

Men of the Bible; Some Lesser-Known Characters eBook

Men of the Bible; Some Lesser-Known Characters

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Page 1

ENOCH, THE DEATHLESS

By Rev. W. J. Townsend, D.D.

Enoch was the bright particular star of the patriarchal epoch. His record is short, but eloquent. It is crowded into a few words, but every word, when placed under examination, expands indefinitely. Every virtue may be read into them; every eulogium possible to a human character shines from them. He was a devout man, a fearless preacher of righteousness, an intimate friend of God, and the only man of his dispensation who did not see death. He sheds a lustre on the antediluvian age, and he shines still as an example to all generations of steady and lofty piety.

It is difficult to realise the exact environment of the early patriarchs. Human society was then in its making. There were giants in those days, both physically and intellectually. They lived long, and unfolded a vigorous manhood, by which civilisation was developed in every direction. Some of them, also, were tenderly responsive to supernatural influences, and thus rose to a spiritual stature which enables them to bulk largely in sacred history.

The guiding lines of Enoch's biography are clear though few. "*He walked with God*"; "*he pleased God*"; "*he was translated that he should not see death.*" These are the pregnant remnants of his history, from which we may construct a character and career of striking eminence.

I.

"He walked with God."

Therefore he knew God. The articles of his creed were not many, but he was fixed on this foundation-truth of all religion. Further than this, he knew God as taking a living interest in His creatures, as one who could be approached by them in prayer and communion, and who was sympathetically responsive to their needs. He somehow knew God, also, as being righteous and holy, and he must have had a rudimentary idea of the Christ, as it unfolded itself in the great promise of a deliverer from evil made to our first parents in Paradise. However scanty in number were the articles of his creed, they were not scanty in results. They produced a great life and a great name. The results were that "he walked with God." Walking is the habitual exercise of a man's life. A man runs sometimes. Under great strain, or the demand of special circumstances, he runs, but finds that exhaustion follows; or if he runs too frequently, total collapse is the inevitable consequence. Two of the most eminent ministers of our times recently died owing to overstrain and over-exertion. But we have some now living who have done signal service for the Church during a ministry of fifty years, and who are still hale and having a green old age. To walk at a steady pace, fulfilling life's responsibilities and the

demands of duty, is to fulfil the will of God and serve our generation. This rule refers to man's religious and spiritual life. To walk onward and upward in the highest things is to grow in excellence and grace.

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As man is a social being, he must walk with someone in life. Perpetual solitude dries up the springs of existence, and true manhood is shrivelled up. Solitary confinement is the saddest and cruellest punishment that can be inflicted by man on his fellow. The prisoner in the Bastille, when his reason reeled through prolonged silence and loneliness, was saved from mental collapse by the friendship of a rat; and a similar story is told of an English prisoner, who, under similar circumstances, found solace in the company of a pigeon. Man craves for fellowship and friendship. Happiest is he who has the noblest companion. God alone fills the deep craving of the heart for a congenial and helpful presence, and Enoch "*walked with God.*" The words imply regular, unbroken, well-sustained communion with Him. With a sublime and lofty aspiration Enoch had risen above shadows, idols, and pretences, and with simple, manly faith had grasped the unseen substance and reality, the personal God, the Father of us all.

This "*walking with God*" may be fairly inferred to have been carried out in all the affairs of life. The statement has no exceptions in it. Other saints have their failings and sins recorded with an admirable candour, but we are left to conclude that this was a saint of pure life and character. In tending his flocks and herds, in carrying out the barter of the markets in the early world, in commanding his children and ordering his household, in preaching righteousness and foretelling judgment, the great law of his life was here, "*walking with God.*"

When such unbroken intercourse with God is maintained, all duty and labour have a new meaning, and are suffused with a new glory. Every occupation or profession becomes a transparency by which divine truth and purity are translated to the world. No man is then a menial or a slave, but a free man, living in love and by love. He becomes an evangel, who, by words of holiness and deeds of sacrifice, adorns the doctrine of God and Christ in all things. Nothing is common, nothing is unclean; all life is sanctified and beautiful; the man is a temple consecrated by and for God alone.

In such habitual fellowship there is constant growth in familiarity and intimacy. God becomes known more and more in the tenderness and considerateness of His love. He unfolds Himself to the soul of His friend in such love-compelling charm as that the believer is constrained to ever-growing reverence, gratitude, and devotion. The man is transfigured. His thoughts, motives, desires, actions, are all inspired by the Divine Mind and framed after a Divine Pattern. The limitations of human nature are relaxed, and the man expands into newness of life; he soars into heavenly places; he is charged with holy influences. "The trivial round, the common task," become *media* to him, by which he can interpret and make known to all, the beauty of holiness as revealed to him by communion with God.

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It is a significant fact in the history of Enoch, that his piety shone brightest amid family surroundings. He was not an ascetic or an anchorite. He was a husband and a father. It is said that he "*walked with God after the birth of Methusaleh.*" With what measure of fervour he served God before the coming of a child into his house, we are not told; but we are told that after that event "*he walked with God three hundred years.*" Possibly he had not manifested special piety before. His children gathered round him, for we are told that after Methusaleh, he had "sons and daughters." But the blessing of children in no wise slackened his course of piety. Not infrequently, family cares and business responsibilities draw men's thoughts and desires from God; and many who in youth were ardent in religious exercises and unfailing in spiritual duties, in middle life and old age are found to be merely formalists in worship, and paralysed for useful work in the Church. The fine gold has become dim, through the fretting cares or the surging excitements of life. It is awful when such is the case, when the promise and interest of youth settles into impotence and rigidity, when the type which once had the die of thought fresh upon it is worn flat by overuse, or when the shell, once the home of life and bright with ocean's spray, lies with faded colour and emptied hollowness. This is melancholy, indeed, and many such wrecks of religious life are around us. But with Enoch, the increase of life's cares brought an access of fresh devotion. New gifts of Providence roused new feelings of gratitude, and he grappled himself the closer in attachment to the Giver of enlarged blessing. This is as it should be. Every gift of God should be a call to renewed praise and prayer, to a more perfect and joyous service.

This record of Enoch's piety teaches that the highest spirituality of nature is not found in avoiding the duties and cares of life, or in seeking a cloistered and solitary existence. The piety of monkery is not the crown of living. It is neither an experience of healthy joy nor of abundant fruitfulness. The healthful influences of Christianity are immeasurably more beautiful when manifested in the joys of family and home life, or in the discharge of honest trade and commerce, than in the introspective gloom of the recluse, or the ceremonial round of the ascetic. It is remarkable that the record states that Enoch's walk with God lasted "*three hundred years after the birth of Methusaleh.*" There was no break in his spiritual course; it was continuous growth and progress until the light of eventide deepened into the glory of heaven.

II.

"He pleased God."



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This is to win the highest prize of life. Not only because God is highest and noblest of beings, but also because His pleasure presupposes great moral and spiritual qualities, and unfolds itself in blessings of untold preciousness both in this life and that which is to come. The pleasure of the Lord is graduated to the intrinsic beauty or value possessed by the object which draws it out. It was manifested when the great creation stood in finished order before Him, and He pronounced it "only good." But of a higher kind is that pleasure said to be taken by Him in His only-begotten Son, in His people, and in His Church. Over these He rejoices with singing, as He rests in His love. Of such pleasure Enoch was the recipient, and it was bestowed upon him in a most signal and unique manner. Two especial qualities are indispensable to those with whom God is pleased. One is faith—"Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. xi. 6). The other is uprightness—"I know also, my God, that Thou hast pleasure in uprightness" (1 Chron. xxix. 17). The former grace is the superlative and distinguishing feature of the people of God. It is indeed the foundation quality on which all others rest, and from which they spring. It is the broad separating act which marks the difference between the saint and the sinner. Without it man is in opposition to God. The Divine displeasure rests upon him, because absence of faith means want of confidence and want of sympathy. The unbeliever distrusts God, and has no fellow-feeling with Him or His ways.

There is no more offensive feeling that can be shown by one being towards another than distrust. It irritates our sensibility; it arrays in opposition all the resentment of our nature. It is the parent of gloom, dissatisfaction, pessimism, and rebellion. It writes discontent on the brow, and bitterness on the heart. It is the fruitful parent of all ill in human nature. But faith pleases God. It draws the human and Divine into loving association. It leads the human to look to the Divine for counsel, to lean upon Him for help, to refer all things to His decision, to wait on Him for guidance in every step and enterprise in life. The faith of the patriarchs seems to have been characterised by entire simplicity and childlikeness. As manifested by Enoch, Noah, and Abraham, all of whom had the pleasure of the Lord resting on them in a pre-eminent degree, there was no stumbling or hesitancy. Some of them had their faith severely tried, but it came forth from the test victorious, as "gold tried in the fire." Therefore, if the command of God was hard, faith led to obedience; if the mystery of life was deep, faith drew them close to the Father; if the sense of sin and guilt was strong, faith never failed, but led them to look for the promised Redeemer, and they rejoiced to see His day and were glad.



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Faith is said to be difficult to exercise in this day of bustle, excitement, and pressure. The differences between this day and Enoch's day are merely accidental and not essential. There were the same inducements and temptations to evil then as now. There were scoffers and cavillers then as now. The doubting spirit in our first parents and in Cain was felt in all; but there was also the strong and manly faith which resisted the sin of doubt, which looked from the seen to the unseen, from the temporal to the eternal, from sin and folly to God, and which established itself firmly on His promise of unchangeable love. Therefore Enoch "pleased God." Faith presupposes reverence, love, obedience, and man never pays a higher tribute to another than to trust him implicitly and for all in all. Such faith God accepts and delights in. Such faith builds a noble character and a lofty life.

III.

"He was translated that he should not see death."

That was the crowning evidence and token of the Divine pleasure. Death is the wages of sin, the harbinger of retribution, the seal of man's humiliation and defeat. The fear of death is a bondage under which the race of man lies, save only where Christian faith and hope alleviate the terror and inspire a superhuman courage before which all fear is banished. The extraordinary nature of Enoch's piety could not be demonstrated by any fact so imperative as this, "*He was translated.*"

There are three complete men in heaven. Man is threefold in his nature. He is body, soul, and spirit. He is not complete without his bodily organisation. The work of faith is not perfect, nor is the work of sin undone until at the Resurrection trump man shall stand complete in his threefold being. But of that completeness there are three specimens in heaven; Enoch from the patriarchal epoch; Elijah from the Jewish dispensation; and Christ from the Christian. The translation of Elijah was a marvellously dramatic episode. It was witnessed by Elisha and the sons of the prophets—and a heavenly equipage, lambent with supernal glow, carried him in triumph out of sight. But as to Enoch there was no such scenic display. "*He was not found, for God took him.*" It was a quiet but beautifully fitting end. Moonlight rising into sunlight, the sweet calm light of a starlit sky becoming flushed with the auroral tints of a brilliant morning.

Translation means promotion, and also expansion.

It is *promotion* in honour, in office, in privilege. The bishop is translated from Rochester to Winchester and thence to Canterbury, because he has pleased his party and his sovereign. It is a sign that he has won promotion by devoted service. Christ says to his follower, "*Occupy till I come*"; and after a due period of labour well discharged, he says, "*Come up higher.*" The rule of the Divine Kingdom is, "*faithful in that which is least,*" then, "*ruler over that which is much.*" Translation to Enoch meant the elevation to

higher duties and enjoyments without the wearing agonies of disease, the sharpness of death, or the darkness of the grave.



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It meant also *expansion*. In the passing from a lower to a higher condition, we cannot now realise the quick change which would pass over the material framework of the patriarch, but that it would be etherialised so as to be “*a heavenly body*” marvellously endowed with new powers of sense, of insight and locomotion, fit to be the instrument of a soul fully redeemed from the consequences of sin, we cannot doubt; and for thousands of generations has that soul sunned itself in the brightest fellowships and employments of the highest heaven.

ELDAD AND MEDAD

BY REV. ALFRED ROWLAND, D.D., LL.B.

NUMBERS xi. 24-30.

Nothing is known of these two men beyond the incident recorded in the Book of Numbers; but this is so remarkable and significant, that it well repays careful study.

The Israelites had been once more displaying suspicion and ingratitude. Turning with loathing from the manna, they whimpered, like spoilt children, for the fish and flesh they had enjoyed in Egypt, and murmured against God and against Moses. The patience of their leader, under this new provocation, completely broke down, so that he went so far as to accuse God Himself of being a hard taskmaster, who had laid too much upon him. With infinite forbearance, allowance was made for the manner in which Divine counsel and help had been asked for, and the promise was graciously fulfilled, “*Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee. He will never suffer the righteous to be moved.*” God dealt with his servant as a father at his best will deal with his child who runs to him, hurt and bruised, in a passion of tears. Instead of beginning with an angry rebuke, help and relief are first given, and then in a few calm words the needed counsel is proffered. It was in a spirit of patient love that God appointed elders from among the people to help his over-wrought servant and share his heavy burden.

Moses was, no doubt, justified in saying, “*I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me.*” Indeed it was well for him, as it is for us all, to feel the need there is for human sympathy and Divine aid. Self-contained, self-reliant men are not the highest type of humanity, and they are sometimes for their own good visited by anxieties and responsibilities which compel them to cry, “*Lord help me.*” Thus was it with Moses. Indeed, our Lord Himself shared that experience, when for our sakes He became man. He chose comrades who were a blessing to Himself, although He was a far greater blessing to them. He took them with Him when he went forth to confront the crises of His life—on the Mount of Transfiguration, and in the Garden of Gethsemane, where His sorrow was intensified by their failure to watch with Him. He had three specially intimate friends. He called twelve to be apostles, and sent forth seventy as missionaries—an arrangement in which we see the New Testament counterpart of the

choosing of these seventy-two elders, to rule and judge the Israelites, and thus share the responsibility of Moses.

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The account given us of their appointment is singularly interesting. Six men out of each of the twelve tribes were summoned to the Tabernacle, solemnly set apart and filled with the Spirit—but two of the men—Eldad and Medad—were absent “*They were of them written to*” is the exact phrase—and the fact that they received a written summons denotes a higher and more general culture among that ancient people than is generally imagined to have existed. Yet it is what might be reasonably expected, for they had come out of Egypt, the most civilised power then in the world, a country where the usual writing materials were exclusively made. Though the Israelites had been only slaves there, they would doubtless be familiar with the art of writing, for the men of that race have never yet lagged behind any people among whom they have lived.

Seventy of the men thus summoned came together promptly, and were ranged in a semicircle before the Tabernacle. Then, in the sight of all the people, the cloud descended, wrapped them all in impenetrable mist, as a sign that the chosen men were being mysteriously baptised with the Spirit, and when again they emerged they began to prophesy. It was the ancient counterpart of the day of Pentecost, when the disciples met, and the Spirit came upon them as a mighty, rushing wind, and they began to speak with other tongues, as men chosen and inspired by God.

In the 25th verse of the eleventh chapter of Numbers, it is said that “*the Lord took of the spirit that was upon Moses, and gave it unto the seventy elders.*” Some conclude from this statement that, as a punishment for his intemperate prayer, the wisdom of Moses was thus lessened, while others were enriched at his expense. But wisdom, and all gifts similar to it, are not diminished by distribution. If we impart information, we do not lessen our own store of knowledge. If we give of our love lavishly, yet affection is not lessened by such outpouring. The spread of fire over what is inflammable increases its intensity. Though we light a thousand candles from one which burned alone at first, it still burns brightly as before. So is it with the Spirit of whose fulness we all receive. No Christian man is poorer because his brother is enriched with grace, nor was Moses. “*There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth.*”

It is time that we turned to the two men, Eldad and Medad, who, although summoned with their brethren, did not come to the assembly at the Tabernacle. They may have been absent from their tents when the papyrus letter was delivered, and would not be quickly found in the vast camp. Be this as it may, what followed is evidence that they did not wilfully disobey the summons, and that their absence was not due to any bad motive. For some reason unknown to us they failed to put in an appearance at the critical time, when others of the elect were receiving the mysterious but efficient grace of the Spirit.

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Yet, at one and the same moment, they also were inspired while walking together, as they probably were doing, in some far-off part of the camp. To the amazement of the people, and doubtless to their own amazement too, they suddenly began to prophesy, and crowds of listeners quickly gathered round them, as on Pentecost they ran together to hear the inspired apostles. This unique experience was given by God, and received by the people as convincing evidence that Eldad and Medad were divinely appointed, and divinely qualified, equally with their brethren nearer the Tabernacle. It is true that Joshua exhibited some jealousy and suspicion, and would have silenced them because the blessing had not come through Moses; but the great law-giver, with characteristic insight and generosity, would not heed the request—“*My lord Moses, forbid them.*” Calmly, yet decisively, the answer rang out, “*Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His spirit upon them!*”

In the experience of these two men there is imbedded valuable and permanent truth. We regard it as an evidence, the more remarkable because given under a ceremonial regime, that God did not intend to institute any order of men outside the limits of which there was to be no liberty of prophesying and no fitness for it. Nor is there any exclusively sacred place, be it tabernacle, temple, synagogue, or church, where alone such gifts can be conferred. We believe that outside all sacred places, outside the churches of our own faith and order, and of any other churches, there are men, and women too, equally called of God with those within such limits, and the evidence that they are so called lies in the fact that in them also the Spirit of God is resting, and through them the Spirit of God is working.

This lesson, which still needs to be enforced in our own day, is perhaps best deduced from an incident so early and so simple as this. Just as we may learn more of the way in which an engine really works from a simple model—say of George Stephenson’s—than from one of the complicated machines of the present day, so we may gain the more instruction from this incident, because of its very simple character, while its antiquity keeps it out of the confusion caused by modern controversies.

Eldad and Medad were men called of God to undertake holy service for the good of His people. In their case the call was manifestly inward rather than outward. Though truly chosen, they were not in the Tabernacle, nor were they wrapped in the cloud, and they received no ordination from the laying on of hands by Moses and Aaron. The evidence of their call lay in their fitness for the work, and their fitness was due to the gift of the Spirit. Yet all this occurred under a dispensation which was far more strict in ceremonial law than that under which we live.

What does it teach? It surely confirms our belief that the word of God is not bound. The exposition and enforcement of Divine truth is not to be confined to those who have received priestly ordination by some outward rite. No man therefore has the right to

forbid any preacher from exercising his functions on the ground that his orders are not regular, or because he has not been recognised by an Episcopate, a Presbytery, a Conference, or a Union.

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To put the same truth in hortatory form, I would say to any one who has knowledge of Divine truth, who has experienced the graces of the Holy Spirit, and who has the gift of utterance: You are called upon, by the fact of possessing these qualifications, to serve God as opportunity comes. You ought not to be silent on the claims of Christ, nor should you refrain from leading others in prayer, while on every other topic you are fluency itself. *“Neglect not the gift that is in thee,”* whether it came by laying on of hands, or in some other way. Every true convert should sometimes feel as the prophet Jeremiah felt, when he said, *“The word of the Lord was within me as a burning fire shut up in my bones. I was weary with forbearing and could not stay.”* The work assigned too often exclusively to the minister is really the work of the Church.

Happily, speech is not the only mode in which men can serve God. It is clear from the Hebrew narrative that Eldad and Medad, like their brethren at the door of the Tabernacle, did not receive an abiding gift of prophecy, but a transient sign which seemed adequate to convince the people that they had been chosen and inspired. Unfortunately, the Authorised Version gives us a phrase which is the exact opposite of the meaning of the Hebrew phrase in the twenty-fifth verse, rendering it thus, *“They prophesied, and did not cease.”* The Revised Version sets this right in the phrase, *“They prophesied, but they did so no more.”* In other words, the singular manifestation of power soon passed away. It was not a permanent possession.

This is in harmony with the experience of the early Christian Church. The miraculous power given to the apostles, as evidence of their Divine commission, was not always at their disposal. The gift of tongues bestowed on them, and on others, soon ceased; for it was intended to show the supernatural origin of Christianity until written evidence was available, and then it was withdrawn. The Holy Spirit still remained in the Church, and was revealed in a diversity of operations. His presence was proved by the changed characters of converts more effectually than by abnormal gifts—and similarly the religious ecstasy of Eldad and Medad and their comrades was soon exchanged for their abiding spirit of wisdom and justice.

Christians who at one time spoke for Christ are not always to blame if they speak publicly no more. They may have withdrawn from Sunday School teaching, for example, but only to serve God in another form. Their matured experience may be quite as valuable as their once fervent zeal. The river which near its source noisily rushes over the pebbles, is not lessened in value when, full and deep, it silently glides onward to the sea.

Happily, there are diversities of operations, though they are all under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; and if we are faithful to our special calling, we may hope to receive our Lord’s *“Well done,”* just as did these seventy-two men, who sustained and aided Moses, though they left no record of their steady, useful work. Indeed, there are those who in actual service can do very little, whose gracious and benign influence is the best proof of true inspiration. Such was he of whom Cowper sings:

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“When one that holds communion with the skies
Has filled his urn where those pure waters rise,
And once more mingles with us meaner things,
'Tis even as if an angel shook his wings;
Immortal fragrance fills the circuit wide,
That tells us whence his treasures are supplied.”

God calls us to Himself before He calls us to His service. The same Divine Spirit who qualifies for religious work, creates men anew. Of every one so created, it may be said he was “*born of the Spirit.*”

In this, also, neither place nor circumstance is essential. Eldad and Medad were both away from the Tabernacle, somewhere in the unconsecrated camp; yet they received the same blessing which their brethren were enjoying at the door of the Tabernacle. And we rejoice that some who are now outside a place of worship—outside this or that denomination—outside Christendom, do receive the Spirit who transforms them into the likeness of Christ.

In confirmation of this, we recall the fact that our Lord spoke more often in houses, and fields, and boats, and streets, than in the Temple. And the apostles who were called to follow Him were engaged at the time of their calling in their ordinary occupations, at the toll-office or in the fishing-boat. Saul was converted on the road to Damascus, the jailor of Philippi in prison, Lydia by the river side. All this reminds us that though our power may be limited by time and place, God's power is not; though our work is contracted, His is broad. The Holy Spirit is no more confined to a place than the wind is, which bloweth as it listeth over land and sea, over desert and garden.

It is a comfort to remember this when we grieve over some prodigal, who has gone beyond the reach of religious observances; who never attends worship, or reads the Bible. We may hope about him, believe in him, and pray for him still, because the Spirit of God can reach him as He reached Eldad and Medad, “*who went not up to the Tabernacle.*” The old promise is not exhausted yet: “*I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.*”

It is this divine afflatus, this outpouring of the Spirit, which is the great need of the age we live in. The Church seems to be lying listless as a sailing ship, due to leave harbour, but still waiting for a breeze. Her masts are firm, the canvas ready to be stretched, and her equipment complete. The helmsman stands impatient at the wheel, and all the sailors are alert, but not a ripple runs along the vessel's side. She waits, and must wait, for a heavenly breeze to fill her sails, and till it comes she cannot stir. Like that ship the Church is wanting impulse, and we ought to be waiting for it, and praying for it. The power we need can only come from heaven, the breath of God must be our real moving

force, and we should be wiser, stronger, and more hopeful if we entered into the meaning of the old, oft-repeated verse:



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“At anchor laid, remote from home,
Toiling, I cry, ‘sweet Spirit, come,’
Celestial breeze no longer stay,
But swell my sails, and speed my way.”

BARZILLAI

BY REV. GEORGE MILLIGAN, M.A., D.D.

“There is nothing,” says Socrates to Cephalus in the *Republic*, “I like better than conversing with aged men. For I regard them as travellers who have gone a journey which I too may have to go, and of whom it is right to learn the character of the way, whether it is rugged or difficult, or smooth and easy” (p. 328 E.).

It is to such an aged traveller that we are introduced in the person of Barzillai the Gileadite. And though he is one of the lesser-known characters of Scripture—and we might perhaps never have heard of him at all had it not been for his connection with King David—on the few occasions on which he does appear he acts with an independence and disinterestedness which are very striking.

The first of these occasions is at Mahanaim, in his own country of Gilead. In the strong fortress there David and his companions had taken refuge after the disastrous revolt of Absalom. Owing to their hurried flight, the fugitives were wanting in almost all the necessaries of life, and they could hardly fail also to have been a little apprehensive of the kind of welcome the Gileadites would extend to them. But if so, their fears were soon set at rest. Three of the richest and most influential men in the district at once came to their aid. Shobi the son of Nahash, and Machir the son of Ammiel, and Barzillai the Gileadite of Rogelim, brought beds, and cups, and wheat, and barley, and honey, and butter, and sheep—all, in fact, that was needed—for David, and for the people that were with him: for they said, “*The people is hungry, and weary, and thirsty, in the wilderness*” (2 Sam. xvii. 29).

In so acting, the first of these, Shobi, may have been trying to atone for his brother’s insulting conduct when David had sent messengers to comfort him on his father’s death (2 Sam. x. 1-5);[1] and Machir as the friend of Mephibosheth (2 Sam, ix. 4), was naturally grateful for the king’s kindness to the lame prince. But, as regards Barzillai, we know of no such reasons for his conduct, and his generosity may, therefore, be traced to the natural impulses of a kind and generous heart. In any case, this unlooked-for sympathy and friendship had an arousing and encouraging effect upon the king. He no longer despaired of his fortunes, black though at the moment they looked, but, marshalling his forces under three captains, prepared for war with his rebellious son; with the result that in the forest of Ephraim Absalom’s army was wholly defeated, and the young prince himself treacherously slain.



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With the death of its leader, the rebellion against David may be said to have ended; but to the sorrow-stricken father victory at such a price seemed an almost greater calamity than defeat would have been. And it needed the strong, almost harsh, remonstrances of Joab to rouse him from his grief, and lead him to think of his duty to his people. At length, however, the homeward journey began, the king following the same route by which so shortly before he had fled, until he came to the banks of the Jordan, where a ferry-boat was in readiness to take him and his household across (2 Sam. xix. 18). Before, however, he crossed, several interesting interviews took place. Shimei, who had cursed so shamelessly on the day of misfortune, was forgiven, and received the promise of protection; Mephibosheth was restored to the king's favour, and his old place at the king's table; and, what specially concerns us at present, David had his final parting with Barzillai.

The loyal chieftain, notwithstanding his eighty years, had come all the way from his upland farm to bid farewell to his king, and see him safely over Jordan. And as David remarked the old man's devotion, and remembered his former favours, the wish seized him to attach him still more closely to his person. "*Come thou over with me,*" he said, "*and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem*" (2 Sam. xix. 33). It was from one point of view a dazzling offer. Barzillai had seen enough of David to know that what the king said he meant, and that if he chose to go with him, honour and position awaited him at the court. But he would not be moved. His grey hairs, if nothing else, stood in the way. "*How long have I to live,*" he answered, "*that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem?*" (verse 34). I am too old, that is, for such a life as would there be expected of me. And, after all, why should conduct such as mine meet with so great a reward? No! let me go a little way over Jordan with the king, and then "*Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother.*" "*But,*" he hastened to add, as if anxious to show that he appreciated to the full the king's generous offer, and saw the advantages it presented to those who were able to enjoy them, "*behold thy servant Chimham,*" my son, "*let him go over with my lord the king; and do to him what shall seem good unto thee*" (verse 37). With a plea so expressed, David could not but acquiesce: "*The king kissed Barzillai, and blessed him; and he returned unto his own place . . . and Chimham went on with him*" (verses 39, 40), to become famous as the founder of a caravanserai, or halting-place for pilgrims on the road between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, which for at least four centuries continued to bear his name (Jer. xli. 17) and which may even, it has been conjectured, have been the same which, at the time of the Christian era "furnished shelter for two travellers with their infant child, when 'there was no room in the inn.'"^[2]



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Round Barzillai's own name no such associations have gathered. After his parting with David we do not hear of him again, if we except a passing reference in David's dying instructions to Solomon, to "*shew kindness unto the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite*" (1 Kings ii. 7), and the mention, as late as the return from Babylon, of a family of priests who traced their descent to a marriage with the Gileadite's daughter, and prided themselves on the distinctive title of "*the children of Barzillai*" (Ezra ii. 61). But in the absence of anything to the contrary, we may be allowed to conjecture that, full of years and experience, surrounded by all the love which his useful, helpful life had called forth, Barzillai died in peace among his own people, and was buried, as he had himself desired, by his parents' grave.

