



HALF
WITH THE HOURS
LESSONS
OF
1883



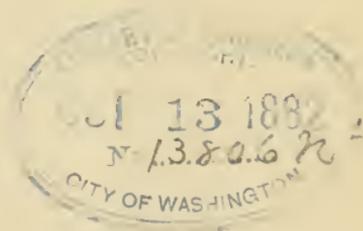
HALF HOURS

WITH THE LESSONS OF 1883

CHAPTERS ON THE BIBLE TEXTS CHOSEN FOR
SABBATH-SCHOOL STUDY DURING 1883

IN CONNECTION WITH

THE INTERNATIONAL LESSON SERIES



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P R E F A C E .

THE study of the Scriptures in connection with the selections made for the "International Series of Lessons for Sunday-schools" is not only widespread, but also, on the part of an increasing number of teachers and superintendents, eager and comprehensive. Very many are seeking for light upon these Lessons from every available source. Whilst desiring to understand the text critically, they wish also to catch the purport, the lessons, the very spirit, of the divine word. It is to aid these earnest students that this volume of "Half Hours with the Lessons" has been prepared and is now sent forth. In it, men eminent for power in the pulpit gather around the sacred narrative comment and application, instructing the understanding and warming the heart, and thus guiding the Bible-teacher to trains of thought and feeling that will fit him for his high calling. May it be blessed to many, both teachers and taught!

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FIRST QUARTER.

THE ASCENDING LORD.

BY THE REV. JOHN DEWITT, D. D.

Jan. 7.—Acts 1:1-14.

IN the first verse of this chapter, Luke describes the Gospel designated by his name as the record of all that Jesus *began* both to do and to teach. The book of Acts is the record of the *continuance* of his deeds and teachings. The deeds recorded in the Gospel were done while Jesus was on earth; those recorded in the Acts were done after his ascension to heaven. The book of Acts therefore appropriately opens with *a narrative of the ascension*.

The question at once arises, Why did the ascension take place? Why did not our Lord continue his work just as he began it? Why did he leave the world just when his presence here seemed an absolute necessity? That this question must have arisen in the minds of the eye-witnesses of the ascension will be evident on a brief consideration of the circumstances in which that event took place.

The forty days that had passed since the resurrection must have been full of joy to the disciples. It was no longer the Man of sorrows who walked and talked with them. It was indeed the same Jesus, for they saw his wounded hands and feet, and adopted every means to

assure themselves that he was not a spirit. But what a change! He was now not only the Master of the winds and the waves, but the Conqueror of death and Ruler of the dark under-world. No doubts oppressed them as to his Messiahship. No fears agitated them lest he might fail to conquer and redeem the world. We can almost hear them say, "Let him but reappear in Jerusalem, and Roman power and Jewish hate will alike be subdued to reverent loyalty. Let him go forth from Jerusalem throughout the Empire, and the ancient prophecy will find speedy fulfillment: the heathen will be given him for an inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession."

Animated thus with high hopes of rapid and universal triumph, they came to Jesus on the very day to which our text refers, ardent, ambitious, restive under the restraints of a single hour's delay, impatient to begin the conquest. Confident of the answer they desired, they came with the question, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom unto Israel?" Who shall describe the sudden chilling of their ardor, their dismay and deep despair, when, suddenly, after his answer, he was taken up like Elijah from Elisha, and a cloud received him out of their sight?

There must have been some good reason for this disappointment; and we may well try to find it. Nay, do not we often ask the question, Why did he ascend to heaven? Why can we not look upon him? Why does he not supplement the feeble agencies of his Church by his own appearing? What power were ours were he but here! How soon would the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of God and of his Christ! Why, then, do the heavens hide him? Why has a cloud received him out of sight? This question I shall attempt

to answer, in the light of the word of God and of the Church's history. We shall find the event abundantly justified by the consideration that because Christ ascended—(1.) Men believe in him; (2.) Men can commune with him; (3.) Men can follow him; and (4.) He is the Redeemer of the world. Let us take these up in their order.

(1.) Christ ascended in order that *men might believe in him*. It seems a singular method of awakening faith, this method of removing from view the object of faith. "Will the Lord," the apostles might have asked, "be more likely to call forth the faith of men in him when out of sight than when attesting the truth of his gracious words by his works of almighty power? Can another herald preach the gospel with eloquence so convincing? Can another defend it with arguments so satisfying? Can another illustrate the glory of its spiritual conquest by a life so loving toward man, so holy toward God? Let Christ remain on earth, if men are to believe on him."

And yet, had these disciples but recalled the ministry of Jesus, they might have doubted their own wisdom. For three years he had taught in Palestine; and with what result? At last men were able to taunt his disciples with the question, "Have any of the scribes and rulers believed on him?" In the beginning, it is true, many professed themselves his disciples. Attracted by his might and eloquence, they followed him in crowds. But the novelty wore away; his life was too hard; and many "who had put their hand to the plough turned back." Explain it as we will, judged by the numbers of adherents attracted by him when he appealed to the senses of men, the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth was a failure. We do hear of five hundred brethren. But what are five hundred disciples? What a lame and im-

potent conclusion to a mission undertaken to redeem the world ; a mission, too, attested by celestial eloquence and infinite power !

But let us refuse to apply the test of numbers, and let us apply the test of faith itself. Unless I misunderstand the story of the Gospels, most of those who believed on Christ trusted in him not so much for spiritual blessings as for the conquest of the heathen invader and for the restoration of the glories of the reign of Solomon : or if not for this patriotic purpose, then for the lower and more selfish purpose of obtaining " loaves and fishes." Nothing is more noticeable in the Gospels than the worldliness of the disciples. How seldom do you find them confessing like David, or longing for a sight of God's spiritual glory like Moses ! How often Christ seems to have rebuked strife among them as to who should be the greatest ! And how often they returned to strife even after the rebuke !

Now, contrast this failure to awaken the faith of men, while he lived on earth, with the success that attended the labors of his apostles after the ascension. The Acts of the Apostles is a history of continued and marvelous triumphs. The first gospel sermon was followed by the conversion of three thousand souls. Jerusalem was filled with wonder, and the rulers of the Jews with alarm, at the rapidity with which the disciples of the Nazarene increased. Throughout the whole book we meet with statements such as these : " The hand of the Lord was with them," and " Daily were added to the Church such as should be saved." It was when the cloud had received him out of sight that the conquest of the world began and the power of Jesus began to be felt in the hearts of men.

The reason of this contrast is not hard to find. While

Jesus lived a human life, and performed miracles of power, and uttered words of wisdom, he awakened men's sense of wonder, he called forth their admiration; but this wonder and admiration, it would seem, prevented a deep spiritual movement in their hearts. In the Gospels we seldom come across narratives of men convicted of sin and crying for redemption: for these are found in the history of events that occurred after Christ had been taken up to heaven. But then only the spiritual Christ began to influence men; then only they looked to him as the Pardoner of sin. Then only he began to move upon the conscience of the world as "the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world." Men are not saved by miracles, by displays of almighty power, or by wisdom. A miracle as great as the resurrection from the dead will not produce repentance for sin in those who are not moved by Moses and the prophets; much less in those who are not moved by the gospel of Christ. This is Christ's own teaching in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus; and it is easy to believe that were he again to appeal to the senses of men they would not be converted. It was, therefore, that his spiritual gospel might be glorified in the saving faith of men, that he ascended to heaven.

(2.) Christ ascended in order also that *men might know him and commune with him.*

"What!" some one may say, "did the physical presence of Christ prevent the knowledge of him by the disciples? Did it prevent the communion of their souls with his Spirit?" Let us see. Take any one of the college of apostles and read the record of his life before the ascension. It is one of the most striking proofs of the loneliness of Jesus that he was misunderstood by those to whom he was especially revealed. How touchingly he refers to it in his last address!—"Ye shall leave me

alone ; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." Thus the prophet beheld him travailing in the greatness of his strength, and crying, "I have trodden the winepress *alone*, and of the people there was none with me."

During his earthly life, our Lord was doubted by his own forerunner and was misunderstood by his own mother. Men were won, indeed, by the beauty of his character. But who knew him? Whose heart throbbed in sympathy with his when he labored and prayed and sacrificed himself that men might not perish, but might have everlasting life? Where will you find, in all the Gospels, the record of any real communion of the apostles with Christ on the great themes that were nearest his heart? When he addressed them on these subjects they but half understood him. How clearly this is brought out in his last great discourse! If he speaks of "the Father," Philip says, "Show us the Father;" and Christ must make answer to the ignorant and narrow apostle, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?" I cannot find recorded by any of the evangelists an incident which serves to show that there was, on the part of one of his disciples, any intelligent sympathy with him in the great redeeming work which he came from heaven to earth to accomplish. They were narrow Jews ; and the part of his life which was seen and special and temporal served to hide the spiritual mission of the Son of God and Saviour of the world.

But contrast these disciples with themselves after the ascension. Then they began to know him. They grasped the significance of his coming, his labor and his death. Then, for the first time, they knew that in longing for the establishment of an earthly kingdom they had been longing for what would have defeated the purpose of redeem-

ing love. The spiritual meaning of parable and miracle, of address and life, stood out clearly before their minds. They saw the concord of Christ's career with the predictions that holy men of old had spoken as moved by the Holy Ghost. They knew Christ as they had never before known him, and they refused to know him henceforth after the flesh. Knowing him now in the spirit and aim of his great mediatorial life, they communed with him, not as in the flesh, limited by the place in which his body was, but as the Prince and Head of his Church, as seated on the throne of universal dominion, the one Redeemer of the world. Illumined with this new knowledge and inspired by this communion, they went forth to preach the gospel, and it proved itself the power of God and the wisdom of God, wherever it was proclaimed.

We easily understand this. The daily life of men and women serves as often to conceal as to reveal them. How often a great statesman is not seen in his true proportions until he has been received "out of sight"! How often the child knows not the meaning of a father's or a mother's life until death has separated the parent from him! So it was with the disciples of Christ. They were familiar with his features, but they did not know him. They talked with him, but they did not commune with him. And had Christ remained on earth until now—though we may not confidently predict what would have been the influence of his physical presence—it would have been but in harmony with a common human experience, if he had been subjected, through all the centuries, to the same misinterpretation that made his earthly life one of utter solitude.

(3.) But more than this. Our Lord ascended to heaven *in order that his people might truly follow him.*

What is it to follow Christ? The disciples of our

Lord would have given one answer to this question during his earthly life, and quite another after his ascension. While he was with them on the earth they sought to imitate his outward life. They tried to repeat his miracles, to cast out devils as he did. They repeated his indignant judgments, and in a spirit to be contrasted with his own would have called down fire from heaven on his enemies. It was the special, temporary, outward life that they sought to follow. I cannot detect a single unmistakable sign that the mind which was in Christ Jesus was in a single one of them. Their following was a narrow, mistaken, servile, and too often selfish, attempt to copy. It was never an inward spiritual imitation. The result was that they never became independent of his physical presence. They always leaned on Christ, and were nothing when they could not see him or invoke his miraculous aid.

But how different a thing their imitation was when he had ascended! When the earthly, temporal life of Christ could no longer be imitated, because of his ascension to heaven, they turned to the spirit of Christ. Behold the transfiguration! The impetuous and ambitious Peter lays down his life, like his Master, for the redemption of men. The "son of thunder" breathes forth the spirit of Christ in the words, "Little children, let us love another." Space does not permit me to dwell on this. I can call your attention only to the fact, that when, instead of attempting to imitate Christ's outward life, they sought to drink into his spirit, then only they became the bold, the loving and heroic apostles that we know. Then only did they meet unflinchingly, and even with joy, all the persecutions of the Jew and all the enmity of the empire, and even death itself.

And so it is with us. His people are Christ-like because

Christ is not here in the flesh. They are stronger and every way better men and women because they cannot lean upon him as a living man on earth. The lofty height of devotion and the large self-sacrifice which so many of his disciples have achieved, the faith and hope and love which have adorned their lives, it is not too much to say would have been impossible had Jesus of Nazareth remained in the world. They would have sought his material support. They would have invoked his miraculous power. They would have sought refuge in his omnipotence. They would have been weak in proportion to their physical distance from him. We have more of our Lord's spirit just because our Lord has ascended to heaven.

(4.) But once more: this event occurred that *he might be the spiritual Redeemer of the whole world.*

The Church and the world are to become one; the spirit of Christ is to become the dominant spirit of the world's life. The vision of a universal kingdom inspired the muse of David and of Isaiah. They looked forward confidently to the day when "all nations should call the King's Son blessed," and "when the glory of the Lord should be so revealed that all flesh would see it together." Our Lord himself in many ways announced his coming to universal conquest. And to-day the Church waits and works and watches for the fulfillment of the prophecy.

It was in order to its fulfillment that Jesus removed himself from the limitations of place and time and nationality, incident to a life in the flesh; and, ascending on high, seated himself, as was his mediatorial right, on the throne of spiritual and universal dominion. The cloud received him out of sight that he might no longer be merely a Jew, that the Church's shrine might no longer be only in Jerusalem, that the isles and continents which waited for

him might receive him through the Spirit whom he had purchased and promised. And thus it was that when Christ had gone the Church of Christ moved forward on the path of universal conquest. It was after he had been received out of sight that the Spirit came, and three thousand gathered from many nations were converted. These were the pledge of the Church's victory, the first-fruits of the harvest, when all peoples shall be Christ's and all kings shall bring their glory and honor to adorn the new city of God.

Imperfectly as the subject has been presented, enough has been said to make clear the wisdom and the grace of God in the ascension of Christ. Because the Lord ascended to heaven men believe in him, as a Saviour from sin; they know him as, had he remained, they could not have known him; they commune with him, as no disciple when on earth communed with him; they follow him, drinking into his Spirit, as his apostles failed to do when he walked with them in Palestine; and the Church of Christ, no longer limited by his physical presence, is able to move forward, under his leadership and inspired by his Spirit, to the conquest of the whole earth. Is not this enough to compensate us for our loss of his bodily presence? It was an affliction to the disciples, this taking up of Christ into the heavens, but who does not see that it was one of those afflictions that already has wrought a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory? Had God granted the desire of the apostles, who does not see that he would have limited the work of redemption and sent leanness into their own souls? Thus the narrative of the ascension is the fitting introduction to the Acts of the Apostles.

THE DESCENDING SPIRIT.

BY THE REV. C. H. PARKHURST.

Jan. 14.—Acts 2 : 1—16.

OUR object will be, in the first place, to notice some features of the event here related, and then to specify a few lessons that readily group themselves about it.

It is interesting that the Holy Spirit should have been first conferred at Jerusalem. We might perhaps have expected that just this place would have been selected for this purpose. Christ was always loyal to the past. Jerusalem had long been the capital of the old faith. It is not God's way, in inaugurating the new, to effect it by any harsh abandonments of the old. The Christian Church is only the Jewish Church led forth into a new stage of development. As the two lay in Christ's mind there was no break between them. "I came not to destroy, but to fulfill." It was suitable, then, that where the old Church had matured, the new Church should germinate. Christ, then, in a way indicates the essential identity of Christianity with Judaism by letting this same Jerusalem be at once the tabernacle of the old and the cradle of the new.

It is impossible to say with exactness where in Jerusalem the disciples were gathered when the Holy Spirit was conferred. It may have been in the "upper room." It is barely possible that it was in some portion of the temple-edifice. We are told, in the final verse of St. Luke's Gospel, that after the ascension the disciples "were

continually *in the temple*, praising and blessing God." If it should be the case that they were assembled in some chamber of the temple when the Spirit descended, it would only be in the line of what has just been said, that Christ made the place of the old the starting-point of the new.

This first giving of the Spirit was at Pentecost. Still another proof this is that God would like to have us consider Christianity as a graft upon an old stock. The feast of Pentecost was the second of the three great festivals of the Jews. It fell on the fiftieth (that is what the word *Pentecost* means) day after the Passover, and (Lev. 23 : 15, 16) was fixed by reckoning fifty days from the morrow after the Sabbath of Passover week. There is not an agreement of opinion as to whether the Pentecost of our chapter fell on Saturday or on Sunday. There is in the Church an old tradition that it fell on Sunday. It certainly would be pleasant to suppose that such was the case. It is pretty clear that the apostles from the first did observe the first day of the week. Christ's resurrection in the first instance hallowed it, and now it will at least be quite congenial to our thoughts to think that after a week of weeks new emphasis is set upon it by the descent of the Spirit.

One reason of the Spirit's being thus conferred on the day of Pentecost was that the occasion gave to the event great publicity. This was one of the three annual festivals on which all male Jews were expected to present themselves at Jerusalem. The Jews were now a widely-scattered people. Some of the numerous nationalities represented at Jerusalem at the festival are specified in the ninth, tenth and eleventh verses of our chapter. The Lord's death and resurrection also occurred at a similar time of national congregation at Jerusalem, so that many of those from abroad, whose ears, seven weeks before, had

been filled with the story of the Passover and resurrection, would now again be startled by the strange displays of the Spirit and by Peter's stirring discourse, to which those displays were the prelude. In this way God adapts to one another the events of history, and bestows his conferments with that timeliness which procures them largest and broadest result.

There have been different opinions as to the real nature of the miracle at Pentecost. Of these only two will demand any present mention. The most consider that the miracle consisted in the disciples having power, for the time at least, to speak in languages with which they had not been previously familiar. Others suppose that the miracle lay in the power which foreign Jews of different nationalities for the time being had of hearing, each in his own language, an address that was spoken in but one language—in other words that it was not a gift of "tongues," but a gift of "ears." The most casual reading of the chapter, however, is sufficient to convince that, as it lay in the writer's mind, it was the disciples that were inspired to speak, and not the foreign Jews that were inspired to hear. Not only is this the import that lies at the surface of the narrative; it is also to be added that the hearers in this instance were not in a mood to be inspired. The Holy Ghost works inspiringly upon those who are in sympathy with him; and this these foreign residents at Jerusalem were not. Inspiration depends for its conferment upon accord between the Inspirer and the inspired—a condition fulfilled here in the speakers, but not in the auditors.

The question as to what this miracle of speaking with tongues really imports is complicated by the fact that there are other instances of speaking with tongues mentioned, which seem at least to differ in some respects from

that related here ; as, for example, in the fourteenth chapter of First Corinthians. It is fair to presume that the gift in the two instances is fundamentally the same. Judging from the intimations afforded in the Epistles, the Spirit used the human organs of speech mechanically rather than dynamically, and worked without the concurrence of the speaker's understanding. The speaker was like the piano, by playing upon which effects are produced of which the instrument is not conscious, but which may or may not have a meaning to those who are standing by and listening. St. Paul says in 1 Cor. 14 : 14, " If I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful." This inspiration that enabled men to speak or pray or sing in the Spirit seems to have been a certain exhilaration that was more significant as a sign than for any practical results of instruction. Speaking with tongues was not of a nature with teaching nor with prophesying. St. Paul, in his catalogues of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12), puts insight and the power to speak with tongues at opposite extremes. The latter was not one of the " best gifts." It was a certain uncontrollable ebullition that was without definite meaning to the speaker, whatever, under certain circumstances, it might be to the hearer. Now, interpreting in this way such instances of speaking with tongues as are recounted in the Epistles, there seems no good reason for supposing that the ferment noticed in our chapter was anything essentially different. The disciples who here spoke in this way probably had no control over their own utterance and no definite appreciation of what it meant. They spoke " as the Spirit gave them utterance." They did not understand their own words. They were not suddenly made acquainted with new languages. They were not linguistically endowed, neither permanently nor provisionally. If they

spoke in the languages used by the foreign Jews, as perhaps they did, it was only because the Holy Spirit operated their organs of speech better than themselves knew. Very likely, their utterances were ejaculatory rather than consecutive or argumentative. This would be in keeping with what was said of them, that they were intoxicated. This would hardly have been charged upon them if either their address had been coherent or their enunciation clear. The first utterances that were made which have been preserved to us were those of Peter. This is quite possibly due to the fact that his utterances were the first that were greatly worth preserving.

In addition to the foregoing, and in confirmation of it, it is to be said that a sudden acquisition of languages was not necessary in order to acquaint foreign Jews with what was occurring or had already occurred. The Greek tongue would probably have answered every purpose. Very likely there was no one among all this audience but who could understand Greek readily, and speak it easily. Alexander's tour of conquest had hundreds of years before made it the current tongue. The Hebrew Scriptures had already been translated into Greek. Peter's Pentecostal sermon, which follows in this chapter, was doubtless spoken in Greek, and understood by the mixed multitude that listened to it. Hence, whatever there may have been, in the utterances of these tongue-gifted disciples, that was anomalous, its purpose must rather have been to startle than to instruct.

Among the thoughts and lessons that readily connect themselves with the event of our chapter are the following :

(1.) The Christian Church was born at Pentecost. There is no Christian *church* history before that point.

The materials of the Church were already present, but standing out of organic relation with each other. It was the brooding of the Spirit that, as we are told in the first of Genesis, produced the formless elements of things into a shapely and prolific world. It was the inbreathing of God into the being of our first parent that developed him into a living soul. It was the influx similarly of the divine Spirit that composed the disciples of Christ into an organized and living Church. A Church is Christianity organized.

(2.) This was the first Christian revival of religion. The Church was born in a revival, and the *survival* of the Church has been along a continuous line of *revival*. A revival is substantially a fresh appropriation of divine power. The dynamic element enters Christianity not at the cross, not at the Easter sepulchre, but at Pentecost. Pentecost is as much a fact of Christianity as is the crucifixion. The Acts of the Apostles is the Gospel of the Holy Ghost and the Gospel of power. It is the scope of a revival to work in men Christian sinew. There is nothing in the whole New-Testament narrative more startling than the transformation which the Twelve suddenly underwent on the fiftieth day after Calvary. An apostle is a disciple plus the Holy Ghost. Appliances are valuable, but only as vehicles for the conveyance of energy that is from God. Christianity would have stopped at Olivet had it not been for the event of our chapter or its equivalent. Christ had indoctrinated his disciples for three years and a half, but they could not preach. Knowledge in their case, at least, was not power. "Tarry ye in Jerusalem *till* ye be endued with power." A cultivated ministry and well-appointed churches are well enough in their way; they are suitable for the conveyance of power, but are not themselves power. They are to positive spir-

itual efficacy only what river-beds are to the floods that are set to roll in them. The early Church, as compared with the modern, was poor in appliances. The sanctuaries that sinners had to come into to be converted were close and crude, yet they came in and were converted. They had not much money for the diffusion of the gospel, but somehow the gospel was diffused. The ministers were inelegant, but somehow they marvelously impressed their congregations. Their sermons, judging from what is preserved to us of them, were singularly void of brilliancy; but one sermon then converted three thousand men, and now it takes three thousand sermons to convert one man. The difference between the times is largely difference of power. Apostleship now, as then, can only be obtained as the sum of discipleship and Holy Ghost. Every subsequent apostle, equally with the original Twelve or hundred and twenty, must have his Whitsuntide. It is the anointing of the Holy Ghost which still sets each of us in the line of the true apostolic succession.

(3.) The Spirit descended upon the disciples when they were together. The full meaning of Christianity is not exhausted in any relation in which it sets us individually to Christ. It comprises a relation between men mutually as well as a relation to God personally and separately. There are blessings and enrichments that accrue to Christians only by their standing in fellowship with each other. That first Sunday evening, the evening of Resurrection-day, Christ showed himself unto his disciples while they were *together*. The week after, the second Sunday evening, he again appeared to them while they were *together*. And similarly, as we learn from the first verse of our chapter, the Holy Spirit descended upon them while "they were all with one accord in one place." And this gathering together of theirs was not for the purpose of

instruction, but in order that they might remain together in the fellowship of concerted prayer and holy waiting. The Church was born thus in a prayer-meeting. The first Christian revival was inaugurated in a prayer-meeting. It is easy, and rather common, to treat prayer-meetings with disparagement. It is old-fashioned to meet together with fellow-Christians and to draw into one another's holy confidences in prayer and spiritual song. There is a good deal of formality and foolishness about these things as they are not infrequently done. But the possibilities of immense things are in the fellowships of the disciples. It is generally found that when a revival comes it begins in God's revelation of himself to saints that draw near to one another in prayer. It is so now; it was so in the first revival. In spiritual matters two are considerably more than twice as many as one.

(4.) This first revival of religion began with the spiritual replenishment of those already Christian. It is time wasted, and runs counter to the divine order of things, for a Church that is not itself revived to attempt revivalistic operations among the unconverted. Christianity, to the degree in which it extends itself, does so as a kind of contagion. The Church may be conceived of as the fulcrum over which the Holy Spirit pries, and according to the fervid stability of those who are now Christians will be the Spirit's power to produce new Christians. In this respect the first revival sets the law for all subsequent revivals. The result of "gotten-up" revivals is only man-made Christians; and man-made Christians stand in the way of their own conversion and add to the inertia of the Church.

(5.) After the ascension of their Lord the disciples simply waited for Pentecost. They prayed together, as it would seem, but exactly what was the subject of their

prayers it would be very hard to tell. They probably did not pray for a baptism of the Holy Spirit. They had not been instructed to pray for it, but to "tarry" till it came. There was no further work that needed to be wrought in them before its bestowment. They were ready to be blessed. The outpouring of the Spirit was deferred till Pentecost, only because that day would give to the event greater publicity. For them to have importuned the Lord for the fulfillment of his promise would then rather have been in the nature of teasing than of legitimate supplication. And the same holds of a great deal of our praying for the Spirit. We shall always receive the divine baptism just as soon as there is nothing on our part that hinders that baptism. Our prayers would often seem to imply that the gift of the Holy Ghost is something that has got to be wrested from God by hard struggling. His Spirit is with us. He has already entered into the world. He is among us like a subtle atmosphere that crowds itself with a gentle intrusion into every space of our hearts and lives that is left open to its occupancy. He is like the sunshine, that fills with brightness and touches with color every object of ground, sea and sky that is bared to its silent impact. When we are not illumined, it is not because we have neglected to pray for the sun's rise upon us, but because we have neglected to stand out in the sunshine. If our lives are cold and barren, it is not because our prayers for the good Spirit of God have been too feeble, but because there is something in us that stops our hearts to the ingress of the Spirit. "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, *and prove me now herewith*, if I will not open the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

(6.) The Holy Spirit descended upon all the disciples—

not only upon the Twelve, but upon the whole hundred and twenty. So far as we are, then, Holy-Ghost Christians, all substantial distinctions in this respect between the laity and the clergy are erased. The time is past when a few men are to be holy in any manner that is vicarious. Priestliness is by. There is no sense in which a clergyman is a priest in which a layman is not equally obligated and privileged to be a priest. Inspiration is the common prerogative of all them that are Christ's.

(7.) The Holy Spirit revealed himself outwardly in the shape of tongues. This was prophetic of the way in which revealed truth was to be disseminated. It does not suffice that men should simply live lives of Christian consistency, and that they should think that conduct fills to the full their measure of obligation. Christ not only lived, he preached. "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." And the word "preaching" must not be construed too narrowly. It does not mean standing upon the platform and expounding a text. It is uttering forth in any way or with any surroundings what God has uttered to us. It is opening our mouth to tell the message which has been divinely put in our mouth. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh;" "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." The first revival, then, opened men's mouths and set men talking. It was a gift of *tongues*. There is no place for silent Christians under the administration of the Holy Ghost. Inspiration and utterance are inseparable. The Holy Ghost and preaching cannot be divorced. And this is the last teaching of our Scripture lesson that we specify: the pressure of God upon the heart inevitably finds escape at the lip. "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak as the Spirit gave them utterance."

THE BELIEVING PEOPLE.

BY THE REV. D. W. POOR, D. D.

Jan. 21.—Acts 2 : 37-47.

IN this passage we have a brief yet vivid sketch of the first Christian Church, in several important particulars—viz. the conversion of its members, its organization, the means of its edification, its social union, and the effect which the sight of it had upon beholders. That marvelous vine of God's planting which was destined to cover the earth with its branches and enrich it with its precious clusters here unfolds itself to view, on its first appearing, in clear and beautiful type, showing us what it was meant to be and how it should grow.

(1.) Observe the effect of Peter's sermon, which was instrumental in winning the first converts. His hearers were "pricked in their hearts." Peter's charge against them of having rejected and crucified their Messiah, like a sharp arrow, pierced their consciences and made them feel guilty of having perpetrated a terrible crime. Strictly speaking, it is true, the act of crucifying Jesus was the work of the Jewish and Roman rulers; yet the people at large could not exonerate themselves from some share in that enormous wickedness. They had refused to believe in Jesus. If not by voice, yet in spirit, they had cried, "Away with him!" By their tacit acquiescence they had allowed the Sanhedrim to act as their representatives and so had become implicated in its doings.

And perhaps some had joined in the shout, "His blood be upon us and upon our children!" Hence, when Peter boldly accused them of having "taken and with wicked hands crucified and slain" their Messiah, it was not possible for them to evade the charge. Indeed, the Holy Spirit signalized his special presence this day by pressing it home upon them in stinging pungency. It was thus, in accordance with the promise of Christ, that he entered upon his first official work as the Comforter. He was convincing the world of sin because it believed not on Jesus. And this conviction, as a rule, is the initiatory step toward the conversion and true beatification of sinners.

The great fundamental evil for which mankind stands condemned in the sight of God, and which all must be made to realize before they can be really blessed, is that by nature they are alienated from God and are bent on having their own way. And of this criminal state the manifestation of Jesus and the presentation of his character and claims are the convincing disclosure. He is the touchstone by which the depravity of men's hearts is revealed. Hence the first work of the Spirit is to apply this test, and show the sinner that his natural attitude is that of a rejecter of Jesus Christ, and how enormous and perilous is the guilt involved.

The business of every gospel teacher is so to present Christ that, under the blessing of the Spirit, such conviction may be produced. As in Peter's address, his dealing with sinners should be plain, earnest and fitted to prick the conscience with a sense of the wickedness of not believing in, and therefore of virtually crucifying, the Lord of glory. Such compunction is the beginning of a blessed change. It is the tingling sensation of a new life started in the soul.

(2.) Next we have the cry of the wounded conscience ; and there are no wounds which prompt to so earnest a cry as those which an awakened conscience suffers. "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" You perceive that, singularly enough, the cry is addressed to the very persons who had inflicted the wounds. This is one of the peculiarities of the Christian warfare. The effect of its sharp arrows is to draw the stricken unto the Smiter for healing. The reason of this is that these arrows are pointed with love, and love's wounds can be healed by love alone.

(3.) We are taught the means of cure—repentance and baptism into the name of Jesus. Of course faith in Jesus is here clearly implied. Baptism into the name of any one were an empty ceremony unless it meant that we believed in that person sufficiently to be united to him and called by his name. What Peter bid the people do, therefore, was to turn from sin in sorrow and utter repudiation of it, and turn to that Saviour whom they had rejected and crucified, in confidence and devotion, and to unite themselves to him in a solemn covenant of which baptism was the sign and seal. This is the only cure for a wounded conscience. On doing this in sincerity there follow pardon, peace, blessedness and joy. The old disposition, with its evil fruits and bitter consequences, is put away, and we become new creatures—are, in fact, born again and become members of the family of God. Being joined to God in Christ, we are also joined to one another by ties stronger and more lasting than those of flesh and blood. We are constituted one mystical body of which Christ is the Head, and become parts of that one great Church which is the fullness of Him that filleth all in all. Thus, then, was the kingdom of God set up on earth ; and by the same means must it be perpetuated. If we

would enter it and enjoy its privileges, it can only be by repenting of sin and receiving baptism into the name of Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour. Three thousand did this on the day of Pentecost; and what is there to hinder every unconverted person doing the same to-day? Why delay, and accumulate the sins which will aggravate our guilt and increase the bitterness of our repentance? If Peter's hearers on the instant of being shown their sin and their duty did what was required of them, so *may* every sinner do now; so *ought* he to do now; and the sooner the better.

(4.) Next consider how this large company of believers grew in grace and acquired strength in their spiritual life. The means employed were four—every one essential to Christian progress.

(a.) "Steadfast continuance in the apostles' doctrine." Christianity is a religion based on facts, all of which embody vital and eternal truths. And the central fact is Jesus Christ himself, in and through whom alone we know the heavenly Father. "Hid in him are all the treasures both of wisdom and of knowledge." The apostles' doctrine, then, we may conclude, was all about Jesus, telling the young converts what sort of a being he was, how beautiful was his character, how marvelous his works of love and power, what was the meaning of his death and resurrection and ascension—how through these acts he had brought salvation to mankind, and what he designed to do for all who believed on him, and what he would have them do. In short, what the apostles taught was the substance of the gospel, the glad tidings of great joy which should be unto all people. This now, on the day of Pentecost, began to be preached for the first time in its fullness; and as it came out in its original freshness and beauty, how must the disclosure have

astonished and gladdened the believers! Each announcement only awakened in them the hunger for more, and so they gave themselves up to the business of learning all they could from the apostles' lips. "Like newborn babes they desired the sincere milk of the word, that they might grow thereby." And this is ever one of the indispensable methods of nourishing the soul in piety and holiness. We must study the truth as it is in Jesus, and be built up into him in all things. Moreover, there must be "steadfast continuance" in this work. Never will the time come for even the most studious to say, "I have learned it all." If a Paul could say, "I count not myself to have apprehended," there is no chance for a reasonable boast with any of us that we have attained all and are perfect in knowledge. The more we know truly, the better shall we become.

(*b.*) The second means of edification is "fellowship." By this I understand friendly intercourse of believers with each other as brethren and sisters in Jesus Christ. Their faith had united them in a new and holier sympathy. One divine Spirit pervaded their hearts. The cause for which they had separated themselves from the world and consecrated themselves to Jesus was a most precious and endearing bond. Their rule of life, their hopes, their aims, were such as to dissolve their former selfish isolation and bring them together in a disinterested communion that was to last for ever. Hence they drew closely to each other in mutual interest and loving converse, and thus they heartened up one another in the divine life. In like manner must believers always strengthen one another. Fellowship is one of the essential conditions of a healthful, happy and vigorous existence. Men cannot live apart without suffering decay in the best elements of their nature. In an important sense friends feed upon

each other. Affectionate, confiding intercourse among them is a mutual feast. In the Hebrew language the most common word for *friend* is derived from a root signifying "to feed;" and who is there that has not found in the sweet interchange of thought and feeling with his fellows a refreshment more invigorating than the richest viands can afford? This principle of our nature nowhere finds such grounds for exercise, nowhere proves so rich in profit, as in the Church of God. Here fellowship ought, by every consideration, to be most closely knit. The Church that does not take pains to cultivate it is untrue to itself. Disintegration by reason of class-distinctions or mutual jealousies and rivalries or personal alienations is weakness, is destruction. Let it be avoided by all means. The "communion of saints" should be no dead article of our creed, but a living fact.

(c.) "The breaking of bread" is the third specific. This expression may be taken in a broader sense to denote the love-feasts of the earlier time, or it may be restricted to denote simply the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, with which the love-feast was always concluded. Now, since love-feasts are no longer held, it will not be out of place to take the words in their more restricted application. And how important the observance of the Lord's Supper is to the development of the Christian life need not be largely insisted upon. It brings us, we all know, into special communion with our Lord in the mystery of his great sacrifice in our behalf. Bread is the symbol which he himself has chosen to signify that body of his which was broken that thereby he might give life unto the world. In partaking of this broken bread in faith we not only indicate our dependence on Christ for life, but we do also then in a special manner derive of his fullness. We appropriate to ourselves something of that divine

power by which Christ was enabled to overcome the might of temptation and the terrors of death, and rise victorious over the grave to become a Prince and Saviour for mankind. Sacramental seasons are therefore the Church's festal seasons. They should be so celebrated, and mark as they come the stages of its enlargement.

(*d.*) "In prayers." Whether there are intended here public or private supplications, the essential thing is "the offering up of the heart's desires for things agreeable to God's will, in the name of Christ." Such prayer is the breath of the Christian life. No soul that has been quickened to feel its own ignorance and weakness and perverseness, that has been awakened to discern the beauty of holiness, and see what it ought to become, that has learned something of the glory of God's kingdom, and what a renovation it was designed to effect on earth, can live without prayer. It must ever and anon break out into longings for the yet unattained good, and in uttering them seek to obtain that good. As with our natural breath, so with our spiritual breath. Prayer is at once the sign and the means of spiritual life. Hence to be "instant in prayer" is one characteristic of a growing Church. It was a marked feature of the early Christians. Their Lord's promise was fresh in their recollection, that where two or three should gather in his name, and agree in their petitions touching any one thing, there he would be to answer; and they put it to the test, and were abundantly rewarded. It was unto them according to their faith. And so will it be always. If Christians would grow in grace, they must pray for grace. The strength of a Church is in its prayer-meeting as much as in its pulpit.

Here, then, we have the four chief means of Christian nurture for all time—apostolic doctrine, fellowship, sacramental communion and prayer.

(5.) A Church thus alive and edified will be likely to exhibit some fruits of its new life. What fruit the early Church bore the text tells us. First, there was the largest liberality. The time was one which called for special sacrifices on the part of believers resident at Jerusalem. A large number of people had come from a distance to attend the feast of Pentecost, and, expecting soon to return to their homes, they had not provided for a long stay. Now, here were many of them caught in the snare of the gospel, and detained, unprovisioned, in the neighborhood of the temple to perfect themselves in the knowledge of the new faith. In such a crisis there was need of generous contributions, on the part of such as had possessions in and about the city, to support the strangers. And the need was heartily supplied. In the first fervors of their love and joy all selfishness seems to have melted away. No one called aught he had his own, but they had all things common. The rich were happy in bestowing and the poor were happy in receiving, with the chief advantage on the part of the first, who found it more blessed to give than to receive. Thus the Church became an organization in the strictest sense of the word—a veritable one body, where the parts were so united that each existed for all and all for each.

Now, although the exigency has passed which required this community of goods—and it is not, nor ever can be, the normal state of society, as some pretend—still, the spirit which led to it must always live. Generosity, is one mark of a true Church. Let no person deem himself a Christian who does not exhibit something of it.

Other fruits were gladness, singleness of heart, praise. Indeed, to such an extent did these fruits abound that one would infer that the early days of the Church were one continuous festal season. The new life burst forth at

once in full beauty and fragrance as a spring-time, and all hearts blossomed with joys and gushed out in song. How could it be otherwise? This is the natural effect of that religion the object of whose worship is a God of love, and whose spirit breathes love into every believing soul. Love is gladsome, love is musical.

(6.) Finally, we see the influence which this exhibition of the Christian spirit had upon the multitude. The new converts "found favor with all the people." And this, too, was a legitimate result. The gospel, truly acted out, commends itself to every man's conscience. It creates a blessedness which wins admiration. And its glorious manifestations at the start, so fresh and gladdening, so disinterested and beneficent, could not but have taken observers by surprise, and awakened a wish in many to be of the number. It must have looked as though

"Heaven, as at some festival,
Had opened wide the gates of her high palace-hall,"

and invited them to enter. The consequence was that many did enter. "The Lord added to the Church daily."

This is the way every Church must grow and spread. It must aim to make itself attractive by catching and reflecting the beauty and the glory of its risen Lord. There is no community on earth that has in itself the possibility of exercising such an all-conquering power over mankind as the Church possesses. Let her once carry out into daily practice the gospel she holds, and she will prove herself invincible and victorious. Wherever she presents herself she will "look forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners." Such may every Church be, and such should every one help the Church to become.

THE HEALING POWER;

OR,

THE CRIPPLE AT THE BEAUTIFUL GATE.

BY THE REV. WM. E. BOGGS, D. D.

Jan. 28.—Acts 3:1-13.

THE season of peace and prosperity which was vouchsafed to the infant Church just after the great outpouring of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost is most graphically set forth in the last words of Acts 2: "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart; praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved."*

But such a state of things belongs rather to the "Church triumphant" than to the "Church militant." The gospel is to be no longer for the Jew only, but for the Gentile also. Not Jerusalem and Palestine, but the wide world, is "the field." To effect this great purpose God will scatter the disciples abroad, and persecution is to become the means not only of the Church's purification, but also of its propagation.

* "Such as should be saved;" Greek, "*the saved.*" The Revised Version gives a far better paraphrase: "*Those that were being saved.*" The only real difficulty of translation lies in the fact that the English has no passive participle in the present tense.

The first of these outbreaks of enmity on the part of the Jewish rulers is given in chs. 3 and 4.

(1.) Among the many apostolic miracles to which allusion is made in ch. 2 : 43, Luke is careful to select the healing of the cripple at the gate "called Beautiful," possibly not because it was intrinsically greater than others, but because of its bearing upon the after history of the Church. The miracle was wrought by the instrumentality of Peter and John conjointly. The co-operation of the two is distinctly emphasized, the expression used in the Greek (*epi to auto*) implying, as Meyer cleverly phrases it, not only that they went "at the same time and for the same object, but also in the same way." The two men, viewed in regard to their natural temperaments, were doubtless very unlike. The one was impulsive, executive, but inclining to vacillation—the other meditative, quiet and determined. The one was the only disciple who denied his Master; the other alone remained with him steadfast to the end. And yet Peter and John were devoted friends and inseparable companions. They were together on the Mount of Transfiguration and in the Garden of Gethsemane. Together they were sent to make ready for the Last Supper. Together they learned by an exchange of signals at the supper-table who was to be the betrayer. Together they ran to the sepulchre on the morning of the resurrection. Together they lingered a little nearer to the Master during the last interview on the lake-shore. Chrysostom* is probably correct when he suggests that Peter's inquiry touching the fate of John was rather from an affectionate solicitude about his friend than from idle curiosity. The attempt of certain "critics" to show that there was antagonism between these devoted friends is only

* Cited by Dr. J. A. Alexander, whose *Commentary on Acts* is by far the best for all classes of students.

another instance of that blindness which ignores the most clearly established facts to maintain preconceived fancies.

It might perhaps seem not a little strange, at the first view, that the apostles should thus be found worshipping in the temple, whereas the types and shadows of its worship were to be set aside by their fulfillment in Christ. And yet nearly thirty years later than this Paul himself, who more than all others insisted upon the abolition of these temporary ordinances, entered the temple to discharge a Nazaritic vow; and that, too, with the solemn sanction of other apostles (Acts 21 : 26). The explanation is clear. The new ordinances promised by Christ (John 4 : 21) not having been as yet fully given, believers were allowed temporarily to use the old. Thus two ends were accomplished: the substantial unity of the two dispensations was attested, and a bridge made by which many thousands of devout Jews were enabled to pass over more easily to Christ.

The exact *locality* of the miracle cannot now, it seems, be determined. The majority continue to favor the great eastern portal, the proper name of which was "the Gate of Nicanor." Of all the nine gates, this, says Josephus, was the most costly and splendid. It was thirty cubits (forty-five feet) high, fifteen cubits (twenty-two and a half feet) wide, and consisted entirely of that famous "Corinthian bronze" which in the fine arts ranked with silver and gold. Others, however, prefer the gate "Shushan" (Lily Gate), so termed, probably, from ornamental work of lilies, which might well lead to the popular title of "the Beautiful" gate. And this opinion is sustained by the fact that the "Lily Gate" was nigh to the dove-stalls, whither crowds flocked to obtain offerings, and also to Solomon's Portico, which is named later in the narrative. (See verse 11.)

Luke's account is wonderfully vivid. The condition of the cripple is carefully set forth: the lameness was not caused by sickness or violence, but was congenital, and the less likely, therefore, to be removed by medicine or surgery. And, besides the requisite strength, the miracle must have conferred the skill or habit of *using* his limbs, which, in the ordinary course of life, we gain only by patient effort, but which this man was able immediately to do. The diagnosis of "the beloved physician" may be detected by the careful statement of the exact seat of the malformation—"the feet and ankle-bones."

The cripple does not appear to have recognized Peter and John as the apostles of Christ. It is not certain, indeed, that he knew anything definite of Jesus. The man's mind was only bent upon getting alms. When, therefore, the apostles "fastened their eyes on him," it can hardly have been, as Meyer imagines, to determine whether or not he was "worthy to be healed." Calvin's sagacity seems nearer the mark when he suggests that the apostles were not empowered to work miracles at their own option, being in this guided by intimations from God, whose instruments they were. Their fixed look, then, and the words of assurance which accompanied the look, are to be viewed as intimations of a communication from God to them. They were assured supernaturally of the result, while the beggar was intent only on his vocation. Peter answers his appeal by the words, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk."* Suiting his action to the words, "he took him by the right hand and lifted him up." The apostle's assurance had not been misplaced, for "immediately his feet and ankle-bones received strength. And he leaping

* The Revised Version omits "rise up."

up * stood and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking and leaping, and praising God." The repetition presents us with a lively picture of the man's demeanor as he keeps testing the newly-acquired powers of locomotion, in which he rejoiced with wonder and ecstasy.

(2.) The effect of the miracle on the people is irresistible. This man was known to multitudes who thronged the temple. They had seen him time and again at his station asking alms. The man's ecstatic gestures appealed alike to their understandings and their hearts. It was the language of Nature, which can hardly be counterfeited. Every eye was directed to Peter and John, as the happy creature kept embracing and clinging to his benefactors. When the crowd had gathered in the great portico, to which the name of Solomon had been attached, Peter answered their expectant looks, if not their words, by the masterly speech which follows (vs. 12-26).

Carefully disclaiming for himself and his associate the credit of having wrought the miracle by any power or holiness of theirs, he proclaims it God's work. His language is courteous and dignified. Addressing the people by their honorable title as "men of Israel," he employs the solemn formula which time and custom had made sacred to every Jew: "The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son† Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let

* Not from a recumbent posture, that being already provided for above, but, as Meyer puts it, "into the air."

† The Revised Version very properly renders the Greek word (*pais*) by "Servant," as also in v. 26 and in ch. 4:27. This discriminates between *pais* (the term expressing Christ's official subordination) and *huios*, and is strictly conformed to the Messianic phraseology as found in Isa. 52:13 and elsewhere.

him go." The despised and hated Gentile had been in this matter more just and more merciful than they. Following up this home-thrust at their consciences, he further lays bare the enormity of their guilt by contrasting *their* treatment of Jesus with what *God* was doing. They had preferred a murderer to the Prince of life. But God had raised him from the dead, and in the name of the Crucified mighty miracles were being wrought before their own eyes. "And now," changing the tone of condemnation to one of pity, he admits frankly that this, their great sin, had been done in ignorance, which, however sinful in itself (inasmuch as they might have known better), yet so far palliated their guilt as to bring it within the scope of God's mercy. He terms them "brethren" in token of his sympathy. He recalls the many prophecies which foretold the sufferings of Messiah; urges them to instant repentance; reminds them of the doom threatened by Moses against him who should reject "that Prophet," and bids them remember that as children of the covenant they are "first" in the privileges of the gospel.

This matchless appeal, sustained as it was by manifestations of God's almighty power and by the demonstration of the Spirit, carried conviction to many a heart. A large accession was made to the membership of the Church, which now numbered five thousand adult males, besides many women and children, who are not included in this estimate. The fact of the miracle was too evident to admit of denial. Its divine origin was abundantly certified to the popular conscience by its mercifulness. So the Sadducees, who under Caiaphas seem to have guided the national counsels, had no recourse left them but intimidation and violence—a clear confession of their defeat on the field of reason.

(3.) It may be well to submit a few considerations bearing upon the position assumed by Peter, *that the healing of the cripple at the Beautiful Gate had demonstrated the divine commission of Jesus.*

In these last days men have risen up who deny the possibility of any such testimony on God's part. Miracles are, according to Spinoza, impossible. And if the fundamental postulate of his pantheistic philosophy be allowed to pass unquestioned, his conclusion remains unshaken. If God and Nature are one and the same being, then, of course, any supernatural manifestation would be inconceivable—the real creation of the world no less than the resuscitation of Lazarus or the resurrection of all men at the last day. But let the evidences for the existence of a personal, extra-mundane God be exhibited, and the whole superstructure of Pantheism falls like the temple of Dagon when its pillars had crumbled in the embraces of Samson.

Miracles, says Hume with all the caution of a "canny Scot," may not indeed be impossible in the nature of things (it did not suit the skeptic to dogmatize on the point), but they cannot be established by human testimony; for while the witnesses for miracles are confessedly few, the uniformity of Nature is observed by all. There is a conflict of testimony here, and when from the greater sum we subtract the less, there remains a great overplus in favor of the unvarying uniformity of Nature and against the occurrence of the miracle. The fallacy of Hume may best be exhibited by an illustration from daily life.* The assassination of President Garfield was witnessed by very few persons indeed: perhaps scarcely a half dozen actually saw the fatal shot fired into his body by Guiteau.

* For a specimen of this argument the reader is referred to Dr. Whately's admirable tract, *Historic Doubts relative to Napoleon Bonaparte.*

For every one who swore to seeing the deed, thousands might have been produced from the population of Washington, millions from the country at large, who would have deposed that they did *not* see the murderous assault. And yet no lawyer would have dreamed of presenting this immense mass of "negative" testimony as an offset to the few credible witnesses who asserted under oath that they saw the shot fired. The reason is plain: there is no conflict of testimony in the case. To establish such a conflict one must be able to show that the "negative" witnesses were really *present at the time and place specified*; that they were *qualified* to testify; that they were on the *lookout*, and therefore that they did not see *because no such thing happened*. Now, this is precisely what cannot be alleged in the case of the Christian miracles. The friends and the foes of Christ who were really present agreed thoroughly as to the *facts*, though of course they differed as to the *cause* or power by which the admitted phenomena were produced. In one notable instance at least the attempt was made to have rebutting testimony. Christ's declarations relative to his own resurrection from the dead had put his adversaries on the alert. They resolved to prove him an impostor *by producing his dead body*. A guard of Roman soldiers was set and the door sealed to prevent outside interference. *But the corpse could not be produced*. Instead of exposing the body, the rulers offered as their explanation the confession of the guards that while they slept his disciples had stolen it away. At first the explanation seems formidable. But a little examination will satisfy us of its worthlessness. For, not to dwell upon the absurdity of men who really were asleep trying to say who stole the body, the story, as Paley well observes, "bears collusion on its face." Such a confession would hardly have been extorted

from Roman soldiers unless they were sure beforehand of immunity. And when we ask, "How does this explanation harmonize with the behavior of the apostles?" the impossibility grows upon us. The story of the soldiers accuses them of willful perjury. It says, "They knew all the while that they had hidden the corpse, and yet they solemnly averred that he was alive." No earthly motive can be alleged for this perjury. Their leader had warned them while he was with them of what their testimony would cost them. Even if he had not done so, their own reason and observation must have anticipated it. The soldiers' story accuses them of persisting in this lie, though the telling of it cost them home, country, friends, religious association—in a word, all that renders life desirable. There is no room in this case for "pious fraud," for that always presupposes something which is regarded as *true* and *good*, for the sake of which the "pious" lie is told. But if the disciples purloined the body, they knew that Christ was an impostor. Paul states the case with the point and accuracy of a jurist: "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ" (1 Cor. 15: 14, 15). Upon this supposition, you will perceive, there was no room left for "pious fraud." Nothing is left for which rational beings would be willing to persevere in telling a lie which was costing them so dear.

But the miracles of infidelity only fairly begin at this point. These perjured men, it seems, were able to interweave with their fraud and deceit the most wonderful system of morals that the world ever saw. They were able, too, to identify the principles of truth, justice and benevolence with the character and actions of "this de-

ceiver," Jesus of Nazareth, who, it seems, had cruelly betrayed them into a life of suffering and useless toil; so much so that a skeptic like John Stuart Mill avers that the most compendious rule of a moral life might be stated thus: Ever seek to do what would meet with the approval of Jesus Christ. In their system lying is singled out as *the sin* which is especially abominable; and of all lies those told about religion are represented as the most abominable.

But still more marvelous is the historical fact that these Jewish peasants, without learning, money or arms, actually succeeded in persuading the world, or the best part of it, to believe this lie, which, of course, they themselves never could have believed! And so practical was this belief that by means of a lie they persuaded millions to forsake their ancestral religions and become followers of Jesus! And even *that* is a small matter to this further result: *that by means of this lie millions were somehow led to forsake their sins and vices*, insomuch that not only does Gibbon, the infidel historian of the Roman Empire, employ the unquestionable morals of these reformed heathen to explain the early successes of Christianity, but it is a fact that the best elements in our modern life and institutions can be traced to the benign influence of "this deceiver" and to the "fraud" of his pretended resurrection.

Nobody but an infidel ever had such credulity as is needed to swallow such monsters of the great deep. We Christians can only exclaim, in the words of the late Henry Rogers, "O infidel, great is thy faith!"

And when the current infidelity attempts "to change front" in order to follow Strauss and Renan, it inevitably exposes itself to a raking fire from all the batteries that history commands. The whole conception of "myths" and "legends" growing up under the full blaze of the

Augustan age is contrary to the philosophy of history. Such developments (as Prof. Max Müller shows) belong to the childhood of nations. The demand for the New-Testament literature to shape itself by such means within the short space of time allowed is simply preposterous. The fact that such outgrowths of the imagination could possibly keep in absolute harmony with Tacitus, Josephus, Suetonius and the host of able secular historians of that age is unaccountable upon the ingenious theories of Strauss and Renan. The impossibilities thicken upon our path, and we cry again, with intensified emphasis, "O infidelity, great, great indeed is thy faith!"

No: the simplest, the most reasonable, explanation is the one propounded by Peter in his masterly speech to the crowd that had witnessed the healing of the cripple at the Beautiful Gate: "The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son [Servant] Jesus." The Healer of the body is seen to be the Saviour of the soul.

THE PRINCE OF LIFE.

BY THE REV. J. T. McCRORY.

Feb. 4.—Acts 3:12-21.

AN introduction is unnecessary when a single perusal of the incident narrated will give one the utmost familiarity with its every detail. Let the first eleven verses of the chapter be read, and the event stands out in a vivid picture real as life.

Let us arrange the leading truths of Peter's sermon under three distinct heads, and then draw from this discussion the more important lessons suggested by it. We have—

(I.) Jesus Presented; (II.) Sinners Condemned; (III.) Pardon Proclaimed.

(I.) *Jesus Presented*.—Jesus did not need to be brought forward. There was no necessity of going up to heaven to bring Christ down. He was there—there in their midst, there in all the perfection of the God-man, in all the majesty of the Godhead, in all the plenitude of his Messiahship and in all the kindness and helpfulness of the Friend. He was there, but *unseen* by the multitude. Two obstacles stand in the way of his being seen. First, the disciples, Peter and John. They perceived this. The miracle was being ascribed to them. They are standing between Jesus and the people. How promptly they remove this obstacle! how promptly and emphatically they step aside!

“Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power and holiness we had made this man to walk?” How can you be guilty of so serious a mistake as to ascribe to us, your brethren, the credit of so great a miracle? We are but the humble instruments of another. The power exercised in this man’s marvelous cure dwells not within us. Neither by magical craft, nor by meritorious efficacy on account of any especial personal sanctity, have we made this man whole. We are agents; we act in another’s name; and by our faith in that other was this wonder wrought. Both the might and the merit of this miracle belong to another, who is here, whom ye see not. We point you to him. He is Jesus, God’s Servant, the Messiah, promised and given, crucified and exalted. Thus they stand aside that Jesus may be seen.

But blind men cannot see the most conspicuous object. Those whose eyes are thickly veiled are the same as blind. This was the condition of these Jews. Hence the second thing necessary that Jesus might be seen was to remove the veil, to snatch the thick covering of moral and intellectual ignorance and prejudice from their eyes. This the disciples proceed to do with characteristic promptness and energy: “The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers”—thus they seize the veil at its farthest extremes; there the lift must begin if the uncovering would be successful and complete—“You believe in God, the God of our fathers; this miracle was wrought by his power; it was performed in honor of his Servant, his Messiah. That Messiah, that Servant, is Jesus. He is the Prince of life. He is the Messiah of prophecy. He was crucified in exact fulfillment of the writings of all the holy prophets. He is exalted, has passed into the heavens, has there his dwell-

ing-place—there for a purpose, a purpose sublime and eternal, to bring in the final, complete and glorious restoration of all things. Behold, then, in the miracle that fills you all with amazement so profound, behold, not the power of men, but of God. Ascribe the glory of this miracle not to us, but to Jesus your Messiah.”

Thus Peter presented Jesus to the multitude. This is preaching *Christ*, and him *crucified*.

(II.) *Sinners Condemned*.—The Spirit by which the disciples witnessed made no mistakes; a different spirit, I fear, guides not a little of the witness-bearing of the present. That Spirit did not allow the disciples to make the miserable mistake of preaching Christ to those who could get along very well without him.

It suggests “a fool’s errand” to see a man running anxiously to those whom he regards as in good general health, or at the worst only slightly indisposed, with a prescription prepared especially and only for those “sick unto death.” Peter is not chargeable with any such folly. The Spirit by which he preached led him to conclude that if Christ be a Saviour for mankind, then mankind must be lost; if he is to preach the remission of sins through Christ, then he must preach that men are sinners. Pardon supposes guilt. If it be important to press the Saviour upon man’s acceptance, then it is equally important to enlighten man as to his need of that Saviour. Hence we have Peter condemning the multitude.

And what a condemnation! How the astonished thousands must have shuddered as Peter passed from one count to another of his fearful indictment! Note these terrible counts: 1st. He charges upon them the infamy of betrayal: “Whom ye delivered up.” God had sent him to you, his covenant people, but you gave him over into the power of a heathen tribunal. But, 2d: betrayal,

infamous as it is, was not the extent—nay, it was but the first act—of your wickedness, for after ye had betrayed him, when natural justice demanded his release, when Pilate, the Roman governor, who was neither scrupulous nor tender-hearted, was about to let him go, ye denied the Holy One and the Just. Ay, and being compelled to choose between his acquittal and the release of a notorious murderer, ye rejected Jesus and desired the murderer to be granted unto you. It were nothing to you that your own consciences condemned your wickedness and agreed with Pilate's verdict, that he was a perfect and faultless man—nothing to you that he was holy, while the one preferred by you was full of crime—that one was the Author and Preserver of life, while the other was its destroyer. Against it all ye denied the innocent and preferred the guilty. That was awful. The sun in the heavens never looked upon a blacker crime. 3d. But betrayal, denial and rejection, damning as these charges are when in the rejection ye must take a murderer to your bosoms, are not the weightiest counts of this indictment nor the extent of your infamy and wickedness. Ye are guilty of the awful crime of killing the Prince of life. There is no shifting the guilt and responsibility of that death. Other lips may have pronounced the unjust sentence, other hands may have led him to Golgotha and fastened the cruel nails that rent his hands and feet and sent the spear into his side; but all the infamy and guilt of that shameful, cruel tragedy, from Gethsemane to Calvary, the betrayal, denial, rejection, crucifixion,—all lie at your door; they are crimes for which you must answer.

Thus with firm and steady hand does Peter thrust the iron of a terrible accusation into their guilty breasts. It was, indeed, only a simple narrative of facts, but such facts!—facts calculated to produce the profoundest con-

viction of guilt, the deepest shame and sorrow, the bitterest remorse. And such, the sequel shows, were its effects; for, as on Pentecost many were pricked to their hearts by Peter's terrific indictment, so it was here. As soon as that result is produced Peter changes his voice, and we have—

(III.) *Pardon Proclaimed.*—Peter was severe in his indictment, but he was wounding to heal. He thrust the keen lance of conviction into their souls, that he might open the way to pour into their hearts the grace of pardon and peace. Hence, the moment he saw that the truth had done its work of conviction he hastened to apply the balm of Gilead.

1st. He softens the indictment by referring their murderous deed partly to their ignorance: "I know that through ignorance ye did it." Ignorance is no excuse for wrongdoing, especially such criminal ignorance as theirs; still, there is a distinction between a crime committed by one fully informed and the same crime by one largely ignorant of the real character of the act. "Father, forgive them, *for they know not what they do,*" said Jesus. "But I obtained mercy, *because I did it ignorantly* in unbelief," wrote Paul. So here Peter does not hesitate—nay, he rather hastens—to give them the benefit of any extenuation which ignorance justly affords. It certainly was no compliment to be reminded of their ignorance; but sore as their hearts were from Peter's terrific thrusts, they were in no danger of being offended by plain words, nor were they in any mood for bandying compliments. Their hearts were smarting bitterly; any oil, though at first it stung the open sore, was better than nothing—better than the agony of conviction they now are suffering.

2d. He urges upon them the consideration that God had overruled their murderous work to the accomplish-

ment of his eternal purpose. All the suffering which, through their cruelty, Jesus had endured was, in the wise ordering of God, endured on their behalf. While this did not lessen their guilt, it did hold out to them a good hope of mercy and pardon. Jesus had suffered for sinners, hence they might hope for forgiveness.

3d. He calls then to repentance and a different life: "Ye are guilty of the blackest crime, but it is mitigated by your ignorance of what ye were doing, and it has been overruled to the fulfillment of God's purposes; and the very sufferings that ye caused Messiah prepared the way, in the eternal purpose of God, for the pardon of your sin in crucifying him. Now, if ye are truly sorry for your sin, and will but turn from it unto God with all your heart, God will blot out your transgressions."

He urges all this upon them by a glorious consideration. This consideration was the fact that the times spoken of by all the holy prophets, the glorious times of deliverance, rest, refreshment and joy which Messiah was to introduce, had come. Even then were they under Messiah's gracious and mighty reign, and by accepting him they would hasten his coming to them and the world with all the fullness of Messianic blessings.

Let us now attend to a few of the important lessons suggested.

1. We are reminded that it is strong faith, on the part of the disciples, in the name of Jesus, that works wonders. No one engaged in any way in the Master's service can afford to be unmindful of this fact. To be faithless is to be helpless and useless, so far as spiritual matters are concerned. You can do nothing for your own or another's welfare without faith. But with faith what cannot be accomplished? "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye shall say unto this mountain,

Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you;’ ‘If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.’ But if you forget that ‘precious name,’ whatever other qualifications you may possess for the service of the Master, your efforts will be futile.” Depend upon it, defeat awaits whoever goes forth to fight the battles of the Lord in his own name, while victory is for him who fights in the name of Jesus. “Lord, increase our faith.” The faith of the humblest disciple may yet work wonders that will startle and amaze the world. Let this be the first inquiry in every work we undertake: “In whose name?”

2. The wise and true teacher always puts Jesus forward and hides self. How easy would it have been for these disciples to have secured for themselves the fame of that miracle! They need not have made any assertions of their ability to do wonders; they needed only to pretend great humility, to stand silent in the presence of that astonished multitude, and to allow that restored, rejoicing man, as he held his benefactors by their hands, to tell his story: that was all, and Peter and John would have been the most famous men in Jerusalem. But their object was anything but selfish; it was to glorify Jesus and bless mankind. Hence they at once disclaim any of the honor, and put it all where it belonged—upon Jesus.

Is there not a profound lesson here for us all? Are we always careful to bring Jesus forward when our works of kindness and acts of faith turn the eyes of unbelievers toward us? Is it not to be feared that too often we pretend great humility while we are receiving the flatteries of men, when we ought to speak out and point them to Jesus as the real Author of the acts they have witnessed?

3. The true gospel-teacher tells men the truth, however severe or distasteful it may be. What a contrast

between Peter's method and that of not a few so-called teachers in our day!—men standing before the godless and guilty with cringing, shuffling, apologetic words and manner, aiming to excuse Moses and David and Isaiah and all the inspired teachers and prophets and apostles for their hard sayings against sin and sinners: "Oh, you know the race was not enlightened in the time of David;" or "Paul, being a Jew, could not, of course, get entirely rid of his Jewish ideas and prejudices." Miserable gospel-tinkers! The thunders and lightnings of trembling, flame-wrapped Sinai, as the eternal Jehovah speaks out from its darkness a law for the race, are turned by them into a meaningless display of theological pyrotechnics. The awful agony of the cross, that speaks so plainly the fearful penalty that sin deserves, and, if unpardoned, will receive, tells them no story of human guilt and impending woe or of eternal justice and consuming wrath. They rob the Word of its power to convict, and hence of its power to convert and save. God have mercy upon the teacher who dares thus to emasculate the gospel, and also upon the sinners he instructs! The one has never been shaken by "the powers of the world to come," and the others never are likely to be under such teaching.

But what truth is appropriate for all? "He that believeth not God hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son." However free from wrong-doing any unbeliever may think himself to be, there is something of which he is certainly guilty: he has made God a liar! Surely that is sin enough.

4. The true gospel-teacher calls to repentance and faith, and offers pardon to the worst of sinners. There were those present, perhaps, who had cried "Crucify him! crucify him! His blood be upon us and upon our children!"—some whose taunts and jeers had been heard

by the suffering Saviour as he agonized upon the cross, who had thus pierced his very soul, adding new pangs to his grief and pain. Yet there was not one that Peter did not call to repentance and faith, and assure of pardon. Do we meet cases that might appear more hopeless? Are there sinners of deeper dye than those were who had been guilty of murdering God's Son? Let the gospel we proclaim always be, "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."

5. We learn to encourage, in every legitimate way, those to whom we preach the gospel. We must not hesitate to declare the "terrible things in righteousness" that produce thorough conviction of sin and fill the heart with an awful fear of punishment; yet if we are wise we never will stop there. We will proceed to encourage the sinner to come to the One whom he has offended, to secure pardon and salvation. We will not fail to employ every encouragement which the truth and the circumstances will justify. "He that winneth souls is wise."

RIGHTEOUS BOLDNESS.

BY THE REV. HERRICK JOHNSON, D.D.

Feb. 11.—Acts 4:1-14.

COURAGE is of various sorts. Brazen courage is simply an outside affair, born of impudence. Many a timid soul will cower before it, but itself will always cower when rightly met. Physical courage is an affair of the body, born of mere brute force. There is a courage of love and a courage of conscience and conviction. There is a courage of action and a courage of repose. What is Christian courage? Let us to-day look back to the time when Christ's disciples were first under the fire of persecution and see.

(I.) *The Occasion of the Courage.*—Peter and John, a few days after the first great outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, on passing into the temple for worship, had healed a lame man at the Beautiful Gate. A crowd had gathered round them in the colonnade or portico known as Solomon's Porch, along the east wall of the temple, and to this wondering and amazed crowd in this public place Peter had preached Jesus and his resurrection.

Priests and Sadducees, out of patience with this continued talk about Jesus—the priests, because Jesus had denounced their hypocrisy and formalism; the Sadducees, because in Jesus was set forth the resurrection, which they scouted and denied—had gotten the captain of the Le-

vitical guard of the temple to arrest Peter and John and put them in prison, that the next day they might be brought before the Jewish high court or great council called the Sanhedrim, and there accused and silenced, if not punished. In the presence of this august body, on the morrow after their arrest, these two apostles proved what stuff they were made of.

It was an imposing assembly, made up of the intelligence and authority and ecclesiastical power of the Jewish nation. In the midst of this high court, confronted by these stern guardians of Jewish traditions and these learned interpreters of Jewish law, sat the two Christian disciples. They were members of a despised sect. They had no friends at this court. It is true their doctrine had made a great stir in Jerusalem. "The word of God was not bound," though its preachers were. Already "the number of the men" believing in Jesus had come to be "about five thousand." And this, for a few days' preaching, was a marvelous success. But still, wealth, learning, fashion, pride, tradition, an overwhelming weight of numbers, and even piety and the national faith, and the very oracles of God, were arrayed against these poor disciples. The court demanded by what power or efficacy, and in the use of what name, they had done this now notable miracle. Peter stood in view of them all, calm and confident, a splendid illustration of the truth that "the righteous are bold as a lion" (Prov. 28:1), and made his reply.

(2.) *The Secret of the Courage.*—"Filled with the Holy Ghost." This was the secret of Peter's boldness. This made the difference between Peter before the ascension and Peter after it—between Peter blanched by the charge of a maid-servant and frightened into falsehood and blasphemy, and Peter unblanched in the presence of the

Sanhedrim, and able, in the face of their charge of having been with Jesus, to declare and glory in the truth.

It was not natural courage, "to the manner born." Peter was impulsive and forward, quick and stout in assertion, but by nature a coward. His impetuous ardor often got him into trouble, but his courage failed him when put to the test. He could draw his sword and use it under sudden impulse, as at Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested. But his temporary boldness is followed by blank cowardice a little while after in the cooler moments of the examination at the high priest's house. He could eagerly invite the command of his Lord to come to him on the waters, and leap from the ship in impulsive obedience, but he scarcely touches the waters before he cries out for fear. He takes on at times almost the tone of bold bravado, but he is no sooner faced with danger than he seems the very child of vacillation. This is Peter by nature.

But after Pentecost, when "filled with the Holy Spirit," what granite-like firmness he exhibits! what courage of conviction! what unflinching loyalty to truth! what boldness in the rebuke of wrong! This is Peter by grace.

He faces a crowd of Jews in the city and dares charge them with the crime of slaying their own Messiah (Acts 2:23). He repeats the charge in the porch of the temple (Acts 3:15), and summons them to repentance. And he abates not one jot or tittle of the terrible indictment when arraigned before the high Jewish court (Acts 4:10). The coward is become a hero. The bank of sand is transformed into a rock of firmness. Impulse has given way to principle. Fear of man is exchanged for fear of God. And Peter, boasting in safety that he will die with his Lord and denying in peril that he knows

anything about him, is made over into Peter rejoicing to own his Lord whether in life or death.

His being "filled with the Holy Spirit" accounts for the difference. That Spirit has given him a sense of things invisible, has opened to his faith's sight invisible troops of God, has lifted him to a level where he can look with something of the calmness and fearlessness of his Lord upon those who can only "kill the body." He knows now, even better than he knew before, his own weakness and his own need, but he has been taught of the Spirit the illimitable sufficiency of God. "Filled with the Spirit" means assurance of sonship. "Filled with the Spirit" is proof that "God is for us and in us," and that therefore they that be for us are more than they that be against us. "Filled with the Spirit" is that condition in which "things not seen" are made nevertheless to give the evidence of their presence, and to pass from mere notions or conceptions to real powers—a kind of spiritual dynamics.

It can easily be understood how this would arm the timidest soul with a dauntless and deathless courage. One, with God, is a majority always. Weakness, with God, is omnipotence. By this invisible alliance it comes to be seen how arms and armies of governments, and prejudices and passions of crowds, and powers and penalties of human courts, and any or all combinations of evil men, are but the weak devices of material and carnal appliance, and no match whatever for a God-trusting spirit. It was this that gave occasion for Melancthon to write of the great Reformer, "O Luther! all thy words are thunderbolts!" It will make any impulsive, wayward, uncertain, tempest-tossed soul, even as it made Peter, as bold as a lion.

(3.) *Characteristics of the Courage.*—But a courage of

this sort, born of the presence of the Spirit of God, true Christian courage, will be marked by certain characteristics. Let us look at them as they appear in the record of Peter's speech before the court.

Courtesy marks the first words of this brave soul. Peter gives the men of the court their appropriate titles, recognizes their office and authority, and addresses them with deference and respect: "Ye rulers of the people and elders of Israel."

Bravery does not consist in brusqueness and bravado and bluster. To speak the truth boldly one need not be a boor or a bear. The bully is not the ideal hero. Courage of the bull-dog sort is at a wide remove from courage of the Christ-like sort. The kingdom and patience of Jesus go hand in hand. There is a so-called maintaining one's self-respect which is simply a manifesting one's impudence. "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil, but if well, why smitest thou me?" was Christ's courteous protest against the rude blow of an officer; but the courtesy had no weakness in it. Where grace salts courage, the courage is not noisy or dogged or defiant, but marked by a quiet courtesy in the very repose of conscious power. Without the thunder of rude assertion, it yet loses nothing of the spirit of unalterableness in its respectful speech.

Prudence is another characteristic of Christian courage, as shown by Peter in this defence. His courteous recognition of the position and office of the men composing the tribunal is immediately followed by a reference to the character of the deed for which he was arraigned: "If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man." The deed was "good," and Peter reminds them of it. An impotent man has been made whole. A man "lame from his mother's womb" for the first time in

all his life stands on his feet, and goes praising God for his cure, his leaping heart lifting his feet for joy. And it is this "good deed" for which Peter and John are called to answer. It is well-doing they are to be examined about, not evil-doing.

Mark the prudent wisdom of this answer. Peter first turns attention from the method of the doing to the thing done. The work itself could challenge only gratitude and joy. The deed was undeniably good. Of itself it could provoke no opposition. One would think the healing of a lifelong cripple to be a matter about which there could be no two opinions. Yet we are arraigned for it, Peter says, as if we had been guilty of some base thing. But how can a corrupt tree bring forth such good fruit? He thus by a wise tact sought to pave the way for a favorable hearing. He made the most of his circumstances.

So will the highest courage always. It does not disdain the use of every justifiable means to conciliate opposition. While scorning compromise of principle, it presses into service every alleviating circumstance. It does not court a tilt or invite a conflict. It believes with Solomon that "yielding pacifieth great offences," and yet it is ready with Paul "not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus." In other words, rashness or recklessness, either in speech or deed, is no part of true Christian courage. Boldness born of the Spirit is marked by prudence.

Frankness is another characteristic, as exhibited by Peter. The council demanded by what authority or by what name they had done this. They got for instant answer, "By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth." Here Peter might have stopped. This was the truth, and nothing but the truth. But this was not the truth that

put Peter in bonds. He knew he was a prisoner because of some other word that he had been bold enough to speak in the presence of the people on the street and in Solomon's Porch, and in the frankness of righteous boldness that word must be spoken now in the presence of the court. So he fearlessly adds, "Whom ye crucified," for this had stirred the priests against him; and, "whom God raised from the dead;" for this had stirred the Sadducees against him (vs. 1, 2).

This is simply another Daniel *keeping the windows open* (see Dan. 6: 10). It is hard in the actual presence of danger to leave things exactly as they were when the danger was far away. It was not necessary for Daniel to pray with "his windows open;" but, having been open when he prayed in security, they must not be shut when the king's decree threatens with a den of lions any man that prays. That would be concealment of prayer and denial of the true God. Peter could answer the court's question without any allusion to the crucifixion and resurrection. But it was this that got him into trouble, and he must not withhold it now to get out of trouble.

Christian courage is always the very soul of frankness. It will wear no masks—tell the whole truth, as well as nothing but the truth. The temptation to be compromisingly politic at the point of real danger is most plausibly insidious and subtle, and a brave spirit gets here its sorest test. It is so easy to compromise, and to justify the compromise, where it involves no actual perversion of truth. But it is a sham out-spokenness, and not the apostolic sort, that lets out truth indeed, but only enough to keep one safe. Where safety reflects on frankness, rather than consult safety it were better to die. The man of real Christian courage will die rather than thus be sheltered behind a truth withheld.

Fidelity is one more mark of Christian courage that shone out conspicuously in this court-scene at Jerusalem. This pushed Peter beyond the mere claims of frankness. He had fully stated the facts. The Jews had crucified Jesus, and God had raised him from the dead. These two facts Peter had put in the plainest terms. They were offensive to the tribunal. They implicated his hearers both in crime and folly. Yet out they came with courageous frankness. But now here was a rare opportunity to bring out also the *meaning* of the facts. Peter might never get such a hearing again. So with bold and righteous fidelity he makes the rejected Christ the glorious and chief corner-stone in Zion (Ps. 118 : 22 ; Eph. 2 : 20), and preaches *to the highest tribunal of Israel the impossibility of salvation save in Jesus Christ alone*. These trusters in Abraham and good works are thus told that there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby they must be saved. In their arraignment of the disciples they themselves are arraigned as guilty before God and under condemnation, and shut up to just one avenue of escape—through belief in this same Jesus whom they had taken and with wicked hands had crucified and slain.

