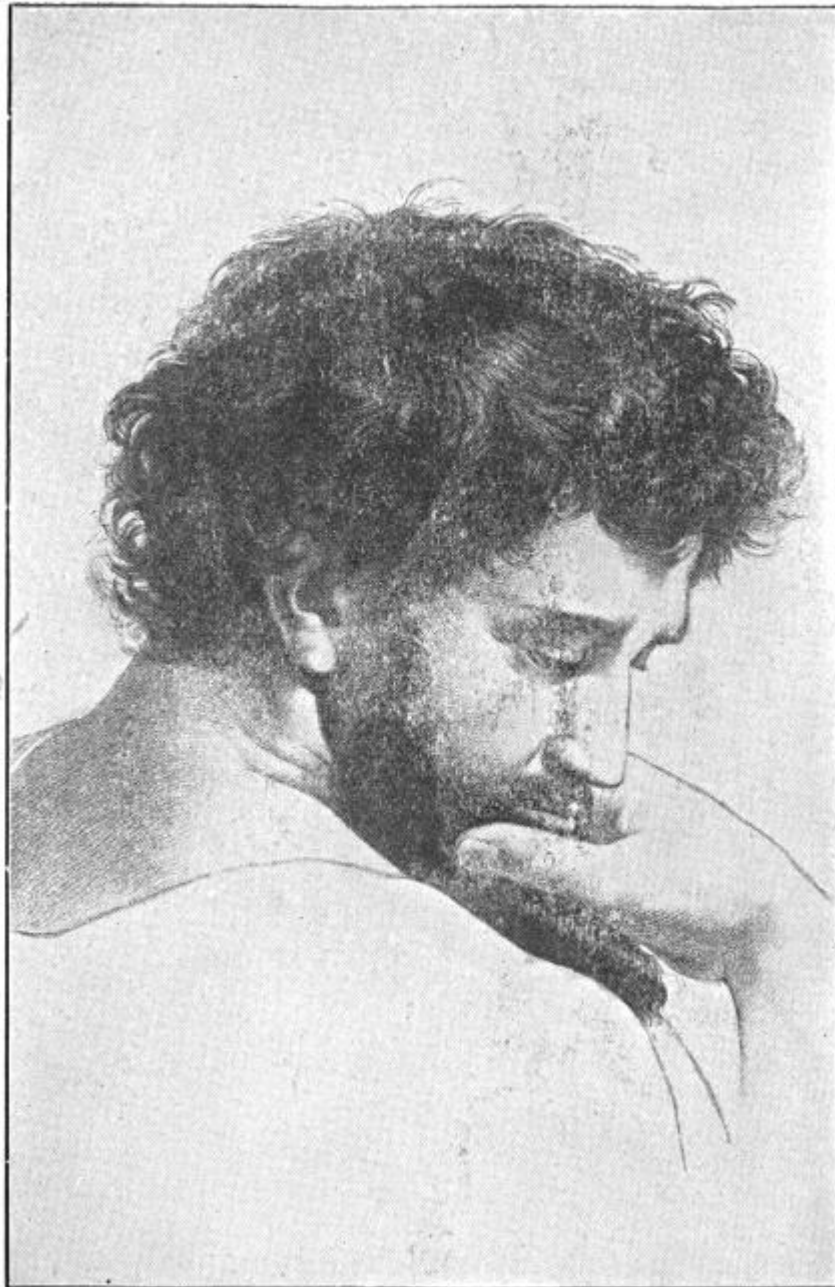
Micaiah also made his appeal to the people, and thus committed himself to the verdict of history, saying: "Hearken, O people, every one of you."

See whether it is not a moment to be proud of when Micaiah turns away in the custody of his persecutors, having delivered his soul with a fearlessness that did not cower or blanch, even at the sight of death in its most ghastly form. Surely, it is due to history to recognize the fact that there have been men who have not counted their lives dear unto themselves when they were called upon to testify for truth and goodness.

The martyrs must never be forgotten.



JOSEPH INTERPRETING PHARAOH'S DREAM. Genesis, xli.



St. Paul.

From the Painting by Raphael.

Dark will be the day in the history of any nation when the men who shed their blood that truth might be told and honor might be vindicated are no longer held in remembrance. In vain do we bring forth from our hidden treasure the coins of ancient times, the robes worn in high antiquity by kings and priests, the rusty armor of warriors, if there is no longer in our heart the most tender recollection of the men who wandered about clad in sheep-skins and goat-skins—being destitute, afflicted and tormented—that they might save the torch of truth from extinction and the standard of honor from overthrow.

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Away the kings have gone, and instead of relying upon the word of the Lord, or taking refuge in the sanctuary of great principles, they invent little tricks for the surprise and dismay of the enemy.

The king of Israel disguised himself, and Jehoshaphat made himself as the king of Israel; but all their inventions came to nothing. A certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness. The poor king was fatally struck. He

“was stayed up his chariot against the Syrians, and died at even; and the blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot... And one washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked up his blood; and they washed his armor; according unto the word of the Lord which He spake.”

So will perish all the enemies of the Lord.

Differences of merely accidental detail there will ever be, but no honor can mark the death of those who have gone contrary to the will of Heaven, and taken counsel of their own imagination. How long shall the lessons of history be wasted upon us? How long will men delude themselves with the mad infatuation that they can fight against God and prosper? Horsemen and chariots are nothing; gold and silver are valueless; all the resources of civilization are but an elaborate display of cobwebs. Nothing can stand in the final conflict but truth, right and purity. These are the eternal bulwarks, and unto these are assured complete and unchangeable victory. If God be for us, who can be against us? And if God be against us, it will matter not what kings are for us; they shall be blown away by the wind as if contemptuously, and cast out as refuse which is of no value. [306]

My soul, be thou faithful to the voice of history, nor tell lies to thyself, nor operate merely through imagination, ambition or selfish calculation; for the end of this course is death—not heroic death, not death over which coming men and women will weep, but death that shall be associated with dishonor, a thing to be forgotten, an event never to be named without bitterness and shame.

The first and second Book of Kings constitute a section of Jewish history, and originally formed only one book in the sacred writings. It was customary with the Jews to name the sacred books from the word or words with which they commenced; and, while this practice may have given rise to the designation, “Kings,” it is right to observe that the title is well fitted to indicate the character of these historic compositions.

The annals given in these sacred registers are necessarily brief; but they extend from the close of David’s reign till the commonwealth was dissolved, a period of 427 years. Succinct as is the history contained in these books, there are some peculiarities in them which should not be overlooked, and from which not a little may be learned. There is not here a simple biography of the various kings that occupied the thrones of Judah and Israel, nor is there a mere detail of national movements and events, nor even a tabular register of ecclesiastical affairs. The throne, the state and the church are all exhibited in their mutual relations and bearings upon each other. Kings and people are held up to view as existing and acting under the immediate government of God; and hence the character of the ruler is always tested by the mode in which he adheres to the laws of the Most High and develops the moral excellences of the people. The notice of his accession to royal office is generally accompanied with an estimate of his conduct, and the standard to which he is likened or with which he is contrasted is either the character of David, of his own father or of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, “who made Israel to sin.” [307]

All the political events which are recorded have been brought forward chiefly to exhibit the influence of religion on national prosperity, and in this way to show how the divine King of Israel observed the conduct of his subjects, and rewarded their fidelity or avenged their wickedness with expressions of righteous indignation. And the affairs of the Church are all portrayed with the evident design of giving prominence to the same important truth.

Idolatry in Israel was treason against their King; religious defection was open revolt, and every act of overt wickedness was an act of rebellion. Hence there is a constant comparing or contrasting of religious state and feeling with those of former times, and especially are the oracles of truth continually elevated as the perfect standard to which the thoughts and actions of all should be conformed.

The Mosaic promises and warnings are strikingly verified in the Books of Kings. For this object they were written, and to the manifestation of this the author has made his whole narrative conduce. [308]

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

AHAZIAH.

Ahaziah was the son of Ahab and Jezebel. He was badly born. Some allowance must be made for this fact in estimating his character.

Again and again we have had occasion, and shall indeed often have, to remark upon the disadvantages of children born of wicked parents. It is not for us to lay down any final doctrine of responsibility; we must leave that in the hands of a just and gracious God.

A terrible spectacle, however, it is to see a man whose father sold himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, who bound himself as for a price to show rebellion on the very floor of Heaven.

Ahaziah was a prince of evil—a man who said he would defile the sanctuary and commit his supreme sin within the shadow of the altar, and whose mother laid the plans for the murder of Naboth, and who all but personally superintended their execution. What can we expect from such a child of darkness? Who can gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Was he responsible for his own actions? Society is often hard on such men—not unreasonably or unnaturally. Yet society is often very gracious to such men, saying with an instinctive piety and sense of justice: “After all, such men are not to be personally blamed for their antecedents; they may indeed be open to some measure of suspicion, but even they must have their opportunity in life.” [309]

Let us consider the case of Ahaziah and see how matters stand for our own instruction.

To understand the matter thoroughly, we must go to the twenty-second chapter of the first Book of Kings: “Then said Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, unto Jehoshaphat: ‘Let my servants go with thy servants in the ships.’ But Jehoshaphat would not.”

Jehoshaphat was right when he acted upon his instinct. By-and-by he came to act upon a basis of calculation, and then a compact was entered into. But who dare set aside the voice of instinct—the very first voice that rises in the soul to make judgment and to give direction?

Jehoshaphat, on hearing the proposal of the son of Ahab, said: “No. I have known thy father too well. I am too familiarly acquainted with thy family history. Thou shalt not send thy servants with mine.”

It would be well for us if we could sometimes act more promptly upon our instincts. It would have been well for Jehoshaphat if he had acted upon his instinct.

Ahaziah fell through the lattice, and in his helplessness he became religious. Man must have some God. Even Atheism is a kind of religion. When a man recoils openly from what may be termed the public faith of his country, he seeks to apologize for his recoil, and to make up for his church absence by creating high obligations of another class. He plays the patriot; he plays the disciplinarian; he will be a Spartan in personal training and drill—in some way he will try to make up for or defend the recoil of his soul from the old altar of his country. [310]

It is in their helplessness that we really know what men are. Do not listen to the frivolous and irresponsible chatter of men who, being in robust health, really know nothing about the aching, the sorrow, the pain, the need and the agony of this awful human life.

What does our helplessness suggest? Instantly we go out of ourselves to seek friendship, assistance and sympathy. "Oh, would some gentle hand but touch my weariness!" Thus cries the helpless one. All that, being fairly and duly interpreted, has a religious signification. The cry for friendship is but a subdued cry for God.

Sometimes men will invent Gods of their own. This is what was done, practically, by Ahaziah. Men will go out after novel deities. This is what is being done every day—not under that name, but the mere name makes no difference in the purpose of the spirit. Say new enjoyments, new entertainments, new programs, new customs—these, being interpreted as to the heart of them, mean new altars, new helpers, new gods.

It is said of Shakespeare that he first exhausted worlds, and then invented new. That was right. It was but of the liberty of a poet to do so. But it is no part of the liberty of the soul. Necessity forbids it, because the true God cannot be exhausted. He is like His own nature, so far as we know it in the great creation; He is all things in one, gleaming and dazzling as noon-tide, soft and gentle as the balmy wind, strong as the great mountains and rocks, beautiful as the tiny fragrant flowers, musical as the birds that make the air melodious, awful as the gathered thunder which hovers above the Earth as if in threatening.

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Who can exhaust nature?

Who can exhaust nature's God?

Still, the imagination of man is evil continually. He will invent new ways of enjoying himself. He will degrade religion into a mere form of interrogation. This is what Ahaziah did in this instance: "Go, inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover of this disease." All that we sometimes want of God is that He should be the great fortune teller.

How true it is that Ahaziah represents us all in making his religion into a mere form of question asking—in other words, into a form of selfishness!

The messengers have now come. They have taken their speech from their king, and they are on the road to consult Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron. But who is this who meets them, and who asks:

"Is it not because there is not a God in Israel that ye go to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?"

The men had said nothing about their errand. Who is it that reads the heart night and day, to whom the darkness and the light are both alike, and from the fire of whose eye nothing is hid? How do we get the impression that when we have perfected our lie it is in some sense public property? We are sure the man whom we meet knows it. He looks as if he did.

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Elijah is an abrupt speaker. The "hairy man" and "girt with a girdle of leather" did not study the scanning of his sentences. He struck with a battering ram; his interrogations were spears that quivered in the heart; his looks were judgments. What an effect he produced upon these men! Why did they not go past him and say: "Keep thy speeches to thyself, thou hairy man, nor interfere with the king's messengers"?

We can not do that. We know that some men are not to be turned away so. We may attempt to deceive, evade or disappoint them, but they have a magnetic and most marvelous influence upon us. Though they do not speak in the imperative mood, they speak with imperative force.

The men turned back like whipped children to tell the king what they had heard, and Ahaziah was surprised at their early return. He can not sleep. He asks that the book of the

chronicles may be brought, that he may look up events and see where the loop slipped, where the wrong entry was made, or where the minutes were not carried out in detail.

All this means that Elijah lives in some form or other and will meet us and confront us and have it out with us.

Look at the conflict between Ahaziah and Elijah, the Tishbite. Ahaziah is the king and Elijah is only the prophet, and the king ought to have every thing his own way ex-officio. Now we shall see what metal Elijah is made of. He handled kings as if they were little children. He took them up and set them down behind him and said: "Wait there until I return, and stir at your peril." [313]

The prophet should always be the uppermost man. Kings are nothing compared to teachers and seers—men who hold the judgments of God on commission. The great men of the nation are the prophets, the teachers, the educators of thought, the inspirers of noble sacrificial enthusiasm. See how Elijah tramps among the kings. He has no favor to ask. If he were driven to ask for one morsel of bread, he would be Elijah no more.

Ahaziah sends to Elijah and says: "Come down." These words sound very commanding and imperative. Elijah answered: "If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from Heaven and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from Heaven and consumed him and his fifty."

Look at the conflict and its parties. On the one hand, petulance; on the other, dignity. On the one side, anger—fretful, fuming, petty; on the other, judgment—calm, sublime, comprehensive, final.

Ekron was one of the royal cities of the Philistines. Its situation is pointed out with considerable minuteness in Scripture. It is described as lying on the northern border of Philistia and of the territory allotted to Judah. It stood on the plain between Bethshemesh and Jabneel. Jerome locates it on the east of the road leading from Azotus (Ashdod) to Jamnia (Jabneel). From these notices we have no difficulty in identifying it with the modern village of Akir. Akir stands on the southern slope of a low and bleak ridge or swell which separates the Plain of Philistia from Sharon. It contains about fifty mud houses, and has not a vestige of antiquity except two large and deep wells and some stone water troughs. Ekron means "wasteness." The houses are built on the accumulated rubbish of past ages, and, like their predecessors, if left desolate for a few years they would crumble to dust. The most interesting event in its history was the sending of the ark to Bethshemesh. A new cart was made and two milch kine yoked to it, and then left to choose their own path; "and they took the straight way to the way of Bethshemesh," the position of which can be seen in a gorge of the distant mountains eastward. The deity worshiped at Ekron was called Baal-zebul, and we may conclude from the story of Ahaziah that this oracle had a great reputation, even among the degenerate Israelites. Ekron was a large village in the days of Jerome, and also in the age of the crusades. [314]

ASA.

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." [315]

While the land had peace, Asa set to work and built walls, 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.

Zerah brought against Asa, king of Judah, no fewer than a million soldiers—to us a large number, but to the Orientals quite a common array. Zerah's host was the largest collected army of which we read 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. Xerxes crossed into Greece with certainly above a million combatants. Artaxerxes Mnemon collected 1,260,000 men to meet the attack of the younger Cyrus.

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.

“Lord, it is nothing with Thee to help, 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 against this multitude. O Lord, thou art our God; let not man prevail against Thee.”

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. [316]

The defeat of Zerah 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 and Ptolemy I. were either unopposed or only opposed in this 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.

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. Do not make an accident of your lives—a thing without center, purpose, certitude or holiness. 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.

“And Asa took courage, and put away the abominable idols 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.” [317]

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 tried Theism of the universe.

We are 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 or forgotten.

Nothing of the kind. They live here; they build today. 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.

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 economic system.

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 when they saw that the Lord, his God, was with him.”

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.” [318]

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 around 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 can not begin one. That is the philosophy we would unfold and enforce.

Regard all leaders with prayerful hopefulness in so far as they want to do good and to be good. Sympathize 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. [319]

Solemn renewals of the original covenant which God made with their fathers in the wilderness 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. There is a third in the time of Nehemiah. 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.

“And they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and 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.”

That is the danger. You can not 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.

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.” [320]

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 can not 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."

Some 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.

The original word for "idol" 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.

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. [321]

"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."

ATHALIAH.

Athaliah was a king's daughter and a king's wife. She had a son whose name was Ahaziah, but, as he was an invalid, he did not occupy the throne longer than about twelve months.

As soon as his mother saw that he was dead a fierce and most murderous passion seized her heart. She then resolved to be queen herself.

In order to carry out this nefarious purpose, she slew all the seed royal, so that, there being no successor to the throne, she ascended it and reigned as queen.

It is very wonderful that some of the most cruel and startling things in the world have been done by women. One called Laodice poisoned her six sons one by one, that she might be empress of Constantinople. Another, ironically named Irene, took the eyes out of her own boy, that he might be incapable of empire, and that she might reign alone.

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

Athaliah made her heap of corpses and laughed in her mad heart, saying that now she was queen. But always some Fleance escapes the murderer's clutch. In that heap of corpses there was an infant boy, hardly twelve months old; he was spared. The sword had not taken his little life, but the queen knew not that the child Joash had escaped. He was taken and with his nurse was hidden in the Temple, and there he was trained by the good priest, Jehoiada, for some six years. All the while the queen was reigning and doing evil. [322]

The little boy was saved by his aunt, Jehosheba, and when six years had passed and the boy was seven years of age, being twelve months old when he was snatched from impending ruin, Jehoiada called the rulers together and all the chief and mighty men of Israel. He then revealed the secret to them.

Having disposed these dignitaries in military order and with military precision around the person of the young king, Jehoiada brought the crown and put it upon his head, and he gave him the testimony or Book of Leviticus; and, having gone through all this ceremonial

process, the young king stood upright by the pillar of inauguration in the Temple, and all that great throng then clapped their hands and shouted: "God save the king!" Louder the shout rang till the queen heard it in her own house, which was not far off.

"The nearer the church, the farther from God," has been wittily said.

Athaliah hastened to the sacred place to know the reason of this hilarious tumult, and when the case was made clear to her she shrieked and cried:

"Treason! Treason!"

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But her voice found no echo in the hearts of men. Not a soul fluttered—not a heart started up in the royal defense. The woman—the evil daughter of an evil mother—was taken out by the way along which the horses came into the king's house, and the sword which she had thrust into the throats of others drank her own blood.

In an event of this kind there must be some great lessons for all time. These are not merely momentary ebullitions of wrath or malice. They have history in them; they are red with the common blood of the whole race.

Very few men stand out in ancient history with so fair and honorable a fame as good Jehoshaphat. It is like a tonic, intellectual and spiritual, to read his vivid history. He was a grand king—long-headed, good-hearted, honest and healthy in purpose of doing wondrous things for his kingdom and for the chosen of God.

But is there not a weak point in every man? Does not the strongest man stoop? Does not great Homer sometimes nod?

Jehoshaphat had this weakness, that he hankered after some kind of connection with the wicked house of Ahab. He had a son, whose name was Jehoram (or Joram), and he wanted his son married. He must look around for royal blood. Explain it as we may—no man has explained it fully yet—Jehoshaphat wanted to be connected with the evil house of Ahab. To that house he looked for a wife for his son, Jehoram. His son married Athaliah, and she brought into the kingdom all the idolatry of Ahab and the fierce blood-thirstiness of Jezebel. That was the root of the mischief. Some roots lie a long time before they begin to germinate. There may be roots in our lives which will take ten years or forty years to develop, but the root will bring forth according to its kind. Let us take care what roots we plant in our lives—what connections we form.

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Jehoram, the son of good Jehoshaphat, walked in the evil ways of the kings of Israel, and he wrought that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. Mark the reason given by the inspired historian: "He had the daughter of Ahab to wife."

What secrets were indicated by that one reason! What a whole volume of tragedy is wrapped up in that brief sentence!

The responsibility seems to a large extent transferred from Jehoram and placed upon his wife, who was a more subtle thinker, a more desperate character, with a larger brain and a firmer will, with more accent and force of personality. Jehoram played the evil trick, repeated the foul habit, went in the wrong direction, bowed down to forbidden altars, for—"he had the daughter of Ahab to wife." She lured him; the seduction was hers; she won the conquest. When he would have bowed the knee to the God of Heaven, she laughed at him and mocked him into Baal worship. He fell as a victim into her industrious and cruel hands.

"Be not unequally yoked together." Do not look upon marriage lightly; do not suppose that it is a game for the passing day, a flash and gone, a hilarious excitement, a wine-bibbing, a passing around of kind salutations, then dying away like a trembling echo. Beware what connections you form, and do not suppose that the laws of God can be set aside with impunity. Get out of your heads the infinite mistake that you can do as you like and escape the operation of divine law. Deliver yourselves from the cruel delusion that you

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can sow tares and reap wheat. Be not deceived. God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows that shall he also reap.

Our family life explains our public attitude and influence. What we are at home we are really abroad.