Such, then, is the story of Barzillai's life, so far as the Bible reveals it to us. It is, as I have already said, as an old man that he is principally brought before us, and in thinking of his character further, it may be well to do so from this point of view, and see what he has to teach us regarding a true old age. Four points at least stand out clearly from the Bible narrative.

I.

Barzillai was evidently by nature a warm-hearted, sunshiny old man, himself happy and making others happy.

David himself was such a man before the great sin which brought a trouble and a sorrow into his life that he was never again able wholly to surmount. And it may have been the sight of his own lost gaiety and lightness of spirit in the aged Gileadite that first drew out his heart to him.

It may be said, perhaps, that it was easy for Barzillai to be cheerful. The sun had shone on him very brightly: the good things of life had fallen very freely to his share. He was, according to the Bible record, "*a very great man*" (2 Sam. xix. 32), evidently a most successful farmer, rich in flocks and herds, looked up and respected in the district in which he lived. But after all, is it the universal, or even the general, experience that wealth and power are associated with simple cheerfulness and happiness? Could anything, for example, have exceeded the bitterness and the boorishness of the other rich flockmaster whom David's youths, with Eastern frankness, had asked, "*Give, we pray thee, whatsoever cometh to thine hand unto thy servants, and to thy son David*" "*Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse?*" burst out Nabal in a fury. "*Shall I then take my bread, and my water . . . and give it unto men whom I know not whence they be?*" (1 Sam. xxv. 8, 10, 11). And even if that be an extreme instance, it will not be denied that outward blessings in themselves, and considered only by themselves, are apt to have a hardening rather than a softening effect. It says much, therefore, for Barzillai, that amidst his great possessions, he still kept the free, open, happy disposition of youth.



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II.

That he did so, is due amongst other reasons to the fact that he was a generous man.

His unsolicited assistance of David clearly proves this, while the very length of the catalogue of articles with which he and his friends supplied the fugitive's needs, proves that when he gave, he did so in no stinted fashion, but freely and liberally.

It is an excellent example for all who are feeling themselves burdened by the possessions and the opportunities with which God has enriched them. Let them remember that they hold them only in trust, and in helping to bear others' burdens, they will actually, strange to say, lighten their own.

"'Tis worth a wise man's best of life,
'Tis worth a thousand years of strife,
If thou canst lessen but by one,
The countless ills beneath the sun."

While, on the other hand, can there be a sadder thought for the man whose earthly course is nearly run, than the thought that there will be none to rise up after him and call him blessed, but that he will die, as he has lived, unhonoured, unwept?

If that, then, is not to be our fate, we cannot use too diligently every opportunity of well-doing which God has placed within our reach; we cannot live too earnestly, not for ourselves only, but for others: that from the seeds which we sow now, there may spring up hereafter a rich and abundant harvest.

III.

Barzillai was contented.

Not many men in his position would have refused the king's offer. It seems rather to be one of the penalties of wealth and greatness, that their owners cannot rest satisfied with what they have, but are always desiring more. But Barzillai felt, and felt rightly, that in his circumstances, the place in which he had been brought up—"his own place"—was the best place for him. He was a home-loving old man, and the simple interests and pleasures of his daily life had more attraction for him than the excitements and rivalries of the court.

I do not, of course, mean to say that either here or elsewhere in Scripture, a wise and healthy ambition is discouraged. It is natural to wish to get on, if only for the sake of a wider sphere of usefulness; but let us see to it that we avoid that restless longing for



change, simply for the sake of change, that coveting of positions for which we are not suited, and which, if gratified, can end only in disappointment.

“It is a great thing,” said one to an ancient philosopher, “to possess what one wishes.” “It is a greater blessing still,” was the reply, “not to desire what one does not possess.” And surely, in what we do possess, in the beauties of nature with which we are here surrounded, in the love of home and wife and children, in the intercourse with friends and acquaintance, we have much to make us contented, much, very much, to be thankful for. “To watch the corn grow, or the blossoms set; to draw hard breath over ploughshare or spade; to read, to think, to love, to pray,”—these, says John Ruskin, “are the things that make men happy.” And these are things that, in some measure at least, are within the reach of us all.



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IV.

There remains still a fourth and a last element in Barzillai's honoured, life and happy old age—his attitude towards God.

Though we are never distinctly told so, we cannot doubt that he was a religious man. And as it was in gratitude to God for all that He had done to him, that he first showed kindness to God's anointed, so it was in the same humble and trusting spirit that he accepted old age, and all that it involved when it came. That is by no means always the case. Are there not some, who, as they look forward to the time of old age, if God should ever permit them to see it, do so with a certain amount of dread? They think only of what they will be called upon to abandon—the duties they must give up, the pleasures, so dear to them now, they must forego. But to Barzillai, the presence of such disabilities brought, as we have seen, no disquieting thoughts. He could relinquish, without a sigh, what he was no longer fitted to enjoy. He desired nothing but to end his days peacefully in his appointed lot. Enough for him that the God who had been with him all his life long was with him still.

Happy old man! Who does not long for an old age, if he is ever to see old age, such as his? But, if so, it must be sought in the same way. Every man's old age is just what his own past has made it. If, in his days of health and vigour, he has lived an idle, careless, selfish life, he must not wonder if his closing years are querulous, and bitter, and lonely. But if, on the other hand, he has devoted himself to good and doing good, if he has made the will of God his rule and guide amidst all the difficulties and perplexities of his daily lot, then in that will he will find peace. God will not forget his "*work and labour of love*" (Heb. vi. 10): and in him the old promise will be once more fulfilled—"Even to your old age I am He; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry and will deliver you" (Isa. xlv. 4).

[1]In view, however, of the difficulty of reconciling the two passages, and of the fact that Shobi is not mentioned elsewhere, it has been conjectured that for "Shobi the son of Nahash" in 2 Sam. xvii. 27, we should read simply "Nahash," see Hastings' *Dict. of the Bible*, art. "Shobi."

[2]Stanley, *History of the Jewish Church*, ii., p. 154.

ADONIJAH

BY REV. ALFRED ROWLAND, D.D., LL.B.

It is notorious that the sons of devout men sometimes prove a curse to their parents, and bring dishonour on the cause of God. When Eve rejoiced over her first-born, she little suspected that passions were sleeping within him which would impel him to slay his



own brother; and the experience of the first mother has been repeated, though in different forms, in all lands and in all ages. Isaac's heart was rent by the deceit of Jacob, and by the self-will of Esau. Jacob lived to see his own sin repeated in his sons, and he who deceived his father when he was old and blind, suffered for years an agony of grief because he had been falsely told that Joseph, his favourite son, was dead.

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Probably few men have known domestic sorrows, so many and so great, as those which befell David. He shared, in all its bitterness, the misery of a parent who sees his best hopes disappointed, and who is racked with anxiety as to what his wayward boy will do next, sometimes wishing that before such dishonour had befallen him his son had been laid to rest under the daisies, in the time of infant innocence. David's eldest son, Amnon, after committing a terrible crime, was assassinated by his brother Absalom. In his turn, Absalom, the fairest of the family, rebelled against his own father, and was killed by Joab, as he hung in the oak. Chiliah, or Daniel, died we know not how, and then Adonijah, the fourth son, the eldest of those surviving, followed in Absalom's footsteps.

Adonijah's sin appears at first sight so unnatural that, in justice to him as well as for our own instruction, we should try to discover the sources whence this stream of evil flowed which was so bitter and so desolating in its results.

This is not an easy task, because the full details of his life are not recorded. There are, however, no less than three evil influences hinted at in these words: "*His father had not displeased him at any time, in saying, Why hast thou done so? and he also was a very goodly man, and his mother bare him after Absalom*" (1 Kings i. 6). Taking them in reverse order: *Heritage, Adulation, and Lack of Discipline*, were three sources of moral peril, and these would tend to the ruin of any man. Let us think of each of these, for they are not extinct by any means.

We know very little of Haggith, but she was probably a dancing girl who made her way to the front by her ambition and beauty. From her and from his father we may assume that Adonijah inherited a tendency to ambition and self-conceit such as Absalom inherited from the union of David with Bathsheba. It is one of the laws of life that "like produces like," Evidence of this constantly appears in the lower animals, in the speed of the racehorse, in the scent of the hound, and so forth. This asserts itself in men also. We often notice what we call a "family likeness." Tricks of manner, and various mental qualities such as heroism, statesmanship, mathematical or artistic talent, descend from parents to children, and sometimes reappear for generations in the same family. This cannot be due to example alone, because the phenomena is almost as frequent when the parents die during the child's infancy. Similarly, moral tendencies are transmitted, and the Bible gives us many examples of the fact. The luxury-loving Isaac, who must have his savoury food, just as his son, Esau, who would sell his birthright for a mess of pottage, Rebekah, who, like her brother Laban is shrewd and cunning, sees her tendency repeated in her son Jacob, who needed a life of discipline and prayer to set him free from it.

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In more senses than one “the evil which men do lives after them.” A drunkard’s son, for example, is often conscious of an inbred craving which is a veritable disease, so that he is heavily weighted as he starts out on the race of life. This solemn and suggestive fact that the future well-being of children depends largely on the character of parents, should give emphasis to the adjuration in the wedding service—marriage, therefore, is to be honourable in all, and ought not to be engaged in rashly, “thoughtlessly, or lightly, but advisedly, reverently, and in the fear of God.” The law of moral heritage makes parental responsibility a solemn trust, while, in so far as it affects those who inherit bad or good tendencies, we are sure that the Judge of all the earth will do right. But it must never be forgotten that even a bad disposition need never become a dominant habit. It is something to be resisted and conquered, and, it may be, by the grace of Him who is faithful, and will not suffer any of us to be tempted above what we are able to bear. Our tendencies are Divine calls to us to recognise and guard certain weak places in the citadel of character, for it is against these that our enemy directs his most persistent and vigorous attacks.

Unhappily, Adonijah’s natural bias was made the more dangerous by the atmosphere of the court, where flatterers naturally abounded—for “*he was a very goodly man,*” physically a repetition of Absalom, the Adonis of his time. We may also fairly surmise that his parents were guilty of partiality and indulgence in their treatment of him, for David would love him the more as one who revived the memory of his favourite Absalom, the idol of the people, distinguished for his noble mien and princely bearing. Courtiers, soldiers, and people all flattered Adonijah, and Joab, the greatest captain of his age, next only to the king, was his partisan, the more so because he neither forgot nor forgave David’s reproaches after the death of Absalom. Even Abiathar, who represented the younger and more ambitious branch of the priesthood, joined in the general adulation, until Adonijah, intoxicated by vanity, set up his own court in rivalry to that of his father, and when he moved abroad was accompanied by a stately retinue of chariots and horsemen, and fifty foot attendants gorgeously apparelled.

No doubt every position in life has its own peculiar temptations. The ill-favoured lad, who is the butt at school and the scapegoat at home, is in serious danger of becoming bitter and revengeful, and of growing crooked in character, like a plant in a dark vault, which will have no beauty because it enjoys no sunshine. But, on the other hand, physical beauty, which attracts attention and wins admiration, especially if it is associated with brilliant conversational gifts, and great charm of manner, has befooled both men and women into sin and misery. Many a girl has been entrapped into an unhappy marriage; and many a lad, moved by a vaunting ambition which overleaped itself, has fallen never to rise: like Icarus, when his waxen wings melted in the sun.



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There must have been sad laxity of discipline in the home of David. It is said of Adonijah that *"his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so?"* In other words, Adonijah had never been checked and rebuked as he ought to have been, and this foolish indulgence was as fatal to him as it had been to the sons of Eli. There are still such homes as David's, although their inmates do well to draw down the veil of secrecy over them with loyal hands, and never blazon abroad the grief and anxiety which rend their hearts. In one home a fair, bright girl mars the beauty of her early womanhood by a flippant disregard of her mother's wishes, and by an exaltation of her own pleasure-loving disposition as the one law of her life. In another, a mere child, hasty and uncontrolled in temper, is the dread of the whole household, and at last becomes its tyrant, because every wish is gratified rather than that a scene should be provoked. In yet another a grown-up son is callous about his mother's anxiety and his father's counsels; and gladly ignores his home associations as he drifts away upon the sea of vice, and there becomes a miserable wreck. With each of these it might have been otherwise. If authority had been asserted, and steadily maintained, before bad habits were formed; if firm resolution on the part of the parents had taken the place of indulgent laxity, if, instead of being left to chance, character had been moulded during the time when it was plastic—these might, with God's blessing, have grown up to be wise, pure-hearted, courageous followers of Christ—who would not only have sweetened the atmosphere of home, but would have done something to purify and illumine society, as the salt and the light of the world.

The sin of which Adonijah was guilty, whose sources we have tried to discover, was the assumption of unlawful authority and state, which involved rebellion against his own father.

Ambition is not always wrong. It is a common inspiration often nerving men to attempt daring and noble deeds. Desire for distinction, with capacity for it, may often be regarded as the voice of God summoning to high effort. The world would soon be stagnant without ambition. The scholar working for a prize, the writer or speaker resolving to make a name, the man of business pressing onward past the indolent and the ne'er-do-weel, are not to be condemned, so long as they seek lawful objects by lawful means. Those who strenuously and hopefully fulfil the duties of their present sphere will be called higher, either in this world or the next, for God means us to rise by our fidelity where we are, and not by discontent with what we are. Ambition may have conscience in it, and this will reveal itself in the steady and minute performance of small duties. Any who are content, with tireless hand, to make crooked things straight and rough places plain, will ultimately see glory revealed. But if ambition is not ruled by righteousness, if it is not modified by love and consideration for others, it becomes a sin, and will prove to be the herald of disobedience and death, for it is such ambition which has cursed the world by tyrannies and bloodshed, and dragged down angels from realms of light. This was the ambition which let Adonijah exalt himself, and say, "I will be king."



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It may be said that his conduct was natural enough, although it was too precipitate, because he would legitimately succeed his father in due course, as his eldest surviving son. But this was not so. The law of primogeniture was not law for Israel. The invisible King expressly reserved to Himself the right of appointing the ruler of His people, as is evident from Deut. xvii. 14 and 15. The government was theocratic, not monarchical nor democratic. David himself had been chosen and anointed in preference to Jonathan, Saul's son, and Solomon, David's younger son, had already been designated as his successor through the prophet Nathan, partly because he was best fitted to become the man of peace who should erect Jehovah's temple, and partly as a sign to David that his sin with Bathsheba was forgiven. It was not as the "leader of a court cabal," but as a prophet inspired by Jehovah, that Nathan had made this solemn appointment. Adonijah knew this perfectly well; he acknowledged it to Bathsheba in the fifteenth verse of the second chapter, and therefore, when he declared, "*I will be king*," he was deliberately and knowingly setting his will against God's, and this was a sin.

The divine choice often differs from the human, for "*the Lord seeth not as man seeth*." In his reply to the sons of Zebedee, Jesus declared that God is not swayed by favouritism, nor moved by arbitrary impulse, but assigns to each his position according to his fitness. This should give us contentment with our lot, and should emphasise the precept, "*Seekest thou great things for thyself; seek them not*." Though it is natural enough to wish for escape from the fret of poverty, or the weariness of pain, and to win for ourselves wealth or prominence, we must be on our guard against the indulgence of defiant self-will, like that of him who said, "*I will be king*."

Adonijah's motive in aspiring to the throne was not that he might the better care for the welfare of others, but that he might selfishly enjoy wealth and honour. He cared much for outward show, while he failed to cultivate inward worth, preparing for himself chariots, horsemen, and a retinue of servants, but never displaying a love of justice or ability in statesmanship. And such little motives as his never make greatness.

Adonijah was not the last to be attracted by glitter and tinsel, and to live for earthly things which perish in the using. The candidate who cares much for honour and nothing for learning, the professional man who will sacrifice reputation to win a fortune, and all who wrong others in order to better themselves, only gain what is transient and unsatisfying. It would be well for all to learn the lesson (not least he for whom the ceremony is primarily intended), which is symbolically taught when a Pope is crowned. The Master of the Ceremonies takes a lighted taper in one hand, and in the other a reed with a handful of flax fastened to it. The flax flares up for



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a moment, and then the flame dies away into thin, almost imperceptible, ashes, which fall at the Pontiff's feet, as the choir chant the refrain "Pater sanctus, sic transit gloria mundi." No earthly honour is worth having except it is the result or the reward of character. Even in Pagan Rome the Temple of Honour could only be reached through the Temple of Virtue. And over the gateway of the greatest of all kingdoms in which Christ Jesus is supreme, this motto is inscribed indelibly—"*He that humbleth himself shall be exalted, and he that exalteth himself shall be abased.*"

How often such ambition is accompanied by disregard of the rights of others! What did Adonijah care for his father's dignity, or his brother's claims? David was still on the throne, and Solomon's right to succeed him had been authoritatively proclaimed, and yet, with inbred selfishness, this ambitious prince declared, "*I will be king!*" The lawfulness of any ambition may often be tested by the amount of selfishness which inheres in it. If desire for distinction, or wealth, leads one to crush a competitor to the wall without ruth, or to refuse all help to others in a struggle where every man seems to fight for his own hand, its lawfulness may well be questioned. Our Lord taught us to love even our enemies, and surely competitors have a still stronger claim on our consideration, and certainly all who belong to a church which is based on sacrifice, and symbolised by a cross, should even in such matters deny themselves, and seek every man his neighbour's good.

All sin is the worse when it is committed, as Adonijah's was, in defiance of warning. He deliberately repeated his brother's offence. Yet he knew the tragic story of his death, and how his brilliant life had been ended by violence in a wood, where he perished without a friend; and he must often have seen his father brooding alone over the trouble thus caused, as if he was still whispering to himself: "*O Absalom, my son, would God I had died for thee! O Absalom, my son, my son!*" Yet the very sin of Absalom which had been so terribly punished, Adonijah boldly committed.

History is crowded with examples of ambitious men who died in disappointment and despair,—Alexander, who conquered a world, and then wept because there were no more worlds to conquer, perished in a scene of debauchery, after setting fire to the city. Hannibal, who filled three bushel measures with the gold rings of fallen knights, at last, by poison self-administered, died unwept in a foreign land. Caesar, who had practically the whole world at his feet, was stabbed to the heart by so-called friends, even Brutus being among them. Napoleon, the scourge and conqueror of Europe, died, a heart-broken exile, in St Helena. Indeed, it is written in letters of blood on the pages of history, "*The expectation of the wicked shall perish.*"

Happily, angels' voices are calling us to higher things. Conscience whispers to us of duty and love. Christ Himself, from the Cross, which was the stepping-stone to His throne, still cries to every one who will listen, "*Follow me.*"



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The false must be displaced by the true—the world by the Christ—the usurper by the Divinely-appointed King. It was thus that Adonijah's scheme was defeated. Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, and Nathan, the prophet, hurried in to tell David of Adonijah's revolt against his authority, and that at his coronation-festival, then begun, even Joab, the commander-in-chief, and Abiathar, the priest, were present. Then David's old decision and promptitude reasserted themselves once more. At his command, Solomon, his designated successor, was seated on the King's own mule, and rode in state to Gihon, where Zadok anointed him in Jehovah's name; and when the trumpet was blown all the people said, "*God save King Solomon!*"

It was the crowning of the new king which proved the dethronement of the false; and this fact enshrines a principle divine and permanent. False doctrine is overcome, not by abuse, but by the proclamation of the true. Evil, whether enthroned in the heart or in the world, is conquered by greater good. The strong man armed, only keeps his goods in peace, until One stronger than he comes to bind him and cast him out. Christ conquers the devil, be he where he may. "*For this purpose the Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil.*"

In the progress of Solomon, as he rode on his mule to Jerusalem, amid the acclamations of the people, we see the Old Testament counterpart to the New Testament narrative, which tells how Christ Jesus entered Jerusalem as its king, while the people met Him with welcomes, and with palms, and children sang His praises. And in both is a symbol of His advent to every heart, and, if He be but welcomed as rightful king, He will take to Himself His power, and reign.

HIRAM, THE INSPIRED ARTIFICER

BY REV. W. J. TOWNSEND, D.D.

The Temple of Solomon was the crown of art in the old world. There were temples on a larger scale, and of more massive construction, but the enormous masses of masonry of the oldest nations were not comparable with the artistic grace, the luxurious adornments, and the harmonious proportions of this glorious House of God. David had laid up money and material for the great work, but he was not permitted to carry it out. He was a man of war, and blood-stained hands were not to build the temple of peace and righteousness. Solomon was the providential man for such an undertaking. He had large ideas, a keen sense of beauty, generous instincts, a religious nature, a literary training, and a highly cultivated mind. He was in peaceful alliance with surrounding nations, many of whom would be drawn into requisition for the suitable materials. They had to supply the cedar wood, iron, copper, brass, tin, gold, silver, and the rich fabrics which have made proverbial the sumptuous and beautiful raiment and decorations of those times, with the rarest marbles that the quarries of Lebanon and Bezetha could contribute. So with the thousands of busy builders and artificers,



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“Like some tall palm, the graceful fabric grew,”

until it stood complete on Mount Moriah, an inspiration to the people, a continual benediction to the nation, and the envy of many a covetous conqueror.

The name of one man only has been handed down the ages as having specially signalled himself in the decoration of the temple. Solomon must procure the best of human talent and genius for the perfection of the work he meditated. Therefore he not only made a treaty with Hiram, King of Tyre, for supplies of material, but of workmen, and chief of these, one whose artistic productions were to be the best adornments of the House of God for succeeding centuries. He was a tried veteran in decorative work, an expert in almost every kind of art, and fit to be placed in the position of chief superintendent of so superb a building. The King of Tyre sent to Solomon a testimony which was eloquent in his praise: *“I have sent a cunning man endued with understanding . . . the son of a woman of the daughters of Dan, his father was a man of Tyre, skilful to work in gold, and in silver, in brass, in iron, in stone, and in timber, in purple, in blue, and in fine linen, and in crimson; also to grave any manner of graving, and to find out every device”* (2 Chron. ii. 13, 14). Another record says: *“He was filled with wisdom, and understanding, and cunning to work all works in brass”* (1 Kings vii. 14).

It is a significant fact in the history that Hiram, this expert artificer, bearing the same name as his king, should have had an Israelitish mother, and a Gentile father who had also been a worker in metal. Thus he got his artistic taste and training from the father, his religious knowledge and sympathy from the mother. Religious feeling and sympathy he certainly had, as his magnificent work in the temple fully demonstrated.

Hiram constructed of bright, burnished brass, an immense laver, called “a molten sea,” to be used for the ablutions of the priests. It was capable of containing from fifteen to twenty thousand gallons of water, and the ornamentation was elaborate exceedingly. Under the brim were two rows of balls or bosses, encircling the laver. Twelve oxen, three looking in four different directions, supported it, and the brim was wrought like the brim of a cup with flowers of lilies. Beyond this, there were ten lavers, smaller in size, for the washing of such things as were offered in sacrifice. These were carefully decorated with lions, oxen, and cherubim on the borders of the ledges. They stood upon bases, measuring 6 feet by 4 1/2 feet, ornamented carefully on each side with garlands hanging in festoons, literally, “garlands, pensile work.” Each base had brasen wheels attached, with brasen axletrees, and brackets which stretched from the four upper corners of the bases to the outward rim of the laver. All the furnishings were also made by Hiram, such as pots, basons, shovels; probably also the golden



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altar, and table, with the seven-branched lamp stands, of which there were ten, of beautiful construction and ornamentation. But the most glorious work of Hiram was the construction of the two majestic brasen pillars, called Jachin and Boaz, They were stately in height, the shaft of each measuring 27 feet, a base of 12 feet, and two capitals of 13 1/2 feet, thus the whole height of each pillar being 52 1/2 feet. The decoration was equally graceful and elaborate, especially upon the capitals. The lower capitals had a fine network over the whole, and chain-work hanging in festoons outside. There were also pomegranates wrought upon them. The upper capitals, forming a cornice to the whole pillar, were ornamented with lily-work. At Persepolis there still stands a pillar, the cornice of which is carved with three rows of lily leaves. These pillars were esteemed the most important ornaments in the magnificent temple, the erection of which was the best feature of Solomon's reign. They were of such prominent importance that a name was affixed to each of them. One was called "Jachin," which means, "he will establish," the other was called "Boaz," which means "in strength." The ideas involved are stability and strength. Possibly the Psalmist had these pillars in his mind when he wrote, "*Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary*" (Ps. xcvi. 6); strength first, then beauty; strength as the foundation of divine work, then beauty, graceful finish, and ornament.

Hiram was an inspired artist and artificer. He was "*filled with wisdom and understanding, and cunning to work.*" We are told the same as to the great decorative workers of the Tabernacle, concerning whom the Lord said: "*See, I have called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur of the tribe of Judah: and I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones for setting, and in carving of wood, to work in all manner of workmanship*" (Exod. xxxi. 2-5). So also it is written of Aholiab, Ahisamach, and other Tabernacle workers.

It is instructive to find that in Scripture, genius as displayed in literary insight and facility, in ingenuity and inventiveness as to the various arts, and even in the conception of instruments of husbandry, is attributed to Divine inspiration. It may not be the same order of inspiration by which "*men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost*"; "*Searching what time or manner of time the spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow them*" (2 Peter i. 21; 1 Peter i. 11); but the fact is clear, whether it was inspiration of a different nature or in a different degree, that on men of special gifts in various departments and of the highest order, wisdom

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and understanding are a direct gift of the Holy Spirit. This truth was acknowledged in earliest times, and skilled experts in art or handicraft were reckoned to be under the inspiration of God. Among the heathen this belief lingered long. The ancient poets invoked the aid of their deities when entering on some great composition, and the devout earnestness of some recorded prayers is remarkable. There should be a line of demarcation drawn in this connection between a man of talent and a man of genius. Talent may be a matter of cultivation and perseverance. A man of ordinary intelligence may, by determined resolution, push his way to power in many directions, and the one talent may become ten talents. But genius is not mere cleverness, however well directed and carefully developed. Genius is creative and inventive; it has insight, it has imagination, it “bodies forth the forms of things unknown,” and “gives to airy nothings a local habitation and a name.” Isaiah speaks of the inspiration of the inventor of the agricultural instrument: “*His God doth instruct him aright, and doth teach him . . . This also cometh from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom*” (Isa. xxviii. 26-29).