This was the top and crown of Christian courage. It was transforming the prisoner's bar into a pulpit from which to preach a gospel sermon to men, some of whom probably had never heard it before, and whose ear the preacher might never have again. Frankness prompted the telling the whole truth about the affair in Solomon's Porch. That met the demands of the truth as concerning the past. But loyalty to Peter's Lord concerns itself with every emergent hour, and failure to seize opportunity like this to speak a faithful word for Christ would have seemed almost like surrender. Peter could preach boldly

to the crowd of the street; it was chiefly composed, doubtless, of men like himself. But now he is in another presence. The great trial of his courage has come. Here are polish, culture, learning, authority, power—the very chief of his nation, a select and august body that might well awe this fisherman's soul, and make him think twice before venturing on a gospel "improvement." But there he stands in the midst of the Sanhedrim, the prophet of the street still, unaffected by the surrounding dignities, unabashed by their threat, confronting rulers and Sadducees, Pharisees and scribes, with the unpalatable truth of God that they must believe in Jesus as the only one under heaven given among men whereby they could be saved.

This is another John the Baptist ready to lose his head rather than fail to testify that his hearers are wrong. Herod's voluptuous court needs as plain dealing as the crowd of the wilderness. A brave soul will preach the gospel as fearlessly to the Sanhedrim as to a mass-meeting. Opportunity is obligation. Opportunity seized is obligation met. Every occasion, in any kind of circumstances, anywhere, is not to be regarded as an opportunity. For that would take away judgment and make preaching the gospel the folly of fools. But extreme and perilous occasion may be golden opportunity. And the seizure of that is duty discharged, and often the mark of the highest bravery.

Thus, in this brief apostolic speech we see clustered the qualities of a true Christian courage—a courtesy that never flags, a prudence that favors a wise conciliation, a frankness that tells all the truth, and a fidelity that makes it impossible to forget anywhere the obligations of supreme allegiance to Jesus Christ. These are outward paradoxes. They seem like traits contradictory. But in

Christ, and in souls like Christ, they are deep and inner harmonies, the courtesy giving grace to the frankness, and the prudence preparing the way for the fidelity, and all blending in beautiful proportion, constituting courage of the sort that is born of being "filled with the Spirit."

(4.) *Effect of the Courage.*—It only remains to speak briefly of the effect of this righteous boldness. The record is, that when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were men "unlearned and ignorant" (*i. e.* without rabbinical knowledge or official experience as teachers or speakers), "they marveled." The first effect was profound surprise. Then they came to recognize them as men they had seen before in the company of Jesus. And beholding the cripple, whom they had so often seen lying helpless at the temple-gate, *standing* now, a healed and living witness to the truth, "they could say nothing against it." Literally, "*they had nothing to speak against.*" Every ground of reply was knocked from under. They were silenced completely, just as Jesus had said they would be (Luke 21:15) when he promised his disciples that he would give them a mouth and wisdom which all their adversaries should not be able to gainsay.

These effects are common where Christian courage gets anything like such public exhibition in such hostile circumstances.

Men *wonder* first at the boldness. They see nothing behind it, nothing to support it—no arms, no government, no material resource—and they are astounded. They marvel where it gets its spring and inspiration. The world knows not its secret. The natural man has not entered into its hiding-place. It is born of the invisible Spirit of God.

Then *they have nothing to speak against.* Christian courage has a wonderful way of disarming opposition.

Somehow or other, it gives so much reason for itself, and buttresses itself round with such worth and weight of evidence, that little is left for ground of attack. Opposition may still rage, as it did here, but it has no case, as it had not here. It may still scheme and plot and spit out its venom and give vent to its hate, but there stands the healed cripple or the healed soul, the blessed and questionless witness that through Jesus a "good deed" has been done and a good work wrought.

Christians, there are some things taught here that ought to be to our spiritual profit.

1. The Spirit of God can make the weakest saint bold. We see what wonders he worked in Peter. He can do just as much for our fearfulness and feebleness. Let us be found waiting much on God, and we shall be "filled with the Spirit." When he gets fairly and fully in possession, neither sneer nor hate nor passion nor power of man or devil shall make us afraid.

2. We can afford to trust Christ. It is a fearful sin and shame not to trust him. He has accomplished so many deliverances that it is full time the veriest doubter in all the household of faith ought to be trusted out of his doubt into the largest confidence, and made a very lion for boldness.

3. Truth will sometimes smite to silence when it does not smite to heal. There are two ways of winning Christian victories: one, by silencing the enemy; the other, by winning him over to Christ's side. *Truth* is the weapon, and the only weapon, in either case. But one or the other way of victory *is sure*. Let us be bold, therefore, in our use of truth. But remember, courtesy, prudence, frankness and fidelity will mark the boldness if it be born of God's Spirit.

CHRISTIAN COURAGE.

BY THE REV. W. E. KNOX, D. D.

Feb. 18.—Acts 4 : 18-31.

THE title given to this lesson is Christian Courage, and that, as closely connected with the twentieth verse, shall suggest the topic around which to group the teachings of the narrative.

Courage is one of the Bible virtues. It began to be magnified as far back as the days of Joshua, leader of Israel. It was one of the last words of Moses to him on bidding him farewell : " Be strong and of good courage." It was almost the first word of the Lord on welcoming him to his new office : " Be strong and of good courage." It was the counsel given the twelve Hebrew explorers, and, if they had heeded it, would have saved the forty years' sojourn in the wilderness. Joshua repeated the command that had so invigorated him in the ears of his officers and men of war. David, over four hundred years afterward, recalled the energizing word in his charge to Solomon, and in the Psalms he rings out the same voice to all the saints : " Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord."

The correspondent word *boldness* is as often used in the New Testament. It is applied to Christ himself in his preaching ; it was what Paul would have the Church pray for as a gift to him ; and, as we see in this book of

Acts, it was one of the distinguishing traits of the other apostles and the primitive Church.

We cannot, therefore, make it too prominent in the teachings of this lesson.

(1.) Mark, then, this instance of Christian courage as belonging to private and non-professional men. This was the problem that first exercised the Sanhedrim—confidence where they looked for diffidence. They saw that Peter and John were bold, but also unlearned and ignorant. Not that they did not know letters alphabetically so as to read, but did not know letters as literature. They were not scholars, neither were they orators. For the word “ignorant” is in the Greek *ιδιωται*, private or obscure persons. They were not professional men, who, having learning, used it in a public way. They had not been trained in the schools as rhetoricians who might be expected to command their speech and self-possession before the tribunal or a popular assembly. They were plain, common sort of men, with only ordinary advantages of education, unused to public occasions, and likely to be helplessly embarrassed if called before a learned audience such as that composed of these high dignitaries. It would have been a severe ordeal to some men of education and experience. Whence, then, the calmness of these obscure disciples?

It was their Christian courage—that is to say, a courage derived from Christ himself. And so the Sanhedrim soon perceived, for the explanation began to dawn on them as they took knowledge that these men had “been with Jesus.” They had not been in the rabbinical schools, but in the one where Christ was teacher. Christ, though no professed rhetorician, spoke with calmness, with knowledge and with authority, and these two disciples had taken their style from their Master.

Here, then, is one characteristic of Christian courage that should have special consideration. It belongs to no favored class, but is the privilege of all. One need not be a pastor, doctor of divinity, elder or Sunday-school officer to have it. It is for the humblest and youngest. I have seen plain men, who had been brought up far from schools, but brought so near to Christ that they could not but speak of him, and with such knowledge and calmness that they always gained a hearing. Laymen in their place may be as effective as clergymen in their place. It is a gift greatly needed for the whole Church—Christian courage.

(2.) Mark, again, this Christian courage as maintained in the face of worldly array and authority. "What will the world say of us?" is a question many persons ask with great solicitude. Some very strong men (like Napoleon) have been very weak here. What the world will *do* to us is still more startling, if it has a rod in its hands and a will to use it. It seemed as if the whole world was against these two Galileans, and likely to make quick work with them. Their beloved Lord and Leader had been taken, hung upon a tree like a miserable felon. The Shepherd had been smitten; how could the flock fail to be scattered? Jesus himself before the tribunal that arraigned him was reserved and had scarcely a word to say, so that the high priest taunted him with it. He did not understand the secret of Christ's silence, and would have the people infer guilt and fear. He should have remembered the prophecy that told him the Messiah was to be brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and like a sheep dumb before his hearers was not to open his mouth.

But there is a time to speak as well as to be silent, and that had come now to these disciples. They had spoken already at Pentecost. Scattered no more by the destruc-

tion of their Leader, they came back to proclaim against that murderous cruelty: "Him ye have taken, and with wicked hands have crucified and slain." We know the effect of that bold accusation.

It would seem that the people rather than the rulers were the audience on Pentecost. There and at the Gate Beautiful the address was to the "multitude." "Your rulers" are spoken of as if absent. But now the great men began to be astir. They had hoped their work was ended with the death of the Nazarene leader, but, behold! it is all to be done over. Suddenly, while the disciples were preaching to the people, the priests and captains of the temple and the Sadducees came and bore them off to prison. There seems to be some virtue in authority, for the apostles are as helpless as their Master was in Gethsemane. When they have reflected over night on their first lesson in prison, the Sanhedrim will give them another one in open court.

It was a formidable array—rulers, elders, scribes, Annas the high priest, Caiaphas ex-high priest, the priests John and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest. How were two plain men to face such a tribunal? What could they answer when, "set in the midst," in the very focus of all this grandeur, it was sternly demanded, "By what power and in what name have ye done this?" As much as to say, "Who has any power in such matters but we? and how dare you disregard our authority? Do you not see that you have got yourselves into prison by your folly, and are likely to suffer worse punishment?"

How amazed was the Sanhedrim at what followed when these two plain men, instead of humbly begging pardon, calmly stood on their defence! They went over the gospel story as unembarrassed as if they were telling it to an

audience of friends. Boldly they asserted that it was the name of Jesus that had supremest power, and in that name they had done as they had. That name, set at naught of men, had been exalted of God to honor. That which was rejected of the builders had become the headstone of the corner. Safety comes not from earthly rulers, but from Christ, who is Lord of all, and whose name alone, under heaven, is the one by which we can be saved. Instead of silence, the Sanhedrim had a sermon. Instead of sitting as a tribunal, they were suddenly held fast as an audience under the spell of a discourse less easily broken than the fetters on their prisoners' hands.

Never was an assembly in greater straits. They "marveled," and began to take knowledge of what kind of prisoners turned preachers these were—men who had been with Jesus, and from that name of power had this power of utterance given them.

Such is the might of Christian courage, and this in all ages has been its history. To be brought before kings and prelates has been the fortune of all who have spread the gospel to new lands. So it was when the apostles went to Asia Minor, to Macedonia, Greece and Italy. So it was when the evangelic word has come again and again by gospel pioneers and Reformers even in Great Britain and France. In the early history of our own country, in New York and Virginia, ministers were arrested by High-Church prelates and magistrates and thrown into prison for preaching and baptizing. Not the Puritans chiefly sinned in this way, but still more the hierarchy that thought to establish its exclusive jurisdiction here as it had done in England. But, thanks to the courage of those true Presbyterian apostles, Mackemie, Hampton, Hubbard, Macnish and others, the word of God prevailed against the wrath of men. So it did when

Judson and his co-presbyters went to India, Morrison to China, Goodell and Dwight to Turkey, to speak of no others. Where dangers are in the way of the gospel, courage will be given to Christian hearts to brave them.

(3.) And this suggests a third explanation of all Christian courage. It is sustained by the sense of a divine presence. Constantly do these disciples appeal to the name of Jesus as their authority in the face of human prohibition. Coupled with this was a consciousness of God's presence with them in the presence of these high earthly dignitaries. "Whether it be right *in the sight of God* to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. There being two here to judge us, which shall have the precedency? When God riseth up, what shall man do but take the second place? When God comes near to us, what place at all is left for the fear of man?" The rulers had not been with Jesus, and had not learned this lesson. He came forth from the bosom of the Father, and had a sense of constant divine fellowship. The disciples acted under the same heavenly influence. If Jesus were at their side, what though the whole array of the Sanhedrim confronted them? Precisely this was what the Saviour had promised: "Lo, I am with you always." That "always" is for us who are teachers. If we keep near to Christ, timidity as regards others will be overcome. We shall have a calm self-possession before our congregations and classes. We shall feel that we have God's word in our heart, and cannot but speak it.

(4.) Christian courage also has the support of pertinent and palpable facts. Observe the one fact here: "And seeing the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it." The arraignment of Peter and John had grown out of this miracle on the lame man. The people had known the man in his impo-

tency, and now recognized him in his cure. When the lame man heard of the apostles' arrest, he went before the tribunal, ready to give his testimony and share their fate. Standing upright there on his feet, what could the Sanhedrim say? How else could the apostles feel at that sight but joyful and thankful that such a miracle of mercy had been wrought by their hands? It was not the time to be depressed in spirit or dumb of speech. The people's mouths were open everywhere, glorifying God; why should apostolic lips be shut?

This has always been a strong support in the work for God—the good results that have attended it. Paul felt this: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation." He had seen instances innumerable of such salvation. What striking ones he mentions in Corinth, and kindred to them in Rome and Ephesus! Whence the great host of the Lord whose numbers every land helps to swell in our time? It is all the fruit of gospel preaching. The Church never was upbuilt so fast as now. While skeptics distrust her strength, she goes on to demonstrate it. They prophecy her fall, while she fulfills the better prophecy of "Rise and shine, for thy light is come."

Just in the ratio that any church organization departs from gospel truth and ceases to magnify Christ as divine does it lose courage and success. It has no power to gain new victories or hold what it has. Socinianism has no missionary zeal, nor does it retain what it has gained by accession from evangelical churches. Few independent societies organized by rationalism maintain more than a brief existence. Extraordinary talents may suffice to attract a congregation to a favorite preacher, but his removal operates like the withdrawal of a magnet from a heap of iron filings. A true Church does not lose

heart because it loses its minister, for it has Christ with it still, and the voice of prayer and exhortation never ceases from its walls. The true evangelical Church knows that God is in her of a truth, and fears not therefore what all her enemies can do against her.

(5.) We are reminded in this narrative of another aid to Christian courage—the companionship of Christian men. Observe the significant words: “And being let go, they went to their own company.” They had kept, by constraint, company they did not prefer, though it was that of great and titled persons, but the constraint being removed they went to quite another company—obscure and unpretending, but still “their own.” Peter and John had encouraged one another before the council; now they went to gain new strength from the larger company of their brethren, and to impart to them new joy by the story of their deliverance. And that was the abundant result. As they conversed together, they also praised and prayed. In holy joy they lifted up their voices together in the triumphant words of the Old-Testament Psalm: “Why do the Gentiles rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?” Their prayer went up for greater boldness in the Master’s cause, and new wonders of grace as the fruit of it: “Grant unto thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness, while thou stretchest forth thy hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done in the name of thy holy Servant Jesus.”

I close by saying that all true gospel courage will lead its possessors into the Christian Church, to take their stand openly there, to join in the fellowship of pious labors, praises and prayers. The Church of God is the divine ordinance for strengthening the faith of believers, developing their graces and giving efficiency to their zeal.

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA.

BY THE REV. W. G. MOOREHEAD, D. D.

Feb. 23.—Acts 5:1-11.

THE sin and punishment of this pair of hypocrites present the first trace of a shade on the bright form of the young Church. Up to this point its history is one of unsullied light, the adversary opposing it only through the world without. Now, however, the shadow falls from those within. As in Eden the enemy could not assert his evil sway in his proper form, and hence chose one which would not excite suspicion, so in the efforts to obscure the manifestation of God in the Church he assumed a guise suited to effect his purpose—the guise of goodness. A foe within is more to be dreaded than a foe without, and evil in the seductive garb of devotedness is more dangerous than the antagonism of the world. No sooner, however, did evil reveal itself within the Christian circle than the Spirit in the Church detected and judged it.

The word “But” puts the conduct of Ananias and his wife in sharp contrast with that of Barnabas and the other Christians. It is a little word, yet on this small hinge grave issues sometimes turn. Matthew Henry calls it the “melancholy *but*.” “The door that swings on this sharp pivot,” writes Dr. Arnot, “opens and shuts the way of life.” The blessedness of the godly is described in the first Psalm as unfading, while of the opposite character

it is written, "Not so the ungodly, not so" (Sept. Version); "*but* are like the chaff which the wind driveth away." "The wicked is driven away in his wickedness; *but* the righteous hath hope in his death." Sometimes the hinge turns from darkness to light, as in the proverb above; and sometimes from light to darkness, as here in Acts. We pass suddenly from the warm sunshine of the "Son of Consolation" to the gloom of hypocrisy and fraud. Evil is often a close neighbor to good. Of old it was written, "The sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them." How near to each other are chaff and wheat! *but* the chaff is not wheat; it is finally separated from the wheat.

Teaching by opposites is an impressive method of instruction. It is the Bible method. We have opposite characters frequently submitted—the good as examples that should be imitated, the evil as examples that should be shunned. We may profit alike from the truth of the true and the lie of the false. Barnabas the Levite, with his deeds of self-sacrificing love, and Ananias, dying with a lie on his lips, are beacons to us—the one showing the light which guides into the port of safety, the other the light which warns from the place of doom.

I. *The sin of Ananias and Sapphira.* It is expressly stated to have been "lying unto the Holy Ghost" (v. 3). It will be observed that in vs. 3 and 4 the personality and deity of the Spirit are asserted in an incidental way. Peter varies the charge of lying to the Spirit in the third verse to lying to God in the fourth. The peculiar enormity of their sin consisted in its being against God the Spirit. It was an attempt to deceive and impose upon Him whose abiding presence in the Church was attested by many infallible proofs. It was not with simple falsehood or misrepresentation they were charged, but with the

deliberate effort to practice a deception on the Holy Ghost. They sought to cheat the apostles also, but that aspect of their conduct was so unimportant in comparison with the other that it is overlooked, decried. In the ninth verse the wife is asked why she and her husband had agreed together to "tempt the Spirit of the Lord." This is severer language than had been addressed to Ananias. It reveals the turpitude of their sin as an effort to test the Spirit in order to ascertain whether he dwelt in the Church and whether he was liable to be deceived.

It is noteworthy that a similar exchange of expression occurs in Ps. 78 : 36—"lied unto him," and v. 41, "tempted God." Num. 11 and 14 clearly show that the righteous judgment which Israel's "lying" to God and "tempting" him provoked was quite analogous to this of Ananias and Sapphira. It would be pressing their crime unwarrantably to pronounce it the sin against the Holy Ghost which is unpardonable; yet that it possessed some of the elements of that fearful transgression can hardly be doubted. They had ample evidence of the Spirit's presence in the Church—had witnessed the display of his power and grace; nevertheless they devised a scheme to test both his omniscience and his justice. Their case was aggravated far beyond that of Simon Magus or of Elymas. It resembles more closely that of Nadab and Abihu, of Achan and of Gehazi (Lev. 10; Josh. 7; 2 Kings 5 : 20-27), but was more criminal, because committed against greater light and intensified by a more profound hypocrisy. Let us note some of its aggravations.

I. *Their act was gratuitous.* In the community of goods which prevailed in the infant Church the rights of property were not obliterated; there was no compulsory communism. With each Christian it was optional to devote all or only a part of his property to the benefit of the brother-

hood; such is the plain inference from Peter's language. If the apostle knew that Ananias had no choice, but was compelled to give up all that he possessed when he became a Christian, the upbraiding questions of v. 4 would have been a cruel mockery. The sin was without coercion, and therefore spontaneous. Evil is intensified when it is gratuitous; it reveals a peculiarly malignant disposition.

2. *It was marked by covetousness.* There is a strange mingling of discordant elements in their act. They loved the praise of men, and were unwilling to be held in less consideration than Barnabas. But they loved money quite as well, even better. Zeal and faith of some sort led them to profess the name of Christ, but beneath their profession lurked a hateful lust for influence and greed of money. They were ambitious to be thought as self-sacrificing as any, but they would achieve that eminence more cheaply than others. The impulse to sell came, possibly, from the Spirit; and at first they may have intended to devote the whole proceeds to the common fund. But avarice counteracted the better feeling and exposed them to the assaults of the devil. Accordingly, they determined to bestow a part on the community, reporting it as the whole, and reserve a balance as a secret treasure for themselves. They would thus enjoy their private comforts, and at the same time be accredited with disinterested benevolence and magnanimity. Thus ambition was strong enough to win a partial victory over avarice; avarice was strong enough to triumph over truth. The plan seemed perfectly feasible, for "as easy as lying" is a proverb. They would serve two masters while appearing to serve only one. Nor were Ananias and his wife the first or the last who, even in connection with the holiest acts, have lied through the love of money. "For the love

of money is a root of all kinds of evil; which some reaching after have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows." "Hypocrites," the Fathers used to say, "may deny themselves some comforts if thereby they may hope to further their selfish aims."

3. *Unbelief* also entered into and aggravated their guilt. This had a twofold aspect. Obviously, they distrusted God. We can imagine that the failure of the sustentation-fund was the subject of anxious debate between them. "Suppose this community of goods should become exhausted, what then? A beautiful arrangement it now is, that we should have a common treasury, and all draw from it as need requires; but will it last? Is it not our duty to retain some security against the contingencies of the future?" They feared to endanger their comforts beyond recall; a portion of their property would be safest in their own hands.

Moreover, there appears to have been a worse feature than distrust of God in their act. There was the feeling, latent, unconfessed mayhap, that they would not and could not be detected in their deed. All knew that their land had been sold—probably themselves alone knew for what sum—and if they concealed it who would be the wiser? who could discover it? The Spirit? The inquiry of Peter addressed to Sapphira reveals the appalling depths of iniquity into which the unhappy pair had fallen, and fallen by their own deliberate act: "How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?"—*i. e.* to *try* or *test* whether the Spirit that dwelt in the apostles was really a discerner of the secrets of human hearts—whether he could discover and divulge their purposes? Their act challenged at once the omniscience of the Spirit, his veracity and his power to punish.

4. *The sin was preconcerted.* They "agreed together" to deceive the Church and the Spirit in the Church. The plan was concocted deliberately and dispassionately. No doubt they spent much time and thought in working out a device which should save appearances with the Church and gratify their avarice. Together they contrived the pious fraud, and they executed it together. This fact intensifies the criminality of their conduct, for it shows that the sin was deliberate and presumptuous, without the palliation of haste, ignorance or inconsideration. It was, in short, a conspiracy to cheat the Holy Ghost by lying. The resolution to stand by each other appears in the arraignment of Sapphira by the apostle (vs. 8, 9) and her answer. The opportunity was given her for repentance, an opening to clear her conscience by confession; but she missed it, refused it. The lie which they had agreed upon came glibly from her lips, and the irrevocable word was spoken. Crime is wellnigh mature when two persons plan a lie together and resolve to support each other in carrying it out.

5. *The devil's agency in the sin.* "Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie unto the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?" Covetousness and unbelief prompted the deceit, we might be disposed to say. But the apostle saw deeper. He saw that the devil had been joined by this guilty couple. The question "why" implies that resistance to Satan's influence had been possible—that complicity with him whose aim has always been to thwart God's gracious purposes was a voluntary act. The deed, therefore, had in it a malignant subtlety of evil which involved the perversion of conscience and will just at the moment when they seemed to be on the point of attaining a higher perfection than before.

Ananias is addressed, not as a helpless creature whom the enemy had duped and made his tool, but as one who had accepted his aid—who had opened the way and made him his partner and abettor. The extent of the alliance is indicated by the words, "*filled* thine heart"—terms which mean something more than to suggest or to encourage; they reveal the presence of an influence which engrossed the affections and dominated the will. God is patient toward those who, deceived by Satan, are by him overcome and led into sin; but he is intolerant of those who deliberately yield themselves to the tempter.

Whether consciously or unconsciously, this wretched pair was assisted by the devil in the attempt to impose upon the Spirit of God. The device which they adopted exposed them to his assaults. Had they been honest with themselves, with the Church, and, above all, with God, they had been kept from the snare of the fowler. Instead, they helped him weave and spread the net in which themselves were taken. Poor victims! They fancied they were quite safe in their admirable scheme. Every precaution was taken—nothing forgotten except God. Strange is sin, passing strange! Everything is remembered and provided for in the way of contingency, emergency, detail, save the one infinite fact of an omniscient, just and almighty God! What a creature is man! His very conscience becomes so tortuous and serpentine under the evils of sin that he thinks he can mock and cheat the great God himself. Oh, how idiotic we become when we make Satan our ally!

II. *Their Punishment*—*it was instantaneous.* As their sin challenged both the omniscience and justice of God, he at once vindicated the holiness and majesty of his character. Instantly his wrath streamed forth and consumed the guilty couple. One glance from that Eye

which cannot look upon sin was enough to strike them dead. They died, not from fright, not from chagrin at being detected in their fraud, but by the judicial act of the Spirit, who has said, "Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man" (Ps. 5 : 6).

But why were these persons so swiftly and severely judged? Have not men lied to God since? Avarice, ambition, dissimulation—open doors for Satan's entrance—have, alas! disfigured the professing Church in every generation, yet a like punishment has not been visited upon the transgressors. Why the difference? Certainly not because the sin is less flagrant in his sight. God's estimate of sin never varies. A complete answer cannot here be given, but let these points be noted :

1. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was peculiarly heinous and odious. Elements entered into it such as made the divine judgment a moral necessity. The like sin committed under similar circumstances doubtless would be followed by the same dreadful doom in any age.

2. At their death "great fear came upon all the Church, and upon as many as heard these things." To produce this impression was doubtless one of the objects intended. It was important also as a permanent testimony against similar offences in every age of the Church. "Such severity in the beginning of Christianity was highly proper in order to prevent any occasion for the like punishment for the time to come" (*Benson*).

3. This judgment connects with God's dispensational ways. At the opening of an economy a standard of holiness and uprightness is established which it is designed shall characterize the entire period. At the beginning any willful and gross departure from this standard is immediately punished. The *first* Sabbath-breaker, the tres-

pass of Nadab and Abihu at the *first* founding of the priesthood, and that of Achan at the *first* entrance into Canaan, were punished with death. At the opening of the Christian dispensation Ananias and Sapphira die by divine judgment. Such inflictions are at the start the exhibition of God's thoughts as to what the economy should be. Nothing false, hypocritical or presumptuous is to be tolerated in it. Thus established, man's responsibility follows to maintain the purity of the divine institution according to the pattern which God has given.

III. *The lessons taught* by this solemn incident are many—a few of which only may be designated.

And, *first*, mark well the divine abhorrence of prevarication. To lie to a fellow-creature is a grave offence, but to lie to the Holy Ghost is pre-eminently criminal and foolish—criminal, because committed against Him who is the Spirit of *truth*, loves truth and desires it; the height of folly, because He who searches all things, yea the deep things of God, cannot be deceived. How bitter our disappointment, how burning our indignation, when we discover that a trusted friend has proved treacherous and false to us in that thing especially wherein we had a right to expect him to be true to us! If falsehood kindle among men the deepest resentment, what must be God's feelings toward the hypocrite?

Secondly, the certainty of the exposure of hypocrisy. God will unmask the hypocrite. He may bear long with him, but sooner or later the exposure must come. All that it requires to show him in his true character is some pressure. The fable of ancient lapidaries touching the Chelydonian stone was, that it retained its brilliancy and lustre just so long as it was enclosed with gold, and no longer. Let the prosperity and safety in which the hypocrite is set be removed, and his affected piety is gone.

“Be sure your sin will find you out.” It may be covered never so deeply and concealed never so adroitly; God has a hundred ways of bringing it up and blazing it abroad. “Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

Thirdly. Religious enthusiasm without grace is dangerous. People run fearful risks when they profess more than their spiritual strength can carry. In times of great religious excitement the temptation is that men pledge themselves to what they cannot fulfill. In such cases there will ensue regret, then the wish to be well out of it, and finally the determination to extricate one's self at all costs. Or a different process: remarkable experiences are claimed; deliverance from all sin, a sort of “perfect holiness,” is announced as a personal possession; the most extravagant promises for the future are made. Then trials are encountered, and failure succeeds. Pride forbids the acknowledgment of failure; dissemblance is practiced; the appearance of earnestness and zeal is maintained; professions are as loud as ever; expressions of delight in religion, of conscious communion with the living God, are freely indulged. And for all this there is no basis in fact—it is a mere mask to hide the true state of the heart. Thus to pride is added insincerity, and to insincerity hypocrisy, lying to God and men. How much safer and nobler is the honest confession of a breakdown than such loud and hollow protestations!

May the solemn words ever be remembered (James 1: 14, 15)!—“God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempteth no man; but each man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lusts, and enticed. Then the lust, when it hath conceived, beareth sin; and the sin, when it is full grown, bringeth forth death.”

THE SANHEDRIM AND THE COLLEGE OF THE APOSTLES.

BY THE REV. S. J. NICCOLLS, D. D.

March 4.—Acts 5:17-32.

THE word "Then," with which this passage begins, points to the occasion for the prompt action and hot indignation of the high priest and his counselors. The work of the Lord was prospering mightily in Jerusalem through the ministry of the apostles. On account of their powerful testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus multitudes believed, and "great grace was upon them all." Added to this, there were signs and wonders wrought by the apostles. The sick were healed by them, and unclean spirits cast out. Multitudes from the neighboring cities and villages came to hear the wonderful tidings, and brought their sick with them. They even carried them into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that as Peter came by his shadow at least might fall on some of them; and they were healed, "every one." It was indeed a most extraordinary state of affairs, but certainly not such as ought to have excited the indignation and alarm of wise and good rulers. There was no mob violence, no thieving, no wild revelry; there was nothing tending to produce distress or disease; but, on the contrary, everything indicated the presence of a new, holy and divine life which had taken possession of men. There was a power present that cured disease, drove out evil

spirits, brought men to repentance and turned them from sin to righteousness. It produced the highest exhibition of practical beneficence the world had yet seen. The rich shared their goods with the poor, and the disciples "had all things in common." It was a time of peace and gladness among the people, such as Jerusalem had not witnessed since the days of Solomon.

Yet it was this state of affairs that filled the high priest and his friends with indignation, and moved them to take prompt action to arrest, if possible, the growing power of this new movement. So they laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison.

There is a little parenthetical clause in the narrative which explains, though it does not excuse, their malignant opposition. All who were acting with Annas, the high priest, were of "the sect of the Sadducees." They were the rationalists of those days, and believed neither in angels nor in spirits, nor in the resurrection of the dead. Hence their special dislike for the preaching of the apostles. It is recorded in the preceding chapter that when Peter and John were preaching in the temple the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, "being grieved that they taught the people and preached through Jesus the resurrection of the dead." They well knew that if the doctrine preached by the apostles prevailed, their influence as religious teachers and leaders of the people would be utterly destroyed. They were also enraged by the fact that the apostles had disregarded their command not to teach in the name of Jesus. So, pride, envy and bigotry move them to begin a religious persecution. What they cannot overthrow by argument must be suppressed by force. A prison, or, if need be, death, can silence these fearless witnesses of the risen Jesus.

There are men to-day who are grieved and indignant when the gospel is proclaimed with saving power and the fruits of the Spirit are manifested on every hand. They assail it as if it were a personal enemy and its triumph their condemnation. It is worth while, in view of the present efforts of rationalism and materialism, to ask what would have been the effect on the world's history if the Sadducees had succeeded in their attempt to exterminate the Christian faith. If instead of being the heirs of all that Christianity has wrought in the past we had as our inheritance the results of eighteen centuries of Sadducean doubt, despair and worldliness, what pen or tongue could describe the contrast?

In considering the lessons to be drawn from this history we see—(1.) *How God overrules persecution and opposition for the good of his Church.* It seemed indeed a dark hour for the cause of Christ when all of the apostles were shut up in the common prison, and left, apparently, in the power of their bitterest enemies. Their situation was one of extreme peril, for it was the evident purpose of the high priest and his party to condemn them to death by the vote of the Sanhedrim. What a memorable night that was when the entire college of the apostles was shut up in the common prison! They were now beginning to realize the truth of their Lord's words: "They shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake." But they had no reason for despondency, for in that same prediction concerning their trials was also the promise of help: "And it shall turn to you for a testimony." Certainly they had a warrant for believing that their present distress and danger would be overruled for the furtherance of the cause they represented; and in this faith they waited on

the Lord. Nor did they wait in vain. That very night his angel opened the prison-doors and brought them forth. It was a marvelous deliverance, but still most admirably adapted to the time and occasion. It was a triumphant answer to the teaching of the Sadducees, who denied the existence of angels, and it was also calculated to instruct and elevate the faith of the Church. It taught believers to look to the living Lord Jesus for help, and not to man.

Nor was the lesson lost. As mercies granted and remembered make us bold to ask for more, so, we may believe, this deliverance was remembered and mentioned on a subsequent occasion, when the disciples met together to pray for the release of the imprisoned and imperiled Peter. But more especially was this event blessed to the apostles themselves. The angel of the Lord who delivered them said, "Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life." Their trial and deliverance, after all, increased their qualifications to preach. Satan defeated himself. He thought by imprisoning and persecuting these disciples to intimidate and silence them; but instead he has made them better and bolder preachers than ever. Their divine call to preach is renewed by the angelic message. So it has ever been in the experience of God's faithful ministers. Many a sore trial or dark night of sorrow has fitted them to proclaim more clearly and positively the words of life. Out of their own experience they could testify to the goodness and faithfulness of God. The whole college of the apostles in prison, Paul in Nero's dungeon and John Bunyan in Bedford jail, are events which show how God can make the trials and persecutions of his servants advance his glory and turn to them "for a testimony."

The direction given the apostles by the angel is worthy

of a master of the art of homiletics. It is a short yet comprehensive rule for good preaching. They were not to teach secretly the new faith. The gospel method of extending the truth is in direct opposition to Jesuitical propagandism. They were to "stand and speak"—that is, boldly and openly declare their message. They were to go to the temple, where the people were gathered for worship. It was, at that time, the appropriate place for religious teaching, and especially could its ordinances and arrangements be used to point the people to Christ. They were to speak to the people, not to a select class; and the matter of their preaching was to be "all the words of this life," the complete gospel of the grace of God. No part was to be left out or blurred over. They were to tell of sin and its condemnation, as well as of pardon and life; of Christ the King and Judge, as well as of Christ the Saviour; they were to say "He that believeth not shall be damned," as well as "He that believeth shall be saved."

We cannot but admire the prompt and faithful obedience of the apostles. To stand in that public place and teach in the name of Jesus was to expose themselves again to danger and death; it would be to invite the repetition of the arrest and imprisonment of yesterday, and increase the wrath of their enemies. Carnal prudence might say, "You are now delivered; hide yourselves until this storm of indignation has swept by." But no; these were men who thought more of Christ than of their personal safety. The message which they had received from the angel was enough for their decision; they will obey God rather than the promptings of their own flesh or the will of men. Fresh from their experience of God's saving grace, how earnestly and with what power must they have taught! We may know that

our trials and deliverances are sanctified to us when they lead us to a prompt and cheerful obedience to the will of God.

(2.) *This history shows us rationalism confounded.* The high priest and his council slept that night in peace, or at least undisturbed by the visits of angels. They had the satisfaction that they had taken vigorous measures for suppressing the new fanaticism which was threatening to carry all before it. On the morrow the senate of the children of Israel, the great Sanhedrim, was to assemble and pass sentence upon these disturbers of the peace. There could be no doubt about the verdict. The troublesome leaders would soon be in their graves, beyond the hope of a resurrection. But instead of their anticipated triumph came their discomfiture. Evil is never so near its defeat as when it seems to be in the hour of its triumph. The morrow came; the high priest, his council and the Sanhedrim were assembled, and officers were sent to bring in the prisoners. As this was not the only time that men in power have arrogantly presumed that they had the disposing of Christ's cause in their own hands, we can easily gather from subsequent scenes in history how the members of the senate justified themselves in what they had determined to do. But soon their arrogancy and self-complacency give place to anxiety and consternation. The officers return, with their faces proclaiming their amazement, saying, "The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without, before the doors, but when we had opened we found no man within." The circumstances of the escape were such that it could not be accounted for by the action of the prisoners themselves, or secret friends, or treachery on the part of the guards. Here was something that confounded all their plans and put a new

phase on the matter before them. Just when rationalism thought to put down the supernatural, lo! it appears in a new manifestation before them. There was evidently a power working for these apostles which prison-walls, bolts, bars and guards of soldiers could not restrain. The perplexity of the council is further increased when one came saying, "Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people." When men escape from prison it is to hide themselves from those who imprisoned them, but these prisoners go at once to repeat their offence, and stand in the temple preaching to the people in the presence of their enemies. It was this conduct, as much as the strangeness of their deliverance, that impressed the senate. Then, as often since, men were made to see that there is a hidden, spiritual force about the gospel which cannot be accounted for, save on the ground that the life of Christ is in it.

(3.) *We can also learn from this that the enemies of the gospel are made to fear and respect those who are fearless in proclaiming it.* The high priest and his council have now heard where their former prisoners are, but how were they to arrest them? A short hour before they deemed it enough to send the ordinary officers to drag them from the common prison to their tribunal, without ceremony and with the usual violence and insult shown in Eastern countries to supposed criminals. But now these arrogant judges show a striking change in the manner of their acting. The record significantly says, "Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned." They were compelled to show special consideration to the apostles, and the latter are set before the Sanhedrim with something of honor and deference. The providence of God has so ordered it that the whole

college of the apostles is brought before the highest court of the old dispensation. The meeting between them is most significant: it presents one of those striking contrasts between the old and the new which history now and then furnishes. On the one side is a court of venerable and august authority, composed of men of the highest rank and influence in the nation; on the other is the highest earthly tribunal of the new dispensation, a body of men without rank or reputation for learning. On one side are men of this world, who have no aims or hopes beyond the grave—men of policy and self-interest, controlled in their actions by “fear of the people;” on the other side, men who are living for eternity, and who through the risen Christ have seen the glorified life beyond the grave—men whose conduct is shaped only by the fear of God. The issue between them is the struggle of the ages; they represent the parties of to-day.

The words of the high priest as he addresses the apostles have a form of superior authority, but there is that in them which betrays his inward fear and anxiety. With something of official pride he demands of them why they have disregarded the injunctions of the council and continued to preach in “this name.” But soon he unconsciously betrays his anxiety by charging them with the design of avenging the death of Christ: “Behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrines, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” Here is a manifestation of that dreadful irony in history which comes to mock guilty consciences. These were the men who, but a few months before, had boldly assumed the responsibility of the crucifixion of Jesus, and had joined in the cry, “His blood be upon us and our children!” Now, as if an awakening conscience was apprehending coming vengeance, they say anxiously, “You intend to bring this

man's blood upon us." In their guilt and hardness of heart they were far from understanding the true nature of the gospel. The doctrine with which the apostles had filled Jerusalem was not one of vengeance upon the murderers of Christ, but of pardon and salvation to all through his shed blood. The gospel comes to guilty and sinful men crying, "Fear not." The only thing they need fear is their rejection of its grace, for then indeed it becomes a "savor of death unto death."

(4.) *Finally, we have in this history, Peter's address to the Sanhedrim.* It is the jewel of which all the rest is only the casket. The chief value of this historical narrative is, that it helps us to a better understanding of those great truths which Peter utters in the name of the apostles. The Lord Jesus had once said to his disciples, "But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you." Certainly that promise was fulfilled in this case. As a defence nothing could be more admirable and to the point than the words of Peter. The specifications in the indictment against the apostles were two: First, that they had disobeyed the lawful authority in continuing to preach after they had been strictly charged to speak no more in the name of Jesus; Second, that by their preaching they were stirring up the people to avenge the crucifixion of Jesus upon the Sanhedrim. To the first Peter replies, "We ought to obey God rather than men." This was their justification for the disobedience charged. In answer to the second he fearlessly tells the Sanhedrim their guilt, and charges upon them the death of Jesus. He tells them to their faces that they slew Jesus and hanged him on a tree. But, instead of seeking to avenge that death through their

blood, he has glad tidings for them. That same Jesus God has raised up "to be a Prince and a Saviour for to give repentance and forgiveness of sins." He and his brethren were there to witness this to them, and to offer them pardon and salvation in the name of Christ. This was their only intent. Was there any murderous purpose in this? Did such doctrines savor of vengeance? How completely the tables are turned! The prisoners stand before their judges offering them pardon and life in the name of Jesus. So to the world that persecutes and hates it the gospel is ever offering mercy and forgiveness.

But the words of Peter have an application far beyond the hour and circumstances of their first use. Never did statesman or philosopher speak more wisely or utter more significant truth in behalf of freedom and just government than did this Galilean fisherman. In the declaration, "We ought to obey God rather than men," we have the great charter of civil and religious liberty, the true declaration of independence for all men. It is the solid principle that lies at the foundation of all true liberty, and, as wrought out and applied to human affairs, it has brought to us all the blessings of free government which the world to-day enjoys. Prompt and loving obedience to God is true liberty for men. Conscience must first be emancipated before there can be a free man. "If the truth shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." In Peter's immortal saying we have the short yet expressive creed of true liberty. It has proved itself a revolutionary power in the world, and tyrants and oppressors, both civil and ecclesiastical, have hated and feared it. The greatest struggles of the past have been those made in its defence, and the most significant and glorious triumphs for oppressed humanity are those that have vindicated and upheld this same principle. But the gospel, which eman-

cipates man from human tyranny and ennobles him by setting forth and demanding his supreme allegiance to God, does more for him. It comes with a revelation of God's wondrous love. It tells of Jesus his Son freely "delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification." It reveals him to us, who deserve death on account of sin, as a Prince and Saviour, reigning at God's right hand, and having all power to give repentance and forgiveness of sins to us. Surely there is nothing in this to make us dread it as an enemy, and yet how many misapprehend its true meaning and turn from it with aversion!

It is most significant that in the defence which Peter makes, as indeed in all apostolic preaching, special prominence is given to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The apostle well knew that the larger portion of the Sanhedrim was of the sect of the Sadducees, yet he does not hesitate in his testimony. Face to face with the very body of men that had condemned Jesus to death, these calm, earnest, fearless witnesses repeat their testimony to Christ's resurrection. They are there to be examined further if the senate wished. It was indeed a masterly position. On the reality of the resurrection everything turned; if it was true, then beyond all question Jesus was the Son of God, the long-expected Messiah. This was the time, if ever, to have disproved the testimony of these men and to have shown them to be impostors or self-deceived. But it could not be done.

There are three great indestructible facts that have remained all through the ages as witnesses to the reality of the resurrection. The first is the testimony of the apostles; the second is the Christian Church; the third is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The proof which they furnish is conclusive, and we may rest assured that our holy faith, so glorious in the hopes which it inspires and so

wonderful in the destiny which it opens for sinful men, is founded upon the ROCK.

In conclusion, the whole passage suggests an urgent personal question: On which side do you, to whom this message comes, stand? The day was when men seeking greatness and happiness would have counted themselves honored could they have been numbered with the Sanhedrim. But time brings some striking reversals of human judgment. The judges and wise men are now in disgrace, and the despised prisoners are exalted in imperishable glory. Seen in the light of the judgment of history, you cannot hesitate as to the wise choice. But the judgments which God has written in history are only foreshadows and types of the great final judgment which shall be affirmed by the risen Saviour. You must take your stand for or against him, and be judged accordingly. Will you, then, join yourselves to the company of the apostles and the noble army of martyrs and confessors, who, through the ages have borne witness for him, or will you stand with men who, blinded by pride or deluded by worldly wisdom, reject him?

THE SEVEN CHOSEN.

BY THE REV. HERVEY D. GANSE.

March 11.—Acts 6:1-15.

THIS chapter describes the appointment of the first deacons, and begins the particular history of Stephen, the most notable among them.

The “murmuring” which led to the appointment of deacons did not necessarily imply wrong intent on either side. It must be remembered that the members of the Church in Jerusalem held their worldly goods in common. Of this generous and exceptional system this is not the place to speak. The Church which adopted it was made up entirely of Jewish converts. But the Jews of Jerusalem were in that day of two classes. There were those who were at home in the Holy City, and those who had come back to it from other lands to which their fathers had been scattered, and were to a good degree “strangers in Jerusalem.” The most obvious distinction between these two classes would be that of language. The Jerusalem Jews would speak Hebrew—of course in the modified form in which it was then spoken in Judea; the stranger Jews would speak Greek, which was a sort of universal language in that day, as the French has been in modern Europe. More than two centuries before this the Hebrew Scriptures had been translated into Greek, and from that time the Jews

who lived abroad had not required the knowledge of their mother-tongue, even for the reading of their sacred books. Thus the distinction of language, while it marked no distinction of blood, plainly marked the distinction of previous residence. Supposing, then, the Jerusalem Church to have made an honest attempt to apportion the daily supplies among these two classes of its members, the Jews long resident in Jerusalem, and therefore better known, would have a manifest advantage over the strangers; and if any of these latter were diffident and retiring, as the widows might be expected to be, their loss by pure oversight might come to be very hard to bear. Of course, if the distribution was intended to be unequal the grievance must have been far greater; and this, very evidently, is what the Greek-speaking Jews believed, for they counted their widows "neglected," and they "murmured" accordingly. Their view of the matter, though not at all confirmed to us, was not unnatural, for we know that the Jews of Palestine were accustomed to show scanty respect to their foreign brethren. The murmurers, therefore, even if mistaken, should by no means be counted as factious disturbers of the Church.

The evil being discovered, the apostles dealt with it at once; and their course is interesting, as well on account of what they did not do as what they did.

They did not foment sore feeling by a profitless investigation into details of blame on the side of accusers or accused. A very little of human infirmity might have led them to do this, since the distribution had certainly been made by their own agents, and it was natural to defend them. Passionate mistakes in church rulers can easily develop an honest misunderstanding into a bitter strife.

They did not, in their zeal to prevent future irregular-

ities, take the whole care of the distribution upon themselves. They foresaw how such occupation would interfere with spiritual work, not only in their case, but with all future ministers of the word; for though the distributions, as then made, were peculiar to the church in Jerusalem, the apostles had the best warrant for knowing that the Church should have "the poor always with" her, and that the attention justly due them would never be small. So they took care that the distinctive office of "prayer and the ministry of the word" should not be encumbered with the duty, however sacred, of "ministering to tables."*

The apostles did not summarily appoint the new officers whom they saw to be so necessary. Yet they did not, on the other hand, throw it upon the Church to decide whether such officers should be appointed or not. But this they did: with the authority of Christ's apostles they decided that the new appointment should be made; yet they left it to the whole Church to select the officers by whom it was to be served. This brief but significant history, coupled as it is with the subsequent and equivalent instructions of Paul to Timothy (1 Tim. 3:8-10), settles both the duty and the rights of the body of the Church in regard to an office which can no more be spared than the eldership itself.

Upon the men so chosen the apostles laid their hands, with prayer, to show that as Christ's highest officers they put their seal upon the Church's choice, and desired and

* It is to be observed that while our Version, and the Revised as well, speak of the daily "*ministration*," of "*serving tables*," and of the "*ministry*" of the word, the original for all these expressions is one word, though in its two forms of verb and noun. It is the same word that has come down to us in "*deacon*," which means, accordingly, "one who serves or ministers." The expression "*serving tables*," when compared with that of "*ministering to tables*," has a sort of contemptuous sound. With that shade of expression the apostles are not chargeable.

expected for these new helpers God's gracious endowment for their work.

Since the names of all the seven deacons are Greek, it has been thought by some that they were all selected from the Greek-speaking converts. But such an unequal arrangement would hardly have been made, and Greek names, we know, were sometimes borne by pure Hebrews. Yet the fact that *all* these names are Greek is proof at least of this: that the complaining party was very generously represented among the new officers—an exhibition of good feeling and wisdom worth studying by all brethren who have honest differences.

A very ancient tradition identified the Nicolas named among these seven with the founder of the heretical sect of the Nicolaitans, so severely condemned by our Lord in the epistles to the churches (Rev. 2). But the proof is too doubtful to be relied upon, and an evil report, even against a man eighteen centuries dead, is not to be believed except upon good evidence.

No lasting importance seems to belong to the number of deacons appointed. It was a number that met the existing need. Fewer or more may be necessary under other circumstances. But great interest and importance attach to the qualifications which the apostles demanded in the new officers. They were to be men of "honest report"—of "good report," the New Version has it—literally, "witnessed to"—namely, by the whole community. Such men would be safe from the suspicion of partiality in their work. They were to have "wisdom" as well; and they would need it in meeting demands which would not always be reasonable and unselfish, even when they came from Christians. And, beyond all this, they were to be "full of the Holy Ghost"—a requisition warranted not only by the specific work of Chris-

tian love to which they were appointed, including, as it did, abundant opportunities of spiritual duty, but by the greater emergencies into which the new officers were sure to be brought.

In that day and in Jerusalem every Christian was a marked man, and was sure to be challenged for the faith that was in him; and every earnest believer, however humble his place, was ready with his answer. By this individual zeal the early Church grew. But it is evident that the attention both of friends and enemies would be most attracted to those Christians whose office made them noticeable. In the case of the apostles this was manifest enough. In an inferior but considerable degree it was to be expected of these new men who, by the choice of all the Church, took up the duty of the daily ministration. The office which made them, in form, only the distributors of temporal supplies, was sure to make them, in effect, champions of the truth. In this regard, then, they needed pre-eminently to be men not only of good report, but full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom.

The justice of this representation is distinctly borne out in regard to two of the seven—namely, Philip, who became known as “the Evangelist,” and Stephen, whose brief but glorious history immediately follows. But it is fair to believe that the other five, whose personal career is not recorded, were also useful far beyond the function to which they were specially appointed. As much as this is naturally implied when the record of their ordination is immediately followed by a statement like that of the seventh verse: “And the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.” To this result, no doubt, the peace and good feeling which followed the deacons’ appointment largely con-

tributed. But the holy and zealous bearing of seven new men full of the Holy Ghost, who felt themselves put forward with solemn ordination into a place of trust and constant duty, was well adapted to hasten the Church's growth.

It was a fact well worth recording that a large element of that growth consisted of priests, who had had their living in the old religion, and whose sacred office, relinquished at so great a cost, could not but give their example special weight with the people. May it not also be hinted in the narrative that the sympathy which the Church in Jerusalem showed for the temporal wants of its members, the thorough organization that had been given to that part of the Church's work, and the Christian bearing of the wise and holy men who discharged it, had had some incidental relation to these numerous conversions among the priests? What the deacons supplied was so moderate, no doubt, as to have bribed no priest to resign his priesthood, but it may have saved any priest who was poor from the need of reckoning the hunger of his children as one of the conditions of his open acceptance of Christ.

These converted priests are said to have been "obedient to the faith." Both this striking expression and the courageous duty which it then described prove how far true faith in Christ is from being a mere sentiment or a self-interested expectation of salvation. It is only by a man's obedience to what he believes that his life is ever taken from under the control of mere sense and passion; and what a Christian believes concerning God and Christ not only persuades his judgment, but commands his conscience. The highest style of human action is "obedience to the faith."

The interest of the narrative now greatly increases, for we enter upon the particular history of Stephen.

Verse 8 describes him as "full of faith and power;"

the New Version, and apparently with good reason, has it "grace and power." The meaning does not suffer by the change, for *grace* includes *faith*, with all the other fruits of the Spirit. In this case it seems to have included as well the endowment of working miracles, for the power which Stephen manifested was not only spiritual, but miraculous. Whether in the larger or the stricter sense, it is "grace" that gives "power" for the work of God.

Could a more commonplace thing occur in the history of a man of "grace and power" than that he should be appointed the provider for a certain list of tables? But see what grew out of the appointment, and, to such a man, how naturally!

His new duties took him from house to house. Of course he found the sick and the unbelieving, and, conscious of his miraculous endowment, would be zealous to heal and to convince. Thus it came to pass that "he did great wonders and miracles among the people." The natural result followed. The unbelieving Jews began to dispute with him, using at first, so far as the original expression indicates, no discourtesy of manner. But their numbers and concert evinced their determined purpose to oppose him; for it appears that the representatives of three different synagogues united in the discussion. One was the synagogue of the "Libertines," the designation, probably, of the descendants of those Jews who had been sent captive to Rome by Pompey about sixty-three years before Christ. These, having been liberated from servitude, and so acquiring the name of "Libertines" or "Freedmen," had afterward, on account of their Jewish faith, been driven out of Italy. It would not be strange if among the four hundred and eighty synagogues, said by rabbinical writers then to have been in Jerusalem, there were one synagogue of these

liberated Jews from Rome. Then the African Jews, from Cyrene and Alexandria, might naturally have a synagogue together; and the Jews from Cilicia and what was called Asia, two parts of Asia Minor, would unite in another synagogue.

The attention of these three congregations had been drawn to Stephen, and members of each united in attacking his Christian faith. Since Tarsus was a city of Cilicia, and Saul was a helper of Stephen's murderers, it is entirely probable that a good part of this dispute with Stephen had been carried on by Saul. But the single Christian champion was more than the equal of them all, for they could not stand up against "the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake"—a statement which in the Greek, as in the English, seems to have been intended as a reminder of the very language of Christ's promise: "For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist" (Luke 21:15). The Revisers therefore appear to have done well in assuming that the word "spirit" here refers to the Holy Ghost, and in printing it, accordingly, with a capital.

The enemies of Stephen, unable to answer in argument, and unwilling to witness his spreading influence, went on to oppose him with force. They could accuse him to the Sanhedrim, which, though without authority in civil matters, could judge and convict in religious, and with great probability, as the crucifixion of Christ had shown, that the Roman authorities would allow the execution of their sentence. It was easy to frame an accusation, for Stephen had certainly said such things concerning the Jewish temple and the Mosaic rites as with small but material perversion would sound to Jewish ears like blasphemy. He must have said that Jesus of Nazareth had foretold the destruction of that place, and that the effect of his fulfill-

ment of the Mosaic types would be to supersede them, though by a wider and more spiritual faith that would crown them with glory. The Epistle to the Hebrews sets forth the spirit of reverence and affection in which a Jew, enlightened by Christ, estimated the ancient religion. No other spirit could Stephen have shown, as his devout review of God's dealings with Israel and by Moses sufficiently proves. But his bigoted enemies carefully misrepresented him into a blasphemous despiser of the temple and its worship. So, with witnesses prepared to prove this charge against him, they had him seized and brought before the Sanhedrim. There they made their charge and produced their evidence.

To the recital thus far carried this chapter adds a single striking statement that foretells the martyr's bearing to the end of the brief and terrible ordeal: "And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel."

From these words some have inferred that a supernatural lustre shone on Stephen's face. But it is not well to infer more miracles than are clearly declared. Moreover, the charm and the instructiveness of the statement seem to lie in the fact—made certain not only by this history, but by many another—that the enthusiasm for Christ which the Holy Spirit breathes into an heroic soul at the view of duty and danger can clothe a mortal face with a spiritual glory that makes it like "the face of an angel."

In addition to some other lessons already hinted at, the chapter teaches us—

(1.) What a spirit of reasonable, practical goodness has characterized the Church from its beginning. Its great aim, indeed, is to advance the glory of God and the spiritual good of men. But, like Christ among the hungry

multitudes in the wilderness, it has to deal with men's bodies as well as their souls; and it deals with both in Christ's spirit. That modern congregation which does not stand forth in its own community as the wisest and kindest of possible organizations for the temporal aid of its needy members does dishonor to New-Testament example and law, and, above all, to that Master who went about doing good.

(2.) Two offices so distinct and so important as the "ministration" of God's word to the whole Church and the "ministration" of the Church's dutiful supplies to her needy members ought to be committed to different officers. The ecclesiastical system that makes of deacons an inferior order of clergy on their way to higher orders has no warrant whatever in the New Testament, nor in the nature of the duty to which deacons were appointed.

(3.) It is none the less true, however, that when a Christian man is appointed to a definite office his Christian manhood remains a personal thing, and is not to be narrowed to the measure of official work. The sacramentarian idea of a church officer is that of the office personified. The New-Testament idea is that of a Christian man who discharges an office, but who, in the office and over and above the office, is an individual Christian man. This responsible personality does not entitle him to despise official distinctions and to pass from office to office at his own choice. Stephen, the deacon, could not, by virtue of his consecrated personal zeal, pretend to apostleship. But, outside of the distinctive office, whether of deacon or apostle, there was a great common ground of Christian duty. Loyalty to Christ, courage and martyrdom, were not the functions of an office, but the movement of an heroic soul. So, it was not the deacon Stephen, but the Stephen who was a deacon, that flamed

out in sudden splendor before the ancient Church, and flamed with a splendor that has not yet grown dim. Whoever, therefore, will wisely compare the two halves of this chapter will learn this chief lesson: That a true Christian will measure his duty to his Saviour not by the pledges which he may have made concerning particular work, but by his general pledge and loving choice to do his utmost, letting opportunity and grace instruct him. Those Christians who abstain from teaching because they have never promised to teach, from attending the prayer-meeting and aiding in it, from speaking for Christ in private and before men, from giving conscientiously and freely for the spread of the gospel, and all because they have not promised to do these things, may well ask themselves whether Stephen, in becoming a deacon, promised to be a martyr. Yet if they search well, they can find that promise, but far back of his deaconship, at that point in his life in which he did what every sincere believer does—devoted to himself without reserve to his Master's service and glory.

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR.

BY THE REV. HANFORD A. EDSON, D. D.

March 18.—Acts 7 : 54-60-8 : 1-4.

THIS is a riot, not a case in court. There had indeed been a convening of the "council." Doubtless they had assembled in the historic hall Gazith, the "stone chamber," in close proximity to the temple.* Amidst the general excitement in Jerusalem few of the seventy judges would voluntarily absent themselves. They had taken care to "set up false witnesses." The accused was permitted to speak in his own behalf. But no Baal-Rib, or counsel, was designated for his defence. Not a single witness was summoned in his favor. Immediately after the decision against the prisoner his execution followed, although the law distinctly required one day's delay. And it is more than doubtful whether at this period the Sanhedrim had the power of inflicting death at all.

The proceedings recall the scenes of another "trial," in which, perhaps less than a year before, Stephen's Master had been condemned. The familiar figures are unchanged. Possibly Caiaphas was yet high priest.† Hannas, his father-in-law, the fortunate intriguer,‡ was sure to be at his side. Joazer and Eleazer, brothers of Herod's wife

* Conybeare and Howson's *St. Paul*, vol. i. p. 75.

† Josephus, *Antiquities*, xviii. 4, 3; cf. also MacDuff's *Footsteps of St. Paul*.

‡ Josephus, *Antiquities*, xx. 9, 1.

Mariamne, were there. Simon, surnamed "the Quarrelsome," the murderer of St. James, was another councilor. Ismael Ben Phabi, "the handsomest man of his day," luxurious and shameless; Johanan Ben Nebedai, a glutton who could not restrain himself from making feasts of the sacred temple-offerings; and Issachar, who in his subsequent pontificate would not sacrifice without silk gloves "for fear of soiling his hands,"—were all among the "judges."* Is it likewise possible that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus still held their places and helplessly observed this other crime?

The man who stood before the semicircle of haughty dignitaries was himself a marvel. Among his friends his character and his career had awakened a singular enthusiasm. The leader of "The Seven," he had won admiration that is almost unique—"full of faith and the Holy Ghost," doing "great wonders and miracles among the people," with such gifts of argument and persuasion that disputants "were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spake." These graces of mind and heart appeared, too, in a striking majesty and beauty of countenance, so that even those who hastened to kill him, "looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel."† Stephen had grown up into Christ in all things. His energy had been prodigiously effective. The whole city had been put into commotion. Bad men were passionately agreed. This deacon stood straight across their path. How might they be rid of him?

When it came to speaking, there was really little to be said—to them. Need we talk to a storm? Do we choose words for wolves? It does not appear that

* Geikie's *Life of Christ*, chs. 60 and 61.

† Ex. 34 : 35; Matt. 26 : 3; Luke 24 : 4; Acts 1 : 10; Rev. 18 : 1.

Stephen even hoped to move that high priest. As to what he really did intend, there has been a long debate. But he was probably speaking to the future, thinking aloud, building better than he knew. Providence was taking care of his speech. It was given him in that same hour. So the ideas have no shackles on. The truth has made him free. Though the Christian Church is scarcely one year old, here is a man who already knows that religion is not provincial. He has discovered the purpose of the Messiah; he can see Jehovah's pity for the whole race. With a Gentile largeness and liberty of interpretation he expounds the Scriptures.*

What would be the effect of such discourse upon priests and scribes and elders may readily be anticipated. He has only to look into their angry eyes. Then, at last, he comes back to the actual, the present, the seventy ferocious men reclining around him: "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears!" That is enough. The address is quickly broken off. "They gnashed on him with their teeth." It is a scene of tumultuous disorder and violence. Nothing but a human sacrifice will now suit these priests. These gluttons want a feast of blood. These white, soft hands thrill rapturously as they grasp the stones of the street for murder.

A brief delay must be endured, however. These people can bribe witnesses. They can incite a riot. They can head a mob. They can stone a saint. But they have squeamish consciences notwithstanding. They are as sensitive and systematic as Mormons. The crime is nothing, but they are particular about the place. Jerusalem is sacred. This sort of business must be transacted beyond the walls. Away they go, therefore, dragging their

* See a paraphrase of Stephen's speech in Vaughan's *Church of the First Days*. Consult Pressensé's *Early Years of Christianity*.

victim through the gate that now bears his name, and then promptly the air grows dark with missiles.*

But while this tempest rages, and in the midst of it all, there is one still place. It is the martyr's own heart. He is not disturbed. He has no resentments and no fears. For his enemies he prays as his Master did.

“The glory which our God surrounds,†
The Son of man, th' atoning wounds,—
He sees them all, and earth's dull bounds
Are melting fast away.”

It does not seem far to heaven, and it was not far. Jesus, “standing,” risen from the throne, is ready to aid his friend, to hear his last words and to “receive” his spirit. So the sufferer “fell asleep.” Yet how wakeful he must have been entering Paradise! How far from sleep the heavenly hosts must have been, summoned to welcome the first Christian martyr!

They were not all placemen and partisans in Jerusalem, however. Still adhering to the Jewish Church‡ were “devout men,” filled with shame and sorrow on account of this new religious murder. Though it were but a poor atonement for the crime, they would at least secure for the bruised body of Stephen all appropriate tokens of respect. And they “made great lamentation over him.”

One witness at least there was of these events whose dreams for many a night they disturbed. Like serpents' fangs they stung his conscience. It is probable that he had already been prominent among “them of Cilicia”

* Consult Prof. Hackett on “Stoning,” and Dean Stanley on “Stephen,” in Smith's *Dictionary*.

† Ps. 68 : 17 ; Matt. 16 : 27 ; 24 : 30 ; Mark 14 : 62 ; Luke 2 : 9.

‡ See Hackett's *Acts*, *ad. loc.*

“disputing with Stephen.”* Perhaps to his hearing of the address before the council we may owe the extended report preserved for us. At any rate, with the mob he strode from the “stone chamber” to the city-walls. He was close enough to the actual violence to see the face and hear the voice of the expiring Christian. He must have observed the public grief and the decorous tender regard for the body. All this was more than he could bear. In after years, his memory still clinging to the scene, he wrote with a pang, “I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death.”

(I.) We can see how bad men are made to serve the good cause. A wise prayer for the devil would be, “Save me from my friends.” It was the design of these conspirators to cripple, and if possible to destroy, the infant Church. But it is manifest how they only strengthened and enlarged it.

Perhaps not much is to be said of the indignation against such ecclesiastical brutality which was for a time apparent. The way in which the martyr was carried to his burial proves, however, that for more than one mind the lesson was effective. The people had again seen the contrast between piety and pretence. In such a case the charm of real goodness could not but win friends. It is not safe, indeed, in any case to despise even the humblest virtue. But when a good name has attained the eminence and force of Stephen’s, it will be found to have a surprising vitality. “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit.” So it proved here. There were men and women who night and day could only think with tears how this brave servant of the truth had been

* Schaff’s *Apostolic Church*, p. 211.

struck down. A great and successful teacher he had been, but now, though quiet in his grave, the following he had was larger than it had been even during his most fervid activity.

See, too, how this crime wrought upon the young man Saul. The rioters had killed Stephen, but they had done their utmost to make it sure that the most significant and mighty personage among them must desert their company. They had started the train of circumstances which was to find a fit completion at the gate of Damascus. So does a bad purpose blunder and defeat itself. It is like Pharaoh kindling Moses, like Goliath summoning David. A pope makes Luther necessary, and finds him; King Charles brings Cromwell out; the Georges develop Washington; and a prison gives to the world John Bunyan and his book.

We must observe, too, the persecution that arose. Having tasted blood, these wild beasts were ravenous. They "made havoc of the Church." The disciples were driven out of the capital. But "they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word." "Thus were the sparks of the gospel blown by the stormy wind into various parts of Palestine, and even to Phenicia, Syria and Cyprus."*

At every point, therefore, were the enemies of the gospel made to aid the gospel. They excited popular indignation against their own cruelty. They secured the planting in the mind of Saul of germs of truth "which, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, afterward developed into the Epistles with which we are now so familiar."† "And the more havoc" they made of the Church

* Cf. Acts 8 : 1, 4; 11 : 19, 20. On this third persecution in Jerusalem consult Neander's *Planting and Training of the Christian Church*.

† Taylor's *Paul the Missionary*, p. 10.

at Jerusalem the more quickly was the Church established in many distant localities. We need not doubt that for God's friends Paradise Lost will in good time have its sequel in Paradise Regained.

(2.) We seldom know at the time how much good we may be doing. Our opportunity often comes when we are least aware of it.

Stephen could not have failed to see that he was fighting "a good fight." It perhaps occurred to him that his death might aid the truth more than his life could have done. But how little he suspected the real culmination of his power! "If Stephen had not prayed, the Church would not have had Paul," Augustine said. There was the tremendous circumstance. On the edge of the savage throng was that young Cilician holding the raiment of the executioners. What of it? Who need care? Why should the martyr's thoughts be diverted to him? Anybody can see the reason now. There stood the great apostle, the foremost man of all the Christian centuries. And in this linking of Stephen's life with Paul's lies the martyr's force in history.

Such opportunities we easily fail to meet. They are not likely to be repeated. If we have no mind for them, no heart for them, life creeps on, commonplace, feeble, small. We stay at home some stormy Sunday from the Bible-class, and miss the boy whom that day's fidelity might have rescued for righteousness. Care and business are allowed to hinder preparation of a Bible-lesson, but for us and for those we teach that was the lesson of the whole year. We pass a ragged child without a word of Christian kindness, and that child was possibly a second Robert Morrison. There were divisions in the Church, there was torpor in the prayer-meeting, vice was eating away the vigor of society around us. At the critical

moment a wise method might have restored peace and life and virtue. But we were not in the mood; we lacked the grace and courage. Just then it was that Providence had led us up to the summit of life's privilege. But we only marched up and marched down again. Stephen made no such failure. Though quite unconscious of the sublimity of the hour, he kept on in duty. That once more proved to be the path of glory.

(3.) We may also learn that our visions come when we need them. "He saw heaven opened, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God."

To troubled, weary Christians the fear will sometimes arise that the Redeemer has forgotten them. "Carest thou not that we perish?" is apt to be the cry of unbelief in storms and perils. But in the nick of time comfort comes. There is "grace to help in time of need." Jacob, solitary, absent from home, laying his head upon a stone at Jabbok, has a meeting with the angel. Elijah, under the juniper tree, fleeing from Jezebel, hungry, longing to die, is fed from Heaven, and goes "in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights." To Jesus himself, fasting, tempted of the devil, the angels minister. And for Stephen there comes this satisfying vision of heaven.

"Looking upward, full of grace,
He prayed, and from a happy place
God's glory smote him on the face."

(4.) It is clear that such dying as Stephen's is possible only as the fruit of such living as his.

Thus far in the brief Christian history death had often served as a dreadful warning. In utter darkness Judas, an apostle, had gone to "his own place." Ananias and Sapphira had met their sudden doom. Now, however, in contrast with such dismal dying, comes this martyr's

victory. It is a moment of passion and blood. But those hoarse cries we scarcely hear, the heart is so entranced with the music of the martyr's prayer. We scarcely see the scowling murderers, such beauty shines upon the face of the peaceful Christian. Heaven is opened to us too. We behold the Redeemer sustaining in death the sufferer who had been true in life. If we would "die the death of the righteous," we must be careful to live the righteous life.

We need envy no man's triumph, whether in death or in life, as if it were luck instead of labor. "Do men gather grapes of thorns?" Whoever meets occasions, furnishing what is needed, only discloses the completeness of former preparations of mind and heart. When emergencies (like our great Civil War, for example) suddenly call for leaders and heroes, from their wood-wagons and ploughs and forges and shops and books the needed men start forward. It is no accident. The leadership, the heroism, was there already. Knowledge had been slowly gained, character had been quietly disciplined; they were but waiting for their hour. For us, too, the hour will be sure to strike if only we will be worthy of it. For those who have a little of Stephen's grace, Stephen's Lord will lead the way to Stephen's victory.

It is no wonder that those who keep saints' days should set St. Stephen's Day in the calendar. Fitly might the whole Church, from the joys and thanksgivings of Christmas, turn on the day succeeding to think of Christ's good friend and martyr. "*Heri natus est Christus in terris, ut hodie Stephanus nasceretur in cœlis,*" was the reflection of early piety. Shall we be as quick always to trace today's human glories and triumphs to the cradle of Mary's Child?

SECOND QUARTER.

THE NATURAL HEART.

BY THE REV. HOWARD CROSBY, D. D.

April 1.—Acts 8 : 14-25.

ALL that we know about Simon of Samaria is found in this passage. Tradition tells of his earlier life, his after career, his contest with Peter at Rome and his death, but we can give very little credence to these stories* that were so largely invented in the early ages to fill up the *lacunæ* in the inspired narrative. What the Holy Spirit desired the Church to know about him we have here, and that is all with which we have to do.

He was a Samaritan, and apparently declared himself to the Samaritans to be the Messiah, whom they had been expecting as well as the Jews. He said he was the great power of God, or, more exactly, "that power of God which is called Great." The Samaritans looked upon the angels as uncreated powers, so that by this phrase Simon professed himself to be above the angels, the incarnate power of God himself. For some time, by the help of magical arts, he had astonished the whole people of Samaria, so that they believed in his assumptions. He had evidently unbounded ambition, extraordinary acuteness and a thoroughly godless soul. Such was the con-

* Justin and Eusebius are the chief authorities for these stories.

dition of things when Philip, one of the Seven (and not the apostle), visited the city of Samaria, and began to preach Christ, and heal the sick and infirm, and cast out demons from those who had been possessed.

Philip's teaching and action were so direct and powerful in simplicity and openness, and formed such a contrast to the sayings and doings of Simon, that, with the joy of the people at the cure of their sick, there sprang up instantly an earnest attention to Philip's doctrine and a belief in its truth. Simon suddenly found himself abandoned as the people in numbers received baptism from Philip and confessed their faith in Jesus, the true Messiah. Simon's imposture was exploded. His influence in Samaria was at an end. His almost absolute sway over the hearts of that people had melted away as in a moment. The crafty man was ready for the emergency. He saw that Philip had marvelous power, and he would join himself to him. He did not heed Philip's teachings, but he was astonished at the miracles. His low mind probably considered them the results of magic, and he would, by joining Philip, become possessed of the secret. In this way he would retrieve his lost fortunes. Accordingly, he presents himself as a believer, and is baptized.

When the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard of this first spread of the gospel beyond Jewish limits, although the scene was among the Samaritans, whom the Jewish people especially hated, they sent two of their number, Peter and John—the two who had before the Sanhedrim acted as representatives of the Christian Church, and had there proclaimed Jesus as Messiah—to visit those whom Philip had baptized and to confer upon them the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit. As the two apostles laid their hands upon the baptized Samaritans miraculous manifestations appeared in them, probably in the form of

speaking with foreign tongues. Whether Simon was one of those thus affected we are not told, but the natural inference is that he was, as no exception is made to the general statement. That gifts of the Holy Ghost were bestowed on unregenerate men we know from the case of Balaam, whose inspired prophecies are so sublime and so important. However that may be, Simon, ambitious for power to work wonders, and having no conception of spiritual things, looked upon Peter and John as two of his own trade, and approached them with an offer of some of his worldly riches if they would give him the power they possessed of conferring these miraculous gifts. It seemed to him that here was a more subtle magic than that even which Philip had possessed, and to become possessor of this would reinstate him in his control over the minds of the Samaritans. It was at this depraved offer (whence the word "simony" has entered into all modern languages) that Peter uttered those words of holy indignation: "Thy silver perish with thee, because thou hast thought to obtain the gift of God with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter; for thy heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, and pray the Lord, if perhaps the thought of thy heart shall be forgiven thee. For I see that thou art in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."

All that Simon said in reply was to deprecate the evils that he imagined Peter to be calling down on him. He showed no sense of sin, no feeling of repentance. And there the sacred narrative leaves the incident.

In meditating upon the story of the Samaritan impostor, and studying our own depraved nature in it, we may remark—

(1.) *That the natural heart has no knowledge of divine*

things. We hear a great deal now-a-days of the "religious instinct." It is one of the catchwords by which men would do away with the notions of revelation and a new heart. According to some modern teachings, all men have a religious instinct, all have a desire to worship God—nay, all *do* worship God in some honest way, which, as he is a kind God, must be acceptable to him. On analysis, we shall find that this, which is called a religious instinct, is either the action of a guilty conscience or of a poetic fancy. In the one case the man has a vague idea of retribution for his sins, and he strives in some crude way to appease the offended divinity. In the other, the same disposition of mind which makes the painter and the poet makes the dreamy weaver of cobweb thoughts about the unseen. In both cases there is an entire destitution of knowledge, and hence there can be no faith. There is neither the worship of God nor the desire to worship God in it all. There is a desire to avert evil, and a blind ceremonial in consequence, or there is a constructive imagination indulging in its exercise. These two have just this value, and nothing more. They show that man has conscience of sin, and that he has a groping notion of an unseen world.

But is this *religion*? Is this knowing and serving God? Is this intelligent action toward a revealed Maker? Is it a movement of will and affections toward a personal Ruler of the universe? Can such a religion as is found in the "religious instinct," as it is called, satisfy the heart and purify the life? Has it ever done so? Do we find people and nations growing stronger on such diet, more civilized, more attractive? The pagan nations represent the part of the world whose religion is largely the product of the religious instinct. Does a comparison of these with Christian nations, who have accepted a revelation,

lead us to covet the condition of the former? But we feel that it is almost an insult to Christian readers to discuss such a question. The religious instinct is of no higher character than the eating and drinking instinct, as far as true religion is concerned. One will lead to God as readily as the other. They are both of the earth, earthy. Men are cut off from God by sin, and they can return only by the use of divine means. Nothing in themselves can be of any avail. The chasm must be bridged from the divine side. Acceptance of what *God has done* is salvation. What *we* do only helps us downward in sin. *Our* work is always around self as a centre, and hence we look on earthly things only.

That which Simon brought out into full relief by reason of his position and boldness was simply the common character of the natural man. Divine things are treated with low, earthly affections, and, of course, as low, earthly things. This fearful transmutation, this practical blasphemy, pervades the whole race except where the heart has been renewed. Simon in trying to buy God's power was no worse than the many who try to appease God's anger with a penance or a gift. The one tries to buy God's power, the other tries to buy God's pardon. The whole of formal religion is but the treatment of God as if he were a man, and that a very weak and ignorant man.

The prominent sinners of Scripture are only prominent by reason of their circumstances, not by reason of their sin. Their sin is common to all. Pharaoh, Balaam, Doeg, Ananias and Simon are only types of us all, examples raised up high enough for all to see. The selfishness, rebellion and depravity were no worse in them than they are in every man.