Wives, do not destroy your husbands. When they would do good, help them. When they propose to give to the cause of charity, suggest that the donation be doubled, not divided. When they would help in any good and noble work, give them sympathy, prayer and blessing. We never knew a man yet of any enduring public power that was not made by his wife, and we never knew a public man yet that fully appreciated the value of that ministry. It is secret; it is at home; it does not show. It is chalked on a black-board, and not gilded on a high ceiling; it is silent, but vital.

We have seen a man go down in his church life, and we have wondered why. It was his wife—the daughter of Ahab—who was degrading him, narrowing him and dwarfing him in his thinking and sympathy.

We have seen a man go up in his public influence, and we have found that it was his wife who was encouraging him, helping him, telling him that he was on the right way, and wishing him good luck in the name of the Lord.

See to it that your home is right. Have a beautiful home—morally and religiously; a sacred house, a sanctuary where joy is the singing angel. And then, when you come abroad into the market-place, into the pulpit, into parliament, into trade and commerce or into any of the social relations of life, you will bring with you all the inspiration which comes from a home that blooms like a garden or glows like a Summer sun. [326]

Do not suppose that the divine purpose can be set aside by Athaliahs, Irenes, Laodices or any false, furious or desperate characters of any kind.

The Lord promised David that he should always have a candle in Jerusalem. The light was very low sometimes—it was reduced to a spark in young Joash; but it was God's candle, and Athaliah's wild breath could not blow out that light. The word of the Lord abideth for ever.

Observe a very strong peculiarity in human nature, as shown in the conduct of Athaliah. She went into the Temple and saw the young Joash with a crown upon his head, and she shrieked out: "Treason! Treason!"

Poor innocent Athaliah! Who would not pity so gentle a dove, with a breast of feathers and a cruel dart rankling in it? Sweet woman—gentle and loving creature—injured queen! Her hands were perfectly clean; she was the victim of a cruel stratagem. She was outwitted by heads longer than hers. She, poor unsuspecting soul, had been brought into this condition, and all she could do was to cry in injured helplessness:

"Treason! Treason!"

How moral we become under some circumstances! How very righteous we may stand up to be under certain provocations! Who could but pity poor Athaliah, who had nursed her grandchildren with a wolf's care? We do this very self-same thing very often in our own lives. Where is the man who does not suppose that he has a right to do wrong? But let other people do wrong, and then hear him! [327]

Given a religious sect of any name whatsoever, that has the domination of any neighborhood, and the probability is that that religious sect will use its supremacy somewhat mischievously in certain circumstances. It will not let anybody who opposes its tenets have an acre of ground in that neighborhood, nor will it allow any sect that opposes its principles to build a church there. No! It takes a righteous view of the circumstances; it will not trifle with its responsibilities; it can allow no encroachment. It is charged with the spirit of stewardship, and must be faithful to its sacred obligations.

So it cants and whines, whatever its name be. If it be the name we bear religiously, so much the worse. We speak of no particular sect, but of any sect that may be placed in such peculiar circumstances as to claim the domination and supremacy in any neighborhood.

Now, let any member of that sect leave that particular locality and go to live under a wholly different set of circumstances, and apply for a furlong of ground, or for a house that he may occupy as tenant. Then let it be found that his religious convictions are a bar to his enjoyment of local properties and liberties. He will cry out: "Persecution! Persecution!" How well it befits his lips! The very man who in one district persecuted to the death those who opposed him removes to another locality, where a screw is applied to his own joints, and he raises the cry of persecution. It is Athaliah's old trick, and will have Athaliah's poor reward. [328]

See how the cry of the wicked is unheeded. Athaliah was a woman, and by so much had a claim upon the sympathy of the strong. Yet no man's heart went out to her in loyal reverence.

Jehoash (or Joash, as the name was shortened) was trained in the Temple, under the good Jehoiada. He was blessed in his aunt—for it was his aunt who took him, the daughter of Ahab, but not by the mother of Athaliah—and Joash did good all the days of Jehoiada, the priest. See the influence of a noble life. See how religion may help royalty, and how that which is morally true lifts up patriotism to a higher level. No country is sound at heart—through and through good and likely to endure—that draws not the inspiration of its patriotism from the loftiness and purity of its religion.

All these tragedies are making the Earth reek with abomination today. Athaliah lives in a vigorous progeny.

BALAAAM.

Balaam comes into the narrative most suddenly—but he will never go out of it again. Other men have come into the Bible story quite as suddenly, but they have only remained for a time. Balaam will never disappear; we shall read of him when we come to the Book of the Revelation of John the Divine.

There are some historical presences that you can never get rid of. It is useless to quibble and question. The same mystery occurs in our own life. Some persons, having been once seen, are seen for ever. You can not get away from the image or the influence, or forget the magical touch of hand or mind or ear; they turn up in the last chapter of your life Bible. You can not tell whence they come. Their origin is as great a mystery as is the origin of Melchisedek; they come into your lifelines as quickly and abruptly as came Elijah, the Tishbite; and they take up their residence with you—subtly coloring every thought, secretly and mightily turning speech into new accents and unsuspected expressions full of significance and revealing that significance in ever-surprising ways and tones. [329]

Why sit down and look at the story of Balaam as though it were something that occurred once for all? It occurs every day. God teaches by surprise. He sets the stranger in our life, and while we are wondering He turns our wonder into a mystery more sublime.

Who would have a life four-square, in the sense of limitation, visible boundary, tangible beginning and ending? Who would not rather be in the world as if he had been in some other world, and as if he were moving on to some larger world? We lose power when we lose mystery. Let us not chaffer about words. If the spirit of mystery is in a man, the spirit of worship is in him; and if the spirit of worship is in him, it may detail itself into beliefs, actions and services which are accounted right, and whose rightness will be proved by their beneficence. Balaam comes as suddenly as Melchisedek, as unexpectedly as Elijah; but we shall find him at the very last an instructive historical character. [330]

He is called Balaam, the son of Beor, and he is domiciled at Pethor, on the River Euphrates. At that time the king of Moab was called Balak, and when Balak saw how Israel had destroyed the Amorites he said:

“Fighting is out of the question. If we have to come to battle, we may as well surrender before we begin; the numbers are overwhelming. Now shall this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field.”

You can hear the lick and the crunch, and be present at the destruction. It was a day of fear and much sorrow in Moab.

What, then, was to be done?

Herein came the wisdom of Balak. He also lives to the end of life's chapter, for to the end of that chapter we shall find the touch of superstition in the human mind. Balak would have recourse to supernatural help. He had heard of Balaam, the soothsayer of Pethor—a man of divination, a person who had power to bless and to curse—the Simon Magus of his day. So he took advantage of his superstition, and thought to sow the air with curses which would work where his little sword could not reach.

That is not a mean thought. Call it perversion or superstition—you do not touch the inner and vital mystery of the case. The great agonies of life are not to be explained by calling them perversions, or labeling them superstitions, or denouncing them as nightmares or dreams; they are there. Man must obey voices which are not always articulate and reportable as to words and tones. It may be more superstitious to deny the supernatural than to affirm it. Never forget the cant that is talked against cant. [331]

Do not believe that they are the heavenly, pure and brilliant souls who have no church, no religion, no altar; who live under the dome of their own hats and walk on the marble of their own boots. Whose prophets, pray, are they? They must be accounted for, as well as the Melchisedeks, the Balaams and Elijahs of old time. What is their history? Where have they made their mark? What marvels of beneficence have they performed? Or do they only live in the very doubtful region of sneering at other people's piety?

Balak's was a great thought. We do not adopt its form, but we should perhaps do unwisely to reject its spirit and intent. Balak said: “Numbers are against us. If it is to be a mere contention of army against army, Moab will be destroyed at once. The thing to be done—if it can be done—is to enlist the service and the action of the supernatural.” Quite right. We say so now. If that can be done, any other thing that can be done is contemptible in comparison.

So Balak sent for Balaam, who made answer that he would not come. By-and-by Balak sent other princes more honorable still, with offers of promotion and honor and abundant wages. Balaam said he would ask God. He asked God, and angered Him by so doing. Some second prayers are worse than superstitions.

So God said: “If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them; yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do.” But God's anger was kindled against Balaam. [332]

“And God's anger was kindled because he went; and the angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary against him. Now, he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him. And the ass saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand; and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field; and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way. But the angel of the Lord stood in a path of the vineyards, a wall being on this side and a wall on that side.”

When Balak heard of Balaam's arrival he was glad. Gold went for nothing, now the soothsayer had come. Riches were as water poured forth. In those days the supernatural went for something in the market-place. It is the cheapest of all things now. Ideas are

without value; religious thoughts are mere breath. But Balaam remembered that he was only to speak what God told him; so he began to play the priest. He would have altars put up.

He took up his parable, and said: “Balak, the king of Moab, hath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east, saying: ‘Come, curse me Jacob,’ and ‘Come, defy Israel.’”

Balaam would have altars put up and sacrifices rendered. But the answer was: “No. Israel can not be cursed.”

So Balak took him to another point of view, where perhaps, the multitude looked greater or did not look so great. “And he took up his parable, and said: ‘Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor.’” And again the people were to rise like a lion, and lift up themselves as a young lion; and the people were not to lie down until they had eaten of the prey and drunk of the blood of the slain. [333]

“Well, then,” said Balak, “if that be the case, this thou must do for me: Neutralize thyself; be nothing; act as if thou hadst not come at all. Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all.”

But Balaam said: “No. You can not treat God’s messengers in that way. As a matter of fact, they are here; you have to account for them being here, and to reckon with them while they are here.”

We can not quiet things by ignoring them. Simply by writing “Unknowable” across the heavens we really do not exclude supernatural or immeasurable forces. The ribbon is too narrow to shut out the whole Heaven. It is but a little strip, and looks contemptible against the infinite arch. We do not exclude God by denying Him, nor by saying that we do not know Him, or that He can not be known. We can not neutralize God, so as to make Him neither the one thing nor the other.

So Balaam was the greatest mystery that Balak had to deal with. It is just the same with the Bible—God’s supernatural Book. It will not lie where we want it to lie. It has a way of getting up through the dust that gathers upon it and shaking itself, and making its pages felt. It will open at the wrong place. Would it open at some catalogue of names it might be tolerated, but it opens at hot places, where white thrones are and severe judgments, and where scales are tried and measuring wands tested. It will speak to the soul about the wrong doing that never came to any thing, and the wicked thought that would have burned the heavens and scattered dishonor upon the throne of God. [334]

Balak said, in effect: “Would to Heaven I could get rid of this man.” He took Balaam to another point of view, and Balaam “set his face toward the wilderness, and took up his parable.” He sang a sweet and noble song: “How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob! And thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river’s side, as the trees of lign aloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters. He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. God brought him forth out of Egypt; he hath, as it were, the strength of an unicorn; he shall eat up the nations his enemies, and shall break their bones and pierce them through with his arrows. He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion; who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee.”

Balak made a bad bargain that day. He added unto his troubles, instead of diminishing them.

Balak would gladly have parted with Balaam, but he could not get rid of him; and Balak was wroth. It became a king to become angry. And Balak’s anger was kindled against Balaam, and he smote his hands together and said unto Balaam: “I called thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast altogether blessed them these three times. Therefore, now flee thou to thy place. I thought to promote thee unto great honor, but lo, the Lord hath kept thee back from honor.” [335]

Balaam then made a great speech to Balak. He said: "Is this not precisely what I said to the king's messengers? Did I not say: 'If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I can not go beyond the commandment of the Lord, to do either good or bad of mine own mind; but what the Lord saith, that will I speak'? Now, I will tell that which I see."

And then came the parable of the man whose eyes are open:

And he took up his parable, and said: "Balaam, the son of Beor, hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said, he hath said which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the Most High, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open; I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh; there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly. Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city."

Then the parable is continued, Balaam looking Balak full in the face; and last of all "Balaam rose up, and went and returned to his place, and Balak also went his way."

You can not carve your God into any shape that will please your fancy. You can not send for any true faith and bribe it to speak your blessings or your cursings. Balaam was a man of noble sentiments. Look at some of his words: "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." And again: "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent." And again: "I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh."

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Then take the grand words which he spoke to Balak, as reported in the prophecies of Micah. Never did man preach a nobler sermon than this: "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."

Who can amend that speech? Who can refine that gold? Who dares touch that lily with his mean paint? Who taught Balaam that great speech?

We sometimes say we find, scattered up and down in ancient literature, morals as beautiful as any we find in the Bible. Possibly so. Who wrote them? Whence did they come? Is God the God of one corner of the creation? Is God a parochial Deity?

Is there not a spirit in man—universal man—and does not the Spirit of the Most High give him understanding? Wherever there is a line of beauty, God wrote it; wherever there is a sentiment which is charged with the spirit of beneficence, that may be claimed as a good gift of God.

Apostle Paul never uttered a nobler sentiment than is uttered by Balaam, as reported in the prophecies of Micah. This is the Sermon upon the Mount in anticipation. That is the vicious Church, built on the wrong foundation, aiming at the wrong Heaven, which does not recognize in every literature and in every nation all that is good, noble, wise, prophetic.

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Balaam's convictions and wishes disagreed sometimes. Therein he was most human. He knew he ought not to go to Balak, and yet he wished to go. He would ask the second time; he would doubt his own convictions, or he would adjust them according to the shape and temper of circumstances. Wherever he came from, he claims herein to be quite a near neighbor of ours. Doubt may exist as to the exact relation of Pethor to the river upon which it was built, but there can be no doubt whatever of the blood relationship between Balaam and our own age. Speaking impulsively from the center of his convictions, he said: "No. Nothing shall tempt me to go. You speak of gold and silver. Were Balak to give me his house full of gold and silver, I would not go. I am the Lord's servant, and the Lord's work alone will I do."

Then the thought occurred to him—a second message coming, borne by more honorable princes: “Perhaps I might go and obtain this wealth and honor, and still do my duty.”

He is on the downward road now. A man who thinks to do forbidden things and spend the bounty for the advantage of the Church is lost; there is no power in him that can overcome the gravitation that sucks him downward. He says: “I will bring back all Balak’s gold and silver, and add a transept to the church or another course of marble to the altar.”

He will never return. God will not have His house so patched and bungled; nor does He want Balak’s gold for the finishing of His sanctuary. A nobler spirit was Abram, who said no to the king of Sodom, “lest thou shouldst say: ‘I have made Abram rich.’” [338]

The whole story of Balaam is intensely Oriental and primeval. The first deputation is dismissed in obedience to a divine warning; but, so far as we know, “the wages of unrighteousness,” which Balaam loved, are carefully retained. A second embassy of nobler messengers, carrying richer gifts, succeeds. He does not at once dismiss them, as God had required, but presses for permission to go with them, which at last is granted.

Balaam would earn the fame and honor apparently within his grasp, yet he knows that when the prophetic afflatus comes on him he can only utter what it prompts. With a feigned religiousness, he protests that if Balak were to give him his house full of silver and gold he could not go beyond the word of Jehovah, his God, to do less or more; but he also bids them wait overnight to see if he may not, after all, be allowed to go with them. If his ignoble wish to be allowed to curse an unoffending nation be gratified, he has the wealth he craves; if it be refused, he can appeal to his words as proof of his being only the mouth-piece of God.

That Balaam should have been allowed to go with Balak’s messengers was only the permission given every man to act as a free agent, and in no way altered the divine command, that he should bless, and not curse. Yet he goes as if at liberty to do either, and lets Balak deceive himself by false hopes, when the will of God has been already decisively made known.

Balaam’s was a maneuvering life—very truthful, and yet very false; very godly, and yet very worldly—a most composite and self-contradictory life, and still a most human life. Balaam never breaks away from the brotherhood of the race in any of his inconsistencies. When he is very good, there are men living today who are just as good as Balaam was; when he is very bad, it would not be difficult to confront him with men who are quite his equals in wrong doing. When he is both good and bad almost at the same moment, he does not separate himself from the common experience of the race. He was always arranging, adjusting, endeavoring to meet one thing by another, and to set off one thing over against another. It was a kind of gamester life—full of subtle calculation, touched with a sort of wonder which becomes almost religious, and steeped in a superstition which reduces many of the actions of life to a state of moral mystery wholly beyond ordinary comprehension. [339]

ELAH.

There was once a king in Israel named Elah. He reigned over Israel, in Tirzah, two years. He had a servant called Zimri, who was a captain of his chariots.

Zimri was a born traitor. Treachery was in his very blood. In the case of Elah, Zimri had a marked advantage, for Elah was a drunken fool. He was in the habit of visiting the house of another of his servants, a steward called Arza. There he had what drink he asked for, and he asked for a great deal—so much that he was often drunk in his servant’s house. On one of these occasions Zimri went in and killed him, and reigned in his stead. [340]

These are the facts with which we have to deal. Are they very ancient, or are they happening about us every day? Is Elah dead? Is Zimri clean gone for ever? And is the house of the servant Arza closed, so that the master can drink no more with the steward?

Elah lives in every man who has great chances or opportunities in life, but allows them to slip away from him through one leak in the character. Elah was a king and was the son of a king, so his openings in life were wide and splendid; but he loved strong drink, and thus through that leak in his character all that might have made him a man oozed away, and left him a king in nothing but the barren name.

Strong drink will ruin any man. It is the supreme curse of England. I will say nothing now of the old, but to the young I may speak a word. I care not, young man, how many and how brilliant in life your chances are, if you drink wine in the morning, as many young men in London do, you are as good as damned already. You think not, but that only shows the infinite deceitfulness of the enemy. He tells you:

“Nothing of the kind. This is parson’s twaddle. Take your wine when you want it, and let it alone when you do not care for it.”

There is suppressed mockery in that high challenge. There is no soundness of health in it. Every drink but leaves you weaker. Every emptied glass is another link added to the strong chain thrown upon your limbs.

Zimri still lives in all persons who take advantage of the weaknesses of others. Zimri [341] knew that Elah was a drunkard, and he further knew through Elah’s habit of drunkenness alone could he be reached. On every other side of his character Elah may have been a strong man—acute, shrewd and far-sighted—but when in drink he was, of course, weak and foolish. Zimri played his game accordingly. He said:

“Elah goes to Arza’s house after sundown. In half an hour after going, he will begin to fall under the effects of wine; then the worst wine will be brought out, and he will go mad under its poison and become drowsy. I must get Arza out of the way. The fool will go on any errand I name, on promise of another horse; that is it.”

The Bible says: “And Zimri went in and smote him and killed him.” He took advantage of his master’s weakness, and his progeny is numerous on the Earth.

Some people trade on the weaknesses of others. They study them. They adapt themselves to them. They watch for striking time, and seldom miss the mark. How else could the net be always ready for the bird? How else could the pit be always prepared for the unsuspecting and bewildered traveler? There is an infernal science in these things—a devil’s black art!

And does not Arza still live in those who find the means whereby men may conceal their evil habits and indulge their unholy desires? They seem to say: “In my house you may do what you please. I shall not look at you. Come when you please; go when you like; I am nobody, if you like to call me so.”

Tirzah, whose name means pleasantness and which was Elah’s capital, was an ancient [342] royal city of the Canaanites, captured by Joshua. After its conquest it is not again mentioned in history till the time of Jeroboam, who appears to have chosen it as his principal residence. The geographical position of Tirzah has not been given by any ancient geographer. Zimri reigned only seven days in Tirzah. Omri, captain of the host, was made king over Israel in the camp. He besieged Tirzah and took it. Zimri, seeing that the city was taken, went into the king’s palace, set it on fire and perished in it. The last mention of Tirzah in Scripture history is in connection with Menahem, who went from Tirzah to Samaria, “and smote Shallum, and reigned in his stead.” Solomon made the comparison: “Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah.”

ELIJAH.

Elijah means “Jehovah is my God.” There is often much in a name. It is a history, sometimes—the summing up of generations; it is sometimes an inspiration, recalling memories that stir the soul to high daring.

There are two places called Tishbi—one in Gilead and the other in Galilee. Elijah belonged to the former. Sometimes character is mysteriously and very deeply affected by country. Gilead was a wild and mountainous district, bordering on Arabia, and consequently half Arab in its customs. There was a wonderful similarity between the man and the region; stern, bleak, grand, majestic and awful were they both. John the Baptist seemed to bring the wilderness with him when he came into the city. Children born in luxury are apt to be themselves luxurious. Children born in slavery will hardly ever be free, though slavery has been abolished. To the end of life we carry the color which first impressed itself on our vision. [343]

All revelations seem to us to be sudden. Look at the suddenness of the appearance of Ahijah to Jeroboam, and look at the instance before us: “Elijah, the Tishbite, said unto Ahab.” The total apostasy of the Ten Tribes (Israel) was now almost accomplished, and yet a faithful prophet of the Lord stands up in the degenerate land and declares that Jehovah is his God, and in sacred solitariness protests against the abominations of Israel and her king.

No mild man would have been equal to the occasion. God adapts His ministry to circumstances. He sends a nurse to the sick room and a soldier to the battle field. The son of consolation and the son of thunder can not change places. You are right when you say that the dew and the light and the soft breeze are God’s; but you may not, therefore, suppose that the thunder and the hurricane and the flood belong to a meaner lord.

Imagine the two men standing face to face—Ahab, the dissolute king, and Elijah, the faithful prophet. Probably there is no finer picture in ancient history. Terrible indeed is the national crisis when king and prophet come into collision. There is not a combat between two men. Mark that very closely. It is Right against Wrong, Faithfulness against Treachery, Purity against Corruption. Look at them—Ahab and Elijah—as they face one another! Consider the boldness of the prophet. Religion is never to be ashamed of its own testimony. [344]

As we look at the scene, not wanting in the elements of the highest tragedy, we see the value of one noble witness in the midst of public corruption and decay, and the grandeur as well as necessity of a distinct personal profession of godliness. It is not enough to be godly; we must avow it in open conduct and articulate confession.