When man required in the old time direct teaching of great religious truths and realities, God inspired prophets and seers, but the world required also to be educated, regulated, civilised. Therefore poets, painters, *litterateurs*, artists, and artificers were called for, by deep needs of humanity. God answered the need by giving the marvellous gift in various forms and degrees to men who had understanding of their times, and who by special insight were able to give impulses to progress in every direction. This truth is powerfully stated by a German metaphysician:—“Nothing calls us more powerfully to adore the living God than the appearance and embodiment of genius upon the earth. Whatever in the ordinary course of things we may choose to attribute to the mechanical process of cause and effect, the highest manifestations of intellect can be called forth only by the express will of the original Mind, independent of second causes. Genius descends upon us from the clouds precisely where we least look for it. Events may be calculated, predicted—spirits never; no earthly oracle announces the appearance of genius: the unfathomable will of the Creator suddenly calls to it—Be!”[1]

The Apostle Paul says concerning the Christ, “*IN HIM were all things created*” (Col. i. 16). Everything in the universe became objective, because they were first subjective in Christ, the second Person in the adorable Trinity. All things were made from forms and types which were in Himself before they were impressed on Creation. The infinite glories of sky, and air, and sea, the beauties of the tree, the flower, the bird, and all forms of life, the fleeting and recurring grandeurs that paint the

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seasons and the years, are all but revelations of the boundless resources and the ineffable beauties and qualities of the mind of Christ, our Master and Teacher. Our craving of genius, and its never-dying ambition, is to come ever nearer to the perfection of the Infinite Artist and Architect. The inspiration which filled the soul of Bezalel or Hiram may not be so elevated or elevating as that which enabled Isaiah to soar to the throne of the Eternal in speechless rapture, or which enabled Michael Angelo to represent in form and colour his vast conceptions of the beautiful and sublime; but it was as real, and in some aspects as serviceable in suggestion and realisation, as these. "God fulfils Himself in many ways." As the Divine Spirit plays on the minds of special men, one is turned to music, another to painting, another to sculpture, another to architecture, another to mechanics, and another to a smith's imaginings; but it is still the same Spirit that worketh in all and through all, and each may be perfected instruments by which He accomplishes His wise and gracious purposes in the uplift of men.

What a living force among men is the true poet, the man who can take words and weave them into forms of perfect rhythm, rhyme, and measure, and then fill them with thoughts so suggestive and burning, as that they become for ever a force in the hearts of men, thrilling the souls of men and women with lofty ideals, prompting them to noble deeds, nerving them to patience in suffering and courage in battle. What may not the artist accomplish by throwing on the canvas landscapes or seascapes, like Turner, Scripture scenes, like Raphael, or heroic deeds, like Millais? Do these things not speak to the heart through the eye effectually? And what refining influences may not be silently absorbed into the nature by the artificer, who works in metals, or in pottery, in glass, or in wood, producing shapes of graceful contour, and decoration of delicate beauty, so that the articles of the household or the warehouse may be an education to the mind, and become to it patterns of things in the heavens. The command to Moses on the Mount was, concerning all the furniture of the Tabernacle, which Bezalel and Aholiab had to construct was, "*See that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount*" (Heb. viii. 5). The beautiful things were in the mind of God first, and then had to be produced by the inspiration of the artist, in the house of prayer by the wisdom and deftness imparted by the Spirit.

It is possible, we sorrow to think, to misuse the Divine gift of artistic inspiration. The poet may devote his genius to animalism, like Byron, or to teach immoral license, like Swinburne; the painter may crowd his canvas with degrading ideas and vulgar representations, and the artificer may be ingenious in the production of forms of ugliness and degrading grotesqueness. Such desecration of great endowments is alike displeasing to God and ruinous to the man. Of such it may be said: "*He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?*" (Isa. xlv. 20).



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Thank God, that we may say truly that generally the superlatives might have been found sitting at the feet of Jesus. The heavy, dull masses of meaningless masonry which belonged to Egypt or Assyria, flowered into the pure, delicate, ideality of the Greek builders, and this again developed into the warm, spiritual, suggestive style of Christianity which has covered Christendom with consecrated buildings like the cathedrals of Cologne or Chartres. The art of twenty centuries has been proclaiming the Christ as perfect in beauty, in grace and refinement, as He is perfect in love and in sacrifice. The music of the past, in all its highest reaches from Gregory to Mendelssohn, celebrates His grand redemption. The most gifted poets, from Dante, peeling his threefold anthem from the topmost peak of Parnassus, to Shakespeare, with "his woodnotes wild"; from Milton, with his "sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs and harping symphonies," to Tennyson, with his "happy bells," which

"Ring in the valiant man and free,
The larger heart, the kindlier hand,"

but chief of all which

"Ring in the Christ that is to be,"

are resonant with loyalty and devotion to Him. Thus, all voices and all gifts, as they come from Christ, and are claimed by Christ, should be used for Him and Him alone. The lofty reach of genius is called to glorify Him, and the humblest gift of the peasant in the cottage, or the workman in the mill, or the little child at the mother's knee, are all due to Christ, to be devoted to Him, and also to be appreciated and rewarded by Him.

[1]Gustav Schwab, quoted by Ullmann, in *The Worship of Genius*.

JEROBOAM

BY REV. ALFRED ROWLAND, D.D., LL.B.

"Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin."—1 KINGS xiv. 16.

Jeroboam's character is worthy of serious study, not only because it influenced the destiny of God's ancient people, but because it suggests lessons of the utmost value to His people still. He may be fairly regarded as a type of those who are successful men of the world. He was not an example of piety, for he had none—nor of lofty principle, for he was an opportunist who made expediency the law of his life throughout. Yet he was permitted to win all that he could have hoped for, and reached the very zenith of his ambition, though he went down to the grave at last, defeated and dishonoured, with this as his record—he was the man "*who made Israel to sin.*"



Such a life as his throws a flood of light on our possibilities and perils, showing unscrupulous men both what they may possibly win, and what they will certainly lose.

Jeroboam appears to have been a man of lowly origin. Of his father Nebat, whose name is so often linked with his own, we know nothing, although an old Jewish tradition, preserved by Jerome, identifies him with Shimei, who was the first to insult David in his flight, and the first of all the house of Joseph to congratulate him on his return. All we know with certainty is that he belonged to the powerful tribe of Ephraim, which was always jealous of the supremacy of Judah, and therefore hated David, Solomon, and Rehoboam. It was this feeling of which Jeroboam skilfully availed himself when he split the kingdom of David in twain.



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In the Book of Kings, this remarkable man first appears as an ordinary workman, or possibly as a foreman of the masons who were engaged in building Fort Millo, one of the chief defences of the citadel of Zion, guarding its weakest point, and making it almost impregnable. Under the system of forced labour then in vogue, the workmen would be inclined to shirk their toil, and among them Jeroboam stood out in conspicuous contrast, by reason of his eagerness and industry. Solomon the king, who always had a keen eye for capacity, saw the young man that he was industrious, and after making some inquiries about him, raised him to the remunerative post of superintendent of the tribute payable by the tribe of Ephraim. It was, no doubt, a difficult office to fill, for the tribe was restive and powerful, but it would be very profitable, because the system on which taxes were collected, as is still usual in Eastern countries, gave immense opportunities for enrichment to an unscrupulous man. We may be sure, therefore, that Jeroboam quickly became wealthy. At the same time he won influence with the tribe, by expressing secret sympathy with his fellow-tribesmen, and he stealthily fostered their discontent until the opportunity came for asserting himself as a more successful Wat Tyler, in the kingdom which by that time Solomon had left to his foolish son, Rehoboam. Little did Solomon imagine that when he advanced Jeroboam he was preparing the instrument of his son's ruin, and that this Ephraimite would prove to be like the viper Aesop tells of, which a kind-hearted man took in from the cold, but which when roused by warmth from its torpor, killed its benefactor.

I

1. In looking for the elements which contributed to Jeroboam's rapidly-won success, we must certainly credit him with remarkable natural ability.

No one can read his biography carefully without noticing his shrewdness in seeing his chance when it came, and his boldness and promptitude in seizing it. He possessed such self-control that he kept his plans absolutely to himself until the critical moment, and then he made a daring dash for power, and won it. And these characteristics of his were gifts from God, as Ahijah the prophet emphatically declared.

We are far too timid in the maintenance of our professed belief that physical and mental gifts are divine in their origin. Mediaeval theology, which was largely tinged by Pagan philosophy, sometimes went so far as to attribute exceptional beauty, or talent, to evil powers; and we are apt to trace them to a merely human source. But keen perception, sound judgment, a retentive memory, a vigorous imagination, and, not least, good common-sense, are among the talents entrusted to us by God Himself, who will by-and-by take account of His servants.



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This is regarded by many as an old-fashioned and effete theory. They assume that the doctrine of evolution has conclusively shown that no man is a new creation, but is a necessary product of preceding lives; that his lineaments and talents may be traced to parentage, that the brilliance of the Cecils and the solid sense of the Cavendishes, for example, are simply a matter of heritage. But even admitting this to be largely true, it does not invalidate the statement that our gifts are of God—He is the Father of all the “families” of the earth, as well as of individuals. He does not rule over one year only, but over all the generations. Time and change, of which we make much, are nothing to Him. The theory of evolution, therefore, merely extends our conceptions of the range of His power and forethought. Whether a child presents a striking contrast to his parents, or whether he seems to be a re-incarnation of their talents, it is equally true that all things are of God, and that for Him and by Him all things consist. Natural abilities are Divine trusts.

There is startling unevenness in the distribution of these gifts. Not only do two families differ widely in their talents and possessions, but children of the same parents are often strangely unlike, physically and mentally. One is radiantly beautiful, and another has no charm in appearance or in manners. One is physically vigorous, and another is frail as a hothouse flower. One is so quick that lessons are no trouble at all, and another wearily plods over them till ready to give up in despair. Evidences of this unevenness of distribution meet us everywhere. One man will make a fortune where another would not suspect a chance. One remains a third-rate salesman all his days, and would spend even his holidays in looking into shop windows, for his soul does not rise beyond them; while his comrade is brimful of talent, and the world will ring at last with his name and fame. We say “it is in them”; but what is in them is of God, and these very differences between men are intended by Him to elicit mutual consideration and mutual helpfulness; for we are members one of another, and the deficiencies of one are to be supplemented by the superabundance of another.

2. The most brilliant gifts are of no great value apart from personal diligence, such as distinguished Jeroboam.

He did thoroughly the work which lay to his hand, whether as mason, tax-collector, or king. Such diligence often rectifies the balance between two men of unequal ability. The plodding tortoise still beats the hare, who believes herself to be so swift that she can afford time to sleep. Any one who looks back on his classmates will see that the cleverest have not proved the most successful, but that the prizes of life have usually gone to those who diligently developed to the utmost what they had. Scripture is crowded with examples of this. Jacob laboured night and day, and therefore he prospered,

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even under Laban, unjust and exacting though Laban was. Joseph won his way to the front, though an exile and a slave, for he made himself indispensable in prison, and in the kingdom. *“Seest thou a man diligent in business? he shall stand before kings, he shall not stand before mean men.”* And because this is a Divine law, it prevails in higher spheres also. If a Christian uses, in the service of his heavenly Master, the gifts he possesses, faith in God, knowledge of truth, power in prayer, persuasive speech—his five talents will become ten, or his two will gain other two. *“To him that hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have abundance.”*

3. It may be said that talent and diligence combined do not always win success, and so far as this world is concerned, it is true. Possibly Jeroboam would never have come to the front if Solomon had not happened to notice him. But if we read the interviews which Ahijah the prophet had with Jeroboam, and with his mother, we shall learn to recognise the control of God in this also.

If God over-rules anything he must over-rule everything, because what appears to be the most trivial incident, often has the most far-reaching results on human character and destiny. Trifles are often turning-points in one's history. A casual word spoken in our favour may bring about the introduction which leads to a happy marriage, or to a prosperous business career. It may not have been known to us at the time, nor thought of again by the friend who spoke about us, but back of his friendly utterance God was. In life we are not infrequently like a passenger on board ship, who chats to those about him, but pays no regard to the wheel, or to the seaman who controls it, still less to the officer who gives the man his instructions; and yet the turning of that wheel, in this direction or in that, involves safety, or wreck. God keeps control—unseen—over the lives of men, and it was more than a lucky chance which led Solomon to notice the smart, stalwart worker at Millo, and raise him to a higher post.

The wise king showed his wisdom in rewarding as he did, fidelity and diligence. It is because this is often not done in offices and warehouses that there is so little mutual goodwill between servants and masters. An employer will often treat his people as mere “hands,” who are to sell his goods and do his bidding, but directly work is slack, he will turn them adrift without scruple or ruth; or if they remain for years in his service, will give no increase of wage or salary proportioned to capacity and diligence. A Christian employer, at least, should follow a more excellent way, and advance a diligent servant, not because he cannot be done without, or because it is for the good of the firm to retain his services, but because his promotion is right and richly deserved. It would be a woful thing if God treated us exactly as we treat our fellows.



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But whatever the immediate result, fidelity and industry are called for from us all. Our Lord Himself said, "*It is My meat and My drink to do the will of My Father in heaven,*" and this He felt to be as true of His work at the carpenter's bench as in the precincts of the Temple. Whether in the business, or in the household, or in the Church, the King is ever watching His servants, and of His grace will raise every faithful one to higher service and larger possibilities. "*The Father, who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly,*" and His reward will come not only in loftier position but in ennobled character

"Toil is no thorny crown of pain,
Bound round man's brow for sin;
True souls from it all strength may gain,
High manliness may win.

"O God, who workest hitherto,
Working in all we see,
Fain would we be, and hear, and do,
As best it pleaseth Thee."

II.

Jeroboam's defects in character, and indeed his actual sins, were many and great.

1. His ingratitude to his benefactor was a disgrace to him.

He fostered and used, as far as he dared, the discontent which smouldered in the tribe of Ephraim, as the result partly of jealousy of Judah, and partly of restiveness under extravagant expenditure and increasing taxation, and this treachery went on until he was expelled the country by Solomon, and driven out as an exile into Egypt, where, however, he still carried out his ambitious schemes, till his chance came under Rehoboam.

Many a man kicks away the ladder by which he rose to fortune. He likes to divest himself of the past wherein he needed help, for it was a time of humiliation, and by cutting off association with former friends, would fain lead people to believe that his success was entirely due to his own cleverness. Even his own parents are sometimes neglected and ignored, and these, to whom he owed his life, who cared for him in his helpless infancy and wayward youth, are left unhelped. "*Cursed is the man who setteth light by his father or mother.*"

But though we naturally cry "shame" upon such an one, it is possible that we ourselves are acting an unfilial part towards our Heavenly Father. And the more He prospers us



the greater is the danger of our forgetting Him, who crowns us with loving-kindness and tender mercies.

2. Jeroboam's sin against Solomon was as nothing compared with his sin against God.

From the first he seems to have been an irreligious man. He regarded religion as a kind of restraint on the lower orders, and therefore useful in government. Priests and prophets constituted, in his opinion, the vanguard of the police, and they should, therefore, be supported and encouraged by the State. As to the form religion assumed, he was not particular. In Egypt he had become accustomed to the ritual of



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Apis and Mnevis, which was by no means so gross and demoralising as the idolatry of the Canaanites, and he evidently could not see why the worship of Jehovah could not be carried on by those who believed in Him through the use of emblems, and, if need be, of idols. Therefore he set about the establishment of the cult of Apis, and “*made two calves of gold, and set the one in Bethel and the other put he in Dan.*” This was the sin for which he was condemned again and again with almost wearisome iteration. He was by no means a fanatical idolater, and this act of his was simply the dictate of his worldly policy. He was engaged in the establishment of the separate kingdom of Israel, which for many a long year was to exist side by side with the kingdom of Judah. But this policy of separation would be impossible so long as there was the old spirit of unity in the nation. And this unity was expressed and fostered most of all by the existence of the Temple in Jerusalem, the common centre to which all the tribes resorted, and from which all government emanated. If this continued so to be, it was evident that the nation would sooner or later reassert its unity. The men of Ephraim were just now exasperated by the taxation imposed by Solomon, and increased by Rehoboam, and they still resented the precedence and supremacy of the rival tribe of Judah; but this feeling might prove transient, it might be some day dissipated by the statesmanship of a wiser king, and then the separated kingdom would die out, and all God’s people would appear as one. To prevent this was Jeroboam’s aim in the erection of the golden calves.

It was a policy which would naturally appeal to the jealous people, who were told that they ought not to be dependent for their means of worship on Judah, nor send up their tribute for the support of the Temple in Jerusalem. And they would welcome a scheme which brought worship within easier range, and saved the cost of leaving business and undertaking a wearisome journey in order to keep the feasts. Thus, without deliberate choice, they swiftly glided down into idolatry and national ruin.

Jeroboam thus led the people to a violation of one of the fundamental laws in the Decalogue. For if the first command was not disobeyed by all the people, the second was, and these laws are still obligatory, nor can they be broken with impunity. With fatal facility those who worshipped Jeroboam’s golden calf became identified with the heathen, and the kingdom thus set upon a false foundation was at last utterly destroyed. And as surely as the tide flows in upon the shore, so surely will the laws of God bring retribution on all who are impenitent. To every man the choice is proffered between the false and the true ideal of life. On the one side the tempter points to wealth and position, which may often be won, as Jeroboam won it, by unscrupulousness; and on the other side stands the Son of God, who, though rejected and crucified, was nevertheless the Victor over sin, and who now from His heavenly throne exclaims, “*To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne.*”



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ASA

BY REV. ALFRED ROWLAND, D.D., LL.B.

1 KINGS xv. 8-24; 2 CHRON. xiv-xvi.

Asa was the third king who reigned over the separated kingdoms of Judah. His father was Ahijah, of whom it is sternly said, "*He walked in all the sins of his father, Rehoboam, which he had done before him.*" A worse bringing-up than Asa's could scarcely be imagined. As a child, and as a lad, he was grievously tempted by his father's example, and by the influence of an idolatrous court, which was crowded by flatterers and panderers. The leading spirit of the court-circle was Maachah, "*the King's mother,*" as she is called—the Sultana Valide. She was a woman of strong character, and held a high official position. She was the grand-daughter of Absalom, and was notorious for her fanatical idolatry. In short, she was the evil genius of the kingdom, like the Chinese Queen-mother of our own times, although, happily, Asa possessed a force of character which the young Emperor of China seems to lack. It is certainly noteworthy, that, with so much against the cultivation of a religious life, "*Asa did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, as did David his father.*" Sometimes on a heap of corruption, which we are glad to hurry past with abhorrence, God plants a beautiful and fragrant flower, as if in defiance of man's neglect; and thus Asa appeared in the family, and in the court of Ahijah, his father—a God-fearing, single-minded lad, with a will of his own.

As there was hope for him, there is hope for all. Whatever a man's parentage and circumstances may be, he is not forced into sin, and has no right to say, "*We are delivered to do all these abominations.*" Amid all his difficulties and discouragements, if he is earnestly seeking to serve God, and looking to Him for help and hope, he may triumph over the most adverse circumstances, and prove himself to be a true citizen of heaven. If he waits in prayer on God, as Joseph did in Egypt, Daniel in Babylon, and Asa in Ahijah's court, he will not only be endued with piety, but with an independent spirit, and a resolute will, which will make him a power for good in the very sphere where he seemed likely to be crushed by the powers of evil. It is not in vain that the apostle gave the exhortation, "*Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.*" Asa was a noble example of obedience to that command.

It is clear from the narrative, in the First Book of Kings, that Asa was rich in noble qualities, such as manly resoluteness, political sagacity, and administrative vigour. But special prominence is given in the Bible (as one might expect) to his religious sincerity, for it is emphatically said—"*Asa's heart was perfect with the Lord all his days.*" This does not mean that he was sinless, that he had reached moral perfection, but that he had completely, with whole-heartedness, given himself over to the will of God, to be and to do what He ordained.



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The proof of this was seen in the reformation Asa daringly attempted. This is the record of it—*“He took away the sodomites out of the land, and removed all the idols that his father had made. And also Maachah his mother, even her he removed from being queen, because she had made an idol in a grove; and Asa destroyed her idol, and burnt it by the brook Kidron.”*

Things must have gone badly in the kingdom before he ascended the throne. Although it was only about twenty years since the death of Solomon, irreligion and vice had corrupted the nation. The truth is that evil spreads faster than good in this world, which is evidence that it has fallen. We have embodied this truth in a familiar proverb—“Ill weeds grow apace.” If we neglect a garden, we are soon confronted with weeds, not with flowers. Valuable fruit-trees grow slowly, but a poisonous fungus will spring up in a night.

Evidence of this often appears in national affairs. A few months of war will suffice to desolate many homes, to destroy fertile fields, and to burn down prosperous villages, but it is long before that waste can be repaired, confidence restored, and prosperity and goodwill re-established. The devil will carry fire and sword through the world with the swiftness of a whirlwind, but Jesus Christ patiently waits and weeps over an irresponsible people, as he says, *“Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life.”*

The same contrast in the progress of good and evil appears in our own experience. If we yield to evil, and indulge sinful passions, we move so swiftly downward that it is hard to stop,—like an Alpine climber on a snow-slope, who, having once slipped, in a few minutes' rush loses all that he has gained by toilsome climbing, and becomes less able to make new effort because of his wounds and bruises. Among our Lord's disciples, we see Judas swiftly rushing on self-destruction, whereas Peter and John received years of discipline, before they were fully prepared to fulfil their mission. No doubt, in such cases evil may have been, making slow and stealthy advance under the surface, though the result appears with startling suddenness, just as gas will escape without noise, and creep into every corner of the room; but when a light comes in, death and destruction come in a flash. Evil is an explosion, good is a growth.

This perhaps accounts for the facts that evil had quickly grown strong in the kingdom; while, on the other hand, Asa's attempt at reformation was incomplete and transient. He seems, however, to have done what he could, and that is more than can be said of many. If he had been a timid, half-hearted man he might have been content to worship Jehovah in his private room, and thus rebuke, by his example, any idolaters who happened to hear of it. But his was no policy of *laissez-faire*. He felt that the evils encouraged by the father ought to be put down by the son, and this he did with a strong hand, wherever he could reach it.



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Unhappily, there is a sad dearth of such reforming zeal in the Church, and in the world. Even among those who in private lament prevailing evils there is a singular contentment and tolerance even of those which might be at once removed. This is grievously common in large centres of population, where each individual feels insignificant among such vast multitudes, and loses the sense of individual responsibility in the vastness of the crowd which surrounds him. How many professing Christians, for example, deplore drunkenness and impurity, while they shrink from any kind of open protest, and will not even trouble themselves to vote for representatives who will fight these evils; and if a preacher boldly denounces such iniquities they will even beg him to leave questions of that kind alone, and to confine himself to doctrinal exposition. We are all too apt to forget that truth and righteousness, sobriety and holiness, are of God; and that the mission of Jesus Christ was to establish these, and to put away sin, even by the sacrifice of Himself. The religion He exemplified was not to be ranged on the shelves of a library, but to prove itself a living force in politics, in business, and at home. What was His own doctrine? *“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”* Evils outside the Church, then, are to be combated, and not tolerated, by all true Christians—even though in the result they are maligned as renegades to their party, or jeered at as Pharisees or Puritans. The late Tom Hughes was quite right half a century ago, when he thus described to the lads before him the lot of a would-be reformer.

“If the angel Gabriel were to come down from heaven, and head a successful rise against the most abominable and unrighteous vested interests which this poor old world groans under, he would most certainly lose his character for many years, probably for centuries, not only with upholders of the said vested interest, but with the respectable mass of the people he has delivered. They wouldn’t ask him to dinner, or let their names appear with his in the papers; they would be careful how they spoke of him in the palaver, or at their clubs. What can we expect, then, when we have only poor gallant, blundering men like Garibaldi and Mazzini, and righteous causes which do not triumph in their hands; men who have holes enough in their armour, God knows, easy to be hit by respectabilities sitting in their lounge-chairs, and having large balances at their bankers. But you are brave, gallant boys, who have no balances or bankers, and hate easy-chairs. You only want to have your heads set straight to take the right side; so bear in mind that majorities, especially respectable ones, are nine times out of ten in the wrong, and that if you see a man or boy striving earnestly on the weaker side, however wrong-headed or blundering he may be, you are not to go and join the cry against him. If you cannot join him, and help him, and make him wiser, at any rate remember that he has found something in the world which he will fight and suffer for—which is just what you have got to do for yourselves—and so think and speak of him tenderly.”



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Those manly words are worth quoting in full, and they will fitly set forth the service young Asa rendered to his kingdom, and to the world at large.

I.

It may be well to analyse a little more closely the reformation this right-hearted king attempted. He diminished opportunities for sin. The traffic in vice, by which many were making profit, he put down with a strong hand. And there are hotbeds of vice to be found in our own land, where strong appeal is made to the lusts of the flesh, and where intoxicating drink incites men to yield to passions which need restraint. Indeed, even in our streets moral perils assail the young and innocent, which no Christian nation ought to tolerate. We often meet the assertion that we cannot make people moral by Acts of Parliament; but if dens of infamy, which it is perilous to enter, are swept away, if gin-palaces and public-houses which flood the land with ruin are diminished in number, and in their hours of trade, it would certainly lessen the evils we deplore. Vested interests fight against such a change, and many on the side of sobriety and righteousness shrink from the contest, so that we need the inspiration which God gave to Asa, if we are to win the victory.

This kingly reformer not only lessened opportunities for vice, but certain evil influences in his kingdom he brushed aside with a strong hand. Maachah, the king's mother, was a potent influence on the side of idolatry. It seemed at first impossible to touch her. The king was indebted to her. She was aged, and age merits respect, and, therefore, some would argue that she might be tolerated for the few years she yet had to live. But these pleas did not avail her, for the issues involved were too serious for the nation, and for the kingdom of God. And because "*Asa's heart was perfect,*" completely devoted to Jehovah's cause, he "*removed her from being queen,*" and publicly burnt the idol she had put up.

Leaders in evil are sometimes found among the leaders of the world. Clever, unscrupulous men succeed in winning power through their want of principle, and even of scruple. Distinguished writers, gifted with brilliant style, or poetic power, exercise widespread influence for evil. Young people of singularly attractive personality win to themselves a large following, and use it for the worst ends. Many a golden image, or beautiful object of adoration, still stands on the high places of the world; and even if we cannot pull them down, as Asa did, at least we can say to the evil one, who set them up, "*Be it known unto thee that we will not serve thy gods nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.*"

The history of Asa should inspire us to a renewal of war against the evils which Jesus Christ died to put away. Victory will not come without conflict. In respect to anxiety we are to be quiescent as the lilies, which neither toil nor spin, but in respect of moral evil, within or without, we must be vigilant and strenuous.



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“Lilies have no sin
Leading them astray,
No false heart within
That would them bewray,
Nought to tempt them in
An evil way;
And if canker come and blight,
Nought will ever put them right.

“But good and ill, I know,
Are in my being blent,
And good or ill may flow
From mine environment;
And yet the ill, laid low,
May better the event;
Careless lilies, happy ye!
But careless life were death to me.”

II.

The courage of Asa had as its root confidence in God, and this is shown more fully in the narrative which appears in the Second Book of Chronicles than in the First Book of Kings.