(2.) Note, in the second place, that *man's wickedness before God is in the condition of his heart*. Look at the

words used in Simon's case: "Thy heart is not right before God." And then again, "Repent of this thy wickedness, and pray the Lord if perhaps the thought of thy heart shall be forgiven thee." Men have accustomed themselves to posit sin in overt acts, and have failed to explore the pollution of their hearts. Our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount endeavors to correct this fatal error, and shows that the seat of murder and other gross offences is in the heart, and that the sins may there reside and be nurtured even when these outward exhibitions are avoided. Simon's asking for the power was not his sin, but his heart's desire was the sin. *There* is where God saw the wickedness, although man could not detect it till the answer came: "Thy heart is not right *before God.*" He is the searcher of hearts. He needs no outward flag to know that an enemy is in the citadel. He, in his holiness, cannot allow wickedness concealed any more than wickedness in full display. He, as a holy God, can receive none to himself except as the unholy heart is renewed. This fundamental truth is what the poets and philosophers ignore. They would reform man on the basis of the old evil heart. They would make the outer circles of life pure, and leave the core rotten.

If, however, they say that the heart of man *is pure*, how then did it ever produce such universal impurity in life? For surely the life must come from the heart. If they acknowledge it to be impure, how is the impure heart to clean itself? They are in a dilemma. They cannot deny the prevailing wickedness of man. They cannot account for it except as an outflow from the heart, and yet without any renewal of that heart they would reform mankind.

But some will say, "We believe the heart must be renewed, but why cannot man renew it himself? What

is renewal except turning the heart from one object of affection to another, from wrong to right, from the false to the true?" In reply, we make our third remark on our text—

(3.) *That only God's power can renew the heart.* We accept the definition that renewal is a turning from wrong to right, from the false to the true. But when the affections are in the wrong and the false, how can their own influence take them out? How can love destroy itself? Now, the heart is this love, this love for evil. How can it change *itself* to love for good? You might as well say the swine could become a canary-bird. Where is the first impetus to come from when that which forms the force of the life is fixed upon evil?

Do you take refuge in the thought that there is some element of good in the heart, and that this at last accomplishes the renewal? Then why does it not *always* accomplish it? What is there to make exceptional cases? Any exceptional case destroys your theory, for Nature always works in the same way, and if the good element would produce renewal in one heart, it certainly would in all. But, besides that, how could the good element in the heart overcome the bad unless it had a majority? And if it had a majority, how came the heart ever to go wrong? No; the theory will not bear examination. The evil heart cannot renew itself. God alone can do that. The condition of the heart without God is described as being in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.* One term describes its wretchedness, and the other its helplessness. It is not only defiled and distressed, but it is a bound prisoner. The phraseology is taken from Deuteronomy and Isaiah. The bound prisoner cannot loosen himself;

* The rendering "wilt become gall of bitterness and a bond of iniquity" is one of the eccentricities of excessive purism.

another must do it. The conspicuous examples of this truth (where the heart, of course, is not seen, but only the life as coming from the heart), such as the drunkard and the gambler vainly striving (in order to save their bodies or their property or their reputation) to stop their excesses, are only specimens of a universal rule. If the life cannot be stopped by human means, much less can the heart.

These sad thoughts lead us to our last remark from the passage before us—

(4.) *The hope of man is in prayer.* "Pray the Lord," said Peter, "if perhaps the thought of thy heart shall be forgiven thee." The "if" was not a doubt whether God would pardon if Simon prayed, but it was a doubt whether Simon would ever pray. Prayer must have penitence as its spirit ("*Repent* therefore of this thy wickedness, *and pray* the Lord"). It must have a deep conviction of personal sin. Simon seems to have been too far gone to have any such conviction. His intelligence was so benumbed by his sins that it could transfer no spiritual sensation received from God's word to the heart. Hence we find him only afraid of some outward punishment, and asking Peter to pray to God to avert it.

Though Simon apparently did not take the road to pardon and to God, we see in Peter's injunction what the road is. It is *prayer to God*. The heart needs his forgiving grace. That grace, through Christ's sacrificial death for sin, fills the divine reservoir, and is ready to be outpoured on every seeking soul. Prayer is that act of faith which makes the connection with this reservoir. It is the action of the convicted heart which knows and feels its own inability to renew itself, and yet its fearful need of renewal. Such prayer (and only this is prayer as here defined) is both agent and token of renewal. God told

Ananias of Damascus, as proof of Paul's conversion, "Behold, he prayeth." This prayer is the acceptance of the divine power, which is waiting to be gracious to every sinner. "By faith ye are saved" is the apostle's formula; "Thy faith hath saved thee" is our Lord's own. Now, prayer is nothing but the action of this faith, which renounces self and seeks the clean heart and right spirit altogether from God.

Let us, in view of this meditation, no longer regard Simon Magus as an isolated case of iniquity, but as a type of all who are not looking to God in humble penitence for his forgiveness—who, having an unrenewed heart, treat all spiritual things as earthly, bringing them down to their own level. And let us solemnly ask ourselves the question, "Are we, like the many, with Simon, or like the few who possess from God the renewed heart?"

THE CONVERSION OF THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH.

BY THE REV. ROBERT RUSSELL BOOTH, D. D.

April 8.—Acts 8 : 26-40.

IN the story of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch we can trace, as perhaps nowhere else in the Bible, the harmonies of man's agency with the work of the Spirit of God, and the precise nature of that faith in the Saviour of sinners which bringeth salvation. We will attempt to gather together the threads of this narrative, that it may illustrate to us how God works with man and in man with sovereignty which is displayed at each point of progress, and with personal agency which is essential from first to last.

FIRST. *Notice the method of the Holy Spirit with the evangelist Philip.*

The word of the Lord came to Philip when he was busy among the populous cities of Samaria, reaping those fields which Christ himself had sowed with his own hands years before. It was a strange command: "Arise, and go toward the south, into the way that goeth down from Jerusalem to Gaza, which is desert." To leave the throngs which flocked around him to hear the word of God, to go down into a lonely country, along a solitary way, where there was little prospect of gaining access to a single individual,—it must have been indeed a trial to

the faith of this devoted man. But with unquestioning obedience he arose and went. Like a good soldier, he took his orders from the Captain of salvation, knowing that it was for him to command and for the servant to obey. And now behold him on that lonely road, in that dreary country, wondering what the Lord would have him do. He was in the very frame of mind which fitted him to be an instrument in the hands of God for any work, whatever it might be—his will submissive, his heart in sympathy with God, his feet standing in the path of duty, and his ears attentive to hear the word which should direct him onward.

In all this we have an illustration of the posture which is essential to the Christian who would be about his Father's business. The wisdom which belongs to him that winneth souls is wisdom to hear the voices of the Holy Spirit, and to render a prompt, unquestioning obedience. God's work requires instruments, not so much of polish or of power as of willing co-operation. His plan to make Philip useful to a kingdom turns upon the readiness of the disciple to go where he is sent, to obey the impulse of the Holy Spirit, even though he cannot foresee the end to which those inward strivings point.

And now to him, in such a state, the path of duty opens wider. In the distance a chariot is seen approaching, in which rides the person for whom the evangelist's desert journey has been undertaken. Again his waiting heart hears and obeys the voice of God. The Spirit said, "Go near and join thyself to this chariot." All plastic to the heavenly guidance, careless of all considerations of etiquette or personal reserve, pausing not to raise the question whether he was the proper person to present the gospel message to the unknown stranger, moved only by the burning impulse of his soul to proclaim the love of

Jesus, Philip runs to the place and stands within speaking-distance of the man whom he had come thus far to meet. Wondering still, but still obedient, he finds at once the evidence that he has work to do, and must begin without delay. That dusky face bent over the pages of the word of God, the syllables of prophetic inspiration which those lips are muttering, that look of wonder and of longing as the mysterious passages are read,—all these reveal to him a need for tidings such as he rejoices to impart.

Such, then, to pause at this point in the case of Philip, is the Holy Spirit's method with the mind of the messenger of Christ. He is sent forth with a heart inspired by love to Christ, bearing precious seed, to be an instrument in the hands of God for blessing to this stranger. His presence is essential in that very place and at that point of time. If this is wanting, a requisite condition fails to be supplied in the eternal plan of God. His responsibility is concentrated on this obedience, in such a spirit that he is qualified to speak faithfully, discreetly, tenderly, to that inquiring man.

Here we see how God requires his people to be co-workers with himself in labors for the souls of men. He gives the impulse; he makes the opportunity; he prompts the longing to speak for Jesus. All these motions of the Spirit in our hearts are calls of God directing us to some specific interest or place or person to whom our agency is essential in accomplishing God's purposes of mercy. How important, then, for us to be on the alert to hear the orders which the Holy Spirit gives, and to obey them promptly!

SECOND. *We turn now to the Spirit's method with the Ethiopian eunuch, for further illustration of our subject.*

"One thing thou lackest," said the Saviour to the young ruler of Israel. We have before us a man who *felt* that

truth, though he had never heard it. He was a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority, the treasurer and, in fact, the prime minister of the kingdom. In respect to the possessions and honors of this world he was indeed a man of eminent success. Like many a Dives of ancient or modern times, he had only to frame a wish and it was gratified. He had palaces, courtiers, jewels and luxuries in profusion around him. He had inhaled the incense of flattery and had wielded the rod of power. His name was great in Ethiopia, and doubtless men pointed to him as an illustration of the well-being which worldly good imparts. But amid all this his heart was not at peace. Troubled with misgivings about the religion of his fathers, unsatisfied with the transient delights of his material treasures, anxious concerning the prospects of his soul in that eternity which he dimly discerned by the light of Nature,—he felt the need of light from above to shine on his path, and of help to direct him to the true good of life.

Here, then, you see the first step in the dealing of the Holy Spirit with the Ethiopian eunuch. It was to reveal to him the vanity of earthly good as a means of support for the soul; it was to bring the conviction of need, guilt and peril; it was to make him discontented with himself and the world, and to fill his heart with longings for the favor of God and the forgiveness of sin. Such is almost always the effect of the Holy Spirit's work in the soul at the beginning. He touches the springs of the deep places within us. He opens the doors of those chambers which are empty, swept and garnished. He sends disquiet and longings for some better use and experience of life. He who feels that the world does not content him, and is moved to look above it with a desire and longing for the peace of God, has clearest evidence that God the Holy

Spirit is drawing very near to him with the sweet ministrations of grace.

Thus, then, the Ethiopian treasurer, receiving the first influences of the Spirit, is led to seek some practical relief.

In some way he had heard of Jerusalem and of the temple in which the true God was worshiped. It was a long journey thither, and doubtless he set forth to accomplish it amid the wonder and derision of his countrymen. But his heart was fixed; his soul was athirst for God. The toil of the pilgrimage he counted nothing if he could only acquaint himself with God and be at peace.

Now behold him arrived in Jerusalem! The Holy Spirit is with him, and the sanctuary of God is his place of resort. As he worships in that august temple, and hears the words of the law, and beholds the sacrifices for sin, his conscience is more distinctly enlightened. He feels himself convicted of sin and condemned under the law. "What must I do to be saved?" is the absorbing thought with him. But there is no peace for him in that temple. The glory has departed from Israel, and the blood of bulls and of goats cannot take away sin. Instructed, enlightened, but not yet consciously reconciled unto God, he prepares at length to return. He has gained two things by his visit: first, a broken and a contrite heart; second, the book of the prophet Isaiah. And with that heart of penitence he reads that book of God as he rides.

This is the second step, then, in the method of the Holy Spirit with the Ethiopian. To his vague yearnings for good God has added a deep sense of personal sin, and has led him to the sincere use of means in prayer and the study of his revealed word. In the same way does the Spirit of God now and ever incline sinners to act. Prayer must break forth from the heart, the revealed

word of God must be studied by those who would be led by the Spirit. God's blessing attends the use of these means, and the personal agency of each anxious heart must be exercised faithfully in these acts of duty. The Spirit worketh in us both to will and to do. It is not enough to feel athirst in the desert, but with sincere purpose of soul we must seek to draw near to God, the living Fountain of waters. In such a purpose and posture the blessing is near. From this view of the method of the Holy Spirit with Philip and this inquiring sinner we come to notice the blessed result.

THIRDLY. *Consider the harmony of these two methods of influence in their final adjustment.* As the obedient Christian stands waiting on the highway, and as the anxious heathen comes on in his chariot reading the prophet Isaiah, the well-timed plan of God approaches its consummation. The preacher had been brought there to find his audience, the convicted sinner had been brought there to hear. The truth and the text lay in the promise of an atoning crucified Saviour, over which he was pondering. All these elements were needed to accomplish the blessed result of conversion—the guidance of the Spirit for the evangelist, his obedience, yea, even his joyful alacrity to be in his place; the persuading and convicting work of the same Spirit for the eunuch, and his acceptance of it in such a manner that his heart had been melted in penitence, and his very thought suffused with the tone of the Old-Testament gospel. What is wanting is simply that the personal Saviour whom the one loves and rejoices to preach shall be declared to the other as an object of faith—shall be held up in his history, his offices and his power to save. The truth of the one fits to the want of the other like a joint to its socket.

Nor, with these conditions existing, does it take long to

apply it. An abrupt inquiry, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" brings the case to an issue at once. It is like the touch of the hand to the lever which opens the valve of an engine and throws motive-power in an instant into that struggling volume of steam. "Understandest thou what thou readest?" How gentle and humble and noble the answer!—"How can I, except some man should guide me?"

Here is the spirit of wisdom—not that of this world, proud, averse to be taught, and so much the more in proportion as it is ignorant, but of that which cometh down from above, which is pure, peaceable and easy to be entreated. It needs only this answer to make a plain path for the coming of Christ into that heart. Philip opened his mouth and began at that same scripture, and preached unto him "Jesus." That was indeed a gospel of glad tidings to this burdened soul. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God;" and as the wondrous story of the incarnate Love was unfolded, as he heard of Bethlehem, Nazareth, Gethsemane and Calvary, as he looked into that glorious plan of salvation by which God can be just and the justifier of him that believeth on Jesus, his heart leaped with joy. Faith in such a Saviour was for him a matter of course. He believed in a moment, believed with the whole heart, believed that Christ died for him. He was justified by that faith, and had peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Such, then, was the harmony into which these two independent spiritual agencies converged under the guidance of the blessed Spirit of God. In his providence God is a God of order, not of confusion. In his grace he uses willing hearts as his instruments to bless waiting hearts the world over. He does not disdain or overthrow human instrumentality, but shapes all his plans with ref-

erence to the co-operation of man in the work of salvation, still leaving him that control of personal agency which makes him free to refuse or obey.

This subject of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch imparts several practical lessons.

FIRST. *We see by it how important it is that Christians should yield prompt obedience to the impulses of the Spirit of God, and especially to those which impel them to present Christ to the impenitent.* The first successes of the gospel on earth were wrought by the blessing of God on personal labor for souls. John the Baptist taught the whole world the cry which will never cease till Christ comes in his glory. "Behold the Lamb of God!" he exclaimed to two of his followers. Andrew, one of the two, first found his own brother, Simon, and brought him to Jesus; Philip found Nathanael; and thus the glad tidings spread and the foundations of Christ's kingdom on earth were established. There can be no doubt that it is the purpose of God that by efforts like these the gospel salvation is to have free course and be glorified. The primitive idea of preaching was not that of official utterance of the truth. It is the universal prerogative of believers to be priests unto God in their ministry. Those who receive the glad tidings are required of God to diffuse them.

SECOND. *This lesson shows us the importance of personal guidance for the inquiring and anxious mind.* Had the eunuch turned from Philip or failed to hear the word of counsel from his lips, he would have lost the saving grace of God. Many a careworn and convicted sinner shrinks away from Christian help and hides the anguish of his heart, hoping that he may find relief alone. Perhaps he may. Oftener the sinful heart, unaided, lapses back into indifference or despair. But why not ask for Christian sympathy and

counsel? Perhaps some heart beside you is throbbing with anxiety and longing to tell you of the easy way of life. The very help you need may be at hand if you will manifest your interest. Oh, believe it! there is nothing that a Christian loves so much to hear as the inquiry of the jailer: "What must I do to be saved?" and nothing so confirms a wavering resolution or so reassures a troubled heart as the expression of the inward longing after pardon. If you are interested, ask for guidance.

THIRD. *Our subject also shows us the simplicity of saving faith.* "Believe with thy whole heart," was Philip's word, and the eunuch answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Here is the touchstone of all sincere desire. If you can accept Christ in his person and in his offices, if you can place all your confidence in him, and him alone, if you can stand for him and with him as God shall give you strength, then his salvation shall be yours. What doth hinder thee to share this blessing, and to share it now? Nothing on the part of Jesus, for he came to save the lost, and is waiting to be gracious unto you! Nothing on your own part either, for your fitness to receive him is founded on your utter destitution of everything acceptable and worthy. *What doth hinder?* Nothing but your will stands in the way, and it is your duty to bend that will in an instant submission before God. Mark the blessedness of faith and the joy of pardoned sins as here displayed! See the eunuch on his way rejoicing with a joy that just begins, and that will go on increasing through eternal ages!

"The moment a sinner believes,
And trusts in his crucified Lord,
His pardon at once he receives:
Redemption in full through the blood."

SAUL'S CONVERSION.

BY THE REV. CHARLES H. READ, D. D.

April 15.—Acts 9: 1-18.

THE genuine conversion of *any lost sinner of our race* unto God through the grace and power of the Godhead—Father, Son and Holy Ghost—is a marvel of divine love, and must ever be regarded as the most momentous fact in the experience of *that soul*. The vast issues of life, death and immortality are suspended upon *that experience*. There will be a sublime revenue of praise to God from the salvation of any soul, and yet in the sovereignty of divine grace some souls have an eminence given to them and to their recorded history and services which challenges special attention.

Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor of Christians, and afterward more commonly known as PAUL the servant of Christ, is lifted up into eminence in the history of the New Testament. This distinction at the first mention of him is painful to contemplate: he appears at the martyrdom of Stephen, consenting to his murder and guarding the garments of those who stoned him to the death.

He may be presumed to have witnessed the whole scene of the cruel stoning of Stephen, of his solemn and calm commitment of his soul to Jesus, then and there revealed to him in the opening heavens, and that he heard

the prayer of Stephen as his soul took its flight: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Yet, with *this scene* before him, after the burial of Stephen he is described as "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of Jesus, making havoc of the Church, entering private houses and dragging men and women to prison"—as bearing letters from the high priest to the synagogues at Damascus, "that if he found any of this way" (or of the Christian faith), "whether men or women, he might bring them to Jerusalem."

We are supplied, from Saul's own statements, with some points of interest in reference to his early citizenship and history. Thus (Acts 21: 39), he said before his accusers, "I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city of Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city."

On the western border of the Cilician plain, through which the river Cydnus flows from the snow-clad mountains of the Taurus range to the Mediterranean Sea, near the memorable battle-grounds of Alexander and Darius, the city of Tarsus was situated. Strabo says that "in all that relates to philosophy and general education it was even more illustrious than Athens or Alexandria." Here the future apostle Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles by the will of God, spent his early years; and such a man as he was could hardly have failed to have his intellectual faculties and tastes moulded and sharpened by such surroundings and influences.

At about fourteen years of age he went to Jerusalem, and there entered the school of Gamaliel, an eminent teacher of the law. He was the son of a Pharisee, and was probably devoted from his early youth to the pursuits of a doctor of the Jewish law; but, in accordance with a fixed custom among the Jews, he was early trained to a trade, that of tent-making, it being a maxim among the Jews

that the failure of a father to teach his son a trade was virtually to teach him to steal.

Saul was intensely a Pharisee, glorying in his birth, education and persistent zeal as a conspicuous member of that sect which was prominent in the division which ran through the Jewish nation at the time of Christ's appearance on the earth, the strongest competing sect being that of the Sadducees.

To appreciate the moral attitude of Saul in his zeal for Judaism, and his consequent hostility to the doctrines and modes of worship proclaimed and practiced by Jesus and his disciples, some brief notice should be taken of the distinctive principles of Phariseeism.

The Sadducees, whilst strong as a party, occupying high offices and possessing large influence in the priesthood and in the Sanhedrim, were very loose—or, as the common phrase of our times is, “liberal”—in their religious opinions: “they were the *disciples of reason*, without enthusiasm,” and belonged principally to the richer families of the nation. Their negations outnumbered their fixed avowals of doctrinal truth.

In contrast with them the Pharisees were enthusiasts, if not fanatics, in their zeal for Judaism as a spiritual polity. Profoundly mortified at the overthrow by the Romans of their national independence and political life, the Pharisees devoted themselves to the fortification and maintenance of their law and their religion, aiming to preserve a proud and resolute unity on the basis of a strict Judaism.

Saul was, in all his training and in all his peculiar energies of heart and mind, “a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the Church.”

Every genuine conversion, in the sense of the Gospels,

is a conversion from darkness to light, a deliverance from the power of darkness and a translation into the kingdom of God's dear Son; but in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus there is an eminent display of the marvelous grace and power of God by reason of the peculiar intrenchment of his strong nature, will and habits of life in a false religious faith, his whole soul aglow with the conviction that he was doing God service in his active hostility to the doctrines and cause of Jesus of Nazareth.

Up to the hour of Saul's conversion there had been no change in his convictions and no abatement of his zeal. At that very time he was upon the real and avowed errand of relentless persecution against the disciples of Christ, without distinction even of sex.

Here there was no "prevenient goodness," no "feeble spark of holiness," to be wrought upon or fanned into a flame; all was dark, hard, and positively, actively antagonistic to Jesus Christ the Son of God and to the cause of true religion in the world. He was "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord," and, to all appearance, proud that he was entrusted with letters from the high priest at Jerusalem giving him authority to pursue his remorseless purposes.

Thus animated and equipped, at midday he was drawing near to Damascus with his subordinate attendants, when "suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven; and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

From concurrent statements it appears that this sudden light from heaven was above the lightness of the sun in its meridian glare, so obviously and ominously super-

natural that Saul and the men who were with him, overcome with amazement and terror, fell to the ground or stood in awestruck silence.

It was evidently the design of the Lord Jesus to deal specially with the soul of Saul: a distinct, intelligible voice fell on his ear and penetrated his inmost being; it addressed him by name with solemn repetition: "Saul! Saul! why persecutest thou *me*?"

The voice was as distinct to his ears as was the light to his eyes. He realized the light as divinely supernatural and the voice as divinely authoritative. In humble and reverent recognition of the divinity of the person who thus addressed him with such awful directness, he asked, "Who art thou, Lord?" The answer is remarkable: "And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."

"The very name, JESUS, *Jesus of Nazareth*, had been hateful to Saul; and now, with the sublime manifestation of his glory, no other name is assumed. It is as if he had said, "I am Jesus of Nazareth, once crucified and buried, but now alive, and I hereby attest unto you my resurrection, my glory and my authority. Your further resistance will be vain. You are arrested and convicted of guilt, the evidences of which are palpable in your very presence here and in its purpose: the letters in your possession, under which you were, up to this moment, acting, as well as the temper of your mind and purposes, condemn you. Arrested, convicted, do you now renounce your hostility, abandon your errand and submit to my authority and grace?"

The position of Saul was that of prostration on the ground, and his mental condition that of conscious guilt, helplessness and suspense of purpose as to what he must do.

The language in the first member of the sixth verse of

our version, "And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" is said by competent authority not to be found in a single ancient Greek manuscript nor in the recently-discovered Codex Sinaiticus: it is regarded as a gloss adopted by Erasmus and by others after him. Omitting these words, then—as is done by Professor Lechler and in the recent Revised Version—as an interpolation, we have next to do with the words of Jesus to the prostrate Saul waiting the Lord's commands: "Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do."

The mental exercises of Saul, such as they may be presumed to have been, are so strikingly presented in the notes of Professor Lechler that their introduction may serve a good purpose in this connection: "I have, then, persecuted *Him*, even when I little thought I was doing it; I have sinned against *him!* He is exalted in heaven, possesses irresistible power, justly claims humble and implicit obedience, and yet I have resisted him. I now feel with whom I have to do. Nevertheless, he has not met me for judgment; he has not crushed me in his wrath. He has rather, with pity and love, arrested my erring steps, has called me to himself—yea, assigns a holy work to me. This was grace, full, free, pitying grace, granted to the sinner."

It is evident from Saul's conduct, responsive to the command of Jesus, that the temper of the man was thoroughly changed. Arising from the earth, he found on opening his eyes that he was literally blind, and he submitted to be led by the hand into Damascus, where, awaiting the further manifestation of the purposes of Jesus concerning him, he remained "three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink."

The fasting was voluntary, and the temporary blind-

ness, whilst it may be regarded as an image of his previous moral blindness, was not, perhaps, in the way of punishment, but of mercy. He had passed, and was passing, through marvelous changes: his whole life-plan and all his surroundings were changed; and greatest of all was the change within himself. He needed rest and seclusion from the world, "to be alone with himself and with his God and Saviour." We learn from the eleventh verse that while thus secluded and fasting he was also praying.

The Lord Jesus had Saul in his gracious regards and plans during this interval of fasting, meditation and prayer, this period of self-inspection, and was preparing deliverance and enlargement for him from a quarter least expected. The Lord chose for his instrument a man named Ananias, an entire stranger to Saul and hitherto unmentioned in the history of the Church, to go and seek him out, with specific directions as to the street and house where he should find him.

Ananias knew of Saul, by report, only as a persecutor, and that he had now come from Jerusalem with authority to bind all that called upon the name of the Lord; but in reply to these suggestions of danger at the hands of Saul, the Lord assured Ananias of the conversion of Saul and of his election of him to proclaim his name and grace before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. The fears of Ananias are relieved through faith in the Lord's word, and, obedient to the directions given, he is soon in the presence of Saul, so recently a persecutor, but now kneeling lamb-like at the feet of Jesus.

With beautiful simplicity, Ananias, "putting his hands on him, said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, who met thee by the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy

Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight, forthwith, and arose and was baptized."

The term "Brother," as applied by Ananias to Saul, "Brother Saul," seems to express *Christian fellowship*, as warranted by the assurances of Jesus concerning Saul.

The statement that "immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales" may be understood as describing a sudden relief from blindness—sudden and real as if scales had indeed fallen from his eyes. It was a miraculous restoration of sight by divine power.

"He arose and was baptized." The rising may have been from a kneeling attitude, as of one in prayer, or, as Lechler has it, "This word (*arose*) is merely intended to depict Saul's rapid transition from a state in which he was occupied with his internal experience, and in which he was only a recipient, to a personal and energetic course of action. To such a course of earnest and persevering action the converted Saul, henceforth to be known as 'Paul, the servant of Jesus Christ,' devoted himself until death closed his work on earth and translated him to the joy of his Lord in that heavenly home for which he graciously longed."

It deserves to be noticed that at some time in the course of this wonderful experience of Saul, Jesus appeared *personally* unto him. When Barnabas introduced Saul to the apostles at Jerusalem, who were distrustful of him, he "declared unto them how he had *seen the Lord in the way*, and that he had spoken to him;" and so, in 1 Cor. 9: 1, Paul says of himself, "Am I not an apostle? . . . have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" And again, 1 Cor. 15: 9: "Last of all, he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time."

"It is a fundamental truth of the Christian religion that

the Redeemer lives;" and it was the design of God and the special privilege of the apostles that they should be able to testify, *of their own knowledge, to the resurrection and the abiding humanity of the Redeemer, and to his glorified corporeality.*

DOCTRINAL AND PRACTICAL LESSONS.

1. Jesus is supreme Lord and King in his own right and in the majesty of his power and the glory of his grace, while his enemies indulge their hatred and devise wicked schemes against him.

2. In the conversion of Saul we have a striking illustration of the sovereignty of divine grace in the salvation of the chief of sinners, saving them, sometimes, in the heat and fanaticism of their folly and guilt. How different the entrance of Saul into Damascus from his intentions and expectations! How was he humbled, and yet exalted in moral quality!

3. All the features of the scene show a complete and perfect design on the part of the Lord. Ananias, quite unexpectedly to himself, is made an instrument in the scheme of infinite wisdom, power and love. The very house and street where Saul was fasting, meditating and praying, and also all his exercises of mind and heart, were accurately and exactly known to the sovereign and governing Jesus.

4. The resources of Jesus the Lord are infinitely abundant for every emergency. He is the same yesterday, and to-day and for ever. He can at any moment turn the wrath of men to his own praise. He is mighty to save.

SAUL PREACHING CHRIST.

BY THE REV. T. D. WITHERSPOON, D. D.

April 22.—Acts 9: 19-31.

THE current of the narrative runs so smoothly at the point where we encounter it to-day that it is very difficult to realize that there is a serious break in the continuity of its flow. And yet somewhere between the "proclamation of Christ in the synagogues" of verse 20, and the "letting down in a basket" of verse 25, the narrative is cut sheer across by a deep, broad chasm, to which the apostle laconically but significantly refers when he says (Gal 1: 17), concerning his conduct immediately after his conversion, "Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I *went into Arabia*, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem."

From the manner in which this visit to Arabia is introduced in contraposition to a visit which he might have been expected to make to the college of apostles at Jerusalem, it may be safely concluded, as is now generally done, that the apostle went into the solitudes of Arabia to receive those supernatural revelations and that immediate commission from Heaven which made his ministry entirely independent of human authority. This visit to Arabia therefore separates between the work of Saul as a new convert, making public confession of Christ as his

personal Saviour, and the work of Saul, the inspired and commissioned apostle, making authoritative and official proclamation of him as the Saviour of the world.

Without undertaking to settle questions which are much in dispute as to the precise point in the narrative where the hiatus occurs, as to the place indicated by the somewhat indefinite term *Arabia*, or as to the length of time spent by the apostle in its solitudes, there are several interesting lines of thought suggested by the passage which we study to-day.

(1.) There is a public confession of Christ, an unofficial preaching of him, incumbent upon every one who is converted by his grace. As soon as one experiences the renewing power of the Holy Spirit, and comes into a comfortable hope of forgiveness and everlasting life, he is brought under the sweetest and most powerful constraint to make known the great benefits he has received. He must commend to others the Saviour whose grace has availed for him. He must unite his efforts with those of other ransomed souls in exalting the honor and extending the kingdom of the Redeemer who has bought him with his blood.

Saul is a noble example of this generous testimony for Christ. "Immediately" (Revised Version) "he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues that he is the Son of God." Notice in reference to this confession—

First, it was *prompt*. "Immediately" he entered upon it. There was no unnecessary hesitation, no dalliance with duty, no waiting upon frames and feelings. As soon as he had taken Jesus to be his Saviour he devoted himself immediately to the work of proclaiming him to others. Love, gratitude, joy, a desire to retrieve the wrongs of the past, a yearning to direct others to the Fountain at which his thirst had been assuaged—above

all, a desire to honor Him who had borne for him the cross and shame—led him at once to herald forth the name of Jesus.

Second, it was *brave*. He did not simply enter his name upon the roll of the disciples. He did not content himself with speaking privately to such of his former acquaintances or associates as he might chance to meet. He did not open some private apartment and invite the more conservative and influential Jews to come and hear his testimony; but on the Sabbath day, when the synagogues were thronged and the presence of Pharisees and doctors of the law overawed the multitude, the new disciple availed himself of the opportunity always given strangers to speak, and in the face of friend and foe made public confession of Jesus his Lord.

Third, it was *uncompromising*. He did not undertake to strike a balance between his own convictions and the prejudices of his hearers, as so many faint-hearted confessors now do. He did not confess Jesus as a good man, misguided perhaps in his claim of divine inspiration; or as an inspired prophet, whose declarations of a divine afflatus his followers had construed into a claim of personal deity; or as a supernatural and pre-existent being above angel or archangel, but still created and finite. In the face of prejudice and passion, despite of lowering brows, he rose to the full height of his great testimony. He "proclaimed Jesus that he is *the Son of God*."

(2.) A higher and official preaching of Christ is incumbent upon those, and those only, who are duly called, qualified and commissioned to enter upon it. This is the preaching which Saul did after his return from Arabia to Damascus. A study of his course in reference to it throws much light upon the prerequisites to the gospel ministry.

1. It must be preceded by a divine call. None may enter upon it without such vocation. The call of Saul of Tarsus was in many respects extraordinary. It took place, as he tells us (Acts 26: 16), on the highway to Damascus, when the voice from heaven addressed him, saying, "Rise and stand upon thy feet, for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose to make thee a minister and a witness," etc. But, though the call was thus in its method extraordinary, in essence it was the same that every one must have who would enter upon this office. There must be an impression deeply wrought in the heart by the Spirit of God that it is our duty to serve him in the ministry, that thus we can best honor him and best fulfill the mission he has given us in the world—a conviction that grows stronger as it is prayerfully deliberated upon, and does not yield in prospect of the self-denials and sacrifices which such a life entails. Blessed is he in whose heart such living conviction is inwrought by the unconscious operation of the Spirit of God!

2. It must be preceded by thorough preparation. One would have supposed that Saul of Tarsus, graduate of the school of Gamaliel, a man of broad literary culture, a master of the law, an acute theologian, a ready debater, an eloquent orator, might receive his commission at once, and enter at once upon his work. But there were schools for the ancient prophets. The twelve apostles were for three years under the personal tuition of our Lord. Saul must first go into the desert solitudes of Arabia, and, like Moses in Midian and John the Baptist in the wilderness of Judæa, come under the immediate tuition of Heaven. There, in the midst of revelations of the Lord, he received what he so expressively calls "my gospel," which, as he tells us (Gal. 1: 11), "is not after man, for I neither received it of man, neither was

I taught it but by the revelation of Christ," so that he could say in reference to the high mysteries of Christianity, "For I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you." If such tuition were needful for one so thoroughly furnished by lifelong study of the Scriptures, what shall we say of those who undervalue special theological training now, and would have young converts rush with impetuosity into the solemn vows and arduous responsibilities of the ministerial office?

3. It must be preceded by orderly commission. Saul was commissioned of God to preach. The usual method of receiving a commission then, as now, was through the constituted authorities of the Church. But with the ordinary office of the preacher Saul was to unite the extraordinary office of the apostle. His commission, therefore, was made an extraordinary one. Instead of going up to Jerusalem to receive ordination at the hands of the apostles, he went into Arabia, and there received his commission immediately and supernaturally from the hands of the Lord. He could therefore subscribe himself "Paul, an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God who raised him from the dead." The day of extraordinary commissions is past. No man may enter the ministry now who has not received ordination and commission by the duly constituted authorities of the Church. A divine commission is as necessary now as it was in the days of the apostles.

(3.) The matter, the manner and the effects of preaching Christ are the same in all ages. They are strikingly illustrated in the passage which we study to-day.

1. The matter or substance of all gospel preaching is the same. Saul sounds here the keynote of his whole after-ministry. Amidst the wealth and fashion of Corinth, the learning and culture of Athens, the pomp and pageant-

ry of Rome, the substance of his preaching is the same with his first confession as a new convert at Damascus. He preaches "Jesus." All other themes are absorbed in this or forgotten by reason of it. Jesus, the Joshua of the new dispensation, *the SAVIOUR OF MEN*, the Redeemer of the world,—this is the burden of his message as he goes. He preaches him, "that he is the Son of God." Upon his eternal and essential deity he bases the whole system of doctrines that he proclaims. He proves that this is very Christ. To the fact of his personal deity he adds the evidence of his divine Messiahship. He establishes his claim as God's Anointed, the great Prophet whom Moses had declared that the Lord God should raise up unto Israel, the great High Priest who should "make an end of sin and bring in an everlasting righteousness," the great "King upon the holy hill of Zion" to whom should be given "the heathen for an inheritance and the uttermost part of the earth for a possession." Christ, therefore, the anointed Prophet, revealing the Father to men; Christ, the anointed Priest, making atonement for the sin of the world; Christ, the anointed King, reigning until all enemies are subdued under his feet,—this was the substance of the apostle's preaching. This was the "Christ, and him crucified," save which he determined to know nothing even in wealthy and luxurious Corinth. This was the "Jesus and the resurrection" with which he startled the schools of philosophy and belles-lettres in Athens. This was the gospel which, as much as in him lay, he was ready to preach in Rome also. This is the gospel which every Christian minister is commissioned to preach, which every Christian layman is under obligation unofficially to teach. It is the gospel for this age and for every age. Nothing can supersede it, nothing can take its place. It will bear no admixture of

human philosophy, it will submit to no arraignment at the bar of human reason. It is the wisdom of God, it is the power of God. It, and it alone, as the experience of eighteen centuries has shown, goes down to the deep necessities of the human heart, and has power to lift man up into the life of holiness and into the light of hope.

2. The manner of all true gospel preaching is the same. Saul's ministry at Damascus and in Jerusalem affords, in these respects, a faithful representation of his methods everywhere, and an instructive example of the manner in which the minister or teacher should hold forth Christ as the Son of God and the Saviour of the world.

Saul's preaching was *scriptural*. He confounded the Jews by proving from the Old-Testament Scriptures that Jesus was Christ. He made his appeal to those Scriptures as inspired of God. To their authority he and his opponents alike professed to bow. He based his conclusions not upon the speculations of reason or the deductions of logic, but upon the infallible testimony of the word of God. He who does this stands upon high vantage-ground. It is the men who are "mighty in the Scriptures" whose teaching is crowned with success.

Saul's preaching was *fearless*. He preached "boldly" both in Damascus and in Jerusalem. He did not shun to declare the whole counsel of God. He did not hesitate through fear of the prejudice he might encounter or the opposition he might awaken. He did not consult the partialities or caprices of his hearers. Charged with a message, he delivered it with all gentleness and tenderness, but in all fidelity and candor. Never was such preaching needed more than now. It requires courage to deal faithfully with the consciences of impenitent sinners and worldly-minded church-members. There is

need, therefore, of "great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus."

Saul's preaching was *humble*. He "preached in the name of the Lord Jesus." He assumed no authority and asserted no superiority of his own. He was but the mouthpiece through whom Christ spake. The treasure was borne by him in an earthen vessel, "that the excellency of the power might be of God." He preached "not with wisdom of words, lest the cause of Christ should be made of none effect." He counted "all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord." He relied upon the power of Christ to make his message effectual. He ascribed the glory to Christ of whatever results were achieved.

3. The effects of all gospel preaching are the same. The apostle found in Damascus and at Jerusalem what he did everywhere else: "To the one we are the savor of death unto death, and to the other the savor of life unto life." In every community in which the gospel is faithfully preached two classes will appear—its enemies and its friends. Where the preaching is accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit, the same results will follow with these two classes as in Damascus and Jerusalem.

With the former the enmity of the carnal heart will be aroused. When Saul proved that Jesus is the Christ, the long-promised Messiah of Israel, the Jews, instead of embracing him as their Messiah, grew furious and vented their rage upon the apostle. Unable to refute his arguments and unwilling to accept his conclusions, they gave rein to prejudice and passion, and so became confirmed in their hatred of Christ. How constantly the same process goes forward now when the gospel is preached!

This enmity of the carnal heart, aroused by opposition and inflamed by anger, will lead on to persecution. If the

Jews in Damascus and Jerusalem cannot gainsay Saul's arguments, they can at least "lay wait to kill him." Persecution is ever the resort of men who have tried nobler warfare and suffered defeat. Satan still prompts to it when his cause is put to the worse. Men persecute now with sneer and jest; and many a man quails before the world's ridicule and scorn whose courage would have borne him in stormier days to the fagot or the wheel.

But if such are the effects upon one class, very different are those upon another. Saul soon found himself surrounded by a body of disciples—"his disciples," as the Revised Version teaches us in the twenty-fifth verse. Faithful work for Christ will not be left without result. They that will put honor upon God's word shall have honor put upon their ministry. Saul not only has disciples, but disciples that love him as devotedly as his enemies hate him, and are as assiduous to shield him as his foes are to persecute him. They find means both at Damascus and in Jerusalem to show their love and their care, and to baffle the designs of their enemies and send him to a place of safety.

Finally, the fruits of faithful teaching are gathered after the teacher is gone. Saul has been "brought down to Cæsarea, and sent away to Tarsus," but the Church of God remains; and this Church, for which he has labored and prayed, and which sorely misses him now that he is gone, nevertheless "has peace, being edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, is multiplied." Be it ours to hold forth Jesus with the same fidelity and courage whilst we are upon the stage, and when, at the call of the Master, we shall pass from the scene, may we leave the Church still walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, and being multiplied!

PETER WORKING MIRACLES.

BY THE REV. GEO. C. HECKMAN, D. D.

April 29.—Acts 9: 32-43.

As Peter traversed the Church he came to *the saints* at Lydda. "The saints" is an early and favorite title in the New Testament for the disciples of Christ, and doubtless was adopted and used as full of instruction and exhortation. It has no restricted or official application; but belongs equally to all believers, and is a designation from which no disciple should shrink. Every converted sinner is a saint, and the title should be cherished, not so much as implying honor—which indeed it does—as responsibility, without the consciousness and discharge of which the name has no meaning.

Contrary to general misapprehension, that meaning is not subjective, but objective. Its primary and always its principal sense is, *one set apart as sacred*. Believers are called *saints*, not because they are of eminent sanctity, but because they are set apart as sacred to God. So the Sabbath is set apart from other days as sacred to God. All believers are devoted to God in baptism and by confession of Jesus Christ, and by profession of a life consecrated to him.

This primary meaning does not exclude, but implies, the secondary, subjective sense of moral holiness. Thus the saint is justified, is regenerated, and pursues after personal holiness as becomes one set apart for God.

It is no ordinary regret that the abuse, by fanatical and apostate sects, of this early and inspired name for Christians should have led the Reformed Church into forgetfulness and neglect of its apostolic use. We should penetrate its instructive meaning, and practically recognize its hortatory force as an admonition to hold ourselves sacred to God, as consecrated vessels of the pure and saving gospel of Jesus Christ. If this title could hold this fact in the consciousness of the Church, how little need to fear worldly conformity in Christian society! If believers were daily thoughtful of their sacredness to God, of their sainthood in Christ, growth in holiness of heart and godliness of life would be assured.

In the church at Lydda, Peter found a case of desperate and incurable paralysis. Christianity, by removing the causes and supplying the antidotes, reduces the area and violence of physical diseases. Still, a saint may be a paralytic. But the supernaturalism of the gospel is designed chiefly for the more terrible and fatal moral diseases of mankind. Would it impugn the fair name of Eneas if we regard him as the type of a paralyzed believer or church?

The profit of faithful pastoral or presbyterial visitation is seen in the discovery of certain paralyzing conditions, often of long standing, which otherwise might have remained undiscovered, and of course unrelieved. This palsy may be any evil quality of character or worldly habit of life sufficient to prevent spiritual activity and growth. A master-passion may be a moral palsy; under the paralysis of some besetting sin one may have a name to live while practically dead. There is but one relief—in a miracle of grace, a revival stirring all the depths of the soul. The quickening spirit, streaming out of omnipotent love through Jesus Christ, alone can expel all

diseases of the soul—will alone raise up the saint to a thorough consecration of life.

“Eneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole”—maketh thee sound in every member and fibre of thy body, in every faculty and affection of thy soul. “Arise,” stand upright, make use of the power Jesus gives thee; prove thyself sound by the physical and moral activities of a healthy life; show to all the saving power of Jesus Christ by acting as one whom he has saved. “It is not I; Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.” Peter does not even mention himself, but by regenerated instinct acts in the meekness of a true servant. He thus presents an admirable example of that combination of modesty and power so characteristic of real greatness—the meekness and strength so rare in the natural man, in worldly society and public life, but becoming more and more frequent in Christian circles and private lives sanctified by the Holy Spirit and framed after the pattern of Christ.

The faith of Peter in the power of Jesus is manifest not only in the positive declaration of what Jesus was doing for Eneas, but also in the imperative *Arise*, given to one hitherto paralytic, but whom Peter believes to be no longer paralyzed—given to one under a disease which before would make obedience impossible, but whom Peter now believes to have received quickening power to obey. It was not the assurance of fanaticism nor the duplicity of imposture, but a rational faith in Jesus Christ. Does our visitation of the sick or sorrowing have the belief in the healing of Jesus that it ought to have? Doubtless, often not. Though miraculous power over material nature no longer remains with us, the power of believing prayer does. *Miraculous power* enabled Peter at the bedside of Eneas to say, “Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.” So *believing prayer* empowered Martin Luther by the sick-bed of

Philip Melanchthon at Weimar to say, "Be of good heart, Philip; thou shalt not die;" and he did not, but out of unconsciousness, from the edge of death, was brought back to life. May there not be now lying on the bed of some old palsy of unbelief or besetting sin many whom Christ has healed and they know it not, but only need some believing Peter to say unto them, "Arise, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole"? The faith which works miracles on the bodies of men no longer remains with the ministry, and doubtless for reasons wholly outside of them; but that is of small account to the greater and better power that does remain, the faith that works miracles on the souls of men. The most valuable gifts of the apostolic age the Church still retains. There is no evidence whatever that the psychical power which Christ bestowed on the ministry is any less to-day than as possessed by the apostles; and it is in itself a greater, as in its results it is a more useful and desirable, power than to heal a palsied Eneas or raise a dead Dorcas.

Though no mention is made of the faith of Eneas, it appears in its fruit. The human source of that faith was the faith of Peter. Did all who undertake to speak in the name of Jesus Christ do it with the firm conviction of the apostle in the presence and power of Jesus to save, and in Jesus as the only Saviour, their faith would never fail to be fruitful in the faith and conversion of others.

Lydda was a considerable city, and the Plain of Sharon, possessing that fertility which made other parts of Palestine proverbial, was densely populated. There was no concealment on the part of Eneas of the Christian work effected in him. The fame of his healing spread through all the region. The multitude thronged to see the paralytic, now whole, enjoying full, active health. They heard, and instead of careless indifference or stupid skepticism,

they went and saw for themselves; and when they learned the divine name in which it was effected they believed and were converted. They had the honesty and courage of true conviction; they confessed their faith and openly took their stand with the Church of Jesus Christ. It was a wonderful work of conversion, affecting all classes and achieving a great corresponding growth of the Church. This result, so natural and logical, is a reason why a converted man should make known Christ's work within him; the manly, honest, grateful convert will openly confess what the Lord has done for his soul.

The apostolic visitation of Peter was an upward as well as onward progress, a rising from one great work to a greater until its sublime culmination in the house of Cornelius. A few miles from Lydda was ancient, historic Joppa, the picturesque city of the sea. In the church here was a prominent disciple, one of "the righteous who shall be in everlasting remembrance." Among her Syrian friends she was known as Tabitha, her Greek acquaintances called her Dorcas, while we Anglo-Americans would have spoken of her as "the Gazelle." The graceful form and pliant movement and large, gentle, loving eyes of the gazelle, after all, do not express such attractive beauty as the portrait of Dorcas: "a woman full of good works and alms-deeds," nor does the rarest physical beauty ever gain such a hold on human affection as is portrayed in the pathetic grief of this church of Joppa over her untimely death. She abounded in gentle, generous, loving words and works of humanity and piety, and in deeds of benevolence and mercy, showing some wealth and a beneficent sense of responsibility in the use of her means.

New-Testament biography is brief but comprehensive. Two penstrokes describe the supernatural workmanship in Dorcas: she was a *disciple* and a *saint*. She was Mary and

Martha in one: as a *disciple* she sat at Jesus' feet; as a *saint* she served Jesus in ministrations of sympathy and charity. A disciple, she confessed Jesus openly, and made his doctrine the highest, strongest reason of her life; a saint, she consecrated herself, in all her possessions and capabilities in sacred offices, to Christ. She did not aspire to the place of teacher or ruler, but took a natural sphere in the abundant and varied womanly work of the church. Her faith had life in Christian character and expression in Christian deeds, in principles whose practice is taught by the word of God and in works whose motives are inspired by faith in Christ alone—alms, nor these only, but good words and works besides. Dorcas presents a model worthy the study of every Christian woman. "A congregation that possesses but one Tabitha is rich through love, since it owns in that soul a vast productive capital." We find in Dorcas what, thank God! is no longer rare—the love of Christ in her heart constraining and overflowing in all kinds of charity to the disciples. Nor was it as pearls cast before swine or as water spilt upon the ground, for we find the counterpart of this love returned, for the church had grace not only to receive, but also to requite, an affection so thoughtful and a beneficence so generous.

"She was sick and died." In this was no forsaking of her by the Lord of life. He made her bed in her sickness, and was with her through the solemn experience of death. All that loving human hands could do was done. Her body, according to ancient, even primeval, custom, was prepared for burial, and left to the silence of an upper room. This chamber of death is to witness what has been often witnessed since with the growth of the Christian Church—a *natural* side, the gloom and grief and agony of bereaved affection; and the *supernatural* side,

the wrestling prayer and submissive comfort of faith in the assured rest and resurrection of the dead.

And then the stricken church reached out for sympathy; they sent to Lydda for Peter. They were expecting no miracle. It was too late for the exertion of the power of a healing like that of Eneas. Dorcas was dead. They were in sore need of light and comfort, and they turned to one near on whom Jesus had bestowed other and greater gifts than physical healing—graces and power, the ministry of which they now so much needed. The Holy Spirit turned their thoughts to Peter, again intending far more for the Church and the world than they expected, nor this so much the raising of the dead as the regeneration of many souls.

The apostle left a happy and rejoicing church at Lydda; it was a sad and tearful congregation that greeted him at Joppa. In the chamber of the beautiful dead he was met by the weeping widows who had been relieved by her charities, or, as deaconesses, had been associated with Dorcas or assisted by her in their official care of the sick and poor. They exhibited the clothing they wore or still held for distribution, made with her own hands or paid for by her own means. What an eulogium of the noble dead in the irresistible grief of this Christian sisterhood, and in these proofs of a wise, continuous, laborious benevolence!

I once attended the funeral of an eminent benefactress, not called there to perform any official service, but as a citizen to discharge a duty of respect to one who had been so faithful to Christ and country. Weak and sick, I yet felt impelled to do homage by that confined form to the Holy Spirit who had so manifestly made it for years a temple of God. Was it not a fit place and time for rational Christian worship? The chief magistrates of the

city and State were there, and the venerable pioneer and ministers of various denominations, and the mechanic and merchant and soldier and men of various professions, and women in the garb of wealth and high social rank; and they all bowed tearfully and worshiped God around the breathless form of this Dorcas whom they had known. The poor were not there—the invisible but potent barriers of imperfect society kept them away—but they had been there, had wept over the coffin which contained all that was left to earth of their best earthly friend; and now they wept at home, like the widows of Joppa, in perplexed, painful thought over the dispensation which had despoiled them of a friendship proved in countless deeds of charity. Nothing was heard of her age, personal appearance, dress, dwelling, of high social standing or grand parties, or art or science, but all speech was of the beneficence of her patriotism and piety. She was the friend of the poor, and her Christian life was so rounded and complete, being food and raiment, medicine and care, counsel, sympathy and prayer. Oh the glory of such a life, the inspiration of an example like hers! And her memory, how precious!

As was the cry in Joppa, so now it was said her loss was irreparable. But we know better: Providence is not limited to one Dorcas or two. The fruit of the Spirit is ever ripening. We do daily meet sisters of charity—not indeed flaunting a pharisaic zeal in the garb of a religious order, but dressed as women ought to be—who consecrate their superfluous means and time in sacrifices of beneficence, who deny themselves worldly extravagance and selfish enjoyment that they may be the good providence of God in needy households, be angels of mercy and well-springs of life to despairing hearts and homes, marking the beautiful pathway of their lives not

by vanity and self-indulgence, but by charity and cheer, blessing men and glorifying God.

Peter desired to be alone with the dead. Was it the instinct of Christian meekness, or recalling the example of Jesus in the house of Jairus, on the Mount of Transfiguration and in the Garden under Olivet? The crowded presence of this weeping company was not in harmony with the great emotion now surging in the apostle's heart. Alone, he would be more free in prayer for the guidance of Jesus in this crisis. He did not know what might be the will of God, and he acted with wise and becoming meekness. He felt utterly dependent, and would not appear presumptuous before others. The thoughtful minister, when preparing for Christian work, all the more if it be unusual or critical, prays in the closet, and not before men. Nor does Peter appeal to Jesus in vain. Rising from his knees, as if having received a gracious command in an inspiration of believing prayer, he turned to the cold, lifeless body with the brief words, "Tabitha, arise."

How natural is the story of this resurrection! The eyes of "the Gazelle" once more open upon the earth. He gave her his hand, not to aid her weakness, for Jesus Christ had made her whole, but in joyful welcome, she grasping his in the unity of that Christian work to which she has been called back. He presented her to the church alive, her old life of love, sympathy and beneficence. She would not be less a Christian for having been in Paradise. A few hours of heaven, as was the case with Paul and John and Tennent, give new motives and fresh impulses to Christian consecration.

The news thrilled the Church with joy and all Joppa with wonder. This is not recorded to meet the demands of skepticism. The Bible, while stooping to the

lowest ethical necessity, rises to a higher intellectual level than that occupied by skepticism. It is mentioned because of the effect of the miracle on the activity of the Church, and on the many who believed and were added to the saints; to conduct and confirm which work "Peter tarried many days in Joppa." Throughout this miraculous transaction every act on the part of all connected with it is deliberate, rational and sequent, without hurry, excitement or concealment, without suspicion of imposture in the apostle or of delusion in the people.

If the life of Dorcas was a blessing to the Church and world, even more fruitful of good was her death. It roused the Church through grief and surprise to tears of repentance, gratitude and love. It led them to confession and prayer in seeking heavenly sympathy and comfort. It reminded them that preparation for the grave is preparation for the resurrection, which should comfort us as we lay away our dead. The awakening of her body from the sleep of death was the awakening of many sleeping souls to life in Jesus Christ. O Church of God! O world for which the Son of God died! "Jesus Christ maketh thee whole:" there is none other. Whatever we do or have done, must be done in Jesus—in the name of Jesus—in the Church of Jesus—through the ministries of Jesus.

Let the Church hear the cry, "Arise! awake at the word to the work of Jesus." Have not the Christian women of the Church heard that call? Never the last to hear, ever from the days of Mary, Martha and Tabitha leaders in services of love and mercy, even in those demanding heroic endurance and courage, in these later years they seem to have heard a new cry and to have received a fresh baptism—a very voice from heaven saying unto them, "Arise."

CORNELIUS AND PETER.

BY THE REV. H. A. NELSON, D. D.

May 6.—Acts 10: 30-44.

(I.) *How Cornelius found Peter.*—Cornelius had been diligently and earnestly seeking God. Our Common Version makes him tell Peter (v. 30) that four days before Peter came he was fasting, and at the ninth hour (about the middle of the afternoon), as he was praying, he received a supernatural communication directing him to send to Joppa for Simon Peter (the apostle), who would be found at the house of another Simon, a tanner.

The revisers of our English Version so render the text as to make Cornelius say nothing of fasting, but that he "was keeping the ninth hour of prayer in his house." Not unlikely he did fast, for certainly fasting is not an unscriptural means of helping ourselves to a more intense concentration of thought in prayer, however unscripturally fasting may have been exaggerated or abused as a work of merit or penance. However it may have been about Cornelius fasting, there is no doubt that he was very intent upon what he sought in prayer. He was praying very earnestly and persistently. The whole story makes the impression that he was in the habit of prayer. If that was a special day of prayer that he was keeping (perhaps with fasting also), no doubt he gave some part of every day to prayer. Very likely that "ninth hour of prayer"

was one which he "kept" every day. That was a commonly recognized "hour of prayer." (See Acts 3: 1.)

What was he praying for so earnestly? There is no intimation that he was in any temporal distress or perplexity from which he was asking to be delivered, nor that there was any particular temporal blessing which he desired. The answer which came, and his thankful satisfaction with it, show that it was the urgency of *spiritual* need which moved the devout centurion to such earnest prayer.

The messenger whom God sent assured him that his prayer was accepted, and also his "alms." Do we sufficiently notice how closely the Bible connects almsgiving with prayer, and how little reason the Bible gives us to hope that God will hear our prayers if we do not hear the cry of the needy? This pious centurion's prayers were not hindered by stinginess. "His prayers and his alms were had in remembrance in the sight of God." As to his own great need of spiritual light and comfort and strengthening, God's way of supplying it was by directing him to send for an apostle, and he was told just where to find him.

Could not God as easily have communicated directly to the mind of Cornelius all that he needed to know or all that Peter could tell him? Cornelius did not think of indulging in any such questionings about different ways in which God might do things from those in which he does them. Perhaps it would be better for some of us if we indulged in no such questionings. "Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight." Cornelius readily accepted God's method, promptly obeyed God's direction. His messengers found Peter at Joppa, and conducted him to Cornelius at Cæsarea. Thus Cornelius found Peter.

(2.) *How Peter found Cornelius.*—About the same time

when God, in answer to Cornelius' prayers, was moving him to seek for Peter to get instruction, he was dealing remarkably with Peter, preparing him to go and instruct Cornelius. He did this by a vision as of a sheet let down from heaven containing various kinds of animals. He showed him that the old distinction between clean and unclean meats (in a religious sense) had fulfilled its purpose, and need not any longer be insisted upon—more particularly, that he should no longer look upon any man as unclean or "common" * because he was not a Jew. Taught by that vision, and the Spirit's interpretation of it (vs. 19, 20), Peter did not hesitate to go to Cornelius with the men whom he had sent for him. Making the journey of thirty or thirty-five miles to Cæsarea, he found Cornelius.

Is anything more notable in the providential leadings of God than the ways in which he brings together, from distant places, persons who before have not known each other, but whom he has predestined to have some common work, perhaps a whole life, together? †

* This word seems to have had in it, in the mind of the Jews, something of the same contempt which in some parts of our country is expressed by the word "ordinary," shortened, in common speech, to "*ornery*."

† "Who have strangers always been—
 Never were together brought—
 Neither by the other seen—
 Never of each other thought,—
 These has God, their hearts and hands,
 Bound in love's endearing bands.

"Here an infant is at nurse,
 There another's born afar;
 Both pursue their random course,
 Each of each is unaware;
 But the wanderers yet shall come,
 And together find a home."

(3.) *In what Condition he Found him.*—Cornelius had called together a number of his “kinsmen and near friends” to wait with him for the coming of the man of God who could tell them what they all needed to know. With these friends Cornelius was waiting for Peter and his attendants; and when they came Cornelius met Peter at the door with more emphatic demonstrations of reverence than Peter thought it right to accept. He would be regarded and treated only as a fellow-man, albeit he was to bring a message from God. The obedience and the reverence are due to Him who has sent the message, not to the messenger. It does not take Cornelius long to settle his mind to the right attitude. Receiving from Peter his account of the way in which God has taught him to lay aside all Jewish prejudice, and no longer to reckon any man unfit for his company because he is of another nation, Cornelius as simply and frankly relates to Peter how God has dealt with him, and made known his will and his way to him in answer to his prayers. He tells Peter how promptly he obeyed the divine direction, and frankly expresses his appreciation of Peter’s prompt coming. Then he makes clear acknowledgment of Peter as an inspired bearer of God’s word to them, and assures him of his own readiness and that of his assembled friends to receive that divine word with reverent teachableness: “Now therefore we are all here present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God” (v. 33).

Could there be a better example of reverent attention? Although Peter had refused the personal homage to himself which he perhaps misunderstood Cornelius to offer, he could have no objection to his most reverential submission to the word of God which he had been sent to speak to him. He must have been pleased and encouraged by

finding his audience in that state of mind. Doubtless Peter had stood up before audiences of Jews whose faces had given him no such encouragement, but whose scowling visages showed that he must conquer their prejudices before he could win their consideration to his proofs that the Jesus whom they had crucified was the Christ of their prophetic Scriptures. Now, speaking for the first time to Gentiles, having with so much difficulty conquered his own hindering prejudices, how cheering it must have been to find such a welcome and such attention!—a goodly company of thoughtful people, beforehand convinced that he has God's true word to speak to them, met in the house of a devout centurion, ready reverently to listen. Happy Peter, opening the door into the kingdom of Christ to the Gentiles!

Ought it to be difficult for us to hold fast the distinction between such idolatrous homage to a man as Peter so properly refused, and that reverent and obedient reception of God's word which Cornelius and his friends so well exemplified? Every Christian congregation looking up to their pulpit, every Sabbath-school class seated around their teacher, ought always to feel that they are present before God to hear whatever things have been commanded of God to their teacher or preacher to be spoken to them. Neither teacher nor preacher makes any claim to personal inspiration empowering him to add new revelation to God's word written, but his business is, by previous prayerful study, and present setting forth of the fruits of that study, to help his pupils or his hearers to see and know and feel what truly is in God's word written. No other instruction is fit for pulpit or Sabbath-school. Pupils or people cannot be there *before God* to hear anything else than *the word of God*. The business of that hour is to find, to feel, to accept, the true meaning of

God's word—the very instruction, admonition, help, which God intends that very portion of his word to give then and there to that very audience, to that very class. There are teachers, there are pastors, sometimes so happy as this. I can think of no sweeter happiness. Might we not have more of it? Can we not help each other to it? Do we not owe this to each other? Do we not owe it to God? Will we not come thus to our pulpits, our pews, and our classes next Sabbath, every Sabbath, simply, honestly, obediently to speak and to hear whatsoever things are commanded us of God?

(4.) *What Kind of Man Peter found Cornelius.*—Luke tells us (v. 2.) that he was “a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, who gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.” Although he was a Roman and a soldier, he was no worshiper of Jupiter or Venus or Mars—“gods that are no gods.” On military duty among the people of Israel, he had learned of Jehovah, “who made the world,” and who is not to be “worshipped with men's hands as though he needed anything, seeing that he giveth to all life and breath and all things.” Perhaps he had seen the impressive service of the temple, so far as it could be seen in the Court of the Gentiles. Perhaps he had heard the songs of Zion, and had read in Isaiah of Him who was “led as a lamb to the slaughter.” Like the noble Ethiopian to whom Philip was sent, Cornelius may have needed some one to tell him of whom the prophet thus spoke; yet may not he have *trusted*, without such explanation, in Him, whoever he might be, upon whom “Jehovah had laid the iniquity of us all—who was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, with whose stripes we are healed”? I would not dare to say if I wished—and I would not wish to say if I dared—that there may not

often have been such saving trust in the midst of very defective knowledge, going before and ready to welcome the instruction which "expounds the way of God more perfectly."

(5.) *How Peter Preached to Cornelius and his Friends.*— He did not preach *repentance* to Cornelius. There is not a word which would intimate that he thought him a man who needed to turn from sinful courses. Evidently, he recognized him as one who "feared God and wrought righteousness," and was "accepted of him." Let us not be afraid to take this frankly, just as Luke reports it. This will not lead to any denial or dishonor of the New-Testament doctrine that we, sinners, cannot be justified by the deeds of the law, but only by faith. Peter did not fail to honor that true doctrine in his address to Cornelius and his friends. He preached to them "the good tidings of peace by Jesus Christ, the Lord of all," and taught them, according to the testimony of "all the prophets," "that through his name every one that believeth on him shall receive remission of sins." No one who heard Peter preach was likely to be left to think complacently of himself as having always so "feared God and worked righteousness" that he could be accepted of him without trust in Jesus Christ. No less important was it for them to know that no trust in Jesus Christ could be accepted as genuine if it did not lead to a righteous and godly life.

"Mistaken souls! that dream of heaven,
And make their empty boast
Of inward joys and sins forgiven,
While they are slaves to lust!

"Vain are our fancies, airy flights,
If faith be cold and dead;
None but a living power unites
To Christ, the living Head.

“’Tis faith that changes all the heart ;
’Tis faith that works by love,
That bids all sinful joys depart,
And lifts the thoughts above.”

Some of our most thoughtful theologians and pastors, firmly holding the New-Testament teaching in both its aspects, are gravely questioning whether, in our time, it is so much Paul’s teaching, that we must be justified by faith and not by works, which needs to be emphasized, as James’s teaching, that a faith which does not produce good works is only the dead corpse of the faith which Paul taught. The first thing Peter noticed in Cornelius was the righteous and godly life which attested the genuineness of his faith, and showed that he only needed enlightening, not converting. He was already “devout.” He already “feared God” and “prayed to God alway.” He already knew something of the gospel of “peace by Jesus Christ.” He needed to have this way of peace expounded to him more perfectly, that he might come into the clear, conscious, full enjoyment of it. His mind was already open ; his heart was already prepared to receive this gospel joyfully and obediently, just as Lydia did at Philippi (Acts 16 : 14). I have heard of modern missionaries finding some to whom they have carried the gospel thus ready to receive it, recognizing it at once as the very thing they have needed and longed for, and some dim pre-intimations of which had before come to their thoughtful, inquiring, penitent spirits. So the true gospel came to the heart of Luther, finding it already subdued into complete readiness to welcome it. How many such prepared yet needy and hungry hearts may there be longing and aching now amid the darkness or dimness of popery, of Mohammedanism, of Mormonism, or in the chill and gloom and bewilderment of skepticism, of pantheism,

of "science falsely so called"! Does not the story of Peter and Cornelius teach us how we should seek them and treat them? They need us. Is God intimating to us, as to Peter in that vision, how sympathetically we should go to them?

Peter told them of Jesus, with beautiful tact assuming that they already knew something of him—of "the word" which he and John preached, of the "power" he had shown under the Holy Spirit's "anointing." Is it not beautiful, the simplicity with which Peter speaks of Him "who went about *doing good*"? The sweet and gentle beneficence of that lowly life, in which there was always hidden, and from which, every now and then, there issued forth, such power to "heal all that were oppressed of the devil,"—the contemplation of this Peter found a good preparation for the still higher truth that the meek Jesus is "Lord of all," is "ordained to be Judge of quick and dead," and that it is only through his name that "whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins."

Can any now admire and applaud his "going about doing good," and overlook all that shows him our Saviour from sin, our only refuge from the woe and ruin to which our sinfulness exposes us? Such are greatly deceiving themselves if they think that they are following the example of Cornelius or the teaching of Peter. We need Jesus as "the Lamb of God" bearing our sins. We need his blood "cleansing us from all sin." Until we *thus* accept him our efforts to imitate his going about doing good will not be a success; they will be rather a caricature. *Thus* accepting him, we are assured of receiving that Holy Spirit of promise with whose indwelling we shall be enabled to follow Jesus in the way of godly beneficence, and to "live the life which we now live in the flesh by faith in the Son of God."

BARNABAS, THE NOBLE MISSIONARY.

BY THE REV. THEO. L. CUYLER, D. D.

May 13.—Acts 11:19-30.

PETER'S vision at Joppa introduced a new era in human history. To the fisherman-apostle, as he kneeled at his noontide hour of devotion, was revealed the glorious truth that God is no respecter of persons. This was not only the "gospel of democracy" for every land, leveling up all castes and classes into a common brotherhood before God; it was a gospel of foreign missions which proclaimed that the Gentile had as good a right to the offer of eternal life as the children of Abraham. That vision of Peter opened the way to the evangelization of Western Asia, as Paul's vision at Troas opened the way to the evangelization of Europe.

The persecution which arose on account of the heroic martyr Stephen "scattered abroad" many new converts from Jerusalem, even as a sturdy blow of the blacksmith's sledge scatters the fiery sparks from the anvil. Some of them enter the maritime coast of Phœnicia; some of them cross over to the luxurious and licentious island of Cyprus; others move northward to the superb city of Antioch. These early pioneers of the cross were not commissioned by "boards" or other missionary organizations. The book of the Acts is mainly the record of

individual efforts for the conversion of individual souls. The souls thus evangelized were in great centres of influence, like Jerusalem, Ephesus, Rome and Antioch.

The American tourist who visits now the shrunken and miserable hamlet called *Antikia* can form but a poor conception of what Antioch was in the days of its flashing splendor. It was the queen of the Orient, the capital of Syria, the third city in influence on the globe. Its population was about equal to that of Chicago to-day. Its natural situation was commanding, with the river Orontes flowing past it and the magnificent mountains of Lebanon towering above its walls. Grecian art and Roman wealth had enriched it with gorgeous temples of heathen deities, with sumptuous baths and theatres, with elegant villas upon its hillsides, and with expensive aqueducts carried across its adjacent plains. No capital outside of Rome was more imperial in its splendor or more corrupted by wealth and sensuality.

Among the mixed population of this Oriental mart of commerce were many Greeks. Some commentators insist that the word "Grecian" in the twentieth verse describes Hellenistic Jews. But as we are told in the previous verse that some of the gospel itinerants "preached the word to none but the Jews only," it is probable that this verse announces that the good news of salvation had begun to be offered to the Gentiles.

An immediate blessing followed. The omnipotent "hand of the Lord was with" these earnest preachers of the truth. The instruments were human, the power was divine. We pastors and Sunday-school teachers can do nothing without God, and it is equally true that in our departments God will do nothing without us. When God's hand and man's hand combine, then comes the spiritual harvest. The results which followed this pioneer preach-

ing-work at Antioch were an admirable type, and a model of the best modern revivals. We are told that "a great number believed, and turned to the Lord." Observe this process: the inward must precede the outward—the root must be planted before we can expect the tree. The root here is heart-faith in the crucified Jesus. As the result of this internal acceptance of Christ there was a conversion or "turning" from a life of sin to a life of serving Christ. When the hand of the Holy Spirit is laid on the helm, the whole vessel swings around upon its keel and "heads" in the opposite direction. We have no doubt that this fleet of new converts bore the colors of an open confession of Christ at the mast-head, and were all ready to go into action for him at once. True conversion demands prompt confession and union with the Church. As soon as a lamp is lighted, let it straightway *shine*.

Good news flies fast, even before the days of newspapers and telegraphs. Jerusalem was the head-quarters of Christianity, and what was going on at Antioch could not be kept from the mother-church. According to the literal rendering of the twenty-second verse, "the tidings concerning these things" (or converts) "was heard with the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem." In the judgment of that parent church the important work that had opened in Antioch demanded a master-workman.

The man whom the Jerusalem church selected to be the city missionary at Antioch, and afterward the foreign missionary to Cyprus, has never received the high honor through after ages to which he is fairly entitled. In our humble judgment he stands next to Paul, as the second most remarkable character who is presented to us in the roll of converts after the days of Pentecost. A gratuitous slur has been cast upon him because he afterward had a "contention" with Paul about certain matters; but

may it not be possible that in that contention Paul may have been as much in the wrong as Barnabas? Good men may easily differ, and often dispute warmly, about the best method of prosecuting God's work.

The original name of the gospel-preacher who was delegated from Jerusalem was *Joses* or Joseph. As the brightest light is kindled on a point that comes out of a bed of charcoal, so this light-bearer of the gospel came out of one of the darkest regions of debauchery and idolatry. He was a native of the island of Cyprus. He was of a Levitical descent, but his country was proverbial for its licentiousness, and the name of "Cyprian" is to this day applied to one who has sinned away the purity of her womanhood. But as the sun can attract heavenward pure particles of moisture from a slimy pool, so God's grace elevates many human souls from very filthy surroundings. One of the earliest converts to the gospel of Calvary is Joseph the Cyprian; and what a thorough, out-and-out work was his conversion! In our times we discover conversions of the head without a change of heart; again, we see both head and heart renovated without much perceptible influence on the purse. But Joses was the subject of a spiritual revolution that reached to the bottom of his pocket.

Make way for him as the pioneer of the noble army of generous givers for the gospel! He may be called the father of *Christian beneficence*, for he is the first one specifically named who, "having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet." The whole host of Christian givers—the Thorntons, the Peabodys, the Lenoxes, the Dodges, the Tappans, the Stuarts and the Baldwins—are all the successors of this "son of consolation." In modern days we do not often hear of Christians who sell their real estate in order to fill Christ's

treasury. The reason why there are so many stingy professors in our churches is that their hearts are not warm enough to thaw out their purses.

With his new nature Joseph receives a new name. He is christened "*Barnabas*," which in our Authorized Version is translated a "son of consolation." This would bespeak a fine character. "He who has consolation gives it, and he that gives consolation has it."*

This were an enviable cognomen for every pastor and Sunday-school teacher, whose offices are not only to instruct in the truth, but to visit their flocks and to heal the broken-hearted. The late Westminster Revisers give to the name of Barnabas the more literal meaning, "son of exhortation" or of persuasion. This would describe him very happily, as a zealous and successful exhorter and preacher of the word. Being familiar with his gifts and his graces, the mother-church at Jerusalem appointed him to "go as far as to Antioch."

On his arrival there he finds himself in the midst of what we now designate a "work of grace." So visible and impressive was this mighty work that Luke tells us that Barnabas "saw the grace of God"—*i. e.* the manifest effects of the Holy Spirit's power in the conversion of heathen idolaters. This gladdened his heart with an unselfish and inspiring joy. Nothing quickens the hungry soul of a true minister or Sabbath-school laborer like visible results. The spiritual atmosphere is charged with a sort of divine electricity. It is a luxury to fish when the gospel-net encloses a great multitude of fishes, yet he is not worthy of the name of Christ's servant who is not willing to spend the labor of a life to win even one precious soul from the pains of hell.

Barnabas comes in no jealous or fault-finding temper to

* Dr. William Arnot.

criticise the labors of others; he rejoices in the rich results already achieved, and "exhorts them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord." Some ancient authorities read, "that they would cleave unto the purpose of their heart in the Lord." He directed them immediately to Christ, and bade them cleave fast to him. He taught those awakened souls that faith was a transaction by which they joined their own weakness unto Christ's strength, their unworthiness to his merits, and their guiltiness to his full pardoning grace. The atoning blood not only cleansed, it cemented. This is the secret of the only religion that holds out; and it holds out because it *holds on* to Him who declares that "none shall be able to pluck you out of my hand."

We always know what manner of spirit a man is of when we ascertain what gladdens him the most or what grieves him the most deeply. Barnabas "was glad" to see these early fruits of the gospel of the cross. "For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith." The Bible is chary of personal eulogies, and leaves us to form our estimate of men's character by their conduct. I do not now recall any laudations of Paul or Peter or the beloved John, such as surviving partiality often inscribes on the tombs of the departed. But here is an encomium, uttered by the Holy Spirit, that would outshine burnished gold if it were carved on the monument of any servant of God. Brethren, how sweetly might you or I sleep in our last narrow bed if over our dust the divine Hand could write, "A good man, and full of the Holy Ghost"! This description does not imply miraculous inspiration; it simply describes what is attainable by the humblest Christian here, for we are all commanded to be filled with the Spirit. In proportion as we are emptied of pride and self-seeking may we be filled to

the brim with the divine indwelling—yes, filled unto all the fullness of God!

The harvest soon becomes too great in Antioch for any one man to gather, for “much people was added to the Lord.” Please to mark this expression well. The narrative does not say that many people joined the Church, but that many people *joined Christ*. When a soul has joined itself to Jesus, then union with his Church is the most natural step imaginable. Barnabas finds that the gospel-net is becoming so full that he requires a partner to assist him in drawing it to land. He has in his eye a new convert who is not very far away—one who is in the prime of his powerful manhood, and one who has a prodigious driving-wheel in his mental machinery. Once before (Acts 9: 27) he had introduced this extraordinary convert to the leaders of the church in Jerusalem. So he departs from Antioch to Tarsus to look for Saul. When Sir Humphrey Davy was asked what was the greatest discovery he had ever made, he replied, “It was young Michael Faraday.” To the quick eye of Barnabas was due the honor of first recognizing the fiery vigor, the intrepid courage and the indomitable zeal of him who was yet to be the very chiefest of the apostles.

Since Saul—who had not yet received the familiar name of Paul—had left Cæsarea we had lost track of him. He seems to have returned to his native city of Tarsus in Cilicia. How long he had been residing there, or what occupation he was pursuing there, the inspired history does not inform us. He may have been intent upon his sacred studies in preparation for his after-work, or he may have been undergoing a portion of that discipline to which he refers in his subsequent Epistle to the Corinthians. Quite likely it is that he was not idle among his neighbors, for we were informed afterward that there

were churches in Cilicia, and he may have had a hand in planting them.