Let us now observe how Elijah proceeds to deal with Ahab. “There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.” Here is physical punishment for moral transgression. So it is; and that is just what a parent does when he uses the rod upon his child for falsehood. You can only punish people according to their nature. The garroter can submit to any number of censures and lectures, but he dreads the cat-o’-nine-tails.

Physical punishment for moral transgression is the law of society. So the liar is thrown out of his situation; the ill-tempered child is whipped; the dishonorable man is expelled from social confidence.

With regard to the particular punishment denounced against Ahab, it is to be remembered that drought is one of the punishments threatened by the law if Israel forsook Jehovah and turned after other gods.

This, then, was the brief communication which the prophet addressed to the king. God’s threatenings are terrible in their conciseness. He leaves no room in a multitude of words for ambiguity and verbal wiggling. The soul that sinneth shall die. “The wages of sin is death.” “There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked.” [345]

And as He can be concise in threatening, so He can be concise in promise: “I will give you rest.” “I will give you living water.” “He that believeth shall be saved.” “Ask, and it shall be given you.”

Thus great things can be said in few words: “God is light.” “God is love.” “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” “Ye must be born again.”

At the bidding of the word of the Lord, Elijah turned eastward and hid himself by the brook Cherith, a place nowhere else mentioned in the Bible, and “no place like it has as yet been discovered in Palestine.” It was a torrent-course facing the Jordan, “but whether it was one of those which seam Mount Ephraim or of those on the opposite side of Jordan, in the prophet’s own country, is uncertain.”

But what is the meaning of the extraordinary expression: “I have commanded the ravens to feed thee”? By omitting the points, which are generally allowed to have no authority, the Hebrew letters may signify Arabians. Then the passage would read: “I have commanded the Arabians to feed thee.” Or, if we retain the present pointing, the word may be translated “merchants,” according to “The Speaker’s Commentary.” But it is better to allow the word “ravens” to stand. It implies a miracle; but the whole Bible is a miracle, and so is our own daily life, could we but see the inner movement and look beyond all symbols to the spiritual reality.

But Elijah’s brook dried up. Prophets may be overtaken by the operation of their own prophecies. The great laws are impartial, yet wonderful is the scope within which exceptions may be established. This incident gives an instance in point. [346]

“Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.” This place is called Sarepta in the New Testament. It lay upon the great public road which connected the two towns. A little village called Sarafend now occupies the situation.

But how did it come about that Elijah was sent to a place so near the city of Jezebel’s father? It has been suggested that it would be the last place that he would be suspected of having chosen as a retreat. When Elijah came to the gate of the city the widow woman was there gathering sticks, and he asked her for a little water in a vessel, that he might drink. And as she was going to fetch it, he asked her to bring also a morsel of bread in her hand. But she had no bread—not so much as a cake—only a handful of meal in a barrel and a little oil in a cruse.

She was just going to dress this little food for herself and her son, “that we may eat it and die.” But Elijah claimed it in the name of the Lord, and gave to her in return the gracious promise: “The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the Earth.”

We may here admire and imitate one of the finest instances of ancient faith. The woman was asked for all she had, and she gave it. But mark, she was put in possession of a promise. This is God’s law. He gives the promise first, and then asks for the faith of man. It was so in the ease of Abraham. It is so with ourselves today. [347]

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

And now sorrow fell upon the poor woman’s house. Her only child died, and her heart was lacerated even to torment and agony. But the Lord was merciful. Elijah took the dead child away into a loft—the upper chamber, which was often the best part of an Eastern house—and cried unto the Lord, and stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried again and again unto the Lord, and the child’s life returned. Then the glad mother hailed Elijah as a man, and one in whose mouth was the word of the Lord.

Elijah had put himself beyond the reach of Ahab—not because he feared him or distrusted the power of God in critical circumstances—but because God’s providence or government is a great scheme with innumerable sides, and requires time for its full disclosure and accomplishment. We are not to hasten the march of God. To every thing there is a season. Everywhere we see this idea of time observed and honored. Though there is famine in the land, we can not urge the seasons forward. The child, too, must have years of growth, though his father be disabled and there be none to earn the household bread but himself. [348]

So in the case before us. Ahab must be wearied out with searching for Elijah. He must be made to see how fruitless may be the efforts even of a king. And at last, when success does come, it must come not from his side at all.

We have said that Ahab was a speculative idolater rather than a cruel persecutor. Jezebel acted the part of cruelty; Ahab acted the part of unbeliever and spiritual rebel generally. A proof of the probable correctness of this view is found in the incident before us, for when Ahab met Elijah he did not show a spirit of cruelty. He said unto the prophet: “Art thou he that troubleth Israel?” He did not threaten Elijah with the sword; he did not demand his immediate surrender and arrest. He seems rather to have looked upon Elijah with wonder—perhaps not unmixed with admiration of a figure so independent and audacious.

The tone of the king’s mind may be inferred from the kind of challenge which he accepted. It exactly suited his speculative genius. Elijah proposed a trial between himself and the idolatrous prophets, 850 in number—proposing that the god who answered by fire should be God. The idea instantly commended itself to Ahab as excellent. He liked the high and practical speculation. He was fond of intellectual combat, and he warmed at the notion of a holy fray. The man who could accept a notion of this kind was not cruel, wild or fond of human blood. Ahab was even wickedly religious; the more altars and groves the better—yea, altar upon altar, until the pile reached to Heaven; and grove after grove, until the line met itself again and formed a cordon around the world. If he had started from a right center, Ahab had been the foremost evangelist in the ancient Church. [349]

Let us now look at the controversy itself.

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

Moses challenged the necromancers of Egypt; Elijah challenged the priests of Baal; Christ challenges the world.

At first the challenge was more strictly physical; but now it is intensely spiritual. What religion produces the highest and finest type of character? That is the challenging question.

That sane men should prefer a display of physical power or skill to a spiritual contest is an illustration of the infancy and rudeness of their minds, and not a proof of the best form of competition. Where, in Christian or in pagan lands, have we the finest men, the purest character, the most sensitive honor? Where are schools, hospitals, asylums and charities of every kind most abundant?

That Christian countries are disgraced by some of the foulest crimes possible in human life, may but show that their very foulness and atrocity never could have been so vividly seen and so cruelly felt but for the enlightenment and culture furnished by Christianity. In any other countries they would have been matters of course; but in Christian lands their abomination is seen by the help of Christian light. [350]

The appeal or challenge was forced upon the prophets of Baal; it was not spontaneously accepted by them. This should be made very clear, as it is a point apt to be overlooked.

Perhaps the common impression is that Elijah challenged the prophets directly, standing face to face with them, without any medium of communication.

Nothing of the kind. Elijah first challenged King Ahab, who snatched eagerly at the sensational chance, little knowing what he was snatching at. Having spoken first to the king, Elijah spoke next to the people, and demanded why they hesitated between two opinions, insisting that they should make a choice between Jehovah and Baal. Then Elijah made his grand appeal to the people of Israel, and they answered and said: "It is well spoken." Having secured the approval of the king and the people, Elijah called upon the prophets to proceed to trial.

Today Christianity appeals not to a few sectarian prophets, nor to a few bewildered speculators, nor to a few scientists who are wild with boy-like joy because they have found a bird's nest, though they have never seen the bird that built it; but Christianity makes its appeal to the great and broad heart of human nature, to the common sufferings of the race, to the indestructible sentiments of mankind. In Elijah's day the people said: "It is well spoken." Of Christ it is said: "The common people heard him gladly."

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Every assault upon truth must bring mockery and death upon the assailants. Elijah mocked the prophets on Carmel and slew them at Kishon.

Elijah was a prophet of truth, but of sternness and terror. He lived in a tempestuous atmosphere. Lightning seemed to play around his temples, and his voice was as thunder.

Van de Velde gives a vivid delineation of the precise locality of the Carmel contest. He was, it is believed, the first traveler who identified the site of the "Burning." The rock shoots up in an almost perpendicular wall, more than two hundred feet in height on the side of the vale of Esdrelon. This wall made the burning visible over the whole plain and from all the surrounding heights, so that even those left behind and who had not ascended Carmel would still have been able to witness, at no great distance, the fire from Heaven that descended on the altar. Here the place must have been, for it is the only point of all Carmel where Elijah could have been so close to the brook Kishon as to take thither the priests of Baal and slay them, return again to the mountain and pray for rain, all in the short space of the same afternoon. Down 250 feet beneath the altar plateau is a vaulted and very abundant fountain. While all other fountains were dried up, one can well understand that there might have been found here that superabundance of water which Elijah poured so profusely over the altar.

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ELISHA.

When Elijah supposed that his work was done he was ordered by Jehovah to go up and return on his way to the wilderness of Damascus; and he who supposed that his ministry was concluded had yet to anoint Hazael to be king over Syria and Jehu, the son of Nimshi, to be king over Israel.

But the anointing of these kings was a comparatively insignificant circumstance. The great point of the commission is contained in this sentence:

"And Elisha, the son of Shaphat of Abel-mehola, shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room."

Probably it had not occurred to Elijah that he could have a successor. A very subtle indication is thus given of his approaching end. The Lord, instead of telling Elijah that he had many a year left to spend in holy service, gave him to understand that even he, mighty prophet though he was, could be dispensed with, and a man of almost unknown name would be qualified by divine inspiration to take his room. We can not imagine Elijah's feelings under these circumstances. If a great demonstration of regard had been made, on the part of the Lord God of Israel, because Elijah was weary, the prophet might have supposed himself

to be of vital consequence to the divine economy; but to be told that Elisha, a man who was plowing the twelfth plow in the field while his eleven servants were plowing beside him, would succeed to the high dignity was really to inflict in the most gracious way a very solemn humiliation upon a man who had become so self-conscious as practically to ignore the resources of the living God. [353]

Elisha was a man in what we should now term comfortable circumstances. As he was plowing in his field of Abel-mehola (“the meadow dance”) Elijah drew near and threw over the plowman his prophetic sheep-skin mantle, and passed on in silence, leaving Elisha himself to interpret the graphic symbol. Elisha instantly comprehended the purpose, and, running after Elijah, he begged to be allowed to kiss his father and mother, after which he promised to follow the senior prophet.

It is noteworthy that at this time Elisha must have been quite a young man—an inference which may be fairly drawn from the fact that sixty years after this event he was still in the exercise of his prophetic office.

It is a noticeable circumstance, which repeats itself even in our own day, that Elisha was in many respects the exact counterpart of Elijah.

By choosing all kinds of character and capacity to represent the divine kingdom, God shows His infinite wisdom in a way which even the dullest understanding can hardly fail to appreciate. He is not dependent upon one particular aspect of genius, or one particular aspect of eloquence; but He calls whom He will to the prophetic office and the ministerial function, and it should be our part to accept His vocations, however much we may be surprised at the course which they take and at the social consequences which they involve.

At the time in which Elijah and Elisha exercised their functions religion and morals had gone down to the lowest possible point in Israel. The very schools of the prophets had themselves felt the corrupting influence of the times. Ahab was able to gather four hundred false prophets at a time, the remarkable circumstance being that they were not prophets of Baal, but false prophets of the Lord himself. [354]

It can hardly be a matter of surprise, therefore, that a man of burning spirit, arising under such circumstances, should begin his ministry with displays of power which can hardly escape the charge of being stern or even violent.

The second chapter of the second Book of Kings introduces us to the beginning of Elisha’s ministry. He had just seen Elijah ascend, and he felt that he was left alone to carry on the great work which had been so wondrously conducted by a master hand.

In the twelfth verse we see how Elisha estimated the character and service of Elijah. He exclaims: “My father! My father!” He thus indicates the most serious loss which can befall human life. This is not altogether a cry of reverence, but it is also a cry of orphanhood. In their brief intercourse, one with the other, Elijah had naturally taken the paternal place, and Elisha, as a very young man, had felt the comforting influence exercised upon him by the mighty prophet.

This is a cry of young sensibility. The almost child feels himself to be quite alone. He who an hour ago supposed that, after all, he might be able to continue the work of Elijah now felt how terrible was the void that was created by Elijah’s absence.

We do not know the bulk and value of some ministries until they are removed from us. We become quite familiar with them, and attach no particular significance to their exercise; we come to think we have some right in them, and that by some means or other they will be present with us always. When, however, the great removal does take place and we look around for the familiar face and expect to be touched by the familiar hand, but find our expectations disappointed, the natural cry is: “My father! My father!” [355]

These words, too, may fairly be construed as suggesting an aspect of Elijah's character which is generally overlooked. Probably it has hardly occurred to us to regard Elijah as a man of special tenderness. We think of him as a great comet, or as a flash of lightning, or as a mighty whirlwind, or under any figure that suggests grandeur, majesty and force; but we have never associated with Elijah the notion of graciousness, tenderness, love and that easy familiarity which constitutes the very soul of friendship.

Now, however, by the ascription of his name we do seem to know somewhat of the genial intercourse which passed between father and son—the senior prophet and the young apostle of God; and it is delightful to infer that such intercourse had been conducted on the one side paternally and on the other side filially.

We do not know altogether what men are when we only see them in public life. The great parliamentary orator may be the simplest of all men when he is in the domestic circle. The great commander of armies, whose courage never quails, may have the heart of a woman when he stands in the presence of suffering childhood. It is important for all who attempt to delineate the characters of public men to remember that they see only one aspect of those characters, and are not qualified to pronounce upon the whole man. [356]

The next expression of Elisha is: "The chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof."

This is an apparently incoherent exclamation. When properly understood, however, it conveys a further tribute to the ministry which was exercised by the ascending prophet. The real meaning is: "My father—so much better than all chariots and horses; in thy absence the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof are useless. They were used by thee, and under thy conduct could be turned to good account; but, now that thou art gone, they do but mock our loneliness and make us feel still more bitterly our helpless condition."

A greater question than "Where is Elijah?" now occurred to the desolate young man. Instantly he seizes the reality of the occasion, and by exclaiming "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" he shows that he is not called to a merely official position, but that he is elected to represent the divine majesty upon Earth.

The young man thus begins well. There is nothing frivolous in his inquiry or in his interpretation of events. The very depth of his feeling gives us an index to the capacity of his mind. Rely upon it, that he who can feel as Elisha did must have a mind equal in its proportions to the fine emotions which enlarge and ennoble his heart. Had the young man deported himself in a way which suggested self-sufficiency, his prophetic office would have been destroyed well-nigh before it was created.

It is when we stand back in humility and in almost despair, and cry out in our desolateness "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" that we begin our work in the right spirit, and only then. [357]

In this whole ministry of righteousness and redemption there is no place for self-sufficiency. Apostle Paul said: "Our sufficiency is of God." The great inquiry "Who is sufficient for these things?" keeps down human ambition and vanity, and prepares the heart for the utterance of prevailing prayer. The question which was thus propounded by Elisha is full of suggestion to ourselves. When we come to read the Bible we should not inquire so much where inspiration is, but where is wisdom which can be applied to our own circumstances and be made unto us as the very staff of life.

We need not exclaim, in considering the Christian ministry of our own day: "Where are the miracles of the Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles?" Our inquiry should be: "Where are the healed men, the comforted hearts, the forgiven souls, the rejoicing spirits?"

Who care to inquire into the mechanism of the organ when he can hear its music and be bowed down by its most solemn appeals?

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

There was no mistaking that spirit. Who can mistake the presence and influence of fire? Better that our spirit should be discovered than that our credentials should be examined.

Of what avail is it that a man can produce a whole portfolio of testimonials, if nobody has discovered in him the presence and effect of the divine Spirit? [358]

This tribute is also to the credit of the sons of the prophets, for their judgment was vital, and was not accidental. There are men who will only regard providence as operating in one way, or as operating in one form. These sons of the prophets did not belong to such an inferior class of judges.

It is remarkable, too, that the organic unity of the prophetic office is hereby recognized. The sons of the prophets do not treat Elisha as a novelty, a new sensation, or as representing a new point of departure. They unite the old with the new; though the man has changed, the spirit remains the same.

This is what must be always regarded in reading Christian history and in watching the course of the Christian ministry. Old ministers depart, but when new men come they come with the old spirit and with the old truth, or if they come with any other spirit or any other doctrine, they should, in the degree of the change, be suspected of being other than genuine successors of the prophets.

Elisha begins his ministry by doing good—that is to say, by healing the water that was diseased. This appeal to the prophet to do something for the city of Jericho was itself a tribute to the genuineness of the prophetic office as exercised by him. It is always beautiful to notice how great power is associated with the doing of good. What is it to be a prophet of any age, if the age is not practically benefited by the exercise of the office? The age does not want ornamental prophets, nominal prophets, official prophets. The age is crying out for men who can give it bread, who can heal its water, who can mitigate its sorrows, who can destroy its oppressions. [359]

By this sign must all prophets live or die. It would have been a poor thing on the part of Elisha to have shown the mantle of his predecessor if he could not also show his power. We are only in the apostolic succession as we are in the apostolic spirit.

We may have all the relics which the apostles left behind—the cloak that was left at Troas, the parchment, the staff and the vessels out of which they ate and drank—we may even have the scrolls which they used in reading the Holy Scriptures; but all these things will constitute only a burden if we have not, along with all other possessions, the mighty and eternal Spirit of the living God, without whose energy even the apostles themselves were but common men.

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

“And he went up from thence to Beth-el; and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him: ‘Go up, thou bald head! Go up, thou bald head!’ And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them. And he went from thence to Mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria.” [360]

This miracle has occasioned no little difficulty to those who read it only in the letter. It is not a narrow incident which can be regarded as a mere anecdote and treated, as it were, within the limits of its own four corners. We must understand the spirit of the age in which the incident occurred. We must realize that the whole air was full of idolatry and blasphemy. We must also remember that the very Church of Israel itself was deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, with hardly one spot of health on all the altar from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot. We must keep steadily before our minds the fact that the places which are mentioned in this incident had become as Sodom and Gomorrah—not, perhaps, in the physical and carnal sense, but in the still worse sense of spiritual alienation and spiritual contempt for every thing associated with the name of the living God.

When Elisha, therefore, wrought this deed of violence—this miracle of destruction—his action must be regarded typically and as strictly in keeping with the necessities of the occasion. Only this kind of miracle could have been understood by the people among whom it was worked and who had an opportunity of feeling its effects, either directly or incidentally. How often it happens that the first miracle is one which is marked peculiarly by a destructive energy!

This would seem to be the miracle which our own first zealous impulses would work, had they the power to express themselves in such a form. When the soul is alive with the purity of God, when the heart glows and burns with love, when the whole being is in vital sympathy with the purposes of the cross of Christ, the first and all but uncontrollable impulse is to destroy evil—not to reason with it, or make truce with it, or give it further treatment of any kind, but instantly and violently to crush it out of existence. [361]

This impulse will be trained unto other uses in the School of Christ.

We see, in the opening of the sixth chapter of the second Book of Kings, some of the simple and happy relations which existed between the elder and the younger prophets.

Is it not possible to revive some of these relations? Look at the case:

“And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha: ‘Behold, now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us.’”

Put into modern language, the statement amounts to this: “Our college is getting too small, and we want more room. Let us, therefore, consider this practical question, and see what can be done.”

Elisha did not live with the young men. That, perhaps, was rather a happy than an unhappy circumstance—though a very beautiful picture could be drawn concerning domestic collegiate life. A college or a school with the teachers and the students all living together must, one would surely say, be a little Heaven on Earth. What can be, ideally, more perfect than the old prophet surrounded by all the younger prophets, eating and living together, having a common room, a common hostelry—a common home? What can be, imaginatively, more taking, pathetic and satisfactory? [362]

Without pronouncing a judgment upon that inquiry, it is enough to be so far just to the text to say that Elisha did not adopt that system of collegiate life. He went around from place to place; he visited the schools of the prophets in the various localities, and when he came to this place the young men said: “We have not room enough; we must consider our circumstances, and endeavor to enlarge our accommodation.”

What did they propose?

It is well now and again to hear what young men have to suggest. It is useful to listen to young politicians in national crises, that we may hear how they would treat the patient. It is most desirable that young voices should mingle with old voices in the common council.

Now it is the turn of the young men to speak. What will they propose to Elisha?

The answer is given in the second verse: "Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make a place there where we may dwell."

The city was not situated exactly upon the Jordan, but upon a stream a little way from it, which flowed into that great river; and now the young men proposed to get a little nearer to the main stream, for the district of it was called The Valley of Palms.

Palestine was notably destitute of trees, but in this particular locality timber was to be got. So the young men made the proposition to Elisha. What does the proposition amount to? It amounts to something which in this day might horrify a good many of the successors of Elisha. [363]

The young men said: "Let us go and cut down our timber, and enlarge our college with our own hands." Did they propose that the question should be "reported upon"—that it should be brought first under the attention of the general committee, then be referred to a sub-committee being bound to make a report to the general committee, and the general committee being unable to attend, or to constitute a quorum, and so go on to forget the whole business? The young men said:

"We want room; let us make it. We want a larger college; let us build it."

Why not adopt the same principle today? There is nothing so easy as to send around an appeal for a contribution and never get any reply to it.

We, wanting to be missionaries, should go by the next boat; wanting to preach the Gospel to the heathen, we should ask: "When does the ship start?" Being unable to pay the fare, we should work our passage. If people should ask us what we are doing, and whether we have lost our senses, we should say: "Yes; if we be beside ourselves, it is unto God."

Then an impression might be made upon those who look on. They would say: "Surely, these men are in earnest; be they right or be they wrong, be they fanatical or sober-minded, their earnestness burns in them like a fire, and such men can neither be put back nor be kept down."