His reforming work—carried out with ruthless vigour—naturally raised up adversaries on every side. In the court itself Maachah and her party were implacable. Outside it the idolatrous priests, and all their hangers-on, whose vested interests were abolished, were plotting and scheming against the king. But Asa was imperturbable, because he had found God to be his refuge and strength. The man who really fears God finds the fear of his fellows thereby cast out.

To Jehovah, therefore, the brave king brought all his difficulties. This was beautifully exemplified when he found himself confronted with an overwhelming force of Ethiopians, for then *“Asa cried unto the Lord his God, and said, Lord, it is nothing with Thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go against this multitude. O Lord, Thou art our God; let not man prevail against Thee.”* Prayer was the secret of his strength, and in it we also may find all the help we need in meeting our discouragements—the ignorance which tries our patience, the indifference to God which nothing seems to stir, the vice which holds its victim as an octopus, the sin which is as subtle as it is strong. Against them all we have no power, and may well pray as Asa did. “Lord, help us.” Then He will fulfil the promise, *“When the enemy comes in like a flood, the spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him.”*



III.

After his great deliverance Asa renewed his consecration. The need for its renewal shows that in character and conduct he was far from being all that he ought to have been. He was not “*perfect*” in that sense. His earnestness cooled down. Through his carelessness the “*high places*” were re-erected. He seems to have been content that the “*groves*,” with their grosser forms of idolatry, were gone, and that other forms might be tolerated, just as some, who have conquered their vices, are morally ruined by what the world calls little sins. But, in spite of these failings, the judgment of God, who is ever slow to anger and of great mercy, was that Asa’s heart was “*perfect*”—sound, whole, and sincere, though not sinless.



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How happy it is that God judges not as man judges, that He can unerringly read the heart, and graciously accepts even the imperfect and blundering service which we sincerely offer to Him. Jehu accurately executed Jehovah's fiat, whereas Asa's obedience seemed imperfect; yet the latter was commended, and the former condemned, because Asa, unlike Jehu, was right in heart. Therefore we may be encouraged still to do our little part in God's service, in spite of the failures and imperfections of the past, if only we can say, "*Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee.*"

AHAZIAH

BY REV. J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.

"And the destruction of Ahaziah was of God, by coming to Joram; for, when he was come, he went out with Jehoram against Jehu the son of Nimshi, whom the Lord had anointed to cut off the house of Ahab."—2 CHRON. xxii. 7.

We rarely read this part of the Bible. And I do not wonder at it. For those particular chapters are undoubtedly dreary and monotonous. They contain the names of a number of incompetent and worthless kings who did nothing that was worth writing about, and who were singularly alike, so that when you have heard the story of one of them you know pretty well the story of all. It is the good lives that furnish attractive reading, because there is so much individuality and variety in them, so many pictorial lights and shadows. A novel in which all the characters are mean, would be read by nobody. The blackness needs to be relieved by something good, for darkness is always monotonous. Bad men show a dreary sameness in their thoughts and doings, their rise and fall. The godly are like nature illumined by the sunlight, manifold and infinite; the wicked are like nature when the darkness covers it, uniform and dismal. Nearly all that is said in the Bible about these bad kings, is that they walked in the ways of Ahab or Jeroboam or some other wicked person, that they closely imitated the doings of their model. The Bible does not waste space in describing them more accurately. One or two specimens do for all.

But certain things are said about Ahaziah which afford room for reflection, and may, perhaps, be useful to us if we take them in a right way.

And first let me give you a lesson in genealogy. These lessons are often very wearisome. Let two men get on talking about who was the cousin, father, grandfather, great-grandmother, and what not of such a person, and you begin at once to wish that you were out of it, or that you could quietly go to sleep until they settle the question; and yet it is not so unimportant as it seems. When a man writes a biography he deems it his duty to go back three or four generations, and tell you what sort of fathers and mothers and grandmothers and even great-grandsires his hero had. It is very wearisome, but it

is very necessary. The story is not complete without that—for breed and ancestry go quite as far with men as with cattle, and often further.



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Ahaziah's descent was right on one side, but it was very mean on the other. He had David's blood in his veins, and Jehoshaphat's, and mingled with that, the venom of heathenism. His mother was Athaliah, and Athaliah was the daughter of Jezebel, and Jezebel was a licentious heathen princess whom Ahab on an evil day had made his wife.

There is nothing in the Bible more tragical and more infamous than the story of this woman Jezebel, and the part which she took in shaping the destiny of the Jewish nation. She was a Syro-Phenician princess, whose father ruled over the powerful and wealthy cities of Tyre and Sidon. Ahab was caught by her beauty, and by the attractive political alliance of which she was the pledge. Some think that the forty-fifth Psalm had reference to her, which speaks of the daughter of Tyre coming with gold of Ophir, splendidly arrayed, and bringing a handsome dowry with her. Ahab thought he was marrying wealth and dignity, and providing for the greatness of his house, and, as often happens in such marriages, he forgot to ask for a certificate of character, forgot to ask what sort of mother he was providing for his children. She came with all her meretricious splendour covering one of the most fiendish natures that ever wore a woman's form. She developed, if she did not bring with her, all imaginable vices—her vindictive passion revelled in blood; her religion was the filthiest licentiousness; her beauty became the painted face of a common harlot. Her figure stands forth in the Bible as the very worst exemplification of the dark possibilities of human nature. Tennyson says men do not mount as high as the best of women—but they scarce can sink as low as the worst. For men at most differ as heaven and earth; but women, worst and best, as heaven and hell. And this woman became, alas, the mother of kings; and all who went forth from her inherited her nature, and forgot nothing of her training. For several generations the taint of her evil influence was felt throughout the whole court life of Israel, and the licentious abominations which she had introduced infected the whole national life. Ahab married for money and position, and this was what came of it.

Her influence extended also to the southern kingdom of Judah. Jehoram, King of Judah, must needs marry Ahab's daughter, Athaliah, who was the exact counterpart of her mother, Jezebel. Another wedding in which morals and religion were sacrificed on the altar of gain—for by means of it a small kingdom was to be cemented in alliance with a greater, and another rich dowry to be secured. And the same dreary results followed—a court corrupted with all manner of impurity, sons and daughters initiated into all the mysteries of wickedness, demoralisation spreading all around.



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In this atmosphere Ahaziah was trained. His mother's name, says the record briefly, was Athaliah, the daughter of Omri, that is, the direct daughter of Jezebel. He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly—wherefore he did evil in the sight of the Lord, for they were his counsellors after the death of his father to his destruction. What else could result in a home of which Athaliah was the head, in which the main training and influence were supplied by one of Jezebel's brood. The significant feature in all these Chronicles is the immense influence of women in shaping the lives and characters of kings. The men seem to have little to do with it; the women are almost supreme. Sons do not take after their fathers but after their mothers. Again and again we read of a good king who had a wicked father—Josiah, Hezekiah, and others. They shake off their evil inheritance; they refuse to follow in their fathers' steps; they destroy idolatry, and endeavour to redeem Israel from its iniquity. But whenever this is the case you do not look far without discovering the cause. A good mother has been at work—woman's gracious influence has counteracted against the pernicious example of the father. And, on the other hand, we have a long list of vile and idolatrous kings, whose fathers were either comparatively worthy, or full of downright godliness, and then, invariably, there is some evil-minded royal consort at the back of it. Whenever we can get into the secrets of court life, we find that the character of the wife determines the moral weight and form of the royal children. It is her training that shapes the men. How could it be otherwise indeed? What time had those kings to spend on home matters, what with their fighting, judging, governing, and attending to all the affairs of empire? How could they do a father's work and watch the training of the future kings? It was left to the mothers, and unhappy they who had mothers like Ahaziah's.

And is not this an everlasting story, true to-day as it was in those old days? It is the mother's hand mainly that shapes men for good or evil. Women more than men make the atmosphere of home—the atmosphere which young lives breathe, and breathing never lose. The wise woman buildeth her house—the foolish plucketh it down with her hands. What time does a father spend in disciplining the moral and spiritual nature of his children? That has to be done in the hours when he is toiling in the warehouse, or resting wearily after the labours of the day, or surely it is not done at all. From a mother the child receives all its early religious thoughts. By her the Bible stories are taught, and through her lips the good book comes to be loved. None can do it except her. It is her eyes that watch every moral movement in the young life—every sign of change—every incipient error—every beginning of good and evil habit. No eyes can



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detect these things as quickly and as surely as hers. And if she is too careless to discover them, they will go unobserved and unchecked. Unhappy is the mother who gives to society, or to friendship, or to pleasure the time which she owes to her sons and daughters, for she will have to reap in vain regrets the penalty of her neglect. How rarely do good and true women and men go forth from a home in which a mother has been too busy with the giddy affairs of the pleasurable world to teach and pray with her children. Still more rarely do permanently evil and incorrigible lives go forth from a home in which a noble and religious mother has made it the chief business of her life to mould and train her children in paths of pure thought and reverent purpose. There is no religious work which a woman can do that equals this in importance, and none which secures such sure and blessed results. That, then, is the main thought suggested by these chapters—the measureless influence of women in forming lives for evil or for good.

Then comes the only other thing that we are told about this Ahaziah—that he was killed because he happened to be found in evil company. He lived badly because he followed the counsels of his mother, we read, and he died suddenly and tragically because he endeavoured to be on very friendly terms with his mother's relatives. He was King of Judah, and Judah with all its sins still worshipped God and was comparatively free from idolatry. But Israel, over which Jehoram, his mother's brother ruled, was given up to all the abominations of heathenism. Its court was a horrible sink of iniquity, and God's judgment had gone forth against it and all its doings. Ahaziah must needs join hands and pledge friendship with his relatives, and for that purpose visited them—probably he did not intend to do more. It was just to look at the doings of this court, and have a taste of its pleasures, and then come back again. But once there he was led on from step to step—found Jehoram's company very attractive, entered into his plans, went out with him to battle, took part, no doubt, in the worship of his gods, and then while the two were going hand and glove together, the long-deferred judgment of God fell on Jezebel's house. The soldier raised up by God for that purpose swooped down upon the wicked king and his favourites with resistless force, making no distinction; and Ahaziah, being one of the band, shared in the general destruction.

The destruction of Ahaziah, says the Book, was of God, by coming to Jehoram. By his coquetting with evil he was made to pay the last penalty. So runs the story, and it seems far removed from everything that concerns our lives—yet not so far—things of a similar kind are happening every day. Men who tread the ways of sinners, who enter into any sort of fellowship with them, often find themselves involved very strangely and suddenly in their shame and their punishment. You cannot go into ways



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of evil men, or visit any forbidden scenes, or lend your countenance in any way to their doings, even though you have no further intention than just to look on, but there is ever hanging over you the sword of detection. The policeman appears, or God's light is let down upon the scene, and you are discovered as having part in it, and your name is stained and your character gone, and your life marked with a perpetual stigma of disgrace. When God's Judgment comes on sin it always involves some who are just hovering on the edge of it, as well as those who are in the thick of it. You ought not to be there. Remember Ahaziah.

And there are some evil natures and some evil things which a man cannot touch in even the slightest degree without being led on from step to step, as Ahaziah was, until he was in the thick of Jehoram's iniquity. A young woman cannot enter a gin-palace and drink her glass at the counter—as I see scores do any night—without gradually going further and losing all the modesty and grace of womanhood. A young man cannot touch gambling in any of its forms without almost inevitably being drawn under its fascinations, as one who is slowly involved in a wily serpent's coils. An English bishop thinks and has said that a little betting is allowable, that if you only indulge moderately in it, you may do it with impunity. He might as well have said that if you only steal coppers the law will smile upon you, but if you steal gold you will come in for its stripes. He might as well have said, "If you only put your little finger in this fire it will not hurt you, but if you thrust your whole hand in, it will burn." There can be no moderation in a thing which is essentially and in all its principles based on dishonesty and corruption, and evil excitement and evil greed. I am profoundly sorry that such a thing has been said by one whose word has so much authority and influence. It will be taken by thousands as an encouragement to do what they are only too prone and eager to do. Who shall curse what a father in Christ has condescended to bless? We need rather to have all Christian hands and voices raised in passionate and tearful denunciation of that which is doing more than anything else to demoralise our youth and eat away the very morals of the nation. We need to warn against it and denounce it in whatever form and degree it is practised, and to say, "Touch not, taste not, handle not the accursed thing."

We must keep away altogether from the men who delight in evil paths, and from the things, the very touch of which defiles. Go not in their way, pass not by it. "If sinners entice thee, consent thou not." Learn the lesson of Ahaziah's life, and how his fall came because he consorted with wickeder men than himself, and was anxious to see their doings.

GEHAZI

BY REV. J. MORGAN GIBBON

“The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.”—2 KINGS v. 27.



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Elisha and Gehazi were master and man. They were more. They were almost father and son. Elisha calls him “*my heart*,” just as Paul calls Onesimus his heart. Yet they parted so.—“*He went out from his presence a leper.*” The punishment was terrible. Was it deserved? Had the master a right to pass this sentence? “*The leprosy of Naaman*”—yes! but had Gehazi caught nothing from Elisha?

Most commentators fall on Gehazi with one accord. He is pilloried as a liar. He is branded as a thief. He is bracketed with Achan, and coupled with Judas. They flatter the master, they are hard on the man. But this is surely a very false reading of facts. By clothing the prophet in spotless white, and tarring Gehazi a deep black all over, we violate the truth of things and miss the lesson of the story, which, like the sword-flames at Eden's gate, turn many ways.

To take but one out of its numerous suggestions, we have here a story for servants of all sorts, and for masters and mistresses too, of all kinds.

The section is rich in domestic interiors. Servants have always formed important members of the household, and often their service has risen to be a beautiful and holy ministry.

We see here, for example, a great Eastern lady, Naaman's wife, and her little Jewish maid, whom the fortunes of war had swept from her home “in the land of Israel.” In the division of the spoil, this human mite had fallen to Naaman's share, and drifted into his lady's service. The slave-child has evidently reached the woman, perhaps the hungry mother's heart, in her mistress; and the sorrow of the woman, for alas! she is a leper's wife, has touched the servant's heart. The burning sense of the wrong to herself is cooled and quenched by the pity she feels for her master; and the expedition that brought health to Naaman, and unspeakable joy to Naaman's wife, was the outcome of a word she spoke. She knew of Elisha, she said what she knew, and great things came of it.

She did this, not as a slave of Naaman's wife, but as a free human soul, and servant of God. No tyranny could extort this service. No wealth could pay for this golden secret. Sometimes a character appears but once in the course of a great drama. The man or woman, comes on the stage to deliver one message, and then disappears. But that one brief word has its place in the playwright's scheme, and its effect on the action of the piece. This child was sent to Syria to utter one speech, to speak one name, and because she spoke her little speech, kindly and clearly, things went better with ever so many people.

“A fair day's wage for a fair day's work,” but let there be more than money in the wage, and more than labour in the service. Let no one, in being a servant, cease to be a free human soul. Do you serve in Syria? Is your lot cast among those that know not the Prophet? Well, but *you* are from the land of Israel; speak your speech, tell out the



Prophet's name. Be more than servant, more than clerk, more than a "hand," an apprentice, a journeyman; be a soul, an influence, a link with higher things, a reminder of God, a minister of Christ.



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Naaman, too, was happy in *his* servants. He was a Bismarckian, peppery man. Accustomed to command, he expected miracles to be done to order, and prophets to toe the line. And because he did not like Elisha's manner nor his prescription, he was on the point of returning to Syria in a rage. But he had servants that knew him through and through. They knew what note to sound, and they saved him from himself. The expedition had been suggested by a servant who generously paid good for evil. It was saved from defeat by servants who did for kindness what no contract could have specified and no wage could cover. They also were souls who knew at times that man was created for spiritual service.

But Elisha, too, though doubtless poor, had his servant, and an efficient, tactful servant he was.

A very good book might be written on "poor men's servants." For they have had of the very best. The whole world knows Boswell, and with all his faults it loves him still, for he was loyal to a royal soul. Well, most great men have had their Boswells. When all is known it will be found that the men of the five talents have owed much of their success and more of their happiness to the fidelity and love of men of the one talent.

How well Gehazi served Elisha! How nobly the servant comes out in that exquisite story of the Lady of Shunem. How jealous he is of his master's honour! How dear he was to Elisha's soul, "my heart! my other self!" And yet, he did this thing. He lied, he cheated, he obtained goods by false pretences, he lowered the prophet in Naaman's sight; and after all his years of noble service, his master smote him with his curse, and he went out of his presence a leper!

But was Naaman's the only leprosy that infected Gehazi? Had Elisha any share in his fall? After all, it is a sorry business to heal a stranger and send forth one's own friend in this fashion.

Nothing can exonerate Gehazi. His lie remains a lie, say what you will. But our business is not to apportion blame, but to try to find out how such things came to be, in order to guard against them in our own homes. If a servant leaves your employ poorer in character than when she came to you, if a youth leaves your business harder, colder, weaker in will, further from God than when you received him from home, it is a clear case for inquiry. It is our duty to see that young people are not exposed to moral infection in our homes.

In the matter of physical infection, two facts are familiar to us all. The first is, that mischief enters the system by means of a germ; and the second is, that the action of the germ depends very much on the condition of health in which it finds a man. If the man is healthy, he is often proof against the arrow that fleeth by day, and the pestilence that walketh in darkness. But if the body is already enfeebled, the germs find half their work done for them beforehand.



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Well now, these natural laws are valid in the spiritual world. The rules of moral hygiene are summed up in our Lord's prayer, "*Lead us not into temptation,*" that is to say, do not breathe the germ-laden air, and in St Paul's precept, "*Be strong in the Lord,*" cultivate general spiritual health, safety lies in strength. Good health is the best prophylactic. There is no precaution so effective as being well.

Now what have we in this narrative? When the prophet permitted Naaman to bow in the temple of Rimmon he did very right, say the chorus of commentators. But the common-sense of mankind has taken a different view. Bowing in the temple of Rimmon has become a byword and a reproach. It signifies something which men feel is not quite right. It was, in fact, an indulgence. Still, perhaps it was wise not to force the new-born convert. Perhaps it did Naaman no harm. Possibly it did Elisha's soul no injury to be so far complaisant towards idolatry. But surely there was a germ of evil in the thing, and this germ found a nidus, found a nest in Gehazi's soul, in which to hatch its evil brood. It lighted on Gehazi at the psychological moment. He had seen the gorgeous equipage. He had gazed on the ingots of gold and the great bars of silver. He had fingered the silks and brocades. Elisha had waved them away. To him they were as child's trinkets. But he had other resources than Gehazi, and when the cavalcade drew off, leaving nothing of its treasures behind, his longing grew into a fever of desire. It was so mad of the master to let *all* that gold and silver go, and he so poor! Gehazi had to bear the brunt of the poverty, and tax his five wits to make ends meet. And to think that a gold mine had come to their very door and they had refused to let it in!

But it is too late now—and yet why should it be too late? The company moves slowly. One could easily catch up with it. But what to say?

Pilgrims sometimes knock at Elisha's door. Sons of the prophets from the college on Mount Ephraim often come to see the master. There were two last week, or was it the week before? Without doubt we shall have others soon, for they like to talk to the master. They are miserably poor like ourselves, but they have good appetites. Naaman would be delighted to leave something for them. He would feel easier in his mind. It would be a kindness to let him give something. True, we have none of them in the house at this moment. But we have had and we shall have. If I say we have them *now*—well, that will only be making a little bow in the temple of Rimmon. Naaman means to do that. Master allows him to do it. We must not be *too* strict. "*As the Lord liveth I will run after him and take somewhat of him!*" Elisha was hurt, shamed, and angry. The sin was great and terrible. Yet, perhaps, had Gehazi met Elijah this would not have happened. Had Elisha sounded the great Elijah-note, "if the Lord is God, follow Him, but if Rimmon, then follow him," perhaps the germ of temptation would not have found Gehazi even quite such an easy prey,



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Mind, I am not whitewashing him or mitigating his crime. I am trying to get at the forces that conspired to make him what he was, and among these I have no doubt at all that his master's complaisant permission of compromise was a very potent force. Of course he was wrong, of course there is no logical connection between what the master allowed in the Syrian general and the great lie Gehazi told. And yet there was a sort of ghastly logic in this poor wretch's procedure. There are many commandments. But duty is one thing, and if you weaken a man's sense of duty by breaking one commandment yourself, you must not be surprised if you find him breaking another commandment later on. Gehazi was cured of the leprosy of Naaman. The prophet's angry word was not countersigned on high, and one hopes that he also shook off by God's assisting grace the ill-effects of Elisha's complacency. For the greater danger lay in *that*. And does it not still lie there?

Our young people, our children, our servants that minister to our comfort, our assistants and clerks that multiply our personal activities and help to build up our fortunes, is there no danger to their spiritual life in being exposed as they are to the spiritual influences which we give off every hour? They see the cavalcades of wealth, they gaze at the ingots of gold and the great white silver bars; they look with longing eyes at the silks with colours that come and go like the iris on the dove's neck. The luxuries of meat and drink appeal to them. The temptation to live for these things assaults them.

And what help does Gehazi get from Elisha to-day? What help do young men in offices and shops get from masters and heads of departments? What help do servants in London homes get from the daily examples of mistresses? What are the inferences drawn in the kitchen from things heard and seen in the dining or drawing-room? and what in the nursery? Does a young man who sees to the very core of your business say to himself, "The master's profession of religion is hypocrisy—*all* religion is hypocrisy?" Then may God help him, for he is smitten with the leprosy of Elisha; and may God help you, for it is a sorry business to evangelise Asiatics and send your own servants forth from your presence lepers white as snow.

Let every master and mistress pray, "*Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there is any way of wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*"

HAZAEEL

BY REV. J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.

"But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?"—2 KINGS viii. 13.



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Hazael was the chief minister and prime favourite of Benhadad, the Syrian king. He had been raised from a humble lot and promoted to that high post by the partiality of his sovereign, who had doubtless discerned his exceptional abilities, and certainly placed implicit trust in him. Just now the king was dangerously ill, and Hazael had been sent to inquire of the prophet of Israel as to the probable issue of the sickness. He put the question with seeming anxiety: "Will my master recover?" He spoke as if that was his dearest wish; perhaps he did wish it. But there were evidently other thoughts half-formed, lurking and hiding themselves in the background. Suppose the king should die and leave the throne vacant, what then? May there not be a chance for me? Elisha read these hidden thoughts, and looked the man in the face long and steadfastly, until the face turned crimson and the head was lowered with shame. And then the prophet said, "Thy master need not die of the sickness; nevertheless, he will die, and I see you filling a throne won by murder, and I have a picture before me of the terrible things which you will do to my dear land of Israel." And as this vision passed before the prophet's eyes, he wept. Then Hazael gave the answer which stands at the head of this paper.

It is open to two interpretations. The Authorised Version gives one and the Revised Version the other. According to the first, it is an indignant denial; he recoils with horror from the picture of perfidy, cruelty, and enormous criminality which the prophet has sketched for him. I am not capable of such a thing, he says; "*Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?*" According to the other reading it is not the crime that he revolts from, but the kingship and the greatness that he refuses to believe in. It seems so improbable and all but impossible that he, a man of obscure birth, should climb to such eminence. He exclaims against it as a piece of incredulous and extravagant imagination. "*What is thy servant, which is but a dog, that he should do this great thing?*"

Now, I doubt not that both readings may be allowed. For certainly both thoughts were in the speaker's mind. He did not believe at that moment that he could ever be brought to commit such infamous deeds, and he did not believe that he could ever attain such high ambitions and power. There was a dark moral depth predicted for him to which he was sure he would never fall, and there was a certain grandeur and elevation to which he was confident he would never rise. To both things he said, "It is impossible," and yet the impossible came to pass.

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Now I would have you observe that this is one of the prominent lessons of the Bible; on many a page does it bring out an unexpected development like this. Again and again it is the unlikely that happens in the lives which figure on its pages. They rise or they fall in a way that no one looked for, and which they, least of all, anticipated themselves. We seem to hear them saying with Hazael, "Impossible," and then, before we get far, the thing is done. Impossible, we say, that king Saul should ever descend so low as to deal in witches; or that Solomon, the wise, God-fearing youth, should give himself up to the sway of lustful passions and idolatries. Yet that comes to pass. Impossible, we say, that the cunning, lying Jacob should ever develop into a man of prayer; and the outcast beggar, Jephthah, ever grow into a hero-patriot and king. Yet we see it. In the Bible stories greatness always comes to those who have neither marked themselves out for it, nor deemed themselves fit for it; and, on the contrary, its most infamous deeds are done, and its most shameful lives lived, by those who have given promise of fairer things, and who in their early manhood would have scouted the possibility of descending so low. The men whom it describes have no suspicion, to begin with, of the great power for good that is in them, or the equally great possibilities of evil. Tell the shepherd youth, David, that he has in him the making of a king and an immortal poet, and he will think you are poking fun at him. Tell him that he will one day fall into the crimes of adultery and murder, and make all Israel blush for him, and he will be indignant enough to strike you to the ground. Speak to the fisherman, Peter, of the commanding influence which awaits him in some coming kingdom of God, and he will think you are beside yourself: and then tell him that he will one day deny and curse his sworn Master and kindest Friend, and he will ask you, Do you think I am a dog or a devil that I should do this? Impossible! And yet the thing comes off.

Why do the sacred writers give us so many stories of this kind? Surely it is because we need both the warning and encouragement. It is to prove to us that on one side of our nature we are greater than we think, and on the other side weaker and lower than we believe. It is to inspire the diffident with courage, and the despairing with hope, while it pulls up the forward, the careless, and the over-confident with the wholesome and humbling word, "*Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.*" These men of the Bible were strangely mixed. They were conspicuous instances of the contradictions and surprises which are in us all. For that is the point: the thing comes home to us.



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Believe me, we are all a riddle to ourselves. Each man is to himself, and each woman too, the greatest of all mysteries save the one greater mystery, God. None of us know of what elements he is composed, and how strangely the good and evil mix and mingle and clash and strive in each day's doings, and through the whole of life. They who believe that the saint is all saint, and the sinner all sinner, are blindly and pitifully ignorant of human nature. God has made no man without putting some little bit of the Divine image in him. The worst has some lingering trace or ruin of it. And the best is not so entirely the temple of the Holy Ghost that no fouler spirits ever obtain entrance there. You may say that you do not believe in a devil. Well, that may be; but there is something like a devil in all of us at certain times, and I would rather believe that it comes from the outside than that it is born and bred and originates within. At any rate, there are in all of us the strange oppositions, the darkness and the light overlapping each other, the evil and the good ever contending, like Esau and Jacob, in the birth hour. The awful and the blessed possibilities are there, and which shall get the uppermost depends first on God, and then upon ourselves.

I.

Remember first, then, that we have all a lower side.

There is in us what I may call a lurking, crouching, slumbering devil, which needs constant watching and holding down with the strong hand of self-mastery and prayer. "Praying always with all prayer, and watching thereunto," says the apostle. In every one of us there is the possibility of falling, however high we stand and however near God we walk. Bunyan says, in his immortal story, "Then I saw in my dream that by the very gate of heaven there was a way that led down to hell." No man, however ripe in goodness, however firmly rooted and grounded in faith, love, and Christian qualities, ever gets beyond the need of vigilant sentinel work—watching himself. He must always be buffeting himself, and keeping under his body, as Paul did, lest he himself should be a castaway. Let him grow careless, presumptuous, neglectful of prayer, and all the old tempers and passions slowly steal in, and bit by bit obtain the mastery, and the Christian disgraces his profession, and the saint becomes a sinner again. Every Christian knows this. He knows the evil powers that are in him.