I am inclined to think that Saul was not in Tarsus when Barnabas reached there, because the Greek word translated "seek" signifies a sharp search, as though Barnabas had some trouble to find him. He persisted in the hunt until he did lay hands on him. When he did capture the prize he "led him into Antioch" with the happy feeling of one who has found great spoil. At once they enter upon their work, Barnabas and Saul, in holy and loving partnership, "assembling themselves with the Church" for worship and for work. Their chief business was spiritual instruction in the elementary truths of Christianity. Not with sensational claptrap or curiosity-seeking devices did they aim to attract popular attention. They simply "taught" their auditors, but taught them with such winsome skill and affectionate zeal that they had "much people" to listen to them. Literally translated, they had a "sufficient crowd." The word implies a miscellaneous congregation of rich and poor, cultured and ignorant, from the various classes of society. No splendid sanctuary gave them shelter; no costly music baited their æsthetic appetites; no luxurious pews invited the rich while the poor were kept standing at the gates; none of the ecclesiastical poms and pageantries of modern worship had yet intruded into the sweet, primitive simplicity of apostolic Christianity. Two anointed preachers, filled with the heavenly unction, stood up and proclaimed Christ crucified and Christ risen from the dead. If any of the assembly were troubled with difficulties, they asked questions and the two teachers answered them. Psalms were sung and spiritual songs; fervent prayers were offered, and alms were distributed to the poor. On every first day of the week those Antioch disciples gathered

for an "agapé," or love-feast, and with simple fragments of bread and cups filled with the fruit of the vine they commemorated the dying love of their blessed Lord. From beginning to end their Sabbath services, their week-day work, their preaching, their prayers and their social fellowship, all tasted of CHRIST. The aroma of Christ pervaded everything. They knew nothing of theologic systems—they knew only one divine Person; they just believed, and preached, and loved, and lived out, the LORD JESUS CHRIST.

With the new nature came a new name. Hitherto the followers of Jesus had been known as his "disciples." Sometimes they were sneered at as "Nazarenes" or "Galileans," but they always spoke of each other as "the brethren" or as "the saints" or as "the faithful in Christ Jesus." A new word is coined at Antioch; for there, we are told, the disciples were *first called* CHRISTIANS. The coinage is not their own; it was a nickname invented by their enemies and flung at them as a reproach. The Jews did not invent it, for they would not admit that the crucified Galilean had been the Christ, the Anointed Prophet of God. The word has a Roman ending, and probably came from those who used the Latin tongue. Just as the name of Puritan or of Methodist was first bestowed in ridicule and afterward worn as a title of nobility, so the name Christian was scornfully applied to the new sect as a term of ignominy. As Canon Farrar finely remarks, "An hybrid and insulting designation was invented in the frivolous streets of Antioch, and around it have clustered for ever the deepest faith and the purest glory of mankind." Scoffer of Antioch! we thank thee for that word "Christian." The prophecies of the ancient seers, the light of Bethlehem's star, the precious power of Calvary's blood, the dawn of the resurrection-

morn, the devotion of the early martyrs, the civilizations of the best peoples of the globe, the mission-schemes of all times, and the redemption of the race,—are all linked with that glorious name. It is the enduring witness that our salvation stands not in a system, but in a *Person*, the ineffable and almighty Christ Jesus. Whoever would be saved must be Christ's man.

Having narrated the signal services of Barnabas and Paul at Antioch, the chapter concludes with an account of a visit made by certain prophets, or inspired teachers, from Jerusalem. They come to warn the church at Antioch that a famine is approaching. The chief object of narrating this prophecy would seem to be its beautiful illustration of Christian beneficence. A relief-fund is raised by the Antioch brethren, and the rule of giving was the golden rule for all right giving to the end of time. Here it is: "*Every man gave according to his ability.*" The measure of his purse was the measure of his charity, and nobody robbed himself of the luxury of contributing. When the Antioch rule is thoroughly practiced by Christians in America, there will be a speedy end of raising money for the Lord's treasury "by hook and by crook"—a system which often practices petty larceny and then varnishes it with the sacred name of charity. Promptly was the money raised and put into the hands of Barnabas and Paul; they, in turn, delivered it to the presbyters or elders of the church at Jerusalem. This is the first time that the New Testament mentions the important office of "elder"—an office which was essential in the Jewish Church, and has been, and will be, a permanent office in the Church of Christ as long as it endures. From the name of that office comes our venerable and honored name of PRESBYTERIANS.

Having now walked around this goodly and fruit-laden tree of Antioch, let us give it one good shake, and the following truths will drop like ripe apples into our laps :

1. The devil always outwits himself when he persecutes God's people. The blood of Stephen the martyr was the seed of the churches of Syria.

2. The only preaching that ever saves a sinner from hell is that which wrought such wonders at Antioch ; it is simply and faithfully "preaching the Lord Jesus."

3. Spiritual success is secured only when God and man work together in partnership. If the "hand of the Lord" is withheld, the hand of the strongest man is paralyzed.

4. The only title worth your ambition or mine is this : "He is a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith." It is a great thing to have a church modeled after such a pattern as Barnabas.

5. "Cleaving unto the Lord Jesus" is the true secret of the higher life. When my weak, wicked heart is grafted, by faith, into his bleeding heart, then doth the blood of the Vine flow into the branch.

6. The only name that you or I can ever carry in through the gate of heaven will be the name of *Christian*. If we are never willing to bear it as a cross, we can never wear it as a crown.

7. The golden word that shines through the whole passage we have studied is the word *Give*. The master-spirit of the Antioch church was a bountiful giver ; he gave his real estate, and then gave himself. The first recorded act of that church was that "every man gave according to his ability." Never could there have been a Christian in Antioch or a Christian here had not God given his only-begotten Son, and had not that Son given his life a ransom for us all.

PETER'S DELIVERANCE.

BY THE REV. WILLIS G. CRAIG, D. D.

May 20.—Acts 12 : 1-17.

UNDER the reign of Herod Agrippa I. a new persecution of the Christians arose. James, the brother of John, one of the three apostles who were most intimately associated with Jesus during his life on the earth, fell by the sword as the first sufferer.

As the murderous deed seemed to please the hostile Jews, the politic tyrant selected another illustrious victim, and Peter fell into the hands of a deadly and irresponsible power. We cannot tell with what unseemly haste James had been hurried to death. There is no intimation in the history that he was furnished an opportunity of defence, or that if a word of manly defence was offered it availed anything.

Peter might have been summarily dealt with after the same fashion but for the fact that his arrest occurred about the time of the paschal feast; and while it was a small thing to take an innocent man's life, it would not do so far to violate the proprieties of Jewish ritualism as to force an execution into the midst of the formal sanctities of so important a festival. So Peter was lodged in prison, to be held until the festival was concluded, and the usual Roman guard of sixteen soldiers, divided into four

bands, was detailed to guard him, each band keeping in turn one of the "four watches" into which the night was divided.

But there are more powers than one abroad in this evil world of ours. And as Peter lay prone in the deep recesses of the prison, chained by each arm to a soldier, while other two kept sentinels' watch about the prison-gates, a Power was invoked in his behalf which is mighty for the relief of God's people when their condition seems remediless.

Let us for our instruction follow the steps of this incident until we see this mighty Power, invoked by believing prayer, in full display for the relief of an imperiled Christian.

(1.) *We obtain a pleasing view of the deep and tender sense of brotherhood which pervaded the early Christian Church.*

This sense of brotherhood is one of the best gifts which the gospel brought to men. It is indeed the primary, unique element of the human race as a special, distinct creation. As a variety of intelligent creature, intended to carry still higher the proof of God's creative wealth, the fact of its interlaced brotherhood, instinct with a common life, mutual love and fully-shared joys, was its distinguishing feature. In the far-reaching competency of this unusual principle, by which an unnumbered series of individuals were joined together in the bonds of a closely-articulated *family*, there might be opportunities of usefulness, capacities for happiness and the means for moral displays of an elevated character far transcending all that had yet been manifested by the creatures of God. We know what a disastrous blow sin struck this distinguishing principle of human nature—how the members of the one family fell apart; how dissociation came into play, with all its

destructive consequences; how warring tribes grew up in sullen isolation, with jarring interests and conflicting claims, until soon the field upon which the noblest deeds should have been wrought was changed into a scene of bitter hatred and bloody strife, brother arrayed against brother, neighbor against neighbor.

If reclamation should ever come for the race, if it should ever be started afresh upon a career of honor and blessedness, this principle must be called into life again. It must become the regulative power of human action. Men must be taught not only to know God as a Father, but each other as brothers, if they would attain to their true destiny. And so we perceive that Christ in his gracious work of restoration made this brotherhood of men the basic element of the kingdom which he came to establish on earth. He drew his redeemed followers close about his person—filled them with the tenderest love for himself as their Elder Brother and for one another as members of himself. He revived and rehabilitated the original principle of human brotherhood, and set it upon a career of disinterested love, of holy self-denial, of mutual helpfulness and unshrinking fidelity, which in its consummation may well become the admiration of the universe.

How beautifully did the early Church display this elevated, this transforming principle! How closely were they joined together! How constantly they assembled for mutual instruction! How tenderly they loved one another! How generously, when the occasion seemed to intimate it, they sold their private property and laid it at the apostles' feet to be disposed of for the common good! How sharply did an authoritative apostle rebuke the simulation of this holy principle! And how carefully yet surely did the Holy Spirit lead them from the admission of a loving brotherhood among themselves to the

recognition of the vaster brotherhood of the entire human family, until a Peter was made ready to admit into the sacred circle the hitherto despised Gentiles, and a Paul, in the culmination of the doctrine within his enlarged Christian consciousness, longed to fold upon his breast the entire world of men!

Out of the fruitful soil of loving brotherhood sprang up the intense concern of the whole church of Jerusalem for Peter, now in the hands of a relentless enemy. It is the true cement which binds Christians of every name and country together in an indissoluble bond. It should be our special business to exhibit this spirit more and more as we mingle among our fellow-men. It is our solemn duty to imbue the hosts of children who are brought beneath our hands with the holy ardor of this sacred brotherhood. It is the only sentiment of sufficient power to arouse the Church to carry the gospel to the millions yet lying in the region and shadow of spiritual death.

(2.) *We see the church of Jerusalem in the attitude of prayer for an imperiled brother.*

The Christians of Jerusalem are described as constituting one church. In order to convenience they doubtless met for purposes of worship, instruction and brotherly communion in several different places, such as private houses or hired apartments, like the one which served the disciples as a place of assemblage at the time of the Pentecostal blessing. But there was one organized Christian community, and one spirit prevailed the body. Mark its features:

It was a praying church. When they had returned to the city from the Mount of Olives after witnessing the ascension of the Lord into heaven, they entered into an upper room, and all continued with one accord in prayer

and supplication. When they would select one to fill the place in the apostolate made vacant by the defection of Judas, they prayed, and said, "Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen." When they had received three thousand souls into the Church, they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers.

When Peter and John returned to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them at their first arraignment for preaching the gospel, the whole company lifted up their voice to God with one accord in a noble prayer of praise, thanksgiving and petition. As the result of this habitual prayerfulness "they were filled with the Holy Spirit," "they spake the word with boldness," the multitude of them that believed "were of one heart and of one soul," "and great grace was upon them all."

By the habit of prayer the Church was prepared for trying emergencies. "While therefore Peter was being kept in prison, prayer was being made of the Church unto God for him." Here was a great emergency. It was a fair, full test of their faith. Peter was arrested at the time of the passover. This feast began on the fourteenth day of Nisan (corresponding partly to our March and April). A festival-week followed. He was to be kept in prison until the close of the festival, and then brought forth for execution in the presence of the crowd. Through this dreary week the faith of Christ's people was their only comfort, and prayer their constant occupation. Well may they now call to mind the blessed promises of the divine Master; well may they now sustain their courage by the recollection of past instances of helping grace, for Peter, their beloved friend and honored leader, is

in the front line of danger, and the emergency is very great.

They had no carnal weapons with which to fight. They had no distinguished friends at court to whom they might appeal. They had no treasures to offer as a ransom for the valuable life. But they were not utterly feeble, nor were they altogether cast down. There was a Power of which they knew, above the might of kings, standing ready to be invoked; and to this Power they made their appeal in terms of confidence and with accents of entreaty which we verily believe never fail to move that Power to give help.

They prayed in concert. All hearts were touched, all minds agreed; not two or three, but the entire church of Jerusalem. From upper room to upper room, from house to house, the electric current of sympathy passed, until the whole company of the saints spoke as with one voice the deep desire of united hearts. This was their constant method, and goes far to unveil the secret of their astonishing success.

They prayed unceasingly. Through the long week, amid the distractions of the crowded city, with the danger of a bloody persecution hovering about them, in the presence of the mailed soldiers of the heartless tyrant, and under the very shadow of the thick-walled prison whose inner ward held their friend, they lifted their prayers in his behalf. There was no relaxation of energy, no manifestation of doubt, no giving over of entreaty. The vision of their father Jacob wrestling at Mahanaim all through the livelong night may have risen before their spirits, or the thought of the unbroken vigils through which their beloved Master prayed for the help which he needed when he was being perfected through suffering may have come to strengthen them.

Three potent elements met and mingled in their prayer: namely, their sense of need, a present God, and the undoubting conviction that he was able and willing to help. Could it be less than unceasing?

The prayer was not only unceasing; it was instant, earnest—*intense* perhaps better expresses the meaning of the word. They prayed not coldly, nor over the fields, says John Calvin, but so long as Peter was in the conflict the faithful did what they could to help him, and that without wearisomeness. What a power is this *intensity* in the field of prayer!

They prayed to the point. It was all for Peter. Self was forgotten. There were no diffuse and rambling petitions during those earnest meetings—no grooved sentences or highflown expressions, or dull repetitions, certainly no prescribed form. The fountain of feeling was open, the object of desire was clearly defined, the powers of the soul were all aroused, and the petitions came quick and clear, expressing the deep longing of united hearts aglow with loving concern. They could not run wide of the mark: "Hear us for Peter in his lone prison."

And to God direct they spoke. No appeal to angels; no mention of Mary, the honored mother of our Lord; no saint is thought of as a helper, not even Stephen, or the saintly James fresh in heaven from his baptism of blood. No living man is called on to help; no message is sent to Herod. They cast themselves on God nakedly; they invoke the divine Power only. The case is urgent, and the mighty Presence alone filled the scene.

(3.) The appeal has been made, the divine Power invoked; let us see the issue.

The festival-week is over. The day is fixed to bring Peter forth to his doom. It is the morrow. Night has fallen on the city. To the expectation of the Jews and of

Herod it is Peter's last night on earth. But the Church is still praying. One place of meeting is full. "Many were crowded together at the house of Mary." Most likely all the places of assembly were similarly attended. No specific answer had come to their prayers through the week, and yet this night they were not only assembled in large numbers, but they were spending the whole night in prayer, as is proven by the sequel. Peter was asleep in his cell, chained by each arm to a soldier. But even his sleep, the image of helplessness, yet the expression of quiet trustfulness, did wonderfully call upon God, says an old writer. So, in a double way, the mighty power of God was being invoked. The night was far spent. The last or morning watch had come, when, behold! an angel appeared upon the scene and stood over Peter, while a light, proceeding, perhaps, from the person of the exalted visitor, illuminated the prison. We are in the midst of the supernatural. Let us move gently and with uncovered head through the scene, for a messenger of the Lord, direct from his presence, has come in answer to united, long-continued, importunate prayer.

There is no thunder-storm, no earthquake. No jailer is bribed to release Peter. An angel is in the prison, "acting wholly as a person, touching Peter, speaking to him in clear, intelligible orders, producing physical effects of the most marked character." He aroused Peter with a blow on the side, and bade him get up quickly. In the very act of his rising the chains fell off from his hands. Up to this point everything is prompt, as has been well remarked. Haste is demanded, unquestioning obedience is required. Peter must be sharply impressed. Now a more deliberate movement commences. "Gird thyself," put on thy clothes. "Bind on thy sandals," and so he did. Then, "Cast thy upper" (or outer) "garment about

thee." Take time. Fully robe thyself for the outside world; thy liberation is about to be accomplished. Thou art going out of this prison and back to full freedom. Let there be no fear on this point.

The angel moved out of the cell, and Peter followed him. He was in a state of amazement; perplexity filled his mind. He might be in a trance, as once before at Joppa, and this might be a panoramic vision passing before his mind. And yet he obeyed. The movement is now steady and advancing. They pass through the first ward; now they are clear of the second. No warder's challenge halts them; God's spell is on the guards. What is all human vigilance or power when God chooses to exert his supreme control? In a moment they are before the great iron gate "that leadeth into the city." As if endowed with intelligence and will, it swings noiselessly upon its hinges and opens for their passage, as of old the waters of the Red Sea rolled back and Jordan stayed his floods for the convenience of God's people. They went forth, and together passed through the space of a street, or a block, free from prison-walls, out into the cool, refreshing atmosphere of the coming morn; and just then, without another word, without a congratulation or a good-bye, God's messenger departed from him. He does all that is necessary; he does no more. Peter's deliverance is complete; he is at liberty. He is God's *freedman* more than ever.

Left alone, "he comes to himself," passes out of his state of amazement, resumes, so to speak, his natural condition, and with the unerring intuition of a trained servant of God used to divine interventions he traces his deliverance to the right source, and exclaims in the fullness of confidence and gratitude, "Now I know, of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out

of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews."

When he had considered the whole matter, where he was and what was best to be done, he made his way direct to the house of a particular friend, Mary the mother of John Mark, where a large number of Christians were praying through the long watches of the night. With the confidence of familiar friendship he knocks at the front door. The servant-girl attending the door recognizes Peter by his voice, and being in full sympathy with the stream of petition which has been ascending all night, she runs, in the full joy of her heart, to announce Peter's presence, neglecting to admit him. The assembled company could not accept the statement; they thought she was over-excited. The news seemed too good to be true. But under the force of her reiterated statement they concluded that it must be an angel appointed of God to minister unto Peter.

There is no intimation here that they had been praying without faith. Their faith in the power of the living God is proven by their urgent, continued supplications. They may not have prayed specifically for his miraculous deliverance from prison. Their petitions may have been to the point that God would change Herod's mind, overrule his wicked designs against Peter, or that Peter, if the worst must come, might be stayed by the power of God to endure martyrdom with the fidelity of a true witness and the courage of a spiritual hero. But while they hesitated as to how to receive the report of Rhoda, Peter made himself heard by continuous knocking, and when they had moved in a body to the door, there, to their astonishment, stood the apostle, alive and well. It is not to the point, we repeat, to challenge the quality or quantity of their faith. "God had simply granted them more than they hoped

for. He had surpassed their expectations with his infinite goodness."

With a word Peter announced his miraculous deliverance, declaring boldly "that God had brought him out of prison;" and after a message to the brethren touching his escape, he took his departure, and passed at once to another place (most likely outside of the city), in which, for the present, he could be safely concealed.

The mighty Power invoked by believing prayer in the hour of sore distress has responded. With an uplifted arm God has entered upon the scene. His servant is delivered. The purpose of Herod has been thwarted, and "all the expectation of the people of the Jews" has been disappointed.

Believing prayer has won a most notable victory.

May the study of this incident bring us closer to God! May we live in the constant sense of ready access to him! May all doubt about the efficacy of prayer vanish away before the commanding facts of the sacred history as mists are driven from the valley by the rising sun! And may the work of our hands in the vast and varied field of Christian endeavor be undertaken under the all-sufficing assurance that "God is in us, and with us, of a truth"!

PAUL AND BARNABAS IN CYPRUS.

BY THE REV. JOHN HALL, D. D.

May 27.—Acts 13: 1-12.

THIS section of the book opens up a form and pattern of church-extension. Believers, driven from Jerusalem by the persecution that "arose about Stephen" (11: 10), went, among other places, to Antioch, a flourishing city on the Orontes, fifteen to twenty miles from the Mediterranean—so called from Antiochus, the father of its founder, Seleucus, whose own name its port, Seleucia, bore. The Macedonians left such cities with colonies after their conquest of the East. Its Hellenic energy, language, wars and commercial activity raised it to a foremost place, and of course many Jews were there, speaking Greek and known as "Hellenists." They were the natural recipients of the gospel. The grace of God runs along providential lines.

The gospel was believed by many. The company of followers of Christ attracted such notice as to have the name "Christian" given them (11: 26). Barnabas and Saul labored there, and were delegates to Jerusalem with some money subscribed for the famished in the mother-church (11: 27-30), the elders receiving it.

We now see a congregation entering upon the missionary work as it had already entered on the work of benevolence. It was rich in the true strength of a con-

gregation, which is not real estate, buildings or income (it had probably little of these), but men. It had "prophets" who enjoyed the gift of supernatural speech, and able teachers of the ordinary kind having the gift of teaching. The names of three are mentioned, besides Saul and Barnabas, of whom we know nothing else—Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen, a Greek form probably for the Hebrew *Menahem*. One of them had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch. God's grace can reach every class, even the most unlikely. (See Matt. 24: 40.) The congregation did not need all this strength, and probably felt the need of direction as to what to do, and sought it in prayer (ministered—*i. e.* worshiped, offered service) and fasting. There is sometimes weakness in concentration, strength in dispersion. God is to be waited on, and he will direct. So it was here. The Holy Ghost said—in what way we are not told; it may have been by the lips of the "prophets" (v. 1), or by the counsel of the congregation expressed in the usual way; for when a body of Christians seeks light, and then acts according to the indications of Providence, it is to be taken as the mind of the Holy Ghost: men called in this way to fields of labor are to count themselves called of God the Holy Ghost, and to go to work with hope and courage—"Separate me"—*i. e.* from their labors here and from this church to new fields—"whereunto I have called them." Chrysostom notes in the "me" a proof of the divinity of the Holy Ghost.

A solemn service was held; a new departure was to be taken; old traditions were to be upset; it was not the work of any one man or body of men, but of the Church. They fasted, prayed, "laid their hands on them" and sent them away. They had been prepared providentially and by the Spirit; they had the inward call to the work of the

ministry; now they have the outward call through a body of God's people, and they accept it and are authorized to go in Christ's and the Church's name.

Some in the Antioch congregation might have urged the importance of that place and the need of strong men to occupy it; but it is a huge mistake to think that *any one* is good enough for foreign work. The Christian host needs strong men on its outposts. Missionary zeal and Christian life go together. A living Church must think of the parts beyond—not solely of gathering unto itself, not at all of its own greatness. There was no “Book of Discipline” to guide the Antioch congregation; the Lord the Spirit directed, and the course here followed is the foundation of any such scriptural “book” now. The lines here are such as we follow. No pope nor prelate gave the appointments. Peter is not invoked. The believers composing the congregation did it under the Spirit's guidance. So Paul and Barnabas are sent out as missionaries.

Now we see them on their way (v. 4) to Seleucia, the port of embarkation, where they procured passage for Cyprus, an island in the Mediterranean of much interest in olden times, and lately under the notice of European politicians from its being secured for England by the diplomacy of the late Earl Beaconsfield. It had then (has still) some interest from its position in the most eastern part of the Mediterranean and about equally near to Syria and Asia Minor. It has a little added interest to us from the recovery of its buried works of art, now the property of the city of New York. Cyprus was the home of the generous and devoted Barnabas. It contained an immense Jewish population (one-half, it is thought, in this year, A. D. 45), was only about fifty miles from Seleucia, and had Salamis for its chief city. John Mark, the

nephew of Barnabas (see ch. 12: 12), was their assistant, arranging meetings and probably baptizing converts. (See ch. 10: 48; 1 Cor. 1: 14.)

There (v. 5) they preached in the synagogues as they had opportunity. Next we find them at Paphos, on the western side, near which the famous temple of Venus stood, the centre of boundless corruption. Here they came on a man (v. 6) of their own race professing magic or prophecy ("Elymas," his assumed name, means "the wise," "the magician"), finding a profitable field in the rich Roman people, who, having lost faith, had endless credulity, and were the easy prey of the scheming and deceitful. Ample illustration of this is given by Greek and Roman literature, by all history, and even by our own times. The less faith, the more boasted freedom of thought, the better chance for the Spiritualist, the quack and the fortune-teller. (See Howson on this passage.)

This man (v. 7) had fastened himself on the deputy or proconsul, the provincial governor of the island, then under the Romans. He was a better man than ordinary, and wished to hear the message of Paul and Barnabas. His dissatisfaction with the Roman religion probably led him first to cultivate Elymas, and now to inquire after Christianity. But Elymas saw in this the overthrow of his power, and so opposed the Christian preachers—secretly, no doubt, and perhaps openly also. He feared that the deputy might carry into further effect the favorable views he appeared to entertain of the gospel. He is the representative of genius, "art," selfishness, interested in opposing the truth, mercenary in the last degree, unprincipled, only thinking of his own interests. This is the justification of the severity of Paul (now so called, either from the governor giving him his name or from its being his Gentile name in Tarsus. See v. 1 as illustra-

ting two names for one man) in v. 8, filled with the Holy Ghost, not of his own motion, who set his eyes on him, searching him through, showing his conscious superiority to his craft and mercenary aims; denounced his designs in the strongest language: "O full," etc. The cunning and selfish vileness marked (v. 10) him as a "child of the devil," breathing his spirit, doing his work, an "enemy of all righteousness," living by fraud and hating integrity as an "enemy" of his, so "perverting," misrepresenting, belying the right ways of the Lord. He no doubt tried to upset the proofs of Christ's Messiahship and to twist Scripture. (See 2 Tim. 2: 18; Col. 2: 8.) This is followed by the infliction by God and announcement by Paul of a penalty fitting in the case—blindness (v. 11), an outward sign of his inner condition. It was to be "for a season," giving him space for repentance, of which, however, whether it came or not we do not know.

This is one of the few miracles of judgment. It comes at the beginning of the Gentile work, as that on Ananias and Sapphira did at the beginning of the Jewish work under Peter. The sins were different. It was not, however, unbelief in either case: it was the designed hypocrisy in one case, and in the other interested influence against the truth.

The apostles did not perform supernatural works at their own will, but at God's, as they were prompted. If they had had this power Epaphroditus had not been sick, nor Timothy often infirm, nor Paul suffering a thorn in the flesh.

This miracle attested Paul's right to speak, broke the force of the sorcerer's sophistry and perversions, and the deputy believed, no doubt confessing his belief in fitting ways, and, some surmise, after the manner of great rulers, giving his name to Paul, though whom came to him this benefit. Let us learn—

(1.) The duty of the Church of Christ: send forth the ambassadors of Christ.

(2.) Use the right methods: dependence on God and the guidance of the Holy Ghost.

(3.) There may be opposition (as now with the men who live on the Indians, on the Mormons, etc.), but the Holy Ghost can deal with it.

(4.) It is a dangerous thing to allow self-interest to blind us to spiritual truth. Blindness chosen for our own ends may become a curse from God for his ends.

AT ANTIOCH.

BY THE REV. ARTHUR MITCHELL, D. D.

June 3.—Acts 13 : 13-16 ; 43-52.

ELEVEN years have rolled away since Jesus rose from the dead. Saul, the converted Pharisee, so far as the churches in Judea are concerned, is out of sight and almost out of mind. Death threatened him in Jerusalem, as it had in Damascus, and so one night five years ago he fled, traveled stealthily down the mountain-passes from Jerusalem to the western plain, crossed Sharon in safety, reached the port of Cæsarea, and sailed away northward to his old home, Tarsus. Here he has been laboring among his kindred and amidst the scenes of his youth until now. The zeal which could not be silent in Damascus and Jerusalem could not during these years have been idle in Tarsus. There is no record of his work, but here are his own Hebrew kinsmen, here are throngs of cultivated Greeks, whom he can reach through his mastery of their tongue ; and the ruder Cilician dialect, the language of the peasants, the artisans and the mountaineers, he has known from a boy. There is room enough, one would think, for all his zeal.

From October until May is the busy season in this Marseilles. The docks are crowded, the shops are full, the university is in session. And when the city streets lie silent and almost deserted in the scorching summer,

he can go with the departing population up into the cool retreats of Taurus, preaching as he goes, carrying the gospel to the dwellers in the mountains and the high inland plains.

But one day in Tarsus an old friend meets him in the street, or maybe finds him in his shop working again at his old trade. That kind, confiding face Saul could never forget, and he grasps his friend's hand with exclamations of delight. This is the man who, when Saul came down to Jerusalem from Damascus, when all others in the church there eyed him with suspicion, had faith in him, introduced him to the apostles and told them that he had indeed seen the Lord. No, he never could forget Barnabas, the first friend he had found in Jerusalem when he came back there to undo the dreadful work of his former life.

But what has brought Barnabas to this far-off place? He has come seeking Saul; he wants help. There is a great work on hand. Peter's vision, Cornelius' conversion, the liberal action of the quick-minded Hellenists, the wonderful revivals at Antioch, kindled by the fugitives from Jerusalem, have opened a new day for the infant Church. With quick breath and earnest face Barnabas tells Saul the new thoughts and plans which have filled the Church with a noble ferment. The Gentiles, the Gentiles of every nation, are to be evangelized. Yes, foreign missions have been inaugurated. Barnabas' own field is Antioch, the Grecian capital of Northern Syria, and the work is growing beyond all his powers. In this great heathen metropolis, with "Roman soldiers, Phœnician sailors, Greek artists and philosophers, Jewish merchants, African slaves, Arab shepherds and herdsmen, Syrian vine-dressers, and fortune-tellers from the far East," Barnabas and a few others have been toiling, and "the hand of the Lord has been

with them;” “much people have been added to the Lord.” But the burden is too great. Again and again his fellow-workers have said to him, “Brother Barnabas, we must have reinforcements.” And now this thought seizes the good man’s mind: “I will find Saul. Yes, he has the zeal, the faith, the education that this work needs; he is just the man.” Across the sea from Seleucia, or, it may be, overland by the Roman road through the defiles of Mount Amanus, he journeys to Tarsus. An eventful day it was for the world when that gentle but enterprising Levite with his travel-worn garments entered the gate of Tarsus, inquired for the bazaar of the tent-makers, and at last startled Saul with his hearty greeting.

Go with Barnabas to carry the gospel to the Gentiles? Why, it is the very thought which has been burning in Saul’s heart ever since he heard the voice of his Master on the Damascus road. He hails with joy the hour when he can give himself wholly up to his great commission. They returned to Antioch, and there for a year “they taught much people.”

But the great cause of missions still grows in the heart of the Church. They hear the voice of God that still more widely the Church must send forth her light: “Separate me Saul and Barnabas for the work whereunto I have called them.” “And they sent them away.” First, by ship—“the first foreign missionary ship ever chartered”—to Cyprus. There, from one end of the island to the other, they preach the word. It is the birthplace of Barnabas. The governor is converted; all things seem favorable. Shall they not settle down here and stay? No; still on to the regions beyond. Again they are upon the sea. The coast of Pamphylia comes in view; the deep bay of Attaleia, the “rugged knot of mountains piled up into snowy heights above the rocks of Phaselis.” Still near-

ing the shore, they see the fruitful plain reaching back, it may be, twenty miles to the foot of the rugged mountains which enclose the scene. There are the walls and towers of Perga, the noble aqueduct, the theatre, the stadium, the idol temple of Diana on yonder eminence.

But the missionaries make no stay at Perga. The heats of summer have begun. On that southern plain the cities are wellnigh deserted: the silent fields lie trembling in the glare; it is the time of languor and inaction; the world of Perga is on its vacation. This is the season to climb that northern mountain-wall; all Asia Minor lies beyond. Earlier the passes would have been blocked with snow; these are the months for "tours" on the high, cold plains. Before the winter chokes the passes they will return to Perga and the southern towns.

A nephew of Barnabas, John Mark, had been with them hitherto. At Perga, "departing from them, he returned to Jerusalem." Was he afraid? Certainly there were dangers before them. Those mountains were notorious for their wild, lawless clans. Robbers infested them. Rivers, swollen by the melting snows, often swept the roads. Floods turned the dry ravines in an hour into raging water-courses. One of these mountain-streams, the *Cataractes*, tells us by its very name of its turbulence, foaming over the heights and precipices on its way to the Pamphylian Sea. "'Perils of rivers' and 'perils of robbers,'—these words express the very dangers which Paul would encounter on his journey from Perga to Antioch in Pisidia."

The mountains passed, our missionaries travel on due north over the wide plain which stretches more than a hundred miles before them. They are aiming at the Pisidian Antioch, like its Syrian namesake the leading city of its neighborhood, with the cluster of important towns around it—Iconium, Lystra, Derbe. These all lie on the

road running east and west which the Romans have built from Ephesus to Syria. Indeed from Syria to Scotland one might travel on that solid pavement, interrupted only by the Hellespont and the British Channel. These military and commercial roads seem to have been fore-ordained as the earliest highways of the gospel.

Paul and Barnabas spent two Sabbaths in Antioch—a short visit, but long enough for men of earnestness and faith to do a great work. Many Jews had settled in this Gentile city, and there was one place, therefore, amidst all the idol temples where the two Jewish strangers would find the worship of the true God. They found also that their countrymen had much influence there. They had won many Gentile proselytes, persuading them to listen in their synagogue to the writings of Moses and the prophets. The “chief men” of the city, and “honorable women” not a few, in many matters listened with deference to the Jews.

The first Sabbath found the two travelers in the synagogue. It might seem strange that they were at once invited to address the congregation. Probably, however, they had already been a few days in the city, and had made themselves known to the elders of the synagogue. It was evident also that they were no common men. And had they not come from the dear mother-land? To these Jewish colonists in that far-off Gentile city the two rabbis seemed like messengers from home. All things appeared to promise well for their mission. Paul rises to speak; every eye is fixed, every ear is strained.

How shall he break to them his message? His whole heart is set on leading them to believe that the promised Messiah has come, and that Jesus is he. But will they not revolt from the thought that their Messiah is—a Galilean, despised and rejected in Judæa itself, condemned, crucified by the very leaders of their nation—that he loves

the Gentiles as he loves the Jews, welcomes all, and all alike? Paul will lead them to the truth as gently as he can.

Read his address. See how he shows to them first that he himself is a loyal Jew, the history of his people fondly cherished, their hopes in his heart, their prophets on his tongue, and, above all, the prophecy that from royal David should come Israel's Saviour-King (vs. 17-23).

"And he *has* come," says Paul; "'Of this man's seed hath God, according to his promise, raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus.'"

"But is he not Israel's Saviour only?"

"No: 'Men and brethren, ye children of the stock of Abraham, and *whosoever* among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent'" (v. 26).

"But our Jewish rulers in Jerusalem—surely they ought to know—have rejected him, crucified him."

"The very thing the Scriptures had foretold (Isa. 53: 1). They fulfilled the prophets in condemning him (vs. 27-29). And Jehovah fulfilled the prophets in raising him from the dead (v. 30). The witnesses are living, and they are 'many,' who will lay down their lives in testimony that he was seen of them alive, having left the sepulchre that had been watched and sealed" (v. 31).

And then the apostle opens out before them all the gospel—free grace and full forgiveness, not by Moses' law, but by Jesus' cross; not for Jews alone, but for all mankind, and for all on the same gracious though humbling terms (vs. 38, 39).

He has said it. The truth is out. This is the gospel, let who will oppose. Does he see a smile of unbelief on some faces? Some token of incredulity or of displeasure must have been shown by some of his auditors, else he would not have closed with that most solemn warning:

“Beware, therefore, lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the prophets: Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish” (vs. 40, 41).

The sermon made a deep impression. No sooner was the congregation dismissed than many came crowding up to Paul, begging that it might be repeated on the next Sabbath. Some appear to have accepted the truth at once, for after the house was emptied many, both Jews and Gentiles, followed Paul and Barnabas, craving still further instruction. The burden of the apostles' counsel to them was to “continue in the grace of God.” And they had need of firmness. To set out in a Christian life was one thing; to “continue” in it, they would find, was quite another.

All that week Paul's sermon was the talk of the town. No wonder that “on the next Sabbath came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God.” The very sight of those multitudes thronging to hear a doctrine which at least was not *their* doctrine filled the Jews with envy. But when they heard again the gospel itself, blotting out their national monopoly of Heaven's regard—heard that Moses' law could not save; that all alike, they and their Gentile neighbors, were guilty before God; that all alike were to be saved by sheer mercy, and wholly on the atoning merits of that very Jesus whom their rulers had slain,—when they heard all this they broke forth in angry contradiction and reviling.

Here, then, is the crisis of the apostles' mission. We shall need to look—

First, at their *failure*. With the Jews they failed. It was Paul's duty and his desire to bear to them, first of all, the glad tidings of forgiveness. But a self-righteous exclusiveness refused the offer of forgiveness which they must take on the same terms with the low heathen around

them. "They could not endure the notion of others being freely admitted to the same religious privileges with themselves. They indulged the opinion that God's highest favors were only for themselves. Thus, they who on one Sabbath had listened with breathless interest to the teachers who spoke to them of the promised Messiah were on the next Sabbath filled with the most exciting indignation when they found that this Messiah was 'a light to lighten the Gentiles' as well as 'the glory of his people Israel.'" Must they ask for mercy on the same conditions with these pagans bowing down to wood and stone? Their spiritual pride refused. The offer of mercy was made to them by a God of love, and it was made in truth. Do not suppose, because it is said of others that they were "ordained to eternal life," that any secret decree of God concerning these unbelievers prevented their trust and made their repentance impossible. They destroyed themselves. See how Paul expresses it: "Ye put it from you," "Ye sentence yourselves."* So Jesus, in his tears, explains the doom of guilty Jerusalem: "How oft would I, . . . but ye would not."

And not only did they harden themselves; they prejudiced others. Through their influence the passions and the superstitions of leading citizens were aroused; the apostles were persecuted, banished from the city. With words and signs of solemn condemnation they depart. They shake off the dust of their feet as a testimony against these rejecters of the truth (v. 51). This was not an act of unholy passion. It was done in sorrowful obedience to Christ's command (Luke 10:10-16). As for the persecuted missionaries, doubtless they went on their way rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for Jesus' name.

* The true sense of the expression, "Ye judge yourselves."

And they had other causes of joy, as we shall see if we look—

Secondly, at their *success*. The enmity and contradiction of the Jews had from the first only advertised the gospel the more. Their public denunciations did but make the apostles more widely known, pique public curiosity regarding their message, and spread it by every tongue. Not only was the city now full of it, but “the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region.”

The Gentiles heard the word with gladness. Those who believed were not, it would seem, the chief men of the city, nor, of the women, those who had been the leaders of society, the most honored and regarded as the most devout. These sided with the Jews (v. 50). One cannot help the fear that they were too much like the Jews in pride—that they felt themselves too important to be cast off by God, too correct to have need, like common sinners, to cry for mercy.

But God would not have the gospel wholly fail. Some he ordained to eternal life; some hearts he opened by his Spirit's power. The same message which was scorned in one home was welcomed with humble thankfulness in the next. These “glorified the word of the Lord;” they believed it, prized it, spoke of it with joyful freedom, openly declared their faith and love. By grace they were saved, through faith; not of themselves; it was the gift of God. Though lonely and persecuted, they could not be sad; they were “filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.”

We ought to leave this passage of Scripture with three thoughts deeply impressed on our hearts.

(1.) *The apostles of Christ were firm believers in Foreign Missions.* There are still too many in the Church who are

heard to say, "Do not ask me to give to foreign missions; wait until our own country is christianized." Such persons condemn this whole journey of Paul and Barnabas. Was Judæa christianized when they left it? Was Antioch in Syria, where they were ordained for their mission, all gathered unto the Church? Had Cyprus, Barnabas' own birthplace, become a Christian land? By no means. But Paul, through his labors in foreign lands, by his disclosure of the awful degradation and wretchedness of men without God, by the faith which he displayed and the power of God which followed him, by his example of rising above local and narrow views, teaching men of different races and customs to live in unity and love, did a hundred-fold more for the churches in Judæa itself than if he had settled down as a pastor in Joppa or Jerusalem.

The Holy Ghost is the author and inspirer of foreign missions, as any one may see by reading the second and fourth verses of this chapter. Indeed, from these verses on to the last line of the Acts of the Apostles what is this book but a foreign missionary magazine? It is well that we love our own land ardently, but let us not fall into the very error of the Jews, boasting of our Anglo-Saxon blood and history and destiny, half forgetting that other races are as much God's children as ourselves. Not only is the example of Paul before our eyes; his very words are ringing in our ears: "I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians;" and those other words which he quoted from the prophet Isaiah that day in the synagogue of Antioch: "I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for *salvation unto the ends of the earth.*"

(2.) We who hear the gospel should learn also *how dreadful will be the doom of those who neglect it.* As we

see the apostles shake off the dust of guilty Antioch from their feet, we remember the words of Christ himself: "It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city" (Mark 6 : 11 ; Luke 10 : 8-15). Plainly, there are degrees of future punishment. "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." Sodom and Gomorrah never heard the gospel once. The people of Antioch heard it on two Sabbaths. On how many has it been heard by you?

(3.) Those who have been led to embrace the Saviour here learn *whom they have to thank for it*. It is God who ordained you to eternal life. It is God alone who "hath made thee to differ." It would have been just for him to have treated you as he treated others who heard and refused the truth—to have left you to your chosen sins. But he was better to you than you were to yourself. It was he who sent those convictions of sin; it was he who drew you to those humbling confessions, to penitence, prayer, faith and Christian duty. Never forget those words of Paul: "By the grace of God I am what I am."

"Why was I made to hear thy voice,
And enter while there's room,
When thousands make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?"

"'Twas the same love that spread the feast
That sweetly forced us in,
Else we had still refused to taste,
And perished in our sin."

ICONIUM AND LYSTRA.

BY THE REV. THOMAS H. HANNA, D. D.

June 10.—Acts 14 : 1-18.

ICONIUM and Lystra, though only forty miles apart, differed widely as to their city characteristics. Iconium, properly the capital of the district, was on the great, broad, well-traveled road which connected Ephesus with Cilicia and Syria, and her people kept pace with the sluggish current of the times. Her inhabitants were such as were usually found in Eastern cities: a few Roman officials, "cold and stately in their pride;" many Greeks, idle, quick-witted, ready for adventure; and a large element of Jews, always busy during the week, and always in the synagogue on the Sabbath to attend to the reading of the law.

Lystra was a little, out-of-the-way town, with scarcely any commercial or social intercourse with adjacent regions. Her people were half barbarous and altogether idolatrous: able to understand Greek when spoken, they used a dialect of their own as unknown to the outside world as the world without was unknown to them. With the exception of the wife and mother-in-law of one Greek resident, there were, perhaps, no Jews in this place, and in consequence no synagogue. But just outside the city-gate was a temple erected to Jupiter, the tutelary deity of the town, who (their traditions told them) had once visited the place, and might come again at any time.

In two places so very different we would expect different experiences on the part of the visiting missionaries, and different lines of instruction as they prosecuted their mission. And so we find it. We know not the text of any discourse at Iconium, but we may conjecture, as the people were the same, that the theme would be the same as that used back at Antioch: "Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent." But to the Lystrians, who knew nothing of Abraham or David or the promises of Israel, the opening words of their most telling speech were: "Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, who made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways."

At Iconium the missionaries first received acceptance and belief, and then they were exposed to unscrupulous misrepresentation and abuse, which culminated at length in a conspiracy to take their lives. At Lystra the wonderful success achieved in their mission brought them reverence and worship as to descended gods, and then, in the revulsion of feeling caused by the rejection of the offered sacrifice, fanned into fury by the enemies who had followed them from Antioch and Iconium, the same hands that gathered flowers to crown them hurled stones at them to put them to death, and the chief speaker was dragged outside the city and left there for dead.

The early and successful mission-work done in these two places, together with the varied experiences and conduct of the missionaries, may suggest to us these practical lessons:

- (1.) *The manner of presenting gospel truth has much to*

do in producing results on the hearers. At Iconium they "so spake that a great multitude believed."

Paul afterward told the Corinthians, "And I, brethren, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God;" "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." He had not learned anything as to the manner of presenting the truth or of the efficiency of the Spirit, which he did not know here when he "so spake" as to win multitudes, expressing the idea clearly that if he had not spoken in the way he did the truths he brought them would not have led so many to believe. He evidently did not disregard the character of his audience, and the kind of evidence he should produce, and the manner in which he should express his thoughts, any more than he showed carelessness as to the subject on which he was to talk, which was always "Christ, and him crucified." The manifold of increase depends more upon the good seed and the good soil and the warm rains and sunshine than upon him who stalks across the field scattering the grain; and yet, for all that, the skillful sower is the successful husbandman. So in the economy of grace the teacher and his methods have a prominent place, and the results, both by God and man, are looked for in proportion as he fills his place with aptness and earnestness as well as faith. "God gives the increase;" and yet when Paul preaches and Apollos waters the increase will be greater than when the argument is faulty, as Paul's never was, and the address stammering and blundering, as Apollos never spoke.

Orthodox, faithful, earnest, persevering instruction in gospel truth is not enough to ensure success. Humble and constant dependence on the Spirit will not make every man a winner of souls. If we would have "mul-

titudes believe," we must always rely on the Spirit, whose it is to "show Christ unto us;" but we must none the less—nay, all the more, as Paul always did—suit ourselves to the audience and the place, and "so speak" that we may first interest, and then win them—persuade their minds to accept the evidence we skillfully bring forward, and then their hearts to take it as the "power of God and the wisdom of God."

This may, and does, add to the responsibility of the teacher, but it will add to his honor as well. It may increase many fold his labor, but it will increase as largely his joy. "It may demand of him the deepest study of human nature, of general literature and of the word of God, but in the end, by the blessing of the Spirit, he will be the most successful in winning souls." To the teacher the responsibility of *speaking* rightly is as great as the responsibility of trusting *supremely*.

(2.) *Present the truth as wisely as we may*, DIFFERENT RESULTS WILL BE PRODUCED AMONG THE HEARERS. At Iconium "part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles." There were divisions in Iconium before the gospel came there, but so soon as the word was spoken so as to win belief on the part of some, the people were newly classified, the line running now not between the races, but through the ranks of Jews and Gentiles, dividing them perhaps nearly half and half. In their peculiar race-prejudices and race-susceptibilities the Jews were all alike, and the Greeks had their national traits of mind and habits of thought. Yet the gospel which won the faith of some of each class turned others of each class away with scorn and hate. They were not the "thinkers" in Iconium that rejected, and the "credulous" who believed. The evidence was enough to convince every mind in the city, just as it was sufficient to con-

vince any mind. The "signs and wonders" which they saw done by the apostles, and which the Lord granted only on special occasions, "when they were filled with God, were *en rapport* with him," were such as could not be denied nor explained away; and yet many would not believe. Jewish prejudice was always strong and bitter, but some yielded, whilst others did not. Greek pride was always great and stubborn, but some bowed before the cross, whilst others turned scornfully away. How can we account for it otherwise than by tracing it to the sovereignty of God? "He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." It is a deep mystery; we cannot fathom it, but it is not wise to ignore it. "I have much people in this city;" and cheered by this, Paul stayed at Corinth a year and a half, that these people might, through the word, be saved. So God has much people wherever the gospel goes. These the gospel story will touch sooner or later. But there are many who are not his. These the gospel story, told wisely and earnestly, backed by signs and wonders which cannot be denied or explained away,—these will only be hardened in iniquity and embittered in their opposition. So messengers and messages and listening people are alike in God's hands, but there in such a way as not to free messengers from responsibility as to the matter and manner of their messages or the people from sin in their rejection of the message.

(3.) *The wisdom of preserving an untarnished reputation on the part of those who would win souls to the truth.* We read, "long time therefore they abode, speaking boldly in the Lord." "Therefore." Wherefore? Because the "Gentiles had been stirred up and their minds evil affected against the brethren."

The missionaries were winning many. The opposing

Jews must break their influence and weaken their testimony. They are not able to disprove the new religion, so they bring it into disrepute by attacking the character of the teachers. They so misrepresent them as, in a measure, to gain their point. We are not told what the charges were. It has been suggested that they insinuated that they were dangerous men, emissaries of evil, disloyal to the empire because they spoke of Jesus as King. Whatever the stories were, the two resolved to stay and confront those who circulated them and live down their calumnies. It took a "long time," but the end to be gained was worth the time it took to reach it. They stayed while their reputations were under a cloud for the gospel's sake and the sake of the new converts; and then, when their lives were in danger, they left the place for the same reasons. In this they set all Christians an example.

Very often the enemy tries to weaken the power of the teacher of the word by damaging his reputation, and just in proportion to the depth of the cloud he is brought under and kept under will he be hindered in the work he would do and weakened in the work he has done. It may take a "long time" to lift the name fairly above the cloud, but for the sake of the truth we love and the souls we would help it may be duty to abide where we are till this is done, expecting, while we live consistently and work earnestly, that God, who guards his own, will by some "signs" which cannot be mistaken confirm the faith of the disciples in us, and so in the truth we bring.

And now, as we go with them over to Lystra, we see them tried on the very opposite side of their nature. So learn that—

(4.) *Popularity need not, and must not, turn from steadfastness to the truth.* Before they were bad men, to be

shunned and disbelieved. They stood that test, and by their lives gave the lie to the base charge. Here they are not men, but far above men, messengers from heaven, very gods—ay, the chief among the gods, *the great Jove and his attendant*. And as the people are ready to do something worthy of their visitors and themselves, Jove's favorite people, we see Paul and Barnabas spring forth. Eager, are they, to bow the head and wear the crowns woven for the heads of gods? Anxious, are they, to see the oxen die and the smoke ascend in clouds of oblation to themselves, and thus receive higher honor than Jew ever had offered him before? No, but to stop it all at once, and "with an inspired tact, that can vary its utterance with the needs of the moment," to make the offered thanksgiving service a text from which to preach a telling sermon against all forms of false worship and all faith in any but the living and true God.

"We are men," by nature no better than yourselves. "We are men," dependent, like you, on divine help and blessing. The same God feeds us both, keeps us both, will judge us both. Many men who, when low down in the estimation of the people, were true as steel to truth and God, when they have been, like Paul, lifted up in popularity, had they taken Paul for an example would not have become the "trimmers and temporizers" in the cause of right which history has been compelled to write them.

"We are men," and, alike with all men, are dependent here on God alone, and together with all men must appear before God in judgment. These three words, remembered when in place and power, when the plaudits of the people fill the air and the eulogy of flattery is whispered in the ear, would have kept, and may yet keep, many a popular Christian man from the "shriveling touch" of

Jehovah's hand, which Herod felt, who gave not God the glory. Their experience teaches here another lesson :

(5.) *That miracles, even when admitted, have but little influence in leading bitter opposers of the truth to accept it.* One goes up and down our land to-day, ever and anon flinging out his challenge, amidst the sympathetic cheers of his admirers, for one miracle, "just one little one," to prove the nearness and intervening power of the Christian's God, promising to bow the knee before him when it is done! Here, at Lystra, Paul, and back at Jerusalem, at the "Beautiful Gate," Peter, wrought miracles much alike in their nature and above suspicion as to their supernatural character. Note the result. At Lystra they deified the worker, and when plainly led by remonstrance and argument away from their preconceived notions as to the *kind of divinity* able to do this, they accepted not the proof, but stoned the worker and teacher. At Jerusalem the "notable miracle" was admitted, for the men stood before them, but instead of deification the workers are hurried off to prison, and then "strictly threatened" to speak no more in Christ's name. The miracles did good; they strengthened the faith of those who believed on other testimony; in other ways they were not in vain; but neither there, where philosophy ruled, nor here, where untutored Nature guided, did the supernatural lead the mind set bitterly against God to accept him, though each instance stands on record uncontradicted and unexplained. "It thus appears," says Dr. Taylor, "that the effect of a miracle depends upon the degree of knowledge possessed by the beholder as well as *upon his moral disposition.*" "Neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead;" "They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them."

(6.) *God's claims may be fearlessly maintained anywhere.*

It is the first time the gospel has met idolatry pure and simple, and it promptly and confidently offers a better God than the greatest in their list. In a voice unmistakable it declares that the temple at your gate holds a vanity. Your boasted god never raised a cloud so large as the hand of a man, nor distilled one drop of water on your treeless and thirsty plains about you. But does he by argument prove the vanity of idolatry, and leave them alone with the wreck he has made? No; but he brings them tidings of the true God, and by argument, brief but logical and striking, makes good his claims to their devotion.

We will not stop to notice the brief outline of the argument given, nor the peculiar force there is in such a line of defence of God's existence. Only, in passing, notice the marked difference between Paul's method of attacking idolatry and that adopted by the modern opposers of the God Paul worshiped. He would take every idol out of Lystra, but he would leave a God far better in their stead. Barnabas was not Jupiter, for Jupiter was not, but God was, and to him he endeavors to lead them, and thus leave Lystra and her people richer far, better contented, with a firmer foundation of peace for the present and hope for the future. But these would take away our God, destroy our guides, and then leave us alone and hopeless with the ruin they have wrought. There was no agnosticism in Paul's theory. He *knew* idols were vanities; he *knew* God lived, who "made heaven, and earth, and sea, and all things," and whose constant "witness" is the good he does in "filling men's hearts with food and gladness." Is it not fair to demand better things, surer things, when they, with iconoclastic blows, demolish the God we have learned to love?

(7.) *How fickle is the favor of men!* They lauded Paul

as a god, and in maybe less than a day they stoned him as one worthy to die for his vileness. Had Paul cared for the praise of men, how sorry would his case have been! Had the honors they proffered him been sweet to his soul, he had rather have died outside the gate than been forced to go back to face that people again. Yet men live for the praise of the multitude, and feel that earth's highest reward is gained when the plaudits of the people are ringing in their ears and the honors they can give are forced on their acceptance. The distance is short between the garlands and the stones, between "Hosanna!" and "Crucify him!" but the favor of God endureth, and it satisfies the soul.

(8.) Let us beware of writing all *adverse things as disadvantageous things*. When that conspiracy drove Paul and Barnabas out of Iconium, and they worked their way over to secluded Lystra, in part, at least, to get away from their enemies, they doubtless felt it was hard—that it was against the cause they represented. Yet I doubt if there was a place in all Paul's wanderings to which he looked back with such delight as Lystra. Not because "once was I stoned" there, but because it was the home of Timothy, the best beloved, the choicest fruit ever given to his ministry. In the love he bore for Timothy, and the sweet fellowship he had with him, and the beautiful testimony Timothy ever bore to the value of practical Christianity, was not Paul justified in saying, "Blessed be that deadly plot which made Barnabas and me hurry out of Iconium and steal across to that heathen town where we found Eunice and Lois and their dear boy Timotheus"? "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness."

END OF THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY.

BY THE REV. A. T. PIERSON, D. D.

June 17.—Acts 14: 19-28.

THERE is a profound proverb, attributed to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, that "History is philosophy teaching by examples." The book of the Acts, which we are now studying, is a rare and rich fragment of sacred history, teaching us by examples practically what is elsewhere in the New Testament unfolded theoretically. This brief historic narrative is well named, for it is a book of *acts* rather than of *words*; and it shows how God's blessed Spirit wrought wonders in and through the activity of apostles and disciples sowing the seed of the kingdom. It might be called "the Acts of the Holy Ghost."

The passage of Scripture before us for study is a beautiful illustration of the "Golden Text:" "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28: 19). Here we see the heralds of our Lord going in person, discipling all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things commanded by Christ; and here we see our Lord himself, true to his promise, "with them alway" and "confirming the word with signs following."

Before approaching the moral and spiritual truths of

this lesson it would be well to get a glimpse of the geographical and historical features of the scene here presented.

The thirty-fifth parallel of latitude north from the equator passes through the middle of the island of Cyprus in the Mediterranean. If from the centre of that island we run another line directly north over about one and a half degrees of latitude, or about two hundred and seventy-five miles, we reach a point in the plains of Lycaonia about midway from the supposed sites of Derbe on the east and Lystra on the west. Iconium will lie toward the north-west, twice as far from this point as Lystra, and Antioch in Pisidia in the same direction, three times as far as Iconium.

This lesson finds Paul and Barnabas still at Lystra, which, like Derbe, lay somewhere near the foot of that dark mass which rose from the Lycaonian plains and is known as Kara-Dagh, the "Black Mount." At Lystra, Paul had healed, with a word, a cripple who from birth had never walked. The cure was instant and complete; the impotent man stood on his feet, and even leaped. The people were at first struck dumb with amazement, and then hastened to pay divine honors to the healer whose word had wrought such a miracle. Thus, near the extreme limit of Paul's first missionary journey we find the gospel in its first close contact and bold conflict with the mythology and superstition of paganism.

Lystra claimed Jupiter as her guardian god, and built a temple to him: the personal presence of this tutelary deity, coming down to them in the likeness of men, seemed to these ignorant idolaters a ready and reasonable key to this mystery of healing power. And as Mercury, the god of eloquence, was Jupiter's attendant, it seemed plain that these two deities were favoring them with a

joint visit. Hence the prompt preparations to honor the strangers with sacrifices, which Paul's vigorous protest scarce restrained.

And now comes a revelation of the proverbial fickleness not only of the Lycaonians, but of all ignorant and superstitious pagans. From the extreme of popular enthusiasm they swing at once to the other extreme of persecuting violence. Jews from Iconium, and even Antioch, hung like bloodhounds at the heels of Paul and Barnabas, and moved the unstable Lystrians to stone him whom they had just before been ready to worship. Idolaters have no firm faith either in their gods or their fellow-men, and their enthusiasm is like a tidal wave that surges shoreward, but sweeps backward with a reaction full as resistless. We have another example of these fluctuations of popular sentiment in the rude people of Malta, who one moment thought Paul a murderer, and the next a god.

How these Jews wrought this sudden change of feeling at Lystra we can only conjecture. Perhaps, like those in Galilee who construed our Lord's healing work into a sign of Satan's agency, they led the Lystrian mob to attack as a prince of demons him whom they had just now held to be an incarnate deity. However this be, at the instigation of these Jews *Paul was stoned*, and as dead dragged beyond the city-walls. Some even among these fickle pagans had found the knowledge of the Christ whom Paul had preached, and abode by the seemingly lifeless body as Judean disciples lingered about the cross. And, lo, a resuscitation! The apostle of the Gentiles rose up and came into the city; the power that wrought through him to heal the cripple wrought in him to suffer stoning uncrippled, as afterward to shake off a viper unharmed.

The next day he and Barnabas started for Derbe, and after preaching there and making many disciples, Paul retraced the steps of his first missionary journey, confronting anew the dangers he had encountered and escaped that he might confirm the souls of the disciples. What sublime heroism and self-forgetfulness! Well might he bid them "continue in the faith" and confront the "tribulation" through which they must "enter into the kingdom of God," when the exhortation was enforced by such a radiant example.

After ordaining elders in every church, with prayer and fasting commending these new disciples to the Lord, Paul and Barnabas return through Pisidia, Pamphylia, Perga and Attaleia; then, sailing for Antioch, complete a two years' tour by arriving at their starting-point. Here they assemble the church to tell of the doors great and effectual opened before them to the Gentile world, and abode for a time in the blessed companionship of the fellow-saints at Antioch.

Such is the outline of history in this fragment of the Acts of the Apostles. Like a piece of spar beautiful in any aspect, there is one angle at which this fragment is specially luminous and radiant. For the sake of brevity and unity we pass by all lesser suggestions to fix our thought upon one grand lesson that like a thread of gold runs through all the rest and gleams out with marked brightness. Here is a missionary visit to Lystra and Derbe which, with its methods, measures and results, is *representative*. It reveals the apostolic *method of forming and feeding churches* in pagan communities. *Three things* pertain especially to this method: 1. *Evangelization*; 2. *Edification*; 3. *Organization*.

(1.) *Evangelization*.—This grand word is the very trumpet which the Lord blows to rally his hosts for the on-

ward march to stir all true believers to motion and action in conquering the world for Christ. "Go ye into all the world, and *preach the gospel to every creature.*" *Evangelize!*

Evangelizing is simply bringing the gospel into contact with souls in the most prompt, earnest, effective way. We cannot convert men—that is God's work; but we may preach the gospel to them—that is our work; and while we are not responsible for conversion, we are responsible for contact. Men may reject Christ even when faithfully set forth before them crucified for their sakes, but how can they receive him if he be not offered for their acceptance? "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?"

Of all the duties which believers owe to a lost world, this is the first and foremost, for without this there can be neither new converts nor a growing Church; in fact, the very continuance of the Church, as well as its extension, depends on faithfulness in evangelizing. Death is constantly transferring believers from earth to heaven, and how shall the vacant places be filled in the household of God if there be no new births into God's family?

No greater evil to-day exists in the Church than the abounding apathy as to the unsaved about us. As a generation passes away thrice in a century, we must have an accession of three new members yearly for every one hundred, in order to hold our own. As a fact, the Presbyterian Church averages about *four* new converts annually for every hundred members; so that we are gaining on the world only at the rate of *one soul* a year for each hundred of our members! Meanwhile, three times a century the earth opens her bosom to receive another generation of the lost. After nearly nineteen hundred years the last command of Christ is still ringing in our ears, and so

slowly do we obey that there yet remain from six hundred to nine hundred millions of the race to whose ears the tidings of the gospel have not yet been borne.

Nor will the tidings ever be proclaimed to every human creature until the whole body of believers is roused to feel the responsibility and accept the commission: "*Gó ye.*" To evangelize is the duty of every disciple; it is neither the prerogative nor the privilege of any exclusive class. We are all "witnesses" to testify what we have seen and heard. To "hear" gives the right and the preparation to "say 'Come;'" and to say "Come" is to preach the gospel. But there must be heart in it. Preaching the gospel for a witness among all nations is not a formal, frigid announcement of gospel tidings to rid ourselves of responsibility. We have heard of a missionary in India who many years ago would go into a city or town, and as he went would with a loud voice proclaim Christ as the Saviour of sinners, and then, shaking off the dust from his feet for a testimony against them, go on to the next town to repeat the dramatic performance. Such a proceeding may conform to the letter of Christ's commission, but it is far from representing its spirit, and it would be as well to attempt to warm a dying man with an icicle as to try to convert men by such a method. No, the very heart must speak to the heart, and the gospel must flow, like warm blood from a throbbing fountain of life, into other souls, if men are to be won by it to Christ.

(2.) *Organization* should promptly follow and, in fact, attend all efforts at evangelization. As fast as new converts are won they should be formed into churches. Christ is a Shepherd and has a flock, and he gathers his flock into folds. The Church is made for man: it is not good for the disciple that he be alone, and hence the household of God. That we belong to Christ is a suffi-

cient reason why we should belong to each other and to the great body of believers which is his body. Hence the apostolic method was to organize congregations wherever the work of evangelization was successful in making disciples. To make organization the more thorough and effective, they ordained elders in every church, and with devout prayer and fasting commended the sheep, newly gathered into one flock and fold, to the care of these under-shepherds, and, where it could be done, secured for each congregation a pastoral bishop in addition.

Organization is second in importance only to evangelization. It brings system, order—prepares for harmonious operation and co-operation. The body of Christ has organs, for it is organic; and these organs have functions, duties, spheres of activity. The growth and health of the body depend on each member or organ, however minute or humble, doing its own work well. There are to be no drones in this hive, not one idle soul in this brotherhood. Here is a rallying-point for us to gather, that we may make it a radiating-point from which to scatter, working for God and souls.

Elders are not ordained to do our work or to do work in our stead; responsibility we can neither shirk nor shift. They are but to help carry on a work and a war in which all disciples are workers and warriors. The pastor and his councilors are to reduce work for Christ to such a system that there shall be a place for all who have a mind to work, or, to borrow Sydney Smith's quaint figure, a hole for every peg, whatever its size or shape.

For any believer, therefore, to stay outside of the Church of Christ is so foreign to all New-Testament teaching that no provision is made for a non-confessing disciple. He is a contradiction, as much as a "*member*" that belongs to no "*body*." The union of believers with

the household of believers is scarcely enjoined; it is rather assumed. The "word of faith" is, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart, . . . thou shalt be saved"—faith and confession as naturally and inseparably linked as living and breathing.

If evangelization, preaching the gospel, is the Church's *right arm*, organization, getting believers into social bonds and working order, is the *left arm*. Do you believe in Christ and on him? Confess him; come promptly into his Church; open your mouth to speak for him, your hand to work for him. Be sure you show that all there is of you has been converted—head, heart, hands and feet; yes, tongue and temper; and *purse* too: not even in your hearty yearning for salvation and sanctification are you to forget *service*.

Oh for a new Luther to nail up these seven "Theses," and with the echo of his hammer rouse an idle Church and make Sloth turn pale on his couch of ease!—

1. The will to work for Christ is the test of the new heart;
2. There is a work to which you, personally, are called of God;
3. For that work you have fitness, patent or latent;
4. In that work you must put your heart, to do it well.
5. If called to a special work, God will give special fitness;
6. Work well done fits the worker for a higher sphere of trust;
7. God judges our work not by its quantity, but its quality.

(3.) *Edification*. This means "building up," and it is a *social* word, having regard to a *mutual* influence. Believers are to help each other to live and grow, and build up one

another in their most holy faith, that together they may grow into an holy temple for the Lord, an habitation of God through the Spirit. As in work, so in believers, quality is of more importance than quantity. One disciple who sanctifies the Lord God in his heart, and is ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh a reason of the hope that is in him—an intelligent, consistent believer, ardent and fervent in prayers and labors—is worth a host of timid, lukewarm disciples who have only a name to live.

It is of grand importance, therefore, not only to “make disciples,” but to make *strong* disciples. When our Lord gave his last commission he said, “Go ye therefore and *teach* (μαθητευσατε) all nations, . . . baptizing them, . . . *teaching* (διδασκοντες) them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” The original words are not the same, and cannot both be represented by one English word: the first teaching is instruction in the terms of salvation—evangelizing; the other, that comes after, is the more thorough teaching of the whole system of Christian doctrine and practice. The first is *making* disciples; the second is *training* disciples.

The scripture we are now studying illustrates this twofold teaching. Paul and Barnabas first preached the gospel and made disciples; then they confirmed and exhorted them, that they might help them both to continue in the faith and grow strong in the knowledge and love of God. These two words, “disciple” and “discipline,” are beautifully linked, not only in form, but in what they represent: the Church needs *disciplined disciples*. We must first *make* disciples, then *gather them into* the Church; then *train them* in knowledge of all truth and practice of all duty. Here is the threefold office of the Church; and nowhere is a grander field to be found for the practical

working out of this great problem than in the *church-school*. Here is a field of Christian effort open to every willing worker. Here he may preach the gospel in his own humble way. If he will go out into the highways and byways, streets and lanes, he may find those who are practically heathen, and gather them in and tell them the story of the Cross. With an anointed tongue "talking about" Jesus, he may make disciples by God's blessing. Then he may lead them to confess the blessed name and find the help and joy of God's household. Then he may go on to confirm, exhort, instruct, strengthen, edify.

The world presents no field of labor more promising and more available. It is at hand. You need cross no great continent or sea, master no foreign tongue, consume no years in scholarly training. This field and work lie over against your own door, and a step brings you into the very sphere of service, where the mellow soil invites your sowing; and promises to reward your prayerful tillage with a rich white harvest in God's good time

THIRD QUARTER.

JOSHUA, SUCCESSOR TO MOSES.

BY THE REV. HOWARD CROSBY, D. D., LL.D.

July 1.—Josh. 1 : 1-9.

THE succession of Joshua as the leader of Israel had been foreknown by Moses for thirty-eight years, from the time of Joshua's good report of the land (see Deut. 1 : 38), and this knowledge Moses communicated to Israel in the plains of Shittim when he was about to depart from them. Joshua first appears as a warrior in the contest with Amalek, when he was selected by Moses to lead the Israelitish host against that malignant enemy. Afterward we see him as Moses' attendant in Mount Sinai, waiting probably near the foot of the mount while Moses went up to the summit and remained there forty days. (See Ex. 24 : 13 and 32 : 17.) His close personal relation to Moses is especially seen in his abiding within the sacred precincts of the proto-tabernacle while Moses interceded for the sinful people (Ex. 33 : 11).

Joshua was of the tribe of Ephraim, a fact which shows the perfect harmony of the tribes at that period and their freedom from jealousy, Moses, the Levite, making Joshua, the Ephraimite, his trusted helper in all the long sojourn in the desert. It is also remarkable that Moses did not seek to exalt his own immediate family. None of his children were put into office, so far as we can learn. His

brother's family had the high priesthood in perpetuity, but *he* laid down his kingship in Jeshurun (Deut. 33 : 5) without any view of the family succession.

Accordingly, when Moses had disappeared from Israel according to God's word, Joshua's leadership was disputed by no one. Moses had been eminently "Jehovah's servant" (the phrase occurs five times in this one chapter), doing Jehovah's will in and for Israel; and now Joshua was to be "Jehovah's servant" (Josh. 24 : 29) in the same department of duty. Only, the form of the service was to be more military than legislative. Moses' administration had been principally legislative, and yet there had been wars with Amalek, with the Canaanites of Hormah and with the Amorites in Moses' day. But now Joshua's chief duty would be to conquer the tribes of Canaan and to partition the conquered territory among the tribes of Israel. In this work he would need both courage and an impartial mind; and the sequel showed that he possessed both in an eminent degree, and, like Moses, sought to exalt neither his own tribe nor his own family.

Joshua was about eighty years of age when he entered upon his office of Israel's leader—the same age at which Moses had been called to the mighty task. We may justly imagine him a man of commanding aspect, fitted in every way to hold the obedient respect of the new nation. He was the pattern of a devout soldier, brave and decided in his movements, and yet humbly trusting only in the strength and wisdom of God.

Of Joshua's family we know absolutely nothing beyond the mere name of his father. His history was national, and not domestic. His name is a precious one for the Church of all ages, especially as it is the same name which the incarnate God bore, "Jesus" being the Greek form of "Joshua" (or Jehoshua), meaning "Jehovah-sal-

vation." As leading God's people into a land of rest, Joshua was a type of Jesus guiding his people into eternal rest; and this likeness is more than a happy analogy, possessing as it does the marks of a designed typology from which many illustrative lessons may be derived.

Our lesson embraces the assuring words of God to Joshua when it became his duty to assume the reins of government. It was an immense responsibility, the care of two millions of people, and that, too, a people not settled and moving in a tried social and political system, but in a condition of transition, about to enter into a new country and begin life under new experiences. Well might Joshua tremble at the thought of the load resting upon him, and most grateful to him must have been the divine words which form our lesson. While Moses lived Joshua confided in him, but now that Moses is gone his stay is removed, and he feels a loneliness that God only can relieve. It is this peculiar state of things that gives significance to these words of God. There is something startling in the first utterance (v. 2): "*Moses my servant is dead; now, therefore, arise, go over this Jordan.*" The good and great Moses had been a hindrance. Israel could not cross Jordan till Moses had been taken away. That good man had dishonored the Lord at Kadesh, and from his conspicuous position before Israel his serious error had to meet a signal chastisement which all Israel could see and comprehend. It was announced that the great leader could not enter the land flowing with milk and honey; he must die before the Lord's host could go in. What a wonderful lesson is this of the awfulness of sin, that so eminent a saint as Moses must be made an example of its odiousness in the sight of God! We are to distinguish between example and expiation. Moses' death before Israel's entry into Canaan was no expiation of his sin. The

expiation was only in the sacrificial blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God, who was prefigured by the lambs of the Mosaic ritual. But as an *example* of the odiousness of sin in God's sight Moses' death was very striking.

Ver. 2: "*Thou and all this people unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel.*" The land of Canaan was a gift of God to the people, and always to be so considered. They had nothing to do with selecting it, and acted under the divine guidance and orders in conquering it. It was the land of rest for the pilgrims, and thus a token of the sabbatism (Heb. 4:9) remaining for the people of God both in earth and heaven. For heavenly joy is not merited by the believer, but is given of God to him. It is the divine grace alone which takes him out of the Egypt of sin, leads him through the pilgrimage of the Christian life and brings him into the glories of the world of light. Furthermore, this land of Canaan was given to the people because they were the "children of Israel;" that is, they were in covenant with God. He had formed them into a separate and holy people, with a system of life and law peculiar to themselves, and he had prepared them by a long training for the occupancy of Canaan. It is thus by no haphazard that a soul reaches heaven, but by being found in God's covenant and under his special rule and training.

Ver. 3: "*Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses.*" There is a limitation in this. In the next verse the land potentially has the boundaries of the wilderness, the sea and the Euphrates, including the entire region of the ancient Hittite or Khatti empire, so marked on Assyrian monuments. But this wide area is only to be possessed and enjoyed as they place the sole of their foot upon it. In other words, they are to conquer all the land, trusting

in the divine strength. In the sequel we find they were remiss through cowardice and love of ease and want of faith and obedience, and hence they did not enter into possession of a large part of that promised land. So is it in the Christian life. The attainment of the gracious gifts of God is in proportion to our faith. Where the sole of our foot treads, that is ours. Where our faith seizes the promise, it is made good.

Ver. 5: "*There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life.*" God's word is now direct and special to Joshua himself. He promises him that no foe shall withstand him and no envious rival overthrow him. "*As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee.*" The marvelous upholding by the divine hand so clearly seen in Moses' career would be as conspicuous in Joshua's. "*I will not fail thee nor forsake thee.*" God here repeated to Joshua the words of encouragement which Moses had before used to him in God's name (Deut. 31 : 7, 8). God would not abandon Joshua willfully, and he could not abandon him through carelessness as a man might abandon him. Men may leave us because they become enemies or because they forget us; God can exhibit neither of these conditions toward the believer. He neither will fail nor forsake. And as his is the divine and infinite power and love, what a firm basis of encouragement we have in this promise! A human friend may cling to us, but we may both perish together: here, however, it is God who will never fail nor forsake us, and hence our eternal life is assured. It is very natural, then, for us to find the exhortation (ver. 6), "*Be strong and of a good courage,*" following immediately such a promise. Courage in heart and strength in life must come from a right contemplation of the offered grace. Joshua had a great work before him, but he had a great God with him.

He that is with us is greater than they that be against us. With this proportion we need fear nothing. Our reason may tell us the Canaanites are formidable, but our faith (which is our stronger reason) assures us of success.

In the seventh verse we see that a courageous practical faith like this was necessary in order to obedience: "*Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee.*" Distrust on Joshua's part would make it impossible for him to obey the injunction which Moses (at God's command) had left for him. So God's commands regarding our Christian life are all made on the supposition of our faith. Without faith we cannot develop a grace or exhibit a virtue. We must be strong and of good courage in the Lord, and then his Spirit will furnish us. The subduing of the Canaanites is to be a divine work, grasped and used by Joshua's faith. Joshua's trust will enable him to perform all the Lord's commands, and that means prosperity. How often Christians are heard to say, "I cannot live a consistent life; it is too hard"! when the trouble is that they are trying to subdue the Canaanites in their own strength, and are not trusting in God. Courage derived from a sense of God's presence would give them a different song, one of triumph and praise.

The eighth verse emphasizes the great truth that the Lord's commands indicate the way of prosperity. By faith we gain strength to obey, and in obedience is prosperity. "*This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth;*" that is, Joshua was never to tire of speaking its precious truths. "*But thou shalt meditate therein day and night.*" Deeper than the speaking and that from which the speaking arose was the heart's meditation. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. "*That*

thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein." The heart's meditation on God's law not only sets the mouth to speaking, but the whole life to acting. The first Psalm shows this process—how, when the root is in God's word, the life is flourishing: "His delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night; and he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." So here God tells Joshua (and through Joshua he tells *us*) that when he shall meditate day and night in God's law, and so fill his mouth with it and guide his life by it, "*thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have great success.*"

In the ninth verse, which is the last verse of this stirring exhortation, the whole is summed up—God's command, the strong faith, the serene mind, the divine presence and guidance. It is the full blast of the heavenly trumpet, filling the soul of the warrior with courage and preparing him for everything.