However, without wishing to modernize the details of this incident, which, owing to our civilization, would be impossible, it is enough to remember that, in the early days of collegiate and school life, the scholars were prepared to do something toward helping themselves. They did not send for builders from Jerusalem, or even from the city of Jericho; they undertook the work at their own impulse and at their own charges. [364]

There is a line of beauty even in the proposition of the young men. They desired Elisha's permission. They said, in effect: "Father, may we go?" They were enthusiastic, but they were under discipline; they had fire enough, but they responded to the touch of the master. And one said to Elisha: "Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants." They were stronger when the elder man was with them.

Sometimes the eye is the best master. It often happens that the man who is standing in the harvest field, resting upon his rake, a picture of dignity and ease, is doing more than if he were sweltering himself by cutting down corn with his own sickle. His eye is doing the work, and his presence is exerting an immeasurable and happy influence upon the whole field.

Elisha was not asked to go and fell the timber, but to be with the young men while they did the hard work; and, becoming young again himself, as old men do become young when associated with young life, he replied:

"I will go. The work is a common work. It belongs to me as well as to you; it belongs to all Israel, in so far as all Israel is true to the living God. Come, let us go in one band; union is strength."

Now, they went—the old and the young together. Why would they not go alone? Perhaps they were all reminded of what happened when once they did go alone. Elisha ordered that food should be prepared, and when the seething pot was on, one of the young men went out and gathered something and threw it into the pot, and nearly poisoned the whole college. Small wonder if one of them, remembering this, said:

“No more going out alone, if you please. We once took the case into our own hands, and I remember how many of us fell sick, and how we cried to Elisha: ‘Master, there is death in the pot!’ And he kindly took up a handful of meal, sprinkled it into the vessel and restored its healthfulness. The pot was relieved of all the disease which it had contained, and the meal most happily proceeded.”

We should remember our blunders, and learn from them. We are always safer in the company of the old and wise than when we are in our own society. Happy is the man who takes counsel with his elder neighbors, and who can sometimes renounce himself and say unto wise men: “Such and such are my circumstances; now, what would you advise me to do?”

Elisha and the young men have now gone down to the Jordan. Elisha felled no tree but he did his own particular kind of work.

The Syrian king could not rest. In his heart he hated or feared the king and the hosts of Israel. There was chronic war between Israel and Syria. The king of Syria said: “I will fix my camp in such and such a place.” Of this the sacred record says: “And the man of God [366] sent unto the king of Israel, saying: ‘Beware that thou pass not such a place, for thither the Syrians are come down.’”

There is a ministry of warning. Men may not go themselves to battle, and yet they may be controlling the fortunes of war. We need statesmen, spiritual interpreters, religious teachers, men of thought and men of prayer; and they may be doing more practical work than is being done by those who are engaged in the physical work of leading armies and commanding military hosts.

This is what Elisha did.

He felled no tree; he wielded no sword. Yet, alike in the building of the college and in the direction of the war, his was the supreme mind. The prophet saved the king. This must always be the case.

The great man of the nation is the man who can think most profoundly and most comprehensively. The architect is a greater man than the builder. The prophet is a greater man than the king. He reads more; he sees farther; he grasps a larger field. He is master of metaphysical principles, which alone endure. They wear the clothes of the present time; they adopt the form of the passing generation, but they go on from age to age—themselves always the same, their adaptations being addressed to the immediate and pressing necessities of the people.

We have been told that “Justice is not an intermittent apparition.” That is perfectly true in one sense; but justice is often a deferred creditor, and sometimes that may be done tomorrow which can not be justly done today. The prophet sees all this. He looks ahead; he [367] has a larger horizon than is accessible to the vision of other men.

So let it stand, an eternal lesson, that the greatest men in any nation are the men who can think most, pray best, feel most deeply and penetrate the metaphysics and the inmost reality of politics and of civilization.

Spiritual power is not only useful in one direction; it is alarming in another. When the king of Syria felt himself baffled, all his plans thrown into uncontrollable bewilderment, his heart was sorely troubled. It is the Immeasurable that frightens men. It is the Unknown

Quantity that troubles all their calculations and causes them to feel that after they have completed their arithmetic their conclusion is a lie.

What was in the air? Whose was this ghostly presence that was upsetting Ben-hadad's well laid schemes? What was it, or who, that always went before him, and that made his proposals abortive and turned all his policies into mocking nothings?

Had there been any man who was visible and measurable, that man could have been dealt with. There is always a quantity equal to any quantity that is known. What is wanting in one way can be made up in another—as, for example, what is wanting in number may be made up in quality. As one great leader said in ancient history, when his soldiers were saying they were too few for the battle: “How many do you count me for?” That touched the fire of the army, and inspired the soldiers with confidence.

Now, the matter was revealed to the king, and he took means to remove the spectral influence. He made this arrangement: “Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him.” When he knew that Elisha was in Dothan the king sent “thither horses and chariots and a great host.” [368]

What unconscious tributes bad men pay to good influences! Men do not know wholly what they are doing. Why, this was but a poor prophet, wearing a hairy robe that had descended to him; he was no king; he had no sword or horse; he was but a man of prayer. How did Ben-hadad propose to capture him?

The king sent “horses and chariots and a great host” to take a man whose sword was the word of God, whose helmet was the defense of the Most High, whose breastplate was Righteousness!

Here are three arms of the Syrian service—footmen, horsemen and chariots; and remember that these were all employed to bring one poor man to the king's presence. Well might Elisha have said, before Antigonus uttered it: “How many do you count *me* for?” Elisha might have taunted the king of Syria, saying: “Why all this ado? Would not one soldier have been enough to take one prophet? He might have come on foot; a horse was not necessary, and certainly not a sword. One soldier might surely have arrested me.”

But bad men unconsciously pay tribute to good men. They say, in effect: “Elisha is only one, but a stubborn one; only one tree, but his roots seem to have spread themselves through the Earth, and to have taken hold of the entire scheme of things; he is only one, yet, what is strange, he is many in one.”

And this, indeed, was the interpretation given by Elisha, for he said: “They that be with us are more than they that be with them.” [369]

Who can tell how many angels are round about the praying man? How is it that when the arresting hand is laid upon some men it becomes softened, the muscles relax and have no more pith in them, and the men come back to say: “Never man spake like this man; arrest him we can not”? This is a tribute paid to the Christian religion. Men have passed parliamentary statutes against it, but the religion of the cross has outlived the statutes—has seen them grow into yellow letters, has observed them being canceled or otherwise passing into obsolescence.

We are now brought to a very striking point in the incident. The servant of Elisha came back, saying: “Alas, my master, how shall we do? I have been up early, and behold, a host compasses the city—both with horses and chariots.”

Then Elisha said: “Lord, open his eyes; let this young man see. At present he can only look upon appearances, which are not realities. The universe is within the universe. The Bible is within the Bible. The man is within the man. This servant of mine sees only the outer circle—the rim or rind of things. Lord, show him the reality; let him see, and then he will be at peace.”

There is a view of sight; there is a view of faith. The worldly man goes by what his bodily eyes notice or discern; the spiritually minded man walks by faith, not by sight.

The telescope does not create the stars; the telescope only reveals them, or enables the eye to see them. If, then, a telescope can do this, shall we deny to that spiritual power within us called Faith the power which we ascribe to a mechanical instrument which our own hands have fashioned? [370]

Look upon a given object—say, you take a piece of glass two inches square; look upon it and ask: “Is there any thing on that glass?” Looking with the naked eye, the sharpest man would say: “That glass is perfectly free from blot, stain, flaw or inscription of any kind whatsoever.”

Now, put that same two-inch square of glass under a microscope, and look through the microscope. What is upon it? The Lord’s Prayer, upon a speck not discernible by the naked eye.

If, then, we ascribe such wonderful powers to a glass which we ourselves have determined as to its size and its relation to other glasses, shall we deny to a certain spiritual faculty the power of seeing that which can not be discriminated by unaided reason?

By all the pressure of analogy, by all the reasoning of inference, we insist that, if such wonderful things can be done mechanically, things at least equally wonderful can be done by forces that are spiritual.

The Sun does not make the landscape; the Sun only shows it. A man may stand upon a high hill on a dull-gray day and say: “I can imagine what this would be when the Sun was shining.” But no man can imagine light. It stands as a sacred mystery in our life that the Sun never comes within the lines of imagination. The Sun light is a continual surprise, even to the eyes that have most reverently and lovingly studied it.

When the Sun looks upon the landscape there are new colors, new distances, new forms; a whole work is wrought upon the landscape which can only be described by the word “wizardry.” [371]

So it is with the Bible, the great work of the living God. Look at it with the natural vision, and you may discover in it particular beauties. You may say: “The poetry is noble; the English is pure; and the moral sentiment of the book is not without a certain elevation.”

But the Bible wants no such reluctant or impoverished compliments. Let the soul be touched by the Spirit that wrote the book; let the eyes be anointed by the living God; and then the Bible is like a landscape shone upon by the noonday’s cloudless Sun.

Elisha took his own way with the Syrian army, and here occurs a point worthy of special note. When the Lord smote the people with blindness, according to the word of Elisha, the latter said unto them: “This is not the way, neither is this the city; follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek.” But he led them to Samaria.

What! Then did the man of God resort to a false strategy? This is a very serious case, indeed, and has occasioned much difficulty. Nor need we wonder, for in “The Speaker’s Commentary” we find such words as these:

“Untruth has been held by all moralists to be justifiable toward a public enemy. Where we have a right to kill, much more have we a right to deceive by stratagem.”

When words like these occur in a Christian commentary, no wonder that infidelity should seize upon the annotation as a prize, or use it as a weapon. No such comment can we adopt in perusing this portion of sacred Scripture. It can not be justifiable to treat a public enemy by untruth or deception. We have no right to kill, and therefore we have no right to deceive by stratagem. This is not the way to recommend the word of the living God. [372]

The incident must be taken in its totality. The reader must not arrest the progress of the narrative by stopping here or there to ask a question. He must see the incident in its completeness, and, seeing it, he will have reason further to glorify God for the pure morality of the book and the noble spirit of the record.

Elisha might well so far follow his illustrious predecessor as to use the weapon of irony or taunting in dealing with the Lord's enemies.

Elijah said to the prophets of Baal: "Cry aloud; for he is a god." As well might we stop there, and say: "By Elijah's own testimony deity was ascribed to Baal." We forget the irony of the tone; we forget that Elijah was mocking the debased prophets.

So Elisha might say: "This is not the way, neither is this the city; follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek."

There was a taunt in the tone; there was sarcasm in the emphasis. Nor is the verse to be read in its unity. It is to be read as part and parcel of a whole narrative.

Now, what became of all this so-called deception and stratagem?

When the people were come into Samaria, Elisha said: "Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see." [373]

He prayed, first, that their sight might be taken away. That seemed to be cruel. Now he prays that their sight may be given to them again.

"And, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria. And the king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them: 'My father!'" As if he had become a convert. The son of Ahab and Jezebel said to Elisha: "My father!" A reluctant and hypocritical compliment, for Jehoram could be neither reverent or true.

But, said he, observing the prize that was before him: "Shall I smite them? Shall I smite them?" This was a Hebraism equal to: "Smiting, shall I smite?" So Jehoram said: "Shall I, smiting, smite them?"

Elisha answered: "No."

Now, let us hear what this man can say who has been judged guilty of untruth and of stratagem.

Elisha said to Jehoram: "Thou shalt not smite them. Wouldst thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive without thy sword and without thy bow?" This is the same as saying: "If you yourself have won the victory, then you can smite; but you did not take these men, and therefore you shall not smite them. What you have taken by your own sword and spear may be your lawful prize in war; but here is a capture with which you have had nothing to do."

What, then, is to be done? Hear Elisha: "Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master."

And so great provision was prepared, "and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master." [374]

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

Elisha was supposed to be about a hundred years of age when he died. We have seen that he was a domestic rather than a public prophet. He was unlike his great predecessor and father. The awful Elijah dwelt alone. He came upon society now and then—came down like a flood from the threatening clouds; shot out like a fire, and burned the men whom he approached.

Elisha was exactly the contrary. He worked his miracles in the house. He often called upon people; he was quiet, serene, most sympathetic and tender-hearted. Now and then he could stand bolt upright and send away proud men from his door with a disdain that they

could never forget; but in the usual process of his life he was a mother-man in Israel. He went into people's houses and asked how they were. He consented to increase their oil and their flour, and to bless their family life with prophetic benedictions.

GEHAZI.

The name Gehazi means "valley of vision," and is appropriate enough if we think of what Gehazi saw as to the nature of wickedness when the prophet opened his eyes.

Let us note what points there are in this case which illustrate human life as we now know it. In this way we shall test the moral accuracy of the story—and that is all we are now principally concerned about. [375]

Gehazi was "the servant of Elisha, the man of God." Surely, then, he would be a good man? Can a good man have a bad servant? Can the man of prayer, whose life is a continual breathing unto God of supreme desires after holiness, have a man in his company, looking on and watching him, and studying his character, who denies his very altar and blasphemes against his God? Is it possible to live in a Christian house and yet not be a Christian? Can we come so near as that, and yet be at an infinite distance from all that is pure and beautiful and true?

If so, then we must look at appearances more carefully than we have been wont to do, for they may have been deceiving us all the time.

Surely, every good man's children must be good, for they have had great spiritual advantages. They have, indeed, had some hereditary benefits denied to many others. Their house has been a home, their home has been a church, and surely they must show by their whole spirit and tone of life that they are as their father as to all spiritual aspiration and positive excellence.

Is it not so?

If facts contradict that theory, then we must look at the theory again more carefully, or we must examine the facts more closely, because the whole science of Cause and Effect would seem to be upset by such contradictions. There is a metaphysical question here, as well as a question of fact. A good tree must bring forth good fruit; good men must have good children; good masters must have good servants. Association in life must go for something. [376]

So we would say—emphatically, because we think reasonably.

But facts are against such a fancy.

What is possible in this human life? It is possible that a man may spend his days in building a church, and yet denying God. Does not the very touch of the stones help him to pray? No. He touches them roughly; he lays them mechanically, and he desecrates each of them with an oath.

Is it possible that a man can be a builder of churches and yet be a destroyer of Christian doctrine and teaching generally? Yes.

Let us come closer still, for the question is intensely interesting and may touch many.

It is possible for a man to print the Bible and yet not believe a word of it. On first hearing this shocking statement we revolt from it. We say it is possible for a man to handle type that is meant to represent the greatest revelation ever made to the human mind without feeling that the very handling of the type is itself a kind of religious exercise. Yet men can debauch themselves in the act of printing the Bible; can use profane language while putting the Lord's Prayer in type; can set up the whole Gospel of John without knowing that they are putting into visible representation the highest metaphysics, the finest spiritual thinking, the most tender religious instruction.

Let us come even closer. A man can preach the Gospel and be a servant of the devil. [377]
Who, then, can be saved? It is well to ask the question. It is a burning inquiry; it is a spear-like interrogation. We would put it away from us if we dare.

Now, let this stand as our first lesson in the study of this remarkable incident, that Gehazi was the servant of Elisha, the man of God, and was at the same time the servant of the devil. He was receiving wages from both masters. He was a living contradiction; and in being such he was most broadly human. He was not a monster; he was not a natural curiosity; he is not to be accounted for by quietly saying that he was an eccentric person. He represents the human heart, and by so much he brings against ourselves an infinite impeachment.

It is in vain that we shake our skirts as if throwing off this man and all association with him and responsibility for him; this can not be done. He anticipated ourselves; we repeat his wickedness. The iniquity is not in the accident, in the mere circumstances, or in the particular form; the iniquity is in the heart—yea, in the very heart itself. Marvel not that Christ said: “Ye must be born again.”

Gehazi did not understand the spirit of his master. He did not know what his master was doing. How is it that men can be so far separated from one another? How is it that a man can not be understood in his own house, but be thought fanciful, fanatical, eccentric and phenomenally peculiar? How is it that a man may be living among men, and yet not be of them; may be in the world and yet above the world; may be speaking the very language of the time, and yet charging it with the meaning of eternity? See here the differences that still [378] exist, and must ever exist, as between one man and another:

Elisha—living the great spiritual life, the grand prayer-life and faith-life.

Gehazi—grubbing in the Earth and seeking his contentment in the dust.

These contrasts exist through all time, and are full of instruction. Blessed is he who observes the wise man, and copies him; who looks upon the fool, and turns away from him, if not with hatred yet with a desire not to know his spirit.

Gehazi had a method in his reasoning. Said he, in effect:

“To spare a stranger, a man who may never be seen again; to spare a beneficiary, a man who has taken away benefits in the right hand and in the left; to spare a wealthy visitor, a man who could have given much without feeling he had given any thing; to spare a willing giver, a man who actually offered to give something and who was surprised, if not offended, because his gift was declined! There is no reason in my master’s policy.”

It never occurred to Gehazi that a man could have bread to eat that the world knew not of. It never occurs to some men that others can live by faith, and can work miracles of faith by the grace of God.

Are there not minds that never had a noble thought? It is almost impossible to conceive of the existence of such minds, but there they are. They never went beyond their own limited location; they never knew what suffering was on the other side of the wall of their own dwelling place. They were never eyes to the blind, or ears to the deaf, or feet to the lame; they never surprised themselves by some noble thought of generosity. How, then, can they understand the prophets of the times? [379]

Yet how noble a thing it is to have among us men who love the upper life, and who look upon the whole world from the very sanctuary of God, and who say:

“A man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth, but a man’s life consists of his faith, love and charity.”

We can not tell how much the prophets are doing to refine their age, to give a new view to all human duty, to inspire those who otherwise would fail for the lack of courage.

We can not tell where the answers to prayer fall, or how those answers are given, but we feel that there is at work in society a mystic influence, a strange, ghostly, spectral action, which keeps things together, and now and again puts Sabbath day right in the midst of the vulgar time.

There are facts of a high and special kind, as well as what we commonly call facts, which are often but appearances and dramatic illusions. What about the secret ministry, the unnamable spiritual action, the holy, elevating and restraining influence? What is that hand which will write upon palace walls words of judgment and keep the world from plunging into darkness infinite?

Surely, God is in this place, and I knew it not. This—wherever it be, garden or wilderness—is none other than the house of God and the gate of Heaven.

Gehazi prostituted an inventive and energetic mind. He had his plan: “My master hath sent me, saying: ‘Behold, even now there be come to me from Mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets. Give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver and two changes of garments.” [380]

The case was admirably stated. It was stated, too, with just that urgency which increases the likelihood of that which is declared.

Elisha spent his time among the sons of the prophets. They all looked to him as a father, as he had once looked to Elijah. He was the young man’s friend—the young minister’s asylum. They all knew the gracious, gentle, Christ-like Elisha—the ante-type of the Messiah; and what was more likely than that two of them, in the course of their journeying, should have called on Elisha unexpectedly?

It was a free and gracious life that the old ministers lived. They seemed to have rights in one another. If any one of them had a loaf, that loaf belonged to the whole fraternity. If one of them, better off than another, had a house or part of a house, any of the sons of the prophets passing by could go and lodge there.

It was a gracious masonry—a true brotherhood.

Gehazi was no model man in a moral sense. His invention was a lie; his cleverness was but an aspect of depravity; his very genius but made him memorable for wickedness.

But Gehazi was successful. He took the two talents of silver in the two bags, with the two changes of garments. He brought them to the tower, and bestowed them in the house. Then he sat down—a successful man! Now all is well; lust is satisfied, wealth is laid up. Now the fitness of things has been consulted, and harmony has been established between debtor and creditor, and Justice nods because Justice has been appeased. [381]

Were the test to end with the twenty-fourth verse of the fifth chapter of the second Book of Kings, we should describe Gehazi as a man who had set an example to all coming after him who wished to turn life into a success.

Who had been wronged?

Naaman pursues his journey all the more happy for thinking he has done something in return for the great benefit which has been conferred on him. He is certainly more pleased than otherwise. The man of God has at last been turned, he thinks, into directions indicated by common sense.

All this has come about in the way of business; for nothing that is not customary has been done.

Gehazi is satisfied, and Elisha knows nothing about it. The servant should have something, even if the master would take nothing. It is the trick of our own day. The servant is always at the door with his rheumatic hand, ready to take any thing that may be put into it. We leave nothing with the master; it would be an insult to him.

So far the case looks simple, natural and complete; and we have said Elisha knows nothing about it.

Why will men trifle with prophets?

Why will men play with fire?

When will men know that what is done in secret will be published on the house tops?

When will men know that there can be nothing confidential that is wicked?

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Observe Gehazi going in to his master as usual, and look at his face; not a sign upon it of any thing having been done that is wrong. Look at his hands—large, white, innocent-looking hands that never doubled their fingers on things that did not belong to them.

Look at Elisha. Fixing his eyes calmly upon Gehazi, he asks:

“Whence comest thou, Gehazi?”

“Thy servant went no whither.”

Gehazi meant it to be understood that he had been on the premises all the time; always within call; the lifting up of a finger would have brought him.

Then came the speech of judgment, delivered in a low tone, but every word was heard—the beginning of the word and the end of the word—and the last word was like a sting of righteousness.

“Went not mine heart with thee?”

Oh, that heart! The good man knows when wickedness has been done. Christ knows when He enters into the congregation whether there is a man in it with a withered hand.

“Went not mine heart with thee?” Was I not present at the interview? Did I not hear every syllable that was said on the one side and on the other? Did I not look at thee when thou didst tell the black, flat and daring lie?

Then came the infliction of the judgment:

“The leprosy, therefore, of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever.”

Thou, Gehazi, hast touched the silver, not knowing that it was contagious and held the leprosy; thou didst bring in the two changes of garments, not knowing that the germs of the disease were folded up with the cloth. Put on the coat; it will scorch thee.