It is the man who has never fought with his temptation, never prayed, who especially needs to be reminded of it; young men and women who have been well brought up, who have kept themselves moderately straight so far, and who are full of good resolutions. I hear them say, "Oh I am strong enough. I am not such a fool as to throw myself away in the stupid game of the prodigal, in drunkenness, and gambling, and unclean living. I can hold myself in. I can go just as far as I please. I can indulge to a certain extent, and pull myself up just at the moment I please; and as for prayer and seeking God's help, thank my stars I can clear a safe course without all that. I shall not

overstep the line you may depend upon it.” *“Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this?”*

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And I answer, yes—there is quite enough of the dog in you, or of the devil, if you like the word better, to do this and to do worse things—if you play with the dog and let it loose, and let it have a free run now and then. In my time I have heard scores of young men talk in this way. I have heard them laugh scornfully when danger was mentioned to them, and I have seen a few of them fortunate enough to grow up to manhood with a fairly unspotted character; a few, but not many—the greater part have gone wrong, and some deplorably wrong. There is hardly one of us can keep that dog fastened up and chained down always, unless we rely upon a stronger power than our own. It gets loose at times with the best of us—it runs wild and plays dreadful havoc with those who are not the best; there is always in you the baser self—always the dry torches of evil passions which a spark may kindle—always the moral weaknesses and lusts, half-sleeping, which some stronger blast of temptation may awaken and bring out; and if you wish to escape the evil and hold fast to the good, you will commit your way unto the Lord, and put on the Christian armour, and strengthen yourselves by prayer. Do not presume too much—better men than you have fallen every day. God only can save you from yourselves.

II.

It is just as needful to remember the other side—the side of better possibilities.

Some of you are tempted to say at times with Hazael, “*Thy servant is but a dog; how can he do these great things?*” You are disposed to underrate your gifts, your opportunities, your happy chances in life—in a word, your possibilities. You despair of finding any opening; you are sure that you will never hear a call to come up higher; you think your lives must always be ill-paid drudgery, with no promotion. It is sad to work with a conviction of that kind. You never work well if there is nothing to look forward to, and it is cowardly to give way to a conviction of that kind. Perhaps you are not specially clever—no, but there are better things than cleverness in the world, and things which have more to do with life’s real successes.

If you have in you some power of plodding, to do steady work, doing it always honestly; if you have perseverance, self-control, a sense of duty, a determination to do always the thing that is right, all will be well—these are the qualities which lift a man up to the best places, and one of those places is being prepared for you if you are worthy to fill it. You say, perhaps, “I can never be a good man. I can never be a Christian. I am not made for these high things; it is not in me.” I answer, “It is in you, or if it be not in you now, God will put it in you if you diligently ask Him.”



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Nay, truly, there are the germs of goodness in every one of us. Thy servant is something more than a dog, though he calls himself that, and nothing else. There is something of the religious emotion in you, and that means there is something of the Divine. You have dreams at times of a beautiful life, you have longings for it, sometimes you even set out to reach it—and these are all touches of God. They all prove that the Holy Ghost sometimes pays at least a passing visit to your hearts. You do not know what God can make of you until you trust and try Him. There are greater things by far in you than you have guessed. Have confidence in Him, and He will bring them out. I can see a man of God in you, a pillar in the Church, an honour to the town. I can see a Christian mother in you, a half-sainted woman full of good works, bringing children up to noble lives. It is there in many of you, if you do not despise and neglect the gift that is in you, but use it and cultivate it prayerfully, and let God bring it to perfection.

MANASSEH

BY REV. J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.

“Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem.”—2 CHRON. xxxiii. 1.

Fifty and five years—he wore the crown a longer time than any other of the house of David. Of all the kings that reigned in Jerusalem, this man’s reign filled the largest space; yet he is the one king of Judah about whom we are told least. In the modern city of Venice there is a hall which is adorned with the portraits of all the doges or kings who ruled that city in the days of its splendour—all except one—one who made himself infamous by evil deeds. Where his portrait ought to be, there is a black blank space which says nothing, yet speaks volumes; which says to every visitor, Do not think of him, let him be forgotten. In some such way Manasseh is disposed of by the sacred writers. They hurry over the fifty-five years; they crowd them into half a chapter, as if they were ashamed to dwell upon them, as if they wanted the memory of them and of the man to be forgotten. And that was the feeling of all the Jews. Century after century, and even to the present time, Jews have held the man’s name in abhorrence. Do not speak of him, they say. He was the curse of our nation. He denied our faith. He slew our prophets. He brought Jerusalem to ruin.

Yet, strange to say, the man so hated and cursed was once a nation’s hope and joy. When his father, Hezekiah, lay sick unto death, his greatest grief and the profoundest sorrow of his people was caused by the thought that he was dying childless. They prayed for his recovery mainly on that ground. He recovered, and married, and a child was born, and the glad father called him Manasseh, which means, God hath made me forget—forget my sickness and my sorrow; and all over the land the ringing of



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bells was heard and shouts of rejoicing, and the prophet Isaiah sang of the child's birth in those triumphant words which we have often heard since in another connection, "*Unto us a son is born, unto us a child is given*"; and they thought that all would go well now that there was an heir to the throne, and they prayed that he might be sturdy and strong, and get over all the ailments of childhood. They hoped more from the child than they did from God. Their prayers were granted. God gave them their desire, and the result was such as to make us doubtful whether we are always wise in pressing such prayers. We are never sure that it will be good for us, or good for our darling child, that its life should be spared and prolonged in some time of crisis. Often the early death which we dread may be far less cruel than the evil which waits beyond. Better to leave these things in God's hands, and say that will be best for all which seems right to Thee. A whole nation prayed for the birth and preservation of this son. That same nation came to curse the day on which he was born.

Strange that a father like Hezekiah had a child like this. Hezekiah was, I think, the best of the Jewish kings, wise and brave, gentle and strong, full of reverence and faith, pre-eminently a man who walked with God and strengthened himself by prayer, and fought as earnest and true a battle for religion and righteousness as we have recorded in the Old Testament. How came it that the son was in all respects his opposite? Did an evil mother shape him, or what? We cannot tell. These are among the saddest mysteries of human life. The law that a child's training and environment determine the character of the man, often fails most deplorably. The wisest man may have a most foolish son; the godliest home may send forth a reprobate; the child of many prayers may live a life of shame. When a young man goes wrong, it is often both unjust and cruel to lay it on the home training, and to say that there has been neglect or want of discipline, or want of right example there. It is adding another burden to hearts already weighted with intolerable grief.

For the most part, children will follow their parents in what is good, and those nursed in prayer will grow up praying men. But there are hideous exceptions, and sometimes the most Christlike people have this cross to bear; and it is the most heart-crushing of all to see children turning aside from all that they have held dear, and by the whole course of their lives mocking the religious ideals and hopes which were cherished for them. God save all you fathers and mothers from this calamity, and God save all our young people from crushing tender hopes in this cruel way.

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Manasseh's life was spent in undoing what his father had done. It seemed to be his great ambition to overturn and destroy the sacred edifice which his father's hands, with untiring prayer and devotion, had raised. Hezekiah had taught his people to trust in God, and in reliance on His help to sustain a noble independence separate from heathen alliances. Manasseh hastened to join hands with Babylon, and make his nation the vassal of a great heathen empire. Hezekiah had swept the land clean of idols. Manasseh filled every grove and hillside with these vain images again. Hezekiah had restored the Temple worship and the Mosaic ritual, and the moral law, and laboured to establish a reign of sobriety, purity, justice, and order. Manasseh outraged all the moralities, and delighted in introducing everywhere the licentious abominations of the neighbouring peoples. Hezekiah had cultivated and encouraged prophecy, and gathered about him great and noble souls like Isaiah and Habakkuk. Manasseh drove them from his presence, and finally slew them.

There were new lights in those days, as there are now. Men who sneered at all the old thoughts and ways, who swept Moses aside with disdain, and thought that David's psalms were poor and feeble things, and that the old-fashioned religion was narrow and provincial, and that the stories of victories won by faith and miracles wrought by prayer were worn-out fictions. They said that if the nation would prosper, it must turn its back on all this stuff, and follow new methods, and profess a new religion. Let them make the great empire, Babylon, their model, with its advanced civilisation, and science, and literature, and vast stores of wealth, with its worship, too, of the sun, and stars, and fire, its religion full of jollity and license, which contrasted so happily with the sober and severe worship of Jehovah, and did not trouble men with unwelcome moral precepts. See how great that empire had become, and how stationary and unprogressive was their own little kingdom, because it clung to the old ways. That was what the new party said. Away with the old-fashioned thoughts and the old-fashioned trusts and beliefs and worship. We are wiser than our simple-minded fathers. We know a few things more than these narrow-minded and crazy prophets. We will have all things new.

And Manasseh, being a young man and as foolish as he was young, drank in greedily their counsels and made himself their leader. For it is ever the temptation of young life to think lightly of their father's wisdom, and to despise what they call the narrow religious beliefs, and the careful moral scruples of the old, and to fancy that they know all things so much better than those who have gone before. They want to try experiments of their own with life, and shake off the shackles of old moral laws and religious creeds, and be free to do and think as they please, and put the Bible away on the shelf, and shove prayer aside as a sort of worn-out heirloom, and have a merrier and better time than the old folks knew. That was the course which Manasseh took, just as headstrong and irreverent youths take it now.

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Then followed that time which the Jewish people never speak of without shame—a hideous reign of idolatry, and immorality, and injustice; an awful period of persecution for the few righteous and God-fearing people who were left when the prophets had been sought out and slain. Isaiah sawn asunder, Habakkuk stoned to death, the faithful driven into dens and caves of earth. It is of this time that we read in the Epistle to the Hebrews, in that graphic account of the martyred faithful: *“They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented: of whom the world was not worthy”* (xi. 37, 38). A few years of this sufficed to pull down the whole fabric of religion which Hezekiah had so painfully and patiently raised. For it is so easy to destroy; so easy for folly and irreverence to pull down what wisdom and goodness have taken years in building; so easy for a vicious and irreligious son to bring shame and ruin upon the house which a godly father and mother have spent a lifetime in rearing with honour; so easy, by a few rash acts, to destroy the character and reputation which the prayers and training of years have sought to establish. It is the easiest thing in the world to undo and overturn; there is no cleverness and courage required for destroying, the cleverness and courage are called for in building it up.

Manasseh succeeded to his heart's content. People followed him greedily, except the steadfast few. And presently the prophets were all gone, and the worship of the true God was nowhere practised except in secret, and the sacred names were no more mentioned, and the land gave itself up to all the foul rites and the shameful indulgences of the heathen world, And then God's retribution came swiftly. Where the rotting carcase was, there the eagles gathered together. These same Babylonians whose ways the renegade Jews had so much admired and imitated, swept down upon them with the talons of a vulture, with cruelty that spared neither tender woman nor innocent child, and Jerusalem was burned with fire, and Manasseh carried off in chains and flung into a foreign prison to muse in solitude over the end of his projects, and to find out there that the old ways had been the best.

There we are told that he repented, that he was stricken with shame because of all the evil that he had done, and turned with prayer and humility to the God whom he had defied. And we are told that God was merciful and heard his entreaties, and accepted his repentance, and brought him back after sorrowful years of imprisonment to his land and throne. This is the part of the story which most people emphasise. That, they say, is the main lesson of the story—Manasseh's repentance, and how God accepted the rebellious sinner at the last and forgave him all his iniquities—and they draw from that the conclusion that it is never too late to turn to God, and that all the dark doings of a man's life are swept clean away, if at any time the heart repents and believes.



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But this is not the part of the story which the sacred writers dwell upon. In the Book of Kings, where there is another version of Manasseh's doings, no mention is made whatever of the repentance, and here it is only briefly recorded, and in a somewhat sorrowful tone.

He came back humbled and forgiven, indeed, but not in a happy state of mind. He came back to a ruined kingdom; to a sinful and demoralised and destitute people; to see everywhere the sorrow, and the evil and the misery and shame which his doings had caused; to be reminded continually that his life had been a great wicked and foolish blunder, and that there was no undoing the mischief which he had done. For the sake of his repentance he was spared a little longer, but there could be little joy in the remaining years of a life like that.

I think that that is the experience of most men who turn away in their youth from the example and precepts of godly fathers, who reject the truths which make life sober and strong, who betake themselves to thoughts of infidelity and ways of sin, and fancy that they can live life happily without God and prayer. There comes a time when they are made to feel that their life has been a mistake, that it would have been far better for them to have stuck to the old ways, that those believing fathers whom they laughed at were right after all; perhaps they repent and go back to God at last, and He accepts them; but whether repentant or not, they always carry with them an awful burden. Shame is upon them for the evil they have done, shame for the life that has been spent to so little purpose, regret and humbling that they cannot undo the blind and guilty past. Repentance at the best is a poor business when it comes in the evening hours of life. Better then than never; but better far to have gone with God from the beginning. That, I think, is the lesson which the wise man will find in the story of the evil king.

AMAZIAH

BY REV. J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.

“And Amaziah said to the man of God, But what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel? And the man of God answered, The Lord is able to give thee much more than this.”—2 CHRON. xxv. 9.

Amaziah, King of Judah, belonged to that numerous class of men who wish to stand well with both worlds. He was what we call in religious matters half-and-half. He wanted to secure the favour and protection of God without losing much or anything of the ungodly helps and advantages. One hardly knows whether to describe him as a bad sort of good man, or a better sort of bad man. He was like those gentlemen in the *Pilgrim's Progress* whom Bunyan names Mr Facing-both-ways and Mr Pliable. It depended very much on the company he was in, whether he showed a religious face or assumed the other character.



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We have an illustration of this doubleness in the incident recorded here. He was preparing to go to war against the neighbouring nation of the Edomites, or probably he had learned that they were about to make war on him. For these neighbours, like some others you know, were always ready to pick a quarrel. Edomite and Jew were never long without a scrimmage or a battle. Amaziah, with this business on hand, took count of his forces, found that he had three hundred thousand soldiers; big enough battalions if they had only had a leader with a big heart. David had scattered those Edomites with an army not one-twentieth part the size of that. But Amaziah was not a David. He must needs have more men. He sent, therefore, to the king of Israel to hire another hundred thousand, and paid him down an enormous sum of money for the loan. Now these men of Israel and their king had fallen away from God, and become heathen people, worshippers of Baal, foul and immoral as the Edomites themselves. But Amaziah thought that was of no consequence so long as he could increase his fighting force. The money was paid, and the hundred thousand hirelings came.

And then suddenly appeared another man whom he had not sent for, one of those prophets or preachers whom kings and other people find very troublesome at times, who upset all the nice arrangements, and stop the business which promises so well, with an unwelcome "*Thus saith the Lord*"; prophets who do not know how to flatter, who cannot be bought for a hundred talents, or for any price, and who say what God has given them to say whether the great folk like it or not. This man came uninvited, and told the king that he must pack off these mercenaries to their own country again, for God was not with them, and God would not be with him if he joined hands with idolaters and paid them to fight his battles.

It was an awkward position. Amaziah knew that what the prophet said was true, and he believed, moreover, that if God should turn against him, that business with the Edomites was likely to end badly for him. But, on the other hand, to send that goodly array of fighting men away and lose all that gold into the bargain, was both galling to his pride and a ridiculous waste of treasure. He knew well what was the right thing to do, but to do it at such a sacrifice, that was the difficulty. He was in a strait betwixt two, wriggling and hesitating, and at last he cries in his bewilderment, "*What shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel?*" And the man of God answers, "*Never mind the money, let that go; far better forfeit that than lose God's help. The Lord is able to do for thee much more than the hundred talents are worth.*"

And now, out of this old story, we learn some lessons for this and every day.

I.

Our difficulties in the way of serving and obeying God are often self-made.



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They are always more or less self-made. This man pleads his own wrong act as a reason why he should not do right now. He himself has raised the obstacle which now stands in the way of obedience. He ought not to have sought the help of an idolatrous king. He ought not to have bargained for these hirelings, he ought not to have paid the money. God had not put the difficulty in his way; his own foolish and wicked action had created it. And people are constantly talking as this man talked, declaring that there are hindrances and immense difficulties which prevent them from doing what is right, prevent them from doing what they know to be the will of God. They talk as if God was somehow responsible for those hindrances, when, in fact, their own wrong-doing has caused them.

For instance, some of you know perfectly well that you ought to be Christians, avowed Christians, that you ought to take the Lord's side in the great battle of life; you know that you ought to be His servants, followers, and soldiers; you know that that is your duty, you cannot help knowing it and admitting it, unless you reject the Bible altogether, and deny the whole Gospel of Jesus Christ. You have known from childhood that Christ has claims upon you, and that to live the Christian life is your solemn obligation. It is more than probable that you told your mother, your teachers, and yourselves long ago, and perhaps many a time over, that you fully intended to give your lives and hearts to Christ's service. But you have not done it yet, and the reason is that there are certain self-made difficulties which hold you back. God has not put them in the way—you have built them up yourselves. I hear young men and women say, in the very tone of this perplexed king. But what shall we do for the hundred talents? If we take up religion, how shall we bear the loss which it involves? How are we to get on without those pleasures, self-indulgences, and dearly-loved habits which Christ's service would cut us off from? How are we to abandon those very pleasant, but not very inspiring and pure, companionships, with and among which we spend most of our leisure time? How are we to resign all our free and easy and thoughtless ways, our loose talk, our vain and sinful imaginations?

These are your difficulties, are they? But who made them for you? Heaven did not send them. I am not sure, even, that the devil was the author of them. You made every one of them yourselves. It was your own weak yielding that formed those habits so dear to you. It was because you preferred your own way to God's that you took to pleasures and self-indulgences which were wrong in His sight. It was your own choice that sought out and formed friendships and companionships of the ungodly sort. If you have any joys, delights, and associations which Christ would compel you to resign, they are only such as you ought never to have entered upon. They are self-made difficulties which ought never to have been made; and now, with curious inconsistency, you are urging them as reasons why you cannot serve God. You are using the sinful things which you have done in the past as an excuse for not doing the right and noble thing now.



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There are hundreds of people who, if they could begin again, would join the ranks of the religious—at least they think they would, and perhaps say it. If we could just start with a clean sheet, we would be Christians, we would walk in the noble and faithful way. But then, you see, we cannot undo the years that have been lived in the other way. We have committed ourselves to the irreligious side. We have made all who know us understand that we do not care about religious things. We have talked about them carelessly, perhaps contemptuously, as if we put no value upon them at all. We have made a reputation of that sort, and now it stands in the way. We cannot go back of all our old professions; the inconsistency would be manifest. No one expects it of us. No one would believe if we did it. There you have the self-made difficulties again. Because you did wrong all those years, you must needs go on doing wrong. Because you talked and acted in an unbelieving way, you must not now change into the higher and prayerful way. Because you have robbed God and your own souls so long, there is nothing for you but to continue repeating the offence. Yet these, when you name them, are so absurd, that one could almost laugh at them. The conviction that you have hitherto been on the wrong side is the one thing that ought to force you now to the right side. Why should you perpetuate blunders, follies, and misdoings? Why should the evil past chain you? Let the dead bury its dead—forget the things which are behind. You have paid the hundred talents to the wrong master. Why should you go on paying because you have done it once? Let God's mercy cover and forgive that. And now pay your vows and give your lives to Him henceforth.

II.

We are held back from the right thing by the fear of the loss which it will involve.

We say with poor, frightened Amaziah, But what about the hundred talents? They will be clean gone if I obey the voice of God. The hundred talents take many forms, but the principle is always the same. We shall lose a little in the way of business, if we make up our minds to be scrupulously honest, and to speak the simple truth. We shall forfeit a little of our present popularity, if we take the course which conscience dictates. We shall have to forego and neglect certain things, and suffer loss, if we undertake Christian work. We shall have to give up many an easy hour, many a light and frivolous hour, many an open and secret sin, sweeter to us than honey, if we confess the Lord Christ, and take up the burden of discipleship. The hundred talents block the way, and rather than let them go, we let God go, and sacrifice all the sanctities, and all the precious and immortal things.



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And this answer comes to all of us—the answer which the prophet gave to the hesitating king as he stood balancing the hundred talents against the duty of the hour: “*The Lord is able to give thee much more than this.*” Better to win thy great battle and lose the talents, than keep the money and lose thyself and everything in the impending struggle. God is not so poor that He cannot pay His servants as ample wages as they ever get from other masters. It is not the same kind of pay, but it is always, in the long-run, larger and better. No man ever does the right thing at God’s command, without receiving eventually sufficient wages for it—joy even in this life. Whatever immediate losses he may incur, there will be more than compensating gains. The man who lives an upright, conscientious, pure and kindly life, wronging no one, showing justice and mercy to all, is always the happier man; richer in all his thoughts and emotions, richer in friendships and affections, richer in peace of mind, in abiding satisfactions, richer in hopes. He has within him a well-spring of joy which never ceases to flow. Righteousness is not a losing business: it has the best part in this life, and in that which is to come.

Whatever you resign at Christ’s call: whatever His service costs you in the way of sacrifice: however much you must give up in the shape of pleasure, ease, and agreeable habits—there will be more given to you in return. When Christ asked the disciples to leave all things and follow Him, He said nothing about the rewards—not just then. He told them to take up their cross and come after Him; that was all. He spoke often to them about the pains they would have to endure, the scorn they would meet with, the tribulation they would have to pass through. When he called the last of the apostles, Paul, He even said, and it was the only promise He gave, “*I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name’s sake*” (Acts ix. 16). No talk of rewards and gains at first. He knew the men. He knew their eagerness to do what was right and to obey the voice of God. Men who have the right spirit, men with some fire of enthusiasm, do not need crowns held before them to draw them into the true and noble way. They are almost glad to think that crosses and self-sacrifices await them in that way. Christ spoke no words at the beginning about gains and rewards. Come, because I want you, and God asks you, and it is your duty: but afterwards, when they had obeyed His call, He talked to them often about the gains. They had begun to understand them then. There is no man who hath left anything for My sake, who shall not receive a hundredfold in this present time, and in the world to come, life everlasting.



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And we all learn in a measure what that means, when we have faithfully served Christ for a little time. You talk about the sacrifices and losses of the Christian life. Yes, but no man is fit to be called a Christian who has not found in Christ ten or twenty times as much joy as he has lost. If there were no hereafter, no future crowns at all, it would be a terrible disappointment, but even, apart from that, the present life of every one who believes in Christ and does Christ's work, and loves as Christ loved, is richer, fuller, wider, and happier in almost every way than the life which knows Him not. What about the hundred talents? you say, and I answer with the prophet, "*The Lord is able to give thee much more than this.*"

JABEZ

BY REV. J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.

"And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren."—1 CHRON. iv, 9.

This is a curious fragment of biography, half-hidden in a dreary mass of wholly uninteresting names. We cannot conjecture how it got there. It seems to have no connection either with what comes before or what follows. It is like a sweet little poem in the midst of a dry, genealogical chart; or like a real, living face with the flush of warm colour in it, speaking amid endless rows of mummies or waxwork effigies.

It is indeed the short, incomplete story of a life with neither beginning nor end. We are not told who his father was, or who his mother was, or what tribe or family he belonged to. Not a word about origin, descent, pedigree. And there seems to be a purpose in this. For the sacred writer at this point is doing nothing else but tracing pedigrees. These four chapters are to us the most useless in the Bible: names, nothing but long-forgotten names. Names of everybody's father, grandfather, great-grandfather, back to a remote antiquity. I question whether there are many Bible readers who have ever laboured through the list. Yet these family trees, as we may call them, were very precious to the Jews. They thought as much of long descent as my lord Noodle does now. It swelled them immeasurably in self-importance if they could trace their lineage back in unbroken line to one of the twelve patriarchs, or to one of those who came out of Egypt. And the historian ministers to this prejudice or vanity by diligently recording the whole dry catalogue, and then, as if weary of the business, or, perhaps, with just a touch of scorn, he introduces this one name as something worth talking about.

Here was a god-made nobleman, whose heraldry need not be written on earth, because it is more surely written in heaven. All the rest were their fathers' sons, and that was about all. This man did not need a pedigree: he won a name and reputation for himself without the help of a distinguished ancestry. By prayerfulness, and energy, and courage, he fought his way from obscurity to honour. And when that happens, when a man has fought the fight with adverse circumstances and overcome them, when he has



made his mark in the world by sheer force of work and character, no one cares to grope through musty fusty parchments in search of his progenitors. What does it matter! God has given him a certificate of noble birth; that was surely what the historian meant: *“Jabez was more honourable than his brethren.”*



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Now there are two or three touches in this little story worth noticing. God sends us some of our best joys in the guise of sorrows.

I.

He came into the world without a welcome.

I venture to say, and I thank God for it, that there is hardly one of my readers of whom that can be said. No matter into what home you were born, there was a welcome awaiting you on the part of one at least. It may be that no one else was particularly glad, that every one else looked upon you as one too many; but your mother at least met you with a sweet kiss which plainly said, thank God for this gift. Here, however, there was not even that; this child was received with misgivings and fears, and awoke no joy in the mother's breast. She called his name Jabez, which means sorrowful, because she had borne him in sorrow.

Of course, we do not know what lies behind that, but it was something of a heart-burning or heart-breaking kind; either the father was dead, or the home was in a state of terrible poverty and distress, or the child was a child of shame; you can only guess, and all your queries will probably be wide of the mark. But the mother looked mournfully upon him, and wished he had not come, and could not believe that a life which commenced so untowardly would ever be anything better than a burden to her, and a misfortune and misery to himself. She expressed her fears and forebodings in the name which she gave him—Jabez, the child of sorrow.

And while she was gloomily predicting his future with the black colours of her despondency, God was writing the child's story in golden lines which would have set her heart leaping for joy could she have read them. This despised one was to win for himself a noble name, and build up the house in honour, and become his mother's pride, and make her young again in hope and gladness.

What fools we are when we set ourselves to forecast the future of our children! They rarely develop on the lines we draw for them; the most promising of them sometimes flatter us in the bud and blossom, and mock us in the fruit. Where we hope most there comes most heartache, our favourites are made our burdens, our pride is humbled by a harvest of sorrow. And where we have bestowed most tenderness we get most ingratitude—the child of many gifts, the joy of the household, the flower of the flock, turns out the nightmare of our lives, the one unhappy failure which costs us endless tears.

And perhaps it is partly our own fault, because we have pampered, flattered, and indulged them too much. Ah! and just as often the reverse is true—the child whom in our hearts we called Jabez; the slow, dull child so hard to teach, so unresponsive, or



perhaps so wilful and obstinate that we never thought or spoke of him save with secret fears and misgivings—the child who was always to be a burden and a cross to us, develops by-and-by in beautiful and unexpected



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ways, grows into moral strength and religious grace, becomes honourable in the sight of all men, and saves our old age from going down with sorrow to the grave. The golden harvest of our lives grows not where we look for it, but often in the neglected places where God bids it grow. Where our pride built its palace of content we find emptiness and shame, and that which we almost cursed God for sending us becomes our crown of rejoicing. She called his name Jabez, my sorrow, and lo! he became her very consolation, most honourable of all.