Joshua's need against the Canaanitish foes was no greater than ours against the strong spiritual enemies of our souls. We are exposed to overwhelming numbers and strength, and if left to ourselves we perish. Sin must have us as an easy victim. But the divine aid is vouchsafed. Our faith in that aid will identify us with the cause of grace, and will accomplish our complete victory over Satan. "Be it done unto thee according to thy faith" is a formula which expresses the condition of the efficiency of the divine promises. Faith conforms us to the divine word and will, and so the promised triumphs are achieved. God does not promise us the divine assistance if we neglect his word and disregard his ordinances. Such a thought is absurd. It is when we seek after his word and

way that he meets us with his full salvation, his perfect deliverance. It is to such as thus seek him that he says, "Fear not; the Lord thy God is with thee;" and it is such who can sing joyfully, "When I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me."

We stand on the borders of the land. Shall the Canaanite be expelled? Shall our sins be eradicated? It all depends upon *our dependence* upon the divine strength. That dependence implies a life "hid with Christ in God." Our philosophy and worldly prudence can never overcome sin. They may modify some of its outward exhibitions only. It must be dealt with by the divine power. When that divine power is accepted, then the conquest is sure. This, and this only, is the basis of a true courage. Knowing that the right arm of the Lord is stretched out for our salvation, we may afford to be not afraid nor dismayed. Such a knowledge does not beget indolence, but the strongest activity against the great enemy, for we know that God fights not only *for* us, but *with* us and *in* us.

PASSING OVER JORDAN.

BY THE REV. CHARLES H. PARKHURST.

July 8.—Josh. 3 : 3-17.

THE event related in our chapter is a hinge-event in the history of the Hebrew people. It looks every way. It stands in close prospective relation to the Hebrew future and in close retrospective relation to the Hebrew past. It is indeed a *transitional* event, both in fact and in figure. The Hebrews at once settled down to new modes of life. They ceased from their nomadic habits, and presently established themselves in fixed residences and in political relations of a finer quality. The event marks an epoch in the history of their national development. They have now outgrown their past. It will be pretty nearly accurate to say that their existence as a nation dates from the "Passing over Jordan."

Besides the historic interest of the event forward and backward, the passage of the Jordan addresses itself to us affectingly as a typical event. Like so much else that occurred in those old days, it is continually repeating itself in our own times and experience. It is surprising in how many ways the associate life of this old people out of Egypt symbolizes the individual life that is lived now. The Egypt-history, the wilderness-history, the Jordan-history, never become obsolete. The books of Exo-

Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, are almost as valid histories of our individual lives as of the life of the Hebrews at large. These chapters, and this third of Joshua, are like some of the Psalms of David in this respect, that though so old they still carry with easy grace the sentiments and experience of to-day with which the men of to-day laud them. It is one of the marvelous characteristics of these old Bible-narratives that they still furnish us better figures and phrases than any new ones we can invent for describing events and *transitions* in our own experience.

The forty years close, as they commenced, with a miracle. The passage of Jordan is a late echo of the similar passage of the Red Sea. If we let the Jordan symbolize the dark river over which we cross at last into the land of heavenly promise, then the Red Sea will denote to us, perhaps, our mysterious emergence from the answering realm of the unknown that stretches out with infinite reach behind us. Between the miracle of the cradle and the miracle of the coffin there wreath themselves, in perplexed intricacies, the forty years of our pilgrimage-living.

The miraculous passage of the Red Sea was God's autographic signature to the commission of Moses. In the same way the miraculous passage of the Jordan was God's autographic signature to the commission of Joshua. (See verse 7.) The world is always waiting for *a man*. No man with a thought and a heart makes a mistake in being born. There are deeds waiting for doers, victories waiting for victors, Jordans waiting for Joshuas. And when *the man* comes, the generation that he comes into has the hint given it of his arrival. No man is sent to perform a work without being in some way divinely certified to. Every workman of God carries with him his credentials.

Moses' work ended at Jordan—Joshua's began at Jordan.

History is vested in the life of its representative men, and has in it no gaps. The mantle of Elijah falls on Elisha, and the next generation was provided for before Moses went up into Nebo. Moses wanted to go over Jordan. It seemed to him most likely that he died before his time. And yet his work, as we can see it now, was a completed and a nicely-rounded one. His commission was to bring the Hebrews *to* the Jordan; Joshua's commission was to bring them *over* the Jordan and establish them in Canaan. We are to learn from such representative instances that when a man is interested in nothing but to do the work that God sets him, he will never die till the work is done thoroughly and successfully. Among the little servants of God there are no fallen buds, and among the adult servants of God no broken columns.

The names Jesus and Joshua are etymologically the same. "Jesus" is the Greek form of "Joshua," and means "Saviour." The first Jesus and the last, therefore, were divinely certified to on the banks of the same holy river—the first by the staying of the waters, the second by the descent upon him of the Spirit in the form of a dove. The later Jesus was baptized by John in the waters of Jordan; by a kind of baptism in the passage of the same river his prototype was separated to the work of his life. Jesus the son of Nun was a "saviour" who saved the Hebrews from their Gentile enemies; Jesus the Son of God came "to save his people from their sins." The first Jesus selected twelve men for the erection of a memorial pile to perpetuate the memory of the salvation of God at the Jordan. The second Jesus, on the bank of the same river, fifteen hundred years after, selected the same number of men to disseminate the knowledge of a greater salvation wrought in the region of the same sacred stream. We hardly do justice to such analogies when we treat them

as barren accidents. The more intently and affectionately we read Scripture, the more thickly we shall find its pages strewn with such analogies, and the more we shall find every part of Scripture in some way a prophecy or an echo of every other part.

The last encampment of the Hebrews before the passage of the river was at Shittim in the Valley of the Acacias, some six miles east of Jordan and over against Jericho. This encampment among the acacia-groves was the forty-second station at which the Hebrews had stopped during their forty years' wandering. This number, forty-two, is one of frequent occurrence in Scripture. It is the number obtainable by reducing three years and a half (time, times and half a time) to months; and it is not easy to read the twelfth chapter of Revelation and fourteenth verse without suspecting that in some way in the mind of God the allusions of that verse stand associated with the events of the wilderness-wandering terminating at Shittim: "And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the *wilderness*, into her place where she is *nourished*" (as the Hebrews were with manna?) "for a *time, times and half a time.*"

We have nothing told us as to the *feelings* of the Hebrews in crossing the river. A great deal has to be read between the lines here. It is so generally in Scripture. There is little sentiment in the historic portions of the Bible. When we remember with what earnestness the Hebrew people had been so long anticipating just that entrance into Palestine which they are now upon the point of making, it is not difficult to imagine the strange sensations with which at last they moved out through the acacia-meadows, stepped down the eastern terraces of the river, and surveyed the towns and answering slopes of the land that for five hundred years had been to them only a

Land of Promise. A people that lived in its past as much as the Hebrews, and cherished the memories and traditions of the old centuries as fondly as they, must have regarded with passionate interest a region in which had already occurred so much that was sacredly treasured in their national regard. We need to let imagination have free play in studying these old scenes and events. Next to the Holy Spirit, there is nothing that so lets us into the appreciation of these old narratives as a chastened imagination.

It must have broken just a little the edge of Joshua's delight as he led the host across to reflect that the unfaith of the people was all that had prevented their occupying the land nearly forty years before. Since the time when the spies had returned from exploring the country, and only Joshua and Caleb had advocated going up at once to possess it, thirty-eight years had been spent in penal wandering. The same divine power that is willing to aid the Hebrews against the Canaanites *now*, had been just as ready thirty-eight years before, and would have been just as effectual. It must have been a distress to faithful Joshua that Hebrew unfaith had been so expensive. The lesson we can learn from this is, that a very large part of our own lives also is wasted time. We are continually reaching by long indirection what, with more faith, we might have compassed directly. Much of our life is in this way wasted life. We plod on a long time in zigzags of unfaith without getting any nearer to our destiny. Unfaith keeps rubbing out our years. Our lives are not practically half as long as the years that number them would seem to indicate. We take perhaps more backward steps than forward ones. The lands of promise that we might immediately enter we keep pushing into the distance by our distrust, and feed for years on insipid and monotonous manna when we might be regaling ourselves on milk and honey.

The discrepant reports given by travelers of the breadth and depth of the Jordan are due to the different seasons of the year when their visits have been made, and the different points of the stream that have come under their observation. Dr. Thomson says: "When and where I saw it the width might have been sixty feet and its depth ten feet." Another traveler, who visited it at about the same season of the year as that in which it was crossed by Joshua, says: "We were fortunate enough to see it in the state in which it is described in Joshua, 'overflowing all its banks.' The turbid stream rushed along like a mill-race, and, though it had fallen from its greatest height, the proper banks of the channel were invisible, and indicated only by lines of oleanders and other shrubs." Ordinarily, the river is reduced within narrow limits, and is fordable in many places. But at the time of barley-harvest, when Joshua crossed, the tributaries have become so swollen by the spring rains and by the melting of the snows on the slopes of Hermon that fording is out of the question, and the current too swift to be crossed by boats. That just at this time of the spring freshet a passage should have been easily effected by six hundred thousand men, besides women, children and baggage, evidently argues interposition of some sort. Whether this interposition was effected along the line of natural cause and effect, as in the case of the passage opened through the Red Sea (Ex. 14 : 21), our chapter does not specify, and it would not be greatly worth our while to consider.

It is indicated in the thirteenth verse that the emptying of the channel of the river was to be effected by some interruption of the supply farther to the north, and the latter half of that verse will be both more accurately and more intelligibly rendered as follows: "The waters of Jordan shall be cut off—viz., the waters that come down from

above—and they shall stand, one heap.” The point at which the flow was interrupted is indicated in the sixteenth verse as being at the city Adam. The corrected reading of the first clause of that verse is as follows: “The waters which came down from above rose up, one heap, very far off, *at* the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan.” These localities cannot, with any confidence, be identified. Perhaps as prudent a conjecture as any is that which fixes the point where the current was stayed at Mount Sartabeh, twenty-five miles or so north of the Hebrew encampment. This is the narrowest point in the Jordan Valley: the rocks extend from either bank almost to the formation of a natural dam. A local disturbance at this place would operate to the sudden arresting of the current, and so to the emptying of the channel from that point southward to the “Sea of the Plain”—*i. e.*, the Dead Sea.

It is said in the fifteenth verse that this inundation occurred at the time of harvest. The harvest here intended was the barley-harvest. Now, by reference to Ex. 9 : 31 it can be easily inferred that the barley-harvest came at the same time as the flax-harvest. It was quite in accordance with this, then, that a few days before Rahab should have hid the spies among the freshly-cut stalks of flax “that had been laid in order upon the roof” to dry (Josh. 2 : 6). This is one of those undesigned coincidences which are all the more conclusive because undesigned, and which argue the detailed accuracy with which the writer composed his narrative.

Joshua and the host evidently recognized this as a crisis in their history. They felt keenly the dignity of the moment and the far reach of its consequences. Crises are continually occurring in the life of individuals and of peoples. Not every day is critical, and not every event

pivotal. Every nation and every individual has had "decisive battles." In our individual living one day sometimes sets the key for a whole year; and in national life a year, or even a day, will sometimes throw itself forward determinatively over a whole generation or century. Success in life is a good deal a matter of the way in which we brace ourselves up, and are divinely braced up, to meet the crises of life. We learn from our story to respect these crises, and to put ourselves in training and preparation for them: "Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves, for to-morrow the Lord will do wonders among you." It was a crisis in the history of the Hebrews when the twelve spies came back and Caleb and Joshua advocated going up and possessing the land immediately. But the people did not rise to the dignity of the crisis. They had not "crisis-virtue," and the lack of it cost them nearly forty years. "There is a tide in the affairs of men" and nations. We need as Christians and citizens to pray for the sense to appreciate the grand moments that only once in a while are let down to us, and for the grace so to "sanctify" ourselves, like Joshua and the Hebrews at the brink of Jordan, that we may rise to the grandeur of the moment, and so win, on the instant, a triumph that shall make us masters of the days and years that shall follow on after.

It is worth noticing the use which in the passage of the river they made of the ark of the covenant. The pillar of fire had ceased to go before them. They had grown into the ability to appreciate a better and more spiritual symbolism. Fire meant more to the eye than a little box of acacia-wood, but the acacia box, considered as the casket of the divine autograph of the Two Tables, denoted more to the mind and heart; and so it marks a growth that not the pillar, but the ark, guided them across the river. They

treated the ark on this occasion reverently, but not superstitiously. They used it not as a "charm," but as a symbol. The Israelites on a later occasion used it as a charm in one of their battles with the Philistines, when after one defeat they said (1 Sam. 4:3), "Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that when it cometh among us *it* may save us out of the hand of our enemies." But "it" did not save them, and they were smitten with terrific slaughter. To the men standing on the brink of the swollen Jordan, however, the ark was not a charm, a power, but only the representative of a Power. Their own faith earned them miraculous passage, and not the little acacia chest; and they felt it so. There is danger of our coming to use the holy things of our religion more as the Israelites used the ark at Ebenezer than as they used it at the river. We easily fall into a way of attributing divine potency to rites and ceremonies, prayers, sanctuaries and ordinances, forgetting that these things are only types, significant as types, but not as forces—that the power of Christianity is not in the rites, but in the faith only that uses them. A symbol is a dangerous thing: the Hebrews learned that lesson at Ebenezer. A symbol is a precious thing: the Hebrews learned that lesson at the Jordan-crossing.

The swelling of Jordan gave God an opportunity to display his power and his grace. Man's necessity is God's opportunity. God seems to love to bring men into straits, that he may show his disposition and power to deliver them. God loves to perplex men, in order to show how easily and tenderly he can extricate them. If the Jordan had been crossed at a fordable season, there might have been just as much of the grace of God in the passage as in one made when the river was swollen, but no memorial stones would have been piled up in Gilgal. It

was here as it was with Shadrach in the plain of Dura: the furnace being heated seven times as hot as usual, made the delivering grace of God more conspicuous and startling. Paul would never have known so much of the gracious deliverances of God had not his thorn given him an opportunity to hear God saying unto him, "My strength is made perfect in weakness." We are almost every day consumed in our little fiery furnace or deluged and drowned in our little swelling of Jordan, when these things ought all of them to be to us scenes of splendid victory, as they were to Shadrach and Joshua.

We ought to expect divine deliverances now as well as in the olden time. God is the same since Christ as before, and the same in the Occident as in the Orient. We need not fight our battles alone, nor stem with our own strength the violence of every swollen, turbid river. When misfortunes overtake us or obstacles oppose themselves to us, we have a way of saying that we must meet them "philosophically." There is something better for a Christian than to meet obstacles "philosophically." We *do* too much. We fight without our reserves. God wants to do more for us than we are disposed to let him. When the next little Jordan comes flowing down turbulently between you and yonder Gilgal, do not go about to bridge it or boat it or swim it until you have waited just a little for God to open a dry and pebbly passage through it.

THE PLAINS OF JERICHO.

BY THE REV. D. W. POOR, D. D.

July 15.—Josh. 5 : 10-6 : 5.

THE history of the children of Israel, when construed with reference to those higher ends and uses for which all Scripture is given, appears transfigured into one grand and varied parable providentially devised and overruled for the purpose of illustrating for all time the fundamental principles of religious faith and practice. Only when thus understood can it be rightly appreciated or profitably studied. An excellent illustration of this inner design is afforded us in the passage that has been taken for our text. Here we are told how the people of God, having crossed the Jordan, prepared themselves under the divine direction for the conquest of the Promised Land. That land, though belonging to them as an inheritance from their fathers, to whom it had been granted long ago as a gift for ever, was not to be entered upon or enjoyed without cost. Enemies numerous and powerful had possessed themselves of it, whom it was first necessary to expel. And this was a most perilous undertaking. There were walled cities to be captured, armies to be routed, warlike inhabitants to be destroyed or driven out from their mountain-fastnesses, among whom were the giant sons of Anak. If ever it had been needful for the Israelites

to quit themselves like men and be strong, it was now. Palestine was the goal of their wanderings, the home for which they had been liberated from Egypt, and the prospect of which had sustained them through all their dreary residence in the desert. And to fail now was to lose the long-looked-for recompense of all their toils, and to make the covenant which God formed with their fathers of none effect. On the other hand, to win now was to secure a permanent foothold in the earth, and to become, according to the promise, a source of blessing to mankind. Their position, it will be seen, was a very critical one: it called for the utmost wisdom and resolution.

And just such is the position of every one by whom the gospel is accepted. It too has the promise of an inheritance. We call this inheritance the heavenly Canaan. But its location is not all yonder in the skies. It is here at our feet, to be entered upon and possessed now. The kingdom of heaven is come nigh unto us, and our enjoyment of it in its glory hereafter depends on our conquering it here and now. As the Scripture saith, "It suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." First of all, it is to be "within us" as a state of existence, and thence it is to create for itself a suitable environment, which, begun now, will be perfected when our Lord shall come. At present it is here held by usurping foes that vigorously dispute possession. These foes are the world, the flesh and the devil. In other words, they are all the forms and agencies of sin—sin as a law in our members warring against the law of our minds; sin as embodied in a whole system of society that is alienated from God and truth and righteousness, and provides only for the present gratification; sin, above all, as working powerfully in and through a whole realm of unseen and malignant spirits, even the Prince of darkness and all his

adherents, who hold the world in bondage. Such are the enemies we have to confront and overcome. They are mighty and strongly entrenched, and not easily expelled. Yet there is no rest possible for us until these are driven out or slain. And to do this is our appointed work. Hence the Christian life is properly termed a warfare. Paul describes it in stirring words: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." It is an intimidating array.

To us, thus confronted, the text gives—

(1.) An important lesson of procedure. We read that the Israelites immediately after crossing the Jordan first renewed their covenant with God. Those who had not received its seal in infancy were forthwith circumcised. They then celebrated the passover. This was a feast which, it will be remembered, was designed to commemorate Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage, and to serve as an ordinance in which the people renewed their consecration to God through the atoning blood of a spotless lamb. Its celebration now, therefore, meant nothing less than the readjustment of their relations with Jehovah, a putting of themselves right with him. Here at the very commencement of their perilous enterprise they felt their truest preparation for success to be the recognition of their obligation to God for his redeeming grace and the securing of his favor and guidance in all their future undertakings. The religious sense of every one will acknowledge their conduct to be at once solemn duty and sound policy.

And here observe in the face of what great dangers and against what counter-considerations the high duty was discharged. The observance of the passover involved a delay

of seven days in the presence of wary and warlike foes, during which the Israelites would not be in fighting trim. They would thus be exposing themselves to sudden and disastrous attack at a moment when least capable of resistance. Or, if not this, the delay would certainly give these foes a chance for recovering themselves from the first fright they fell into on seeing the invaders so marvelously crossing the river-barrier to which they had trusted, and for entrenching themselves more firmly in their fortified cities. In view of such possibilities human strategy would have urged the importance of striking at once upon the enemy, without waiting a day. But heavenly wisdom said, "No. First strengthen yourselves in the Lord. The battle is his. Let him guide and sustain. No success can be won without his aid. Time spent in religious preparation is not time wasted, but time improved." Such counsel Israel followed. To what profit we shall soon see.

Their conduct in this particular is an example for us. It teaches us that the only wise start for a successful career in conflict with evil and for securing a true rest is to covenant with God for his aid and blessing through Jesus Christ, and to commemorate his redeeming love. For he is our Passover, who has been sacrificed for us. Only so far as we recognize our true relations to God, and the ground of our acceptance with him, and keep in communion with him, shall we derive of his fullness and be rightly equipped for every duty, however arduous. In all things our sole sufficiency is of God. He is our strength and our shield. With him on our side, who can be against us? This is a truth which it becomes us to lodge deep in our convictions and ever to act upon. He that trusteth in his own heart when going forth to cope with the numerous foes to his welfare, all so subtle and powerful, with whom he will have to contend, is simply a fool. This is the testimony of all experience,

and our safety lies in heeding the warning. The only thing that ensures victory is faith in God. By it we live, since by it we take hold of and appropriate to ourselves all the elements he furnishes for the invigoration of our moral nature. The sense of his presence is an animation. In communion with him the eternal world and all its momentous truths become most impressive realities, and take possession of our entire nature. All our faculties are energized by them to high and noble duty, whether it be to patient endurance or to victorious effort. In short, we become quickened thereby in the inner man, and grow strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Hence we may be said then only to begin our true existence when we have consecrated ourselves to the Lord. Our most effective preparation for all serious undertaking ever after is to refresh ourselves in prayer and devotional exercises. With such preparation no pressure of business, no threats of peril, should be allowed to interfere. It is the right beginning which ensures the good ending.

(2.) We learn from what ensued upon the observance of the passover what we too have a right to expect as the reward of our fidelity to God. We read that the Lord manifested himself to Joshua for the purpose of encouragement and direction. His appearance was after a remarkable manner: "It came to pass when Joshua was by Jericho"—probably reconnoitring the city, surveying its high walls and closely-barred gates, and looking perhaps for some point of attack, wondering meanwhile whether he would be able to take it—"there stood over against him a man with a drawn sword in his hand." The person and attitude of the stranger were alike suspicious. Friend or foe? that was the question. Like the brave commander that he was, Joshua solves the doubt at once

by the direct inquiry, "Art thou for us or for our adversaries?" It was no time for uncertainty. In a moment so critical it was of the utmost importance that the attitude of every person on the field should be understood, and he be dealt with accordingly. There were but two sides to the pending issue, and no neutrality could be tolerated between them. He that was not *for* had to be treated as *against*; and Joshua means to know precisely which it was with the new-comer. So the question is put, and how surprised Joshua must have been at the discovery made in the answer he got!—"Nay; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come." One can hardly conceive of a more startling claim. Instead of a foe, Joshua discovers his heavenly Chief, the commander-general over himself and Israel's armies. And the claim made we must suppose to have been accompanied with some token of its truthfulness, for we read that Joshua on hearing it fell on his face to the earth and did worship, asking at the same time with ready ear and open heart, "What saith my Lord unto his servant?" Here, then, was the help he had sought for ready at hand. He was brought to head-quarters to learn what he ought to do and what he might expect. It was a blessed relief from all his anxieties, and a glorious assurance of ultimate triumph. Well did Isaiah say, "Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways."

As to the form of the Lord's appearing in this instance, we take it to be one of those remarkable theophanies under the old covenant which were the preludes of the Incarnation. God the Son here took upon himself the transient form of a man before he assumed our veritable nature and thus became man. We say God the Son, because God the Father hath no man seen at any time. The only-begotten

Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, alone has the office as the image of the invisible God to reveal him. Accordingly, we say that this Captain of the Lord's host who presents himself to Joshua as a man of war is to be regarded as none other than He who under the new covenant proclaims himself as the Captain of our salvation, whom God has given to be a leader and a commander to his people still.

The lesson of this divine manifestation, then, is apparent. It tells us that *if we are true to our duty in seeking the Lord, he will surely make himself known to us in some way suited to our needs.* If we draw nigh unto the Lord, he will draw nigh unto us. No longer, however, can we expect him to appear in visible form. This, he has said, is not expedient for us. But he does something better. He sends us the Comforter, who is to take of the things that are his and show them unto us. In other words, he deals with our hearts through his Holy Spirit, to assure us of our acceptance with him, to quicken our faculties, to invigorate our powers, to awaken our hope, and in every way to qualify and energize us to do our work and manfully fight the good fight of faith. Our warfare is not a carnal, but a spiritual one, and our weapons and equipment must be, accordingly, not carnal, but spiritual. What we most of all need, therefore, is to be strengthened with all might by God's Spirit in the inner man. And here it is that we must expect the manifestations of Christ to be made unto us; and they will be made in proportion to our fidelity in seeking for them.

(3.) But we must hasten to consider the nature of the communication made by the Lord to Joshua.

(a.) First, there was an encouraging assurance to relieve him of all anxiety as to the issue of the conflict before him: "See, I have given into thine hand Jericho and the king

thereof, and the mighty men of valor." He does not say all Canaan and its inhabitants, but only Jericho, the city immediately in view. One step at a time. This is the more common way of the Lord's leading, and this is enough. First successes are earnest of those which are to come. He who helps at the beginning can help us to the end.

In like manner our divine Lord encourages us at the start. To his disciples, few in number, yet sent forth to the mighty task of discipling the world, he said cheerfully, "Fear not, little flock. It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." And again, "Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall by any means hurt you." It is thus that our Lord inspires his followers with hope and stimulates them to the work of noble living and noble doing. They are not to be disheartened by hostile appearances. He pledges his word in advance that through his aid they shall overcome, and be privileged at last to sit down with him on his throne, provided they prove faithful. All they have to do, then, is to undertake in his name. The spirit which he gives them in their first efforts to prove successful they are to take as "the earnest of their inheritance until the full redemption of their purchased possession," when they shall receive the fruition of all their toils and pains unto the praise of his glory.

(b.) But with the assurance given to Joshua there is also a duty enjoined. And how singular the order! Anything, one would think, but what was suited to the matter in hand. No assault was to be made, no mounds were to be cast up, no battering-rams to be constructed and played upon the walls, no mines to be dug. The only thing Joshua was told to do was to have all the men of war march

around the city in procession once each day for six days, led by the ark, with seven priests in advance blowing seven trumpets of rams' horns. On the seventh day this performance was to be repeated seven times. Thereupon it was pledged that at the last long blast of the trumpets the walls of the city would fall flat, and every man be able to step over the tumbled ruins right into the city and capture it. It was the strangest siege ever planned and ordered. No seeming adaptation was there in any part of it to the end proposed. What could a mere march effect toward overthrowing a wall? or how could a single horn-blast from ever so many mouths burst open barred gates? Unbelief would have derided the order as absurd, and refused obedience through fear of ridicule. But Joshua complies without demur. The history of his people, from their deliverance from Egypt all the way down to the recent crossing over Jordan, had taught him that Jehovah was a God that did wonders. His methods were all strange and marvelous, designed to abate man's self-reliance and signalize his own power. Joshua, therefore, did not hesitate.

By this achievement we are significantly taught that the warfare to which we as believers are called is not to be carried on in our own strength nor after the fashion of this world: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Our victory lies in that faith which lays hold of and employs God's omnipotence. This obligation to depend on God, and to use the instrumentalities of his appointment, God will not suffer to be weakened by granting success to any means that will redound to our own glory. He will have the glory himself as his due. What we have, therefore, to put on is the whole armor of God. Of this the one effectual weapon of attack is the divine word. This is what was symbolized in the blast of the rams' horns. The word

is a sword which proceeds out of the mouth; and in that the horns were seven in number and were blown seven times, we are taught that this word is the word of that gracious covenant of redemption by which God intends to reunite heaven and earth, for seven is the recognized signature of that covenant. The gospel, then, is what we are to take as the wisdom of God and the power of God. In the estimation of the would-be wise it may appear but folly, yet on trial it will prove mighty to the pulling down of strongholds. To this, then, must the believer resort in all times of danger and conflict. When temptation assails, by this must he resist if he would have the devil flee from him. For breaking open the tightly-sealed hearts of sinners, quelling the hostility of scoffers, battering down the many institutions where vice and iniquity are entrenched, and prostrating those gigantic superstitions which are holding millions in bondage, still our sole reliance must be the "foolishness of preaching."

Jericho's overthrow is the abiding testimonial of the subduing power of God's word when faithfully proclaimed by his peaceful preachers. It is written—and oh, would that we all could remember it when tempted to resort for success in winning souls to the excellency of speech, or the enticing words of man's wisdom, or to fascinations of art, or to human authorities, or to any of those agencies by which the world acquires dominion!—it has been written: "God hath chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, and base things of the world and things which are despised, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things which are, that no flesh should glory in his presence; for of him and to him and through him are all things, and to him be glory for ever. Amen."

ACHAN'S SIN AND ISRAEL'S DEFEAT.

BY THE REV. W. E. BOGGS, D. D.

July 22.—Josh. 7:10-26.

THE careful student of the Bible and of human nature will hardly fail to be struck by the awful visitations from God upon Achan, and, long afterward, upon Ananias and Sapphira. The places assigned to these solemn events give them a meaning. One of them marks the beginning of the Jewish, the other of the Christian, dispensation. They have furthermore this point in common: that in both cases the sin which provoked such swift and terrible retribution grew out of *covetousness*. Taken together, therefore, the two judgments constitute a commentary, such as God only could furnish, upon the words of the Holy Ghost penned by Paul: "The love of money is the * root of all evil."

Other forms of sin are better fitted to challenge the attention of the world and to startle men's consciences. But God, who looks deeply into the hidden springs of human conduct, is careful to lay a special emphasis upon the more subtle evil of covetousness. It deserves attention that, along with murder, theft and lying, it has one entire commandment to itself. Our Lord's opinion as to its deadly nature is abundantly testified by the frequency

* Greek, "a root."

with which he alludes to it. Two of his parables, the Rich Fool and the Unjust Steward, deal expressly with it. In others, as the Sower, and Lazarus and Dives, he casts at it a keen side-glance as he passes on. His blessed Sermon on the Mount gives a long paragraph (Matt. 6: 19-34) to avarice and its effects upon our religious life. And those famous words, "*Ye cannot serve God and mammon,*" seem to lay bare the very core of this sin. *It puts a created thing, money, into God's place.* The apostle is fully justified in writing, "No whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God;" "Fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence and covetousness, which is idolatry." Mark the evil company into which it is put by the Holy Ghost!

Our Lord's sad interview with the amiable young man who "went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions," wrings from his heart those solemn words which need to be sounded through our land: "Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. . . . It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

Drunkenness, violence, sensuality, luxurious living, corruption and bribery are doubtless making havoc with reputations, with human life and with immortal souls. But who shall say how often these open vices draw their inspiration or the means of gratification from "the love of money, which is," in very deed, "a root of all evil"? Many of the more violent sins are like fire in dry stubble—they burn out rapidly. But avarice is like those fish which can best thrive in Arctic seas—it flourishes in the chilly blood of old age.

I. In turning our attention to the dealings of God with Israel concerning Achan's transgression let us briefly review the facts. The Hebrews had been repeatedly and in the most solemn manner prohibited from taking anything from the spoils of the conquered Canaanites. God chose in this way to impress them with a horror of idolatry. The prohibition is once more repeated during the siege of Jericho: "And ye in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed * thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed * when ye take of the accursed * thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse,* and trouble it. All the silver and gold and vessels of brass and iron are consecrated" [Heb. "are holiness"] "unto the Lord; they shall come into the treasury of the Lord" (Josh. 6: 18, 19). After this, for an Israelite to take of the spoil was an act of willful disobedience to his King, who was also the real Commander of the army; to take of the gold and silver, in particular, was nothing less than robbing God. The sin was wonderfully like that of Ananias, as set forth in Acts 5.

Notwithstanding God's solemn injunctions, however, there were eyes that looked with longing upon the devoted booty. It is curious to observe the resemblance between the temptation of Eve (Gen. 3: 6) and that of Achan, as he describes it: "When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels' weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it." Thus it is ever with us. "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

The evil deed is cunningly planned and deftly exe-

* Heb. "*devoted*"—*i. e.* either to God or to destruction, as the case might be.

cuted—if only there were no God! But the end is not yet.

A military expedition is sent out against the town of Ai, which lay amid the hills near Bethel. But the soldiers of Israel are seized with panic. They fly from the gates, pursued down the defiles of the hills, leaving their dead on the field. Joshua sees that God's hand is in this defeat. With the marks of mourning and deep grief he betakes himself to earnest supplication. His prayer is an illustration of the holy boldness with which burdened hearts may come to the throne of heavenly grace. He pours out his whole heart, its fears and griefs, without ceremony or hesitation. He expostulates with the Lord after the manner of Moses, reminding him that his own honor is pledged to place Israel in possession of the Promised Land. And yet it is possible that this prayer, so admirable for its grasp upon the unseen realities, so replete with a sense of God's power and presence, may have exceeded the limits of a very wide discretion, especially when he expresses a regret that Israel had ever crossed over the Jordan. The passage had been ordered by the Lord, as, indeed, it was effected by his miraculous interposition; so that a refusal to pass over would have annulled the whole covenant. This accounts, perhaps, for the startling sharpness of the Lord's words: "Get thee up! Wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?" Nevertheless, the prayer *prevails*. God discovers the cause of the disaster, shows how the culprit may be detected and denounces his doom.

The whole people being involved, they must all come to the judgment and be witnesses of God's power to see and punish secret sins. The tribes pass in review, and Judah is taken by lot, and finally Achan is indicated. Joshua's words to the guilty man furnish an admirable model for

us. The confession is sought, apparently, for the good of Achan's soul, and his humble confession encourages the hope that though the body died the soul may have been saved. The doom as pronounced by the Lord is executed, and Achan's family is annihilated.

II. These dealings of God with Achan's family and with Israel because of one man's sin bring before us in a startling shape that great mystery—*fellowship in guilt and in suffering*. Efforts—well meant, no doubt—have been made to tone down the rugged severity of this providence. Care has been taken to show, by counting the generations from Judah down to Achan, that he was probably far advanced in years at the time of his death. From this it has been argued, with some probability, that Achan's sons and daughters were old enough to be partakers in his sin. But all must admit that the sacred narrative shows no anxiety upon that point. It is certain that such an explanation could not be made to cover the doom pronounced and executed against the Canaanites. (See Deut. 2 : 34; 3 : 6; 7 : 2; 20 : 17.) Besides, this mysterious principle of fellowship in guilt and in suffering appears in the moral law itself. Those well-known words, "Visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate me," can signify nothing less. Nor can it be limited to the Old Testament as to a cruder code of morals, according to the beliefs of some among us. Christ's terrible denunciations upon the people of the covenant contain these words: "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple" [sanctuary] "and the altar" (Matt. 23 : 35). In view of these facts, the rule laid down in Deut. 24 : 16 is seen to be intended for human

judges. God claims and exercises a wider discretion in his dealings with men.

Nor are the traces of this great law of human life confined to such cases as that of Achan or of the Canaanites. Providence and creation are full of it. Bishop Butler states a fact of daily experience when, in his irrefutable reply to objections against the mediation of Christ (*Analogy*, pt. ii. ch. v.), he reminds us that nearly the whole of what we enjoy or suffer comes to us through our relation to other men. Every thinking man can see for himself that the conduct of parents shapes the destiny of their children. Drunkenness, sensuality and gluttony stamp themselves upon the offspring that is yet unborn. The more obvious operations of the law are visible to our feeble eyes. How much farther it extends is known only to God or as he reveals it to us. When the attempt is made to break the force of this analogy by saying, "It is all natural," that same sagacious thinker reminds us that "natural" means *appointed by Him who is the Author of Nature*. So it appears that, explain the facts as we may, deny them if we dare, we cannot get rid of the principle so long as we hold to a belief in an almighty Creator. Human faculties may not be able to explain such a vast principle. It is apparently coextensive with creation and providence. It is as high as heaven, as deep as the sea, as broad as the earth. But the believer has this reply to all the cavils of unbelief: "In such things as I *can* understand I have ever found God to be just, wise and good. Common justice, the rule by which all good men judge each other, requires me to believe God to remain true to himself in all things until the contrary is proved. 'Clouds and darkness are round about him; justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne.'" The logic is unanswerable. Further than this, in the present state of our fac-

ulties, we may not go, unless with the devout apostle we are prepared to exclaim, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counselor?"

These darker shadings in the plan of creation and providence, however, harmonize most wonderfully with the scriptural doctrines of the fall and of the Cross. For herein the principle of *fellowship in guilt and in suffering* finds its highest application. In Christ alone do we find an absolutely innocent sufferer, nor can the principle of federal headship be successfully impeached save upon such grounds as must accuse of unrighteousness the Author of Nature himself.

III. From this discussion, notwithstanding our imperfect apprehension of its great theme, certain conclusions seem to follow which are of immense practical importance.

I. How vain to hope for escape from punishment so long as sin remains unrepented of! "All things are naked and open unto Him with whom we have to do." Sinning against such a God is but wronging our own souls. "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence? . . . If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee."

The Lord exercises a wide discretion, indeed, as to the *time* and *manner* of punishing sin. "Some men's sins are open, going beforehand to the judgment; some men they follow after." This is a source of temptation to many. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of men is set in them to do evil." But let us hear the exhortation, "Fret not thyself because of evil-doers; neither be thou envious at

the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb."

2. A wise regard to our own happiness will make us deeply interested in the welfare of our neighbor. God holds us accountable in this regard to an extent that many seem not to dream of: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke him, and not suffer sin upon him" (Heb. "*and not bear sin on account of him*"). And in the same line of thought Paul enjoins prayer for rulers and all men, "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."

3. It especially becomes parents to consider the influence which, in the nature of things, they must exert over the destiny of their children. Not miserable Achan only, but far better men, as Noah, Lot, Eli and David, are sad examples of this. "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked, but he blesseth the habitation of the just."

4. Among other duties it is incumbent upon such parents to consider well what place shall be made in their plans for "goodly" garments and for shekels of gold and silver. There may be, there often is, a place for such things, but it becomes us to consider the text, so to speak, upon which our Lord preached that wonderful sermon, the parable of the Rich Fool: "Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Again the Holy Ghost admonisheth us: "They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition." Do any ask, "What shall we do to be saved?" Brethren, I commend you to God and the word of his grace. One very simple rule, at least, you will find in Prov. 3 : 9, 10.

THE READING OF THE LAW.

BY THE REV. J. T. MCCRORY.

July 29.—Josh. 8:30-35.

THE event studied by us to-day is impressive and significant. Let us get it before our minds with its circumstances, and then attend to some of its important lessons.

I. *The Event and its Circumstances.*—The forty years' wilderness-wandering is ended. The work of Israel's great leader and lawgiver is finished. Moses has had his vision of the promised inheritance from Nebo's lofty summit, and his patient spirit has passed from its view of the earthly to its possession in the heavenly Canaan. Joshua is at the head of the pilgrim-company. The command of Jehovah has come to the chosen nation: "Arise, go over this Jordan." The command is promptly obeyed. The war of conquest begins. The first obstacle that disputes their possession of the country is overthrown: "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days." Achan's sin, the cause of Israel's defeat before Ai, has been discovered, confessed and expiated. That heap of stones in the valley of Achor is a sad and significant reminder of man's disobedience and Jehovah's displeasure with sin and sinners. Ai, with her giants and her nameless crimes, is no more; her inhabitants have all been made to feel the edge of the sword,

and only a heap of ashes marks the spot where stood the city of twelve thousand. Israel is flushed with victory, while the nations of Canaan are paralyzed with fear.

Fortunately, the victorious people did not forget the God of battles by whom their triumphs had been secured. Moses had commanded that as soon as they had passed over Jordan, and had secured a foothold on the promised inheritance, they should go at once to the Mounts of Blessing and of Cursing and there perform certain prescribed duties. (See Deut. 11 : 26 seq. ; also 27 : 1 seq.) They remember and obey. The victorious nation takes up its march into the heart of the country God had given them for possession, and here they are, in exact accordance with the divine requirement.

We enter the valley with our backs toward the Jordan. There, upon our right hand, stands Ebal crowned with an altar of unhewn stones, upon which is being offered the sacrifice of burnt-offering and peace-offering. Yonder are also in full view the plastered pillars or tablets on which are inscribed all the words of the law, the blessing and the cursing, while along the mountain-side are congregated ten times ten thousand and thousands upon thousands of the people of God—six tribes with their warriors, women and children. On the left is Gerizim, the Mount of Blessing, along whose rugged sides are gathered the thousands of the other six tribes. There, in the valley before us, is the ark of the covenant, around which are assembled those commissioned to bear this symbol of Jehovah's presence and wait upon God before the altar. The smoke from the altar on Ebal has ceased to ascend, and all eyes are turned toward the ark in the midst of the valley.

A deep stillness, like the hush of Nature before the bursting of a mighty storm, pervades that valley with its

hundreds of thousands. There stands the Levite with the copy of the law. He speaks: "Blessed"—how like the first utterance of One who, standing upon a mountain not far distant from that, more than fourteen hundred years later addressed to the world the Beatitudes!—"Blessed shalt thou be in the city and blessed shalt thou be in the field;" and back from Gerizim there comes, "like the noise of many waters and like the voice of mighty thunders," a mighty AMEN. Turning now to Ebal, the Levite in sad cadences pronounces the curse: "Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field;" and like the moan of a bursting volcano Ebal thunders her mighty *Amen*. This is a religious assembly. Here, in the very heart of the enemy's country, Israel turns from war to worship. The final conquest of the whole land is anticipated, their solemn covenant with Jehovah is renewed and all the people are instructed in preparation for the service of their eternal King.

II. Let us now consider some of the *important lessons this event suggests*.

I. *Here is Great Faith*.—The conquest of the land was scarcely begun; but two cities had been conquered. The Israelites have already sustained one defeat before the inhabitants. That was enough to teach them that they are not absolutely invincible. They must go down before the enemy if God fights not for them; they had learned that. They knew that the warlike inhabitants of Canaan would not suffer themselves to be dispossessed without a struggle. They might expect them to employ tact and strategy and deception, and to fight with courage, skill and desperation, before they would surrender the land that flowed with milk and honey, their vineyards and olive-yards and

houses and cities, to a horde of foreign invaders. And yet here they are in the very heart of the enemy's country, apparently indifferent to any danger. They build no fortress, prepare no city of defence. No warlike squadrons, with sword and shield and spear, pace the summits of Ebal and Gerizim to defend those in the valley from a possible sudden assault of the Canaanites, who fill the mountains around them. No keen-eyed, watchful, sentinels keep a lookout from surrounding hilltops. The whole nation, putting aside the implements and spirit and aspect of war, the warriors, women and little ones, engage in the solemnities of sacrificial worship. Were they entirely safe? Only as their trust was in the God of battles. Safe as Elisha was at Dothan girt with a wall of fire. There was faith, too, in their taking formal possession of the land. Ninety-nine hundredths of that territory was yet unconquered, and they are here anticipating what would not be fully realized for more than four centuries.

Such faith is certainly worthy of the closest imitation. The Church is engaged in a war of conquest. Much land remains to be possessed. Indeed, is not the Church to-day, after eighteen centuries of conflict, very like Israel in the heart of the enemy's country with but a mere foothold upon its possessions? Are not the "saints of the Most High" but a little company compared with the enemies of our King? We are here in the heart of the unconquered territory—here, professedly, taking possession of the land for God's Israel. We are calling upon all men everywhere to submit to the authority of King Jesus. But are we displaying the sublime, all-conquering faith that they exhibited? Are we not rather discovering our unbelief and unmanly fears? How much of our precious time is given to building human defences against possible

assaults of the heathen, instead of devoting it all fearlessly to the duties of divine worship! Enough effort is wasted in fighting off the feints of infidels and worldlings to conquer, if rightly directed, India or China.

Many of our wisest leaders seem to regard themselves as specially commissioned to stand away off on the spurs of Lebanon or on Tabor or Zion to watch for the approach of some mailed and warlike Philistine, and then run with the news to carry consternation into the hearts of the worshipers at Gerizim. O ye Joshuas, if ye be Joshuas, get back to the camp and attend to your divinely-appointed duties, and God Almighty will attend to the Canaanites and protect Israel. The Israelites gave themselves to the worship of Jehovah, and expected him to defend them in the mean time from the rage and assaults of the heathen. We to-day in many ways, I fear, are rather giving ourselves to the business of defending Jehovah from the assaults of the enemy, and expect him to glorify us for it.

Israel took formal possession of Canaan at God's command, and trusted him to secure the final conquest. Are we not trying to make the final conquest, expecting God to follow after and take formal possession? We have faith, sublime faith, in ourselves, but little trust in God. It was exactly the reverse with Israel. Are we not, disciples of Jesus, trusting more in our own efforts than in the Almighty? We are for ever boasting of our multiplied agencies and facilities for Christian endeavor. I say nothing against agencies—let us thank God for them, and use them to the best possible advantage—but if we put these in the place of God, we are lost; Canaan never will be conquered. Give us the faith that will issue in more downright devotion, pure heart-worship, and less demonstration. The faith that trusts God and works bravely is desirable, but a sublimer faith is that which

trusts in God and *waits*. "Stand still and see the salvation of God:" this is the kind of faith which the incident emphasizes. Let us try and catch the inspiration of such a faith, for, verily, it is sadly needed just now.

2. *Here is Prompt Obedience.*—God had commanded, through Moses, that as soon as they had passed the Jordan and a foothold was secured in the Promised Land this duty should be attended to. Shechem can only be reached, however, by going over the ruins of Jericho; hence a delay of seven days at least is necessary after crossing the Jordan. But, alas! when Jericho is in the dust, Israel is there also, for Achan's theft and disobedience have brought the whole nation under the curse. This sin must be put away before they are prepared for any work for God—for either war or worship. This is done, but still there remains the defeat of Ai to be retrieved. They must strike terror into the hearts of the heathen ere they can march unmolested to Ebal and Gerizim, and worship there without distraction or interruption. Ai is in ashes, and the terrible destruction of that city with its giants has prepared the way for obedience to God's command. They delay not a day. Their obedience is as prompt as their faith is powerful. They make haste, and delay not to keep God's commandments.

Now mark this! The exact time had not been fixed for the performance of this duty. It had not been said, "As soon as Jericho and Ai are in the dust, go to Shechem and worship." The precise time, evidently, was left to the discretion of Joshua, under this specific direction: that it was not to be delayed unnecessarily after the land was entered. Worldly wisdom, we doubt not, would charge Joshua with a lack of generalship. A Napoleon would have ordered his victorious army on from Ai to Gibeon. In modern warfare a general would be court-martialed

and dismissed the service in disgrace should he fail to follow up such a victory with more important battles. And when these things are considered in connection with the large discretion as to the proper time for the performance of this duty left with Joshua, we can only admire and commend the ready obedience which characterized that victorious people, and especially their brave leader.

But why should they not obey promptly and let slip, if necessary, apparent advantage in rendering obedience to Jehovah's commandments? To whom did they owe the advantage gained? Was it not Jehovah's arm that had won their victory for them? It was under the special direction of the "God of battles" that the ambushments were formed and the strategy adopted which secured the final victory at Ai. The defeat of the three thousand that had gone up so confidently to that city had taught them the futility of their efforts apart from the immediate help of Heaven.

While this obedience, then, is greatly to be admired, is it not just such obedience as both faith and love would dictate and sound wisdom approve? It was just such obedience as ought always to characterize the true Christian. Difficult as it may be to learn this lesson of prompt obedience, let us apply ourselves to the task, remembering that "Obedience is better than sacrifice."

3. *Here is Renewed Consecration.*—They had already received the whole law as it issued from Sinai, and more than once had they covenanted with God to be his obedient and faithful people. But that was before they came into possession of the promised inheritance. Now, however, they have possession: the land is not only theirs by promise, but by actual conquest. The victories already won are the earnest of final victory; the territory already possessed is the earnest of complete possession. Renewed

consecration is therefore a becoming and very necessary act. They must not be permitted to forget that all belonged to God. Again they must lay themselves and their possessions upon the altar.

Besides, it was terrible, bloody work in which they were engaged. It was a work of judgment, of awful retributive justice. The God "who taketh vengeance" had commissioned them as he commissioned the flood in the days of Noah, as he commissioned the hurricane of wrath from heaven that consumed the "cities of the plain," as he afterward commissioned Babylon and Rome to visit his righteous wrath upon his own chosen but disobedient people. So had he commissioned Israel to avenge himself upon the sinners of Canaan. How important, therefore, that they be kept mindful of that fact! God, by them, is visiting the heathen in judgment; they are the sword of the Almighty. It is important that every battle be fought with a distinct sense of their commission, or they will become hardened by scenes of slaughter.

So renewed consecration is called for on the part of every disciple of Jesus. We are constantly making acquirements and entering upon new possessions; and just as these are made and entered upon, they ought to be laid without reserve and gladly at the feet of our Lord. Ay, and we too are sometimes called to do work that has in it something of the spirit and aspect of a work of judgment. Both in teaching and governing we must frequently make prominent the righteous judgments of God against the unbelieving, disobedient and ungodly. We need constantly-renewed consecration that the work may be performed with a profound sense of obligation to God.

4. *Here is Suitable Instruction.*—The whole nation was taught, and the instruction given was comprehensive enough to include all their needs. Here was instruc-

tion for them as individuals. There was the ark of the covenant, which told them of their personal relations to a personal and ever-present Jehovah. The burnt-offering reminded them of their condition as sinners, and emphasized the need and the fact of atonement. That they belong to God, and that every new favor received and every mercy enjoyed call for uninterrupted thanksgiving, are taught by the sacrifice of the peace-offering. The law read and inscribed upon the pillars on Ebal, with its blessings and its cursings, reminds them of the conditions on which the favor of Heaven is bestowed. Similar instruction, also, was afforded them as a nation in their organized capacity. The importance and necessity of national religion were insisted upon.

Such instruction is still greatly needed. Individuals need it, nations need it. All need to be made more deeply sensible of their personal relation to a personal God. Men and nations must be taught that God has a law that may not be violated with impunity. It must never be forgotten that God's law has its Ebal as well as its Gerizim. We may think to assent to the latter and withhold our amen from the former, but the curse will not thereby be evaded. The violation of eternal law will surely be avenged. There exists the relation of cause and effect between the observance or violation of righteous law and happiness or suffering. Let the nations learn that God is in the midst of them, *and will rule*, that his law is supreme, and that obedience ensures the blessing, while disobedience will not fail to invoke the curse. Let individuals learn the same important lessons, and also that the atonement alone can bring us into perfect harmony with eternal righteousness, and prepare us so to live that we shall enjoy the blessing and escape the curse.

THE CITIES OF REFUGE.

BY THE REV. HERRICK JOHNSON, D. D., LL.D.

Aug. 5.—Josh. 20:1-9.

“APPOINT out for you cities of refuge, whereof I spake unto you by the hand of Moses.” This is the word of the Lord to Joshua. The scene is at Shiloh. The whole congregation of the children of Israel is assembled there. The Jordan has been crossed. Much good fighting has been done under the leadership of Joshua, many enemies subdued and much land possessed. The allotments of the promised inheritance to the respective tribes have just been made. The closing record of the preceding chapter is, “So they made an end of dividing the country.”

The Lord now directs Joshua to carry out his will, which he had before made known to Moses—namely, that he should appoint six cities of refuge as asylums for those who should unwittingly take human life (Num. 35:9-15). Three of these cities had already been designated by Moses on the east side of Jordan—Bezer, Ramoth and Golan (Deut. 4:41-43). Joshua now formally ratifies this previous selection, and names three other cities on the west side—Kedesh, Shechem and Hebron.

Their general name, “cities of refuge,” signifies the purpose of their appointment. Their specific names, Kedesh, etc., have no significance whatever as related to the uses to which the cities were thenceforth to be put—

though an effort has been made to link these names typically with Crist.

Let us first consider the *merciful features of this appointment*. Any person killing another unawares could flee to these cities. They were numerous enough to be ample for the country. They were so located as to be accessible. Reaching a city and declaring his cause to the elders, the manslayer came under the city's protection (v. 41). If an avenger of blood appeared, on his charge the manslayer was to be handed over to the congregation where the act had occurred, that they might judge between the slayer and the avenger. If the deed was found to be willful, the slayer lost all protection. No city could be his asylum; the avenger might kill the murderer whenever and wherever he came on his track. If the deed was found to be accidental, the slayer was restored "to the city of his refuge whither he had fled" (Num. 35 : 25), there to abide until the death of the high priest. Then he could return to his own city and his own house. If he strayed from the city of refuge before that time, and the avenger of blood found him, he had the right to kill him. Only within the city of refuge was he safe; there the protection was absolute.

Let us look now at *what these cities of refuge show concerning God*. They show a merciful provision on the part of God *to check the violence of human passion and to teach a more reverent regard for human life*. Life is too sacred a thing to be left wholly to the passion of revenge even when "the heart is hot" because of the slaying of some near kinsman. When human blood is shed the law of God demands expiation. At the hand of every man's brother will God require the life of man. But this must not be in a wild and reckless way. It must not expose the innocent to death. It must not make life cheap. So

these cities of refuge were provided as temporary shields for every involuntary homicide.

These cities of refuge show, also, *toleration on the part of God of what is not appointed or even approved*. Revenge of blood under the heat of passion to vindicate family honor was by no divine ordering. But it was a custom striking its roots deep in human nature. While associated with worthy impulse, it rallied to itself almost every evil instinct of the heart, and became capricious, lawless, vengeful, bitter, and often as if possessed with the very spirit of hell. Now, God does not at once peremptorily prohibit this custom, but he hedges it about. He does not stay the avenger and forbid his pursuit of the manslayer, but he makes provision of refuge for the manslayer. He does not appoint or approve the evil, but suffering it "because of the hardness of their hearts," just as he suffered "a writing of divorcement" under Moses (Matt. 19:8), he modifies it, relieves it of its worst features, softens its relentlessness, throws a shield about the innocent, provides in certain contingencies for an investigation of the case, and so lays the foundation and prepares the way for judicial rights and safeguards under a government of law and order, bearing the sword by divine ordainment, and using that sword for punishment, not in the heat of blind passion and for private revenge, but in the calmness of intelligent conviction and for the public welfare.

But our chief concern with these cities of refuge is *in what they show concerning Christ*.

Are they designed to be a type of Christ as the refuge of sinners? To this question there will be different answers, according to the views held concerning the principles or laws of typology. To those who hold that nothing in the Old Testament is typical which is not

expressly named as such in the New Testament, these cities of refuge will be happy resemblances, and not types at all. To those who hold that *everything* in the Old Testament prefigures and foreshadows the gospel dispensation, there will be no question as to the typical character of the cities.

In view of the extravagances of interpretation that have been born of an ambitious ingenuity rather than of a reverent desire to know the mind of the Spirit, we need to be pretty certain of our "Thus saith the Lord" before we declare it with any very great confidence.

Here are two things in this connection, however, of which we are perfectly sure: that again and again the Lord is exalted in the Scripture as the Refuge (Prov. 18 : 10; Deut. 33 : 27; Ps. 57 : 1; Ps. 46), and that between these cities of refuge and Christ as a Refuge there are some happy resemblances and some marked contrasts. Without attempting to settle the question of typology, we may here find abundant material for our spiritual profit.

POINTS OF LIKENESS.

1. The cities were *always accessible*—could be entered at any hour of day or night. No matter when the manslayer began his flight, he could be sure of getting into the city if he once reached it. He never perished because of delay at the gates or because those gates were barred against him. So one of the unspeakably blessed things about Christ as a Refuge is that he is always accessible. The door into this high tower is always open. The cleft of this Rock of refuge may be a hiding-place at any time for any hunted and troubled soul. A woman who has been a sinner may seek it at a feast and enter in. A blind Bartimeus may seek it by the wayside and enter in. A dying thief may seek it in the agonies of crucifixion and enter in.

Any sinner, in any circumstances, at any hour, may seek it, and, blessed be God! may enter in.

2. The cities were *open to all*. Rich and poor, high and low, Jew and foreigner, could alike seek this refuge. There were no class-distinctions in this provision of mercy. The least member of the least of the tribes, and of the least of the families of the tribes, could find as ready an access as an elder or a prince in Israel. And a voice sounds out from the New-Testament Refuge, saying, "Come unto me, *all ye that labor and are heavy-laden*;" "*Whosoever will*," let him run into the strong tower and be safe.

3. *The way to the cities was prepared and made plain*. The roads to them were to be kept open and in good repair. According to the Talmudists, "No hillock was left, no river or stream was allowed over which there was not a bridge; the road was to be at least two-and-thirty cubits wide," and "every kind of obstruction was to be removed that might hurt the feet of the runner or hinder his speed." At the cross-roads posts were put up bearing the words *Refuge, Refuge*, to guide the flight of the fugitive pursued by the avenger of blood.

How thoroughly the way has been prepared for the flight of the sinner to Christ! Every obstacle has been removed. The way is made light with truth, and easy to the feet with exceeding great and precious promises; and at every crossing and bypath there is a gospel signboard pointing to Jesus and bearing on it the evermore blessed words, "The eternal God is thy Refuge!"

4. The city of refuge *needed to be sought, and with effort*. It left something for the manslayer to do. He had no agency in providing the refuge, but there was necessary a very urgency of effort on his part to secure it, or the avenger of blood might overtake him. He could be no loiterer on his way there and count on security. His face

must be set toward the city ; his eye must be blind to the alluring delights of the fields that stretch away on either side the road ; his ear must be deaf to the voices that would stay his flight ; and swiftly, eagerly, earnestly, with active feet and intense look and resolute heart, he must speed his way to the city or fail of its refuge. Imagine him thus in flight, and you have a vivid picture of the sinner fleeing for refuge to Christ, with the urgent word of the gospel ringing in his ear, "*Strive* to enter in at the strait gate, for many, I say unto you, shall *seek* to enter in and shall not be able."

5. *Inside the city of refuge the manslayer was safe.* "So there is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8 : 1). The name of the Lord is a strong tower ; the righteous runneth into it and is safe—is safe ! "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea ; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled."

"Not one object of his care
Ever suffered shipwreck there."

6. *To quit the city of refuge was exposure to death.* And to leave Christ is at the imminent peril of our souls. Just as the manslayer needed to stay in the city, so the sinner needs to abide in Christ if he would not perish.

Happy resemblances are these indeed. They are beautifully and strikingly illustrative of Christ as the Refuge of the sinner. They put before us in a definite and tangible way some most precious truths about the Lord our hiding-place. But these points of likeness fail to set forth the chief and distinguishing glories of Christ as a covert from the tempest and a refuge from an avenging law and an accusing conscience and a hating and malignant devil

No comparison can meet the case. Nothing completely resembles Jesus. He is the unique and singular glory of the universe. Rushlights may help us to climb up the shadowed mountain-side, but in the presence of the sun they go out as the stars go out in the full-orbed glory of morning. It is by contrast we can best be told all the Lord our God is as a Refuge.

THE POINTS OF UNLIKENESS.

1. The city was a *temporary refuge*. Christ is an everlasting Refuge. The difference between time and eternity, between a while and for ever, between change and changelessness, between doubt and certainty,—this is the difference between the refuge of the city and the refuge of the Lord. “My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall *never* perish” (John 10 : 27, 28).

2. The city of refuge was *sometimes distant*, taking hours, and even days, to reach it. *Christ is near*—so near that the sinner, any sinner, loaded with whatever guilt, only need turn his face and heart and look believingly to see the strong tower into which he may run and be safe. No matter how far he may have wandered from God, through whatever wilderness and over whatever desert place, if he shall but feel that he is athirst and weary, homeless and perishing, he need but turn to find that a spiritual Rock is beside him, and that Rock is Christ, in the cleft of which he may instantly hide and be at peace. Oh, the wonderful nearness of God’s overshadowing mercy! How often and to how many millions Jesus of Nazareth *is passing by!*

3. The manslayer, turned to the city of refuge, and running with all his might to reach it, *could possibly fail*, nevertheless. With the sinner once turned to Christ as a Refuge failure is impossible. The homicide might be

swift of foot, but the avenger might be swifter, and overtake him ere he had accomplished half the distance. After the toil of a long and weary race, with heart beating faster and faster, and fairly leaping with tumultuous excitement at the nearness of the rescue, and even within sight of the very gates, the avenging pursuer might close in upon him and bring him to the dust. But never yet in all the history of redemption has a sinner humbly and heartily sought Christ and failed of finding him. "Look and live!" "Believe and be saved!" "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he *will* have mercy upon him;" "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." These are the words that make it impossible a sinner should ever be overtaken by the avenging law while running to covert in the cleft of the Rock of ages.

4. The refuge of the city was a *partial restraint*: the refuge of Christ is a perfect freedom. The manslayer was exempt from punishment when once within the city: he had the freedom of the place, but beyond the city's walls a thousand cubits he had no rights that any avenger of blood was bound to respect. But the freedom wherewith Christ makes his people free is a freedom by the truth. It is a liberation of all the powers and faculties. It is the possession of all things, for all things are the Christian's, in Christ. It is the liberty of the sons of God, for whom the law was not made, their perfect obedience being their highest liberty, their will so wholly God's that their liberty is as the liberty of God.

5. The refuge of the city was for *only one class of crimes*—the taking of human life. The refuge of Christ is for any sin whatsoever. It covers the whole case and

every possible case. How great soever the multitude of the sins, God's mercies in Christ are a greater multitude.

6. The refuge of the city freed from *unjust condemnation*. It only protected the involuntary homicide, the man who had slain another by accident, without evil intent or any intent. If he were proved a willful murderer, even the city of refuge did not shield him from the avenger of blood. But the refuge of Christ frees from *all* condemnation, just as well as unjust. The pursuing Satan comes up to the gates of the strong tower and says, "I demand the surrender of the fugitive, for he has again and again willfully yielded to my devilish devices, and his condemnation is just." The accusing conscience appears at the gates and says, "Here is the long catalogue of sins I have recorded against the fugitive—sins of grieving the Spirit, and neglect of prayer, and indulgence in unbelief and pride and worldliness—and I charge their voluntary and criminal commission on the sinner who has fled here for refuge, and his condemnation is just." The avenging law thunders at the gates of the strong tower, and, flaming out in terrible majesty its righteous and exact demands, declares that they have not been met by the fugitive within, and says, as if with the awful emphasis of Sinai, "His condemnation is just." And a voice comes from the tower—a voice in which blends all the majesty of Sinai with all the pathos and tenderness of Calvary—saying, "It is true, O Satan, O Conscience, O Law; it is true he is a sinner, but *he is mine*. I bore his sins in my own body on the tree. And there is now therefore *no condemnation* to them which are in Christ Jesus." And before that plea Satan is silenced, and conscience is silenced, and the law is silenced. And the pursued, accused and guilty sinner, pardoned and sheltered now,

and *saved*, sings over and over, "The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer. The eternal God is my refuge, and underneath me are the everlasting arms."

"Free from the law, oh happy condition!
Jesus hath bled, and there is remission;
Cursed by the law and bruised by the fall,
Grace hath redeemed me once and for all."

Oh, what a perfect, sufficient, ever-accessible, never-failing, justifying, peace-assuring and everlasting refuge Jesus Christ is! How these cities of refuge in their resemblances to him, and much more in their contrasts, set out in a bright, shining way the glorious excellency of the Redeemer as a covert and a hiding-place!

My friend, to-day unsheltered and homeless, bruised and buffeted, sometimes sensible of your sin and ashamed of it, sometimes accused of conscience, and knowing the accusation to be just, sometimes faced with God's holy law and convicted of its repeated and constant violation, do you want a hiding-place where you shall be justified and freed from every condemnation and given a great peace? Turn to Jesus Christ and tell him so. Flee to the cleft of the Rock of ages. Say, as the believing Thomas said, "My Lord and my God!" And in the shadow of his wings he will make you a refuge till all your calamities be overpast.

THE LAST DAYS AND WORDS OF JOSHUA.

BY THE REV. W. E. KNOX, D. D.

Aug. 12.—Josh. 24 : 15.

THE whole lesson is concerned with Joshua's parting charge to Israel. "Behold," said he, "this day I am going the way of all the earth." The way that all the earth goes leads to the grave and what lies beyond. Few men know they are about to take that journey without some such solemnity of feeling as this of Joshua. It is not uncommon that the father of the family, the minister of the church, or even the head of the nation, desires to speak some last word to those gathered about him or to send a message to absent children, parishioners or citizens. We almost hold our breath at the parting utterances of a man who is taking his last look on the earth and his first look into eternity.

The world long remembers Jonathan Edwards's dying charge to his family, "Trust in God, and you have nothing to fear;" or the English Samuel Johnson's exhortation to his physician, "Doctor, believe a dying man: nothing but salvation by Christ can comfort you when you come to lie here;" or a departing President, like Jackson, saying, "Religion is a great reality: the Bible is true." These and a thousand other instances testify that a thoughtful man

going the way of all the earth is pretty certain to have his thoughts fixed on the place to which he is going and the preparation he and those around him may need for that journey.

So it was with Joshua. He had last words to speak to his people assembled now to receive his dying charge. What should his theme be but a religious one? The past, the present and the future were full in view. He recounts God's gracious dealings with them as a nation, their eventful and often afflictive experiences, their present privileges, and, above all, their future purposes. When he, the leader, is gone, whither will they, the people, go? Shall God be their Leader still, or will they turn to other gods? It is an urgent question, and he wants an immediate answer. If, possibly, it shall seem evil to choose the Lord's service, whom will they choose? Choose ye whom, and choose to-day. I and my house will set you an example of promptness, for to-day we count it no evil thing to choose the Lord, and declare before you all that him we will serve.

Would that all who study this lesson might consider this choice for themselves as if their deathbeds were in view and their journey over the way of all the earth were about to be taken!

I. How well is true religion here described!—*a service to the Lord*. How well this was understood under the old dispensation by truly good men! The Lord was set foremost as the aim of all piety, not man. There are some even in these New-Testament times who think the first business is to keep their relations well balanced between themselves and their neighbors. Truth, honesty, justice, kindness, make up the sum of duty, it is claimed. That these *help* to make up the sum is true, but it is little they

can do alone. They need a better beginning and ending. No true scheme of morals, to say nothing of religion, can begin with man and end with him. Morals implies a law, and therefore a lawgiver; and He who made man a moral being is the only one who could create his moral relations or place him under a supreme law. If you would be moral, therefore, you must begin with God, and you surely must if you would be religious. Service to our neighbors is a good thing, but it is second always to God's service. It is good for children in the family to serve one another, but the first persons to be served are the parents.

I need not minutely analyze the word *serve*. It has a great number of meanings in the dictionary, among which are, to wait upon, to help, to please, to obey. If you are in another's service, you do not follow your own wishes, but his; you do not aim to please yourself, but him; your business is to help him and promote his interests. Such a servant was Jesus: "I do always the things that please him" (my Father). Enoch had this testimony, that he pleased God. "If any man will serve me, let him follow me," said the Saviour; that is, let him be close at hand to do whatsoever I may require.

How absurd, some may say, to suppose the Lord has *need* of our service! In one sense he has not, any more than he had need to create the earth and make man to dwell upon it. He could have got along without us. But having made the earth and the laws by which it is governed, one of which was that man should help take care of the earth, he had need of us. He could have made the wheat and corn grow of themselves, but he made them to grow with man's help; and therefore, because it so pleased him, he had need of man to help in all kinds of husbandry. He could have built up his kingdom on earth without any help from us, but because he pleased otherwise our help is need-

ed, and human service can no more be omitted than divine grace. What a wonderful favor, that God should so arrange things as to need us, and make all moral duties and religious actions a part of our service to him!

II. Religion, then, is a service; and another important lesson here taught is, that the *beginning of religion* in the heart is with *the choice* of that service. The fact is, man has turned away to another master, just as the Israelites had in old time turned to the idols of Mesopotamia. Abraham, found in that idolatrous association, was called to choose the Lord as his God, and freely his will went out in obedience. Constantly his descendants lapsed into the same apostasy, and they were summoned to decide anew the question in God's favor. Joshua wanted them to hear the argument on both sides and make their own conclusion. What had idolatry profited the nation in the past? what would it in the future? Look at the claims of God on the one hand, and at those of Baal on the other. All thinking minds are summoned to this debate anew. Shall Christ have dominion over you, or the world? who has the first right? What says reason? what says conscience? what says the voice of your immortal interests? Thus deliberates the soul in the crises of its history. All persons are to be addressed in this matter as free moral agents. Their decision, when it comes, is their own. When religion begins in the soul, it is with a free choice. Not that any one can make and maintain the deciding purpose unless God's Spirit is with him. The soul in that hour always feels the Spirit striving with it and urging to that choice. If the decision is as right as it is free, it is because God's servants are willing in the day of the Spirit's power, and say from their hearts, "Other lords have had dominion over us, but *by thee* only will we make mention of thy name."

III. The next teaching of this lesson is a painful one—namely, that to some persons *it seems an evil thing to choose the Lord's service.*

You see from the narrative that Joshua intimates this of the Israelites. If any of them did not make this choice, that feeling would be at the bottom of it. No doubt it is true of most men that religion, looked at in the distance, does not seem evil; under some circumstances they regard it as a positive good. Moses said even of the wicked, "Their rock is not as our rock, our enemies themselves being judges." Covetous Balaam's wish is in point. But when religion is pressed home as a present duty, as a matter of free and immediate choice, the case looks different. It does not seem good to choose the Lord, and choose to-day.

I. One reason is that which Joshua gives in the lesson: "Ye cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy God." To choose his service is to renounce sin. This is the secret of many irreligious lives. There is some illicit indulgence to which they cling—some unlawful business or way of doing business they cannot surrender. Every man who is licentious, intemperate, profane, dishonest or otherwise immoral has this special obstacle in his way. He must renounce every such wickedness if he will receive Christ for his Lord. This is at the root of much of the infidelity and unfriendliness of multitudes toward the Church. It is a standing remonstrance against their sins.

It seems evil to *give up idol-worship.* Joshua knew the choice that day lay between Jehovah and the gods of Mesopotamia or of the Amorites. The last had been a snare in times past, and might be again. Those gods exist no longer, but others are risen up. It is not the Chinese alone in this land that have their joss-houses

and burn incense on unholy shrines. There are men who worship the farms they cultivate, the houses they build, the very horses they drive. Many women make idols of pleasure and position and fashion, and pay such homage to dress and jewelry as they do not to the living God. Such things are more in their thoughts and more influence their acts than all sacred delights. They *cannot* give them a second place and God the first. They are idolaters as truly as the people of India or China.

3. Then there is a mortification of pride in the choice of God's service which often seems evil. It implies the wrongfulness of the past life, and that admission is not pleasant. It implies the acceptance of Christ's righteousness in place of our own, and that is too humbling. It implies that the choice, if secretly made, is to be openly avowed, and pride does not readily consent to that. Joshua called on the people to *say* whom they would choose. They must make an open sign of their preference. To choose the Lord is to choose his people. It is a joining ourselves to them, a coming out from among the ungodly. Or if there has been no association with the openly immoral, there must be the beginning of a Christian confession. To be known even as a seeker after God, to visit a minister for instruction, and, above all, to enter into open covenant with the Church,—this beforehand seems like such a mortification to pride that many draw back as from something that would do them evil instead of good.

IV. But now comes the final appeal of this narrative. Whether it seems good or evil to choose the Lord's service, there is a necessity of choosing, and of choosing *now*.

1. Those Israelites were to weigh the fact that they did that day make some choice. Joshua knew their refusal to

choose the Lord would be a decision to choose the Mesopotamian gods of their fathers or of these Amorites. That is the serious dilemma of every awakened soul. You are under the necessity of preferring the service of God or some other. It is as if you spoke it out: "For the present I have other masters, and to exchange them for this one does not seem desirable. It is better to remain as I am. The service suits me, and I cannot renounce it. Some other time I may feel differently, and I hope I may."

2. The more important, then, to note that the choice of to-day is likely to be that of to-morrow and all time to come. Joshua knew if under these circumstances the people did not choose right, they would not under any other thereafter. When this impressive day had closed, when he was gone, what probability of their taking up the duty they would not now assume? Here comes in the snare of a future probation. Where is the harm, it is said, of hoping for another convenient season in another world? Why not hope for that, and hold out an intimation of it in our preaching? Because of the temptation and the peril. No future time is as good as the present. "*Now is the* accepted time and *the* day of salvation." So says Scripture, and so says common sense. You that are young now, how old you may be in sin before you take your departure from earth and your entrance on eternity! All favorable circumstances are here; you do not know how entirely otherwise they may be in the world to come. You will take your impenitent mind and hardened heart there. Will you find any ministers of God, any Sabbaths and Sabbath-schools, in the land where you go? All the saints will have gone to heaven. In the place outside of heaven, call it by what name you will, who will be your ministers and teachers and helpers?

“ In that lone land of deep despair
What Sabbath’s cheerful light shall rise ?
What voice shall call your heart to prayer,
Or herald point you to the skies ? ”

If all the righteous go at once to heaven, it does look as if the words of the old hymn which I have altered in quoting would prove true. For who in that land will keep the Sabbaths and open the sanctuaries and speak from the pulpits, if any such are there ?

This is the land where the gospel light shines brightest and all influences combine to bring you to a wise choice. If you do not choose wisely now, when will you do so ?

3. Last, but not least of all, your choice will have a *controlling effect on others*. Note these most impressive words in the lesson : “ As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” They are Joshua’s words of decision announcing what he would do. He wants not to have their answer before making his announcement : “ Choose, if ye will, the gods of the heathen ; but as for me and my house, we choose the Lord.” Why was Joshua so eager to put forth this declaration ? Because he knew it would have a controlling effect on those that heard it. It was an example that would be contagious. As went the leader of Israel, so would go the people of Israel. What a lesson to all who are in high places ! What an example for men of prominence in every community ! What an admonition to every father of a family ! How wide-reaching is the influence of such persons over the decisions of others ! O ye Joshuas ! by virtue of your position your responsibility is great. You are telling others what to do in the concerns of religion as in all other concerns, and they are obeying you. Is it not a strong motive by which to draw you first to Christ, since whatever direction you take they will follow ? Your salvation will secure theirs ; your ruin will pluck ruin down on

them. Should you not, Joshua-like, rise and say, "Friends and neighbors, this matter concerns us all; it looks far forward; it goes down to the foundation of things. We must look well to it. I know not what you will do; but if you are looking to me, if any word or act of mine has influence in so momentous a concern, be it known to you all that as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord"? Would there were such a Joshua-spirit in the leaders of the people! Better for such men to have languished in deepest obscurity than to live in the presence of others only to mislead them.

Joshua's saying the decisive word brought all the people with him. He led his house, and his house prevailed with other houses. God hath set us in families for the sake of such influence, that every house may be a sanctuary for daily worship and every father a priest as Abraham was. But if the father is no servant of the Most High, where is the religion of the house? And if both father and mother are irreligious, who shall teach the children the fear of the Lord? Sunday-school teachers may do something, but how shall they prevail against the example of the parents? Let the teachers visiting such families take with them this instruction from the Joshua-narrative. Let them appeal to father and mother on behalf of the children, and that word will perhaps go straight to the parental heart. Be at least not careless of your children's souls, if you are of your own. Come, take them by the hand and bring them to the Saviour, and lead them toward heaven. Their destinies are with you. Their salvation by your agency will give you more joy hereafter than when your stores and barns increase. What a meeting will it be with their and your Lord in heaven when you shall say, "Here am I, and the children thou didst give me"!

ISRAEL'S APOSTASY.

BY THE REV. W. G. MOOREHEAD, D. D.

Aug. 19.—Judges 2: 6-16.

THIS passage is introductory to the book of Judges. It announces the execution of the commission which had been entrusted to Joshua and his contemporaries; it tells us also of the superior excellence of that generation (v. 6, 7,). In verses 10-16 the rapid deterioration of the chosen people, the sufferings which their sin provoked, as likewise God's merciful provision for their deliverance and recovery, are described.

A part of this passage (vs. 6-10), it will be observed, is a repetition substantially of Josh. 24: 28-31, and is inserted here to put the reader in possession of the reasons which called forth so severe a rebuke from the Angel of the Lord.

The book of Judges occupies a special place in the canon of Scripture. It describes the conduct and condition of Israel during the interval between the conquest of Palestine and the erection of the monarchy. It relates the story of the fall of the chosen nation and the moral causes which led to it. It traces the history of the long and stormy period which intervened between the death of Joshua and the rise of Samuel. It reproduces with unexampled vividness and power the transition-period from the nomadic state to that of settled order and defi-

nately organized government. It is a record of a remote and turbulent age—a treasury of deeds and characters such as we find nowhere else, of sacred heroism springing up with supernatural growth from a soil otherwise most fertile in crime and atrocity. “In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” This sentence, so frequently and earnestly repeated, is the key-note of the whole book. It expresses the freedom and independence, the license and the disorder, of the time.