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“He went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.”

A splendid conception is this silent departure. Not a word was said, not a protest uttered. The judgment was felt to be just. “Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness.” “These shall go away into everlasting punishment.”

Oh, the hush—the solemn silence! The judgment seemed to begin with the sound of trumpets and the rending of things that apparently could not be shaken; at the end there is simply a going away, a silent motion, a conviction that the sentence is right.

See Gehazi as he goes out of Elisha’s presence, and regard him as a specimen of those who, having been judged, on the last day will depart.

Men should consider the price which they really pay for their success.

The grateful Syrian would gladly have pressed upon Elisha gifts of high value, but the holy man resolutely refused to take any thing, lest the glory redounding unto God from this great act should in any degree be obscured. But his servant, Gehazi, was less scrupulous, and hastened with a lie in his mouth to ask, in his master’s name, for a portion of that which Elisha had refused.

The illustrious Syrian no sooner saw the man running after his chariot than he alighted to meet him, and being glad to relieve himself in some degree under the sense of overwhelming obligation, he sent him back with more than he ventured to ask. [384]

Nothing more is known of Naaman.

We afterward find Gehazi recounting to King Joram the great deeds of Elisha, and in the providence of God it so happened that when he was relating the restoration to life of the Shunammite's son, the very woman with her son appeared before the king to claim her house and lands, which had been usurped while she had been absent abroad during the recent famine. Struck by the coincidence, the king immediately granted her application.

As lepers were compelled to live apart outside the towns, and were not allowed to come too near to uninfected persons, some difficulty has arisen with respect to Gehazi's interview with the king. Several answers occur. The interview may have taken place outside the town, in a garden or garden house, and the king may have kept Gehazi at a distance, with the usual precautions which custom dictated. Some even suppose that the incident is misplaced, and actually occurred before Gehazi was smitten with leprosy. Others hasten to the opposite conclusion, and allege the probability that the leper had then repented of his crime, and had been restored to health by his master.

HEZEKIAH.

So far in our Bible studies we have had many weary wanderings among bad men. The fear was that, to some extent, familiarity with them might blunt our own moral sensibility. [385]

Man after man has passed before us out of whose very countenance the image of God had faded. How pleasant it is, and how spiritually exhilarating, to come upon a case in which we read of a different pattern of man! Of Hezekiah it is recorded in the eighteenth chapter of the second Book of Kings:

“And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David, his father, did.”

After a long journey underground we seem to have come suddenly upon a sweet garden, and the sight of it is as Heaven. The charm is always in the contrast. If things are not quite so good as we supposed them to be, they are all the better by reason of circumstances through which we have passed, which have made us ill at ease and have impoverished or disheartened us; then very little of the other kind goes a long way.

A man comes up out of the underground railway and says, when he emerges into the light:

“How fresh the air is here! What a healthy locality! How well to live in this neighborhood!”

Why does he speak so kindly of his surroundings? Not because of those surroundings intrinsically, but because of the contrast which they present to the circumstances through which he has just passed.

Hezekiah was no perfect man.

We shall see how noble he was, and how rich in many high qualities, yet how now and again we see the crutch of the cripple under the purple of the king.

It is well for us that he was occasionally and temporarily weak, or he would have been like a star which we can not touch, and at which we can not light our own torch. [386]

Even Hezekiah was a man like ourselves in many particulars, and therefore what was good and sound in him is all the more attractive and is all the more possible to us.

Who can mistake an honest man?

If all men were upright, where would be the peculiarity of any individual man's integrity? But, given a corrupt state of society, when the honest man appears we say: "The wind has changed. It blows balmily and healthfully. It comes from a fine origin, and brings with it many a blessing."

Who can mistake the atmosphere of the sea? How it blows away all the city dullness! How it quickens the blood! How it throws off increasing years, and makes the voyager feel almost young again!

It is so with honesty, nobleness, charity and goodness of character when the surrounding air is charged with some kind of poison or pestilence.

So it is that we come upon Hezekiah.

Perhaps it is well for him that we approach his case after such an experience. He thus gets advantages that otherwise might not have been accorded to him. He looks the higher for the dwarfs that are round about him, the whiter because of the black population amid which he stands—at once a contrast and a rebuke.

But from Hezekiah's point of view the case was different. Behind him were traditions of the most corrupt sort. He was as a speckled bird in the line of his own family. It is hard to be good amid so much that is really bad. All attempts at goodness are accounted examples of affectation, conceit, vanity and pharisaism; and under such circumstances sometimes a man's foes may be the people of his own household. They wish he was more pliable, less sabbatarian, less devoted to his Bible, less constant in his attendance at church. He might go once a day, and give himself one end of the rope not tethered to the altar; but he will not.

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Has that man an easy time of it?

No hard word may be spoken to him—certainly no bitter word—and yet all the while he may be made to feel that perhaps, after all, he may be affecting somewhat of piety and purity, and that those who are looking on may be better critics of him than he is of himself.

At all events, there come to him periods of trial, and sometimes he says within himself:

"Shall I today be as constant as I have been, or may I not break away now? Have I not built up a character, and may I not retire upon my moral competence, and live henceforth the life of a latitudinarian? After a long spell of many years, surely I might intermit just a little."

Who shall say that the temptation is not subtle and strong? Some men have to force their way to church through innumerable and unnamable difficulties. This ought to be reckoned. Some credit must be due to men who are thus constant to their sense of public duty and religious obligation. Men are not always at church with the entire consent of those who are round about them.

What, then, must be done?

One of two things. Either yield to the temptation or resist it. You can not trifle with it. You can not compromise, and then recur to firmness, and again connive, and again balance, consider and hesitate. Virtue is not an intermittent grace. We must stand, or we must fall.

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Hezekiah had a wicked father. How will that wickedness come out in the son? Not, perhaps, as wickedness, but as infirmity, weakness, and want of constancy in some directions, though there may be no want of firmness in others.

Can a man wholly escape the bad blood inherited of his father?

We must not forget that Hezekiah's mother's name was Abi, the daughter of Zachariah. How she came to marry a wicked husband must remain a mystery. But the mother will come up in the son.

She was the daughter of Zachariah, and Zachariah was a prophet, or seer—a man with double sight—one of those strange men who can see beyond the merely visible and palpable, and can read things that lie behind.

Zachariah came up again in his daughter, and the mother came up again in the son, and so there was a mysterious play of inheritance, transfer, transition, reappearance, somewhat of resurrection—a great tragic mystery of transformation and representation.

We speak about a man as if he were self-contained—just standing upon so much ground, without relation behind or before, on the right hand or on the left. But no man is thus insularly placed; no man is an absolute solitary.

Every man has in him the blood of the past and the life of the future.

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Can a son of a good mother be altogether bad? Most surely not. You must have mistaken the case if you thought so. Your very thinking so may constitute an element of hopefulness in your case. Take comfort from that suggestion.

So long as you can think of yourself seriously and of the past and of your advantages, and can compare what you are with what you might have been, there is hope of you.

But can there be in all history such an irony as this, that a man should have had a praying mother and himself be a prayerless man?

No! It can not be. Somewhere—at some time and in some way—the better nature will assert itself, and out of a good seed surely there will come a good harvest.

But the lesson does not lie upon one side only. Here is encouragement to the praying fathers and to praying mothers.

Zachariah, read on; read between the lines of things; interpret events symbolically; read the apocalyptic sense of what is happening—and out of all this mental elevation and spiritual conduct there will come results in your daughter or your son.

Abi, pray on. Be just to your father's memory, and say: "He was a holy man. I must prove it by being a holy woman. He can not live upon a written character; he must live in my life. I will prove that such a child must have had a good father."

So the vital lessons fall—on the right hand, on the left, and around about us. Shame be to us if, amid this shower of monition and encouragement and stimulus, we be deaf and dumb and blind, unfeeling, unresponsive.

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Hezekiah will now go to work and prove himself to be an energetic reformer.

"He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made; for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it; and he called it Nehustan."

He must have been a strong man. He had no colleague, no ally; no one to say to him: "Be brave, be true." He went straight against the hardest wall that ever was built by the stubbornness and perversity of man.

It is not easy to begin life by a destructive process of reformation. Who would not rather plant a tree than throw down a wall? Who would not rather plant flowers and enjoy their beauty and fragrance than give himself the severe toil and the incessant trouble of destroying corrupt and evil institutions?

Whoever attempts this kind of destructive work, or even a constructive work which involves preliminary destructiveness, will have a hard time of it. Criticism will be very sharp, and selfishness will be developed in an extraordinary degree.

If a man be more than politician—if he be a real born statesman, looking at whole empires at once and not at mere parishes, and if in his thought and purpose he should base

his whole policy upon fundamental right—he will not have an easy life of it, even in a Christian country. In proportion as he bases his whole policy on righteousness, temperance and judgment to come, he will be pelted with hard names and struck at with unfriendly hands. [391]

This holds good in all departments of life, in all great reformations, in all assaults made upon ignorance, selfishness, tyranny and wrong of every name.

The children of Israel always seemed to live a foolish life. They were the veriest children—so, at least, we would say but for fear of branding sweet children with an evil stigma.

They were infantile, weak, treacherous to themselves, uncertain at every point—and so, having kept the brazen serpent, they burned incense to it. They liked a visible God. When the calf appealed to their religious feelings they danced around it as if at last they had found a deity.

But who can worship a spirit—invisible, impalpable, far away, near at hand, without a name, without a shape which we can verify and say: “It comes to thus much, and this is the weight and this is the value of it?”

It requires a mind of some mental strength to stand up, take hold of the brazen serpent and call it “Nehushtan”—a contemptuous term, meaning a piece of brass; dead brass, useless and worthless brass, a relic but not a God.

Let us give credit to the men who have been bold—religiously intrepid—in the midst of circumstances of a most discouraging and overbearing kind. They are the men to whom we owe our present privileges. We have the Bible in our mother tongue because they were valiant. Not a church would have been built today in which men could assemble with a sense of freedom—sweet, joyous liberty—but for the Hezekiahs and others who went forth and, at great cost and great peril, destroyed things evil and black, by the power of God’s almightiness—overthrew them, and set up a better kingdom. [392]

What was the root of Hezekiah’s character? At present we have seen phenomena of a gracious kind; we like what we have seen of this man.

“He trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah nor any that were before him. For he clave to the Lord, and departed not from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses.”

At length a man arose who said: “I will do God’s will, God helping me. I will not only read the commandments, but I will incarnate them. I will not only speak religious words, but live a religious life.”

Tender and yet emphatic are the words: “He trusted,” “he clave,” “he kept.”

He “trusted”—that is to say, he had no other trust. His religion was not a convenience, one thing among many things, an occasional exercise in piety; but it was a perpetual confidence, the one trust, the all-centralizing and all-ruling fact.

Then he “clave”—he kept close to. He would not allow any thing to come between his hand and the God he seized. The hand could do nothing except cleave to God and what was possible through that cleaving; and much is possible of a helpful and beneficent kind.

He “kept the commandments”—counted them one by one; examined himself in them; took himself daily to task about the whole ten. We live an off-hand life. [393]

Religion is now as easy as a wave of the hand, a salutation across a thoroughfare; it is something that can be taken up, laid down, forgotten and resumed.

What wonder if the Rab-shakehs of the age come and taunt us, mock our piety and blow back our prayers before they get to the skies?

We want more trust, more cleaving piety, more keeping of the commandments, living in them and having no other life that is not consonant with them.

Now came, as we have often seen, the inevitable temptation. We pass instantly to the visit of Rab-shakeh. This Rab-shakeh was an eloquent man. He had the gift of mockery; he could gibe well. He was not without a certain logical qualification.

He made a long and offensive speech to the people under Hezekiah's rule, and he thought he had them at both ends of the argument.

Having mocked their piety, laughed it down, challenged it, spat upon it, he said:

“Perhaps you will say: ‘We trust in the Lord, our God,’ but you forget that this very man, Hezekiah, has thrown down His altars, has taken away His groves, has rooted up the house of your God by the foundations.”

Rab-shakeh did not understand the destructive reformation wrought out by Hezekiah. He heard of the groves being cut down and the holy places being removed, and he said:

“This is so much to our advantage. The king of Assyria shall hear of this, and we shall make good commerce of it.”

Rab-shakeh did not distinguish between idolatry and piety—between a reform essential to health and a mere accident in history. That which was good in Hezekiah seemed to be wickedness to Rab-shakeh. [394]

Rab-shakeh assaulted the people, trampled on them, leaped over their bodies, mocked their refuges and their trust, and thrust his fist into the face of Egypt and said:

“Come away from Hezekiah. Trust him not; he is blind; he is incapable. Leave him, and I will tell you what the king of Assyria will do for you.”

And he held this out to them:

“I will come and take you away to a land like your own land—a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive oil and of honey—that ye may live, and not die; and hearken not unto Hezekiah, when he persuadeth you, saying: ‘The Lord will deliver us.’”

It is but an empty saying: “Come, and I will give you a great Canaan!”

Sometimes it does seem as if the enemy had the best of it. Every thing lies so handily to him. He says:

“I will get you through this difficulty. I know a lie that would deceive a king. I can instruct you in a policy that would blind a judge. I could get the money for you; you need have no difficulty about that. Why, I say, in confidence, I can let you have it now!”

What can the preacher do in the presence of such a Rab-shakeh?

Or, he may not offer temptation in that direction, but in another. He may say:

“All these arguments I could answer, if I cared to do so. Who wrote the Bible? Who has seen the original manuscripts? Who has ever seen God? It is utterly impossible to know the infinite. Come, and I will make you rich at once in real, solid, practical things. I can give you work instantly, and wages immediately the work is begun. I can give you something in advance. Leave the preacher, the altar, the Bible and the church. Come and work in the open streets, and be doing something that you can handle and about which there is no manner of doubt.” [395]

People begin then to wonder.

They should adopt the policy which was imposed on the children of Hezekiah:

“But the people held their peace, and answered him not a word, for the king’s commandment was: ‘Answer him not.’”

Nothing is to be got out of wordy controversy. Live the Christian life; grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. While the controversialist is contemning you, taunting you and smiting you, show to him that you are growing broader, more massive in character, more tender in disposition, more benevolent in every aspiration and desire and purpose, and thus by well-doing “Put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.”

Defend your Christianity by the eloquence of your life.

The servants of Hezekiah said to him: “What Rab-shakeh has said may come to pass. Let us go to Isaiah and tell him all.”

Hezekiah himself thought that perhaps there might be something in it, after all. There he and his servants fell into a state of incertitude.

“So the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah.” They came to the right man. Standing up like a king, he said: [396]

“Thus shall ye say to your master: Thus saith the Lord: ‘Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me. Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumor, and shall return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.’”

He would make no violent attack on the men. He would summon no legion of angels to overwhelm this great Oriental potentate. He would simply “send a blast.” He would change the wind; he would scatter something upon it and bid it blow across the brain of the king of Assyria, and the king would not know his right hand from his left, nor the morning from the night; he would be calling everybody by the wrong name, and be asking for things that he did not wish to possess, and be, generally, thrown into a state of unbalanced and wandering mind.

“I will send a whisperer to him. He shall simply go to the ear of the king of Assyria and say something, and the king will take fright and fly away in a panic. O Hezekiah, continue thy prayer, repeat thy morning sacrifice and thine evening oblation; and, as for the king of Assyria, I will send a blast and a rumor. I will answer Rab-shakeh.”

Let the contempt of the enemy be answered by the contempt of Heaven.

Rab-shakeh, having found that the king of Assyria was warring against Libnah, returned; and when he heard that Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia, was come up to war, he once more addressed Hezekiah in terms of exultation and contempt. [397]

Rab-shakeh was pretendedly anxious that Hezekiah should not be deceived by the Lord, his God, and then he taunts him with many a history in which Assyria had been conqueror over opposing nations. He completes his taunt by asking:

“Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivah?”

This message came to Hezekiah in the form of a letter, or letters, and he instantly “went up into the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord.”

There is no need to regard this as in any sense involving a heathenish custom. The meaning simply is that Hezekiah consulted the Lord on the whole matter, and declined to take any thing into his own counsel or power. He acknowledges the dignity of God by the expression: “O Lord God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubims.”

Then he pointed to the letter which more immediately concerned himself, thus showing his consciousness that the majesty of the Lord did not separate Him from taking an interest in earthly things. We are not to stop at the point of majesty, but are to reason that, because

God is so majestic and august, He will pay attention to the prayers and desires of the beings whom He has created in His own image and likeness. The divine majesty is not a rebuke to human approach, but is an encouragement to human prayer. When Hezekiah says “Thou art the God,” the emphasis is to be laid on the pronoun. Thou art the true God, and Thou alone. When he desires God to bow down His ear, and hear, the reference is not so much to listen to Hezekiah’s prayer as to the words of Sennacherib. [398]

The meaning of the whole petition may be:

“Interpose immediately and energetically between me and mine enemy. Let Thine ears hear, let Thine eyes see, and let Thine arm be extended.”

Hezekiah acknowledges that the kings of Assyria had destroyed the nations and their lands, and had cast the gods of the nations into the fire. By so much he gives the Assyrians credit for having spoken the truth, and for having thus founded their project against Israel upon the success which they had already attained.

Hezekiah acknowledges, indeed, that the gods of the nations were no gods. At the same time he feels that to the minds of the Assyrians they may have been as real deities, and their overthrow may have encouraged the Assyrians to believe that Jehovah was like unto them.

Thus the prayer of Hezekiah was argued and ordered in logical and historical form, and was intended to excite, as it were, the very jealousy of the Lord God of Israel.

We now turn to the reply which was made to Hezekiah through the lips of Isaiah, the son of Amos. The reply was manifestly given in a contemptuous tone:

“The virgin the daughter of Zion hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee.”

This is a poetic personification of place, Zion being regarded as mother of the people dwelling there. While the term “virgin” may denote the inviolable security of the citadel of Jehovah, it may also intimate that a woman—even a solitary woman—was enough, when under the inspiration and protection of God, to repel the assault of the most boastful and audacious king. [399]

The expression, “hath shaken her head at thee,” has been literally rendered: “Hath nodded behind thee.” It signifies an act of security—as, for example, in the Twenty-second Psalm: “All they that see me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying: ‘He trusted on the Lord that He would deliver him. Let Him deliver him, seeing He delighted him.’”

The people of Jerusalem are represented by this expression as nodding their heads in contempt at the retiring envoys of Sennacherib.

The answer of Isaiah to Hezekiah was a religious revelation to the king of Assyria.

The twenty-second verse puts into interrogative form a reproach against the ignorance of the king:

“Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? And against whom hast thou exalted thy voice and lifted up thine eyes on high?”

The meaning evidently is that the king did not know the real nature of the God of Israel and Judah, and that he was making an infinite mistake in confounding that nature with what he had already seen of the idols of the nations.

Humiliation is promised to the king of Assyria. A hook is to be thrust into his nose, a bridle is to be put on his lips, and he is to be turned back by the way which he came. [400]

While the king of Assyria is humiliated, the remnant that escaped of the house of Judah is promised again to take root downward and bear fruit upward—literally, shall add root to

root, shall take firmer root than ever, as a tree often does after a storm; the ravaged land was to be newly stocked by the remnant that was to be saved out of Jerusalem.

All these statements are supported by the declaration: “The zeal of the Lord of Hosts shall do this.”

Thus the promise is not made in any human name or guaranteed by the conquests of human history. It is immediately connected with the very purpose and power of the Most High. Nor is this the only instance in which divine strength is promised on behalf of Judah and of Israel. We read: “For I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David’s sake.”

We must always be careful to notice that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, and that no occasion is ever given for man to glory in man, but that everywhere from the beginning of religious history, as given in the Bible, it is God who is King, Ruler and Protector, and to Him all the glory of deliverance and conquest undividedly belongs.

And that night “the angel of the Lord went out and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand; and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses.”

Again and again we say: “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

Let Rab-shakeh talk—let him deliver his burning messages—and when he has ceased his mockery it is not necessary for us to answer. God will defend His own cause. [401]

Here we stand. We think all history is on the Christian side. But let us not forget that the finest argument in favor of Christianity is a Christian life.

JABEZ.

The ninth verse of the fourth chapter of the first Book of Chronicles contains a reference to Jabez. The whole history is brief:

“And Jabez was more honorable than his brethren; and his mother called his name Jabez, saying: ‘Because I bear him with sorrow.’ And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying: ‘Oh, that Thou wouldst bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that Thine hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldst keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!’ And God granted him that which he requested.”

Nothing more is known of this Jabez or of his brethren. “The Speaker’s Commentary” regards the fact as remarkable that Jabez should be introduced without description or patronymic, as if a well-known personage, and supposes that he was known to those for whom the Book of Chronicles was written, either by tradition or by writings which have perished.

The word Jabez signifies sorrowful.

Jabez was distinguished in some way above his brethren. By this distinction we are not to infer the exercise of an undue partiality in the spirit of his parents. Account for it as we may, some men appear to be born with what may be called a larger religiousness of nature than other men. It is easy for them to pray; it is a delight to them to peruse all sacred writings; it is a positive pain to them to be deprived of religious privileges. [402]

We must leave this mystery as insoluble. It is a very pleasant mystery to those who are gifted with religious intuition; but, on the other hand, it is a most appalling mystery to those who seem to be what we can not better describe than by calling them natural Atheists.

The name which Jabez bore was a memorial of his mother’s sorrow—not a prophecy of his own. Yet Jabez was animated by that inexplicable superstition which discovers in names

and circumstances omens and predictions which the imagination can never treat with disregard.