II.

Faith wins the battle of life against many odds.

Yes! this is indeed a romance of faith—faith overcoming the world. This child or youth starts out with all things against him. He is likely to grow up into an Ishmaelite if he grows up at all. He starts with an ill-starred name—a name that spells misfortune. He starts without his mother's blessing and without a glimmer of hope to cheer him; no father to give him a helping hand by the way—without endowment, fortune, family, or friends. What chance can there be in the race for one so heavily handicapped? Failure is written on his brow by the hand that nursed him. Failure is written on all his circumstances. It will be a desperate struggle all through. There will be none of the prizes of life for him. If he gets a bare living wage, it is as much as he may expect.

That is what he has before him, apparently! Well, for one thing, he puts on courage, and starts on his way singing *Nil desperandum*. And then, knowing well that he has few or no human friends, he falls back on the Father of the fatherless and the Helper of those who have no other help. He relies on faith instead of fortune. He will make prayer his main weapon, and the light of the Lord his guide, and duty his pole star. He will pursue a straight course, avoiding evil, trying to feel the hand of God upon him, and the watchful eyes of God over him. And he will make a brave fight of it day by day, doing his best, and leave a higher power to determine what shall follow. That is what we read between the lines of this story. Nay, that is all expressed. "*He called on the God of Israel.*" He committed his life to the ordering of the Almighty. And the Almighty promoted him. He became more honourable than his brethren.

They are poor creatures who complain that the battle is lost before it is even begun, who groan that the chances of life are all against them before they have made one brave venture and endeavour; and they are vain and self-deceiving men who fancy that the victory will be easy because somebody has given them a good start, and they have the backing of family, social position, wealth, and mental gifts. If some of you think because your fathers stand high, because your education has been well looked after, because there are unlimited money and plenty of friends to



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push you on—if you think that because of these things you can dispense with the fear of God, and the daily obligations of duty, and make pleasure and self-indulgence your main ends, and do without honest, persevering, self-denying toil, you will be miserably disappointed. God has some hard things to say to you before you get far on in years. It does not matter how promising one's beginnings, if there is no steady, conscientious brave self-discipline, and endeavour.

Life is always a failure and a disgraceful thing with a downward course, if there is no serious purpose in it and no great thoughts. And if you are ever tempted to say, as many do, that there is no hope for a life which commences heavily weighted; that all the chances go to those who are clever, and richly endowed; that if a youth begins with no money to back him and no friends to push him into promotion, he must remain chained down to that low condition to the end—then I point you to this little bit of biography. I could take you round a certain town and point you to a hundred men who have repeated that bit of biography in their own lives, and I tell you that even now the chances are plentiful: waiting at the feet of those who tread life's way, a brave heart within and God overhead, and that no one need despair, however unpromising his start, who makes God his guide, and prayer his inspiration, and duty his chosen companion, and shuns evil, and pursues that which is good. Faith and loyalty to conscience and a courageous temper are still the weapons which conquer in the fight. Jabez, the child of sorrow and misfortune, became more honourable than all his brethren.

III.

And now I commend this prayer to all of you—the prayer which this youth offered when he went out carrying his unhonoured name and empty hand into the rough places of the world. It is a beautiful prayer. It is on the whole a wise prayer. There are better and more Christian prayers in the gospels and epistles; but in the Old Testament there are few prayers more worthy of imitation than this.

He asked that "*God might bless him indeed*," that is, above every human blessing and favour, that he might, by his life and conduct, deserve it He asked what we may all safely and humbly ask of God, provided that we give a large and not a low meaning. He asked that "*God would enlarge his coast*." If that meant broad estates, you had better drop it out of your prayer. But if it means to have your life enlarged, your sympathies and interests widened out, your influence and your power of service increased, it is such a prayer as Christ might have taught you. Never forget to offer it. He asked that "*the hand of God might be with him*"; that every day he might feel the leadings and take no step which was not a step approved by God. And he asked that the watchful and restraining power of the Almighty would "*keep him from evil*."



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You will do well to offer that prayer at the beginning. You will do well to offer it every day to the end. It is a prayer that will keep; you will find it fresh each morning. And every day will be a better day which is thus commenced, and every life will grow honourable in the sight of men, and beautiful in the sight of God, which develops in the spirit of it.

SIMEON

BY REV. H. ELVET LEWIS

The Temple shows to better advantage at the beginning of the Gospel history than at its close. As we follow our Lord through the events of the last week, we meet no winsome faces within its precincts. Annas is there, and Caiaphas; Pharisees too, blinded with envy; but there is no Zacharias seen there, no Simeon, no doctors of the law even, such as gathered around the Boy of twelve. If any successors of these still frequented the sanctuary, they are lost in the deep shadow cast by a nation's crime. Perhaps we may consider those whom we meet on the threshold of our Lord's life as the last of an old regime of prophetic souls, the last watchers passing out of sight as the twilight of a coming doom thickened and settled on the Holy City.

But there he stands, the gracious, winsome old man, whom death is not permitted to touch till the Star of Bethlehem has risen. "*It was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ!*" He is like a dweller of the spiritual world, who only returns to visit earthly ways. For him the veil, though not as yet rent, has worn thin, and he is more familiar with the voices from beyond it than with the voices of earth. The priest, the Levite, the Rabbi, pass him like shadows: the Holy Ghost is his living companion and teacher. Browning's Rabbi ben Ezra might well have borrowed his song from the lips of this aged saint:

"Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand
Who saith, 'A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!'"

Consider his CHARACTER: "*the same man was just and devout.*" Inward and outward are in equipoise; he does not make frequent prayers atone for equally frequent lapses in duty. He looks upon men in the light which has risen upon him through looking upon God. He brought with him, from the Throne of Grace, the tranquil beams which helped him to perceive what he owed to his fellow-men. He was so subdued to charity, that his one expectation was the consolation of Israel. He was no prophet of doom; perhaps he was even blind to the moral deterioration, the blight of ideals, growing more wasteful,

every day, of the nation's best life. To him, Israel was still more in need of consolation than chastisement. Alas! for these gentle-souled patriots,



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whose hopes rise from their own heart's goodness, and not from their nation's worth! So obscure, so devout: while the great ones sin, they pray; while the popular priests lead in worldliness, they retire into God's hiding-places to intercede. They have private paths into God's Paradise: they do not always see the cherubim with flaming sword. God often calls them home before the stormy dawn of the evil day. So they live and die, waiting for the consolation.

Consider, again, his HOLY FELLOWSHIP: "*the Holy Ghost was upon him.*" His heart became the ark of the Heavenly Dove, wandering over the grey waters; and to him was the olive leaf brought. He looked past the face of the Rabbi and the priest, not contemptuously, but wistfully, wondering why he must: he looked past them, and beheld in the dawning shadow a diviner Face. He heard secrets which would be foolishness to others, even to frequenters of the Temple and to robed priests. He thought of death peacefully; but that other Face always came, faintly but immutably, between him and the Last Shadow. The Lord's Christ first, death after. What gracious ways God has of treating some of these simply-trusting children of His! How graciously He orders the course of spiritual wants for them! "*And the evening and the morning*" are—each day.

"*And he came by the Spirit into the Temple.*" He required no ecclesiastical calendar, no book of the hours. This obscure denizen of the sanctuary had a dial in his own soul, and the silent shadow on the figures came from no visible sun. Be sure that there are men and women still, just, and fearing God, who anticipate the days of heaven, and almost win their dawning. How often must Simeon have come, waiting: and yet how fresh was his hope each time! He fed on God's disappointments; the unfulfilled was his hidden manna.

Consider his ONE GREAT DAY. An obscure worshipper suddenly becomes the richest, most honoured man in all the world: in his arms he holds God's Incarnate Son. Yesterday was a day of earth, tomorrow also may well be a day of earth: but this, a day of heaven! Alas! but only to him. To others this, too, is a very day of earth. Did some officiating priest watch the little group of peasant parents showing their first-born to an obscure worshipper? And did he look, without a stain of contempt upon his vision? And yet Jerusalem, Alexandria, Rome, had no such gift and prize as the arms of that humble dreamer held. Who would not have taken his place, had they known! It is well to be reckoned God's intimate, lest we miss the Child.

"The sages frowned, their beards they shook,
For pride their heart beguiled;
They said, each looking on his book,
"We want no child."

But Simeon had dwelt nearer God than they—nearest God of all that came to the Temple that day. And so God trusted him with His Best.



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Then, once more, consider his PROPHETIC PRAYER. He was now ready to depart. He had arrived at the house where the chamber of peace looks towards the sunrising: why should he return to the warfare again? He was unfitted for earth, by the face of that Child: he would go where such a vision would not be marred by earthly airs! "*For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people: a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel.*" The sentinel has been long on duty: now the watch is done, "*now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace.*" And as he passes from his well-kept post, his heart's charity overflows, and Gentile and Jew are covered with his blessing: the Gentile even coming first, as though, perhaps, he perceived that "the salvation of the Jews could only be realised after the enlightenment of the heathen, and by this means"—Godet suggests. To the darkened souls of the pagan world—light: to the humiliated Jewish people—glory. Israel had seen and lost many a glory: it had seen the glory of conquest, of wealth, of wisdom, of ritual, of righteousness: but in the little Child was the sum and essential radiancy of all glory that had been, the earnest of all glory that was to be. Eternally, Christ is "*the hope of glory.*"

Consider also his PERFECT CANDOUR. He looked in the Child's face, he looked in the mother's face, with all the tenderness and love that made it half divine; and then this disciple of the Spirit, strangely moved from his wonted calm, described truth purely as he saw it. He scanned the future, heard the sound of many a fall, caught the hiss and cry of uneasy consciences against the "sign"; he saw the gleam of the sword, and the wounded mother's heart; he saw the revelations of good and of evil which the child would surely effect. One might not unnaturally conclude that these presentiments were of the day—of that very hour. He had hitherto walked and dwelt in the light of consolation; he had dreamed his tranquil dream "*beside still waters.*" But in this moment of contact with God, he was made strong to see the darkness which is never absent from the azure of truth—"a deep, but dazzling darkness." So to young Samuel came the sorrowful vision of the fall of the house of Eli; so to the old prophet-saint now glittered the gleaming arrows of truth. But neither scorn nor wrathful eloquence moves him, in view of what he saw: he simply accepts this burden of the Lord, and bears it, without murmuring or exulting. He sees the "*fall and rising again of many in Israel*"; it is God's will: let His will be done! "*A sword shall pierce through thy own soul also*": bow, mother-heart, to the purposes of God's heart of love! "*In peace*" this servant of the Lord still stands; "*in peace*" he departs. Blessed are they whom darkling truths may grieve, but not distract; whom stormy revelations beat upon, but cannot shake. They live in the house founded upon a rock.



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What presentiment of his nation's doom came to him in that moment of clearer insight, of more candid intercourse with truth? "*The thoughts of many hearts*"—"the uneasy working of the understanding in the service of a bad heart":—how much was revealed, how much was mercifully concealed? We cannot tell; but strength was given him to bear the gleam of the vision, and still wait. "*O rest in the Lord; wait patiently for Him.*" He saw the Child go out of the Temple; and if, for a moment, a breath as of a chill wind smote his soul, he retired into the deeper consolations of God, where the sun smites not by day, nor the moon by night. If it was his last visit to the Temple, he had seen what would have made it worth his while to have gone there every day for seventy years or more. And let it not be forgotten that God still gives His Child to those who humbly, faithfully wait for the consolation of Israel.

Such a picture as that of Simeon gives piety its divinest charm. It is not simply that men have wished to be in his place; but—what is far better and far more practical—they have wished to be in his spirit. He draws them towards him, and after him. He stands in a glorious company of winsome souls, who not only lead to heaven, but attract men on the way.

"They are, indeed, our Pillar-fires
 Seen as we go;
They are that City's shining spires,
 We travel to:
A sword-like gleam
 Kept man for sin
First out; this beam
 Will guide him in."

PONTIUS PILATE

BY REV. PRINCIPAL WALTER F. ADENEY, D.D.

In spite of the fact that he condemned Jesus to death, the Gospels present us a more favourable portrait of Pontius Pilate than that which we derive from secular historians. Josephus relates incidents that reveal him as the most insolent and provoking of governors. For instance, the Jewish historian ascribes to him a gratuitous insult, the story of which shows its perpetrator to have been as weak as he was offensive. It was customary for Roman armies to carry an image of the emperor on their standards; but previous governors of Judaea had relaxed this rule when entering Jerusalem, in deference to the strong objection of the Jews to admit "the likeness of anything." Nevertheless Pilate ordered the usual images to be introduced at night. When they were discovered, the citizens protested vehemently. Pilate had the crowd that he had admitted to his presence surrounded with soldiers, and threatened them with instant death. But they threw themselves on the ground, protesting that they would submit to

this fate rather than that the wisdom of their laws should be transgressed. The governor had not reckoned on this. He was only “bluffing,” and now he had to climb down, and the images were removed. On another occasion, described by the same historian, Pilate had



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seized the sacred money at the Temple and employed it in building an aqueduct, a piece of utilitarian profanity which enraged the Jews to such an extent that a vast crowd gathered, clamouring against Pilate and insisting on the stoppage of the works. Then the governor sent soldiers among the people, disguised in the garb of civilians, who at a given signal drew their clubs and attacked them more savagely than Pilate had intended, killing and wounding a great number. Although Josephus does not mention the incident recorded by St Luke (xiii. 1), in which Pilate mingled the blood of some Galilean pilgrims with their sacrifices, this is entirely in accordance with his brutality of conduct in the events the historian records. Philo goes further, giving a story told by Agrippa, according to which Pilate hung gilt shields in the palace of Herod at Jerusalem, but was compelled to take them down as the result of an appeal to Tiberius Caesar, and adding that Agrippa described Pilate as "inflexible, merciless, and obstinate." He says that Pilate dreaded lest the Jews should go on an embassy to the emperor, impeaching him for "his corruptions, his acts of insolence, his rapine, and his habit of insulting people; his cruelty, and his continual murders of people untried and uncondemned, and his never-ending, gratuitous, and most grievous inhumanity." Josephus is not trustworthy, always writing "with a motive," and Philo must be considered prejudiced, since he saw too much of the worst side of the Roman treatment of Jews; and the wholly unfavourable verdict of these two writers should be qualified by what we read in the New Testament concerning the subject of them. The interesting point is that we have to go to the Christian documents for the more calm and just estimate of the man who crucified Christ. This fact should deepen our sense of the fairness of the evangelists. They evince nothing of that bitterness of resentment which the Jews, quite naturally, as the world judges, cherished towards their oppressors. They were the followers of One who had taught them to love their enemies, and who, when in mortal agony, prayed to God to forgive the men who had inflicted it. But further, the early Christians discriminated between the Jewish authorities, who planned and purposed the death of Christ and really compassed it, and Pilate, who was but a weak instrument in the hands of these men. The fact that the evangelists so clearly mark this distinction is a sign that they are in close touch with the events, and that they faithfully record what they know to have taken place. In a word, it is clear that we have a more just and accurate portrait of Pilate in our Gospels than the representations of him by Josephus and Philo, who are thus seen to be less trustworthy historians than the New Testament writers.



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The word "Pilate" as a proper name has been variously explained. Some have derived it from the Latin *pileatus*, meaning one who wore the *pileus*, the cap of a freed slave, and so have regarded the Roman governor by whom Jesus was tried as a man who had been raised from the ranks of slavery. The worst condemnation of slavery is, that it degrades the characters of its victims, developing the servile vices of cowardice, meanness, and cruelty—all of which vices are manifest in Pilate's character. But such a promotion as this theory implies would be most improbable. A more likely explanation connects the name with *pilum*, a javelin. The earlier name Pontius suggests the family of the Pontii, of Samnite origin, well-known in Roman history. It was customary to confine such an office as that which Pilate held to knights, men of the equestrian order. Nevertheless, it was not a very dignified office. It is described indefinitely in the Gospels as that of a "governor." But Pilate is designated more distinctly by Tacitus and Josephus as *procurator* of Judaea. This official served under the Legate of Syria. His proper duty was simply to collect the taxes of the district over which he was appointed. Thus he would be likely to come into contact with the chief local collectors, such as Zaccheus; and in this way he may have heard, and that not unfavourably, of One who was known as the "Friend of publicans and sinners." But in the turbulent districts—such as Judaea and Egypt—the procurators were entrusted with almost unlimited powers, subject to an appeal to Caesar on the part of Roman citizens. Soldiers were sometimes needed for the forcible collection of taxes, and the disturbed condition of these parts demanded an official in residence who could act at once and on the spot. The punishment of turbulence was with the rigour of martial law, which really means no law at all, but only the will of the man in charge of the army. A subordinate official lifted to a position of almost irresponsible power—such was Pilate. We can well understand how a man with no moral backbone would succumb to its temptations. Pilate was a much smaller man than Gallic the proconsul at Corinth, and that other proconsul at Cyprus, Sergius Paulus, whom St Paul won over to Christian faith. But his pettiness in the eyes of Roman society would lead him to magnify his importance in the little world he was trying to rule like a king, though often with consequences humiliating to himself.

Pilate's headquarters were at Caesarea, by the sea coast, the Roman capital of Palestine; but he came up to Jerusalem with a troop of soldiers at the Passover, to prevent any disturbance among the vast hosts of pilgrims then gathered together in the city, just as Turkish soldiers now mount guard at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre during the Easter celebrations, to prevent the Christians from quarrelling and fighting. That is how it was he happened to be present when Jesus was arrested and brought up for trial. In this fact also we may see why the Jewish authorities felt it necessary to hand their Prisoner over to the Roman governor; although, a few years later, they were able themselves to execute the death sentence on Stephen in the Jewish mode, by stoning, and still later to do the same with James, the Lord's brother.



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All four Gospels refer to the trial of Jesus before Pontius Pilate; but the fullest information is to be obtained from the third and fourth. St Luke throughout both his works seizes every suitable opportunity for setting out the scene of his story on the large stage of the world's history, and he is especially interested in showing it in relation to the imperial government. Thus, while Matthew only connects the time of the birth of Jesus with the reign of Herod, a Jewish note of time, Luke also associates it with Caesar Augustus and the chronology of Rome; and later, while Matthew does not say when John the Baptist began his work, but notes the imprisonment of John as the occasion of the commencement of our Lord's public ministry, Luke carefully records that it was "in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, *Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea*" (Luke iii. 1), that John the Baptist began preaching and baptizing. It is this same evangelist only who refers to Pilate's savage slaughter of the Galileans at Jerusalem. The author of the Fourth Gospel does not mention Pilate before the time of our Lord's trial, but he gives us a much fuller account of that trial than any of his companion evangelists. Next to John, our fullest account is in Luke. On these two authorities therefore we must mainly rely. But John's is not only the most ample and fully detailed narrative; it also furnishes us with by far the most vivid and convincing portrait of the Roman governor. This is one of the numerous cases of life-like character-drawing with which the Fourth Gospel abounds. Nicodemus, the woman of Samaria, Thomas, Judas, Mary Magdalene, and now Pilate, are all known to history from St John's portraits of them. Should not this significant fact lead us to attach great weight to his portrait of Jesus Christ, which soars above the Christ-pictures of the synoptics in the most exalted Divine glory?

Jesus had been tried soon after His arrest before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, the supreme council of the Jews, and there He had been condemned to death, not on the charge for which He had been arrested—threatening to destroy the Temple—for the evidence against Him had broken down, but for blasphemy during the course of His trial, when adjured by the high priest to declare whether He was the Christ. But the presence of Pilate prevented the council from executing their sentence (as doubtless they would have done if he had been away at Caesarea), in defiance of the law, which was entrusted to a weak and capricious governor. Accordingly they brought their Prisoner to the procurator's residence—probably Herod's palace, a magnificent building with two marble wings, containing large rooms sumptuously furnished, and spacious porticos surrounded by gardens and enclosed in a lofty wall with towers, situated in the western district of the city, and approached by a bridge across the Tyropaeon valley. The facts that a later governor, Gestius Flavius, resided here, and that Pilate lived in Herod's palace at Caesarea when in that city, and that he hung the shields about which there was so much trouble in the Jerusalem palace, make this view more probable than the traditional idea that the trial of Jesus took place in the Castle of Antonia, the imperial barracks, close to the Temple.

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The Jews objected to enter this fine palace, because as a Gentile residence it was defiled, and therefore defiling, and they wished to be “clean” for the feast they were to eat in the evening. Pilate humoured them, and had his conferences with them outside the building. Seeing their object and observing their temper, he must have discovered at once their miserable hypocrisy. These were the men who affected to be the leaders of the one pure faith on earth, a faith which looked with scorn on the “idolatry” of the cultured Roman. He must have regarded them with immense contempt. If his tone is cynical, it is but a match for the unmitigated cynicism of their conduct.

Pilate inquires as to the crime with which the Prisoner is charged. At first, the Jews do not give an explicit reply, only stating that they have already found Him guilty. Pilate catches at that. His weakness, so pitifully apparent throughout the whole proceedings, appears at this early stage. Desiring to shirk the responsibility of deciding the case—he would use the first apparent loophole of escape. Since the Jews have taken this case in hand, let them carry it through, dealing with it according to their law. They are not to be caught by that flattering suggestion. They know that they have not the power of life and death. Pilate would not let them kill Jesus. His proposal, which on the surface looks like the granting of a privilege, amounts to this, that they may exercise ecclesiastical discipline, excommunicate their Prisoner, or perhaps fling Him into jail, possibly scourge Him. But the worst of these punishments will not satisfy their determined hatred, or rid them of the haunting fear inspiring it, that Jesus will undermine their influence with the people. Nothing less than His death will put an end to that danger; so they thought, although the event proved that it was this very death of Christ that was to lead to the victory of Christianity over Judaism. This, however, even His own disciples could not foresee, much less could it enter into the minds of His enemies among the Jews.

Thwarted in his first attempt to escape, and compelled to try this difficult case, Pilate enters the palace where Jesus is kept under arrest, and questions Him. He has been informed that Jesus claims to be the king of the Jews. Is that so? Is the charge but a piece of malicious slander? If it is, there is an end of the matter. Pilate is not going to lend himself to humour the whim of those hateful Jews, whom he affects to despise while in his heart he is mortally afraid of them. There is nothing of the bearing of the violent insurgent in this calm peasant who stands before him. Surely this is some stupid mistake, or there is more Jewish malice in it than Pilate can fathom. But the Roman magistrate soon discovers that he is dealing with no ordinary man. Jesus takes his measure in a moment. Pilate is a feeble creature, with no character, insincere,



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dishonest. He must be made to feel his littleness. We can imagine how our Lord would fix on him a penetrating gaze before which the shallow nature of the man would become apparent, as He asked whether this cross-examination was genuine, or whether Pilate was prompted to it; whether, as we should say, it was “a put-up affair”—“*Sayest thou this of thyself, or did others say it concerning Me?*” Picture the situation—the great marble palace, the representative of Imperial Rome clad in the purple robe of office, and seated in his chair on the dais, the surrounding officials and bodyguard; and then the peasant from Galilee, alone, unattended, undefended, come straight from insult and mockery in another court, and that after a night of mental agony. Observe how completely the relative position of judge and Prisoner are reversed, at least, to the eyes of the onlooker. Jesus calmly questions Pilate, calmly tells him of the limit of his power, and calmly claims the kinship for himself—there of all places—in the Roman governor’s residence, speaking to this governor himself, knowing that it must seal His own fate. The two powers are now face to face—the world-power of Rome, outwardly so imposing, but at this moment shrinking to insignificance, looking so vulgar, so mean, so sordid, so unreal, so essentially weak, in the person of the paltry governor; and the heavenly power, the power of truth and goodness, the Kingdom of God represented by the provincial Prisoner whose inherent dignity of Presence is seen to be all the more sublime for the contrast. And Pilate? How does he view this? He is manifestly disconcerted, but he tries to hide his awkwardness under a mask of Roman scorn. “*Am I a Jew?*” he exclaims, in a tone of measureless contempt. It is like the contempt of Agrippa when, in response to St Paul’s enthusiastic appeal and close home-thrust, he cried, “*With but little persuasion thou wouldest fain make me a Christian!*” Pilate reminds Jesus that He has been given up by His own people. Jews might be expected to stand by a fellow-Jew under the Roman tyranny. How comes it to pass that the Jewish people have brought a man of their own race to the foreign tribunal, prosecuting Him before this alien power, seeking His death from the hated Imperial government? What can He have done to bring about so unusual a situation? Pilate is perplexed; and the answer of Jesus does not clarify the magistrate’s ideas. It seems only more mystifying. Jesus describes His kingdom, so different from any institution bearing the name that Pilate has ever heard of. It is not of the order of things in this world. If it were, of course Christ’s servants would fight, as do the servants of the claimants of earthly thrones. But they do not resort to violence. The kingdom and its methods of government are both unearthly. Pilate is interested, perhaps amused, with what now seem to him the fancies of a fanatical dreamer. He pursues



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the inquiry, we may suppose, with a smile on his lips, "*Art thou a king, then?*" he asked. There is no ambiguity in his Prisoner's reply. He is a king. This strange kingdom, not resting on any basis of earthly power, dispensing with fighting, with all that an army suggests, with force, is the very opposite to Pilate's idea of a state. Rome was materialistic to the core. Her rule rested on brute force. The Empire, the *Imperium*, was the dominion of the *Imperator*, that is to say, of the commander-in-chief of the army. It was a military despotism. Nominally the government was still republican, and the older and more peaceable provinces were administered by proconsuls, whose appointment rested with the senate, or was supposed by a legal fiction to rest with that body. But the newer and more troublesome provinces were governed as conquered territory directly by the emperor as the head of the army. Now Judaea came in this latter division. Pontius Pilate and his superior, the Legate of Syria, were both directly responsible to Tiberius Caesar. Pilate was Caesar's officer under military direction. Military methods characterised the procurator's rule. To a man placed as Pilate, the notion of a ruler independent of fighting supporters, and that in territory held down by force of arms, was simply absurd.

Our Lord's further explanation seems to Pilate still more out of keeping with the notion of royalty. Jesus says He was born to be a king in order that He might bear witness to the truth. A king—truth—what have these two words in common, the one referring to the most real region, the other to the most ideal? To Pilate, the conjunction is absolutely incongruous. "*What is truth?*" he asks, as he turns away, too contemptuous to wait for an answer. This famous utterance has been quoted as a text for the anxious inquirer, and preachers have gravely set themselves to answer it. Jesus did nothing of the kind. Evidently it was not a serious inquiry. Pilate flung off the very idea of truth—a mere abstraction, nothing to a practical Roman. Still, though he was not seeking any answer to his question, by the very tone of it he suggested that he did not possess that gem which those who hold it prize above all things. "The Scepticism of Pilate" is the title of one of Robertson's greatest sermons. The preacher traces it to four sources: indecision; falseness to his own convictions; the taint of the worldly temper of his day; and that priestly bigotry which forbids inquiry, and makes doubt a crime. Pilate is the typical sceptic, who is worlds removed from the "honest" doubter. Serious doubt, which is pained and anxious in the search of truth, is in essence belief, for it believes in the value of truth, if only truth can be discovered; but typical scepticism not only does not credit what the believer takes for truth, but despises it as not worth seeking. That is the fatal doubt, a doubt that eats into the soul as a moral canker.