Of all the Old-Testament books, the Judges, if read superficially, seems to reveal the least of the scheme of redemption, the progress in its development being so dubious as to appear like retrogression. Nevertheless, here also, as in all Scripture, this precious truth is discoverable in the office of the judges and the deliverances which, under God, they wrought for the people.

As the reader is led from Moses to Joshua, from Joshua to the judges, from Samuel to David, and from David to David’s Son, he cannot fail to recognize one divine plan which constantly draws nearer to the great disclosure. At times the progress of this plan may be scarcely perceptible by reason of the failures of God’s people; still, it exists; there is veritable movement. The doctrine grows, the mighty secret of the ages and of the worlds gradually approaches a full revelation; and faith discerns it as certainly in Judges as in Exodus or Joshua.

The structure of this book is peculiar. The historical succession of events is regular till the close of Samson’s career (chaps. 1–16), at which point the history of the judges is abruptly broken off, and the theft of Micah, the raid of the Danites and the civil war between Benjamin and the other tribes (17–21) are recorded: the history reopens with the first chapter of First Samuel. Now,

why does the sacred writer drop the story of the judges and turn his attention to the robbery of Micah and the wickedness of the men of Gibeah? These chapters (17-21) are not a mere appendix to the book: they occupy an important place in the design which the writer had before himself from the outset. This design is to exhibit the disastrous consequences of Israel's disloyalty to Jehovah in their relation to the Canaanites who still remained in the land. They disobeyed God and fell into idolatrous practices: God's protection was therefore withdrawn from them, and they, deprived of their strength, became subject to their heathen neighbors, and had to endure exactions and oppressions of intensity proportioned to their offences. Such is the prominent theme of the first part of the book. In the second part the internal consequences of disobedience are displayed; the degradation, the savage cruelty, the lawlessness and profound immorality of the people are most graphically portrayed. Interspersed with this mournful account is the beautiful and pathetic story of Ruth; which chronologically belongs to the time of the war against Benjamin. Dark as the general record is, it is a joy to find it relieved by bright examples of faith and self-sacrifice, such as the book of Ruth discloses.

I. *The Character of the Jews at the Death of Joshua.*—The men of the conquest were distinguished for their faith and obedience—were free in great measure from the unbelief and pusillanimity which dishonored their fathers of the wilderness. Courage and devotion to the great task assigned them are conspicuous in their history. Their national character was moulded, under God, by the splendid example, the unwavering faithfulness and intrepidity, of their great leader, Joshua. The qualities, the gifts, essential to leadership, which he possessed, were of

the highest order, and are heroic wherever found. Courage was the main feature in his character, but his courage was built very distinctly and definitely upon faith. He obeyed the call of the conquest, and engaged in the colossal work of disencumbering the inheritance of its infamous inhabitants, because he trusted the promise of God (Josh. 1: 5, 6). He combined justice as a magistrate with gentleness as a man—diligence and equity in disposing of the fruits of victory with the most unselfish magnanimity. A victorious soldier, a magistrate and leader invested with authority as absolute as that which Moses wielded, he was without personal ambition, without any desire of self-aggrandizement. His whole heart was patriotic under a system which required patriotism to take the form of religious obedience.

His lofty character, his chivalrous and trustful spirit, made a profound impression on the people whom he led and governed. His courage and his thorough devotion to the cause of God exerted the most beneficent influence on the whole congregation of Israel. In his farewell address to the people, when his work both of war and peace was done, he spoke not of conquest—the sound of the trumpet and the flash of the sword cannot be recognized in it—but of the holiness and the obedience which become the chosen of the Lord. The solemn address concluded with the impressive exhortation: “Choose ye this day whom ye will serve, but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” The people expressed their determination by loud and hearty declarations to be true to their covenant with God, and the dying general set up a stone under an oak as a memorial of the pledge which had been given of their firm allegiance to Jehovah.

Joshua could now lay down his head and die in peace. He had conquered the inheritance for the chosen people,

had reconsecrated them to their King, and bequeathed them an example, the influence of which was prolonged after his death. "And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord that he did for Israel."

Practical Suggestions.—(1.) One devoted and faithful man may induce his followers to serve the Lord: Joshua did so. (2.) But a man to do this must himself be a true servant of the Lord: Joshua was such. (3.) Useful as a man may be in his day and generation, he passes away and his influence for good gradually subsides. The life of Joshua was greatly prolonged: he lived for one hundred and ten years. But he died, and all his generation likewise. With them perished, in great measure, the ennobling instructions and the worthy examples.

II. *The Apostasy of the Succeeding Generation.*—There is something startling in the swiftness with which the Israelites degenerated. From ch. 3: 9 it is inferred that it was among the children of the first occupiers of the land that the declension began. Singular that those whose memories retained recollections of God's mighty deeds at the Jordan, at Jericho, at Beth-horon should so soon forget their Deliverer and King, ignore the covenant so solemnly made at Joshua's death, and shut their eyes to the stone witness under the oak. Yet, surprising as it is, it is, alas! perfectly human. Men naturally gravitate toward evil. Placed in a position of responsibility, they always fail. The history of our race is a series of falls and recoveries.

Observe—1. The nature of their apostasy. It is described by the regular Bible phrase, "They did evil in the sight of the Lord"—a phrase which means the practice of idolatry. It occurs seven times in Judges as de-

scriptive of the seven apostasies of Israel which drew down upon them the seven servitudes under their heathen neighbors. They worshiped and served Baalim and Ashtaroth, the principal male and female gods of the Phœnicians. The plural form is employed to indicate not so much their statues as the different modifications of the divinities themselves, as appears from the designations of Baal; *e. g.* *Baal-berith*, that is, Covenant Baal; *Baal-zebul*, Baal (lord) of the fly, etc. Similar modifications may be discovered in the Mariolatry of Roman Catholic countries. In Italy the Virgin's titles and sanctuaries are almost countless. One encounters the *Madonna* of a hundred different places and of a hundred different functions—*i. e.* there is the same general object of idolatrous adoration, but it is worshiped under an immense variety of conceptions.

The idolatry of the Canaanites cannot be regarded simply as an error of judgment: cruelty the most atrocious and crimes the most defiling were part and parcel of its observances. When, therefore, we are told that the Jews "forsook the Lord God" and "followed other gods, the gods of the people round about them," and "bowed themselves unto them," we are to understand not that the knowledge of Jehovah was altogether obliterated among them, but that to his worship they joined that of the false gods of their neighbors, and engaged in the demoralizing and horrible rites of Baalism (compare Ps. 106 : 34-39). It was sin the most heinous, wickedness the most insolent and abhorrent. God is jealous of his own honor; and to unite his name with idols, and to his worship to join the revolting orgies of Ashtoreth, was diabolism, and must be judged and punished.

2. Their apostasy was intensified by all the distinguishing privileges and blessings they had enjoyed.

Face to face with the story of God's extraordinary interposition on their behalf as a nation in Egypt, in the wilderness, in Canaan, they forsook the Lord. In spite of the instructions, example and influence of Joshua, and the elders associated with him, they forsook the Lord. Despite the sacred pledge by which the nation had bound itself to serve the Lord, they broke away from every restraint and transferred their allegiance to Baal. It was from the "Lord God of their fathers" that they turned away—an expression which in the Old Testament designates the peculiar relation existing between God and his people. Moses, predicting the calamities which should come upon the nation, imagines the onlookers as asking, "What meaneth the heat of his great anger?" and he replies, "Men shall say, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord God of their fathers."

Such a combination of holy influences this "generation" broke through. As virtue is proportioned in vigor to the temptations resisted, so transgression is proportioned to the forces of conscience, education, example and blessing which have been fought with and conquered. Nor was this all their sin. To the list must be added *disobedience*. They refused to execute the divine command to expel the Canaanites from the land. They found it more congenial to spare them and form alliances with them. They allowed themselves to be seduced into the very connections with the remaining heathen which had been most solemnly interdicted; they mixed with them in marriage, in traffic and in worship.

It was terrible surgery, and not murder, that the Israelites were commanded to perform as touching the heathen idolaters—a true and just surgery, cutting away unflinchingly the diseased part, that themselves might remain sound. Stopping short in the operation, *they* became

infected with the moral leprosy which made the Canaanites loathsome to Heaven and earth (Lev. 18 : 21-30 ; Deut. 12 : 30-32). They broke through every preventing circumstance, every cordon of spiritual influence, charged every enclosure which Providence meant should be their safeguard, and madly plunged into idolatry.

Practical Suggestions.—(1.) Mercies despised, privileges scorned, pledges made to God in covenant and broken, become the foundation for towering iniquity. The best things perverted are the worst. The depth of a man's fall is in proportion to the momentum acquired in bursting the bonds which held him. The offspring of a godly ancestry, children of prayers, of baptism and of holy teaching, who despise their great birthright, become the Esaus of the world, and are doubly guilty. (2.) Nothing is more fatal to the Christian calling than alliances with the ungodly. The Bible recognizes but two classes in this world—the good and the bad, the friends of God and the enemies of God. They are to be kept asunder in this world, as they are to be kept asunder in the next world. To ignore this distinction on the part of God's people is to subvert their peace and happiness, and to strike right athwart the whole range of scriptural command and admonition and exhortation. He who makes the experiment of such entangling alliances will speedily discover that his power is lost ; that what he builds with one hand he pulls down with the other ; that he does not win the world to God : the world wins him. It is a notorious fact that alliances with the wicked do not command the respect of the very men for whose favor they are formed. The world scorns those who sacrifice their religious principles to worldly policy or social ambitions.

III. *The Punishment of their Apostasy.*—It is described

in the fourteenth and fifteenth verses of the passage, and was certainly stern and unsparing. The Lord's anger burned against Israel, and they were given helplessly up to the foe. Power was no longer on their side, and victory forsook their arms. In every expedition, every attack they made upon their enemies, "the power that makes for righteousness" defeated and distressed them. "Whoever would might spoil them, whoever would might oppress them." They found, as all backsliders must find, that God is as true to his threatenings as he is to his promises. Their punishment sprang naturally out of their sin. They served the vile gods of the Canaanites: it was inevitable, because just, that they should fall under the rigorous oppression of the heathen. They deserted the arm of strength; of necessity their arms became powerless.

The disastrous consequences of their sin are not to be confined to their subjection to the idolaters. Men are assimilated in moral character to what they worship. Israel morally approximated to the condition of the idolaters themselves. This fact appears in the appalling immoralities which prevailed among them. Chapter nineteen furnishes a specimen in the rash and calamitous use of the *vow*, as that of Jephthah, of all Israel against Benjamin, and in the general lawlessness to which the book bears ample testimony: "The highways were unoccupied, and the travelers walked through byways." How vivid the picture! The thoroughfares were abandoned, for doubtless highwaymen infested them, who plundered as they listed, and there was no strong government to restrain and punish.

The divine inflictions were prompted by mercy and love. They were his chosen people, the objects of his care, the depositories of his truth. God's justice could

not tolerate their sin; his love would not repudiate them. He subjected them to the suffering their transgression provoked to recall them to their allegiance and to a realization of their dependence upon him. This method of procedure on the part of the divine government was generally effective: it brought them to their senses; they humbled themselves before their offended Sovereign and cried to him for deliverance; and the Lord, whose "mercy endureth for ever," heard them.

Practical Suggestions.—(1.) No two ideas are more inseparably linked together than these two of sin and suffering. The one follows the other by a law as fixed and imperative as the agony of a burning hand. They are the "twin serpents" of the race, inseparable companions. "Sin—suffering; suffering—sin!" how fearful a part of earth's history do these two fill! He that sins must suffer; he that is a profligate in his youth shall reap his harvest at last—the harvest of disappointment, of bitter, useless remorse; he shall have the worm that gnaws and the fire that is not quenched. And he that rebels against God's law, exchanges the truth for a lie, puts any idol into God's place in his affections and thoughts, shall have the "reprobate mind" which cheats the soul with falsehood. (2.) But all suffering is not penal. With respect to God's people it is remedial and corrective. The Psalmist's experience is that of multitudes: "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word." The redeemed will bless God throughout eternity that he loved them too well to let them stay in their sins—that his love did not shrink from inflicting pain. Moses Browne truly saith, "A great deal of rust requires a rough file."

IV. *God's Merciful Provision for Israel's Deliverance.*—God answered the cries of distress by sending them judges—men chosen and qualified to act as his vicegerents in the

emergencies of the nation. Fourteen different persons, including Deborah, acted in this capacity during the period of this book. These officers are not to be confounded with the ordinary judges of the theocracy (cf. Ex. 18 : 21-26). They were men raised up for a specific purpose and endowed with extraordinary powers for their office. Their duties were general and political, rather than municipal and strictly judicial. Most of them were military leaders appointed to rescue the people in the day of their calamity. In times of peace they continued to act on their commission, maintaining Israel in their allegiance to Jehovah. They were not a regular succession of governors, but extraordinary officers who were roused by the inward, irresistible impulse of God's Spirit to achieve the deliverance of their countrymen from the thralldom of their enemies. The judges had no power to make laws, for these were given by God; nor to explain them, for that was the province of the priests: they were upholders of the law, defenders of religion, avengers of crimes, particularly of idolatry and its attendant vices. They governed Israel as the subordinate agents of Him who was the supreme Ruler of the people.

It was the grace of the Lord that provided these deliverers: by them the silly, wayward flock of God was rescued from the destroyer and the King of Israel was magnified in the earth. There was no doubt in each deliverance wrought a pre-intimation of the final redemption from sin which faith read and rejoiced in, and many a pious Israelite saw through the temporal emancipation an infinitely more precious salvation which God in due time would accomplish.

Let no Christian despair or be discouraged even in the most adverse circumstances. An ancient Hebrew proverb runs, "When the tale of bricks is doubled, then Moses

comes." When God's people of old were environed with difficulties, helpless and wellnigh hopeless, the delivering judge appeared armed with the strength of God. When the Christian Church was suffering the "captivity of Babylon," Luther arose; when hollow formalism spread like a pall of death over the Protestantism of the eighteenth century, deliverance from the mephitic stupor was sent through the ministry of the Erskines of Scotland, through Wesley and Whitefield of England.

We need to remember the prophetic words of the Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria. Caius Caligula, the emperor, claiming divine homage for himself, determined to place a statue of Jupiter in the holy temple of Jerusalem. A mourning deputation of Israelites, headed by the venerable Philo, sought the imperial presence that such a dreadful calamity might be averted. Wearily they pursued the irascible, half-insane world's ruler as he rushed up and down marble staircases in his palace, pausing now and then to sting them with some coarse epithet or brutal sarcasm. At length he shrieked where a crowd of courtiers might hear, "O Jews! tell me, why eat ye not of pork?" Philo calmly turned to his brethren, saying, "Courage! God will answer the wrathful words of Caius with mighty deeds for our deliverance." The order for the statue was revoked. Evermore it is true that "Man's extremity is God's opportunity."

GIDEON'S ARMY.

BY THE REV. SAMUEL J. NICCOLLS, D. D.

Aug. 26.—Judg. 7 : 1-8.

THIS portion of Scripture is part of the story of the great deliverance which the Lord brought to Israel through the hand of Gideon. As such, it has more of religious than military significance. While it speaks of the uprising of the people and their preparation for war, most of all it reveals to us how God works in behalf of his Church. It is written to set forth, not the excellency of human valor, but the power and greatness of faith in God.

The central figure in the story is Gideon, the son of Joash. Like most of the heroes and reformers who have been raised up for the deliverance and advancement of the Church, he comes to his work from obscurity. He is the son of a poor family and of a divided tribe, without renown in Israel. His low condition and humble origin were well symbolized by the barley cake in the Midianitish soldier's dream. The divine call came to him when he was secretly threshing wheat in his father's winepress, for fear of the Midianites. This thresher of wheat was then very unlike the dauntless leader who afterward, with his three hundred followers, scattered the hosts of Midian like chaff before the wind. Doubt-

less, in common with his oppressed countrymen, he chafed under the bitter yoke of the oppressor. His own brothers had been murdered by the Midianites, and, like a true Oriental, he felt that there was left to him the sacred duty of avenging their blood. But, while chafed and indignant, he is also sullen, dispirited and without faith. He has no consciousness of a mission, no thought of doing anything great for his country. His reply to the angel of the Lord shows this: "My Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites." And yet this despairing and skeptical man is the one who became so bold and mighty that his very name struck terror to the hearts of his enemies. This man, who as yet had no higher purpose than to thresh and hide his grain, became that patriot and hero who, when Israel begged him to become their king, replied in the memorable words: "I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you. The Lord shall rule over you." The secret of the wonderful transformation is easily told. It was *his faith in God*. He received the testimony sent to him and believed that he had a mission from Jehovah. The words of the angel, "Go in thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?" were his commission. By them "he was strengthened with all might in the inner man." His faith produced his marvelous valor.

His first act after receiving his call shows that he understood the spiritual character of his mission. Idolatry was the cause of Israel's affliction, and it must be removed before they could hope for deliverance. So

Gideon began as a religious reformer. Hard by his native city stood an altar of Baal. How could he fight the battles of Jehovah and leave it unmolested? Going by night with a few of his household servants, he tore it down, cut down the grove and built there an altar to Jehovah. It was a brave deed, as nobly done as that of Luther when he defied the pope by burning the papal bull before the people, but it nearly cost Gideon his life. The next day the excited idolaters gathered around his father's house, clamoring for the blood of the bold reformer. He was saved by the ready wit of his father, and on that day he received his nickname, which afterward became his title of honor. They called him Jerubbaal; that is, "Let Baal plead"—"Let him if he can, since he was insulted, avenge his cause." Henceforth Gideon is Baal's antagonist. The influence of that one heroic act of his was wider than he dreamed. It kindled hope in the hearts of others and aroused their failing faith. One brave man standing against all odds on God's side becomes a power among his fellows.

Very soon there was larger work for Gideon. The Midianites came on their annual excursion of plunder, crossing the great plain of Esdraelon like devouring locusts for multitude. But instead of finding, as usual, a frightened people hiding like rabbits in caves and dens, they were confronted by a nation in arms. Gideon had blown his trumpet and the surrounding tribes had eagerly responded to his call. Thirty-two thousand men were marshaled under his banner; his faith and courage had created an army. Such was the man who with his soldiers encamped at the well Harod on the slopes of Gilboa, in full view of the Midianites in the valley to the north of them.

In the account which follows of the sifting of Gideon's

army and his preparation for the impending battle we have one of those striking historical parables in which the word of God abounds.

First. It shows us that the Lord tests the faith of his servants before he gives them the victory. Hitherto his dealings with Gideon had been such as to quicken and enlarge his faith by signs and wonders. But there is a higher and nobler degree of faith than that produced by miraculous signs. Jesus said unto Thomas, "Because thou hast seen me thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." Before Gideon's faith could be crowned with victory he must be able to trust God against all appearances.

It is the hard lesson which all his faithful followers must learn if they would be largely used in the Lord's service. Doubtless it was a source of satisfaction to Gideon to find his summons to the tribes so promptly answered, nor would it be strange if he began to look upon his unexpected success as an evidence that the Lord was with him. True, his army was greatly inferior in numbers to the hosts of the Midianites, but still, thirty-two thousand men full of enthusiasm made a force not to be despised. What a trial, then, it must have been to see his little army suddenly shrivel to one-third of its original size! When, in accordance with the old Mosaic law, he made the proclamation, "Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early," two-and-twenty thousand of the people proved cowards and returned to their homes. It was a wholesale desertion in presence of the enemy. No wonder that the well of water around which they had been encamped was called, as a memorial of their baseness, the "well of trembling." Cowardly desertion from the ranks of Christian service in time of need is one of the sorest trials to true faith. Many brave leaders, striving to arouse

the people of God to do battle and stand steadfast for truth and righteousness, have met this same difficulty. After the transient enthusiasm excited by the first bold call is over, and when the real struggle is at hand, multitudes show that they have no heart for the fight.

Conquering faith rests only upon the word of God, and therefore it stands undismayed by outward appearances. It was such a faith that upheld Gideon in this dark emergency.

But the trial of his faith is not yet ended. Bad as the situation is, his cause is not yet hopeless. Ten thousand picked men who had courage enough to withstand the demoralizing effects of the wholesale desertion of their comrades, ten thousand men resolved to conquer or die, is a host not to be despised. Such a force, led by a mighty man of valor, could sweep down the mountain-side and through the camp of careless and undisciplined Midianites like a destroying thunderbolt. But again sense is confounded and all ground of confidence in man taken away. The ten thousand are sifted until only three hundred remain, and with these Gideon must fight the Lord's battle. How arbitrary and unreasonable the command to dismiss the ninety-seven hundred seems to human reason! They had volunteered to remain; to retain them gave at least a hope of success. But to send them home and to retain only three hundred seemed an act of madness. It was to invite defeat and extermination. What kind of generalship was this, that first rallied an army in the presence of the enemy and then dispersed it, keeping only a little remnant of three hundred? Surely these were hard commands for Gideon to obey. All human probabilities are against him. On his side he has nothing but the word of God. Nothing but that? But that word is everything to Gideon. His faith

rises to its highest and noblest degree. Like Abraham, considering not the difficulties in the way, he believed and obeyed God. He had first asked of God signs and tests to confirm the message sent to him. These had been given, and he had full and sufficient warrant for believing that God would deliver Israel through his hand. So God, in turn, tries his faith, and most gloriously does it come through the fiery ordeal. His steadfastness points us to the true ground of success in Christ's work. We must base our confidence, not in numbers, nor in enthusiasm, nor in the instrumentalities we employ, but solely on the word of promise which our Lord has spoken.

Second. This incident shows us how God works to humble pride and conceit, and to lead men to look to him alone for salvation. The reason for the winnowing of Gideon's army is given in these words: "The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me." If the twenty-two thousand cowards who basely deserted had been led to a miraculous victory, what boasting there would have been concerning their own valor! They would have claimed the glory as theirs, not Jehovah's. Full of conceit, pride and unbelief, man is ever trying to rob God of the honor due him. This disposition to glorify self shows itself in the Church in manifold ways. God warns his people against it, lest they should forget Him who alone saved them, and say in their heart, "My power and the might of my hand hath gotten me this wealth."

Nor is this evil disposition a thing of the past. Too often do we hear the Church boasting of its wealth, power, intelligence, culture and numbers, as though they were the forces that would make it irresistible in the conquest of the world. And thus that which to human view makes

the triumph of Christianity probable, stands as an actual hindrance to its predestined victory. "The people are too many" for God to give them the victory. When numbers lead us away from absolute trust in God as our only Saviour and Deliverer, whenever they lead us to forget that we can conquer only through the efficacious energy of divine grace, they are a hindrance, not a help. But while Christ will certainly lead his followers to final victory, it will be in such a way as to humble man's pride, expose and condemn his cowardice, and show beyond a doubt that salvation is of the Lord. It is not that God would rather have few than many battling on his side; but he often uses the few rather than the many to show that the power is his. For man's good he works by despised instruments and obscure agencies. Men believe in numbers; they glorify brute force and material greatness; but God is ever working in such a way, by scattering our fancied power and wealth, as to lead us to put our trust in him. The Napoleonic maxim, that "God is on the side of the heaviest artillery," is contrary to both Scripture and experience. The brave Jonathan had a truer insight into the nature of the divine government when he said, "There is no restraint to the Lord, to save by many or by few." History shows us that the greatest achievements for religion, liberty and humanity have been those accomplished by God's feeble minorities. They have won the battle against overwhelming numbers, that God's name might be honored and faith in his word vindicated.

Third. This passage also shows us that God does not despise or ignore human agency in carrying on his work; on the contrary, he selects that which is best adapted for his service. It would be strange, indeed, if in his choice of men for his service he honored incompetency, ignorance, cowardice and presumption. But it is not so. All

through this sifting of Gideon's army, which at first sight seems arbitrary, we can discover the action of superior wisdom. The first step was to get rid of the fearful and cowardly. The wise command of the Mosaic law for the day of battle was that the captain of the host should make proclamation, saying, "What man is there that is fearful and faint-hearted, let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart." Cowardice is infectious as well as courage. Better a small number without fear than a great host half of whose numbers are infected with cowardice. The greatest captains in history have recognized this. So in critical moments, when none but the brave could be used, Alexander, Cæsar, Napoleon and Wellington have given leave to all who had not courage for the conflict to retire. God will not honor cowards in his service. Those whom he leads to victory must be true volunteers.

It is a sad reflection that there are multitudes in the visible Church who are a hindrance rather than any real help or spiritual power. The enthusiasm which led them to enlist in the service of Christ has died out, and they even regret that they entered his service. If in some honorable way they could be absolved from their vows, they would gladly accept the release and go back to their old life. Here is a question for our consideration: Is it the overwhelming majority of any particular Church or the small minority that is ever ready to volunteer its services for Christ? There were twenty-two thousand of Gideon's army of thirty-two thousand whom God could not use, for their hearts were not wholly joined to him.

But as God is searching for men of his own heart, the winnowing process is still continued. The ten thousand who remain are not lacking in courage, but his service demands other qualities. Courage is not all the

Christian soldier needs; there must be also prudence, watchfulness and self-denial. It was to discover these qualities that the second test was instituted. The whole army was led down in the sight of the enemy to the fountain of Harod to drink. Little things often furnish the best indications of character. So here ninety-seven hundred, either in the spirit of reckless bravado or of self-indulgence, flung themselves down on the ground and abandoned themselves to the luxury of quenching their thirst. They were careless of danger and unthinking of surprise. It was an unsoldierly attitude. Only three hundred stood erect and lapped the water from their hands. They showed that duty, and not self-indulgence, was uppermost in their minds. These were the men whom God chose as his instruments. They were men of faith, courage, prudence, watchfulness and self-denial. By such men, be they few or many, God conquers. There has always been, there is now in his Church, such a minority. They are men and women of unfaltering faith, earnest prayer, and loyally devoted to Christ. They can be depended upon in emergencies. Their object is not to indulge themselves in the good of this world, but to do some good in it. They are ready for labor and count their time, their property, their all, not their own, but God's. "God looks upon them with delight." As they honor him, he honors them. They are the true conquerors of the world, the pioneers in every glorious cause. They shall walk with their Lord in white, for they are worthy.

We see, then, that God does look to quality in his chosen servants. He cares far more for it than for numbers. The Church to-day needs better men, rather than more men, in order to conquer the world. Let what we have become, as they all might through God's grace, men of courage and faith, bold and outspoken in Christ's cause, self-sacrificing,

watchful and prudent in his service, and no power of earth or hell can stay their triumph.

Poetry and eloquence for long centuries have delighted in proclaiming the glory of the brave Leonidas and the three hundred Spartans, whose heroic valor and death-defying patriotism made the pass of Thermopylæ a shrine and an altar for Greece. Their equals in courage and patriotism, and their superiors in faith, were Gideon and the immortal three hundred who remained on Mount Gilboa while their comrades bade them farewell and marched to their homes. It was no ordinary daring they displayed when, armed with pitchers and trumpets, they went forth to meet the multitudes of their foes. It was the boldness of faith in the divine word. "One, with God on his side," said the old German Reformers, "is a majority." Thus the three hundred outnumbered the hosts of Midian, for God was with them. It is grand to stand with God's minorities. Better be with them than with the myriads of his enemies. Better be with them than with the large majority of cowardly, half-hearted Christians whom he cannot use. Fear not, little flock, outnumbered and despised by the world. Stand steadfast. "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

THE DEATH OF SAMSON.

BY THE REV. HERVEY D. GANSE.

Sept. 2.—Judg. 16: 21-31.

WHOEVER would read with profit the history of Samson must keep in view this consideration: That the chief design of the narrative is to illustrate one of God's methods of interference in behalf of his guilty and suffering people. Those methods were many, as the different stories of this book of Judges very plainly show. The several exploits of Ehud, Jael, Shamgar, Jephthah, Gideon, Samson, were all unlike each other. Some of these used only their own natural resources of promptness and courage, and some were miraculously helped. In this latter particular the stories of Samson and of Gideon are alike; and there is further interesting resemblance in the angelic visits which foretold the prowess and success of the two men. But in one notable particular the case of Samson stands alone: the miracle which aided him wrought solely through his own bodily members. What the old pagan mythology dreamed of in regard to Hercules, God did by means of this ancient Israelite. He put forward one man, not of giant proportions, so far as we are told, but of strength so far beyond that of giants that there could be no question of its special bestowment by the Spirit of God. To preserve to men the knowledge of this manifestation of

God's omnipotence and goodness is the special office of the history of Samson.

The religious character of the man in whom this miraculous manifestation was made is nowhere emphasized in the original narrative ; and outside of the book of Judges, Samson is mentioned but once in all the Scripture—namely, in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The express object of that passage is to illustrate the working of one quality—the faith—by which many different persons, according to their several histories, “subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, . . . out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.” Samson's place in such a list declares, what is plain enough from his story, that he knew that God was the Author of his strength, and that he trusted him for it. But it does not commend any other feature of his life, except, by implication, the patriotic zeal he showed against the enemies of his people. Many of his acts cannot be commended, nor even excused. Shall we say, then, that he was devoid of piety? We can safely say that he is in most things no instructive example of piety. But we are to remember that, since all men are imperfect, their imperfections take color from their several circumstances ; and in view of Samson's unspiritual times and special relations, the ways in which he allowed himself to be tempted did not differ in essence from those by which other weak men, such as Jacob, David and Peter, went astray. We are to remember, besides, that since the design of the record is to set forth what God miraculously did by him, we are told only that part of his life which is connected with his chief exploits. His whole history might have embodied many engaging traits of which we know nothing.

Our concern, however, is with the part that is told us, which, by reason of the very imperfections it includes, we shall find very instructive. If Samson, notwithstanding his strength, was a very weak and erring saint, he suffered for his errors; and his story illustrates God's faithful discipline no less than his wonder-working power.

There was in Samson one great defect that left him exposed to all his special temptations—his lack of any devout regard of his divine endowment. He must have known of its miraculous character. How could his parents have failed to tell him of the two visits of the angel, and of the manner of his departure in the flame of the burnt-offering? Could they have left untold the one errand on which he came? Was it not to set forth their son as a child of God's special promise? Had not special faith in his mother anticipated his birth, and by obedience to the divine command prepared for the wonderful power he possessed? Indeed, his own continued adherence to the Nazaritic rule (see Lev. 11 : 1-47) requiring abstinence from wine and all things ceremonially unclean, and the growth of hair and beard, had distinctly acknowledged the prediction under which he had been born. Moreover, his strength itself bore direct testimony to God's bestowment of it, for it had not been gradually developed, like the strength of other men, nor did it abide with him in one constant degree. It came to him when "the Spirit of the Lord" came upon him. Other marked qualities, such as his shrewdness and droll humor, appear to have been natural endowments; and no doubt he had natural strength that was not small. But his great exploits were not natural, even to him. He was the man upon whom the Spirit of God was accustomed to come. He should have felt an awe of God's indwell-

ing might. He should have felt an awe even of that man, promised of Jehovah, whom he found himself to be.

What right had such a man to that first wife from the heathen Philistines? God overruled his choice to the Philistines' discomfiture, but the disobedience by which he sought such a relation was none the less. With a reverent consideration of his relation to God he would never have thought of such a marriage. And with such consideration how could he have made that disgraceful visit to Gaza? Above all, a just sense of the endowment he had from God would have forbidden him to tell his secret to that vile and treacherous Delilah. Contrast the scene in which the angel stands before his awed but happy parents, making the promise of his birth and of God's deliverance by him, with that in which the son of such a promise lay with his Nazarite head in the lap of that Philistine woman, and suffered his unholy passion to make betrayal of Jehovah's trust! No wonder that when his locks were left upon her knees "the Lord was departed from him." No wonder the Philistines were suffered to take him and put out his eyes. The infatuated man had consented to all that. He knew that he was dealing with a traitress, yet, step by step, he went straight on till the fatal end was reached. And at every step he was himself traitor to his divine commission.

The next stage in the history, then, follows of course. The Philistines first of all make him powerless for any new attack upon them. They put out his eyes; they bored them out, says the Hebrew—a horrible cruelty not unknown among barbarous peoples. Now they could safely let him live. They could even make profitable his remaining strength. So they put brazen fetters upon him to keep even his blind rage from groping after ven-

geance; and they set before him a rude mill—one stone made, by a handle, to revolve above another—and forced him to do that laborious and menial work. “He did grind in the prison-house.”

What a succession of crowds must have flocked to feast their eyes on him! Day after day he heard the noisy tide of steps mingled with jeering laughter and cunning insult. It would be strange if they stopped at that. For now he was both fettered and blind, and no weapon, not so much as the jaw of an ass, was within his reach. It would be safe for any to assail him.

How he must have chafed under his humiliation! What recollections must he have had of his free journeys in the sunlight about the camp of Dan, when the greatest might of men and beasts gave way before him like the grass he trod on! Never the sight of the sun again, nor one free step! They have him! There is no hope! Oh, how his folly must have come up before him! As he saw himself on that Delilah's knees, how he must have despised himself! No doubt he did better than that. No doubt he repented. We know that he could pray. How could he bear that fearful change without support from God? And how could he go to God for support till he went to him in contrition? So God was ready to show him as much of favor as his desperate case admitted.

One element of hope the weary days were bringing him. The sign of his forfeited Nazariteship was coming back to him: “The hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven.” You can fancy the sightless man feeling day by day the locks and beard returning to their former proportions, and wondering whether his enemies would be shrewd enough to outwit his renewal of his vow by cutting them again, or whether God was giving proof of his forgiveness by saving them from their

hands. The doubt must have resolved itself by degrees ; the sense of his renewed power must have returned. Before his first achievements the Spirit of the Lord had begun to move him ; literally, to smite upon him. Those throbbing reminders of the miracle within him no doubt began again.

But what could even miraculous might achieve by means of a sightless man bound in prison? A dim promise of an answer came. They were about to lead him forth. It was a great festival which his enemies were keeping to their fish-god, Dagon, by whom they believed he had fallen into their hands. Perhaps it was some anniversary of his capture (for the story is very compactly told, and it was not in any brief space that his hair and beard would grow again). What a zest would it add to their festivities to have the old-time terror of their nation compelled to play the buffoon before them ! They had means enough to torture him into movements that would fill them with glee.

To conceive of the scene you must keep in mind the form of the Oriental building. It is erected around an inner court. Probably within such a court Samson was displayed to the multitude, who filled the different stories and covered the roof of the main building that made one of its sides. The entertainment was probably long continued, so that while only comparatively few at a time could look down from the open front of the stories and roof, as the day went on most of them had some opportunity to watch the wretched captive. At length they gave him respite, and he withdrew from the open court to the main side of the quadrangle, where, under the shadow of the lower story, they "set him between the pillars." Of course, any building of so great a size must have been supported by many pillars, yet among these there well

may have been a few whose support was, to such an overloaded structure, of critical importance. It is well known that in modern architecture sometimes the breaking of a single column beneath a heavily-loaded building will begin the crash that tumbles the whole into ruin. The thought of such a ruin flashed through the mind of Samson as, knowing from the din of the multitude how great it must be, he found himself now set beside the main support on which that chief side of the great structure rested. He remembered the gates of Gaza, and thought that if now, as then, the Spirit of the Lord would put into his members the miraculous might, there remained to him one deed worthy of the predestined deliverer of Israel. It would end his own life. But what was life to him now? What had ever been the office of the life foretold of him? Not enjoyment, to which he had basely turned it, but the chastisement of the enemy of Israel. The way to one last achievement fully worthy of that life has suddenly opened before him. Let it close unused and the deliverer of Israel goes back to his endless grinding in his prison-house.

Now let Jehovah decide it! If he gives the miraculous power, it shall be used, and Samson, so justly disgraced, shall return to his office, once for all, and die the triumphant champion of his people!

So he uttered his prayer for strength, and "took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood," and "said, Let me die with the Philistines; and he bowed himself with might," says the Hebrew—not "with *all his* might," as our Version, with misleading italics, has it. The might was never his. It was the old miraculous power that came back. What hands and arms could never have done, God did by them. "And the house fell."

“So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.”

One element of this heroic act is painful to Christian feeling: it is the spirit of personal revenge with which Samson gives his life away. He puts it into his prayer: “Only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.” If he could, by this time, have been so purged of selfish passion as to have lost himself in his great commission, and have died the pure minister of God, Samson, crushed under the ruined house of Dagon, would have shone almost as bright as his predicting angel in the flame of the burnt-offering. Yet who could expect that of such a man in such an age? The Scripture presents him in this, as in other things, just as he was. But it does not make him our rule. That we have only in the commands and example of Him who, though he upholds the needs of justice and of God’s retributions, forbids all personal malice and revenge.

But of the magnificent address and heroism of Samson’s last deed there can be no question. It is that last deed that makes his history. His other achievements would, in any event, have been told with interest; but if the story had ended with his death among the other slaves who “did grind in the prison-house” in Gaza, our admiration would have borne a shading of pity, if not of contempt. But his fame was redeemed. Among the grandest of the tragic and thrilling deeds that have been done by men stands this last deed of Samson.

How the news of it must have spread into Israel! The people that had lost their hero, and lost him so shamefully, suddenly found him again. His brethren—not literally his brothers probably, but his nearest relatives—make with concealed triumph their way to Gaza, and the Philistines,

who in grief and consternation are gathering out their dead from the ruined house, little care what those few Israelites may do with the mangled body that is found beneath them all. So they bear him eastward from the low plain of Gaza, where he found both his shame and his glory, up to his native hills; and they "buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the burying-place of Manoah his father."

It has been common to put forth Samson as a type of Christ. The Scripture has never done this, even by a hint. If it had, its representation would have demanded reverent acceptance and study. But since only human ingenuity has drawn the parallel between the sacrifice which Samson made of himself and that of our Lord upon Cavalry, it is as lawful as it is natural to notice how little in common there is between the last resort, heroic as it was, of a man whose betrayal of his own endowments and office had turned him into a mutilated and hopeless slave, and that gracious choice of the free and mighty Son of God by which, not for the destruction of any, but with prayer for enemies whom he might have consumed with a word, "he gave himself, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God."

The chief lessons of the story of Samson are too obvious to be mistaken. It illustrates the power of God, his faithful kindness to his ancient people, his steadfast mercy, as well as discipline, toward his erring servant. The heroic death of Samson, when contrasted with the weak indulgence of much of his life, shows what opposite elements can enter into the same character, and the folly and wickedness of allowing prosperity and ease to develop a selfishness which nothing but the sternest chastisements from God can cure.

But the one most pointed lesson of all the history, I

think, is this : When men willfully dishonor their sacred endowments and calling, and sell themselves to God's enemies, reparation in any degree is very costly, and in any large degree comes only by miracle.

It is very common for the children of pious parents to inherit from them such excellent things as health, intelligence, thrift, respectability and influence. Even the particular moral and mental habits which religion forms often leave their impress on the offspring. Besides, in many an instance believing prayer entreats and secures special blessing upon the child that is not yet born. Take out of any Christian congregation or family all the elements that are due to the faith and piety of Christian fathers and mothers, and the people that would remain would never be known for the same men and women.

It is a very common thing, besides, for the inheritors of such advantages to desecrate and squander them. A youth, in America especially, thinks himself his own master. If his parents ever talked with God about him, what is that to him? What they prayed and hoped for he has. He takes it about with him in health and gracefulness and talent. He can get gratification out of it. It is himself. He will manage it as he pleases. Ah ! if one could follow many a child of faith and prayer and of divine endowment to the strange places which he seeks, the ancient Samson on Delilah's lap would be no marvel. Features and voice that would remind you of saints of God, who walked among men in the might and brightness of his manifest presence, might be found in the haunts of every abandoned passion and crime ; for no inheritance of parents' faith and prayers was ever meant by God to save those who are bent on squandering it.

It is a common thing for such betrayers of their birth-right to suffer for their crime. Their lusts take them to

the Philistines, and the Philistines keep them for slaves. Some they put in prison-houses, shutting them up to terrible remorse and helplessness. What memories of Christian home and Sabbaths can come into the cells of felons who have resolutely broken away from gracious restraints? What snatches of hymns and of Scripture can flit through minds given over to foulness and blasphemy? With recollection not quite dead, but with the locks of their strength shorn, and all vision of beauty and hope put out for ever, they slave on under the bondage to which they have sold themselves.

Yet all such slaves are not as consciously wretched as Samson was. Sin, that shuts up some of its victims, parades others; and these, led about with a chain, boast of their liberty. What their childhood heard about God and angels they have cast behind their backs, and their glory is to ridicule, in the midst of a Philistine rout, what they were taught among the people of God. There are, in our day, not a few intellectual Samsons, big and little, whose very ability to blaspheme with smartness they owe to a Christian lineage in a Christian land. But they have made over their inheritance to irreligion and atheism. Unlike the shorn Samson, they have taken their endowments with them. For since no miracle bestowed their gifts, no miracle has taken them away. Upon these you see no fetter as they display their antics before the crowded house of Dagon. Yet every such renegade has paid for his treason. The enemy that has captured him has put out his eyes. Take our most notable American example, who, born in Israel, chooses to perform in Gaza. Has he taken sight with him? With a certain mole-eyed sense at his finger-tips he rummages the pages of Scripture for motes and dust, triumphant, as the blind are, at every minute discovery, but with no glimpse of the fabric which his fingers

are exploring. The truth and beauty, the divine majesty and holiness, the pure morality and the tender grace, which are woven together to make the whole distinctive substance of the Bible, he never sees. History and psalm, prophecy and Gospel, are to him good to feel over for dust and sand-grains; and he never knows them for the vesture of the Son of God.

When talent born in the Church turns, not mere doubter, but reckless scoffer and blasphemer, the change has run beyond mere feeling into the judgment. The perceptions that are necessary to keep men decent have been put out. Samson, betrayed by lust and afterward pricked on to make unwilling sport for his enemies, was enviable beside any modern man who, having Christianity for his mother, makes a trade of ridiculing her. Let American youth hold that style of manhood, however brilliant, not only in abhorrence, but contempt.

But the momentous warning of this history remains to be spoken. None of all these perverters and squanderers of their inherited advantages have an easy way of repairing the wrong. Nothing but God's wonderful providence and miraculous help enabled the unfaithful Samson even to die to profit; and God does not commonly work miracles in reparation of men's sins. When a man carries his endowments over to the side of sin, the most that he can hope for, even upon his repentance, is that he will be forgiven; but the Philistines to whom he has sold the energies of his life are not likely to come to any catastrophe when he dies. If some magnificent achievement for religion could be the appointed wind-up of a life of sin, the world would be full of pretended Samsons, who would be true enough to their original so long as their passions could be fed, but would never touch a pillar when they should come to the end. Let no man cherish that dream. Sin is common-

place, and leads right down to degradation and helplessness and despair. The world is full of men who by their sins do service to God's enemies, but all history affords only one notable case in which a man's sins brought him into power to sell even his life for a righteous triumph.

Finally, the atonement for sin lies not in our dying, though under some ruined house and congregation of Dagon, but in the death of Christ our Redeemer; and the only safe rule of living is to count every endowment sacred to Him, that Angel of the Covenant, who from the ascending flame of his own sacrifice "gave gifts unto men;" and to hold the trust devoutly for the glory of God.

RUTH AND NAOMI.

BY THE REV. H. A. EDSON, D. D.

Sept. 9.—Ruth 1 : 14-22.

“LET us now go even unto Bethlehem.” By and by the whole world will be going thither. Far in the future as yet, however, are the historic glories of the place. For, though it was “in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem” (Gen. 35 : 19), that Rachel had died and was buried, before the shepherd David appears three generations must first pass away. And there will be long centuries of waiting before the shepherds find here the cradle of David's greater Son. But Nature is already here, furnishing abundant motives for our pilgrimage. What jaded mind will not acknowledge the restfulness of rural scenes? “Come ye . . . into a desert place and rest a while” was the prescription of the Great Physician (Mark 6 : 31). How often by such retirement had his own spirit been refreshed!

Some such medicine we may gain from this book of Ruth. It takes us to the hills and the fields. In its tone and finish the story is idyllic. Nothing in Virgil or Wordsworth or Bryant so completely transfers to language the atmosphere of simple rustic life. Thus readily in his own volume has the Author of inspiration surpassed these lesser literary charms.

Bethlehem "occupies part of the summit and sides of a narrow ridge which shoots out eastward from the central chain of the Judæan mountains, and breaks down abruptly into deep valleys on the north, south and east. The steep slopes beneath the village are carefully terraced, and the terraces sweep in graceful curves round the ridge from top to bottom. In the valleys below, and on a little plain to the eastward, are some cornfields, whose fertility doubtless gave the place its name—Bethlehem, 'house of bread;' while the dense foliage of the olives and fig trees ranged in stately rows along the hillsides, and the glistening leaves of the vines that hang in festoons over the terrace-banks, serve to remind us, amid the desolations of the whole land, and especially in contrast with the painful barrenness of the neighboring desert, that this little district is still Ephrath, 'the fruitful.' "*

From this Judæan landscape the narrative suddenly transfers us, however, to Moab, beyond the Dead Sea. The failure of the supply of bread—such a famine as had formerly driven Joseph's brothers to Egypt for help—suggested to Elimelech a similar remedy. With Naomi, his wife, and their two sons, he forsakes the land of his fathers. It is a sad necessity. With such slight household furnishings as the traveler in Eastern countries may still see bound upon one small beast of burden he journeys around the northern extremity of the Dead Sea to Moab. Not only away from home, but away from the ancestral religion, he goes, to dwell among strangers and idol-worshippers.

What were the prevailing features of that heathen region we learn incidentally from the scriptural allusions to the king of Moab, chronicled by the famous Moabite Stone: "And Mesha, king of Moab, was a sheepmaster, and ren-

* Professor Porter, in *Kitto's Cyclopædia*.

dered unto Israel an hundred thousand lambs, and an hundred thousand rams with the wool" (2 Kings 3: 4). "Here, again," says Palmer," the Bible receives fresh confirmation from geographical facts: Moab, with its extensive grass-covered uplands, is even now an essentially sheep-breeding country, although the 'fenced cities and folds of sheep' of which mention is made in the book of Numbers (32: 36) are all in ruins. But in its palmier days, when those rich pastures were covered with flocks, no more appropriate title could have been given to the king of such a country than that he was a 'sheepmaster.'"*

Attractive as such a region would be to a householder fleeing from famine, the immigrant Elimelech and his good wife were sure to meet sorrow upon sorrow amidst the dark superstitions of the land. The god Chemosh was "the abomination of Moab" (1 Kings 11: 7; 2 Kings 23: 13; Jer. 48: 7). With what cruel rites devotees were accustomed to implore his favor may be inferred from the biblical allusion to that same King Mesha: "He took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead and offered him for a burnt-offering upon the wall" (2 Kings 3: 27).

For pious Israelites in the midst of such social corruptions the chief solicitude would be on account of the children. Would it be possible, even by the wisest household discipline, to fortify the young people against the seductions of a false faith? Might not the new habits of a foreign land, and the entanglements of secular life there, prove more than a match for parental counsel and authority? That there was ground for fear became manifest in what actually occurred. Against the plain requirements of the law (Deut. 7: 3; 23: 3; Ezra 9: 2; Neh.

* *The Desert and the Exodus*, p. 411. Cf. *Sinai and Palestine*, p. 166.

13:23) the two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, sought wives among the idolatrous Moabites. It seemed likely that the fair annals of this honest Bethlehem house were now to be finally merged in a dark flood of heathenism.

Here, however, the hand of Providence is interposed. By such domestic vicissitudes as mark human life everywhere the probable course of events is turned aside. Elimelech dies. The two sons die. Naomi and her daughters-in-law sit solitary amidst these desolating bereavements. In such a case nothing was more natural than the sighing of the banished widow's heart for home. From the "wall of the mountains of Moab, seeming to overhang the lower hills of Judah, from which they are only separated by that deep mysterious gulf of the Dead Sea," * the lonely emigrant would look with infinite longing toward Bethlehem. There still dwelt her kindred. Here in this foreign land, after ten years of struggle and trial, there is nothing to hold her, except, indeed, the two young women whom she has loved at least for her sons' sake, and whom she has carefully sought to win away from a false and debasing heathenism to the God of Israel. For them what might the future have in store? Was it possible, too—her husband and her children gone, with no son left to bear his father's name and continue the ancestral line—that these three graves were finally to obliterate Elimelech's memory? Against such a fate we may be sure that this Jewish woman's heart would most passionately plead.

But it is equally certain that one who had had so wide and varied an experience would deal prudently. Nothing would be demanded of her daughters which hereafter they might seriously regret. If with her they were to seek a home in Judæa, it must be by their own choice. "Go,

* Stanley's *Sinai and Palestine*, p. 104.

return each to her mother's house," Naomi said with gentle persistency—with what result all the world now knows, for this is a story that has stirred all hearts, so that even Sterne, a modern master of sentiment, transferring to his page Ruth's expression of brave and loving piety, has at once surpassed, as Chalmers declares, all his own pathos: "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried." Uninfluenced by the older sister's natural weakness and her final return "unto her people and unto her gods," Ruth resolutely clings to her new and better faith and to the friend from whom she has learned it.

A happy history is that which follows. At the old home friends everywhere spring up in the pathway of Naomi and her daughter. For such sufferers mankind are apt to have a ready sympathy.

"I see the fields of Bethlehem,
And reapers many a one
Bending unto their sickles' stroke,
And Boaz looking on;
And Ruth, the Moabite so fair,
Among the gleaners stooping there."

Henceforth the Lord surely visits these two wanderers "in giving them bread." There is abundance for them. Boaz, the rich kinsman of her former husband, accepting the duty assigned by the Hebrew law, takes Ruth to be his wife, and this true-minded convert from idolatry is to be linked with all that is greatest in history—Boaz, Obed, Jesse, David, and, farther down this same shining line, Joseph the carpenter and Jesus the Saviour.

(1.) The story is to be prized as portraying and exalting home virtues. We see a plain man and a good woman

loving one another and striving to maintain religion in the family. We see the heroine of the book, the widow of their son, in sore affliction cherishing the memory of her husband, clinging to his friends, and furnishing what seems a perfect example of filial piety.

The importance of such lessons, the necessity of defending and honoring the family, is fully recognized by the least romantic and the most secular observers. "Let us come out of the public square and enter the domestic precinct," says Emerson. . . . "I honor that man whose ambition it is not to win laurels in the state or in the army, not to be a jurist or a naturalist, not be a poet or a commander, but to be a master of living well and to administer the offices of master and servant, of husband, father and friend." It may be added, in the very same spirit, that the world will need and will honor the sons and the daughters who have found it a delight to love and obey father and mother, who have made it a study to render home more attractive, more happy and more pure.

(2.) One easily goes on to think how this history of Ruth reveals the secret of real rank. What, after all, is greatness? Is it not goodness? This was an unlettered girl. She was a working woman. She early suffered great misfortune. She had to meet the embarrassments of living among her husband's relatives—strangers and foreigners. But she loved. She was brave and true. She was modest and unselfish and religious. It was such virtues that gave her all her opportunities. They have made her one of the great teachers of the race.

We have, too, the advantage of a striking contrast. "God also hath set the one over against the other." Orah's instincts were good enough. It grieved her to forsake Naomi. She was rather inclined to do right.

But right was not imperative in her. Conscience was not regal, conclusive. What would be easy? What was nearest? What was the fashion there? Such smaller questions ruled her mind. And who cares for Orpah now? Who thinks of her as fortunate or great?

(3.) The wide separations made by a single choice are also suggested. Orpah's advantages and Ruth's seemed even. The same call came to both. They were walking along the same road toward Canaan. Both had the same permission to return to their "gods." But Orpah alone went back to irreligion. And who can now measure the distance between these two souls? In temporal advantage, in social standing, in happiness, in influence, in spiritual attainment, in heavenly rewards, how complete is the separation of these sisters!

(4.) A little thing is found to be of infinite moment when related, however remotely, to Jesus Christ. This is the observation of Jonathan Edwards, having in mind these same incidents. The Holy Ghost thought fit to take particular notice of that marriage of Boaz with Ruth whence sprang the Saviour of the world.* We need not despise lowly tasks, the commonest duties, if only they may touch, however distantly, the kingdom of the Messiah. A woman's drudgery in the nursery, a man's training of apprentices and clerks, patience with a thankless scholar in the class, the letters we write, the journeys we take, the looks we wear, may all have a measureless significance as related to the service of Jesus Christ.

(5.) The transcendent rewards of piety are also illustrated. From Ruth's right choice happiness springs instantly. Under the necessity of obtaining food, her first day's gleanings yielded "about an ephah of barley." She at once happened into the fields of that very proprietor

* Edwards's *Works*, vol. iv., Sermon xxiv.

whom of all persons on the earth it was important that she should find and please. Every plan prospered. A happy marriage established her and Naomi in peace and in honor. And now, after this long stretch of years, the fame of this simple Moabitess fills the whole world. Every human being who loves the Saviour of our race must learn to thank the woman who, not knowing what she did, was willing resolutely to stand in purity and truth. She only was steadfast and came to Bethlehem. Her coming, though unannounced by bell or trumpet, was one of the great events of time. It made possible the train of greater events and the dawning of a mightier name. The traveler, from whatever clime, entering the gate of that mountain-village, will be sure to think of Ruth. Yet how it must please and satisfy her now to know that there another Personage is first remembered, her Son, her Redeemer! "From the first moment that those towers and hills and valleys burst upon you," observes Dean Stanley, "there enters one prevailing thought that now, at last, we are indeed in the 'Holy Land.' It pervades the whole atmosphere. Even David and Ruth wax faint in its presence." Jesus is born. It is Bethlehem.

A PRAYING MOTHER.

BY THE REV. R. R. BOOTH, D. D.

Sept. 16.—1 Sam. 1 : 21-28.

“FOR this child I prayed: and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him. Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord: as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord. And he worshiped the Lord there” (vs. 27, 28). In these words we have the outburst of a pious mother’s heart. They give us a description of her prayer, and show us how that prayer was turned into a song of joy and praise. The child who was the subject of this mother’s prayer and song was Samuel the prophet. His history is replete with interest and instruction. In whatever light we view him, whether as a young lad just entering the service of God, or as a man clothed with the highest honors of the Hebrew commonwealth and administering justice through a long and noble life, he is alike the object of our admiration and love. The circumstances which led to the utterance of his mother’s prayer and praise were so intimately connected with the character, the usefulness, the renown of Samuel that they deserve our careful notice.

The history begins with a festival occasion at Shiloh, where for many years the tabernacle had rested. Hannah, the childless wife of Elkanah, had come to the altar to pour out her sorrow before the Lord. In the bitterness

of her soul she prayed and wept sore. And she vowed a vow and said, "O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look upon the affliction of thine handmaid and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but will give unto thine handmaid a man-child, then will I give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head." The Lord answered her prayer, and when her son was born she called him "Samuel," saying, "because I have asked him of the Lord." The piety of this admirable woman, which was thus manifested by her faith in God, was equally illustrated by the faithfulness with which she fulfilled her vow. Unutterably dear as this child of prayer was to her heart, she had no hesitation in resigning him to God according to her promise. No sooner had she weaned the child than she brought him with a sacrificial offering to Eli, the aged high priest at Shiloh. Standing with the darling boy in the presence of the high priest, she said, in words which reveal the sublime devotion of her spirit and her deep sense of the costliness of her offering, "O my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord. For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him. Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; and as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord." This scene of self-devotion closes with one of those striking pictures which the pen of inspiration sometimes draws with a single stroke: "And he" (that is, the child Samuel) "worshipped the Lord there."

We can imagine the scene presented in this climax of the mother's self-denial—the curtained chamber of the tabernacle, in which the light shone dimly; the altar of the Lord; the gray old priest, clothed in his sacerdotal robes, standing beside it; the mother making this most precious offering with an expression of sweet confidence

in the protecting care of God for the beloved child; and the boy himself bowing in simple reverence before the altar of the Lord and lisping forth his little prayer.

Hannah went to her home in Ephraim singing the song of praise which blends an expression of her joy with a prophetic sense of the greatness of the anointed King of Israel, whose coming is first distinctly spoken of in the tenth verse of her exultant psalm. Only one other incident is mentioned, which indicates the constant turning of her heart toward the child of prayer whom she had consecrated. Every year she made for him a little linen coat, and brought it up to him when she came with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. This was the simple expression of a love that neither time nor distance could diminish; and who can doubt that the prayerful spirit which had sought and gained the child as a gift from God found a continual expression in his behalf as she wrought the garment which was to clothe him as he ministered before the Lord?

If we turn now from this description of a pious mother's love to trace out its results in the character and career of Samuel, we shall see the encouragement which is presented to all Christian mothers. Left thus in the tabernacle, amid all the temptations and corruptions of the family of Eli, the child grew up in innocence and purity of heart, and soon became the chosen mouthpiece of the Lord to Israel: "Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground, and all Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord." Besides attending to the spiritual interests of the commonwealth in his prophetic character, we are also told that "he judged Israel all the days of his life." As a judge his reputation for uprightness was without reproach. Few public officers could say, as did this man of God at the close of his

long career, "Behold now, I am old and gray-headed, and behold, my sons are with you, and I have walked before you from my childhood to this day. Behold, here I am, witness against me before the Lord, and before his anointed; whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? or whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it." And they said, "Thou hast not defrauded nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken aught of any man's hand." Thus in every relation of life we find the man distinguished for his eminent piety and for his unimpeachable morals, one of the most spotless of all men whose history is recorded in the annals of the Church or the world.

In considering the character of this wonderful man we are inevitably led to connect it with the facts first presented concerning his mother. Her prayerful spirit, her devotion to the glory of God, her unshrinking self-sacrifice, bore their natural fruit in that early dedication of her son to God which was the beginning of his piety, usefulness and renown. Had the mother's influence been wanting; had she received the child of prayer in selfish joy, and refrained from that consecration which she had promised; had she clung to him as her natural instincts dictated, and trained him for her own satisfaction,—the character of Samuel would have been different, and the grand place which he holds in the history of Israel would not have been filled. The influence of his mother was the foundation of Samuel's noble life. This fact is one of such practical value, and is so closely related to the duty which is a fixed element in the relation of Christian families to the Church of Christ, that the lessons which it suggests are worthy of the closest attention. The truth which is the natural inference from this history is, that results sim-

ilar to those presented in the character of Samuel may ordinarily be expected to flow from a maternal piety like that of Hannah. By the influence of her prayers, her training, her example, the Christian mother may expect to bring a blessing upon her child which shall control his life and lead to his salvation.

The proof of this is to be found in the following considerations :

FIRST. *The tie of nature makes the influence of a pious mother almost irresistible.* A mother's love is the first blessing which greets the new-born heir of immortality as he begins to live, and it is also the one earthly treasure which endures unchangeable amid the vicissitudes, the sins, the wretchedness which may becloud that life. It is mother-love which lies at the foundation of all the ties of tenderness which unite the human heart to earthly things. It makes the atmosphere of sympathy and helpfulness in which childhood nestles, by which youth is shielded from the tempter, and from which manhood draws its purest memories. Deeper and more lasting even than a father's love, the mother's yearning and compassionate affection realizes the description of the apostle, "It believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." With such a natural tie to hold her child, the pious mother wields a mighty influence. Her life, if it be well adorned with Christian graces, becomes a shining demonstration of the truth of God. In her dear form religion speaks and sings and treads the heavenly way. Christ is associated in the child's esteem with the sweet lullabies of evening and with the morning greeting. Prayer from her lips is music; the Bible is her book, as well as God's. All that is winning in the promises becomes more winning as she utters them. All that is impressive in the admonitions becomes more solemn as

she says "Take heed." This is her influence and power. Many a pious mother does not realize it. Perhaps it is impossible for a woman ever fully to understand the magic power of mother-love upon a son. It is peculiarly the trait of manhood to hold it in the inmost heart as the most blessed, sacred thing in life. The memory of a living mother's pleas or of a dead mother's prayers will do for abandoned men what the fear of death or torture cannot do. With tears of sorrow, and oftentimes with prayers of penitence, they will confess the power of that most sacred memory.

On such a basis of deep natural affection does the mother's nurture stand. The child is plastic to her touch. His heart is in her hand if she is faithful to her trust. Oh, what encouragement is this for her to train her children in the nurture of the Lord!

SECOND. *But we should further notice that the affection of a mother for her child makes her prayers in his behalf especially effectual.* What depths of meaning, what revelation of the earnestness of human intercession, lies in these words of Hannah, which might be the utterance of multitudes!—"For this child I prayed." The sense of want which leads all Christians to the throne of grace must be intense indeed in her who feels that such a burden as her child's salvation is laid upon her heart. She comes in her fear and feebleness, with a deep feeling of the dangers which will soon beset her child, to lay before a sympathizing Saviour the old petition which from the time of Abraham has been the utterance of maternal love: "Oh, that Ishmael might live before thee!" Her Christian heart has confidence in prayer, and her deep longing makes her earnest and importunate in praying. Upon all other subjects prayer may be restrained when it has been long time unanswered, but

for her children's sake she will stand and knock until the gate of hope and life is opened, or until she dies. As this is the spirit of her prayer, so is it also the condition of success. The importunate suppliant prevails with God if faith and works go hand in hand. It is not a vain thing for the pious mother thus to plead with the Hearer of prayer. He has promised, "I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee." There is a covenant promise to support her, and by her earnestness in prayer she puts it to the proof, until at last, in cases without number, she is able from her own experience to add the words of Hannah's song unto her prayer: "For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him."

THIRD. *And this leads us to the point that the evidence derived from the past experience of pious, praying mothers confirms this prospect of success as the result of faithfulness.* Any one who enters upon the investigation of this part of the subject in the light of history or biography will be surprised to find how general has been the fulfillment of the promises of God in this regard, and, moreover, in how many instances of eminent piety and usefulness the controlling influence of a mother's love is manifested. There is a common phrase in reference to the character of the sons of Christian parents which is as destitute of truth as it is of humor. The simplest refutation of it is that given by Albert Barnes in his comment on the twenty-first verse of the fifty-ninth chapter of Isaiah. He there states that having often heard the remark that the sons of ministers and deacons turn out badly, the secretary of the Massachusetts Sabbath-school Society instituted an inquiry in a district where he could ensure correct returns. It contained 268 families of the class in question, and in these were 1290 young persons over fifteen

years of age; of this number, 884 were hopefully pious, and the great majority, or 794, were united to the Church of Christ. Among these households there were 56 favored families, with an aggregate membership of 249 individuals, *all* of whom were Christians. And of the whole number in the district, 1290 persons, only 17 had become dissipated, and most of these had broken down away from home.

Take another fact. In a certain theological seminary several young men who were preparing for the Christian ministry were interested to discover what proportion of their number had praying mothers. The result of this inquiry proved that, out of one hundred and twenty present, more than one hundred had been blessed by a mother's prayers and directed by a mother's counsel to the Saviour. Such evidence might be greatly multiplied. There is no doubt whatever that the instances are few in which such a hopeful outset is followed by a hopeless end. The grace of God brings salvation as the reward of a mother's faithful labors for her children. The covenant made with Abraham has been most signally and gloriously kept in all the history of the Church of God, and it was never more fulfilled than in our day. Many illustrations might also be given of the connection between the eminent and devoted piety of mothers and the special eminence and devotion of their children. We might point to such instances as Augustine, Doddridge, Payson, Edwards, Cecil, Brainerd and Mills (the originator of the work of missions in America), who all bore the imprint of their mothers' piety and usefulness in the lineaments of their religious character, and would have never been the men of piety and power they were but for the love that led them from the cradle to the cross of Jesus. A single illustration may be cited in detail. John Randolph,

the eccentric but influential statesman of Virginia, once addressed himself to a near friend when discussing the infidel tendencies of the day in these words: "I used to be called a Frenchman, because I took the French side in politics, and, though this was unjust, yet the truth is, I should have been a French atheist if it had not been for one recollection; and that was the memory of the time when my departed mother used to take my little hands in hers and cause me on my knees to say, 'Our Father which art in heaven.'" Such, then, is the evidence which brings encouragement and hope to every Christian mother in her attempt to cast upon the Lord her burden of maternal care. She may expect that when she utters Hannah's testimony concerning one and another of her children, "For this child I prayed," divine grace will grant her also Hannah's song.

Two practical points in conclusion: I. *Of what amazing importance is it that parents and all who have to do with children should realize their trust, and fulfill it in the fear of God!* When the sculptor Bacon was erecting the monument to Lord Chatham in Westminster Abbey, an observer said to him, "Take care what you are doing, for you are working for eternity." In a far higher sense should it be said oftentimes to those who train the young—not mothers only, though their responsibility is of pre-eminent importance, but unto fathers, brothers, sisters and teachers—Take care how you act toward the children, for you work for eternity. Receive them in the name of Christ, to take them unto him in never-wearying prayer. Remember that they are the heirs of spiritual life by right of their relation to the Christian family, and seek to make that heirship real by imparting the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Believe that the children may be converted early, and that the ministers of truth who are

ordained of God to feed the lambs are those dear parents whose earthly care is both a pledge and preparation for the higher, holier ministry of grace and peace in Jesus Christ. Oh that the earnestness, the prayerfulness, the consecrative zeal of Hannah might be imparted unto all the Christian mothers of our land! Then would the Church of God be blessed with multitudes like Samuel, whose infant piety, manhood of integrity and old age of peaceful hope make him a bright example in the records of the Bible.

II. *This subject sets before us also a view of the conditions under which parents may expect the salvation of their children.* There are heads of families in the Church of God who, like the Shulamite in the Song of Solomon, have reason to exclaim, "They made me a keeper of vineyards, and mine own vineyard have I not kept." There are conditions to the promises of God concerning the oneness of the Christian family in Christ which, if neglected, will entail the forfeiture of those exceeding great and precious promises. And a regard to these conditions, on the other hand, is altogether likely to be followed by the bestowal of the grace of God on those so dear. We may not be too confident. It would be rash to say that whenever the home influence is right the children *never* can go wrong; but the promise stands, and it will be fulfilled. When? When that strong cord of natural love is strengthened by the solicitude and prayerfulness of Christian earnestness manifested in a life which is controlled by God and made happy by his favor. In the light of a consistent, radiant Christian character the mother's influence and prayers will have constraining power with God and persuasive power with those who are the objects of her fondest love.

SAMUEL; OR, GOD'S WRATH UPON HIS CHURCH.

BY THE REV. HOWARD CROSBY, D. D., LL.D.

Sept. 23.—1 Sam. 3 : 1-19.

It is generally supposed that about three hundred years had elapsed from the conquest of Canaan by Joshua until the birth of Samuel. The genealogy (in 1 Chron. 6 : 33-37) gives sixteen generations from Korah (in the wilderness-period) to Samuel, which would indicate, at thirty years for a generation, four hundred and eighty years from the period referred to. The chronology is certainly obscure in this portion of Israel's history, and we shall not attempt to throw any light upon it. It is sufficient to know that the tabernacle was still at Shiloh, and that the regular worship of Jehovah at that centre was observed by the people of Israel. The line of Eleazar had failed from the high priesthood, and the line of Ithamar was now represented in that distinguished office by the aged Eli.

Samuel was a Levite, descended from Korah, the cousin of Moses and Aaron. He was thus a Levite of the Kohathite family, to which family the high priesthood appertained in the line of Aaron, Kohath's grandson. Samuel's father dwelt at Ramah or Ramathaim-Zophim, which is with much probability identified with the remarkable conical hill five miles north-west of Jerusalem known as

Neby Samwil. The journey thence to Shiloh is one of only fifteen miles. The mother of Samuel dedicated him to God for life before he was born, and he thus became one of the three Nazarites for life of whom we have any certain knowledge. As soon as he was old enough the young Nazarite became a Levitical assistant to the old high priest, and wore a linen ephod, probably in imitation of the ephod of richer stuff worn by Eli. The linen ephod identified him as the body-attendant upon the high priest.

It was a time when God vouchsafed very few revelations to his people. The law as given by Moses was the guide of the nation, and at times, through the Urim and Thummim, the Lord made known his special will. The long series of prophets, whose peculiar duty it was to arouse the people to regard their neglected law and its Messianic tendency, had not yet begun. Indeed, Samuel himself was to be the first of that illustrious series. The beginning of God's revelations to Samuel took place on this wise: Eli and Samuel were sleeping in the quarters assigned to the high priest close to the tabernacle, when, before morning* (or, as the Scripture phrases it, "ere the lamp of God went out;" that is, while the light of the seven lamps of the golden candlestick was still shining), Samuel heard his name called, as he supposed, by Eli. On going to the high priest he found that it was not he that had called. So

* We are not to suppose that either Eli or Samuel slept in the holy place, much less in the holy of holies. The temple is styled the "temple of Jehovah where the ark of God was," from its central shrine. This word "temple" (*heikal*) includes the tabernacle with its court, in which were the lodging-places for the priests and Levites on service. The word "temple," instead of "tabernacle," is used in this narrative, probably because many substantial parts had been made for the tabernacle in its permanent position which it did not have in the desert; as, for example, doors for curtains.

he went and lay down. A second and a third time the same call came, and a second and a third time the child went to Eli for an answer. On the third occurrence the high priest perceived that this was a call from God, and meant a revelation to the child, and therefore he charged Samuel, if the voice should be heard by him again, to say, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." Samuel obeyed, and there came to the child (probably in an audible voice, as had come the call) a revelation of God's purpose toward the house of Eli.

Such a revelation had already been given to Eli through a man of God (ch. 2 : 27-36), but now it comes through the tender child Samuel, and therefore with more force on account of the almost filial relation of the boy to the aged priest.

The burden of the sad message was that Eli had permitted his sons to practice the grossest sins without rebuke, and that therefore his family should bear a perpetual disgrace. No ritual performances could place them again in the high priesthood, from which they were to be cast out. The accomplishment of this prophecy occurred with the exclusion of Abiathar from the sacred office more than a century later (1 Kings 2 : 27). It had already been revealed to Eli that he was the last of his line who should reach old age. All his posterity were to die in the prime of life. Such was the mark God saw fit to put upon this great sin of omission on the part of a parent, who was also the great example to the whole people.

Samuel, on rising in the morning, performed his usual duty of opening the doors to the court, but could not bring his mind to tell Eli of the message from God until the old priest had insisted earnestly on his doing so. He then told everything. The venerable Eli showed that, though he had been criminally remiss in not rebuking

his sons, he was ready humbly to submit himself to God's holy will, even when that will ordained his own chastisement. From that night Samuel became a prophet of Jehovah, honored and obeyed by all the people as representing the will of Jehovah.

We may look upon this divine call of Samuel as the beginning of a new order of things in Israel. The high priest had, from the occupation of Canaan, been the medium of communication from God to the people. He wore the Urim and Thummim in the breastplate, and from these was able to receive answers from God to questions concerning duty. But the degeneracy of Israel, in which the high priests seem to have participated to a degree, rendered a change necessary. The high priest is made secondary, and the prophet is raised up as the primary authority in Israel. The prophet will now be the mouth of God to the people. The Urim and Thummim have not entirely ceased their function, but their response is unfrequent, and they that carry the old oracle are not trusted and respected. For three hundred years Israel had been guided by the wearer of the ornamented ephod, and now for seven hundred years they will be guided by the plainly-clothed prophet, for the first half of that time orally declaring his message, and for the last half recording it for the benefit of the Church of all ages.

As we said before, Samuel begins this long and distinguished list. It is this peculiarity of Samuel's position, as beginning a new order of things, which accounts for the large liberty given him to sacrifice at other places than Shiloh. Shiloh, the old centre of worship, was to be broken up as a mark of God's indignation at the conduct of its priests, and Samuel, during the transition-period between the Shiloh-centre and the Jerusalem-centre, when the ark was no longer in its place, but in the Philistine

country and in Kirjath-jearim, acted by an independent authority from God, and erected altars at Bethel, Gilgal, Mizpeh and Ramah (certainly at the last two places: 1 Sam. 7:9, 17).

It is from this perfectly accountable action, wholly exceptional in its character, that the modern rationalists, in their endeavor to overthrow the credibility of the Pentateuch, have argued against any centrality of worship in Israel and any prohibition of ubiquitous sacrifice, and hence have concluded that the bulk of the Pentateuch was written long centuries after Moses. Their arguments are as weak as they are bold, but, unfortunately, it only requires a bold assertion to delude the minds of many and lead them away from the plain truths of the Scriptures.

The narrative of the call of Samuel is, in that very thing which these shallow critics hold as their strong ground—the breaking up of the regularity of the Mosaic system—a most important lesson of God's ways with his Church. If the Church makes a god of its forms, he breaks those forms to pieces. When the brazen serpent became an object of adoration instead of a memorial of God's grace and symbol of his salvation, he caused it to be destroyed. So when priest and people settled down satisfied with the ritual of the tabernacle, and were careless of their conduct, indulging in all sin, he sent the Philistines to plunder the tabernacle by capturing the ark and carrying it into a foreign country. When the ritual priesthood failed in their duty, he punished them, and set up an order of prophets above them to be the interpreters of his will. Samuel is thus a witness to God's demand for a spiritual religion in contrast to mere form.

There is no more mistaken notion than that the religion

of the Mosaic covenant was a ritualistic religion. It *had* a ritual certainly, brimful of Messianic symbol, but its whole core was spiritual. The love of God and one's neighbor was the inward principle which formed its heart. God, as a merciful Saviour providing a Substitute to bear the sins of Israel, and calling for their grateful love and service, was constantly exhibited to them in every ceremonial, and the words of exhortation from God to them in the law were most touching and tender. To compare such a religion with the mere outward rites of paganism and Romanism is to compare light with darkness. God is a holy God, and he will have his people holy; and if they substitute a ceremonial for holiness, his holy wrath will certainly fall upon them; and in this blow not only those will fall who, like Eli's sons, commit gross wrongs, but those also who, like Eli, through indulgence or apathy, fail to rebuke and resist the evil.

Let us take this lesson to ourselves to-day. The Church of God is to-day courting the world. Its members are trying to bring it down to the level of the ungodly. The ball, the theatre, nude and lewd art, social luxuries with all their loose moralities, are making inroads into the sacred enclosure of the Church, and as a satisfaction for all this worldliness Christians are making a great deal of Lent and Easter and Good Friday and church ornamentation. It is the old trick of Satan. The Jewish Church struck on that rock. The Romish Church was wrecked on the same. And the Protestant Church is fast reaching the same doom. God will not bless a Church that drags down his heavenly things into the dust—that gilds vice, calls it Christian, and then indulges in it. But his holy vengeance will assuredly come and strip such a Church of its pride and make it eat the bread of affliction.

It is not only that people who come to the Lord's table go away to gamble and cheat and lead loose lives, but the ministers of Christ, the Elis, whom God has set to be watchmen to warn the people, yield to the tide of worldliness, and, instead of urging the people to a closer walk with God and a holier heart, give pulpit lectures on philosophy or art, or make *ad-captandum* harangues on the political questions of the day, or show off smart sayings that may raise a laugh, and then servilely seek the patronage of the rich and fashionable, when they ought, even if they have to wear only a rough garment and a leathern girdle like Elijah, to be sounding into the ears of these false Christians the words of the prophet: "Ye people laden with iniquity, seed of evil-doers, children that are corrupters, ye have forsaken the Lord, ye have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, ye are gone away backward." Ezekiel saw the six men, every one with a slaughter-weapon in his hand, going through the midst of Jerusalem, slaying utterly (at God's command) the old and young, and beginning at the temple; and when the prophet exclaimed, the Lord replied, "Mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity, but I will recompense their way upon their head." In this vision God showed Ezekiel that he would bring down his fearful and unsparing wrath upon his own Church, which had gone away from him and identified itself with the world. The vision is meant equally for us. God never changes. He will treat the Christian Church as he treated the Jewish. His fierce anger will be felt both by ministers and people who turn his truth into a lie and use the Christian name as a cover for lust and greed.