Jabez might intellectually know that his name did but represent what his mother had endured, yet a subtle feeling took possession of him, as if he himself would in some way be involved in the same sorrow. Nor was this an irrational conclusion.

As a matter of fact, some men are born to more sorrow than others—as certainly as by constitution some men are more religious than others.

Here, again, is a dark and painful mystery. We see the operation of this mystery even in the same family, where one of the children may be full of sunlight, hope and music, and another may be doomed to walk in darkness throughout a lifetime—unable to discern [403] between Summer and Winter, loaded with trouble and oppressed with undefinable apprehensions.

Jabez is known to history as pre-eminently a man of prayer. Although it has been considered that the prayer of Jabez was uttered in view of some imminent battle or other dreaded experience, yet by common consent Jabez has been regarded by Christian students as a typical man of prayer.

Judging the case within the narrow limits of the history given in verses nine and ten, it would seem as if Jabez started life in an act of prayer. The image is at once graphic and beautiful. Think of a young man standing at the door of his house, looking abroad at the unknown and unmeasured world, listening to the conflicting voices which troubled his native air, and then turning his eyes to Heaven and asking divine direction before he would take a single step from the threshold of his home.

Nothing of the nature of mere romance attaches itself to this picture.

This, indeed, is what every young man ought to do before going out to battle or labor. It would appear, from instances which have come under our view, that God condescends to receive from men promises of religious life on certain providential conditions. We can not understand this now, but it is perfectly clear, from such instances as Jacob and Jabez, that God was willing to respond to propositions of obedience founded upon the realization of specified blessings.

The prayer of Jabez must be judged to be good, for the sufficient reason that it was answered—“and God granted him that which he requested.” [404]

Is the conduct of life, then, open to regulation upon such high and sacred lines? May a young man come before the Almighty, speak out all his heart and receive promises of continual guidance and defense from the Living One?

If we could realize the certainty of this holy commerce as between Earth and Heaven, our whole life would be lifted to a noble level, our spirit would be released from the dominion of fear, and instead of laboring in toilsome prayer, we should be filled with the spirit of triumphant thankfulness and praise.

What privileges are open to the young! It lies within their power to give a whole life-time to God. Those who have advanced considerably in life can now but give a fraction of their days, but the young soul can give God the brightness of the morning, the glory of noonday and the tranquility of evening.

Let the young think of this, and give themselves diligently to the study of such instances as that of Jabez, knowing that if they remember their Creator in the days of their youth increasing age will mean increasing joy.

JEHORAM.

Jehoram undertakes an expedition against King Mesha, but in doing so he pays a tribute to the power of the king of Moab by allying with himself Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and also the king of Edom. A remarkable character is given of Jehoram. He was not an imitator of the evil of his father as to its precise form, but he had his own method of serving the devil. [405]

We should have thought that Ahab and Jezebel had exhausted all the arts of wickedness, but it turns out that Jehoram had found a way of his own of living an evil life.

Warned by the untimely fate of his brother, which had fallen upon him expressly on account of his Baal worship, Jehoram began his reign by an ostentatious abolition of the Phœnician state religion, which his father had introduced.

Jehoram went back to the olden times, and re-established the worship of the calf, after the pattern which Jeroboam, its founder, had patronized. His doing so, however, he found to be quite compatible with a secret allowance that the people should practice their own form of worship.

There is room in wickedness for the exercise of genius of a certain limited kind. The limitation is imposed by wickedness itself—for, after all, wickedness is made up of but few elements.

Many persons suppose that if they do not sin according to the prevailing fashion they are not sinning at all. They imagine that by varying the form of the evil they have mitigated the evil itself.

A good deal of virtue is supposed to consist in reprobating certain forms of vice. A man may be no drunkard, according to the usual acceptation of the term, and yet he may be in a continual state of intoxication. It is possible to shudder at what is usually known as persecution, and yet all the while to be beheading enemies and burning martyrs. [406]

Jehoram made a kind of trick of wickedness. He knew how to give a twist to old forms, or a turn to old ways, so as to escape part of their vulgarity and yet to retain all their iniquity.

A most alarming thought it is to the really spiritual mind that men may become adepts in wickedness—experts in evil doing—and may be able so to manage their corrupt designs as to deceive many observers by a mere change of surface or appearance.

We do not amend the idolatry by altering the shape of the altar. We do not destroy the mischievous power of unbelief by throwing our skepticism into metaphysical phrases, and thus making verbal mysteries where we might have spiritual illumination. We are deceived by things simply because we ourselves live a superficial life and read only the history of appearances.

What is the cure for all this manipulation of evil, this changing of complexion and of form, and this consequent imagining that the age is improving because certain phenomena which used to be so patent are no longer discernible on the face of things?

We come back to the sublime doctrine of regeneration, as the answer to the great inquiry: “What is the cure for this heart disease?”

“Marvel not that I said unto thee: ‘Ye must be born again.’”

We may change either the language or the manners of wickedness, or the times and seasons for doing wicked things, and we may decorate our wickedness with many beautiful colors, but so long as the heart itself is unchanged decoration is useless—yea, worse than useless; for it is a vain attempt to make that look true which is false—an endeavor even to deceive Omniscience itself. [407]

“And Mesha, king of Moab, was a sheepmaster, and rendered unto the king of Israel an hundred thousand lambs and an hundred thousand rams, with the wool. But it came to pass,

when Ahab was dead, that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel.”

Enduring masteries are not of a physical kind. Ahab held Mesha simply by a strong arm, and the consequence was that, as soon as Ahab was dead, Mesha refused to render the tribute.

This historical circumstance, limited so far as the mere letter is concerned, is full of significance to the Christian Church and to all Christian countries.

Let us not call ourselves masters of positions or of men, simply because we happen to have the stronger arm. The dominion which is acquired by mere strength and held by superior force is an illusion wherever it is found.

The men whom we may so hold may be hypocrites enough to assume an acquiescent attitude, or even to display a complacent demeanor; they may even go so far as to appear to be grateful for the rule which they can not set aside. But all such appearances are of necessity without reason, and therefore without continuance. They are always to be suspected.

This would be so in the case of the Christian faith, had we the power of imposing even its nominal belief upon any nation. Suppose we say that any man not professing the Christian faith shall certainly be fined, imprisoned or otherwise punished. It is easy to see that such a threat might in many instances bring about an appearance of acquiescence. But it must be, by the very necessity of the case, appearance only. [408]

Faith is a question of the individual judgment and of the individual heart, and can not be controlled in any degree by external authority.

Suppose we create a law making it penal to open places of business on the Sabbath day. Looking upon all commercial houses whose business was suspended for a particular time, we might say: “See how unanimously and happily the Sabbath day is observed in this country!”

But such would be an altogether superficial and mistaken judgment. The Sabbath day can not be kept by law. If the Sabbath is not kept by the reason, and is not hailed with thankful delight by the very heart, it can never be kept at all.

All shops may be closed, all places of amusement may suspend their entertainments, all toys may be put away from the nursery, all out-door enjoyments and avocations may be withdrawn for the time, but the people who have retired in apparent acceptance of these conditions, but not in heartfelt acquiescence with them, are breaking the Sabbath every moment they breathe.

Here is a great law for the house, the church and the nation. The head of the family who rules by mere dread or tyranny is not training an obedient household, but he is preparing an outburst of sedition, which sooner or later must transpire, and when it occurs his ruin is certain. [409]

The same law applies in the matter of capital and labor. The man who only works that he may receive his wages never truly serves or makes his labor into a delight. The man who can threaten the laborer by withdrawal of pecuniary recognition never elicits from that laborer a response to duty, though he may insist on a formal compliance with law.

What a blessed mastery is that of Jesus Christ in this respect.

For Christ reasons with men, and addresses the very highest form and quality of mind; He sets before men the alternative courses of life, and beseeches them to accept the straight and narrow way leading to repentance. Certainly he threatens, He denounces, He declares an awful issue for the wicked man, but it is not mere threatening or mere denunciation; it is the solemn disclosure of a sequence which even Almighty God could not suspend and yet retain the integrity of His throne and the security of the universe. We must never accuse Jesus

Christ of what is termed “threatening.” His denunciations are revelations, and not the expressions of merely angry feelings.

The way of the approach having been settled, the kings proceeded to fetch a compass of seven days’ journey around by the south end of the Dead Sea. They little knew the difficulty that would arise in their way. We do not read that they made any religious inquiry at the outset of their journey, and therefore no responsibility could be charged upon God for the misadventure which occurred. The three kings seem to have consulted only with themselves, and to have resolved in their own counsel and strength upon their expedition against Mesha. [410]

What was the misadventure which occurred? It is related: “And there was no water for the host and for the cattle that followed them.”

Even kings are dependent upon nature. Think of three kings, who supposed themselves at least to be very mighty, and all their people, stopped in their career simply for want of water!

A very pitiable and yet very instructive picture is this of three kings and their armies standing still merely for want of water. The so-called little things of life are often turned into not only things that are great, but into things that are vital.

Blessed indeed would be the man who sees even in natural arrangements and daily providences a call to him to lift up his head toward the heavens and ask great questions about being and duty and destiny.

So we have the usual religious appeal: “Is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may inquire of the Lord by him?”

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

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

Observe that this address was made to the very king of Israel. It simply means that the God of Israel had nothing to do with the king of Israel, and yet Israel was understood to be a theocracy. The form was theocratic, but not the power. [411]

Think of a man bearing the name of God, and yet being godless! A temple deserted of its deity is surely a melancholy sight, but what shall be said of the man from whose heart the Spirit of the living God has utterly departed?

Elisha seems to have inherited the taunting spirit of his great predecessor: “Get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother.”

Who can say with how bitter a taunt the word “mother” was pronounced in this connection?

The evil that men do goes on for many a day—not only to the end of their life-time, but it lives after them.

This is a taunt that is founded on reason. If men have been serving a god for seven years past, surely it can not be unreasonable to refer them to that god in the time of their extremity. What is faith if it can not be tested? What is the value of an altar if you can not go to it and find lying upon it direct answers to your prayer?

Is there any thing meaner in all the history of cowardice than that a man should ignore the living God all his life, and then whiningly repent upon his death-bed? Why does he not go to the trusts to which he has committed himself, and say he will die in them as he has lived

in them? Surely, the cowardice of men should teach those who observe it something regarding the nature and uses of religious faith.

The appeal of Elisha was perfectly fair.

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If the gods of Jehoram were worth any thing, they could find water for him in the time of his necessity. Let them do it. If they will do it, then they will establish their claim to be regarded with reverence, and indeed be honored and worshiped.

We must insist upon making the same appeal in our own day. Men must be made to feel their irreligion.

Jehoram did feel his in this instance, for he protested against the decision of Elisha. Throughout the course of Scripture men are referred to their gods, and are made to test the value of their religion.

Possibly many a Jehoram may be acting under influences which he himself can not explain—so much that he becomes a puzzle to his own mind, wondering how it is that he takes one road when he has decided upon another, and that he mistakes substances for shadows and shadows for substances, so that his whole life is turned into a mocking bewilderment.

The answer is given in Scripture: “I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear; but they did evil before Mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not.”

Now we come to a better phase of this history—namely, to the saving element—which appears and reappears in the course of our changeful life.

Elisha was not to be placated by the king of Israel. In his eyes a vile person was contemned. The king of Israel was but a poor, frail thing in the presence of a man who lived with God and was commissioned to denounce the judgments of Heaven against evil. But the world is not made up of Jehorams. Blessed be God, there are men of another type, whose very presence saves society from judicial ruin.

[413]

“And Elisha said: ‘As the Lord of Hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee.’”

Now we know that the spirit of Elijah rested upon Elisha. We seem to hear the very tones of the old master in the new disciple. Is it not always so in life—that it is one man who saves many; that the ten righteous men save the city, and that Paul saves all those who sail with him in the midst of the tempestuous sea?

Your house is saved because of your little child. Your whole estate is protected from ruin because your wife is a praying woman. Your life would be cut off tomorrow in shame and disgrace were it not that you have entered upon an inheritance of prayers laid up for you by those who went before.

Life thus becomes very sacred and very tender, and we know not to whom we are under the deepest obligations. Enough to know that, somewhere, there is a presence that saves us, there is an influence that guards our life, and that we owe absolutely nothing in the way of security or honor to bad kings or bad men of any name.

The remainder of the chapter is occupied with a prophecy of Elisha and by a statement of the overthrow of the king of Moab.

Nothing now could save Mesha. A strong delusion was sent upon him to believe a lie. When water came down by way of Edom, and the whole country was filled with it, the Moabites rose up early in the morning, and as the Sun shone on the water the Moabites saw the water on the other side as red as blood.

[414]

It looked so like blood that they declared it to be blood; and, believing that the kings were slain who had come up against them, the Moabites advanced to the spoil. Alas, they advanced to their ruin.

The king of Moab saw that the battle was too sore for him. In his despair he took with him seven hundred men that drew swords, to break through even unto the king of Edom, but through the iron wall he could not force his way. In his madness he took his eldest son, who should have reigned in his stead, and flung him for a burnt offering upon the wall.

But the Lord will not be pleased with thousands of rams or with ten thousand rivers of oil, nor will He accept the first-born for a man's transgression or the fruit of his body for the sin of his soul.

JEHORAM, KING OF JUDAH.

Verses sixteen to twenty-nine, inclusive, of the eighth chapter of the second Book of Kings should be compared with the twenty-first chapter of the second Book of Chronicles. The name Joram is an obvious contraction of Jehoram. Joram and Jehoram were practically interchangeable terms. The king of Israel is called Joram, and the king of Judah Jehoram. In another place Joram is the name of the king of Judah. In two other places both kings are called Jehoram. [415]

Jehoram "walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab"—in other words, as the house of Ahab acted. Jehoram, as son-in-law of Ahab and Jezebel, gave his patronage to the worship of the Tyrian Baal.

Jehoram had examples enough before him of the fate which had befallen idolatrous worship, and yet, turning his eye backward upon all the ruins which had been created by divine anger, he pursued his evil way as if the Lord had approved the house of Ahab and its idolatry rather than manifested His judgments upon them.

Rational men may well ask themselves how it is that history is lost on some minds. They look backward and see that from the beginning sin has always been followed by punishment, and punishment has in many cases been carried as far as death itself. Yet in view of all the suffering, and in full sight of the innumerable graves dug by the hand of justice, they continue the same policy without one particle of alteration.

One would have supposed that, looking at the history of the kings of Israel, Jehoram would have said:

"I see now exactly what to avoid; and to see what to avoid is to begin to see what to cultivate and establish. It is perfectly evident that the worship of Baal is doomed, or that wherever it is set up divine anger instantly and severely attests the displeasure of God. It must be my care, therefore, to destroy every trace of idolatry, and build up faith in the true God."

This would have been called reflective and philosophical on the part of the king, and indeed any thing that stood opposed to this course of reasoning would seem to be marked by incredible fatuity. [416]

The contrary, however, is the exact fact. With all the evidences of divine displeasure around him Jehoram continued in the worship of Baal, or in some other form of idolatry which might appeal to the popular imagination or gratify the desires of his own corrupt fancy.

It is easy for moralists to condemn this neglect of history, and to point out to those who, having neglected it, come into suffering and loss, that they ought to have been wise before the event; but the very same thing is done even by the moralists who criticize the course of Jehoram and his predecessors.

This is the sin of every age, and it should be looked at clearly and acknowledged frankly, because until we do bring ourselves into vital relation to it our reasoning will be founded on false bases and will hasten itself to false conclusions.

All history is teaching us that the wages of sin is death; that the way of transgressors is hard; that, though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished; that the face of the Lord is as a flint against evil doers. Yet, with this plainest of all lessons written on the very face of history, men are doing today as their predecessors did centuries ago, and will probably continue to repeat the folly and the wickedness until the end of time.

Surely, this is as curious a puzzle as any that occurs in all the annals of human history. It would seem, indeed, to be more than a puzzle; to be, in fact, indicative of a suicidal disposition on the part of the actor. It would not be tolerated in any other department of life. [417]

If a man had known that a hundred of his ancestors were killed by drinking a certain liquid, and he thus knowingly put that liquid to his lips, the iniquity of his suicide would be aggravated by the knowledge of what had occurred in the records of his family.

How many murders, then, may he be said to accomplish who murders himself as to his moral nature and spiritual cultivation? He does not do it in ignorance. All history is surrounding him with its evidence, and is doing its utmost to secure his attention, and he himself is not unwilling to acknowledge that the testimony of history is uniform and absolute. Yet some immeasurable force within him drives him with infinite fury to the repetition of every sin and the defiance of every judgment.

What was the reason of all this patronage and support of idolatry?

Jehoram had an excellent father, and if any thing was to be expected from the operation of the law of hereditary dispositions, it would be that Jehoram would be of the same quality as Jehoshaphat.

Some curious and energetic influence must have been at work to throw back all hereditary quality and convert the man into a totally different nature. What was that influence? An expression in the eighteenth verse explains its nature and its scope: "For the daughter of Ahab was his wife."

Wherever we find the name of Ahab we also find the presence of evil. Ahab lived again [418] in his daughter, though Jehoshaphat did not repeat himself in his son. "The evil that men do lives after them." Jehoram was under home influence; and is not home influence most potent of all? It is a daily influence; it begins with the early morning and continues all the day through. It does not assume aggressive attitudes or excite suspicion by tumult and defiance of temper. It is noisy or quiet, persistent or reluctant, energetic or languid, according to the peculiar circumstances of the family history. At this moment a word too energetically spoken might defeat its own object; at another moment a languid reference might be more than a vehement appeal; and on still other occasions anger, fury and clamor may bring to a point a long process of suggestion and education.

This is the mystery of home life.

The plotter waits for opportunities, creates them, puts them in the way of his victim, measures distances, regulates the methods of approaches. He studies his prey, watches him with an evil eye, remembers all his words, weighs them, calculates all their unspoken meanings, and at the right moment interposes his own influence. Wicked men in this respect are often models to good men.

The enemy of souls never rests.

"Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."

Nor is he always a lion. Sometimes he is as a serpent, and sometimes even as an angel of light. But his evil policy never hesitates. When he blesses, it is that he may curse; when he leads his victim into the light, it is that he may have the greater influence over him to persuade him into the darkness. [419]

Is it of no consequence with whom we live our daily life? Is the married relation one that expresses mere taste or momentary pleasure? Are not the companionships of life its true sources of tuition and inspiration?

A man who is in happy fellowship at home may over-get some of the worst hereditary infirmities and disabilities, and may be encouraged into attainments of correct self-discipline and virtue which under other circumstances would be simply impossible.

The conversion of the world, it would seem, must begin at home. We must have happier married relations, fuller domestic confidence, riper household trust and sympathy.

Out of all this daily education, under happy influences, there may come a kind of character rich in its own quality and beneficent in its influence on society.

Jehoram had provoked the Lord, yet so pitiful is the God of Heaven that He spared Judah for the sake of David, His servant, as He promised to give David always a light. But Jehoram was, nevertheless, severely punished for his wickedness.

In his days Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah, and made a king over themselves. Libnah also revolted at the same time. Thus the peace of the kingdom was broken up, and Jehoram was made indirectly to suffer for the sin of idolatry.

How quietly the twenty-third verse reads! It says: "And the rest of the acts of Joram, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?" It would seem as if the bad king had simply fallen asleep like a tired child. [420]

But in the second Book of Chronicles we read that Jehoram died of sore diseases, and that "the people made no burning for him"—that is, the usual honors of a sovereign were withheld in this particular case.

Jehoram died in contempt and neglect. He departed without being desired; in other words, he departed without regret—died unregretted. He was not refused burial in the city of David, but his body was not laid in the sepulchers of the kings.

Thus, sooner or later, wickedness finds out a man, and brands him with dishonor. If, under other conditions, wickedness is carried to the grave amid great pomp and circumstance, it is only that the dishonor may be found in some other quarter—in the hatred of good men and in the bitter recriminations of those who have been wronged.

Set it down as a sure doctrine that, whenever a bad man is buried, dishonor attaches to his whole name, and contempt withers every flower that may be planted over his grave.

The words "but not in the sepulchers of the kings" may receive a larger interpretation than the technical one which belongs to this immediate circumstance. Men are buried in the sepulchers of the kings when their lives are full of beneficence, when their names are the symbols of noble charity, large-minded justice, heroic fortitude, tender sympathy for others. Their burying place is not a merely topographical point. Their relation to the hearts that knew them, their place in the memory of those who lived with them, the tears which are shed over the recollection of their good deeds, the void which has been created by their removal—all these constitute the royalty of their interment. [421]

The end of Jehoram, king of Judah—who would choose it?

JEHOSHAPHAT.

In succeeding to the throne of Judah Jehoshaphat simply followed the course of a law, but in strengthening himself against Israel he indicated a personal policy.

How definitely the statement reads!

“And Jehoshaphat, his son, reigned in his stead, and strengthened himself against Israel.”

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; but he 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 put himself into a highly defensive position, so that if the enemy should pour down from the north Jehoshaphat would be secured against his assaults.

Every thing, therefore, depends on 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 awaiting the issue of events which would determine its scope and tone. [422]

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 may 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 today as he will be tomorrow—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 program 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.”

The Lord was not with Jehoshaphat because he strengthened himself against Israel, nor because he had placed forces in all the fenced cities of Judah, and set garrisons in the land of Judah and within 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. [423]

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 honor—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.

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 apt 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 were different local aspects or phases of the Sun god. [424]

It is to be specially noted that the term Baal includes an aspect even of Jehovah—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.

It is often difficult to abandon a popular custom. More people might be in favor 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, yet who would enter willingly 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."