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Nevertheless, although what is of supreme value to Jesus is reckoned by Pilate as of no importance whatever, the cross-examination has satisfied the magistrate of the innocence of his Prisoner. His duty, then, is plain. He should acquit the innocent man. But he dare not do so immediately. That howling mob of Jews and those odious priests and Sadducees of the council are determined on the death of their victim. Pilate has made himself well hated by the roughness of his government. Nothing would please the Jews and their leaders better than to have some chance of impeaching him before his jealous master at Rome, on the charge of leniency to treason. Pilate quails before the terrible possibility. In face of it he simply dares not pronounce a verdict of acquittal. Yet he means to do all he can to effect the escape of his Prisoner. His inbred instinct for justice prompts him to this; for the Romans cherished reverence for law, and even so corrupt a ruler as Pilate was not independent of the atmosphere of his race. Then it would be a bitter humiliation to let his judgment be overruled by those contemptible Jews. He would be heartily glad to confound and disappoint them. More than this, he had begun to feel some awakening interest in his remarkable Prisoner. He had come to the conclusion that Jesus was a harmless dreamer; but he had felt some faint shadow of the spell of the wonderful Personality. If only it could be managed with safety to himself, he would be glad to have Jesus set free.

Accordingly we now see Pilate resorting to a series of devices in order to escape from his vexatious dilemma. From this point his conduct opens out to us a curious study in psychological phenomena. The ingenuity of Pilate in resorting to one expedient after another, is very striking. Evidently he has keen wits, and he uses them with some agility. But it is all in vain. He is pushed from each of the positions he takes up by the same stubborn, relentless pressure which he invariably finds to be irresistible. The explanation is, that though he has intellect, he lacks will-power. On the other side there is not much need for intelligence, but there is the most obstinate will. The Jews possess a clear notion of what they want, and a set determination to have their way. In such a contest there is no doubt which side will win. When will is bitter against intellect, it is the latter that succumbs. The determined will forces itself through all opposition that rests only on intelligence, reasoning, contrivance. Intellect does not count for nothing; allied to a strong will, as in Calvin, Cromwell, Napoleon, it helps to effect gigantic results. But in the sphere of action, it is will-power that tells in immediate results. Even here, reason may conquer stupid obstinacy in the long-run. But you must give it time; and you must have honesty of character. Neither condition was present in this case of Pilate. He had to decide promptly; and his moral nature was

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unsound. Such a man under such circumstances will never find his most cunning devices a match for the set determination of his opponents. So Pilate, feebly protesting, helplessly scheming, is pushed back step by step; and ultimately he concedes everything demanded of him, and the final issue is more humiliating to himself and more cruel to the innocent Prisoner whom he is trying to shield, than it would have been if he had yielded at the beginning. The real victim of this tragedy in the palace is not Jesus, it is the soul of Pilate. We seem to see a weak man being thrust down a steep place, resisting and catching at the shrubs and rocks that he passes, but torn from his grasp of them and finally flung over the precipice.

Pilate's first device was to send Jesus to Herod Antipas, who happened to be at Jerusalem at the time. It was a compliment to the frivolous "king of Galilee" to remit a Galilean prisoner to his judgment, and Pilate would gladly rid himself of the awkward case by this ingenious device. But it was useless, for the simple reason that Herod had no power of life and death in Jerusalem, and Pilate soon had his Prisoner on his hands again. Next he clutched at the custom of releasing a prisoner during the feast. Here was a chance for letting off Jesus without declaring Him innocent. But this suggestion was hopeless. If the Jews were set on effecting the death of Jesus, they would not give up their right to choose their prisoners to be released, and take at the dictation of Pilate the very man they wanted to have done to death. They clamoured for an insurgent, Barabbas, a man caught red-handed in the very crime for which these hypocrites professed in their new-fledged loyalty to Caesar to be anxious to have Jesus executed. The cynicism of their choice is palpable. By daring to make it, they show in what contempt they hold Pilate. The governor loses ground considerably by this false move. Then he tries to throw the blame of the murder of Jesus, which he sees he cannot prevent, on the Jews. A new motive urges him to escape from the responsibility of committing a judicial murder. His wife had sent a private message warning him to "*have nothing to do with that righteous man.*" She had been much disturbed by a dream about him. Romans were slaves to omens and auguries, and the most materialistic of them felt some awe of dreams, although they had lost faith in real religion. Your confirmed sceptic is often slavishly superstitious in the secret of his soul. It is a way the spiritual has of avenging itself on the man who openly flouts it. Boldly flung out of the window, it creeps back into the cellar and vexes the soul with petty tricks played on the subterranean consciousness. The man who expels his good angel is haunted by imps and elves. He who will not believe in God and despises truth succumbs to the message of a dream.

More anxious now than ever to escape responsibility, Pilate calls for water and publicly washes his hands, telling the Jews that the innocent blood will be on their heads. They accept the awful responsibility. What do they care for the weak Roman's scruples? He is doing their will, and of course no hand-washing can cleanse his conscience from the stain of guilty compliance.



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Yet one thing more Pilate will do. He will scourge Jesus. Perhaps that may satisfy these savage Jews. For scourging was a savage punishment. The whip was loaded with lead and sharp fish-bones, and at every stroke the flesh was cut. Men often died under this severe treatment. Pilate had it inflicted on Jesus, knowing Him to be innocent; but hoping that, if He survived, no more might be required. It was an abominable compromise. If Jesus were innocent—and Pilate knew He was innocent—He should have been set free unscathed, with apologies for a mistaken arrest. If he were guilty, of course he ought to receive the death-penalty for the crime of treason. Justice could allow of no middle course. But Pilate is not thinking of Justice. He only wants to escape the onus of killing an innocent man. Then he has Jesus brought forth, bleeding, in agony, His lacerated flesh exposed to the view of that heartless multitude. “Behold the man,” says Pilate. “Look at your victim; is not this enough?” If Pilate thought his appeal *ad misericordiam* would touch those hardened sinners of the Sanhedrin, he was strangely mistaken. The sight of their victim in His agony only maddens them. They are like hounds who had tasted blood. Like hounds, they “give tongue,” and yell for His death. Pilate can resist no longer. He has played his last card, and it has been taken. Thoroughly humiliated and quite helpless, he gives sentence, and so in spite of the governor’s desperate efforts to escape the stigma of his awful crime, it goes down to all the ages that Jesus was “crucified under Pontius Pilate.”

BARABBAS

BY REV. J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.

“And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas.”—ST LUKE xxiii. 18.

You have heard a crowd of people cry out all at once. It is always impressive, it is sometimes very terrible, occasionally it is sublime. It begins in a way that no one can explain. Somebody in the crowd utters a name, or ejaculates a brief sentence. What happens? Often nothing at all. Men are not in the mood for it; it drops unnoticed, or provokes a jeer or two and is then forgotten. But sometimes the word falls like a spark on a mass of dry tinder—ten thousand hearts have been prepared for it—swift as a flash of lightning a sympathetic current passes through the whole throng—ten thousand lips take up the cry. They are all carried away by contagion, magnetism, or madness, and a shout goes up enough to rend the sky. When some great and noble sentiment has laid hold of them, the shout of a people is one of the grandest things on earth; when it is some awful prejudice, unreasoning hatred, or cowardly terror that sways them, the shout is the most inhuman and hellish thing on earth; and that was the character of the shout that was raised here.



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The world has never forgotten that cry, and never will. To the very last the world will wonder how it should have come to be raised, and will condemn and pity the crowd of people who gave themselves up to it, for they were making a hero of the vilest stuff, and clamouring for the murder of the world's one Divine man. There never was a more brutal and insane shout than that; never again can there be a choice so fatal and so suicidal as the choice they made: "*Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas.*"

If the thing had not happened, we should say it was impossible. It seems well-nigh incredible that human eyes and human hearts could be so blind. A story of this kind is food for the bitterest cynic. He who has the most utter contempt for the race to which he belongs might find here almost a justification of his scorn. Oh what a satire upon human nature, that a whole city full of people, men, women, mothers and daughters, had come to this pass that they could not discern which was the nobler of these two—nay, thought that Barabbas was more deserving of their honour. One the very flower and crown of humanity, the express image of God; and the other a gaol bird, a notorious criminal, whose hands had been dyed red, and whose heart had been hardened by the shedding of blood. Well might those pitiful lips say, "*Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.*"

Why did they do it? Why did they raise their voices for Barabbas?

The main answer is that men make their heroes as the heathen make gods, after their own image. There is no doubt that Barabbas was more to the taste of this people, more according to their heart, than Christ; or at least they thought he was; not quite their ideal man, perhaps, but certainly nearer to their ideal than the Christ whom they rejected. It may be that they had had no particular love for him until just now, possibly they had hardly thought of him at all; but now it was a question between this man and Jesus, and Jesus they did not want at any price. And their very hatred of the one made the other look beautiful. Barabbas is our man, they said, and the more they said it the more they believed it; and each time the name was repeated it sounded sweeter, until they were all shouting it, nine-tenths of them because the others shouted it, and until they really made themselves believe that in this man they had got a veritable hero and hardly less than a god.

That is always what happens in such cases, the greater part begin shouting for no particular reason because a few others have led the way, and they end by believing that the man whom they are acclaiming is almost divine; yet it is certain that they elected this man on the whole because of the two he had more points in common with them, this poor despicable and very unheroic thing was the person whom they delighted to honour because they themselves were very unheroic and somewhat despicable. We cannot see the greatness of a truly great man unless there is just a bit of greatness in ourselves; Christ was too big and too divine to be seen and measured by their small and vulgar eyes. Barabbas was about their size, and they raised their voices for him.



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We have had Carlyle's words quoted to us a thousand times about heroes and hero-worship—how it is part of human nature to go after heroes and make them—how the world has always been given up to this worship, and always will be. We all revere and follow great men, or those whom we deem great, which is not quite the same thing. And it is a beautiful feature in human nature if it is wisely directed, if we can only set our hearts on the true heroes and follow them. It is not beautiful at all when we make our gods of clay, and shout ourselves hoarse in exalting to the skies creatures as undivine and quite as small as we are.

Heroes are sometimes easily made to-day, and martyrs too. Modern martyrdom of the popular sort is about the least costly thing going. It calls for no tears and blood, it can be gained on very easy terms. You have only to break a law which you do not like, or your conscience does not approve, and to be brought up for it with an admiring crowd accompanying you, and to have a fine imposed, which is paid for, perhaps, by popular subscription—and lo, you are a martyr. I am not calling in question the thing itself. It may be both right and Christian to refuse obedience to a law on extreme occasions; but to call this martyrdom is extravagant and almost humorous.

It was not so in the olden time when the real martyrs were made. No, those martyrs were not delicately handled, but stripped and stoned to pieces, and burned, and there were no crowds to greet them with bravoes and caresses, but furious mobs clamouring for their blood. We have changed all that indeed, thank God: but they were heroes and martyrs indeed, and it sounds to me somewhat like a desecration of the word to apply it to men and even women who are good, probably brave in a way, but who win their crown of glory very cheaply indeed. If we are to have heroes, let us make sure that they possess some heroic stuff.

There is a vast amount of hero-worship to-day which reminds us too much of that shout for Barabbas. We are glorifying the wrong people; at least, most of us are. It is one of the deplorable weaknesses of the times, or if you like it better, it is one of the fashions or crazes to which human nature at times gives itself up. The heroes of the crowd, of the great mass of people, are not the good men, not the men of light and leading, not the men who are morally great or even intellectually great, not the men who are the strength and salt of a nation, but the men who minister to its pleasures, and lead the way in sports. No one can have any doubt of that. No one can have any doubt about the sort of persons whom the vast majority of young people, and some older people too, delight to honour. With some it is the star of the music hall or opera. With a great many more it is the winner of a race, or the champion player in a successful football team, or the most effective bowler, or the highest scorer in cricket. The crowd goes mad about these heroes. There is no throne high enough to place them on. Money and favours are lavished at their feet, and all the newspapers are full of their glorious triumphs.



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Mark I am not speaking against athletic sports. I like to see a well and honestly played game, and I would join in the clapping when a man makes a clever stroke. What I object to is the crazy and almost delirious worship which is given to these champions of the sporting world. It is the excess of the thing that proves a diseased state of mind. There is more fuss made over some youth who scores a few hundreds on the cricket-field, than there would be over a man who had saved six hundred lives. In hundreds of journals his portrait appears, and his doings are chronicled as if he had wrought some deliverance for the nation. Poor lad, it is not his fault that he has sprung up suddenly into fame, it is the fault of the people who love to have these things so. It is because men have gone pleasure-mad and sport-mad, and in their madness cannot see the difference between a clever athlete and a mental or moral giant. We prove what our own tastes are, we prove the quality of our own hearts and minds, we prove our own debasement, when we exalt physical strength above excellence of character, when we make our heroes out of muscle instead of soul, when we worship those who serve our pleasure more than those who set us examples of noble things, and lead the way in them. It is only another rendering of the old shout, "*Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas.*" Not so wicked, of course, but equally foolish and unworthy.

Who are your heroes? That is the question. Or in other words, What sort of men do you admire most? Answer that, and I know at once what sort of men and women you are. If you are worshippers of pleasure, the champions of the pleasure-world will be your idols and kings. If you are rooted and grounded in the love of lucre, the successful millionaire is the man that you will fawn upon or worship from afar. If your main delight is in intellectual things, the great thinkers and writers will be the men to whom you look up with reverence. And if you are good men, with a passionate love for goodness, and a constant striving to be better than you are, there are none whom you will admire with all your hearts except the good, except the best, and those who are leading in the way of goodness.

In a land which is truly Christian, the only heroes will be those who most resemble Christ. If we are truly Christians, and Christian thoughts have taken full possession of our hearts, we shall recognise no heroes save those who serve as Christ served, who live in a measure as Christ lived, who deny themselves for others, and spend their strength for the benefit of their fellow-men as the Master did. These are the true heroes, and all the others are more or less cheap imitations of them, or false substitutes for them. These are the true heroes, I say. The men and women who risk their lives to save other lives. The men who use their strength and ability, not for pay, but for the good and the advancement of their fellow-men, to save men from their sins, and to lessen the sum of human ill. The brave men and women who venture all things to serve some great and righteous cause, and to speed on the Kingdom of Christ and righteousness in the world.



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We have no right to count any as heroes unless they have courage, patience, self-denial, great love for their fellow-men, and strength which they cheerfully employ for something greater than themselves. The men, in fact, who have something of Christ in them; these are the only heroes whom God writes down in His book of life, and they are the only heroes whom we shall exalt in our hearts if we are followers of the crucified One.

In a Christian land, the beginning and end of all true and healthy hero-worship, is to set Christ first and above everything else and every one else in our affections. We shall measure all other men truly if we have first of all taken the true measure of Him. Love Him with all your hearts, say of Him, "Thou art the chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely," and you will never give much of your hearts again to the things and the men who are morally not worth loving. You will never be carried away again into the worship of that which is false, common, or cheap. A man who sees *all* beauty, and the perfect beauty in Christ, will never say that there is much beauty anywhere else, except where there is something that resembles Christ.

We have to make our choice to-day, as those men made it long ago. It is not quite the same choice. It is not Barabbas against Christ, but it is the poor, coarse, common, frivolous things of the world against Christ. It is the earthly against the heavenly; it is pleasure and sin against the service of the Man who was crucified: it is the love of self, and things baser than ourselves, against the love of Him who died for us. And everything depends upon that choice. To make Him your King is to become kingly yourselves, and to be crowned at last with the true glory and honour. But it is a terrible thing to say, "*Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas.*"

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA

BY REV. ALFRED ROWLAND, D.D.. LL.B.

"Joseph of Arimathea, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God."—MARK xv. 43.

The crucifixion of our Lord produced strange and startling effects in moral experience, as well as in the physical world. The veil of the Temple was rent from top to bottom as if a hand from heaven had torn it, in order to teach men that the ancient ritual was done with. Darkness covered the earth, suggesting to thoughtful minds the guilt of the world and the mystery of the sacrifice which atoned for it. Concurrently with these physical phenomena were spiritual experiences. The Roman centurion who, in command of four soldiers, had the duty of seeing the sentence of the law duly executed, was so profoundly moved by what he saw of the Divine Sufferer and by His dying cry, that he exclaimed, "*Truly this was the Son of God,*" and thus he became the first of the great multitude out of all nations who give honour to the Lamb that has been slain. The



women, too, who were sometimes despised for weakness and timidity, proved themselves in this crisis to be heroines. And Joseph of Arimathea, who up to this moment of shame and apparent defeat had been content to remain a secret disciple of our Lord, now boldly avowed his love and loyalty.



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The “even” had come, the second evening of the Jews, and the last streak of golden light was beginning to fade from the western sky. Three lifeless bodies were still hanging on the crosses at Golgotha, but according to Jewish custom they were about to be taken down, and flung into a dishonourable grave, when Joseph “*went in boldly to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus,*” caring for our Lord in death as another Joseph had cared for him in infancy.

This man is described as an “*honourable counsellor,*” which doubtless means a member of the Sanhedrim. He is also spoken of as “*a good man and a just,*” which could not have been said of many of his fellow-counsellors. On this occasion his action was sufficiently important in its relation to prophecy, and in its bearing as evidence of the reality of the burial and of the resurrection of our Lord, to be mentioned in each of the Four Gospels. Yet neither by this nor by social influence, nor by brilliant gifts (if he possessed them), did he become prominent in the early Church. Probably he was a man of practical sagacity and ready resource, rather than of great spiritual force. He could not stand on the same level with Simon Peter, the fisherman, whose honour it was so to hold the key of the Kingdom as to open the door of it to the Gentiles; nor did he ever attain influence comparable to that of Paul, who shook the citadel of paganism to its foundations, and planted amid its fallen defences the seed of the Kingdom, even the word of God. Joseph must be regarded as a common soldier, rather than as a general in Christ’s army; but when the officers had fallen, or deserted their Leader, he bravely stepped to the front and proved himself a hero. Perhaps all the more on this account some study of his character and conduct may encourage those who are not prominent in the Church to cultivate his fidelity, promptitude, and courage.

If we piece together the few fragments of his biography which are scattered through the Four Gospels, we shall gain a fuller and more accurate conception of the man.

I.

It is clear that Joseph had already protested against the wrong done to our Lord by the Sanhedrim, though he had been powerless to prevent it.

In this protest no doubt Nicodemus would have sided with him, but he was probably absent, for Joseph seems to have stood alone in his refusal to condemn the prophet of Nazareth. This was not easy. He would be urged to vote with his fellow-counsellors on the ground that their ecclesiastical authority, which had been defied, must be maintained, and that loyalty to the Sanhedrim demanded that all members of it should sink their private opinions in its defence. To hold out against an otherwise unanimous council would be the more difficult if Joseph had but recently attained the honour of membership, and this is probable, for the allusion to his “*new grave*” seems to imply that he had not long resided in Jerusalem. It was difficult, and possibly dangerous, to assert

his independence; but he did so by vote, if not by voice, for he “*had not consented to the counsel and deed of them.*”

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Right-minded men are not infrequently placed in a similar position. A policy may be initiated which they disapprove, and yet their protest against it may wreck the party and even displace the government, so that they naturally hesitate between party loyalty and enlightened conscience. Others who are engaged in business, or in professional affairs, have sometimes to confront doubtful practices which, though sanctioned by custom, unquestionably tend to the lowering of the moral tone of the nation. Their own financial interests, their fear of casting a slur on some known to them, who, though guilty of such practices are in other respects honourable men, and their dread of posing before the world as over-scrupulous, pharisaic men, who are righteous over-much—all urge them to keep quiet, especially as such a custom cannot be put down by one man. Yet is not conscience to be supreme, even under such conditions? The cultivation of the required moral heroism, which is sadly lacking in all sections of society, must begin in youth; and in this, elder brothers and sisters as well as parents and teachers of all grades have serious responsibility. Occasionally the moral atmosphere of a whole school becomes corrupt, and practices spring up which can only be put down by some right-minded lad or girl running the risk of unpopularity and social ostracism, yet it is under such conditions that God's heroes are bred; and books like *Tom Brown's Schooldays* have done much to foster the development of the heroic temper.

The truth is, that, wherever we are, in this world where evil widely prevails, fidelity to conscience must occasionally inspire what seems an unavailing protest against the practice of the majority. But we must see to it on such occasions that a real principle is at stake, and that we are not moved by mere desire for self-assertion, nor by pride and obstinacy. If, however, we are consciously free from these, and bravely protest against a wrong we cannot prevent, we may at least look for the approval of Him who carried His protest against evil up to the point of death, even the death of the Cross.

In thus taking up our stand against what we believe to be wrong, we may be, imperceptibly to ourselves, emboldening others, who are secretly waiting for some such lead.

II.

If Joseph required bravery on the council, he needed it still more when he went into the presence of Pilate to beg the body of Jesus.

The Roman procurator was a man to be dreaded by any Jew, and was just now in a suspicious and angry mood. But Joseph not only braved a repulse from him. He knew he would have to confront the far more bitter hostility of the priests. Theirs was a relentless hate, before which Peter had fallen, and Pilate himself had quailed. Yet this man Joseph, brought up though he had been in circumstances of ease, went in boldly to Pilate and deliberately ran the risk of their



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savage hatred, which would not only bring about as he believed his expulsion from office, but in all probability cruel martyrdom. It was a bold step; but no sooner did he take it than another rich man was by his side—Nicodemus by name—who also himself was one of Christ's disciples, though secretly, for fear of the Jews. The act of Joseph had more far-reaching consequences on the conduct of others than he expected.

Most heroic actions are richer in results than is expected by those who dare to do them; though the immediate effects may seem disappointing. Elijah learnt to his amazement that although all the people on Carmel had not been converted, more than seven thousand faithful men had been emboldened by his conduct. And when John plucked up courage to go right in to the palace of the high priest, Peter, who till then had followed Jesus afar off, went in also.

The truth is, that we all have influence beyond the limits of what we can see or estimate—parents over children, employers over their young people, mistresses over servants; for what we are these are encouraged to be, whether for good or for evil. Indeed, even a child who fearlessly speaks the truth, a servant who does her work thoroughly and cheerfully, an obscure lad who in a small situation is faithful to honour and truth, will effect far more than is imagined. Others who are unperceived are emboldened, and range themselves on the side of righteousness.

Joseph discovered, as many have done since, that when he steadfastly set his face towards duty he succeeded far better than he expected. When he went into the palace of Pilate he foresaw that he might be asked to pay an enormous ransom, for that would be only customary; or possibly his request might be scornfully refused by the procurator, who was angry with himself and with the Jews. But, doubtless to his amazement, no such thing happened. Without delay, or bartering or abuse, Pilate at once gave him leave.

History is crowded with similar incidents. How helpless and hopeless the Israelites were when they found themselves face to face with the waters of the Red Sea, while the army of Egypt was rapidly overtaking them; yet they soon discovered that their danger was to prove their means of deliverance; for the waters which barred their progress to liberty soon overwhelmed their enemies. In other spheres of experience such deliverances have come, and will continue to come, to trustful souls:

“Dark and wide the sea appears,
Every soul is full of fears,
Yet the word is ‘onward still,’
Onward move and do His will;
And the great deep shall discover
God’s highway to take thee over.”



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Peter had a similar experience when in prison. He arose and followed the angel, and safely passed through the first and the second ward; but the great iron gate seemed an insuperable barrier, yet that opened to them of its own accord, and he stepped through it into liberty. Thus it was with the women who as they walked, while it was yet dark, towards the grave of their Lord, thought of one difficulty which seemed insurmountable, and asked one another, "*Who shall roll us away the stone at the door of the sepulchre?*" Still on they went, with faith and courage, and when they reached their imagined difficulty they found that it had vanished; for they saw that the stone was rolled away.

A similar experience is constantly met with. It is shared by a young man who is expected to undertake some doubtful transaction, but from conscientious scruple hesitates. He fears what the result of a refusal may be, but resolves to risk it; perhaps to find that the order is not pressed, or that some new incident opens up for him a way of escape. True, God does not always deliver a conscientious man from the special danger before him, but in the forum of conscience, and before the judgment-seat of Christ, he will be righted.

Be the result what it may, we must be true to conscience, which, however, is but another form of saying, we must be true to God; and instead of peering into the future, and picturing to ourselves all possible evil results, we must learn to take the next obvious step in the pathway of duty, trusting that God will make the next step clear, possible, and safe. When a tourist is climbing a difficult mountain, his guide sometimes rounds a corner, or climbs up to a higher level, and for a time is lost to sight, having left his charge behind him; and he, unaccustomed to such an expedition, dares not look down, and fears to stir another step, till feeling the rope taut between himself and the guide, and hearing his cheery voice, he ventures forward, to find that the danger was not so great as he imagined. Thus made bolder by each difficulty surmounted, he begins to feel the exhilaration of a mountain climb, which braces the nerves more than anything besides. If we are really anxious to be in God's appointed way, and boldly take it when it is made clear, we may be sure that He will answer the prayer: "*Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not.*"

III.

There are crises in the experience of every one when the whole future is determined; and such a crisis came to Joseph of Arimathea.



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He had been for some time a disciple of Jesus, but had never avowed the fact. But after standing on Calvary and seeing the death of his Lord, sorrow, shame, and indignation so stirred him, that at once he went in boldly unto Pilate. It was the turning-point in his history, when obedience to God-given impulse decided his whole destiny. The spiritual influences which play upon our souls are not even in their flow. There are times when one is strangely moved, although in outward environment there is little to account for it. The sermon listened to may be illiterate, the hymn sung may be destitute of poetic beauty, the friendly word may be spoken by a social inferior—yet one of these sometimes suffices as the channel of divine power, which shakes the soul to its very depths. We have known the unexpected avowal of love to Christ on the part of one obscure scholar set all in the class thinking on the subject of personal responsibility to God, and to His Church. And sometimes the sorrow of leaving home for the first time, or the death of a dearly-loved friend, has sufficed to arouse the question, "*What must I do to be saved?*" We must beware of allowing such opportunities for decisive action to slip away unimproved. When a vessel has grounded at the harbour-bar, she must wait till the tide lifts her, or she will not reach a safe anchorage; but when the tide does flow in, no sane man will let the chance go by, lest a storm should rise and wreck her within reach of home.

It is noteworthy that Joseph was moved to decision and confession by the crucifixion of the Lord; for this might have been expected to seal his lips. It would seem to have been easier to follow the great Teacher when listening crowds gathered round Him, and multitudes were being healed of whatsoever diseases they had, than to acknowledge loyalty to Him when He was crucified as a malefactor. Yet it was from the Cross that this man went into the Church. The light came to him when darkness seemed deepest. It was in the presence of the crucified Saviour, of whom even the Roman centurion said, "*Truly this was the Son of God,*" that Joseph learned to say, "Because thou hast died for me, I will henceforth live for Thee." This was one of the earliest triumphs of the Cross, in which Paul gloried, and of Him who died thereon—dying for us all, that we who live should not henceforth live unto ourselves but unto Him. In the presence of that memorable scene we are called on for more than admiration or adoration, even for a passionate devotion to Him who gave Himself up for us all.