I do not speak extravagantly; I have not set up a man of straw to contend against. While it is perfectly true that there are those who "fear the Lord and speak often to one

another" as they think on his name, it is also true that the great bulk of the Protestant Church is identified with the world. It has a name to live while it is dead. It has turned its doctrine into naturalism or rationalism, and its life into selfishness. The old landmarks are gone. Family prayer is given up, Sunday newspapers are read, prayer-meetings are ignored, worldly partnerships are formed, social sins are connived at, and even excused, the pulpit is made a stage on which to strut and pose before a gaping world, and religion is made one of the instruments of fashion. We may not cure this dreadful evil, but we may ourselves avoid it and its doom. We may look to ourselves and to our own families, that we go not with the multitude of Christians to do evil and to perish in the hour when Christ shall come as a thief to their dismay. We may be among the few in Sardis who have not defiled their garments, walking in white with our Lord.

But we cannot hold this exceptional position without an effort. The fast-rushing tide is all to the world. Anxiety to make money, to be fashionable, to obtain sensual indulgence amid the thousand avenues of luxury now opened by Satan, is ready to carry away our young people, to their spiritual and eternal ruin. Unless parents by example, precept and rebuke interfere to check their children, they will only prepare them for destruction. It is in the family that the religious life is nursed. It is by the family God would build up his true and spiritual Church. If religion is neglected by the guardians of the family, the stream of posterity is poisoned at the source.

Let us take the warning given us in God's word from Israel's fall and ruin; let us keep ourselves unspotted from the world; and let it never be said of us, as it was of Eli to his condemnation, "Their children made themselves vile, and they restrained them not."

FOURTH QUARTER.

THE PUNISHMENT OF PARENTAL SINS.

BY THE REV. THEO. L. CUYLER, D. D.

Oct. 7.—1 Sam. 3 : 13.

EXPERIENCE is like the stern-light of a ship; it illumines only the path that is already passed over. This familiar adage is true as to our own experience; but if we study carefully the word of God, we can follow, as it were, in the wake of many other voyagers, and get the benefit of the light they cast upon the waves. Next to its supreme value in revealing God, the Bible is valuable in its perfect revelation of human character. Human nature is presented there in its every aspect. Patriarchs, prophets, kings, warriors and apostles, lofty people and lowly, great saints and great sinners, have their inward lives as well as their outward history, unerringly photographed. Domestic life is portrayed. The virtues and the vices of the household are honestly depicted, both for guidance and for warning. Secret sins are brought to view as vividly as if they had been committed on the rooftops, and he or she must be willfully blind indeed who cannot profit from the "stern-lights" which the Scriptures pour upon the pathways to eternity.

By a striking concurrence we have two domestic his-

tories unfolded side by side. One is the story of wise parental training, as illustrated in the case of Elkanah and Hannah, the father and mother of Samuel. The other is the tragic story of Eli, the father of those two "scapegraces," Hophni and Phineas. This latter story is a beacon of warning against parental indulgence of sins committed by those who are entrusted to us as the trustees of their spiritual welfare. It depicts the errors and the doom of a father who fell a victim to the sins of his children which became really his own sins by his failure to hinder them at the right time and in the right manner. Among all the Bible narratives, none is more instructive than the short, sad biography of gray-haired Eli.

He was of the house of Ithamar, and acted as the high priest of Israel, and also its judge for forty years. We know nothing of his early life. He comes on the stage of history when he is a veteran of fourscore; at the time of his death he lacks only two years of a century! The character of Eli is singularly compounded; it is a combination of excellent traits and of most pitiable weaknesses. The iron and the clay are strongly intermingled. If we look on the best side of the man, we discover the following excellences: He loved God's service, and gave himself to the duties of the high priesthood with diligence. A rare magnanimity was shown by him in reference to the youthful Samuel; instead of being meanly jealous of him as one who was to supplant himself, he does all he can to assist Samuel in reaching the high office to which God had called him. This generosity toward a youthful rival is above all praise. Eli also had the courage to listen to truth, even the most painful truth. To the young Samuel he says, "What is the thing that the Lord hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me; God do so unto thee, and more also, if thou hide

anything from me of all the things that he said unto thee."

Would that you and I were more willing to listen to the plain truth, although it may be sharp enough to pierce us like a lancet!

Eli also exhibited a wonderfully beautiful submissiveness to the will of God under a most humiliating trial. When Samuel had told him every whit of the just judgments that were impending over him, he uttered those brave words of resignation: "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good." We do not exaggerate when we affirm that, if looked at only on the bright side of his character, Eli would be one of the most admirable men in the Old-Testament picture-gallery.

But the attractions of the bright side only deepen the darkness of the dark side. The *clay* in Eli's composition was exceedingly frail and friable. Excellent as were his convictions of duty, he seems to have been pitiably weak in working them into practice. There was a lamentable lack of will-power. When warned of his weaknesses and of the calamities that would follow them, he did not grasp hold of duty with a resolute hand and carry it through with promptness and thoroughness. This feeble irresolution and pulpiness of character brought fearful miseries upon himself and wrought fearful mischief to others.

There are too many such people now-a-days—men and women of good impulses, but of weak performance. They lack spiritual force and fibre; when the strain comes they snap. When we hear them pray so penitently over their own frailties, we do not deny their sincerity; yet as soon as they are done sorrowing they begin to sin again in the same direction. You cannot build a safe suspension-bridge from New York to Brooklyn if the cables are half iron and half twisted tow.

The one vital point in which high priest Eli broke down most disgracefully was in the management of his own household. This has given him his unhappy celebrity; his very name is proverbial for parental neglect, and for the penalty which such neglect commonly brings. Eli's closing years were made miserable by the crimes of his own sons; he gave birth to the sinners, although it would be too much to say that he gave birth to their sins. His fault and folly were that he did not give death to them with a resolute hand. By leaving the iniquities of his graceless sons to grow apace he came at last to be strangled by the serpent-monster which sprang into frightful dimensions within the bosom of his own family.

The first description we have of Hophni and Phineas has a terrible terseness: "Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial." They had a double parentage: naturally, they were the children of the high priest; morally, they were the children of iniquity. "Belial" is not the name of a heathen idol, as many suppose; it signifies *worthlessness* or *wickedness*, and in the New Testament is used as the personification of evil. Having photographed the characters of Hophni and Phineas in this one vivid line, the sacred narrative goes on to specify their peculiar transgressions. Their first sin was a lawless violation of the sanctity of the temple-services; it was a combination of stealing and of sacrilege. When the people came up to the holy place to offer their sacrifices, these two rapacious young priests seized upon a large part of the offerings which were presented—a larger part than they had any right to—and appropriated it to themselves. And, as if robbing the altar were not enough, they committed a robbery against God by destroying the devout veneration which was due to him. "Wherefore" we are

told that "the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord; for men abhorred the offering of the Lord." A solemn sacrifice was made worse than a farce; from despising the priests the people came to despise the enjoined worship of Jehovah in his tabernacle. No better description could be given of the impiety committed by these godless young priests than by applying to them the scorching words of our Saviour: "It is written, 'My house shall be called the house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves.'"

This was not their only offence. Not content with making the tabernacle of the Most High a den of thieves, they absolutely turned it into a brothel! It appears that many of the women of Israel were wont to assemble at the doors of the tabernacle for some kind of religious service—perhaps a service of prayer or perhaps the performance of certain womanly offices of work in connection with the tabernacle itself. These unsuspecting women, who came for a devout purpose, were often made the victims of priestly lust. Within the very precincts of God's house female innocence was assailed and female chastity was corrupted! Devotion was prostituted to the foulest indecencies; the road to the altar became a road to hell!

Heavily indeed must the tidings of these crimes of the sons have fallen upon the ears of their unhappy father. "Now Eli was very old when he heard all that his sons did unto all Israel." Far toward the sunset of his long life—far too late for him, and for them too—he becomes fully aware of their iniquitous practices. That they were a brace of bad fellows he knew before; this fact appears from other parts of the narrative. The extent of their villainies he had not fully known until now. With a broken heart the poor old man summons before him the

profligate sons whom he had begotten and whom he had never attempted to govern. It is a harrowing interview. We look on with a pity that almost makes us forget the wretched errors of the wretched parent when he is telling them in tremulous tones of the shocking reports which reach him. "Why do ye such things?" he exclaims in a sort of helpless amazement—"Why do ye such things? for I hear your bad report from all this people. Nay, my sons, it is no good report that I hear; ye make the Lord's people to transgress." (The Septuagint Version reads, "ye make it so that the Lord's people do not worship.") "If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?" A human fine may punish a transgression against a fellow-man, but a sin against God demands a penalty from God himself.

After listening to this solemn and pathetic rebuke from the aged high priest we are ready to wonder how such a man should have been such an unfaithful father. We wonder that one who talked so well should have acted so wrongly. It surprises us that this just abhorrence of what his sons had been doing did not make its appearance in time to restrain them from beginning their abominable practices. At the eleventh hour he rubs open his sleepy eyes to see what he ought to have seen ten hours before. No one who has ever been sorely tried by the reckless wrong-doings of his own children will fail to pity the suffering old man. We all pity him profoundly, but we cannot excuse or palliate him. God's word sweeps away every shadow of excuse. The Lord said unto Samuel, "I will judge the house of Eli for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he *restrained them not.*"

The verdict against the suffering old man was that he

did nothing effectual in the way of hindrance of his sons' iniquities; there was no wholesome and powerful restraint. It is not by main force that the wayward son is to be kept back from sin—not by hurling terrific threats in his face or by bombarding him with irritating censure and taunts. Restraint is the application of truth in love. It reasons as well as rebukes. It appeals to conscience, and sets God before the tempted youth. It employs *authority*, but authority unmixed with passion and resentment. When it says, "My son, thou shalt *not*," it means what it says; and if punishment is needful to enforce that word "*not*," then it punishes. But with its righteous displeasure it mingles its hearty and spontaneous approval of every right step a son can take. My dear fellow-parents, to "restrain" our children is not merely to pull them back from evil; it is to draw them toward the right.

Eli's misgovernment of his children had two cardinal faults. One error was that he rebuked his sons *too late*. This was the fatal blunder of the father who should begin to dissuade his son from the wine-bottle when the young man had already become an inebriate. Eli's reproofs and admonitions did not commence soon enough. He did not attempt, we may be assured, to "bend the twig;" but he laid vain hold with palsied hands of the deep-rooted and full-grown tree. It was not until God's house had been desecrated with debaucheries, and the public morals corrupted, and the name of priest had become a by-word and a stench, that he lifted up his impotent protest. "Why do ye these things?" was a question that suggested the other question, "Why didst not thou do thy duty *before*?" No attempt was made to use the reins until the furious steeds were dashing the vehicle to fragments.

The other error of the weak-backed Eli was that, hav-

ing postponed his correction of his dissolute sons until they became hardened in vice, his words of rebuke were as weak as water. As quaint old Matthew Henry remarks, "There was no edge to his reproofs." He was not only too late; he was too lenient. Instead of a righteous condemnation of their crimes, accompanied with just punishment and their removal from the office which they desecrated, the half-hearted pontiff contents himself with a tame and pitiful regret for their infamous deeds. Instead of "hearkening to the voice of their father" when he did speak at all, they seemed to have laughed in his face. His culpable indulgence had left no respect even for his gray hairs or his tears; they had come to despise the parent who had never secured their respect nor made them feel his authority.

Eli's wretched failure was the failure of millions of fathers since his day: when his children were young he would not restrain them, and when they grew older he could not. With a few timid words he vainly strove to subdue the stalwart transgressors whom he had allowed to wax strong and stubborn in their sins, which had become so rank as to "smell to heaven." It was a mournful proof of the old man's utter and pitiable loss of all power of restraint that the reckless sons would not even "hearken to the voice of their father." The all-righteous God took them into his own hands, and, foreseeing their obdurate impenitence, he was preparing for them a terrible retribution.

Before we reach the catastrophe of this most instructive story let me emphasize a few truths in regard to paternal influence. If Hannah is a model for mothers, Eli is a beacon for fathers. Many things have been spoken or written—yet not one syllable too many—about the happy and holy influence of a godly mother. But there yet re-

mains a solid philosophy in the ancient adage, "Like father, like family." Not more surely do I impress my shadow on the ground at a clear noonday than do I as a father impress my moral shadow upon my own home and household. The father is, by God's decree, the head of the house for good or for evil. He ordains the home-law; he fixes the precedents; he largely creates the moral atmosphere of the home; and the "odor of the house" remains in the habits of the children if they should migrate to the ends of the earth. "His father was a Catholic," or "His father was a Protestant," is the sufficient reason that determines the religious position of half the people on this continent. The law of heredity decides the denominational and the political status very generally. "He is a chip of the old block," said some one when he heard the younger Pitt's first speech. "Nay," replied Burke; "he is the old block himself." But if in your houses the "old block" is wormeaten, what shall become of the chips?

The grace of God is not transmitted by inheritance, yet a father's conscientious piety is often reproduced in his children. If his footprints are deeply indented toward God and heaven, he may reasonably hope that his children will tread in them. "He sought to the Lord God of his father, and walked in his commandments," is the Bible description of the good King Jehoshaphat. If there is a law of Christian nurture by which, with God's help, the godly family becomes a nursery of religion, so there is a law of unchristian nurture, and by this law bad opinions and bad habits are transmitted to the next generation. Whatever "fires the father kindles, the children gather the wood." If the father sets a decanter on his table, the boys soon practice at the glass; a large percentage of all our drunkenness is hereditary. If the father goes on a

Sabbath drive, the children must have a seat; if he says on the Sabbath, "I go a-fishing," the boys reply, "We go with thee." If he lounges away the Lord's day over his Sunday *Herald* or *Tribune*, then Harry and George are apt to study police-reports and walking-matches far more keenly than their lesson for the Sabbath-school; even if they go to Sabbath-school, the *home-school* pulls downward more strongly than the Sabbath-school pulls upward. Pulpit invitations and pulpit warnings, however faithful, are drowned out amid the din of an irregular home. Show me a father who talks nothing but money at his own table, and I will show you a crop of boys whose chief ambition is to be rich; show me one who talks horses and games, and I will promise you a fast-driving troop of young sportsmen. Show me one who fences his home around with God's commandments, and lights it up with domestic comforts and pleasures, and anchors himself to his home, and I will show you the best kind of restraint from dangerous evening resorts. A happy Christian home is the surest antidote for evil amusements. But if a father hears the clock strike eleven in the theatre or in his club-house, he need not be surprised if his sons hear it strike twelve in the drinking-saloon or the gaming-room or the haunts of the profligate. Even in spite of the strongest restraints, some sons will break through into sin; but if a parent *leads into irreligion*, what but God's omnipotent grace can keep his imitative household from following him to perdition? The history of such a family is commonly written in that frequent line found in the Old Testament: "He walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him."

But Eli, you may say, was a servant of God. So he was, in his way, but there are two very different types

of paternal religion. One parent prays at his family-altar for the conversion of his children, and then does his utmost to secure what he prays for. He surrounds his home with Bible-restraints against sinful temptations. He aims to make both his religion and his home *attractive*. The books he purchases, the journals he takes, the amusements he provides, the company he invites, the whole atmosphere of his home, are made to be a *restraint* against evil by being an attraction toward purity and true religion. The Holy Spirit is not invoked to convert his offspring to Christ while the head of the house is *perverting* them to worldliness or self-seeking or frivolity or secret contempt for all religion.

Yet I fear that certain fathers are guilty of Eli's folly and fatal blunder. They busy themselves with certain words and acts of religious observance; they try to serve God in certain directions; they even pray, formally, for their children's conversion. But their daily example, their conduct and the whole trend of their influence are not an effective restraint against sin; they do not draw their children toward Jesus Christ and his commandments as the law of life. It is a terrible truth to declare, but I honestly believe that some professed Christians are an absolute hindrance to the conversion of their children. For the warning of such the divine Spirit has spread out at full length the calamitous history of Eli's awful mistake. As on an illuminated transparency we read the fiery inscription of God's punishment of paternal neglect of duty: "The Lord said, I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house; when I begin I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not."

God's righteous threatenings are never mere "heat-lightning;" they strike! If we look on into the succeeding chapter of this inspired book, we discover where and how the thunderbolt fell. With a touching minuteness the sacred historian describes the aged Eli sitting by the wayside near the close of the day. All through that day Israel had been engaged in bloody conflict with the Philistines, and the ark of the covenant had been borne to the battlefield as a palladium of defence. The veteran high priest waits in anxious suspense for the result, "for his heart trembled for the ark of God." Presently a loud cry breaks upon his ear. It is a wail for the fall of thirty thousand warriors and the ruin of a lost cause. Aged Eli lifts up his feeble voice and asks, "What meaneth the noise of this tumult?" The messenger, with rent garments and choked utterance, reveals the awful intelligence. Israel has fled before the Philistines! Hophni and Phineas are slain! All this were enough to crush him, but the worst is to come: "*The ark of God is taken!*" When he made mention of that the old man fell backward to the ground. That word is fatal. They take him up tenderly, but he is speechless. His "neck was broken" by the fall, but, ah! good friends, his *heart* had been broken long before by the monster crimes bred from his own parental neglect.

Being dead, Eli yet speaketh. He speaks to-day, and warns us who are parents that if we commit his sin, our sin will yet find us out. Methinks that from his lips, growing pale in death, we can catch the faltering words, "A foolish son is a grief to his father and a bitterness to her that bare him. Correct thy sons, and they shall give thee rest; yea, delight unto thy soul. But a child left to himself bringeth his father and mother to shame."

SAMUEL THE JUDGE.

BY THE REV. T. D. WITHERSPOON, D. D.

Oct. 14.—1 Sam. 7 : 3-17.

FOR more than twenty years the Philistines had held undisputed sway over the greater part of the territory of Israel. Their garrisons were in every strong city; their tribute was yearly exacted of the finest of the wheat and the richest of the oil. The people of God, debased by idolatry, disheartened by defeat and enervated by subjection to a foreign power, had fallen into apathy, dead in great measure both to the claims of patriotism and piety. Shechem and Shiloh, the ancient sanctuaries of worship, were both in the possession of the Philistines. Even the sacred ark of the covenant had been surrendered ingloriously into the hands of the uncircumcised. Restored by miracle, it still remained in the Hivite town of Kirjath-jearim upon the border. Israel was without a sanctuary as well as without a ruler.

But the time had come in the sovereign mercy of God, and in fulfillment of his covenant-promises to Abraham, when the chosen people should be delivered from the galling bondage under which they had so long groaned. The power of the oppressor was to be broken. Deliverance was to come in the only way in which it could come, through the interposition of divine aid. This *help of*

God bringing deliverance is the great theme brought to our consideration to-day.

I. The help of God which brings deliverance comes *through the agency of a personal deliverer*. This is the first great historical lesson of those dark days in which the judges ruled. Ever and anon, when the people by their idolatry had sold themselves into bondage, and the yoke of their servitude had become so oppressive that they cried unto the Lord for deliverance, he raised up for them a liberator in the person of some great champion of the faith, who broke off for them the fetters and led them to victory and political disenthralment. Each of these hero-judges was officially a type of the great Deliverer. In each succeeding one the personal analogies to the great Antitype become more and more apparent, until in Samuel, the last and noblest of the line, we reach one of the most illustrious types of Christ to be found in Old-Testament history. In him the three great offices of prophet, priest and ruler are combined. The beautiful innocence of his childhood, the stainless integrity of his manhood, and the intensity of consecration to his life-work point conspicuously to Him who was "holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners," and who gave himself for the deliverance of his people.

II. The help which brings deliverance comes *only upon condition of sincere repentance for sin and whole-hearted return to the Lord*. The great characteristic of Samuel as a judge is found in the emphasis which he lays upon this work of repentance and reform. Samson, the marvelously endowed champion of the tribe of Dan, had sought to deliver his people out of the hands of this same Philistine host. There were many points of resemblance between these two great leaders. They were both sons of pious parents, to whom they had been mi-

raculously given in token of the special favor of God. They were both solemnly set apart to the Lord in their childhood and bound with the Nazarites' stringent vow. In unshorn hair, abstinence from wine and simplest habits of dress and living they were alike. In heroic faith and zeal for God, and burning desire to liberate their people, they were animated by the same spirit. But here the parallel ceases. Samson adventured all upon personal prowess. Conscious of extraordinary powers, he sought to annoy and intimidate the Philistines into submission. Wasting his strength in brilliant but vain exploits, a romantic life was crowned with a glorious death, yet he passed away, leaving the Philistines still in possession of the land.

Samuel, tracing the miseries of his people to their true source in the chastisement of God for their sins, realizing that the first step toward disenthralment must be taken in repentance and reformation, sets himself quietly but steadfastly to work to rekindle in the hearts of his countrymen the smouldering fires of religion. "If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts," said he, "then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hands of the Philistines."

As the result of his earnestness and his success the historian records in this chapter that "the children of Israel did put away Baalim [the images of Baal] and Ashtaroth [the images of Astarte, the Phœnician goddess], and served the Lord only." The renunciation of these idolatrous images, with the licentious rites with which their worship was accompanied, was the "bringing forth of fruits meet for repentance," an evidence of the genuineness of that "lamenting after the Lord" which

was to be speedily followed by the tokens of his divine presence and blessing.

At the basis of all true freedom from the Philistines that rule the heart, from the bondage of corruption, from the fetters of guilt, from the "lusts that war against the soul," is this bitter work of repentance, this putting away of the idols of the soul, this turning with the whole heart to the service of the Lord.

III. The help which brings deliverance comes *through a covenant sealed with blood*. When Samuel finds the people awakened to a sense of their sins and earnestly purposing reformation, he gives direction to "gather all Israel to Mizpeh," with the promise that he will pray for them. The object of this gathering was that they might solemnly renew their covenant-vows, as their fathers had done at Shechem in the days of Joshua, and as their descendants often did afterward in times of great religious awakening. The symbolical act of "drawing water and pouring it out before the Lord" has been variously interpreted—as expressing humiliation of spirit, "as water spilt upon the ground," etc.; as signifying confession of sin and of need of cleansing; as symbolizing the pouring out of the heart in repentance, etc. But the best explanation is that which connects this pouring out of water with a similar ceremony in many ancient forms of covenanting, of which examples are given by Dr. Kitto and others.

A solemn renewal of the covenant then takes place. Samuel affixes to it the divinely-appointed seal by taking a sucking lamb and "offering it for a burnt-offering wholly unto the Lord." This covenant, originally made with Abraham, and afterward renewed or ratified from time to time, is the one which underlay then, and still underlies, the visible Church of God. This blood of the

lamb, crimsoning the altar and sealing the covenant, was the divinely-appointed type of blood which twelve hundred years later should be shed on Calvary, the seal of "an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure." As deliverance from Philistine bondage came only through the provisions of the covenant with Abraham, as that covenant was ratified and rested in by the oppressed and suffering people, so deliverance from the bondage of Satan comes only through the provisions of the covenant of grace, as that covenant is sealed with the blood of Christ and joyfully accepted and rested in by the sin-oppressed soul.

IV. The help which brings deliverance comes *in answer to prayer*. The renewal of the covenant is accompanied by the observance of a day of public fasting and prayer. The people make humble confession of sin and call upon God for deliverance. They entreat Samuel that he will "cease not to cry unto the Lord God" for them. While he stands before the altar lifting up his cry in their behalf the divine interposition takes place and deliverance is effected. The whole record shows the efficacy of prayer. It affords an instance in a far-distant age of what has often occurred since when the people of God in times of perplexity and peril, face to face with dire calamity of war, pestilence or famine, have humbled themselves before God with solemn fasting and with public prayer—have penitently invoked his interposition and deprecated his wrath, and he has heard them and sent deliverance from their troubles.

The Church of God has never yet tested to its full extent the power of prayer. It is Samuel's memorial that he is (Ps. 99:6) "among them that call upon God's name," who "called upon the Lord, and he answered them." Luther, Knox, Whitefield, Wesley, the men who

carried forward great movements and accomplished glorious works for God, have been men pre-eminent in prayer.

V. The help which brings deliverance comes *in the use of appointed means*. Whilst the people were engaged in their devotions they saw the host of the Philistines advancing. Hastening to set the battle in array, they implore Samuel to remain at the place of prayer and to cease not to cry unto the Lord to save them. While they are using all the means in their power, the arm of the Lord interposes. Help comes to them opportunely—not a moment earlier than is needful, not a moment later than is safe. Not when the first alarm was sounded, and the people, startled by the unexpected assault, “were afraid of the Philistines,” did the Lord appear, but when Samuel, going calmly forward with the sacrifice in the face of the advancing enemy, had shown the sincerity of his trust in God—when the hosts of Israel, drawing inspiration from the faith of their dauntless leader, had set the battle in array and were making use of all available means of defence. Then it was, in the very moment of insolent assault and heroic defence, that the Lord appeared for the defence of his people and wrought with them in the strife. To the noise of their battle-shout he added the awful voice of his thunder. To the sheen of their armor he joined the terrific blaze of his lightnings, dazzling, blinding, bewildering the advancing foe, until, distracted with terror and dismayed at the thought of fighting against God, they turned to flight, and fell beneath the weapons of God’s people as the unresisting grass before the mower’s scythe. And so Israel wrought out its deliverance that day, the Lord working with his people and working in them—the victory in a subordinate sense theirs, but in the highest sense not theirs, but God’s.

Thus is it always in the deliverance which God works

for his people. In all our conflicts with Satan, the world and sin, help comes from God, but only as direct effort is put forth by us. It comes to give efficiency and success to our efforts. We may not sit idle and wait for some marvelous interposition of God's power. We may not first do our part in our own strength and then wait for God to do his. It is in and through our working that divine power is put forth and divine help given. We "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

VI. The help which brings victory in the first conflict is *the pledge, to be gratefully recognized, of complete and final deliverance*. When the battle at Mizpeh had been fought and the victory won, Samuel "took a stone and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it EBENEZER" ["the stone of help"], "saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." The object of this memorial-stone was to keep in thankful remembrance the help that had been received. It pointed gratefully to the past. Lifted up between Mizpeh and Shen, doubtless on some elevated spot near the field where the great victory had been gained, it told to the generations as they passed the story of God's goodness and power.

The Christian also has his grateful Ebenezers, the thankful memorials of help from God, without which the enemies of his soul had surely triumphed over him. There is not a day in his life but calls for some such memorial of divine help in the hour of need. And there are now and then great epochs of special and signal deliverance, when the believer should set up a more conspicuous Ebenezer to bear witness of the loving-kindness and faithfulness of the Lord.

Samuel's stone not only looked backward in gratitude,

but forward in hope. It not only said, "The Lord hath helped me," but "*Hitherto hath the Lord helped me.*" Up to this point he has not failed of assistance. Help has come when it was needed and as it was needed; and, since he changes not, faith delights to draw the inference that He who has helped me hitherto will continue to help me to the end. It is this relation of past mercies to future needs that gives them their preciousness. These "first-fruits" are the pledge of the incoming harvest. They are "the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession." They give assurance that "He which hath begun a good work in us will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

"His love in times past forbids me to think
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink;
Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review
Confirms his good pleasure to help me quite through."

Samuel's hope was not disappointed, for "the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel." Not only were "all the cities which the Philistines had taken" regained, but even "the coasts thereof did Israel deliver out of the hands of the Philistines." The deliverance was complete, as it will ever be with those who seek the help of God in the same spirit and in the use of the same means with Israel at Mizpeh.

VII. The help which brings deliverance *engages to the lifelong service of Him who so graciously interposes for our relief.* "And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life, and he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel," etc. In these concluding words of the lesson we have the record of a life sacredly and exclusively devoted to the service of God. Nor can we doubt that the help which Samuel had obtained at Mizpeh had become a great con-

straining force in his life of daily self-sacrifice and toil. He was animated by the same spirit with the apostle Paul when he said (Acts 26:22), "Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great," etc. It was the spirit which the apostle sought to awaken in the brethren at Rome when he wrote (Rom. 12:1), "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." It is the spirit which should animate every follower of Christ. Each mercy received should be a silken cord binding more closely to the service of God. Instead of presuming upon gracious interpositions in the past as occasions for indulgence or inaction in the present, we should find in these both incentive and encouragement to steady progress and patient labor in the Christian life.

So, setting up our Ebenezers along the way, and gathering from each of them fresh courage for the portion of the journey that still remains, we shall find help as help is needed until the last dread conflict is waged and the last great victory achieved. Then, gathering amid the parted waters, like Joshua of old, materials for the record of our triumph, we shall set up on the shining shore our last Ebenezer, and enter the gates of the city, singing as we go, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

ASKING FOR A KING.

BY THE REV. GEORGE C. HECKMAN, D. D.

Oct. 21.—1 Sam. 8 : 1-10.

REVOLUTIONS sometimes take place without great popular excitement or the leadership of great men. The history before us presents such a case. An immense political departure, itself fraught with greatness in men and events, is about to occur, but the popular excitement does not rise to dramatic height, and the only great man in the scenery does not owe his eminence to the occasion. The *dramatis personæ* are the elders of the tribes, the representatives of the people; Samuel the prophet, the judge and hero; and Saul, the least free agent of them all, whose exceptional size contrasts with the littleness of the figure he cuts in this first scene of a national tragedy.

The revolution, however quietly accomplished, was important and permanent. The introduction of a new instrument under the theocracy, it for ever separated the prophetic office from civil government. Henceforth the prophet and magistrate are distinct as to office and often antagonistic as to policy. Both are prominent in the development of the Messianic design.

The freedom of the individual and the equality of the citizen have never been so justly and wisely provided for as

under the Hebrew law. A freer people from the Exodus to the reign of Solomon was never known, from primitive times to the days of the American republic. The ancient and the modern republics have a common basis in theocratic morality, and stand or fall by similar moral causes. Escaping from common misapprehension, a comparison of the Hebrew state with contemporaneous nations shows, through a long stretch of ten centuries, a personal liberty, security of property, a social equality and private and public morality that are exceptional at least in coterminous history.

Under the wise and vigorous administration of Samuel the tribes had experienced deliverance from oppression, victory over aggressive neighbors, relief from internal disorder, and general prosperity. His very success increased his burdens, and he called in the aid of his sons on the exposed southern border. Even a Samuel is not infallible, and, whatever he intended by this experiment, it was a failure, very sad to himself and alarming to the nation.

The idea of royal authority was not new to the Hebrews. All around them were petty monarchies more or less absolute, and by tradition and commerce they were familiar with the greater kingdoms of the Nile and Euphrates. Among themselves, Gideon, in a true theocratic spirit, had rejected the crown. His disreputable son, Abimelech, had actually set up a small pattern of royalty at Shechem, and some of the judges had enacted the princely *rôle* with no little ostentation. The lesson from all these should have been, "We want no king but Jehovah, nor trust in princes but in God alone."

The demand for a king came from the elders of the tribes. They came fortified with Scripture, quoting Moses in Deut. 17:14-20, simply asking what the

Lord had predicted and recorded by their great legislator as a possible event in their history. They aimed at a centralization of power that would combine the tribes for defensive purposes. Thoughtful men of the times, with no necessary suspicion of pessimism, were right in judging that magisterial corruption, whether because of covetousness or partisanship, sapped the foundations of society; history portrays such magistrates as the meanest of men and the worst of tyrants. To their unbelief, which failed to look beyond man, it seemed that Samuel was to have no successor. Had they remembered by whom Samuel was raised up and in whom he ruled, they might have been spared the untimely birth of royalty in Saul, and the subsequent calamities that crimson the history of Israel under the kings.

The culpable error of the tribes was in calming their reasonable fears and reposing popular confidence in a human dynasty instead of theocratic rule. We sympathize with their aim, nor are we disposed to be severely critical as to their mistake. The history of popular revolutions shows that there was no unusual lack of political wisdom among these compatriots of Samuel. Indeed, their *mistake* has ever been the ordinary *wisdom* of the world. Grecian and Roman history shows how natural it is for nations to seek relief from popular lawlessness in tyrants, dictators and emperors. Mediæval history repeats how popular suffering, industries and property sought escape from feudal tyrannies under the sceptre of kings.

So the Hebrews falsely argued. They saw private outrages, communistic conspiracies, tribal jealousies and foreign invasions all suppressed or repelled by a powerful government. They should have reflected that the sons of a prince might be worse than the sons of a judge, and

that it was wiser to submit to divine jurisdiction than to repose their hopes on human legislation. "Better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes." All the evils from which they sought escape befell them with ten-fold force, with the special cruelties of kings, and culminated in national disruption, civil war, captivity and dispersion.

The great King, who knows the nature of man and the course of history, had anticipated this revolutionary movement. The brief but comprehensive regulation in Deut. 17 : 14-20 as to the choice of a king does not give any clue as to the divine view of such a government for his chosen people. All we can say is, that as a policy it is not sinful in itself nor necessarily in antagonism with the theocracy.

But we are not left in doubt that the call for a king at this time was unseasonable and unreasonable, and full of insult and unbelief as it lay in the heart of the people and expressed itself by the elders. To press their own reasons and wishes for a change was presumption, and proposed a revolution that was virtual rebellion. Moses had not forbidden discussions of policies and changes under the theocracy, and, so far from disrespect to Samuel, it might have been made highly complimentary to ask him to spread before God the popular desire and to conduct any changes agreeable to divine sovereignty. But instead of prayer, they present demands; instead of humbly asking counsel, they impatiently press reasons. To secure a possible constitutional concession they adopt manners and methods full of insult and ingratitude to Samuel and sacrilege and impiety toward God.

The political blunder, as well as religious crime, of the Hebrews was in charging their troubles not upon corrupt magistrates and popular lawlessness, but on their national

constitution. Now, it may be admitted that this constitution was defective in power just as soon as the people lost the sense of their theocratic obligations and of Jehovah as their present King. With the growth of national impiety comes the inevitable and just restriction of personal liberty and the social necessity for severer legislation and sterner administration; and thus the wickedness of the people becomes the excuse of tyranny. The personal liberty allowed under the Mosaic code and the American Constitution is too great for the safety of a society that is not permeated with theocratic ideas and educated and established in the principles of revealed morality. No ancient, perhaps no modern, people ever had so free, wise and comfortable a civil government as the Hebrew republic. The one bond of their policy, which made it a perennial fountain of peace, plenty and prosperity to the family and state, was piety, personal and national, toward God. Decline in theocratic belief and life was ever the one sign of weakness in the Hebrew commonwealth, and the one only dissolvent of their otherwise impregnable security. Their liberties were invincible against internal or external foes so long as they were faithful to inspired covenant morality; but apostasy ever made them vulnerable, and at last exposed their national life to a deadly wound.

There is no call in the examples of human nature, in the Bible or elsewhere, to assume for Samuel such disinterestedness that his opposition to the proposed political change had in it no element of personality. Distinguished piety is not incompatible with wounded feeling. He had a right to be pained, notwithstanding the unwholesome career of his sons. But the moral greatness of his character does require us to believe that Samuel most keenly felt, what his political sagacity perceived, the peril to the theocratic foundation of the state in the transfer of popu-

lar trust from God to man, from ethical principles to material resources. The Lord justified his fears by his answer, and Saul confirmed them by his career.

In this hour of ecclesiastical and political peril Samuel carried the matter in prayer to God. Hither the people and their political leaders should have gone, not to counsel the Lord, but to ask divine interposition in the national crisis which they thought impending. To the illustrious chief the answer of God is full of grace, sympathy and pathos: "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them."

This reply teaches—

(1.) *That this prayer for a king was essential apostasy* (Ps. 118:9). In coming down to the political policies of surrounding nations they violated their covenant relations and exposed themselves to bondage under the prince of this world. The final cause of all priestly and political absolutism is to be found in the implacable enmity of Satan to divine sovereignty and human liberty. "Conscience makes cowards of us all," and fears, the inevitable consequence of declining piety, made them distrust the protection and guidance of Jehovah. They charged as the weakness of a theocratic statesmanship and constitution what was due to untheocratic life and unbelief. This, without doubt, was national apostasy. Nor was there in their individual experience or tribal history any justification of doubt or fear. God had ever fulfilled his covenant in prompt deliverance, even though all their troubles were the direct violations of his will. But against this very agency of deliverance and protection the apostate spirit of the people recoiled, because divine protection implied theocratic obedience, and divine deliverance demanded theocratic repentance. Alas! the universal human experience! The truth was, the morality

of the people too frequently fell below that standard which was necessary to peace within and security without, to the freedom of the individual and the right of property, to the liberal government of the Son of God.

(2.) *That this prayer for a king was the outburst of an hereditary vice.* This was the rejection of the sovereignty of God. They did now just what their patriarchs did to Joseph and their fathers to Moses, the representatives of that sovereignty. It appears in their first king, in Saul's assumption of priestly as well as regal functions and neglect of theocratic commands, and in the forbidden alliances of their later kings with foreign powers, the treasonable mistrust of divine protection and fatal disobedience to God. This hereditary crime reached its culmination of guilt and punishment in the rejection of the Son of God. "We will not have this man to reign over us" is only the last, awful echo of the rebellion which demanded a king from Samuel.

(3.) *That this prayer for a king was practical idolatry* (v. 8). Thus God himself characterizes their rejecting divine and resting on human dependence, trusting in sense and sight instead of religious faith and pious obedience. To indict this political crime in a few comprehensive counts: They rejected a divine for a human government; they preferred a government of policy to one of principle; they sought relief in human counsel, instead of resort to the oracles of God; they worshiped natural agencies and material resources as the sources of social prosperity and national security, apostatizing from theocratic obedience and trust in God; the coveted regal institution was not only a base desire to imitate the political institutions of surrounding nations, but also involved the religious apostasy that speedily ensued.

(4.) *That God may grant the obstinate prayer of mistrust*

(vs. 9, 19-22). Yet there is much to awaken our reverent admiration of God in his answer to the spirit of discontent. He let them have their way in a fair popular election which no sectional jealousy could control. Nor did he overrule the lot to send them an inferior ruler. The experiment of unbelief should have every natural advantage. In physique Saul was without a competitor in Israel; in manly virtues he was worthy to be their leader in war or peace; and his early career shows the control of strong and intelligent religious convictions.

(5.) *Yet the prayer was granted under solemn protest and clear warning* (vs. 9-18). Protest and warning find speedy confirmation. Israel forfeited the peculiar privileges of the theocracy by transferring their trust from Jehovah to a prince. As national deliverance had under the republic depended on the theocratic morality of the people, they made it now dependent on the personal character of the king. And thus impiety or apostasy in a prince is possibly as fatal as that of a nation. Royalty among the Hebrews presents us an historic commentary on the "Golden Text."

The original government of the world designed by God was neither a monarchy, an aristocracy nor a republic. None of these is compatible with the individual sovereignty bestowed in the creation of man. The divine ideal, the ultimate realization for man, is a theocracy in which the will of God is the constitution, Christ the visible King, and men the equal subjects. Under such a state alone is complete personal liberty possible. The nearest approaches to this are the Hebrew and American republics. After Joshua, Israel never rose to this ideal, yet it was sufficiently in their minds to be their ultimate resort in national trials. It was ever the strongest bond of the commonwealth and the healthiest source of prosperity.

But the theocracy was above the ethical culture of the people, too sublime for the moral education of their schools. The large personal liberty conferred by the Mosaic constitution degenerated into social lawlessness and weak administration, and foreign infidelity and socialism penetrated and corrupted the religious beliefs and national manners of the people. As theocratic unity weakened, tribal jealousy and individualism strengthened, and communal lawlessness and national disintegration became the dread of thoughtful and patriotic citizens. The alarm spread through the nation that what had been gained by the statesmanship of Samuel might be lost through the corruption of his sons and the aggressive growth of the Philistine power on their frontier. That there was real peril we need not doubt, and therefore there was just ground for fear. They were not wise enough to see that the crisis was moral rather than political—that the source of danger was not in the degenerate sons of a noble magistrate, but in the national demoralization which had cast the divine will out of the civil government and of popular education. Infidelity and impiety involved all their real woes. The moral status of the people was unworthy of the free government God had given them.

Concentration under the direct sovereignty of God was more possible than under a human dynasty. This their own history demonstrates. The Mosaic constitution admitted varied provisions for the regular administration of justice, the maintenance of law and order by adequate authority, and even an elective magistracy and legislative supremacy, representing all sectional interests, without improper interference with personal liberty, tribal rights or theocratic law. But the divine gift of freedom was perverted into individual license and religious neutrality;

every species of villainy demanded impunity; life and property became insecure, and selfishness and lawlessness dominated industry and piety. "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes." Public patience was exhausted, and mob-violence rose to the dimension of armies and the massacre of cities and tribes. There was a reaction to the theocracy, whose varying potency appears, for more than three centuries to the time of Samuel, ever strong enough to defend and secure the state as far as went the godliness and faith of the people.

From nothing does it appear that the regal office in a human type was an essential part of the Messianic development, nor anywhere else does it appear save as a necessity, for the punishment and correction of human apostasy and deterioration. God alone is King. The noblest idea of government, individual or social, is a theocracy, and under it the parity of citizens. Nor need this state be utopian if the people are, as they ought to be and can be, under a Bible cultus. But it is a conception too sublime for the lower intellectual as well as ethical level of the materialistic culture of paganism and priestcraft, skepticism and unbelief. But Christ is steadily conquering the world to this ideal, and teaching the people that "it is better to trust in God than to put confidence in princes," whether of the Academy or the Senate; and those who have spiritual penetration will not doubt that we are not far from its full realization in the glorious kingdom of God.

But such theocratical institutions, such personal liberty and political equality and such national prosperity, imply a higher *moral* status of the people than, since primitive civilization, has existed among nations, excepting certain

Jewish periods and some modern Christian peoples. By apostatizing from theocratic principles and education, and falling below theocratic morality as the cultus of the family and state, the Hebrew commonwealth fell toward the level of contemporaneous nations, and lost the advantage of virtue, security and prosperity conferred by divinely-inspired institutions. Their whole history is a demonstration that personal liberty, the security of property and national existence, are questions of theocratic morality—whether we shall trust God or man, whether we should rest individual and national life purely on secular agencies and material resources, or chiefly on trust in God and godliness of life. National unity and perpetuity is a matter of ethics, and not of community of race, tradition and history, of laws and language, of literature and religion. These latter are additional bonds, but history, from the Hebrews to the Americans, shows how feeble they are to preserve national unity. The only inseparable bond of union and inexhaustible source of life is theocratic trust. We believe that the question of the day is, Can we stereotype this on American popular education and modern civilization?

Skepticism and infidelity are the sure signs of mental and moral degeneracy in civilization. With the inevitably sensual bias of unbelief the tribes turn from an enlightened and rational trust in God's government to human dependence on natural resources. Against such materialism the Bible warns society when it says, "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help." Royalty is a divine prerogative, and properly belongs to the Son of God. Hence, under the best conditions and as the wisest policy, human kingship has ever been a burden on human liberties. It can have

little defence save as a restraint, discipline or punishment on the lawlessness of society that has forsaken God.

The divine economy proposes a better state of society than has ever been attained under the best material civilizations. The capability of a theocratic government to confer the highest individual and social happiness is sufficiently illustrated in Hebrew and Christian history. Were it not for the presence of exotic apostasy and materialism in our political history, our American States would long ago have exhibited the noblest civilization and most happy society the world has ever known. From perils threatening our national honor and life no human art, science or legislation can deliver us. Our safety is trust in God by the recognition in the family, school and legislature of Jesus Christ as King, his doctrines as law and his precepts as practice.

GOD TOUCHING HUMAN HEARTS.

BY THE REV. HENRY A. NELSON, D. D.

Oct. 28.—1 Sam. 10 : 26.

TO-DAY we study the story of God's choice and call of Saul to be king, the first king, over Israel. The interesting features of this story will be brought out by diligent teachers, not merely for the entertainment of their scholars, but for profitable instruction. The tall and manly young Benjamite, commanding the admiration of the people whenever they could look upon him, the modest timidity with which he shrank away from observation as long as he could, the resolute energy with which he assumed the regal authority and took the lead of the people when his call and his duty were made unquestionable,—these are pleasant topics of remark and of thought.

More impressive is the view which this history gives us of God's hand in this movement. He did not approve of this change in their government. The people's desire for a king was a worldly, not a godly, feeling. They did not seek this change in order to serve Jehovah better, but in order to be "like all the nations." What infatuation! The people of God, the descendants of Abraham, the heirs of the promise, the people who had had the inspired Moses for their lawgiver, the pious Joshua for

their leader, and Samuel for their judge and prophet—the people who had the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant and the tables of the law—wanting to be like the idolatrous tribes of Canaan! There has often been just such folly in the hearts of those whom God has signally favored, turning away from him after earthly vanities, “forsaking the Fountain of living water, and hewing out to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.”

Although God made it plain enough that he did not approve of this change from the simple administration of the federated commonwealth to the more showy and costly methods of monarchy, he saw fit not to keep the people from it. He had them warned by his prophet of the evils which they would suffer, but bade him let them have their way. I think that a good deal of his providential discipline proceeds in that manner. Not only does he at length give over the incorrigibly impenitent to go on in their own chosen ways to utter ruin, but even those whom he means to save, whom he is saving; sometimes, when he finds them obstinately bent on having their own way in something, he just lets them have it far enough to find out their folly and penitently to come back to him.

It was so in this case. God was not about to forsake his people, but he thought it best in this matter to let them have their own way, and suffer some hardships to which it would lead.

It is interesting to observe that, although the people were so bent on having a king, they still were willing to have God decide who their king should be. They had not “waited patiently for the Lord,” content with the administration of their national affairs which he had instituted until he should see fit to order a change; yet

they did not wish to break wholly away from his control. They desired their king to be chosen by him and kept under his guidance. They did not dare take their new departure without the counsel and benediction of Samuel, "the man of God." As a people, although faulty, they were still the sincere people of God, adhering still to the purpose which an earlier generation avowed to Joshua, "We will serve Jehovah," although so far from perfection of fidelity in that service.

Now that the change is made with God's permission, and a king is anointed whom God hath chosen, that king's authority is sacred, is of God. True piety will now lead to true loyalty. Not pious Hebrews, nor true sons of Abraham nor true disciples of Samuel, will refuse allegiance to Saul. Only the "sons of Belial" will do so. There were some such, who said contemptuously, "How shall this man save us?" "And they despised him, and brought no presents," offered no token of loyalty. I should not wonder at all if those who had been the most clamorous for a king were most ready to despise the king whom God chose when they found that he did not choose one of them, putting their "ring" in control of public affairs. Saul bore their insults and "held his peace." He behaved very nobly at his inauguration. One cannot help wishing that he had retained through his forty years' reign the character which he had at first. What a reign it might have been!

From that inauguration-scene "Saul went home to Gibeah"—went, no doubt to serious and earnest thought and deliberation—and (how beautifully it is added!) "there went with him a band of men *whose hearts God had touched.*"

There is infinite poetry in that expression, in that thought—God *touching* a man, the invisible, spiritual God

touching *the hearts* of men! The *contact* of material bodies, which that word primarily signifies, is a very simple and a very familiar fact. But in *living* bodies it suggests much more than that primary fact. It is connected with vivid sensation. To touch is to feel—to be touched is to be made to feel. And then with what facility do our minds pass from feeling as bodily sensation to feeling as mental emotion! The effect of a blow upon our flesh is expressed by the same word as the effect of a sorrow or a disappointment upon our souls: we *feel* it, it *touches* us. This close affinity between the physical and the spiritual is something of which every one is so conscious that no one needs any explanation of it, while it is so mysterious that no one can give an explanation of it.

We are in no danger of misunderstanding the word *touch* when applied to God. When the afflicted patriarch of Uz exclaims, "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends, for the hand of God hath *touched* me" (Job 19 : 21), no one gets the idea of bodily form or members as belonging to God—members which could be brought into *contact* with the bodies of men. It is only a vivid mode of expressing Job's devout belief that all which he suffered was sent on him by God—the God able to crush him by an exertion of power so slight that the lightest *touch* of a human hand might most fitly represent it. "He *toucheth* the hills, and they smoke" (Ps. 104 : 32), is the Psalmist's poetic utterance of his sentiment that the sublimest volcanic phenomena are easy products of almighty divine agency. It is the parallel, in thought as in form, of the other phrase, "He *looketh* on the earth, and it trembleth."

When we read of our divine-human High Priest that he can be "*touched* with the feeling of our infirmities"

(Heb. 4: 15), we readily understand him to be capable of quick sympathy, feeling with us whatever painfully affects us. When, in our text, we read that God "had touched the hearts" of certain men, we cannot take it to mean anything else than that God exerted an immediate and decisive influence upon the minds, the souls, the spirits of those men. It is the distinct recognition in an historic instance of a divine spiritual agency operating influentially upon human minds, securing a different condition and different action of those minds from what otherwise would have been.

Let us examine this instance somewhat more particularly. The people of Israel, as a body, had desired a king—had probably accepted the one whom God had directed Samuel to anoint. The greater part of them, I presume, had no great zeal—had rather a passively acquiescent than a positively zealous loyalty. There were some disloyal, some "sons of Belial"—wild, reckless, unprincipled men—who did not hesitate to manifest their contempt for the new monarch. Over against these in the Scripture picture we see "a band of men whose hearts God had touched," whose behavior showed that they were acting under a divine influence—that their minds were decisively affected by divine power.

What was the behavior which showed this? It is very simply related in the context. It is only that they "went with" Saul going "home to Gibeah" after his inauguration. But how much was implied by that simple action in those circumstances! They "*went with him.*"

Were you ever in circumstances in which simply to *go with* you was the kindest and the bravest thing that any friend could do for you, including and pledging every other kind and generous and courageous thing which

there might yet be occasion to do? Did you ever stand among an angry crowd tossing your name about with ribald scoffs and glaring on you with ferocious faces? Have you known the comfort in such a situation of having honorable citizens and reputable ladies come quietly to your side and show themselves determined to stand with you, and to take with you whatever insults or whatever injuries might come? Were you ever called, in some great emergency in which dear and sacred interests were at stake, to go forward on some line of action, in some path of duty made evident as such to your conscience, but left rough and steep to your natural fears, and when your heart shrank timidly from the peril, and more timidly from the conspicuousness, have you been reassured by generous men rallying to your support and saying or showing that along that path, unto that work or trial, they were ready to *go with* you? Then you can understand what it was to Saul on that memorable day to see that "band of men," "whose hearts God had touched," *going with him* "home to Gibeah."

Clearly and evidently called to be king by Jehovah, anointed thereto by his prophet, obliged in conscience now to exercise kingly authority in spite of all his natural bashfulness, Saul is in the very situation in which to appreciate such moral support and encouragement. It is right that he should have it. It is no more his duty to proceed in the course which God has marked out for him than it is their duty to go with him and to support him, whatever may befall. Happily, they are disposed to go with him, are ready for any service in which he may need them. They are going to stand by him, and they let him see that this is their purpose.

How came they to have this generous disposition and this loyal spirit? The text ascribes all this to a divine

influence. They were "a band of men whose hearts *God had touched.*" They differed from those sons of Belial who despised the new king and turned away from him, because God made them to differ. They had good reason to thank God for this, and surely Saul had quite as good reason. It was a great favor to him, and it was a great mercy to them. To have such helpers and supporters is a great happiness to one in a responsible and difficult position; to be such helpers is not less a happiness.

Does this dependence on God for such good influence remove from men all responsibility for the state of their minds? Did Saul's loyal band of men deserve no commendation? Did the rude and disloyal "sons of Belial" deserve no blame because the former were made loyal and faithful by a divine influence which to the others was not given?

To affirm this or to think this would imply an utter misapprehension of the character of that divine influence and its relations to human activity, human responsibility and human character.

Every man in all the land of Israel ought to be loyal to his king, "the Lord's anointed." Not to be so was wrong, was blameworthy, was impious. God was displeased with it, and would punish it. To be generously and bravely loyal, as that "band of men" were who escorted the new king to Gibeah, was right, was commendable. God doubtless approved it, and would reward it. The influence which he exerted in touching their hearts to make them feel and act rightly cannot have been inconsistent with such righteous exercise of his judgment upon their conduct, and upon the state of mind which their conduct made manifest.

The relation of divine influence upon men to men's

voluntary action, and to their character, and to God's just judgment of them, is one of the most difficult problems of theology. The different attempted solutions of it have had much to do with the classification of theologians under the names of great theological leaders, as of Calvin and Arminius, or into parties, as Old School and New School, for example. Such classifications may have been unavoidable, but I cannot help thinking them for the most part unhappy. I cannot help hoping that the living Church of God will by and by outgrow them. In the mean time I think that thoughtful and conscientious and prayerful minds need not be enslaved by them.

It is becoming more and more evident that no human mind has furnished a complete solution of the difficult problem in theology to which I have adverted. How human character can be determined by divine influence, and still be *character*, retaining all the elements of responsibility, no one has yet so explained as to satisfy all other equally candid and clear-minded persons. There now seems to be little probability that any such complete and satisfactory explanation ever can be furnished to us in this life, with its low standpoint and narrow range of view into the vast sphere of divine operation and divine purpose. For myself, I propose to be content without such explanation until, by God's mercy, I may stand on a higher point of view, and may look with a more clarified vision than I expect to have in this world.

Shall I therefore let go my hold on the one or the other of the great facts the mutual relations of which so baffle me? By no means. I assuredly know that whatever I am in disposition and character is a reality, and is inevitably the subject of moral judgment, of praise or of blame, in the mind of any being who is capable and has opportunity of knowing me as I am—especially of God, who

must know me altogether and cannot err in his judgment. Not less certain is it that for anything in my character which he can approve I am indebted to gracious influence from him. It is not therefore less true that he *does* approve it; nor is it less *blessed*.

“By the grace of God I am what I am,” said Paul eighteen hundred years ago; and can it be doubted that with unspeakably intensified fervor of gratitude he says the same thing now?

On the other hand, we can never justify or excuse our wrong conduct or our disobedient or unlovely or unholy dispositions by ascribing them to God’s withholding from us the influence which would have begotten right dispositions. The “sons of Belial” who scoffed at Saul and turned away contemptuously from him were wicked men in so doing. Saul could not help blaming them; you cannot; God cannot.

“And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?” Nay, let us bow to that judgment, and accept in all humility its condemnation of us for whatever in our conduct or character God must censure.

And must our dependence on God for the influence which should cure our perverseness and transform us into a holy character make us despair of that influence? Have we not, on the contrary, the most abundant evidence that it is the very influence which he loves to exert? Is it not exactly this which the Lord Jesus illustrated—the Father’s readiness to bestow—by the readiness of a human father to give bread to a hungry child—bread, not a stone—an egg, not a scorpion?

Are any of you painfully or uncomfortably sensible of failure to be and to do what God reasonably demands

of you—that you are not worthily fulfilling the opportunity of your life, not going with alacrity along the path of duty or of usefulness which God has opened before you? It certainly is not best for you simply to lash yourselves up to frantic endeavor or hasty resolution to *do better*. You will not *do better* without an influence from God moving and helping you thereto. Seek that influence in simple, frequent, persistent prayer.

But are you sure that that influence is not already upon you? Is it not God who is already touching your heart? That very disquiet which you feel, that dissatisfaction with your present state, that desire for something better and higher,—whence is it but from him? Recognize it, accept it, yield yourself up to it. Enter at once into the obedient activity to which it impels, along whatever line is made plain to your own mind as your line of service in the cause of God.

Every influence of which any of you are conscious, impelling you in any direction which you know to be right, to any service of usefulness which you honestly regard as work for God,—be assured that that influence is divine. That is God touching your heart. Turn not away. Yield to him at once; yield to him fully. So shall you be surely right, so shall you be infinitely blessed.

THE FAREWELL OF SAMUEL,

WITH INCIDENTS IN HIS PUBLIC LIFE.

BY THE REV. CHARLES H. READ, D. D.

Nov. 4.—1 Sam. 12: 13-23.

To Samuel—by reason of the peculiar circumstances connected with his birth, the incidents of his early life, the high office he was called to sustain, the important duties he discharged, his unblemished integrity, his unwavering courage, his irreproachable piety, his purity as a judge, his gentleness and firmness as a man and a friend, and his holy eminence as a prophet of the Lord—a high place must be accorded among the instruments of God's will in the history of the people of Israel. He was indeed great as a judge, the last of the line of the judges of Israel before the establishment of the monarchy, which he, by divine appointment, inaugurated; and also great as a prophet, from whom the succession of prophets downward continued, without interruption, till after the Captivity.

The farewell utterances of such a man cannot be logically or fairly considered without some notice of his life and services.

The name, *Samuel*, is significant—"heard of God" or "asked of God." He was the son of Elkanah and

Hannah of the tribe of Levi. Hannah, being childless, having gone to Shiloh, where Eli presided as high priest, to attend the customary sacrificial feast, there "poured out her soul" before God that her reproach might be removed by the gift of a son. Eli, observing her intense fervency, mistook her emotions, suspecting her and charging her with intoxication; which charge he withdrew upon her explanation, and gave to her a benediction.

Her prayer was answered by the birth of a son, whom, as she had vowed, she carried to Shiloh and presented to Eli for the service of the tabernacle.

Thus was Samuel, the son "asked of God" and bestowed in answer to prayer, presented to Eli while in his infancy, and by him invested with the distinguishing ephod.

The child had been brought up as a Nazarite from his birth, and being installed in the service of the tabernacle, he proved to be a child of gracious temper, for in 1 Sam. 2:26 we read that "the child Samuel grew on, and was in favor both with the Lord and also with men."

While yet a child a very remarkable revelation was made to him by God at night, of a sore punishment impending over the house of Eli for the profligacy of his sons Hophni and Phinehas, whom Eli, in his weakness and irresolution, had failed to restrain as was due to them and to the honor of religion.

The calamity which had before been predicted, and which was renewed and certified by the revelation made through Samuel, soon occurred in a battle with the Philistines, which resulted in the defeat of the Israelites, the capture of the sacred ark, which had been taken into the field, and the death of the two sons of Eli; the report of which catastrophe overwhelmed Eli with grief and shame and led to his sudden death; and thus was

Samuel's public character as a prophet, and subsequently as a judge, established.

With Samuel a new era of prophecy began, which may be traced with but little, if any, interruption to the times of Malachi. Thus in Acts 3, 24: "All the prophets from Samuel, and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days." The maintenance of this line of prophets, of which Samuel is spoken of as the first, may be largely accredited to the establishment of schools of prophets by him.

The "books of Samuel," the principal subject of which is the institution of the monarchy, first in the person of Saul, and then in the family of David, extend, according to Hales, over a period of one hundred and thirty-two years, and according to Ussher over one hundred and fifty-four years.

So important was this change in the government that the circumstances attending it are set forth with remarkable minuteness of detail; and Samuel was raised up by God to act a very prominent part at this juncture in public affairs.

In the first book of Samuel (the first sixteen chapters of which may be attributed to him, his name being given, according to Hebrew custom, to the whole, and the remaining parts of which may be attributed to Nathan and Gad) we find a particular account of the birth and early ministry of Samuel, a description of the low and unsettled condition of the people at that period, and a history of his distinguished services as a ruler.

The administration of Samuel continued for a considerable number of years, or, as in 1 Sam. 7: 15, "all the days of his life;" his circuit (see 1 Sam. 7: 16) embracing Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpeh.

The Israelites, apprehending an invasion from the Am-

monites, and wickedly surrendering their trust in God to defend and deliver them, proposed the establishment of a monarchy, with the special desire to have a king to lead forth their hosts in war, or to be like other nations. This proposition reflected first upon the power and grace of God; and second, upon the wisdom and fidelity of the prophet and judge whom God had placed among them.

Distasteful and repugnant as was the proposal to Samuel, he nevertheless laid the whole matter before the Lord, by whom he was directed to anoint and inaugurate a king over the people. (See 1 Sam. 8:4-22.) The part assigned to Samuel in the anointing of the first king is very remarkable. There was no hereditary line or election by the people. The Lord had said privately to Samuel, before his thoughts seem to have been turned at all to Saul, "To-morrow, about this time, I will bring thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be captain over my people Israel."

Saul, the subject of this determinate and particular purpose of God, goes forth from the house of his father, Kish, with a servant to seek for the strayed asses of his father—seeking lost asses and not a crown. Weary and disappointed in his fruitless search, Saul proposed to his servant to return to his father to relieve his anxiety on their account; to which the servant replied with the suggestion that they should consult for guidance the prophet in the city near at hand, whose fame had reached the servant's ears. The natural delicacy and hesitation on the part of Saul in asking such a favor of one in official dignity, without any suitable gift to present to him, was relieved by the servant; and so they moved forward, inquiring of those whom they met after the prophet. Following the directions thus sought, and in the prosecution of their single purpose to find the lost asses, they met

Samuel going up to the place of sacrifice. "And when Samuel saw Saul, the Lord said unto him, Behold the man whom I spake to thee of. This same shall rule over my people Israel." Samuel at once relieved the mind of Saul in respect to the strayed asses, which he assured him had been found; entertained him that day, ordering the portion of meat which he had directed to be set aside in expectation of Saul's coming; and on the morrow privately poured upon his head anointing and ordaining oil, kissing him and saying, "Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance?"

The prophetic spirit was strong in many particulars in Samuel that day. After the anointing of Saul he gave to him prophetically *three signs* in confirmation of what had been done; thus: (1.) "When thou art departed from me to-day, then thou shalt find two men by Rachel's sepulchre, in the border of Benjamin, at Zelzah; and they will say unto thee, The asses which thou wentest to seek are found, and lo, thy father hath left the care of the asses, and sorroweth for you, saying, What shall I do for my son?" (2.) "Then shalt thou go on forward from thence, and thou shalt come to the plain of Tabor, and there shall meet thee three men going up to God to Bethel, one carrying three kids, and another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle of wine; and they will salute thee and give thee two loaves of bread, which thou shalt receive of their hands." (3.) "After that thou shalt come to the hill of God, where is the garrison of the Philistines; and it shall come to pass, when thou art come thither to the city, that thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high-place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp, before them; and they shall prophesy: and the Spirit of the

Lord will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man. And let it be, when these signs are come unto thee, that thou do as occasion serve thee; for God is with thee."

Thus, first privately, and afterward more publicly, did Samuel, under God's direction, set up a throne and king in Israel.

Of Saul's sad failure and ignominious downfall after such a bright beginning this is not the place to speak.

Another signal service was devolved upon Samuel. After the failure and rejection of Saul the Lord sent Samuel to Bethlehem with directions to fill his horn with oil, so that he might be prepared to anoint David, the youngest son of Jesse, to be king instead of Saul; upon which anointing "the Spirit of the Lord," which had departed from Saul, "came upon David from that day forward."

Thus we see Samuel identified, in the sovereign and far-reaching plans of God, with the most critical times and the most important events in the history of the people of Israel. The merging of the office of the judges in Israel in the office of a king, and the establishment of the royal line in David, opens the pathway in which, "step after step, we are led on to *Him* in whom the successions of prophets, rulers, priests and kings finally meet."

Samuel was a pivotal person and character, and an eminent instrument of God in the political and spiritual history of the most remarkable people of the world.

Many other peculiar and interesting incidents in his life which invite attention must be passed by as we now come more especially to meditate upon his FAREWELL.

Beautifully and thoroughly well had Samuel sustained every important responsibility and discharged every public trust. His life had been an eventful one, filled up and

rounded out with work for God and for men as few lives have ever been; and that work had been faithfully and steadfastly prosecuted from early youth to hoary age. Now we behold him retiring, with parting words temperate, tender, solemn, true and discreet.

His expressions remind us of the striking language of Solomon when he says, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures" (or frames) "of silver." In serious rehearsal he had said (see 1 Sam. 12, first verse and onward) unto all Israel, "Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you. And now, behold, the king walketh before you; and I am old and gray-headed; and behold, my sons are with you: and I have walked before you from my childhood to this day. Behold, here I am: witness against me before the Lord, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hands have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you." "And they said, Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken aught of any man's hand."

With a priceless consciousness of integrity not always possessed by public men Samuel could venture the solemn appeal, "The Lord is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that ye have not found aught in my hand." And they answered, "He is witness."

This was an honest and a noble testimony to the integrity and virtue of a public man, and that, too, in respect of one grown old in public service in places of trust and power.

After reminding them of important events in their previous history, and of God's dealings with them in mercy and in discipline, Samuel proceeds to set before them

their duties and their perils (1 Sam. 12 : 13-25). He gave the people to understand that albeit they had a king, given to them by God in compliance with their desire, they would be held strictly and primarily responsible to God, and that their prosperity and safety, as also that of the king himself, depended upon their faithful following of the Lord. Mercy and wrath were set over and against them as they should prove themselves obedient or disobedient to God, their Supreme Sovereign. In attestation of the truthfulness and solemnity of this warning, Samuel bade them to *stand* and see a miraculous manifestation of the power of God as a witness and an avenger of any infraction of his authority. It was the time of the wheat-harvest, when thunder and rain in that region were unknown occurrences; and Samuel, in perfect composure and certainty, said to them, "I will call unto the Lord, and he shall send thunder and rain, that ye may perceive that your wickedness is great which ye have done, in the sight of the Lord, in asking you a king;" "and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel."

The people were, for the time, deeply impressed with God's power, with Samuel's fidelity and with their own folly; they begged Samuel to intercede with God in their behalf, that they should not die under his hand, confessing that they had added to all their other iniquities this evil, in that they had dishonored God by asking for a human king.

The fidelity of Samuel, in which gentleness and firmness were so beautifully blended and balanced, is admirable. Holding them unwaveringly to a sense of their great sin, and yet hoping in the sincerity of their repentance, he exhorts them to put away enervating fear and to adhere to a true following of God with all their heart,

assuring them that God would be found true to his covenant—that for his name's sake he would not forsake them, inasmuch as it had pleased him to make them his people. Warning and encouragement were employed to work in them a good conscience and a reverently hopeful spirit and purpose. A beautiful model and exemplar, indeed, have we here for all persons in delegated authority under God, whether in the *family*, the *State* or the *Church*.

The closing words of this farewell address of Samuel are full of tenderness and solemnity: "Moreover, as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way: only fear the Lord and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king."

These notices of the character and life of Samuel, and of his farewell address to the people of Israel, present many important lessons:

1. The dignity and beauty of strict integrity in a person occupying a position of trust, whether in the family, the State or the Church. Samuel may well be chosen as a model by all public men.

2. The true fear of God lifts him who cherishes it above the fear of man, above selfishness, above the sinister arts of flattery and cunning diplomacy, into a plane of truth, calmness and amiable godly firmness. A person animated by this spirit and governed by this principle, and especially a person in public office, will ever be a blessing to society—will have the approbation of a good conscience, of all truly good people and of God.

SAUL'S DISOBEDIENCE AND REJECTION.

BY THE REV. WILLIS G. CRAIG, D. D.

Nov. 11.—1 Sam. 15 : 12-26.

THE somewhat confused history of the fierce reign of the ancient judges of Israel has about reached its end. The people wish a human king. Turned back from their high position as the chosen of God to the beggarly elements of the world, and willing to be imitators in this of the surrounding nations, they were ready to risk the burdens and possible bondage of tyrannic earthly sovereigns in order to the gain of visible splendors and outward unity. They would be in the fashion. They were simply in the flesh. It was an inaptitude for the spiritual.

At this juncture in their history of which we treat, God yields to their desires, but not without emphatic warnings. He allows them to have a king. From the midst of the people a commanding figure arises. He is not from the highest ranks, nor yet from the lowest. He has not distinguished himself by any deeds of valor or words of wise counsel. His life has been passed amid the quiet of his ancestral fields. He is more accustomed to the lowing of the herds than to the clangor of the trumpet—to the converse of rustics than the high debate of senates. Samuel,

the prophet-judge, is used by God in his choice, for God deigns to none in the matter of selection, even though his claims to sole sovereignty over his people have been rejected. The young man is found by the prophet while in quest of his father's strayed asses. He meets the announcement of the high destiny awaiting him with modesty, and receives the anointing oil on his head. In due time a great assembly of the people is called at Mizpeh to choose a king. The lot is resorted to in order to selection. Of the tribes, Benjamin is taken; of Benjamin, the family of Matri is taken; and from that family the lot points out Saul, the son of Kish.

He is there, but not in the forefront of the assembled host. Search must be made for him. He is found hidden among the accumulated baggage. And as he is led to the front to show himself as the first in the long line of Israel's kings, the towering figure, a full shoulder higher than ordinary men, the goodly shape, the commanding features, extort the admiration of the people, and they break out in the enthusiastic cry, "Long live the king!"

Saul has passed from the undistinguished position of a landed proprietor's son, and from the uneventful occupations of rural life, to the lofty station of an acknowledged sovereign and to the trying duties of kingly rule.

He is no ordinary person. As we look back through the long reaches of the past his kingly figure stands out boldly from even the crowd of sovereigns. "There was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he." From his shoulders and upward he towered above all the people. Well might Samuel say, "See ye him, look at him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people." "Swifter than an eagle and stronger than a lion," "the wild roe, the gazelle," "the pride and glory of Israel."

In that wild time, when manly strength and beauty and unequalled capacity for mighty deeds of personal prowess counted for so much, when the fierce warriors must be led, not simply commanded, and that by a leader stronger and fiercer than they, Saul in his gigantic armor, with his daring courage, seems the very ideal of a king.

But his matchless physical life was not all. We find him a man of strong will and rugged understanding, having also the secret of the great soldier, a sort of magnetic control over masses of men—the power to fill them with his own great enthusiasms, and thus reduplicate himself many-fold. See him at the first great call upon his powers in his new position. Ere yet he had assumed in form the royal station, while still abiding at his father's house, the news came that Ammon (an old foe of Israel) had attacked one of the tribes on the east of Jordan. The men of Jabesh-Gilead are beleaguered, and the people about Saul's native place are wailing out their terror and grief as he returns from the fields at the close of day. Now the elements of the warrior-king, hitherto lying dormant, spring into action; the train which reaches to the depths of his nature has been fired; the quiet herder disappears: we see the military leader quivering with the ardor of battle.

It is a tremendous transformation, you say. No, only occasion bringing a mighty man into his true sphere. Leaning upon none for advice, self-contained and self-moved, he sends his swift runners, bearing the bones of his slain oxen as the rallying-signal, through the surrounding region, and soon from hill and valley they come pouring to his standard. With the instinct of a hero and the promptness of a veteran he leads the host to the war, and soon Ammon is routed and Jabesh-Gilead delivered. No ordinary man could have done this. His selection is

vindicated; his kingly position is assured; he assumes the royal state, and begins to gather the materials and shape the forms of a monarchy which is to endure for many centuries and to fill large space in the history of following generations.

And yet more: he was vouchsafed a special preparation for his new position. Some time elapsed between his first notification by Samuel and his actual assumption of the regal position. It is evident from the history that God had him in hand during the interval. Samuel carefully instructed him. He sent him to dwell temporarily among the prophets. He passed through a change under this influence. He came under the power of prophetic illumination; he prophesied among the prophets. The Spirit of God came upon him for moulding, for instruction, for guidance. He was carefully taught the true principles of his relation to the Jehovah-King. He could not be in doubt here. He was forbidden to usurp Jehovah's royal prerogatives. He must rule Israel as the vicegerent of God only. He must not take the polity of Israel into his own hands as an originator. Israel has a divine constitution. He is king, but he is not priest; he may walk in royal ways, but not through priestly services. If he would have Israel obey him, he must strictly obey his Overlord. Above all, he must not detach Israel from its obedience to its only supreme Head. With these careful instructions come abundant promises of divine help, dependent only upon obedience.

Whatever may have been Israel's sin in desiring a human king, Saul was God's choice when once he had determined to indulge them; and this he was made to understand by varied forms of instruction and warning. So on many sides Saul was a prepared man for the first experiment of royalty in the chosen nation.

In the first of the three periods into which his life has generally been divided Saul had large success from a military point of view. He chastised Ammon and delivered Jabesh-Gilead. He drove back the Philistines from the territory of the tribes. He cast the monarchy into definite forms and established its insignia. He gained a large control over the people, so that they rallied promptly to his call. His personal prowess was acknowledged, his authority unquestioned.

But in the midst of these successes his individual temperament is disclosed, and rocks dangerous to his career begin to appear. He is self-willed and impatient, rash and vindictive, superstitious at times in his religious manifestations, yet secular in his principles and disobedient to divine laws in his actions. When he confronted the Philistines at Michmash with a trembling array of followers, he gave way to his impatience, and profanely offered the sacrifice which his hands should not have touched. He *forced* himself to do it, he declares when Samuel administered rebuke, because of the danger surrounding him! Rather his audacious temperament led him to do a foolish thing in the very face of the commandment of God which had been laid upon him.

When Jonathan and his sword-bearer, by an unparalleled deed of valor, had thrown the vaunting host of the Philistines into confusion, and the pursuit along the whole line had been ordered, he rashly commanded that whosoever should taste a morsel of food during the pursuit should be put to death; and when the sequel discovered that Jonathan, bravest of the brave, had unwittingly tasted a little honey, his imperious temper and slavish attachment to a hasty vow determined the death of his gallant and really unoffending son, who must needs be delivered from his father's decision by an uprising of

the army. The intoxication of power is upon him, impelling him directly in the teeth of the divine warning. He is occupying dangerous ground.

Our passage shows the turning-point in Saul's history.

I. Let us observe the occasion which brought about the crisis. God had given him a commission to ban the Amalekites, the ancient enemies of Israel. The orders were explicit. The offending race should be exterminated, with all their belongings. God demanded them as his own for the display of his justice. When this claim was made, Saul understood that to claim for himself anything connected with the devoted tribe would insult the majesty of God, as much as to take the consecrated victim from the altar. He went forth to execute the commission. God gave him victory. He overwhelmed the banned people with a great slaughter. He destroyed the weakest and least valuable of the flocks and herds; he retained the strong and desirable, and he kept the king of the Amalekites to grace his triumph.

The crisis in Saul's life has come. He fails to meet it in the spirit of a true man of God. His soul finds temptation in a moment when power and success and human adulation have intoxicated him; he yields to the snare, and falls to rise no more. At the turning-point of his life he is weighed in the balances and found wanting.

The whole sad transaction and all its terrible consequences are summed up in one word—*disobedience* to positive divine command. It breaks upon us at once. It is complete and fully manifested in a single transaction. But definite steps led up to it. It can be accounted for. It should have been avoided.

II. As the disobedience was complete and inexcusable, so the punishment was prompt, definite and final. "God hath rejected thee from being king over Israel." Suc-

cessive steps led to its accomplishment. God caused Samuel to withdraw from him. He took his good Spirit away, and allowed an evil spirit to come upon him. He was left to his own rash, self-willed and self-pleasing nature. He was allowed to work out his own destruction and the ruin of his dynasty, while God quietly but diligently prepared a better man to take his place on the throne of Israel.

A great and solemn principle emerges here—the basis-principle upon which all right and enduring relations to God must rest—to wit, *obedience*. There can be no happy relations between a sovereign Creator and dependent creatures upon any other scheme, even though that sovereign Creator be properly viewed as a tender Father. The fatherhood of God in all the wealth of its love should not obscure his sovereignty, and the man who banks upon his fatherhood at the expense of his sovereignty has reached the crisis of his life. If his thought is not soon adjusted, he will commit Saul's sin and receive Saul's punishment. The very moment that man or angel seizes upon any other idea to express his relations to God than that of prompt, simple, complete obedience, he has set up an independency in the sovereign domain of God and brought himself into direct conflict with Jehovah.