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. [425]

Jehoshaphat laid down a clear program for himself, and he 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. He read the Decalogue; he studied the Word of God; 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; it had lines, points and colors of its own, about which there could be no reasonable mistake.

What is our religion? [426]

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 on eternal metaphysics; and then do we measure our own behavior 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 established the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah brought to Jehoshaphat presents, and he had riches and honor in abundance.”

Whatever was doubtful about the ascent of Jehoshaphat to the throne was removed, and the king was enabled to realize his power. When he closed his hand on the royal scepter 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 prevailing religious element, which constrains them to acknowledge that honor and wealth, power and dignity are the gifts of God. Is not this an anticipation of the Savior’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 honor. But 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, renown and influence. [427]

“And his heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord; moreover, he took away the high places and the groves out of Judah.”

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.” It has also been rendered: “Jehoshaphat grew bold”—that is to say, he was not a timid reformer or a timid worshiper, nor a trimmer or time server in any sense. He was a heroic worshiper 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 scepter. 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. [428]

Men are only required to do that which lies in 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, and 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.”

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 understanding and 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. [429]

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 on a book—on *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. [430]

Meanwhile, let us be thankful that we are face to face with a man who has conviction, courage, independence, high patriotism and generous impulse, and let us hope that his end may be as beautiful as his beginning was promising.

JEHU.

While Jehoram was lying ill of his wounds Elisha had called one of the children of the prophets and sent him on a special mission to Ramoth-gilead.

It has been conjectured that this messenger was the Jonah who is mentioned in the twenty-fifth verse of the fourteenth chapter of the second Book of Kings.

Jehu was left in supreme command of the forces at Jehoram's departure. Nothing is known of Jehu's origin. From the first, however, it is evident that he was called to special functions. He was one of the men who had been foreseen by Elijah, the prophet, under the divine inspiration.

Elijah was ordered to return unto the wilderness of Damascus, and in the course of his progress he was to anoint Jehu, the son of Nimshi, to be king over Israel. Whether any communication had been made to Jehu we know not. Yet it is not improbable that this had been done, as we may infer from the way in which he made answer to the appeal when it was addressed to him by the messenger of Elisha. [431]

All the circumstances of the communication are full of dramatic color and impressiveness.

The young man was to take a vial of oil and pour it on Jehu's head, and say: "Thus saith the Lord: 'I have anointed thee king over Israel.'" Instantly he was to open the door and flee from the presence of the new monarch. A tremendous charge was delivered to Jehu by the young man:

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

Having delivered this message, the young man then "opened the door and fled," as if pursued by fire. We know not whether to pity Jehu under the delivery of this charge. The Lord must have many servants in His household, and some of them are entrusted with hard work. If we could choose our places in the divine economy, who would not elect to be a minister of sympathy, consolation and tenderness to broken hearts? Who would be willing to go forth to fight the battle and endure the trial and hardship of military service? Above all, who would be willing to accept the ministry of shedding blood and cleansing the world of evil by putting to death all evil doers? [432]

We must recognize the diversity of function in the Christian Church, and in every department of human life. Few men could do what Jehu did, but where the special qualification is given the special service is also demanded.

It is pitiful criticism that stands back and shudders at the career of Jehu; it is wanting in large-mindedness and in completeness of view.

The Lord's work is many-sided, and all kinds of men as to intellectual energy and moral daring, and even as to physical capability, are required to complete the ministry of God.

Today one man is gifted with the power of intercession, another with the talent of controversy, another with the genius of exposition, another with the supreme gift of consolation; one minister must tarry at home and work close to the fireside at which he was brought up; in another is the spirit of travel and adventure, and he must brave all the dangers of enterprise and hasten to the ends of the Earth, that he may tell others what he knows of the Gospel of Christ.

We must recognize this diversity, and the unity that it constitutes; otherwise we shall take but a partial view of the many-sided ministry which Jesus Christ came to establish, and to which He has promised His continual inspiration.



SOLOMON



THE JUDGMENT OF SOLOMON. I Kings, iii.

When Jehu came forth he was taunted by the servants of his Lord; they called the young man “mad.” From their manner, Jehu began to wonder whether the whole affair had not been planned by themselves with a view to befooling him by the excitement of his ambition. He said to them, in effect: [433]

“Ye know the man, and his communication in this matter is one of your own arranging. Ye think to make a fool of me, and through the intoxication of my vanity to lead me to my ruin.”

But they denied the impeachment, and their tone so changed that Jehu reposed confidence in them, and told them what the man had said.

Instantly, on hearing the message, they hastened, took every man his garment or coat, and put it under Jehu on the top of the stairs, which they constituted a kind of temporary throne, and then amid loud blasts of the trumpet they cried: “Jehu is king!”

Thus Jehu was suddenly called to royalty and all its responsibilities.

Men should be prepared for the sudden calls of providence. “What I say unto you I say unto all: Watch.”

One is struck by the obedience of Jehu to the heavenly call. There was no hesitation. Men but show themselves to be yet under bondage when they hesitate regarding the calls which God addresses to them.

Jehu was determined to make complete work of his mission. Not one was to escape or go forth out of the city to tell what he was about to do to those who were in Jezreel.

Springing into his chariot and calling for a detachment of cavalry, Jehu set out on his journey of sixty or seventy miles. You can see him almost flying down from Ramoth, which was about three thousand feet above the sea level. Swiftly he crosses the Jordan, and then, turning to the north, he fled over the spurs of Ephraim; then he darted up the Valley of Trembling, made famous in the day of Gideon, and finally he came to the Plain of Esdraelon, where was Jezreel. [434]

Jehoram was unaware of the approach of Jehu. One messenger after another was sent out to make inquiry, but the messengers were ordered behind, and Jehu came forward until he and the king met at the vineyard of Naboth.

The king asked what news was being brought—news of peace or of war.

The question was answered with another question: “What peace can there be so long as the idolatrous whoredoms of thy mother, Jezebel, and her witchcrafts are so many?”

Jehu thus referred to fundamental wrongs. Instead of trifling with details he went straight to the fountainhead, and by the delivery of a profoundly religious message he excited the alarm of those who heard him.

Jehoram was weak and feeble and sought to flee, but Jehu drew a bow with his full strength and smote between his arms, and the arrow went out at the king’s heart, and he sank down in his chariot.

Then Jehu ordered his captain, or squire, to take up Jehoram and cast him into the portion of the field of Naboth, the Jezreelite, that the word of the Lord might be fulfilled.

And when Ahaziah, the king of Judah, saw this he sought to flee, but Jehu followed him, saying: “Smite him also in the chariot.” After a hot pursuit Ahaziah was struck at the declivity of Gur, where his chariot was forced to slacken its speed. [435]

Then came the most tragical of all the acts.

No sooner was Jehu come to Jezreel than Jezebel, now old and withered, heard of it, and her blood tingled at the news. She was not one who was easily deterred.

According to the custom of Oriental ladies, Jezebel painted her eyebrows and lashes with a pigment composed of antimony and zinc. The intention of the dark border was to throw the eye into relief and make it look larger. She adorned her head with a tire, or a headdress, and after donning her royal dress she looked out at a window, designing to impress Jehu.

As Jehu looked up to the window he exclaimed: “Who is on my side?” He ordered the two or three eunuchs who looked out to throw down the painted woman. Jehu knew that the cruel queen was intensely hated by the palace officials.

The two or three eunuchs who had been accustomed to crouch before her in servile dread now saw that Jehu was in the ascendant, and in obedience to the demand of the regicide they threw her out of the window.

Such has ever been the policy of sycophants—the rats of court—who only linger there with a view of seeing how much they can appropriate or destroy.

No sooner was Jezebel thrown down than some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall and on the horses, and she was trodden under foot.

Here, again, we see the end of wickedness. For a time there is escape, but in the long run there is ruin. [436]

Look at Jezebel, and learn the fate of the wicked. No such fate, in a merely physical sense, may await the iniquitous now; but all those intermediate punishments simply point to the last great penalty: "The wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment."

One can pity Jezebel as her flesh was eaten by the dogs and her carcass was made as dung on the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel, and we almost shudder with horror as we think that she was to be so torn to pieces that none should be able to say: "This is Queen Jezebel."

But all this is wasted sentiment, unless we reason from it toward spiritual conclusions.

We are so much the victims of our senses that we can pity with great compassion those who are smitten with bodily disease, or are torn limb from limb in consequence of some wicked deed; but it seems impossible for us to rise to the conception of the terrible penalty which is to fall upon the soul for violating God's commandments and defying God's power.

Instead of being appeased by the fate of Jezebel, Jehu sends out a decree that the whole family of Ahab shall be massacred—that the kinsmen of Ahaziah and the Baal worshipers shall be extirpated from the face of the Earth. He takes a new point of departure when he challenges the sons of Ahab, saying:

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

All this was a declaration of warlike intention on the part of Jehu. But Jehu's character as a soldier was too well known to permit the rulers of Jezreel and the elders to entertain the thought of encountering him in open battle. So they made this answer: [437]

"We are thy servants, and will do all that thou shalt bid us; we will not make any king. Do thou that which is good in thine eyes."

Then Jehu set up a test of their obedience. He did impose on them hard work. He said:

"If ye be mine, and if ye will hearken unto my voice, take ye the heads of the men your master's sons, and come to me to Jezreel by tomorrow this time."

The word was enough. The heads of seventy men were put into baskets and sent to Jehu at Jezreel. Jehu pronounced the men who had beheaded the sons of Ahab guiltless in respect of their deaths, because what they did had been done judicially, under royal command.

Some think that Jehu wished to make them guilty of the massacre of the princes, while he had slain but one king. On the whole, however, it is better to consider that Jehu exculpates the men who had only executed his command.

The slaughter of the priests is one of the most dramatic incidents in all this portion of biblical history. Jehu proceeded by way of strategy. It is impossible to justify the spirit of the policy of Jehu in this matter. He said he would serve Baal "much."

It has been thought that he was thinking of his intended holocaust of human victims; but, whatever his thoughts, it is impossible to deny that the impression he produced was that Jehu was about to become a worshiper of Baal. This reading is imported into the narrative in these words: "But Jehu did it in subtilty, to the intent that he might destroy the worshipers of Baal." [438]

Now a solemn assembly for Baal was proclaimed. From all Israel the devotees of Baal came, so that there was not left a man that came not. The house of Baal was full from one end to the other. And they were all clothed with appropriate vestments.

Jehu was careful that not one worshiper of Jehovah should be in the assembly, but those of Baal only.

When the worshipers went in to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings Jehu stationed fourscore men without, and said: "If any of the men whom I have brought into your hands escape, he that letteth him go, his life shall be for the life of him."

Then came the moment of massacre.

"And they smote them with the edge of the sword; and the guard and the captains cast them out, and went to the city of the house of Baal."

Jehu's guards, having completed their bloody work in the court of the temple, hastened up the steps into the sanctuary itself, which, like the Temple of Solomon, was made after the pattern of a fortress.

The images of Baal were brought forth out of the house of Baal and burned. The image of Baal was broken down, and his house was broken down, and the whole scene was utterly dishonored and desecrated.

"Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel."

But the way was wrong. Perhaps, for the period within which the destruction took place, it was the only ministry that was possible. The incident, however, must stand in historical isolation, being utterly useless as a lesson or guide for our imitation. [439]

We are called upon to destroy Baal out of Israel, but not with sword or staff or implement of war.

"The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but are mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strongholds of Satan."

Jehu did his rough-and-ready work—a work, as we have said, adapted to the barbaric conditions under which he reigned. But there must be no Jehu in the Christian Church, except in point of energy, decision, obedience and single-mindedness of purpose. A Christian persecution is a contradiction in terms.

When Christians see evil, they are not to assail it with weapons of war; they are to preach against it, to argue against it, to pray about it, to bring all possible moral force to bear upon it, but in no case is physical persecution to accompany the propagation of Christianity. Not only so. Any destruction that is accomplished by physical means is a merely temporary destruction. There is in reality nothing in it.

When progress of a Christian kind is reported it must not be tainted by the presence of physical severity. We can not silence evil speakers by merely closing their mouths. So long as we can hold those mouths there may indeed be silence, but not until the spirit has been changed—not until the very heart has been converted and born again—can the evil-doer be silenced and his mouth be dispossessed of wicked speech and filled with words of honesty and pureness. Jehu himself was not a good man. "From the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them." [440]

For reasons of state policy, Jehu maintained the worship of Bethel and Dan.

"But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart; for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin."

Jehu had done homage to Jehovah by extirpating the foreign Baal worship, but he patronized and actively supported the irregular mode of worshiping Jehovah established by Jeroboam as the state religion of the northern kingdom. He attempted to serve God and Mammon. Religion was to him but a political instrument.

Jehu did the particular kind of work which had been assigned to him—a work of destruction and blood. Perhaps he alone of all the people of his time could have

accomplished this task. But Jehu must stand in history as a warning rather than as an example.

JOB.

Sometimes I have most clearly seen the whole tragedy of Job in a waking dream, the whole passing before me in twilight shadows, losing itself in thick darkness, reappearing in light like the dawn—always changing, always solemn, always instructive; a thing that surely happened, because a thing now happening in all the substance of its eternal meaning.

Is it a pillar grand in height, and finished all over with the dainty care of an artist whose life has been spent in learning and applying the art of color? [441]

How stately! How Heaven seeking because Heaven worthy! While I admire, I wonder religiously.

I see the hosts of darkness gathering around the erstwhile flashing capital, and resting over it like midnight sevenfold in blackness; then the lightning gleams from the center of the gloom, then the fire-bolt flies forth and smites the coronal once so glorious, and dashes it in hot dust to the Earth, and the tall stalk—so upright, so delicate, so like a well-trained life—reels, totters and falls in an infinite crash!

Is it true?

Every word of it. True now—may be true in thee and me, O man, so assured of stability and immovableness. There is danger in high places. Is there a Spirit which hates all noble-mindedness and seeks to level the spiritual pile with mean things? Evil Spirit! The very Devil—hating all goodness because hating God!

But stop.

After all, who smote the pillar? Whose lightning was used to overthrow the fair masonry?

O God of gods, the devil's Creator and Master, without whom Satan could not be, nor hell, nor trees forbidden, nor blast of death—O Mystery of Being—what can our souls say in their groaning? And how, through anguish so intolerable, can they pray?

I am afraid to build, because the higher the tower the more deadly the fall. Dost Thou watch our rising towers and delight to rain Thy fires on them, lest our pride should abound and our damnation be aggravated by our vanity? [442]

And God's own Book it is that tells the good man's pains, and that revels in swelling rhetoric over the rottenness and despair of the man who feared God and eschewed evil! And what unguided hands—if hands unguided—set the tale of wrong and woe and sorrow next to the very Psalter? Is not the irony immoral, because cruel? Or is there meaning in all this?

Is it Life's story down to the very letter and jot of reality? How better to come out of the valley than to the harping and song of musicians who have known the way of the Almighty and tasted the counsels of Heaven?

Cheer thee, O poor soul! Thou art today miserable as Job, but tomorrow thou mayest dance to the music of David. Tomorrow thou mayest have a harp of thine own.

A tree of the Lord's right hand planting arises loftily and broadly in the warm air. Birds twitter and sing as they flit through its warp and woof of light and shade. It is a tree whose leaves might heal the nations.

What sudden wind makes it writhe? What Spirit torments every branch and leaf? What Demon yells in triumph as the firm trunk splits and falls in twain? Was it grown for such a fate as this?

Better if the seed had been crushed and thrown into the fire than that it should have been thus reared and perfected and then put to shame among the trees of the field.

Who can give speech to this flood as it plunges from rock to rock in the black night time? Hush! There is a man's voice in the infinite storm: "Let the day perish in which I was born! Let it be darkness; let that night be joyless, let no song enter into it; let them who curse the day stigmatize it who are ready to stir up the leviathan. Why died I not from the womb? Then had I lain down and been quiet; I had slept; ... there the wicked cease from troubling, and there the wearied mighty rest; the prisoners sweetly repose together, they hear not the voice of the exactor, and the slave is free from his lord." [443]

These are human words, but are they not too strong, too rhetorical, to be true?

No! For who can mechanize the rhetoric of woe?

"Why is life given to the miserable, and to one who would be blithe to find a grave? I have no quiet, no repose, for trouble on trouble came, and my sighs gush out like waters long dammed back."

No doubt the rhetoric is lofty, yet with a strange familiarity it touches with happy expressiveness all that is most vivid in our remembrance of woe.

"I loathe my life. I will give loose to my complaint. I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. To God I will say: 'Condemn me not. Show me why Thou contendest with me. As the clay Thou hast fashioned me, and to dust Thou causest me to return. Thou hast poured me as milk and compacted me as cheese. As a fierce lion Thou huntest me; then Thou turnest again and showest Thyself marvelous.'"

Job has found fit words for all mourning souls. So they borrow of him when their own words fail like a stream which the Sun has dried up. What woe the poor little heart can feel! Herein is its greatness. It is, in its own way, as the heart of God. [444]

"Truly, now, He hath worn me out. Thou hast made all my household desolate, and Thou hast shriveled me up. God giveth me up to the ungodly, and flingeth me over into the hands of the wicked. He seized me by the throat and shook me. He breacheth me with breach on breach. He rusheth on me like a man of war."

In what good man's sick chamber is not Job welcome? Welcome because he can utter the whole gamut of human woe. He can find words for the heart that is ill at ease, and prayers for lips which have been chilled and silenced by unbelief. His woe belongs to the whole world. All other woe is as the dripping of an icicle compared with the rush of stormy waters.

In the case of Job the internal is proved to be greater than the external. When the trials came one after another like shocks of thunder, "in all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly."

But did he speak? That is the point. If he did not, perhaps he was dazed. He felt a tremendous blow on the forehead, and he reeled, and was not in a condition to bear witness about the matter. If he said any thing, let us know what he did say. Could he speak in that tremendous crisis?

Yes, he spoke. His words are before us. Like a wise man, he went back to first principles. He said:

"Circumstances are nothing; they are temporary arrangements. The man is not what he has, but what he is. I do not hold my life in my hands, saying 'It weighs so much,' and count up to a high number."

Job went back to first principles—back to elementary truths. He said: [445]

“Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither [that is, as I began]. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away [as He had a right to do; I had nothing of my own]. Blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Could Job look over the ages that have been healed and comforted by his example—stimulated to bear the ills of this life by the grateful memory of his invincible patience—surely, even now, in Heaven, he would be taking the reward of his long-continued and noble endurance of the divine visitation.

It may be so with you, poor man or woman. You do not get all the sweet now. This shall be a memory to you in Heaven, long ages hence. The wrestling you have now may minister to you high delight, keen enjoyment and rapture pure and abiding. Who can tell when God’s rewards end? Who will venture to say: “This is the measure of His benediction?”

God is able to give and to do abundantly beyond all that we ask or think. Should any one inquire of you as to your compensation, say: “It is given by instalments—today and tomorrow, in death; in the resurrection, all through the ages of eternity. Ask me thousands of ages hence, and I will reply to your question concerning compensation.”

Life is not limited by the cradle and the tomb, and it is not between these two mean and near points that great questions are to be discussed or determined.

Job has been read by countless readers. His was, of course, a public trial—a tragedy that was wrought out for the benefit of multitudes in all generations. Nevertheless, it is literally and pathetically true that every man, even the most obscure, has his readers—fewer in number, it may be, but equally earnest in attention. [446]

Think you that your children are not taking notice of you—seeing how you bear your temptations, difficulties and anxieties?

Think you not that your eldest boy is kept away from the table of the Lord because you are as atheistic in sorrow as ever Voltaire was?

Do you know that your daughter hates the church because her pious father is only pious in the three Summer months of the year? He curls under the cold and biting wind as much as any Atheist ever did. Therefore, the girl says: “He is a sham and a hypocrite—my father in the flesh, but no relative of mine in the spirit.”

You have your readers. The little Bible of your life is read in your kitchen, in your parlor, in your shop and in your warehouse; and if you do not bear your trials, anxieties and difficulties with a Christian chivalry and heroism, what is there but mockery on Earth and gloating in hell?

May God give us grace to bear chastisement nobly and serenely; bless us with the peace which passeth understanding—with the quietness kindred to the calm of God; help us when death is in the house, when poverty is on the hearth-stone.

When there is a storm blinding the only poor little window we have, let us say: “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him. If I perish I will pray, and perish only here.” That is Christianity—not some clever chatter and able controversy about metaphysical points; but noble temper, high behavior, faultless constancy and an invincible fortitude in the hour of trial and in the agony of pain. [447]

MICAH.

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. This was 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 had proposed to Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, that they should jointly go up to battle against Ramoth-gilead, which Ben-hadad was bound by treaty to restore to Ahab.

Jehoshaphat assented in cordial words to the proposal, but he 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 gave a unanimously favorable response. Among them was Zedekiah, the son of Chenaanah. He made horns of iron as a symbol, and announced, as 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, King Jehoshaphat was dissatisfied with the answer, and asked if there was no other prophet of Jehovah at Samaria. [448]

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.”

Nevertheless, Micaiah was sent for; and after a vain attempt had been made to tamper with him, he first expressed an ironical concurrence with the four hundred prophets, and then boldly foretold the defeat of Ahab’s army and the death of Ahab.

In contradiction of the false four hundred, Micaiah said 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. He said Jehovah asked: “Who shall persuade Ahab to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?” A Spirit came forth and volunteered to do so. On being asked “Wherewithal?” the Spirit 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.

Then Ahab ordered that Micaiah be taken to prison, and be fed on bread and water till his return to Samaria. But Ahab was killed, and Micaiah’s fate is unknown.

This incident is found in both the first Book of Kings and in the second Book of Chronicles.



The Cross From the Painting by Gustave Dore.



MOSES IN THE BULRUSHES.—Exodus, ii.

MOSES.

[449]

Moses loses nothing by diffuseness. Even in days that were made long by intolerable monotony—in which men lived centuries because of weariness—Moses did not shrink from a condensation unparalleled in human literature.

Considered as embracing the history of one month only, the third Book of Moses may claim to be the most remarkable book in the Old Testament. Containing twenty-seven chapters, ranging its contents under sixteen different categories, and requiring to be actively represented within the space of twenty-eight days—it may, in its own degree, claim an energy not inferior to the Book of Genesis.

The same fearlessness of treatment is distinctive of both books. The reverent audacity which represented creation as the work of six days—whatever the measure of a day may be—did not shrink from focalizing into one month the whole discipline of life.

Moses' words could hardly have been fewer if he had lived in our time of feverish haste and tumult. To put up the Heavens and the Earth in one chapter was a miracle in authorship. Yet, well pondered, it was the only thing to be done. Any poet could have built them in endless stanzas, and any philosopher could have begun the infinite story in a book too large for the world to hold.

Moses chose the more excellent way, creating creation with a swiftness that has dazed a literal criticism ever since—literal criticism that has but one season in its dreary year, a year that knows nothing of snow-blossom or wedded light and song. But this very haste was part of the man. [450]

The Moses of Poetry required fifty-one days for the revolution of his "Iliad"; the Moses of Revelation only took a week for the settlement of the Heavens and the Earth, and in that week he found one whole day of rest for the Creator.

This action was entirely characteristic of Moses, for he was the most wrathful man as well as the meekest—killing, smiting, destroying and burning with anger, as well as praying like the father-priest of his people.

In a sense obvious enough he was the protoplasmic Christ—for was not he who described himself as "meek and lowly in heart" the scourger of trespassers, and did he not burn the religious actors of his day?

Moses and Christ both did things with most startling rapidity. In their very soul they were akin. They were "straitened" until their work was "accomplished." The Pentateuch and the Gospels have action enough in them to fill innumerable volumes, yet there is an infinite calm in both—the haste being in the temporary framework, the calm being in the eternal purpose.

Think of these twenty-seven chapters constituting the discipline of one month! The reflections started by this circumstance culminate in a sense of pain, for who can bear this grievous toil or endure this sting of accusation? There is no respite.

Egyptian burdens were for the body, but these wilderness exactions tormented the soul, and by so doing made Egyptian memories bright. The trial of muscle is nothing to the trial of patience. Men may sleep after labor, but an unquiet conscience keeps the eyes wide open. This discipline afflicted both the body and the soul, and thus drained the entire strength of the people. [451]

This conscious toil must have been accompanied by unconscious inspiration—a reciprocal action impossible in theory but well understood in spiritual experience.

We resume our burdens in the very act of dreading them. We pray the next prayer in the very process of waiting for answers to a thousand prayers to which God has paid no known heed. Yesterday's sacrifice has nothing to do with this day's sin, except to remind us that today must provide its own sacrifice.

This was so with the Jews; this is precisely so with ourselves. Yet we boast our liberty, and suppose that in leaping one inch from the Earth we have broken the tether of gravitation.

As put before us in this manual called Leviticus, the discipline of the month seems to be more than we could endure; and this we say in ignorance of the fact that our own manual imposes a more severe discipline. Our pity for the Jews arises out of the apparently ineradicable sophism that spiritual service is easier than bodily exercise. A most deadly sophism is this, and prevalent yet, notwithstanding the rebuke and condemnation of universal history.

In no spiritual sense is Leviticus an obsolete book. Moses is not dead. The inventors of the alphabet have some rights even in "Paradise Lost," and quite a large property in "Euclid." It is not grateful on our part to forget the primers through which we passed to the

encyclopedias, though their authors were but our intellectual nurses. In no mere dream was Moses present when Christ communed with Him concerning the Exodus that was to be accomplished at Jerusalem, and in no dramatic sense did Elijah watch the consummation of prophecy. [452]

The wonder is that Christians should be so willing to regard the Pentateuch as obsolete. This is practically a foregone conclusion—to such an extent, certainly, that the Pentateuch is tolerated rather than studied for edification by the rank and file of Christians.

Without the Pentateuch, Christ as revealed in the Gospels would have been impossible; and without Christ the Pentateuch would have been impossible.

I venture upon this proposition because I find no great-event in the Pentateuch that is not for some purpose of argument or illustration used by Christ or by His disciples and apostles in the interests of what is known as evangelical truth.

It lies within easy proof that Christ is the text of the Old Testament and that the Old Testament is the text of Christ. What use is made in the New Testament of the creation of the universe, the faith of Abraham, the rain of manna, the lifting up of the serpent and the tabernacle of witness! The sublime apology of Stephen epitomizes the Old Testament, and the Epistle to the Hebrews could not have been written but for the ritual of Exodus and Leviticus. In its purely moral tone the Old Testament is of kindred quality with the New.

Take an instance from Leviticus. Three forms of evil are recognized in one of its most ardent chapters—namely, Violence, Deceit and Perjury. This is a succession amounting to a development, and, unwittingly it may or may not be, confirming that law of evolution which is as happily illustrated in morals as in physics. [453]

Men begin with acts of violence, then go on to silent deceit and calculation, and close with a profanation of the holiest terms. The early sinners robbed gardens and killed brothers; the later sinners “agreed together” to “lie unto God.” It is something, therefore, to find in so ancient a book as Leviticus recognition of an order which is true to philosophy and to history.

But the proof that Moses and Christ are identical in moral tone is to be found in the process which offenders were commanded to adopt. By no sacerdotal jugglery was the foul blot to be removed; by no sigh of selfishness could the inward corruption be permitted to evaporate; by no investment of cheap tears could thieves compound for felony.

First, there must be restoration; second, there must be an addition of a fifth part of the whole; third, the priest must be faced as the very representative of God and a trespass offering be laid on the altar. After atonement forgiveness would come—a white angel from Heaven—and dwell in the reclaimed and sanctified heart. All the past would be driven away as a black cloud and all the present filled with a light above the brightness of the Sun.

What is this but an outline or forecast of what Christ said when He drove the hostile and vindictive man from the altar, bidding him first be reconciled with his brother and at peace with society? Christianity is not a substitute for morality; it is morality inspired, glorified and crowned. Say that the ritual was sanitary rather than doctrinal or theological. What then? All divine things are first sanitary, but not necessarily bounded by that term. [454]

It will be found that the practice of genuine cleanness, chemical as well as mechanical, will be followed by a philosophy, and that the morality of cleanness will be followed by a theology.

Accustom a man to look out for bullocks and rams and lambs “without blemish,” and he will find that he can not stop at that point. He has begun an education which can only culminate in the prayer: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” Yet no word of that holy thought was named in the original instructions.

Leviticus is the gospel of the Pentateuch—glistening with purity, turning law into music and spreading a banquet in the wilderness. But its ritual is dead. This is hard to believe—hard because religious vanity is fond of ritualism, which makes no demand on the conscience. Yet ritualism had a divinely appointed function in the education of the awakening mind, and was the only influence which could hold the attention of a people to whom freedom was a new experience.

Spectacular religion is alphabetic religion; therefore, to revert to it is to ignore every characteristic and impulse of manhood and progress. But they who say so be prepared to complete the philosophy which that contention initiates.

It is not enough to dismiss ritualism on the ground that it has been displaced by spiritual worship. Admit that such is the case, and other and broader admissions are involved in the plea, and can only be shirked at the expense of consistency. [455]

It is generally admitted, for example, that the Old Testament law has been displaced by a New Testament principle. So Ritualism and Law, in their ancient forms, have passed away. But let us be careful. When we say Ritualism and Law, we mean in reality the letter, and it is evident that if any one letter can be displaced every other letter may be outlived and completed. And what is “the letter” but a symbol of flesh—visibleness, objectivity, historic fact and bulk?

Apostle Paul went so far as to say that even Christ was no longer known “after the flesh”—yea, though He had been known after the flesh, that kind of knowledge was for ever done away, and another knowledge had permanently taken its place.

The Church has never adopted the whole meaning of that teaching. Willing enough to consign Leviticus to the shades, the Church still clings to some sort of bodily Christ—the figure of a man—a bulk to be at least imaginatively touched. This is easily accounted for without suggesting superstition, and yet it might be done away with without imperiling faith. We are held in bondage by a mistaken conception of personality. When we think of that term we think of ourselves.

But even admitting the necessity of this, we may by a correct definition of personality acquire a higher conception of our own being. Instead of saying personality is this or that, after the manner of a geometrical figure, binding it to four points and otherwise limiting it, say that personality is the unit of being, and instantly every conception is enlarged and illuminated—the meaning being that personality is the starting point of conscious existence; not the fullness, but the outline; not the maximum, but the minimum; the very smallest conception which the mind can lay hold of—the Euclidian point, to be carried on into ratios and dimensions which originate a new vocabulary. [456]

We do not, then, define “God” when we describe Him as a “Person,” but we merely begin to define Him; in other words, we say that God can not be less than a Person. What more He is, we must gradually and adoringly discover.

So far as Christ is concerned, there is one enlargement of His personality which no school of thinkers will dispute. This is rhetorically expressed by M. Renan, when he says of Jesus:

“A thousand times more living, a thousand times more loved, since Thy death than during the days of Thy pilgrimage here below, Thou wilt become to such a degree the Corner-Stone of humanity that to tear Thy name from this world would be to shake it to its foundations.”

If ritualism has been displaced by spirituality, and if law has been suspended by a principle—in other words, if the local has made way for the universal—why shrink from the admission that limited Personality has been exchanged for unlimited Influence?

How would Moses regard nineteenth century worship—say, of a Low Church and Evangelical type, as the true evolution of Leviticus? Where is the resemblance? The eye that

can see the similitude is surely looking through an adapted medium. Yet the mystery would be dissolved if the Book of Leviticus were not open to reference. [457]

The man is the completion of the child, but the child is no longer in existence.

The fruit is the fulfillment of the blossom, but the blossom is no longer available for comparison and for contrast.

Christianity is the consummation of Leviticus, but Leviticus remains—unlike the child and the blossom—and offers a series of dissonances or dissimilarities of the most positive quality.

Yet if Moses were living now he would be unchurched if he refused to identify the meaning of Leviticus in the service of the Christian sanctuary—the Papist nearest in gorgeousness, the Protestant claiming to be nearest in doctrine.

The Nonconformist Moses, in the absence of inspiration, would in this matter be the arch-heretic of the century.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

The moral character of Nebuchadnezzar is not such as entitles him to our approval. Besides the overweening pride which brought on him such terrible chastisement, we note a violence and fury common enough in Oriental monarchs of the weaker kind, but from which the greatest of them have usually been free; while at the same time we observe a cold and relentless cruelty that is particularly revolting. The blinding of Zedekiah may possibly be justified as an ordinary Eastern practice, though it is the earliest case of the kind on record; but the refinement of cruelty by which he was made to witness his sons' execution before his eyes were put out was more worthy of a Dionysius or a Domitian than of a really great king. [458]

Again, the detention of Jehoiachin in prison thirty-six years for an offence committed at the age of eighteen is a severity surpassing Oriental harshness.

Against these grave faults we have nothing to set, unless it be a feeble trait of magnanimity in the pardon of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—when he found that he was without power to punish them.

It has been thought remarkable that to a man of this character God should have vouchsafed a revelation of the future by means of visions. But the circumstance, however it may disturb our preconceived notions, is not really at variance with the general laws of God's providence, as revealed to us in Scripture.

As with His natural gifts, so with His supernatural gifts—they are not confined to the worthy. Even under Christianity, miraculous powers were sometimes possessed by those who made an ill use of them. And God, it is plain, did not leave the old heathen world without some supernatural aid, but made His presence felt from time to time in visions, through prophets, or even by a voice from Heaven.

It is only necessary to refer to the histories of Pharaoh, Abimelech, Job and Balaam in order to establish the parity of Nebuchadnezzar's visions with other facts recorded in the Bible. He was warned, and the nations over which he ruled were warned through him, God leaving not Himself "without witness" even in those dark times. [459]

Abydenus, a heathen writer who generally drew his inspiration from Berosus, ascribes to Nebuchadnezzar a miraculous speech just before his death, announcing to the Babylonians the speedy coming of "a Persian mule," who, with the aid of the Medes, would enslave Babylon.

QUEEN OF SHEBA.

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 suspicion, and, being a woman of penetrating mind, she desired to put riddles and enigmas whereby she could test the proverbial wisdom of Solomon.

When she arrived at his court she did not put flippant questions to King Solomon. She rather sought out the most difficult inquiries which she could possibly make.

It is recorded that Solomon told the queen all her questions, and there was nothing hid from Solomon which he told her not. She was astounded by what she heard and what she saw. She declared that the half had not been told her.

The visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon, though not strictly commercial, arose 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. [460]

The very rich presents made by the queen show the extreme value of her commerce with the Hebrew monarch. This early interchange of hospitality derives a peculiar interest from the fact that in much later ages—those of the Maccabees and downward—the intercourse of the Jews with Sheba became so intimate and their influence and power so great. Jewish circumcision took root there, and princes held sway there who were called Jewish.

The language of Sheba is believed to have been very 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 language was.

The great ease with which the pure monotheism of the Maccabees spread 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 on by seeing the riches of the distant monarch, whose purer creed must have been carried everywhere with them by his sailors and servants.

REHOBAM.

[461]

“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.’”

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?

Men who are not disquieted are prone to tell others 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 on 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 down-trodden 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 among men when it shuts its door on the cries of reason, the petitions of weakness, the humble requests 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. [462]

It is the peculiarity of the Bible that it is always getting in our way. It has a word on every subject. Is there any thing 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 and 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—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. [463]

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 most singular rebound, which makes them appear the more frivolous because when we last saw them they were absorbed in the solemnity of prayer.

Solomon was 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.

Folly has often more charms for us than wisdom. When Diogenes discoursed of philosophy his auditors turned away from him, but when he began to play frivolous music or to sing frivolous songs the crowds thronged about him, and he said: "Ye gods! How much more popular is folly than wisdom!" Even there he spoke as a philosopher.

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 utilized the interval by taking counsel with "the old men who 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, saying: 'If thou be kind to this people and please them, and speak good words to them, they will be thy servants for ever.'" [464]

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.

Marvelous 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 given credit for philosophy by men who understand the genius of sympathy.

What a message would this have been to return to the complaining people! If, when the people returned after three days, Rehoboam had spoken so, the welkin would have rung with the resonant cheers of a delighted and thankful people. Kindness is not weakness.

But Rehoboam forsook the counsel which the old men gave him, and took counsel with the young men who had been brought up with him and who stood before him. He asked them the same question he had asked the old men. Their answer was:

“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.’”

Woe to the nation whose young men talked so! A young oppressor is an infant devil. [465]
Young men talking so will ruin any occasion.

Are there such things in history as retorts, reprisals, rebounds and consequences? Let it be known and laid down as the basic principle of all action—social, ecclesiastical and imperial—that there is no right of tyranny.

It might be supposed that the king had taken a most patriotic course in consulting the young and the old. 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 King Maker whose throne is on the circle of the Earth, whose scepter touches the horizon and whose will is the law of both monarchy and commonwealth.

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 recognize the difference between employing cattle and employing men. A parent may adopt this course of Rehoboam, if he so chooses, but his children will chastise him and sting him with many a disappointment; or, if he does not live to see the wreck of their manhood, they will execrate his unfragrant memory.

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 on 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, and the end is everlasting punishment. [466]

SHISHAK.

Shishak was a king of Egypt contemporary with Jeroboam, to whom he gave an asylum when he fled from Solomon. This was indicative of his politic disposition to encourage the weakening of the neighboring 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 on the humbled grandson of David.

Shishak has been identified as the first king of the twenty-second or Diospolitan 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 thought that, with the aid of the military caste, he dethroned the Pharaoh who gave his daughter to Solomon. [467]

SOLOMON.

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 then 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, long life or victory over enemies did 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. [468]

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.

Then began Solomon’s marvelous development as a builder and statesman.

He 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 such an edifice as the Temple. Most men are contented to do one thing, and to rest their fame on its peculiar excellence.

Having completed the house of the Lord and his own house, Solomon 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, temple or church is not to be looked on in its singularity, as if it were so many walls, with so many doors and so many windows. A church is a representative institution, through which should [469]

flow rivers that will fertilize 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.

Having completed for the time being the measure of building on which his mind was set, Solomon 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 which was 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.

Having passed through another military period, King Solomon began once more to build. He built Tadmor, and all the store cities; he built Beth-horon the Upper and Beth-horon the 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 a corresponding evil.

Why were the cities fenced? Why the gates? Why the bars? We have instances of the same kind in our own civilization—silent witnesses against the honesty of the society in which we live. Every bolt on the door is a moral accusation; every time we turn the lock we mean that there is an enemy outside who may endeavor to violate the sanctity of the house. [470]

We sometimes forget 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 the society that is round about us.

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 afterward attend to minor matters, or even leave those minor matters to the adjustment of providence.

Solomon is represented as first most anxious about the Temple, giving himself wholly to its erection, occupying his thoughts night and day, turning every thing to account in its relation to the Temple. Having finished that marvelous 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?

“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.” [471]

The statesmanship of Solomon is as distinctly proved by this arrangement as by any thing 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 endeavored to prove the contrary. One man is a genius, but 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 that some men can do the drudgery, some men can dig and build, some can pull down and take away and make ready for the exertions of others; the higher class of men can think and direct, for they are inspired with the genius of administration, and are men of powerful mind, of fertile resources in government and in war. So Solomon made the best use of the material at his 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, many men fail in life.

There are employers who are making themselves but little better than toilers, when they might by an expenditure of money apparently distinctly not economical very 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 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 smaller expenditure of strength he might be doing immeasurably greater good. [472]

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 as useful as the Israelites in their own way. With the eye of a statesman and with the inspiration of a genius, Solomon saw that he must distribute and classify men, and set each man to do that for which he was best fitted. Even Solomon could not do all the work alone.

“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.’”

This may be taken as an instance of punctilious morality. We are not able to understand all that was involved in the incident. Evidently we are 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. [473]

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 and gave him that marvelous 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 of Pharaoh? Why should he, in the first instance, have 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 most zealously betake themselves to bookkeeping, as if they would not spend money except in approved directions?

There is nothing more misleading than a conscience that does not rest on 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 which makes up for sins of a larger kind by ostentatious devotion at the altar of detail and ceremony and petty ritual. [474]

“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.”

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 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 the thought. We are not always to look on the ceremonial action of the Church as indicative of its real spirituality.

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—can not 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 even declared the fear of God to be the only abiding good with which a man can stand before the judgment of God. [475]

The Temple of Solomon was, according to our ideas 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 in 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 been larger than the buildings which the neighboring nations had erected to their respective gods.

Ancient worship was mainly in the open air, and the temples were viewed as shrines for the Deity and for His priests—not as buildings in which worshipers were to congregate. Hence their comparatively small size.

“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.”

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 that Solomon lay down with his fathers. He might hardly be recognized from the humblest of them. The Sun dies at evening with scarcely a reminder of the glory which shone from him at mid-day.

BASELESS PRIDE.

[476]

(This pride-humbling survey of man and his destiny was written by William Knox, a Scotchman.)

Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?
Like a swift fleeting meteor, a fast flying cloud,
A flash of the lightning, a break of the wave,
Man passes from life to his rest in the grave.

The leaves of the oak and the willow shall fade,
Be scattered around, and together be laid;
And the young and the old and the low and the high

Shall molder to dust, and together shall lie.

The infant a mother attended and loved,
The mother that infant's affection who proved,
The husband that mother and infant who blessed—
Each and all are away to their dwellings of rest.

The maid on whose cheek, on whose brow, in whose eye,
Shone beauty and pleasure—her triumphs are by;
And the memory of those who loved her and praised
Is alike from the minds of the living erased.

The hand of the king that the scepter has borne,
The brow of the priest that the miter has worn,
The eye of the sage and the heart of the brave
Are hidden and lost in the depths of the grave.

The peasant whose lot was to sow and to reap,
The herdsman who climbed with his goats up the steep,
The beggar who wandered in search of his bread,
Have faded away like the grass that we tread.

The saint who enjoyed the communion of Heaven,
The sinner who dared to remain unforgiven,
The wise and the foolish, the guilty and just,
Have quietly mingled their bones in the dust.

[477]

So the multitude goes—like the flower or the weed
That withers away to let others succeed;
So the multitude comes—even those we behold—
To repeat every tale that has often been told.

For we are the same our fathers have been;
We see the same sights our fathers have seen;
We drink the same stream, we view the same Sun,
And run the same course our fathers have run.

The thoughts we are thinking our fathers would think;
From the death we are shrinking our fathers would shrink;
To the life we are clinging they also would cling—
But it speeds from us all like a bird on the wing.

They loved—but the story we can not unfold;
They scorned—but the heart of the haughty is cold;
They grieved—but no wail from their slumber will come;
They joyed—but the tongue of their gladness is dumb.

They died—aye, they died—and we things that are now,
That walk on the turf that lies o'er their brow
And make in their dwellings a transient abode,
Meet the things that they met on their pilgrimage road.

Yea, hope and despondency, pleasure and pain,
Are mingled together in sunshine and rain;
And the smile and the tear, the song and the dirge,
Still follow each other like surge upon surge

Still follow each other, like surge upon surge.

'Tis the wink of an eye—'tis the draught of a breath—
From the blossom of health to the paleness of death,
From the gilded saloon to the bier and the shroud!
Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?

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