The salvation brought in by our blessed Saviour for penitent believing sinners has not changed this principle even by the faintest shade. When he took our place under the law he must needs be obedient even unto death. He gave the highest possible illustration of this eternal principle; and when we are justified through faith in him, it is on the basis of his perfect obedience for us, even unto the death of the cross. All his life on the earth is but one steady call to us for the spirit of childlike obedience. The faith that really unites a man to the living Saviour is

the fountain-head, the generative cause, of the spirit of loving obedience to our God, which is shocked and grieved beyond expression, except by groans and tears, whenever the true Christian, in a moment of inadvertence or temptation, turns aside from its promptings.

This whole question needs to be restated with firmness. The sentimentality of a spurious faith, which claims heaven and yet the right to please self, is a travesty upon the word of God and upon every serious utterance of human consciousness. And yet this sentimentality is seeking to interpret the preaching of salvation by the cross in the interest of selfish indulgence, and is going far to justify the sneer of the enemy, "that morals are divorced from religion;" for what are any Christian morals worth that do not mean obedience to the living God? Let Saul's sad fall by reason of disobedience warn us at this point.

In conclusion we may draw out a few brief lessons.

1. The danger of a half-way surrender to God, a consecration which has its reservations. Such a course is an insult to God. It is the very worst spirit of bargain-making. It marks off a section of our individuality, into which God has no right to come with his demands. It rests upon the bold assertion that there are some pleasures, some practices, some possessions and some opinions which we have the right to keep for ourselves, and which we intend to enjoy at every hazard. Saul was willing to serve God in being a king if he could have his way when the spoil was at hand. He was quite willing to fellowship Samuel and have his endorsement if he could sacrifice when he pleased. But this spirit brought him to a bad end. Nay, there is one great sentence which stands like a beacon-light shining above all others to guide our life: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind."

There is only one expression proper to a sinner kneeling at the foot of the cross: "Here, Lord, I give myself away." Let us learn from Saul's sad fate this lesson at least: "We cannot please God, and yet retain our sins and have our own way."

2. See how disobedience demoralizes the spirit and sets it upon unworthy shifts. Meeting Samuel on his return from the campaign, and anticipating rebuke, Saul claims—*(a)* That he has discharged his commission. *(b)* Faced by Samuel with the clear proofs of his failure to obey God, he prevaricates by saying that he had saved the choice of the booty for a pious purpose—*i. e.* for sacrifice, though he knew that he had no right to save for any purpose a thing banned by God. *(c)* Driven from this, he seeks to cast the responsibility of the breach of the divine command over on the people.

His character drooped lower and lower as he sought his way out from the consequences of disobedience by these unworthy shifts. Let us beware of such a course. When we have sinned, it is better to be open and ingenuous with God and man, and, while sorrowing for the sin, meekly receive the consequences in the full purpose of immediate amendment.

3. The folly of those in authority, as parents, pastors or teachers, yielding to the tastes and entreaties of the young, the wayward or the undisciplined for the privilege of doing that which is wrong either in itself or in its tendency. Saul plead that he yielded to the wishes of the people when he saved the best of the spoil. So with many now in the place of solemn and responsible authority. But this is simple weakness where we have the right to expect strength. This weakness does not lessen the guilt before God. And such a course involves advisers and advised in a common loss.

THE ANOINTING OF DAVID.

BY THE REV. JOHN HALL, D. D.

Nov. 18.—1 Sam. 16: 1-13.

FEW questions are more frequently asked (and by persons with a general respect for divine law and a general belief in the divine rule of the world) than these: How shall I get on in life? How shall I give the right impulse to my children? How shall I plan for their making the most of themselves?

Our study of the Old Testament has this advantage, that the hand and counsel of God are formally presented and connected with the rise and fall, the well- and ill-doing, of men. The hand and counsel are just as real now, though, in adaptation to the more advanced condition of the race, with a perfect revelation in Scripture and another and a lower revelation in history and biography, they are not so obvious to the senses. The Old Testament shows us what God is in himself and in his government as against all rivals. In the New we are taught to "endure, as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27). For all who put questions like the above this passage is full of meaning.

Saul has failed through forgetfulness of what he was to be and to do, and the self-will of the people is being punished through his failure. The God of Israel might have left them to reap as they had sown, but he is patient, and

if one will not do his will, he will, within certain limits, find another. Hence the mission of Samuel his prophet to Bethlehem, now to be examined in detail.

The tenderness of Samuel appears in his sorrow for Saul's rejection (ch. 15 : 35 ; see Elijah's case, 1 Kings ch. 19), but grief must not keep us from duty and adequate provision for the future ; nor must we seem to censure by sinfulness the divine Ruler, nor drop any good work in disgust or despair because of one failure. A good remedy for regret is going to the next duty. Israel had chosen to have a king ; now God will provide a fitting leader, having in view not only present interest, but interests stretching forward into a boundless future. The mode of the communications to prophets is not defined, but they were so made as to verify themselves and often overrule private judgments (vs. 6, 7). Mourning is no longer felt ; it is for Samuel to say, "Thy will be done." "I have rejected Saul, I have provided a successor ; thou art to do thine office as a prophet." Not, indeed, that the king-elect was to enter on his office at once, but his call and anointing were to be the means of drawing out his qualities and fixing his aims, and so preparing him for his work. So the word of a parent, even to a boy, has often been a controlling force in the life and work of the man, sending him through school and college to the pulpit and the prominent service of God.

Bethlehem—"the house of bread"—a very old Syrian town, called Ephratah in Gen. 35 : 16, the old word lingering in the poetry of the Hebrews (see Ps. 132 : 6 and Mic. 5 : 2), was probably a Levitical city (Judg. 17 : 7), and is linked with the life of Ruth, the great-grandmother of David ; but it never rose to any special eminence, though connected with the greatest events of revelation. Here Jesse lived in good circumstances, his

sons sharing his duties and the youngest keeping the sheep in the field—that is, the land lying about the little town in which the people lived, instead of being on detached farms, as in Anglo-Saxon lands. To this place (the Bethlehem-Judah of Matt. 2 : 1, 5, the “city of David” of Luke 2 : 4) Samuel is to go and anoint the king of God’s providing.

But, godly and loyal as he is, Samuel fears, for the best men are not always at their best. Saul is still actual and rightful king, and he may hear of this and treat him as a rebel. So he is directed to a course which is not marked by duplicity, but prudence—not by lying, but by reticence. Silence is sometimes as much a duty as plain speech is at other times (ch. 10 : 16). It was not meant to stir up a civil war. Any man may deal with another secretly, as when a minister warns a fellow-man ; there is no falsehood in the matter. A man may be reticent, but not deceitful, as that minister might be if questioned by meddlers regarding the man he warned. God has his secret will, but he is true and faithful. Samuel was indeed a minister. So he is to go to Bethlehem, taking a heifer with him, and avowing a purpose, right in itself, to sacrifice. There was no temple yet : he could choose his place, invite Jesse, and in fitting ways designate the future king (v. 3).

His character as the zealous guardian of God’s honor and the messenger of God was well understood, as every minister’s ought to be, and the elders of Bethlehem—leading men of the little town, more or less formally made its managers, and the precursors of the elders of the synagogue and Christian congregation—with perhaps some fear that they had been provoking God, asked, “Comest thou peaceably?” “Is there any wrong we have done, and for which thou hast come to pronounce or inflict judgment?”

The reply (v. 5) is reassuring, and the directions to sanctify themselves (as in Ex. 19 : 10-15 ; Num. 11 : 18 ; Josh. 3 : 5) are complied with by them (these acts consisted of washing and changing the garments), and under Samuel's eye by Jesse and his sons. They were probably important persons in the little city (Ruth 4 : 11). The ordinary course would be to slay the victim, offer the appointed portion, treat the rest as food, cook it, and make it the material of a public, solemn meal for interchange of thought and for fellowship. So "dinner," and in England "breakfasts," are constantly held.

Before the meal, and in connection with the strictly religious rite in which God was owned, the sons of Jesse were under the observation of the prophet. The fine figure and face of Eliab (1 Chron. 27 : 18) impressed Samuel most favorably. In a land and time when martial prowess was so important, and a battle was largely a series of single combats, "tall stature" counted for much (ch. 9 : 2 ; 12 : 23, 24). He said so, perhaps, in his heart, as did Jeroboam, in 1 Kings 12 : 26, where this gift of the kingdom to David is recalled. But the Lord warned him against trusting to appearances. Who in this respect could be more impressive than Saul? God's standard is different from man's ; he estimates character and standing by the heart. Vigor of brain or muscles does not necessarily carry the day in God's kingdom. Character, as stamped on the heart, is noted by him. So one and another appear till all the sons then at home are passed over with the solemn word, "Neither hath the Lord chosen this" (vs. 8-10). Jesse is not told why this process is gone through (1 Sam. 17 : 28). It had hardly been thought worth while to bring David, the youngest, then with the sheep (2 Sam. 7 : 8 ; Ps. 78 : 70) ; but Samuel, remembering the word of God (in v. 1), will not let the

meal begin until the youngest son is brought (v. 11). Everything about him is attractive. His hair is probably red ("ruddy"), a favorite color in the East, and his sun-browned face is honest, and withal beautiful, and, shepherd-boy as he is, there is a stamp of fair nobility about him. The divine word is, "Arise, anoint him."

Three kinds of public officers were anointed—prophets (1 Kings 19 : 16), types of the Messiah, the Great Prophet; priests (Ex. 40 : 15) at their designation in the family of Aaron and his sons, and the high priest on his entering on office (Ex. 29 : 29; Lev. 16 : 32); and kings among the nations of the East, as we see by Judg. 9 : 8, 15. The custom is used by divine command in Saul's case (1 Sam. 9 : 6; 10 : 1). This was the first of three anointings of David (2 Sam. 2 : 4; 5 : 3). That which was a common act of honor, as at a banquet, had thus a sacred character given it, as with the drinking of wine, laying on of hands, and even eating of bread in the Supper. He became in this way "the Lord's anointed."

Concurrently with this solemn rite a divine gift was given David. How much was explained to him we are not told, but he began from that hour to receive a preparation of mind through the teaching and power of the Holy Ghost. New ideas, aims, hopes, took hold of his nature. How this appeared we are not told, but may it not have been through this that some of the Psalms, and the impressive appearances he subsequently makes, as on the field against Goliath, come to their places in the inspired oracle?

Samuel went to Ramah, but David would be in communication with him, and get further light in what was for the present a secret. (See chs. 19, 20.)

I. We see here how man's sinful will is regarded, overruled and used for the exhibition of God's will, yet with-

out sin in God. Are we trying to do God's will as his? We must carry it out in the end, but is it to be willingly or the reverse?

2. We see how God prepares his instruments for their work in their mind and character. David's training begins, perhaps, by hopes and longings put into his heart, of which his language in ch. 17 is the outcome.

3. But this does not remove from view the fitness in him, coming of a good family where piety was prized and life was trained for God (see Num. 1 : 7 ; 2 : 3 ; Ruth 4 : 20). Jesse was an acquaintance of Samuel—a good sign. No training, however, and no anointing, dispenses with the Holy Ghost (v. 13).

4. David in his shepherd-life was being made ready for his work and for his typical place. He was prepared in privacy and retirement for the high place. So was He who was born in Bethlehem, a King of God's setting up, the "Captain of our salvation," under whom God will at length subdue all his enemies. The "meek and lowly," overlooked perhaps by parental and friendly partiality, are God's choice; and them he makes great.

5. Even an eminent prophet needs to be guided as to his feelings and his judgments. God is "the only wise."

DAVID AND GOLIATH.

BY THE REV. ARTHUR MITCHELL, D. D.

Nov. 25.—1 Sam. 17:38-51.

A BROAD, open valley, a mile wide, running nearly north and south. The grayish hills on either side, five hundred feet in height, are built in natural terraces, great rings of rock, one above another, upholding the plats of soil, and clumps of shrubbery, and here and there a vineyard or an olive-grove. It is the valley of Elah. Its western slope is well named Ephes-dammim, the "Boundary of Blood," for it is the border between Israel and the Philistines, the scene of frequent forays and of many a sanguinary fight. Back of the eastern hills rise at once the mountains of Judah. Beyond the western ridge the hills subside, the arable intervals grow more broad and smooth, and merge themselves at length in a fine expanse of fertile prairie—Philistia—reaching westward to the sea.

Saul, at Gibeah of Benjamin, just north of Jerusalem, has heard of a fresh invasion of the Philistines. They have gathered from their allied cities on the south-western plain and are marching to take possession of the mountain-passes which lead up from the lowlands into the heart of Israel's kingdom. Again and again Saul has led his people to victory, and not only the Philistines, but at Jabesh-Gilead and at Havilah, Ammon and Amalek have

fled before them. But this was in Saul's better days—his days of obedience and faith; now he has estranged himself from Samuel by his headstrong course, and the Lord has "repented that he made Saul king over Israel." Yet the people cannot read Jehovah's thoughts; they are still loyal to Saul. They flock to his standard for the defence of their homes; they hasten down the mountain-passes to meet the invaders. It is an anxious march. But for sixteen miles they advance without opposition. At last, through the opening mountain-gorges they can see the foot-hills, where the rocky heights begin to fall into the Philistine plains. The foot-hills are reached. No Philistines yet are seen. There remains now only the broad strath of Elah and the hills of Ephes-dammim beyond. Are their enemies awaiting them there? The scouts bring the word: midway between Shocoh and Azekah the low western hills are full of them! And they are not hiding. On the other side of Elah all their armies are gathered, their camps, their standards, full in view.

The Philistines have not waited there in fear. They have waited to challenge Israel. They are ready for full battle, but they have a single champion who is their pride and boast.

They mean to pit him against any one warrior of Israel. Of their champion's victory they are sure. Philistia and Israel are face to face. Only the wide valley is between. Down the centre of it ploughs a rough torrent-bed, its white bottom strewn with stones. Out from the midst of the Philistine ranks, out to the very bank of this torrent-trench, stalks the giant Goliath morning and evening, and in the name of all his gods challenges to combat any warrior of Israel. And this he does for forty days. All Israel skulk among the rocks and in their guarded camp. Forty days of shame and fear!

But on the last morning there comes hastening down the mountains, by the steep and rocky valley east of Israel's camp, a light-footed young shepherd from Bethlehem. Before sunrise he started. The twelve miles down that mountain-path have only put new color in his handsome face and braced his sinewy limbs. As the hills open and the far-reaching camps are before his view, he looks upon the scene with glowing eyes. The camp is all astir: he hears shouts, as if the conflict were about to open. He leaves at the baggage-train the gifts which he has brought for his brothers from their old father Jesse, and hastens into the midst of the army to salute them.

It is the very hour chosen by the Philistine for his morning challenge. The men of Israel seem to have advanced for once down into the valley, to the brink of its stony water-way. But when the champion drew near they fled from him up the hill, "sore afraid."

This is the sight which David meets. Of all the host of the living God, not one dares in Jehovah's name to face this blasphemous and boastful adversary! At that sight there is a deeper blush on David's cheek and a brighter fire in his eyes.

Can he believe that true which he beholds? And is it true that Saul himself must *hire* with riches and with honors some man to accept this haughty challenge? And is it true that neither zeal for God nor the offered prizes of the king can call forth a man? He goes here and there among the soldiers and asks, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" There is no mistaking those words. It is a new tone in that craven camp. This youthful face is written all over not with fear, but with manly shame and with an unmistakable resolve. He has not said it, but the soldiers read it in David's face: he will meet the giant

Philistine! They know it. They run to the king's tent with the word, "A man is found!"

David's elder brother, Eliab, is angered at the independence of the modest youth—angry that he dares to differ from all the veterans of Israel, to venture where they shrink, to have a mind of his own, and to speak it, too. He half envies the dauntless spirit which is already drawing to David the eyes and admiration of the soldiery. He sneers at him as a truant, leaving his work to steal down and see the battle; in a domineering tone he bids him go back to his sheep, where he belongs. To all his revilings David only answers, "Is there not a cause? . . . Who could help a word at such a sight?"

But now a messenger from the king! David is summoned to the tent of Saul. Before the king he makes his offer: "Thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine." Saul, we may believe, almost smiles when he sees the young shepherd and hears his words. But a few moments convince the king that here is a spirit of extraordinary mould. There is something in David's soul that speaks, though he himself knows it not, in every glance of his eye, in every tone. It wakes some strange, long-silent echo in the heart of Saul. It inspires confidence: it almost gives him command of the king. Saul consents. Yes, his whole kingdom and Israel's servitude or freedom he is willing to stake on David's sword.

But David will take neither shield nor sword. Himself to the last, he turns away from the tent to meet the Philistine with only his own staff and sling. From the bed of the brook he has chosen five smooth stones, and he is ready for the battle. Through the silent and doubtful ranks of Israel he passes onward to the edge of the hill. He answers the distant shout of Goliath with a firm but devout appeal to God, which all his countrymen

may hear. And David "hasted and ran" to meet his enemy.

The Philistine host had looked to see some man of Israel come forth at last, advancing with cautious, doubtful, half-unwilling steps to meet their champion. What is their astonishment to see this eager combatant come leaping down the rocky hillside from Israel's camp, bounding from ledge to ledge, and now over the open plain, as if he already pursued a flying foe! With light foot he crosses the stream-bed of Elah, and speeds across the valley towards the Philistine line.

Meantime, his ponderous foe, his armor-bearer before him, is advancing with haughty deliberation, as if he almost scorned to meet so insignificant an enemy. But David wisely does not wait until he shall be within range of that massive iron spear. Yet at a distance, his quick hand is in his bag, the stone is in the sling, and with the steady aim of a steady spirit he sends the God-directed missile whizzing to its mark. The huge Philistine, smitten in his very forehead, falls headlong to the earth. Still upon the run, David in an instant has his foot upon the giant's prostrate form, snatches his own sword from the scabbard and beheads him. A shout of triumph goes up all along the eastern hills. The Philistines, confounded, panic-stricken, turn and flee: pursued, smitten by Israel, their wounded strew the valley to the gates of Gath and Ekron. This is the revolution wrought by one brave soul.

And this is but a single incident in the life of one who walked by faith, and who learned his faith *in communion with God*. It was this which gave to David the qualities which this history reveals—a sound judgment, a fearless tongue, a sweet temper and a lion's heart.

(1.) David came to Elah a youth amidst an army of

veterans. Yet his judgment was sounder than Saul's, than Abner's, or that of any of the bronzed warriors around him. Why? Because he came to Elah from Bethlehem, from the quiet hills where he had communed with God, and strengthened his faith in him. The men of Israel had natural courage enough, but this was a combat which, on all natural principles, seemed hopeless. David, however, looked at the matter through eyes that were "full of religious light." To him it was plain, instantly, that Israel's fears were needless, and that every hour's delay was weakness and dishonor. He saw at a glance the right thing to be done—that the Philistine challenge must be accepted and battle given.

David saw God upon the scene. He was the only one who saw him; and that sight made the shepherd the true tactician. Faith in God gave him at once the true point of view. Mere secular computations had half blinded Israel's eyes. They saw nothing but that tower of brass. He saw also the arm of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel. They compared themselves with Goliath. He contrasted Goliath with Jehovah. They heard nothing but the derisive boasts of their adversary and the voice of their own misgivings. He heard only the promise of the faithful God: "Be strong, . . . be not afraid, for the Lord thy God is with thee."

The impressions and the services of the young are sometimes better than those of the old, because the elder may have lost simplicity of faith and have learned to look at life from a worldly point of view. Inexpert in the details of a matter, still the prayerful woman, the believing youth, may have a higher, clearer view of some divine principle, some promise of Jehovah, which should be his people's guide. So the mother of Mills, a quarter of a century before the leaders of the Church had moved, de-

clared that missions to the heathen world ought to be begun, and dedicated her own son in his infancy to the work. So Mills himself and his young associates, praying by the haystack in the fields of Williamstown, saw what Israel ought to do, saw that was possible which others called chimerical, and planned a bold campaign for Christ while yet the eyes of the fathers were sealed. They were mere striplings who offered themselves first to meet the giant forces of the pagan world.

Wisdom dwells not in the noisy camp with the timid multitudes, but on the solitary hills of prayer. Let every youth, no matter what the multitudes may do, hold fast the opinions formed upon his knees. Taught of God, right on some one great principle, he shall by that discern the right on a thousand daily questions. Settled and firm there, he shall read emergencies at a glance. He shall grasp the clue when others are bewildered, and pierce the sophistries and doubts which darken loitering minds.

(2.) It was the same communion with God which gave to David that clear and truthful eye, which gave him also his independent tongue. "Swift to hear, slow to speak," is a good rule for youth, but not when it is clearly seen that others have forgotten God's commandments or have fallen to questioning his promises. Be modest, but be not so cautious a Christian that you shall cease to be a Christian. Whatever you have clearly seen in your study of God's word, be not afraid to speak it out nor to let it be known that you differ from others. You have good examples for it. "His word was in mine heart, as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay" (Jer. 20 : 9).

(3.) And the frankness of David's temper was equaled by its sweetness. It was not easy in the presence of all the soldiers to listen quietly to a brother's taunts and

sneers, to be accosted as an idle runaway, to be contemptuously ordered back by that surly Eliab, jaundiced and spiteful with his jealousy. What an admirable self-control does David show! Only remember the errand and the authority on which he came, the high and fearless spirit which was in him, the ready tongue and strong right arm which could easily have paid back word for word and blow for blow. Yet he answers in few and gentle words. This is a greater victory than his conquest of Goliath. "He that ruleth his spirit is greater than he that taketh a city." This is the quietness of one who had seen the face of God, and whose spirit was trained to calmness by communion with him.

Let us all, but especially the young, know from this spiteful assault on David what we may meet, and learn how to meet it. Groundless jealousies we may encounter, unjust censures, bitter invective; possibly, abusive, insulting attacks. Expect sometimes to hear your earnestness called fanaticism; your independence, pride: your strictness, narrow-mindedness—to hear it said that you are a good man, only born too late by some fifty years. "Remember, then, that your real conflict is not with the scorner, but with yourself. Let your effort be not to silence him, but to control yourself, and then you shall gain a victory over both." When you are reviled, revile not again. Have a soft answer for your detractors, and even stay with them if you may, like David, to fight their battles and cover their disgrace.

(4.) It hardly need be said that it was faith in God which gave to David his splendid courage. His courage was simply *confidence in God*. And it was a reasonable confidence. He did not fail to measure the strength of his giant enemy, but he heard him defy the living God, and when he heard that, he knew his enemy was doomed.

He knew that Jehovah would "make bare his holy arm," and "make all the earth to know that there is a God in Israel." Woe unto him that striveth against his Maker! The most powerful of men, the most gigantic combinations which diplomacy or society or capital can frame, are doomed when they set themselves against God's holy law. They may come forth with their helmets of brass; they may be armed and mailed with all the charters of human law. Their funded strength may be as terrible as the Philistine's spear. They may stalk out unhurt before a dumb world for many days; but "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision." The weakest saint, who goes forth bearing but one good promise of God, is better armed.

But David had not only heard the word of Jehovah's promise; he had had *experience* of his faithfulness. This was not the first danger he had met with quick, uplifted prayer. He remembered his deliverance from the lion and the bear. The God who protected him when he fought for his father's sheep he knew would not forsake him when he fought for God's own fold. Experience is the best solvent of doubt, the best antidote of fears. Even one slight victory over sin, what a lightness will it lend to the spirits! and put a courage in the heart which all the nicest reasonings in the world cannot give. David flew with eager feet to his next encounter because of his triumph in the last. "Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice."

And David's confidence in God was reasonable from another point of view. The hazards he was taking were not encountered needlessly, from a mere exuberance of daring or delight in danger. He might well ask, "Is there not a cause?" The interest of Israel, the honor of

Jehovah, were at stake: it was reasonable, therefore, to believe that he would not be left to fight alone.

Still less did he seek this public championship of Israel, or welcome it to win for himself a name. Who had brought him, just at this crisis, to the camp? It was not of his contrivance. Had he not met this blasphemous defiance while on an errand of humble duty? It was reasonable to believe that God had not brought him there to leave him helpless or to have him turn his back and flee. That faith which we first draw from the promises of God may get confirmation from his providence, until doubt is banished and we advance without a fear. This is not fanaticism; it is the right blending of reason and faith.

But David's confidence in God was attended by *no carelessness*. Because "the battle was the Lord's," David did not think there was little for him to do. What do we see? He carefully selects the most appropriate means, and then he plies them with intense energy. His forecast, his ingenuity, his vigor, are as if all depended on himself. An utter misconception of all this is shown by those who sometimes speak of David as going forth against his mighty foe with *nothing but a sling*; as if this were evidence that anything would answer in fighting the battles of faith! That sling was not the feeblest; it was the very best and surest weapon for David's work. His choice of it was a stroke of genius. Rather, it was of a piece with the good judgment which he had shown from the first. That sagacious choice, so long as he could avoid close combat, not only put him upon an equality with his adversary; it gave him every advantage. David decided at a glance to make the contest one between a rifle and a spear.

He seems even to have taken the precaution to conceal his sling. The little slip of leather, with its two strings of sinew, could easily be hidden "in his hand." The bag,

scarcely larger, hung at his back by a single cord. The Philistine (v. 43) saw nothing but the shepherd's staff, which served, in fact, as an admirable feint. Hence he leaves his shield too long in his armor-bearer's hands. Visors for helmets in those days were unknown, and the giant's face was therefore left a naked target for his foe.

But David's care goes further still. It was not five stones snatched up at random that he carried in his bag. They were "chosen" stones, each one selected, picked with the nicest eye for the smoothness which should send it straight and true. And there were *five*. Faith, if it shall fail at first, does not intend to turn and flee. Faith does not despise reserves.

In every work for God be painstaking. There is need of it. Some of us are teachers. We must search out the best methods and the choicest means. We must study as well as pray. Much may depend even on the weight and smoothness of a word. A word fitly spoken, a word in season,—everything may turn on that. In spiritual undertakings, whatever they may be, as much as in secular affairs, one shot well sent and in the nick of time is worth a whole shower of scattering and belated lead. We have need to seek for discrimination and for skill as well as to pray for nerve. The spiritual marksman must not rely on chance, and then call his indolence by the name of faith.

An eye well trained chose for David that serviceable stone, and then it was the drill of years which drove it whistling to its mark.

"So David prevailed." And so must we.

Well, you will admit that it was a splendid chance.

Yes—for a splendid man.

DAVID'S ENEMY—SAUL.

BY THE REV. THOMAS H. HANNA, D. D.

Dec. 2.—1 Sam. 18:1-16.

“HE chose David also his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds: from following the ewes great with young, he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance” (Ps. 78 : 70, 71); and this choice of the Almighty began manifesting itself in the sight of Israel in the battle with Goliath, while out of that conflict grew the chief obstacle in the way of the accomplishment of this purpose of Jehovah. That victory lifted the anointed one into quick and widespread popularity, reaching from the king on the throne out to the enemies of Israel, who looked on him as “the king of the land” (21 : 11). As Saul said in alarm, we say in wondering admiration: “What can he have more but the kingdom?”

But there was another seed sown in the valley of Elah that day, which in its rapid growth and deadly fruitage wellnigh (in men’s judgment) interfered with the purpose of the Almighty. The dust of the battle had scarcely cleared away, the conquering hosts had not yet, perhaps, reached home, when the heart of the king, which had once “loved David greatly,” began turning against him, and soon bitterness and hate and murder filled it at thought and sight of the slayer of the giant. It is this, *the enmity of Saul*, which we are to consider in the lesson before us—*its beginning, its rapid growth, its deadly purpose.*

Saul had not finished the third year of his reign before the prophet, because of his impetuous spirit, told him plainly, "Thy kingdom shall not continue. The Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people" (13: 14). And not long after the faithful prophet came again, and in sharper words than he used before, because the offence was greater, told him, as he shook loose the grip of the pleading king from his mantle, "The Lord hath rent the kingdom from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine that is better than thou" (15: 28). That "better neighbor" was brought near to him in the person of the youthful page, who, as he "trilled the strains of his much-loved lyre," was alone able to chase away the evil spirit that had begun troubling the moody king; but as yet neither suspected all that he was to the other. The young musician bowed low before the king, the Lord's anointed, and played his best, thinking only to do him good; and the king loved the handsome harper, whose music lifted his thoughts away from himself and gave him relief from his terrible malady. Not until the homeward march to Gibeah, or perhaps it was a triumphal procession afterward taken through the principal cities near to Gibeah, did the suspicion dawn upon the king that David would have anything to do with the succession of the kingdom.

But in that impulsive and exaggerated song with which the dancing-women greeted the warriors at every city-gate there was one grating note. "Till now Saul had never seen the man in Israel, except the old prophet, whom the people would have spoken of as better than the king." But they make mention in their song of another name than his. Loyal to their king in every impulse of their souls, they praise Saul *first*; yet, filled with greater admiration

for David, they praise him *highest*. Again and again the chorus is repeated :

“Saul has struck his thousands down,
But David his ten thousands.”

Here was a direct comparison between their king and this “stripling;” and the superiority, by all odds, was given to the stranger. The words of Samuel come quick to mind, and the thought flashes into his heart: Is not this the “neighbor better” than myself? He is a neighbor, for his home is with his father, “that Ephrathite of Bethlehem,” only twelve miles from Gibeah. The people in their panegyric are calling him the “better” man; his one exploit, they say, out-rivals the greatest of the king’s *ten times* told; and the “green-eyed monster” took possession of the impulsive king, and “he eyed David from that day and forward.”

“On the morrow,” seemingly on the day after they had reached the royal palace, so quickly did the jealous feeling ripen into murderous intent, Saul said, “I will smite David even to the wall.” Twice he hurled the spear, which as a sceptre stood by his bed, crashing into the wall, where it quivered close by the auburn locks of the young musician, whose dexterity alone saved his life. The excitement of the war being over, the king has time to think of himself, and he is filled with thoughts of his dethronement; and the envy of David eats into his heart so greedily that his old frenzy is brought on again. On the very next day his heart grew malicious toward David; the evil spirit seized him once more.

“Whether this was a diabolical possession or a mere mental malady the learned are not agreed. It seems to have partaken of both. There is too much of apparent *nature* in it to permit us to believe it was all *spiritual*;

and there was too much of apparent *spiritual* in it to suffer us to believe it was all *natural*.* This we know from the plain record: "The Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul," and "an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him." So that, negatively and positively, the hand of the Lord was in it. And yet he was eating the fruit of his own doings—"given over," as Paul says, "to a *reprobate* mind."

In this new attack of his old disease there seems to be a new manifestation: "Saul betook himself to prophesying"—either, as Patrick suggests, giving the meaning the term has elsewhere, "singing divine songs," or, as Krummacher says, "there appeared in him the dark image of that agitation under which the prophets poured forth their discourses and sayings when overpowered by the might of the Holy Spirit, which for the moment raised them, if not above their own consciousness, at least above their understanding."

Saul wandered and raged about his palace like one bereft of reason, and, full of suspicions, saw in his unbelieving imagination visions which at one time made him tremble and shudder, and at another hurried him on to madness and wild outbursts of passion. That it was all put on that he might get David near him with his soothing music, and then, when he had smitten him to the wall, be able to say, as one in our own land and day said when the diabolical deed was done that struck our President to death and clothed the land in mourning, that he was impelled to it by an irresistible supernatural influence, we think is most likely, but cannot surely tell. This only we know: as David tried to lift his mind away from himself and give relief, the only medicinal quality his harp and song possessed, he wellnigh perished for his kindness. It would have been a fitting time and way to take his suspected rival off: the mad king would have got no blame

*Dr. A. Clark.

for intended crime, and this "better" man would never dethrone him. But by the watchful care of Providence, and the quick eye and supple movements of the well-trained athlete, David lives, and Saul is yet free from bloodstained garments.

But Saul's hate has not abated with the passage of the frenzy. The direct assault has failed, but there are surer methods in reserve. Seemingly intending honor, but really plotting against David's life, he places him at the head of one thousand men and despatches him to the frontier. David had experience with his sling; he had plenty of time while watching his sheep to make himself perfect with it, as he had made himself unrivaled with his harp; but what can he do at the head of a regiment in an exposed country, facing an experienced foe? Men are cheap now to the king, who sees his crown in danger, and ten thousand slain or captured will not be missed if David but goes down with them. Yet again he fails. David can wield a thousand men as skillfully as he can swing his sling, and the king grows bitterer still. Before all Israel he had pledged his daughter to the slayer of Goliath, but his hate is too strong for his honor, and his word is broken. But David can have Merab on condition of his fighting valiantly the Lord's battles, "his mean and malicious hope being that the sword of the Philistines may do what his javelin had failed to effect." David goes into the thickest of the fight whenever the trumpet sounds, and comes out safe, winning new laurels in every onset; but the princess is given to the "Meholathite to wife."

Saul learns that his other daughter loves this brilliant young captain, and it is surmised that her passion was returned, else the spirited soldier had not submitted so tamely to his twice winning and twice losing Merab. Not to gratify the heart of either does Saul give his consent

now; he hopes that Michal "may be a snare to him" and the hand of the Philistine may be against him. He slyly mentions a dower—not directly, but through his courtiers—such as a "poor man," skilled in fight, might give to a king, the procuring of which he surely thought would bring him his death. And his heart must have been filled with malignant joy as he heard that "he and his men" (his two or three attendants, not his ten hundred) had sallied forth to slay one hundred men. But "before the days were expired" back he comes, bringing the designated trophies in double tale.

But why pursue the disgraceful story further? Each defeat but fans the flame to greater fury, and Saul soon throws off the thin disguise with which he has marked his deadly purpose, and openly "spake to Jonathan, his sons and to all his servants that they should kill David" (19: 1). Surely and consciously he is losing his throne—the more surely and consciously to himself and his people since he has lost complete control of himself. By his own pride and self-sufficiency his fall was begun, but instead of establishing himself in his seat by establishing himself in his God, he goes down fighting, malignantly, recklessly, shamefully, the one chosen to fill his place, as if he had done him all the wrong. Indeed, before the end came he seems to have brought himself to believe, and tried to bring his own tribe into sympathy with him, that he was the injured one, not David—that his life was in jeopardy, not that of the fugitive in the wilderness.

Listen! He is standing under the tree in Ramah, having his spear in his hand and all his servants standing about him: "Hear now, ye Benjamites! . . . Is there none of you that is sorry for me, or showeth unto me that my son hath stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as at this day?" (22: 7-8). What an appeal for

a king to make! What a pitiful complaint against a son and a servant who had never breathed one word of disloyalty or lifted a stroke against the throne! Well might his tribe be "sorry" for him—not for his danger through their lying in wait, but sorry that his jealousy had so blinded and unmanned him. It is true he was "afraid of David" (v. 12), but not that he would take his life. He knew he would not harm a hair of his head, "seeing he was the Lord's anointed;" but he was afraid of his wisdom, of his valor, of his acceptance with the people. He saw that the Lord had chosen David, and was lifting him to the leadership of Israel, and with all the might of his arm and the ingenuity of his heart he set himself to thwart the purpose of his God. He fights, not David, but David's and Israel's God. With more zeal and determination than he ever fought the enemies of his nation and his God he spends his time in "hunting as a partridge in the mountains" the one he knew the Lord had anointed king of Israel.

At length the sad end came. The life that had begun in such brilliant promise was closed by self-destruction. His enmity was fruitless, except in bitterness to himself and trouble to Israel. It could not set aside the plans of the Almighty: "His counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure."

These are the practical lessons which the unrelenting enmity of Saul suggests:

(1.) Beware of *jealousy*. That "jealousy is the rage of a man" and "cruel as the grave," as Solomon says, has no clearer illustration than we find in the life of the first king of Israel. It will not do, I think, to say that Saul was naturally of a jealous disposition. From his popularity with his people from the first, from the way in which his courtiers clung to him till the last, we may fairly con-

clude that this was not so. But when he once permitted himself to "eye" the valiant youth who once won his heart, the passion grew rapidly by every action of the man, as the tumor feeds itself by the nourishment meant to strengthen the body. He doubtless did not mean it to be so at first. He never dreamed his jealousy would lead him to such lengths. But it grew till it became the absorbing passion of the man, and his very life was a burden to him as long as his rival was permitted to live. "Let the misery Saul brought upon himself remind us what a magazine of self-torture every human spirit contains;" and no single disposition of the soul is more likely to touch off the magazine, and make of the "heart a hell of wildest disorder and ever-dripping woe," than the disposition of envy, jealousy and revenge. Jealousy may lead any man who listens to its suggestions into hatred as fierce, and opposition as malignant, and thoughts as deadly, and at last defiance of God as blasphemous, as Saul manifested.

(2.) We are reminded by Saul's conduct *how natural it is for a man to throw over on some other the blame of his own hurtful blunders or willful misdeeds*. Saul proved himself unworthy of his trust, and lost it. But he rarely seemed to blame himself. He visited on David's head the bitter measure of his indignation, as if he had, while watching the sheep, concocted the scheme, and as he grew in years executed it, of unseating his sovereign and taking the kingdom. Rarely, very rarely, do men go down by blunders all their own or wickedness springing from their own hearts. But for some other or others they had been standing yet.

(3.) Saul's case may warn us of *the great danger of becoming embittered and revengeful when going down in prosperity and losing influence and honor*. Men rarely stay long at

the top. There is an established system of rotation in the universe as regards the tenure of its high places. Men may come down when at the height of their powers and opportunity, or they may stay up till waning powers tell them another must take the place. A blunder may give the start, or the scheming of others may do the work. But whatever causes it, let the declining man crucify his selfishness, curb his tongue from bitter words, and go down gracefully, sweetly, clothed in the kingly garments of dignified self-respect. Saul went down in bitterness, and he went down in shame.

(4.) As Saul warns of what may take men down, *David teaches how to rise in the face of opposition that, it would seem, should stop our progress.* "He behaved himself wisely." He was faithful wherever placed. He was honest in all he did. He was modest in every presence. He was humble when he rose the fastest and stood the highest, "remaining master of his spirit, and always like himself." And he ever lived in the fear of the Lord. He knew the king was his enemy, and he must have lost respect for him as a king and a man; but he could not permit himself to harm him when he had him in his power, because the anointing oil of the Lord was on him. He who fears God thus will have the favor of the Lord.

(5.) We may see in Saul's fall and David's rise *that God cannot be thwarted in his purposes.* The "neighbor" of Saul must take the kingdom. God has chosen and anointed him, and he must reign. In spite of Saul's javelin, in spite of Saul's wily scheming, in spite of his pursuing warriors, in spite of the fierceness of the Philistines, he was chosen of the Lord and must take the crown. "Now, therefore, kings, be wise; be taught, ye judges of the earth;" "The Lord reigneth;" "He puts down one, and sets another up."

SAUL—DAVID—JONATHAN.

BY THE REV. A. T. PIERSON, D. D.

Dec. 9.—1 Sam. 20 : 32-42.

THE scenes presented to our view on the pages of God's word are often both pictorial and dramatic. What a significant grouping is found in this passage of Scripture, bringing vividly before us three representative men, Saul, David and Jonathan, each suggesting a peculiar type of character and a special moral lesson!

Saul came to the kingdom in a crisis of affairs : the sons of Samuel proved unworthy to be his successors in the administration of justice, and the invasion of the Ammonites became an additional occasion for the popular clamor for a monarchy. God yielded to the impetuous demand of his people, and gave them their request. This first king had a chance to be great. He had only to mount the throne as one anointed of God, and with an even hand hold the scales of justice ; he had only to show himself an incarnate conscience, and in the fear of God and the love of his law uphold the standard of right and righteousness, and the spirit of the old theocracy would have filled and thrilled the forms of the new monarchy. God would have ruled in the king, and would have been the real Power behind the throne.

Indeed, the inauguration of the kingdom promised great

things: the modest reluctance of Saul to wear the crown and wield the sceptre; the fragrant chrism of a prophetic spirit descending on the young king; the confirmation of a miraculous lot; his prompt repulse of the Ammonites, and the clemency that was a higher glory than mere conquest,—these were a few of the indications that a path was open before Saul which led to a possible summit of greatness which few ever reach. His tall and commanding form was but the outward symbol of the height to which he might attain in political and moral superiority and supremacy. Saul the Benjamite might have been in every respect a king among men, like Saul of Tarsus.

But, alas! history often disappoints uninspired prophecy. The possession of power proved Saul's ruin. Modesty was corrupted into servility, humility into hypocrisy, clemency into laxity. Instead of an imperial sovereign he became an imperious despot. As Epictetus would have said, there were golden and silver vessels on his table, and earthenware principles and practices in his heart and life. His monarchy soon lost all moral vitality, and even political integrity; and even its external glory was only like the sapless skeleton of a leaf once green or the cast-off skin of a once glowing insect. True excellence is not accidental: you cannot "drop the alphabet and pick up the *Iliad*;" and no man or monarch drifts into virtue; and Saul left himself to go backward and downward with a rapidity proportioned to the height to which he had risen and from which he descended. It is one of the compensations that balance high privileges that to fall is correspondingly disastrous. And Saul fell! He dared to conduct the kingdom as his self-will dictated, and to trifle even with the commands of the supreme King of kings. Samuel, with awful solemnity, announces that the Lord has rejected him; and, left to himself, Saul's apostasy is rapid and reckless. It is especially

marked by a *hatred of that goodness* which he had failed to choose as his supreme portion. He became intensely selfish; instead of orbiting about God as one planet in a great system, he seemed to think he was to be the stationary centre about which all the orbs were to revolve. In this passage of Scripture we have a glimpse at the character of the apostate king, turned by his own sins not only into the tyrant who is regardless of the rights of his own subjects to life and liberty, but into the unnatural father who would, in his ungoverned violence, slay the son of his own body; and, withal, so reckless and shameless that he brandishes his javelin before a whole court on a feast-day!

Nay, he is lost even to the sense of political policy. The Philistines hang like a thunder-cloud on the horizon, muttering threats of destruction to his kingdom, and he whom in wild fury he seeks to impale on that javelin is his loyal son and heroic warrior, the chief stay of his tottering throne; and the causeless wrath that would smite Jonathan to the wall would alienate his own subjects at the crisis of the state. Such is the principal character in this historic scene. He is first of all his own enemy, and then madly fighting against a loyal subject, a faithful son, warring against God and destiny. In the department of physical nature, Prof. Huxley says, "to him who will not learn Nature has nothing in store but annihilation;" and it is so in the moral sphere. The man who sets himself against God's law of right and man's right to law, who will not learn either of another's experience or his own—Nature and God have nothing in store for him but certain and awful destruction.

The second character presented before us in this pictorial narrative is David. As Saul fell from the lofty height of a king's throne to ruin, David, by right both of inherent nobility and divine election and selection, mounted from a

sheepfold to a palace, and exchanged a shepherd's staff for the rod of empire. With many individual and private faults, with at least one dark blot upon his life by a rapid succession of crimes no less heinous than adultery, treachery and murder, he was yet, notwithstanding all, a man after God's own heart.

We stand at the grand estuary of some noble river where its mighty flood pours into the ocean, and it often seems that its current is actually reversed. The tidal wind and wave bear strongly from the sea, and the superficial wave beats up the stream; but down beneath the surface, with unceasing flow, the true current of the river moves steadily to the great ocean. Under a tidal wind and wave of terrible temptation that can be understood only when one is placed where David was, on a monarch's throne, in the atmosphere of Oriental society twenty-five centuries ago, this Judean king seemed to have turned all at once against both God and man, and to be transformed into a licentious and unprincipled despot. But Nathan went to him and said, "Thou art the man;" and, as with Peter, the fountains of a great deep are broken up, and from the lines of that fifty-first psalm we seem still to hear penitential tears dropping like water from the ledges of the rock. It was only the surface-wave that bore up stream: the true current of David's being still flowed toward God. The king was still at heart loyal to his Sovereign and faithful to the principles of the theocracy.

The life of David, whether as a subject or a sovereign, shows true greatness. In its earliest period we may trace the qualities of candor, courage, manliness, godliness, tenderness and unselfishness, which only grew as he rose to the summit of power. He had a childlike faith in both man and God. He was devout. He united the imagination of a poet to the inspiration of a prophet, and the Church

yet listens to his psalms and the echoes of his harp as to the melodies of heavenly music. He was undoubtedly a splendid man in the bloom of his physical manhood; he had a rare and symmetrical mind; he was capable of holding and wielding a sceptre as well as any man from Moses to Malachi. But in nothing is David more winning than in the qualities of his *heart*, and these are specially impressed upon us in his relations with Saul and with Jonathan.

Toward Jonathan he showed a tenderness rivaling the love of women, and of which we have in this Scripture lesson a representative exhibition and example. These two friends are forced to part. Saul's murderous malice toward David is the cruel wedge that drives them asunder; but they cannot part without a long and tender embrace: they kiss one another and weep one with another, until David exceeded, and then they part as sworn friends and allies whom not even death can truly separate. Few things more severely test the loyalty of friends than those complete reversals of circumstances which men call "changes of fortune." When this interview was held David was still a private citizen and subject, under a ban of virtual banishment. Jonathan was the son of a king and the heir-apparent to the throne. We do not wonder that he who came from a sheepfold could so prize a prince's partiality, and value the love of one so high above him in social position, that he felt constrained thrice to bow himself before him in homage.

Many a mean man would so far illustrate the Golden Text, and, having such a friend, show himself friendly and stick closer than a brother. But if circumstances should entirely change, if every selfish motive should cease even unconsciously to operate, if the prince and the subject should exchange places, how many would forget in their exaltation all the obligations of friendship and

even of their oath? Not so David. When Jonathan fell in the battle, he bewailed him with the most pathetic anguish :

“ I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan :
Very pleasant hast thou been unto me !
Thy love to me was wonderful !
Passing the love of women !”

Afterward, when David became king and could do nothing more for his departed friend, he rescued the bones of Jonathan from desecrating hands and gave them honored burial ; and for Jonathan's sake showed kindness to his crippled son Mephibosheth, and made him to inherit all his father's estate and to eat daily at his own royal table.

David's heart, however, reveals its magnanimity even more in his relations with Saul, who was his bitter and causeless enemy. Behold him pursued by the king and his minions as by a pack of bloodhounds, driven into mountain-caverns for refuge from that same javelin that so often had nearly smitten him to the wall, yet, when his enemy was lying at his feet asleep, still too noble to take his life or do him harm. Even Joseph's disclosure of himself to his brethren is surpassed in the pathos of its forgiveness and tenderness by the scenes in the wilderness of Engedi and of Ziph, when David's generosity to his implacable foe compels even the hateful king to confess the awful beauty of a goodness that cannot take revenge or harbor malice, and brings tears to eyes unused to weep. Even the Scriptures reveal no depths of human tenderness profounder than these. Such generosity and charity, where there is any impressible nature to work on, develop almost any virtue in humanity : even the lowest, the seemingly lost, respond to the power of such love, as the sterile sand or slimy mud under the sunshine brings forth fairest blooms.

Such tenderness is a reflection of the grace that like Mozart "brings angels down," and like Beethoven "lifts mortals up."

What shall be said of Jonathan? He presents a curious contrast both to Saul and to David, and yet there is as surely a lesson for us in this third member of this singular historic group. He was, as the king's eldest son, heir-apparent to the throne. Yet, though David was God's elect successor to that crown that he would naturally have worn, David was Jonathan's most cherished friend. Jealousy, envy and every other degrading passion found no home in his generous soul.

Jonathan was a brave fellow, and had shown himself valiant in war, without fear and without reproach—a true representative of the chivalrous spirit. His daring exploit in surprising the Philistine garrison with but a single attendant would seem too extravagant a tale for romance, and his nobility of nature won the popular love to a degree that is full as romantic. His valor fitted him to appreciate the courage of David in meeting with only a sling and a few stones the huge giant that kept the armies of Israel at bay; and that heroic act of David was the means of welding his heart and David's into love's sacred unity. Strange to say, the very prince whose throne David was to occupy was thus his most unselfish friend, loved him with the tenderness of a woman, paid the most genuine homage to his gifts and graces, and risked the most for his sake. So great-hearted was his devotion that it gave him no pang to think of David as wielding the sceptre in his stead, and he craved no higher honor than to be still his faithful friend and counselor.

Jonathan seems to be the type of *simple fidelity*, of virtue in a princely nature, but in a private sphere. How great a man may be who never sits on a throne nor embla-

zons the page of human history by his human glory, simply by abiding in his calling with God! To see others preferred and exalted without jealousy, to devote one's self unselfishly to the offices of a magnanimous friendship,—all this may win for us no high and splendid niche in the Westminster of the world's heroes, but it means real greatness and heroism. And because of this Jonathan will go down to posterity among the noblest of scriptural characters—one whose kingdom came not “with observation,” but with all the kingliness of inherent nobility and majesty of soul.

We cannot but feel that this remarkable grouping of these three men is more than ordinarily significant. Saul represents a great downfall from a height of eminence and glory to depths of apostasy and disgrace, for want of true manliness and godliness. David, by the presence of these, rose, on the contrary, from a lowly pastoral life to the sceptre of empire. Jonathan stands between, born a prince, neither rising to the heights nor sinking to the depths, but holding his own, an example of the beauty of a career presenting no startling contrasts, a character without salient points and angles, but like a sphere for its symmetry and faultlessness.

It is not too much to say that to one of these three men every one of us will conform. From summits of privilege we may go down to ruin and wreck; from lowly beginnings we may rise to heights of true attainment and achievement; or we may simply abide where Nature and God have put us, and dignify a humble or a lofty sphere by a character true to God, to ourselves and to our fellow-man.

To some, life proves an *inclined plane*; they found themselves at the upper end, and from sheer want of manly virtue and godly character they did not maintain

their integrity and prove themselves worthy of their privileges. They fall, and the rate at which, and the depth to which, such descend are always in proportion to the height from which they slide. For in moral philosophy as in natural philosophy corresponding laws obtain.

Others found themselves at the lower end of the inclined plane, and, heroically struggling against adverse circumstances of birth and lowly beginnings, or even of physical disease and deformity and inherited vicious propensities, yoking to their infirmity the energies of God, they steadily went on and up to the top.

For some others life seems to present almost a dead level. They are well born, and there is not much chance to rise; and the most they can hope to do is to maintain the standing in which God and Nature have put them.

But whatever be the outlook, if a human soul is but inspired by virtue and piety; if there be simple truth and faith, industry and honesty; if in our calling, whatever it be, we but abide with God,—both our success and our reward are sure. To the young, especially, the one lesson of all true lives is this: find out your powers, and cultivate them; find out your work, and train them for it; find out your sphere, and use them in it. The world may neither call you great nor good—may weave no garland for your brow, may place no wreath on your grave. But there is One whose roll of honor holds no unworthy name and fails to record no deserving life. He will recognize and reward you. You shall wear a crown wrought by no mortal hands, set round with radiant gems that in their lustre shall outshine the very stars of God.

DAVID SPARING HIS ENEMY.

BY THE REV. T. W. HOOPER, D. D.

Dec. 16.—1 Sam. 24:1-17.

THIS scene is an episode in the life of David, whom God had chosen to succeed Saul as the king of Israel. Knowing that David had been anointed, Saul, puffed up with kingly pride and jealous of his royal rights, is now trying to defy God and to kill David, in spite of God's decree and of David's self-defence. Hearing that David is somewhere in the wilderness of Engedi, Saul gathers a large force, who dare not disobey his orders, and searches for the refugee.

More than once David had made what Saul might have regarded a miraculous escape. But a man, and especially a king, as jealous, as angry and as malicious as Saul was, is not apt to think of God; and if he does he is not afraid at such a time to be "found fighting against God." In this frame of mind he presses over the steep places and around the rocky ridges of the mountains until he is almost exhausted.

(a.) *The Cave*.—In the mean time, "hunted as a partridge in the mountains," and accustomed to these "munitions of rocks," David, with his body-guard of six hundred faithful men, has found a refuge in a large cave which was sometimes used as a sheepcote. In all limestone countries such

caves are common, and many of them are large enough to conceal armies. The Mammoth Cave in Kentucky and Weyer's Cave in Virginia are large enough to shelter a hundred thousand men. In troublous times of old such caves were sought as refuges. Bruce's Cave in Scotland is still shown to tourists, and history tells how Mohammed once saved his life by running into one of these mountain-caves. But in this cave at Engedi we have the marvelous escape of Saul as an act of gracious forbearance on the part of David.

(b.) *The Meeting.*—In the solitude of that cave, by the mysterious providence of God, are these two men, Saul and David. Both are kings, anointed of God and ordained of God to reign over his chosen people. Saul is the reigning king, and David is to be his successor—not now, but when God chooses to let Saul die, and when David has been properly trained for the kingdom. Already they are very different men, and every day they are growing wider apart in personal character and in all the elements of manhood. Saul is cruel, jealous, treacherous and murderous. Time and again had jealousy made him ready to kill David on the spot. Indebted to David for his riddance from the giant of Gath, for those sweet strains of music that could drive away the demon and restore him to reason, for many a victory over the Philistines—or rather, as David had told him, indebted to God for using him as his agent in all these events of the past—Saul seems to have forgotten all of David's kindness and all of God's mercies. With a heart full of all uncharitableness he is there that very day to kill David if he can only lay his hands upon him.

And who is David, the innocent object of all this malice? A young man who had been a shepherd-lad, of ruddy complexion and of graceful bearing, attractive even to Saul

because of his mingled courage and gentleness. When a shepherd-boy slaying the lion and the bear; when a mere stripling burying a smooth stone from the brook in the forehead of Goliath, the champion of the Philistines, who "defied the armies of the living God," scattering consternation among the ranks of the enemy; modest in the presence of Saul, and ascribing all his success to the God of Israel; a poet inspired of God, a sweet singer, and, like Orpheus, so skilled in music that he could soothe the grim spirit of Saul when the evil spirit had gotten the mastery; the son-in-law of Saul and the sworn and unchanging friend of Jonathan.

Yet Saul hated David as Haman hated Mordecai, or as Herod hated Jesus when the wise men told him that a King was born in Bethlehem. He hated him, because of these two men, as of Jacob and Esau, God had plainly said, "David have I loved, and Saul have I hated." To such a morbid mind each gallant act of David was a gem plucked from Saul's crown to sparkle with a new lustre in the future crown of the son of Jesse.

(c.) *David Restrained*.—It must have been a great provocation to stand there and see his inveterate enemy ungird his mantle and compose himself to sleep—brought there, as his followers suggested, by God himself, and, as we infer from another occasion when David took away his spear, cast into a deep sleep for the very purpose of putting him completely in his power. Saul's men were all outside, but David's were hidden away in the secret chambers of the cave. "Dead men tell no tales," and an assassin would ask no better chance at his victim and no surer inspiration from God than David had.

But David was a man of war, brave as the lion or the giant he had slain in mortal combat when standing face to face. He was made of nobler stuff than assassins are made

of. He was too much of a man to kill a king when asleep, as Richard hired men to kill the princes of England that he might ascend the throne. Wronged he had been by Saul, driven out of office and of home, "hated without a cause," as his Master was afterward, and at that very time hunted as a wild beast of the forest.

But Saul was Jonathan's father, and "his love for Jonathan was very great, exceeding the love of women." Saul, too, was "the Lord's anointed," his own king as long as God chose to let him live. To him, then, as to every other subject of King Saul, the very person of Saul was sacred, and to lay hands upon him would be an act of sacrilege. Even the recollection of his having cut off the skirt of his robe filled him with regret and sorrow, for he felt that even that might be looked upon as an act of sacrilege.

Besides, it may have occurred to David, "I am one of the Lord's anointed too; and as I mete, it may be measured to me again. If my men see me laying my hands upon a king, the time may come when some of them will lay their hands on me. Justice, manliness, mercy, self-preservation, then, all conspire to make me spare the life of this my enemy, whom God in this strange way has put in my power."

But over and beyond all this, David was a good man, was a pious man, was a man of God, and, with all his faults, was for such an age a most remarkable man. There had never been a time in all his eventful life when God had forgotten him or had failed to help him. Strange had been his past history in peace and in war, as a shepherd and as a courtier; and while the most consummate skill and courage had been demanded on his part, he felt sure that God had been his "refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

It was God who made him what he was. It was God who sent Samuel to anoint him. It was God who gave him that musical talent which could soothe the troubled spirit of Saul. It was God who guided the stone when Goliath was slain. It was God who sheltered him from the blows of the Philistines when Saul sent him into battle to be slain. It was God who had shielded him from the murderous malice of Saul. And so, now, he could feel, and did feel, that God would take away Saul in his own good time, and would at the right time give him the kingdom. "Vengeance belongeth unto God" was the sentiment which even then came into his mind; and by faith he was willing to await God's time for the fulfillment of God's own promise.

(d.) *The Final Appeal.*—"But I say unto you, Love your enemies." We would hardly expect to find a fulfillment of such a sentiment in that rude age of the world. But when David had allowed Saul to escape he went out, called to him, "My lord the king!" and, having attracted his attention, "stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed himself." "And David said to Saul, Wherefore hearest thou men's words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt? Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how that the Lord had delivered thee to-day into mine hand in the cave: and *some* bade *me* kill thee; but *mine eye* spared thee; and I said, I will not put forth mine hand against my lord; for he *is* the Lord's anointed" (vs. 9, 10). Here was a touching appeal to Saul's sense of right and justice, and at the same time to whatever of conscience he might still have toward God, whose right it was to reign over both of them, and, through one or the other of them, as he might select, over the house of Israel. Warming with the subject, and softened now by the fact that he had let Saul get beyond all danger, he

says: "Moreover, my father, see, yea, see the skirt of thy robe in my hand: for in that I cut off the skirt of thy robe, and killed thee not, know thou and see that *there is* neither evil nor transgression in mine hand, and I have not sinned against thee; yet thou huntest my soul to take it. The Lord judge between me and thee, and the Lord avenge me of thee: but mine hand shall not be upon thee. As saith the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked: but mine hand shall not be upon thee" (vs. 11-13).

It would be hard to equal in a few words the pathos of this appeal. And now he makes another appeal to Saul's royal pride and conscious power: "After whom is the king of Israel come out? after whom dost thou pursue? after a dead dog, after a flea?" (v. 14). What sarcasm, keen, cutting, withering, is such a taunt as this! It was enough to make Saul hang his head in shame, while David rose again to the sublime, and closes with these words: "The Lord therefore be judge, and judge between me and thee, and see, and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thine hand" (v. 15).

"Thrice armed is he who hath his quarrel just," and "the righteous are bold as the lion." And thus, in this rebound or reaction which came after that scene in the cave, David is so full of faith and hope and courage that he is not afraid to face Saul and all his hosts, to appeal to the God of justice and of truth to avenge his cause.

"When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." Of this we have an illustration in the answer of Saul to this fervent appeal of David. "And it came to pass when David had made an end of speaking these words unto Saul, that Saul said, *Is this thy voice, my son David?* And Saul lifted up his voice, and wept. And he said to David, Thou *art*

more righteous than I; for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil" (vs. 16, 17).

Saul would have been less than human had he not felt the force of David's words, and especially the force of his act of forbearance. It is not an easy matter for a wicked man, and especially for a king, to acknowledge a wrong, and to say to a fellow-mortal, "Thou art more righteous than I." No: "Stand aside, for I am holier than thou," comes more naturally and more readily into the mind of the Pharisee. And by nature we are all Pharisees, and need grace, and an immense amount of grace, to enable us to confess with the Prodigal, "Father, I have sinned," or with the bowed head and the broken heart of the publican to cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

But, after all, this was not true penitence on the part of Saul. It was a sudden outburst of generous, manly feeling, awakened by the magnanimous conduct and the appeal of David. There was no true sense of sin against God, while there was a confession of wrong toward David. It was not the driving out of the evil spirit for ever, but rather his temporary departure into "dry places, seeking rest," and, finding none, to come back again with seven other spirits more wicked than himself. The last state of Saul was worse than the first.

LESSONS.

(1.) *Sin Hardens*.—Here was Saul, not of Tarsus, but the first king of Israel, at whose inauguration was heard for the first time that loud plaudit which has rung out so often since: "God save the king!" Though "given in anger," as God says, at the clamorous call of the people, as a young king Saul had all that heart could wish of this world's goods. There was a constant stream of popular applause to gratify his pride, and success had followed his

military movements, to gratify his ambition. He was the grand monarch of God's own chosen people, and had he been as humble and dutiful and pious as he ought to have been, there was all of this world's good to make him happy here, and the God of Israel to take him to heaven when he died.

But he sinned against God, and became proud, selfish, jealous, cruel and relentless. Possessed of an evil spirit, at times he became a frenzied maniac, and had to call in David, the son of Jesse, to calm his troubled heart with music. He learned to hate David, and tried all sorts of means, direct and indirect, to get rid of this hated rival. He gave David his own daughter as a wife, hoping thus to lead him on to treason; he sent him out to battle, hoping to have him killed. But even this dastardly attempt only planted new thorns in his pillow, for David came back such a hero that the maidens sang, "Saul hath slain his thousands, but David his ten thousands." Maddened with jealousy, Saul forgot his own kingly dignity and hurled his javelin at that young man who, in fidelity to him, had done more to drive back the Philistines than any other one man in all the kingdom.

Forgetful of all this, and utterly regardless of God's character and of God's will in the premises, Saul gives himself up to the malice of his own heart, and bends all his soul to the one object of killing David. Spared by David, he is melted to tears and asks David's pardon. But he goes on, searing his conscience and hardening his heart, until God utterly forsakes him, and leaves him a dismantled wreck, to drift upon the rocks and perish for ever.

This is the effect of sin—sin in the heart, unrestrained and unpardoned sin—in the palace and in the cottage, in the king and in the peasant, in the grown man and in the child. It is the venom of the fiery serpent. It is the

leprosy that diffuses itself all through the man, and makes him a madman, a murderer, an object to be avoided by all who would have their own self-respect, the respect and love of their fellow-men and the approval of the God of the covenant. Sin puts a man in antagonism to God, makes him hate the rule of God, and makes him ignore and despise the mercy of God, and at last brings him to confront the unmitigated vengeance of God.

“Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.” But, as in the case of Saul, God can afford to wait, and all the time he is saying, “He that being often reprovèd, and hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.”

(2.) *The subduing and restraining power of God's grace.*— If we would see the radical difference between these two men, we must go back to 1 Sam. 18: 12-14: “And Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him and was departed from Saul;” “And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways, and the Lord was with him.” Here we have the solution of that strange contrast which was so patent in the lives of these two men. David may have been no better than Saul by nature or by birth. Both were sinners, and great sinners, even to the day of their death. But Saul had driven God away from him, while “the Lord was with David.”

“The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.” This was not only true in fact, but in David's experience. It was just what he felt and what he said in talking about his various escapes and all the incidents of his life. It was the Lord who delivered him from the lion and the bear. It was the Lord who gave him the victory over Goliath. It was the Lord who sent Samuel to anoint him king. It was the Lord who gave him the love of Jonathan. It

was the Lord who saved him in the battle with the Philistines. It was the Lord who made his arm strong and his heart courageous in the day of battle. It was the Lord who made him active enough to dodge that javelin of Saul. It was the Lord who guided him and Saul into that same cave at Engedi. It was the Lord who told him not to do what his own men begged him to do. It was the Lord who whispered to him, "Saul is the king, and the Lord's anointed." It was the Lord who restrained him when all his own wicked impulses and the vengeance of his men urged him to kill his persecutor. It was the Lord who held back his arm from what would have been an act unworthy of a man who was to be the king in Zion and the sweet psalmist of Israel.

Yes, it was the Lord in him and around him and over him, "a sun and a shield," who made him what he was and gave him what he had, and through him carried forward that great work for which David had been chosen. These Psalms of David, which have been an outlet for all the deepest, truest, purest, holiest sentiments and aspirations of the human heart, are the outcome of these "tribulations," through which God was fitting him for the kingdom here, and for the kingdom of glory too. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

DEATH OF SAUL AND JONATHAN.

BY THE REV. T. W. HOOPER, D. D.

Dec. 23.—1 Sam. 31 : 1-13.

THERE is a proverb of the ancients, "Whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad;" and another quaint maxim contains a most fearful truth :

"The mills of the gods grind slowly,
But they grind exceeding small."

Or, to express the same idea in the language of the Bible, "Be sure your sins will find you out."

This was the truth brought out so forcibly in the last days, and especially in this death-scene, of Saul. For more than forty years he had been known and honored as the king, and all that time he had been looked upon as a symbol of disloyalty to God on the part of the people. To see this read 1 Sam. 8 : 3-7. The very demand for a king was looked upon by God as treason against him, and a wish to get rid of him as their ruler. But, while knowing this, such was his love for them that he ordered Samuel to anoint "Saul the son of Kish," a young man taller than all the men of Israel, and a man so modest that when they all met to proclaim him king he had hidden himself amongst "the stuff." As soon as the people saw him he was received with loud shouts and acclamations of joy.

Suddenly raised to such a dizzy height, it is strange that

from the first he did not become tyrannical and oppressive. But for many years he seems to have put himself under the guidance of good Samuel. With the help of Abner and David and his valiant sons the old hereditary enemies of Israel are driven back, and it seemed that he was in a fair way to establish his kingdom upon a permanent basis. But there came a time when, through fear of the Philistines, he distrusted God, lost confidence in the promise of Samuel and offered a burnt-offering himself. (Read ch. 13 : 8-14.)

But the most grievous sin of Saul was his failure to destroy the Amalekites. And when he tried to extenuate his conduct to Samuel by saying that he had spared the sheep and oxen to offer to the Lord in sacrifice, we have those memorable words, partly quoted by our Saviour. (Read ch. 15 : 22, 23, and 27-29.) This was the last interview between Samuel and Saul while Samuel lived, and from this time forward we have the life of David, who is to be the king of Israel.

When Samuel anointed him it is said, "And the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward;" and in the next verse, "But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him." From that time to the day of his death Saul's whole life is the record of a man forsaken of God and "possessed of a devil." In the mystery of God's providence David is called into Saul's presence to charm away that evil spirit with the strains of music. And then David comes to the rescue when they are confronted with Goliath, the champion of the Philistines. With a certain "method in his madness" Saul tries, over and over again, to defeat God's plans by taking away the life of David. But in every case David is enabled to escape; and as Saul decreases in popularity and influence and success, David increases in all these elements of future usefulness. At

last Saul seems to follow every whim of a diseased fancy. At one time he is penitent, and at another desperate; at one time, in a fit of anger, he has all the priests slain, and at another all the witches and soothsayers are ordered to be suppressed.

But at last the cup of his iniquity is full and the time for God's retributive justice has come. For such a man to die is bad enough, but to die as Saul died is simply horrible. Before the battle he seems to have had a presentiment of what was to come, for "when Saul saw the host of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled;" "and when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets." No, the time for all that was gone. He had rejected God, and God had forsaken him. Samuel was dead, the prophets were dumb and the priests had been slain. David, too, was gone away from him, and even the witches and soothsayers, who might have cheered him with a falsehood, were scattered by his own decree.

In his extremity he finds that there is a witch at Endor, and under a disguise he actually goes there under cover of darkness. Recognized, he has first to go back upon his own decree and promise protection to the witch. And, strangest of all, when asked, "Whom shall I bring up unto thee?" he answered, "Bring me up Samuel." Samuel! that old man of God, whose counsel he had rejected, and who had told him long ago that his kingdom should be rent away and given to another!

But in such a doleful mood it was Saul's desperate wish to know the worst. The shadow of death was on his soul and he could not shake it off. At such a time a man wants to know "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth." As was always the case in his talks with Samuel, he was told the truth, the dreadful truth, as to the past,

and as to the future too. "His sins were set in order before him" to show him the justice of his impending doom. And then, in a few words, he was told that he and his three sons should be slain, the people scattered, and, last of all, that David should be king in spite of all that he had done to prevent it.

Then comes this brief description of the fearful defeat: "The men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in Mount Gilboa." All three of Saul's sons were slain; Saul himself was wounded of the archers, and in his dread of being abused by the enemy begged his armor-bearer to kill him, and when he refused Saul took a sword and fell upon it. The armor-bearer, according to custom, when he saw that Saul was dead, fell likewise upon his sword, and died with him. "So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armor-bearer, and all his men, that same day together."

The Philistines "cut off his head, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to publish it in the house of their idols and among the people. And they put his armor in the house of Ashtoreth, and they fastened his body to the wall of Bethshan." The only light cast upon this dark picture was that kind act of the valiant men of Jabesh-Gilead, who rescued the dead bodies at night, burned off the putrid flesh and buried the bones under a tree at Jabesh.

How true is it, as Solomon says, "The wicked is driven away in his wickedness, but the righteous hath hope in his death"! or, as he says in another place, "The memory of the just is blessed, but the name of the wicked shall rot"!

LESSONS.

1. Saul was what the Bible calls a "*reprobate*." By that we do not mean that he was a man hurried forward to his

doom by a blind fate, or lashed to such a doom against his will by the scourge of relentless furies. There is no such case in all the Bible. It was a rejection of God for Israel to demand a king, and so God says to them in Hosea, "I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath." But Saul was not an unconscious nor an unwilling agent in this whole transaction. The fascinations of royalty were dazzling to his pride and to his ambition. While it was a rough age of the world, he became one of the worst kings and one of the most vindictive men that ever lived.

It was an act of kindness on the part of God to choose him out to be a king. It was an act of mercy on God's part to give him Samuel to tell him what was right and wrong. It was an act of God's providence to give him victory over the Philistines. It was an act of God's grace to make him an avenger of all the wrongs of Amalek against Israel. It was an act of God's mercy to send him young David to kill Goliath, who "defied the armies of the living God." It was an act of God's grace to send David with his harp to charm away that fearful spirit which would cast a gloom upon his soul. It ought to have convinced him of God's sovereign will to see David escape from his clutches so often, and to see him so restrained by grace that he would do him no harm. He ought to have known that it was wrong for him to offer a sacrifice in mingled distrust of God and of Samuel. He ought to have known that it was wrong to spare the spoil of Amalek, and then pretend that it was designed for a sacrifice to God. He must have known that it was wrong to kill God's priests because they befriended David. And when God refused to answer, he knew it was wrong to consult the witch of Endor and ask her to call up Samuel.

Yes, Saul was a sinner, and a persistent sinner—a sinner

who sinned against light and knowledge, against providence and grace, against mercy and judgment. Casting off God's fear and defying God's power, "God gave him over to strong delusions, to believe a lie." At last, forsaken of God and given up to the delusions of his own fancy and the furious lashings of his own conscience, he dies in the midst of national disaster and of personal disgrace.

"Remember Lot's wife!" was the sententious warning of our Saviour. "Remember King Saul!" he might have rung out as a warning to those who, in the pride of person and the pride of wealth and the pride of station, are inclined to forget God, to forsake God, to ignore the being and the law of God and to defy the will and the power of God.

God will not force men to obey him—will not compel them to repent when they have done wrong. "Christ is exalted as a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel and the forgiveness of sins." But "God commandeth all men everywhere to repent;" and the man must repent. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." But Saul never truly repented before God, and never from the heart confessed before God that he was a sinner. No, he forsook God, drove away the Spirit of God; and God forsook him, and left him bound in the shackles of that evil spirit which made him an object of dread and terror to his friends, and at last left him "to die as the fool dieth," his dead body to be mutilated and his armor to be hung up as a trophy in a heathen temple.

(2.) *God's retributions are slow but sure.* It had been a long time since Saul committed that first grievous offence against God. There were years of apparent peace and prosperity, when God seemed to have forgotten his old

curse, and when Saul might have thought that God had changed his mind and purpose. But "with the Lord a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years." It was one hundred and twenty years from the time Noah laid the keel of the ark to that day when "the Lord shut him in." During all that time the curse was impending, and that huge vessel upon dry land was a sure sign of one man's faith in the coming deluge. Men mocked him and scoffed at him, and derided his fanatical delusion; but Noah went on building the ark, and God went on damming up the waters that were to break out at the "*appointed time*," not a day too soon nor a day too late—just when the ark was ready, and just when a world of sinners was ripe for ruin, and could be spared no longer. "Though hand join," etc. "All the wicked," etc.

Sodom was allowed to sin until not ten righteous men could be found to avert the coming doom. But the fire "came at last to consume them all." "His blood be upon us, and upon our children!" was the awful curse which the Jews called down upon themselves at the crucifixion of Christ. It was years before the curse came from an avenging God, but it came at last; and it sickens the heart to read the history of God's answer to that impious prayer. God can afford to wait. He need not be in any hurry. The victim cannot escape, for there is no chance for him to elude the vigilance of "that eye which never slumbers and never sleeps."

The physician who attended the deathbed of Edgar Poe says: "As the end came on he bent over him and asked if he had any word he wished communicated to his friends? Poe raised his fading eyes and answered, 'Nevermore!' In a few moments he turned uneasily and moaned, 'O God! is there no ransom for the deathless spirit?' Continuing, he said, 'He who rode the heavens

and upholds the universe has his decrees written upon the frontlets of every human being.' Then followed murmuring, growing fainter and fainter; then a tremor of the limbs, a faint sigh, and the spirit of Edgar Allen Poe had passed the boundary-line that divides time from eternity." *Nemesis!*

"The mills of the gods grind slowly,
But they grind exceeding small."

It was the brilliant but godless John Randolph who, in dying, wrote the one word, "*Remorse!*" And so fearful was the death of Tom Paine that his nurse would ask, when others afterward wanted to hire her, if the sick man was an infidel, stating that no money could ever induce her to wait on another dying infidel.

"The Lord is not slack" (2 Pet. 3:9). Ah, yes! This is true, and a blessed truth it is. But men will presume upon that truth, and make it a pretext for continued impenitence, and, abusing God's mercy, will go on "treasuring up wrath," etc. (Rom. 2:5-9). It is only when they have "trodden under foot," etc. (Heb. 10:29) that they find out "what a bitter thing sin is," and "what a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God." "Be not deceived," etc. (Gal. 6:6, 7). They that sow the wind, shall reap the whirlwind. (See Eccles. 11:9.)

(3.) *To forsake God is to be lost.* That was the fatal turning-point in Saul's history, both as a man and as the first king of Israel. There was everything to make him loyal to God. He was chosen of God to be a king when he had no thought of such an honor. He was anointed by Samuel, that grand old man of God, whom to know was a pious education. It was not the want of knowledge or the want of counsel that led him to stumble. It was a want of reverence for God as "King of kings." It was a want of will to do God's will, and a desire to follow the

bent of his own heart in spite of all that God told him was right and wrong. So he forsook God—would not be dictated to by that very God who had made him a king. And what could God do, as a lover of truth and a lover of Israel, but forsake him, withdraw from him, and leave him to the perversity of his own will and the hardness of his own heart? How could such a man and God reign at the same time over such a people as were God's own chosen people?

“What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?” “Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid!” No, in all such cases these “vessels of wrath” are fitted to destruction by their own direct and indirect exertions. To all of Christ's disciples he can say, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you;” and to all those who are not he can say, “I have not rejected you, but you have rejected me.” To his own he says, “All that the Father hath given me shall come to me, and him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.” But to those who hear the gospel, yet will not accept it, he says, “Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.” Solomon might have been drawing the picture of Saul, as he was of every lost sinner, when he wrote, “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity: I will mock when your fear cometh: when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord:

they would none of my counsel : they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil " (Prov. 1 : 24-33). To forsake God, then, is to be forsaken of God; and to be forsaken of him is to be lost, and to be lost for ever.

The poet of the "Raven" asked, in his dying delirium, "Is there no ransom for the deathless spirit?" and the prophet asked long before him, "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?" Yes, blessed be God! there is One who is known as the "Son of David," and who sits upon the throne of David now. He has died for us, the Just for the unjust, the Sinless for the sinner, the King for his subjects. And it is he who says, in the sovereignty of his grace, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1 : 18).

THE END.