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It may be that some of His professed followers may again fail Him, and that others will step in to do the service which He requires. In the hour of darkness all His recognised disciples forsook him and fled; and when the tragedy on Golgotha was over, it was not Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, who rendered Him the last service, but holy, humble women, and Joseph and Nicodemus, who up till then had not been reckoned as disciples at all. There are times in the history of the Church when our Lord seems "*crucified afresh, and put to an open shame,*" while His so-called disciples remain silent and hidden. Superstition and sin still join hands to put the Christ to death, to bury Him, and seal His sepulchre. But secret disciples are meanwhile avowing themselves; coming from the east, and the west, from the north, and from the south, to fill up the vacant places, to do the needed services, and to rejoice in a risen and glorified Lord. Better by far the doing of a simple act of love to the Saviour who died for us—such as Joseph did—than loud professions of loyalty, or accurate knowledge of creeds. Hear once more the solemn words of Jesus: "*Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven.*"

“And that voice still soundeth on
From the centuries that are gone
To the centuries that shall be!
From all vain pomps and shows, from the pride that overflows,
From all the narrow rules and subtleties of Schools,
And the craft of tongue and pen:
Bewildered in its search, bewildered with the cry:
'Lo here, lo there, the Church!' poor, sad Humanity
Through all the dust and heat turns back with bleeding feet
By the weary road it came
Unto the simple thought by the Great Master taught,
And that remaineth still:
'Not he that repeateth the Name
But he that doeth the Will.'”

PHILIP, THE EVANGELIST

BY REV. GEORGE MILLIGAN, M.A., D.D.

Philip the Evangelist must be carefully distinguished from Philip the Apostle. And though it is little that we are told regarding him in Scripture, that little is very significant. He first comes before us as one of the seven chosen by the early Church at Jerusalem to take charge of the daily ministrations of charity to the poor widows (Acts vi. 1 ff.). And when this work is hindered by the outbreak of persecution following on the death of Stephen, we find him at once departing to enter on active missionary work elsewhere (Acts viii. 4 ff.). The fact that he should have selected Samaria as the scene of these

new labours, is in itself a proof that he was able to rise above the ordinary Jewish prejudices of his time. And this same liberal spirit is further exemplified by the incident in connection with which he will always be principally remembered.

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In obedience to a Divine summons, Philip had betaken himself to the way that goeth down from Jerusalem to Gaza. And if at first he may have wondered why he should have been called upon to leave his rapidly progressing work in Samaria for a desert road, he was not for long left in doubt as to what was required of him. For as he walked along he was overtaken by an Ethiopian stranger returning in his chariot from Jerusalem. This man, who was the chamberlain or treasurer of Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians, had heard somehow in his distant home, of the Jewish religion, and had undertaken this long journey to make further inquiries regarding it. We are not told how he had been impressed; very possibly the actual fruits that he witnessed were very different from what he had expected. But one treasure at least he had found, a Greek copy of the prophecies of Isaiah, and this he was eagerly searching on his return journey, to see if he could find further light there. One passage specially arrested his attention, the touching passage in which the prophet draws out his great portraiture of the Man of Sorrows. But, then, how reconcile the thought of this Messiah, suffering, wounded, dying, with the great King and Conqueror whom the Jews at Jerusalem had been expecting! Could it be that he had anything to do with our Jesus of Nazareth, of whom he had also heard, and whom, because of the Messianic claims He had put forward, the Jewish leaders had crucified on a cross? Oh, for some one to help him! Help was nearer than he thought. Prompted by the Spirit, Philip ran forward to the chariot; and no sooner had he learned the royal chamberlain's difficulties than he *"opened his mouth, and beginning from this scripture, preached unto him Jesus"* (Acts viii. 35).

We are not told on what particulars Philip dwelt; but, doubtless, starting from the prophetic description of the Man of Sorrows, *"despised and rejected of men,"* he would show how that description held true of the earthly life of Jesus. And then he would go on to show the meaning and bearing of these sufferings. They arose from no fault on the part of Jesus; but, *"He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities."* And yet that was not the end. The life which had thus ended in shame had begun again in glory: the cross had led on to the crown. And as thus he unfolded the first great principles of the Christian faith, Philip would press home on the eunuch's awakened conscience that they had a vital meaning for him. *"Repent,"* can we not imagine him pleading as Peter had pleaded before, *"and be baptised . . . in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost"* (Acts ii. 38). The eunuch's heart was touched, and he asked that he might be baptized. Satisfied that he was in earnest, Philip agreed to his request. And when they came to a certain water, *"they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him."* Thus *"the Ethiopian changed his skin,"* and *"went on his way rejoicing"* to his distant home, to declare in his turn to his countrymen the tidings of great joy.



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There are many points of view from which we might regard this beautiful incident, but it is with it in its bearing on the person and character of Philip that we are alone at present concerned. And in considering it further in this light, it may be well to confine ourselves to noticing in what way it gained for Philip his distinctive title of “*the Evangelist*,” and consequently what it has to teach us still regarding all evangelistic and missionary work.

I.

The Evangelist.

With regard to the evangelist himself, one truth stands out clearly from the whole narrative, his work is *given* to him to do. He is first and foremost a missionary, one sent.

It is a pity, perhaps, that in our ordinary speech, we have come to limit the name “missionary” so much to the man who carries the gospel abroad. No doubt he is a missionary in the highest sense of the word; but still the fundamental idea in every minister or evangelist’s position is the idea of one sent—sent for a particular purpose, with a particular message to proclaim wherever God may place him. He has no power, no authority of his own. All that he has comes from Him whose servant he is, and whose truth he has to announce.

You remember—to appeal at once to the highest example—how ever-present this thought of His mission was to the mind of our Lord and Master. His meat, so He told His disciples, was to do the will of Him that sent Him (John iv. 34). The word which He spake was not His own, but the Father’s who sent Him (John xiv. 24). And so when the time came for His sending forth His disciples to carry on His work, it was as “Apostles,” those sent, that the work was entrusted to them; and in the same spirit He prayed for them in His great intercessory prayer: “*As Thou didst send Me into the world, even so sent I them into the world*” (John xvii. 18).

If we keep this view of the evangelist as the missionary, ever before us, there is one fact regarding his position we can never lose sight of. He has no new truth of his own to declare, no new theories of his own to frame. The message which he has to deliver is not his own, but God’s; and it must be his constant endeavour to learn that message for himself, and then, as God’s servant, to announce it to others. Men may receive his message. If they do not, he dare not substitute any other.

II.

His Message.

In what does the evangelist’s message consist? “*Philip*,” we are told, “*preached unto him JESUS.*” And what that included we have already seen. It was the story of the life,

and the death, and the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, a new story then, an old story now, but still “the old, old story” for us.

The duty of the Christian teacher must be first of all to proclaim Christ and His salvation, to announce the glad tidings of mercy and of love to sinful men.

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This is not, of course, to say that every address or sermon is to be occupied with the objective facts of Christ's life and death. Such teaching would soon become monotonous and wearisome, and fail in the very purpose it set before it. Nor have men only to be awakened to the truth, they must be built up in it. And the practical question for us all is to learn how to apply and carry out in our daily lives, the truths we have received, how to make our conduct correspond to our creed. That opens up an endless field for the evangelist's work: that introduces us to lectures on Home Missions and Foreign Missions, to the story of noble lives; to all, in fact, that is likely to deepen and to quicken our moral nature. But still this remains as the fundamental object of the whole evangel, to preach Jesus, to bring those to Him who know Him not, to strengthen and to comfort those who do.

When, then, men call upon the Christian teacher to leave the objective facts of the gospel alone, and to occupy himself with the philosophic and social questions of the day, they are calling upon him to surrender his special function and duty. He must indeed endeavour so to present the truth so as to meet the peculiar wants of his own time. The form in which the gospel was presented in one age may not be the best form of presenting it in another. At one time it may be necessary to emphasise one aspect of the truth, at another, another. But underneath all its changing forms and aspects, *the* truth remains unchanged; and it is that which must be taught.

And after all, has not the simple gospel message ever proved itself the one message that can touch the hearts and meet the wants of men? What was it, for example, in the preaching of Savonarola that so mightily moved Florence, the elegant, refined, wicked, pagan Florence of the fifteenth century? He himself tells us that it was the preaching of Scripture truth. When he discoursed in a philosophical manner, the ignorant and the learned were alike inattentive: but "the word" mightily delighted the minds of men, and showed its divine power in the reformation of their lives. Or, to take another instance from nearer home. Archdeacon Wilson describes somewhere the experience of the promoters of a certain evening-class, which they had instituted for the benefit of some of the more ignorant and degraded inhabitants of Bristol. All that they could think of they did for the benefit of the men who gathered to it. They read to them; they sang to them: they taught them to read and write. Yet, in course of time, interest flagged. Every expedient failed, and they were on the point of abandoning the work in despair, when it occurred to them to apply to the men themselves. "What would you like us to tell you about next?" they asked. "Could you tell us something about Jesus Christ?" answered one of the men. That was the one thing needful, the one abiding satisfaction for their deepest needs.



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And so ever. It may be strange, but it is true, that it is "*the Man of Sorrows*" who has won the love of men; it is the Saviour who has been lifted up on high out of the earth, who has drawn all men to Himself. Christ: Christ crucified: Christ risen: that is the message which every Christian evangelist has to declare.

III.

His Message of Glad Tidings.

And is not that good news? "*Beginning from that same scripture, Philip preached the GLAD TIDINGS of Jesus.*"

Philip made the eunuch's previous knowledge the starting-point of all that he had to say, and, as he went on, showed how there was in his message the answer to all his doubts and the solution of all his difficulties.

And the gospel has still the same meaning for us. It has a message for the man struggling with the battle of life, in the example of One who has fought that fight before, who knows its every trial and sorrow, and who has come gloriously through them all. It has a message for the sinner, brooding anxiously over his guilty past, conscious only of his own defilement and unworthiness in the sight of an all-holy God, as it assures him of mercy and free forgiveness, of sin blotted out in the blood of Christ. It has a message for the trembling believer, compassed about with temptations and doubts, as it tells of One who can still be "*touched with the feeling of our infirmities,*" and who, because "*He Himself hath suffered being tempted,*" is "*able to succour them that are tempted.*" And it has a message for the mourner sorrowing over the loss of near and dear ones, for it points to Him who is "*the Resurrection and the Life*" of His people, and gives promise of the "*Father's house*" with its many mansions, where He is preparing a place for His children.

And yet great and glorious though that message is, where there are not a hearing ear, an understanding heart, and a willing mind, even a St Philip or a St Paul may preach in vain. But where, on the other hand, these are present, then God may use even the humblest and feeblest of His servants to speak some word, to utter some warning, which may be worth to us more than all we have in the world besides. God grant that it may be so with us, and that by the power of the Holy Ghost the word preached may be welcomed, "*not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which also worketh in you that believe*" (1 Thess. ii. 13).

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

BY REV. GEORGE MILLIGAN, M.A., D.D.



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One of the most striking features of the early Christian Church was what we have come to know as Christian Communism, or as the historian describes it in Acts iv, 32: "*And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul: and not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.*" It is a bright and a pleasing picture that is thus presented. Nor is it difficult to understand how such a spirit should arise amongst men whose hearts were full to overflowing with the new Christian graces of brotherhood and peace. For we must not imagine that there was anything compulsory about this communism. It was entirely voluntary, and was due to the eager desire on the part of the wealthier members of the Church to do all that they could for their poorer brethren. In this particular alone, we can at once see how widely it differed from what is generally known as communism or socialism in the present day. The spirit of much at any rate of our present-day socialism—so the distinction has been cleverly drawn—is, "What is thine, is mine": but the spirit of those early believers was rather, "What is mine, is thine."

At the same time, we can readily understand that in a large and mixed community like the early Church, all members would not think exactly alike, and that while many, we may believe most, would cheerfully obey this unwritten law of love, and share and share alike, others would give in to it—if they did give in, for, let me again emphasise, there was no compulsion upon any—more grudgingly and hesitatingly.

Of these two classes the writer of the Book of Acts presents us with individual examples—of the former class, in the case of Joseph, or Barnabas, a wealthy Cypriot, who "*having a field, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet*" (Acts iv. 37)—of the latter, in the case of Ananias with Sapphira his wife, whose melancholy story is now before us.

That story is very familiar, and is often regarded simply as an instance of the sinfulness of lying. And that undoubtedly it is; but it warns us also against other equally dangerous and insidious errors, as a little consideration will, I think, show. For what were Ananias's motives in acting as he did? If we can discover them, we shall have the key to the whole story.

And here, it seems to me, they must, in the first instance at any rate, have been of a sufficiently *generous* character. Ananias had seen what was going on around him, and he had determined that he must not be behindhand in this ministry of love. But—and now we get a little deeper into his character—*ambition* to stand well with his fellow-members evidently mingled with the pure spirit of charity: though we do not need to suppose that there was as yet any conscious intention to deceive. Acting, then, on these somewhat mixed motives of charity and ambition, Ananias



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determined to sell a possession, some farm or other which he had, and hand over the money to the apostles. He probably meant at first to hand over the whole price, but with the money in his hand, the demon of avarice entered into his heart. And he *“kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles’ feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, did it not remain thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thy power? How is it that thou hast conceived this thing in thy heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God”* (Acts v. 2-4).

The sin of Ananias, then, lay in this, that he gave a certain sum *as if it were the whole*. There was no necessity for his giving either the whole or the part. Had he hung back, when others were selling their possessions, he would have been pronounced *ungenerous* in comparison with them. Had he brought a part, making no mistake about it that it was only a part, when they were giving all, then he would have been not so *generous*. But when he brought a part as if it were the whole, he added to his former selfishness and avarice *deceit and hypocrisy*. If he did not in so many words tell a lie, he did what was equally heinous, he *acted* a lie.

It is only when we thus clearly realise the enormity of Ananias’s sin, that we can understand the reason of the dreadful doom that followed. *“And Ananias, hearing these words, fell down, and gave up the ghost”* (ver. 5). The judgment came not from men, but from God. As it was in God’s sight—the sight of the living and heart-searching God—that the sin had been committed: so it was by the direct “visitation of God” that it was now punished.

Nor was the awful lesson yet over. Three hours had scarcely elapsed since the young men had carried forth her husband, and buried him, when Sapphira, *“not knowing what was done, came in.”* *“And Peter answered unto her”*—answered her look of amazement as she regarded the awe-struck faces of those present—*“Tell me, whether ye sold the land for so much?”* *“Yea, for so much,”* she replied, adhering to the unholy compact into which, with Ananias, she had entered, and adding deceit in speech to his deceit in act. *“But Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and they shall carry thee out”* (verses 8, 9).



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It was the first intimation the unhappy woman had received of Ananias's death: and to the shame of her own consciousness of guilt, must have been added the feeling that she had a certain responsibility in what had befallen him. A word of remonstrance on her part might, at the beginning, have prevented the crime: it was too late now. "*And she fell down immediately at his feet, and gave up the ghost: and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her by her husband*" (ver. 10). And as the sacred historian again impressively adds, showing how deep was the effect produced: "*And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all that heard these things*" (ver. 11).

Such is the story. Who does not feel its sadness? All before had been so peaceful and happy. The early believers had presented such a beautiful spectacle of brotherly unity and love. And now, all too soon, the enemy had been at work, sowing tares among the wheat. In the very particular in which the Church most deserved praise—the enthusiasm of its members' charity—sin had appeared. And thus early had the young Church of Christ learned that truth, which it has been the work of nineteen centuries to emphasise, that her true danger comes not so much from without as from within, and that then only is she disgraced, when she disgraces herself.

For what may we learn from this tragic incident?

I.

We learn the sanctity, the holiness, which Christ looks for in His Church.

The Church of Christ is holy: it consists of those who have separated themselves from the world and its defilements, and who have set themselves apart—body, soul, and spirit—for Christ's service. That, I say, is the Church's ideal. But we know, alas! only too well, how far short the Church on earth falls of that—how much worldliness, and vanity, and ambition—yes, and even grosser sins—mingle with our holy things.

But we must keep God's ideal ever before us, that ideal which assures us that God, by His Spirit, actually dwells in His Church, dwells in the heart of each individual believer. Only when we remember that, can we see how great was Ananias's sin. "*He lied to the Holy Ghost: he lied not unto men, but unto God.*" As by God's Spirit his heart had been enlightened and opened to the knowledge of the truth: so now against that Spirit he had deliberately sinned.

Such a sin could not pass unpunished. Had that been allowed, the false impression would have got abroad that God was easy and tolerant of sin. Rather it was necessary "that men should be taught once for all, by sudden death treading swiftly on the heels of detected sin, that the gospel, which discovers God's boundless mercy, has not wiped out the sterner attributes of the Judge."^[1]

II.



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We learn the reality of the power of Satan.

On this point, Peter's question is very suggestive—"Why has Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?"

There is a constant tendency in those days, which are so impatient of all that is supersensible and wonderful, to try and get rid of the personality of the devil, and to tone down the question of man's salvation to a struggle between two opposing principles within the heart, instead of regarding it, as the Bible teaches us to regard it, as an actual contest for the soul of man between real persons—the Spirit of God from above, the Spirit of evil from beneath. The heart of man is as it were a little city or fortress on the borderland between two nations at war with each other, and which is liable to be captured by whichever at that point proves itself the strongest. But at the same time with this great difference, that every man has the power of deciding into whose hands he is to fall. His will is free: and he is personally accountable for whom he may choose as master.

For, notice how, in the case before us, St Peter, while tracing the fall of Ananias to the agency of Satan, yet prefixes his question with a *why*: "*Why hath Satan jilted thine heart?*" There had been a time when resistance was still possible. Ananias might have rejected the suggestion of the tempter: he was not bound to yield: but he had yielded. And very suggestive of why he had fallen so low, is that other word "*filled*." It brings before us the quiet, gradual manner in which evil takes possession of the heart of man. We have seen already that it was so in the case of Ananias. *Ambition* to stand well in the sight of others was his first step: to ambition was afterwards added *avarice*: and then ambition and avarice combined led to *deceit and hypocrisy*. Or, as bringing out the same truth of the gradual progression of sin, notice how Ananias apparently first *thought* over the sin in his own heart: then *spoke* of it to his wife, and agreed with her that it could be done: and then how together they *carried it out*. Thought, speech, action: how often are these the successive links by which a man is led on from one degree of sin to another? The lesson is surely to resist at the very outset: so much depends upon the first step. We must not give place to even the first thought of evil: nor listen to the tempter's whisper, whisper he ever so softly. How many, as they look back upon a downward career, can trace its beginning to some idle or vain thought, or to some hasty or careless word!

III.

We learn that a divided service is not possible.

"No man!" said our Lord Himself, "*can serve two masters: ye cannot serve God and mammon.*" Not that we are not tempted sometimes to try it. What commoner sin is there amongst professing Christians than the attempt to make the best of both worlds

—to lay hold of this world with the one hand, while we give it up with the other—to seem other than we are?



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But surely with this old story from the Book of Acts to warn us, we must see how vain all such divided efforts are. We may deceive ourselves or others for a while; but the deception cannot last, and in some hour of searching or of trial our true characters will be laid bare. Let us see to it, then, that we may take this awful example home as a very real and practical warning to ourselves—that we not only “*hate and abhor lying*,” but put away from us whatsoever “*maketh a lie*”! and that the prayer continually on our lips and in our hearts is, “From the crafts and assaults of the devil . . . from pride, vain-glory, and hypocrisy, good Lord, deliver us.”

[1]Dr Oswald Dykes.

DEMAS

BY REV. PRINCIPAL DAVID ROWLANDS, B.A.

Many a man who figures in history, is only known in connection with some stupendous fault—some mistake, some folly, or some sin—that has given him an unenviable immortality. Mention his name, and the huge blot by which his memory is besmirched starts up before the mind in all its hideousness. Take Cain, for example. He occupies the foremost rank as regards fame; his name is one of the first that children learn to lisp; and yet what do we know about him? Very little indeed; our knowledge, in fact, is limited to a single act—an act which is the most horrible of human crimes. His name is suggestive only of violence, murder, the shedding of innocent blood—the foulest deeds that man can possibly commit. Or take Judas Iscariot. We know more particulars about him—we know that he was one of the original apostles, that he managed their common fund, that he posed as a strict economist, and above all, that he was a consummate hypocrite. Yet when we mention his name, we call up the remembrance of only one vile deed, one treacherous act—an act that has made his name a curse and a byword throughout the ages. The same remark is applicable to Demas. His name is familiar enough, but the story of his life is almost unknown. Paul refers to him more than once as a fellow-labourer, which shows that for a time at least he was an exemplary Christian. But he failed in the hour of trial—failed through being dominated by an inordinate love of the world—and his memory survives, therefore, as a representative of that worldly-mindedness which leads to apostasy.

The tone in which the great apostle mentions Demas, in his second letter to Timothy, is very touching. “*Demas*,” saith he, “*has forsaken me, having loved the present world*” (2 Tim. iv. 16). We might have expected him to give vent to his feelings in bitter invective—as is customary in such cases—and to denounce the cowardliness of this desertion in language aflame with indignation. It would have been no more than justice to the offender, and it might have deterred others from stumbling in the same way. But no, he does nothing of the kind; his words contain nothing



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more than the brief, deep, pathetic groan of a wounded heart. He had probably built many hopes upon Demas, and not without reason. In his arduous labours among the Gentiles he had found him an efficient helper, and many were the hours of sweet communion he had spent with him and others, in discussing the triumphs of the Gospel. And he was confident that now in his bonds, waiting the pleasure of the Roman tyrant, he would have derived comfort from his companionship and encouragement from his faithfulness. But alas! these bright hopes had been cruelly shattered; for in the hour of his greatest need Demas had abandoned him. The apostle was too grieved to use harsh language—too grieved, not only at his own disappointment, but also when he thought of Demas's own future. Unconsciously, in this unostentatious exercise of self-restraint, he has left us an impressive lesson in Christian charity, and has shown us the way in which those who fall away from their steadfastness ought to be treated. How many of those hapless delinquents might have been reclaimed, had the high, noble, generous spirit which animated the apostle been manifested towards them by those whose confidence they had betrayed, it is impossible to tell; but it is certain that not a few.

The question that presents itself here is this: In what light are we to regard Demas's character? Was he a cool, calculating, determined apostate; or did he simply give way to weakness? There is an essential difference between the two cases, and they ought to be judged accordingly. There are men who through sheer perversity renounce their faith, and are not ashamed to vilify the religion which they once professed. They are generally embodiments of irreverence, who glory in their atheism, and talk of infidelity as if it were a cardinal virtue. Whenever there is foul work to be done, they are almost always to the fore; whenever holy things are to be held up to ridicule, they are the men to do it. These are deliberate apostates; men who with their eyes open prefer darkness to light, who of set purpose deny the truth and embrace error. Happily the world contains but few such. To the honour of human nature, fallen though it be, it may be said that it instinctively recoils from such characters with a sense of horror. We do not think for a moment that Demas belonged to this class, though the terms in which he is sometimes spoken of might lead one to suppose so.

There are others who fall away through weakness. They find themselves in circumstances for which they are not prepared—circumstances by which their faith is sorely tried—and, lacking that strength of conviction, which alone can give stability, they recede from the position which they took up with so much apparent enthusiasm. Theirs is not that deep spiritual experience which makes its possessor count suffering as a privilege and martyrdom as a crown. They rejoice for a season in Christ and His salvation, but "*they have no root*



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in themselves,” so that “*when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by they are offended.*” We are inclined to think that Demas belonged to this class. The apostle was now overwhelmed by calamities. His career as a messenger of the Cross had been ruthlessly cut short. There were unmistakable signs of a coming storm, when he, and possibly those around him, would be tortured and slain, to gratify the bloodthirstiness of the Roman emperor. He seems to be fully cognisant of this, for he says, “*I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.*” It is probable, therefore, that Demas feared lest by continuing with the apostle he might share his dreadful fate. He pictured himself being carried away in chains by the brutal soldiery, as he had seen many others, to the great amphitheatre, to be thrown into the arena, and there to be drawn limb from limb by ferocious beasts, for the amusement of the frivolous thousands who gloated on such scenes. The bare thought of it made him tremble. He “*loved the present world*”; to him life was too precious, too full of delightful possibilities, to be thrown away in the prime of manhood—to be thrown away especially in this awful fashion. Visions of former days began to haunt him. His early home, the comrades of his youth, his loving kindred, all that he had left when he became a convert, completely engrossed his thoughts, and cast over him a fascination that was becoming irresistible. There was nothing else for it; he must see them once more, even though it should cost him his hope of heaven. And so he “departed to Thessalonica,” the place where he was bred and born. Some suppose that he took this step for the sake of gain—for the sake of engaging in some lucrative trade. It may be so; but there is no evidence to prove it.

These considerations, though they explain, do not excuse Demas’s conduct. Far from it. He richly merits all the censure that has been meted out to him. He ought to have played the man, and braved any danger for the sake of his principles. Like the Psalmist, he ought to have said: “*The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?*” Compared with the kingdom to which he belonged, what was Rome with all its power? Compared with the King whom he served, what was Nero with all his glory? Compared with the joys of holy living, what was the world with all its attractions? But he failed to realise these great facts, and hence he acted the part of a weakling; he bent as a reed, when he ought to have stood firm as an oak. If all the first disciples had been made of such pliable stuff as himself, what would have been the condition of the world to-day? How mean and cowardly his action appears when contrasted with the heroic endurance of weak women, who rather than deny their Lord faced the “*violence of fire!*” Weakness

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in certain situations amounts to a crime. Who ever thinks of justifying Pontius Pilate? He was not guilty of wilful wrong; he would have gladly acquitted our Lord, had he been able to do so without risking his own safety; when he delivered Him to be crucified, he simply gave way, through fear, to the clamour of an enraged populace. Nevertheless he stands convicted by after-ages of the vilest act that any judge has ever committed. Wrong-doing is not to be palliated by ascribing it to the overpowering force of temptation. The claims of conscience are paramount, and no inducements, however plausible, can justify us in setting them aside.

It is sometimes asked, what became of Demas eventually? Did he, after wandering in the world, and finding no rest to his soul, identify himself again with the cause which he had deserted? We should like to be able to believe this. But the record is silent; and this silence is ominous; for when the Bible describes the fall of a good man, it generally gives some account of his restoration. Peter is a notable instance. Amidst the terrors of the Judgment-hall he thrice denied his Lord. The evangelists make no attempt to shield him from adverse criticism; on the other hand, they mention in detail every circumstance that enhances the baseness of his behaviour. But they are equally careful to dwell also upon the reality of his repentance. John, in a passage of marvellous beauty, relates how in a saner mood, on the shore of the sea of Galilee, he thrice confessed his Lord—confessed Him with such glowing fervour, that he was there and then restored into the position which he had so miserably forfeited. But the last word about Demas is that which points him out as a backslider; and as such he must be for ever known.

The lesson of Demas's life is clear, nay even obtrusively clear, and the need of it has been freely acknowledged at all times. We could almost wish that it were inscribed in letters of fire upon the midnight sky. He was a man who "*loved this present world,*" and we see in his history how loving the world involves separation from God, and how separation from God results in the abandonment of His cause.

It is difficult to discourse to any purpose upon worldliness. You might get a crowd of people anywhere to hear you dilate upon it. They would probably applaud to the echo your most scathing denunciations of its baseness. But after all the probability is that no one would apply those fervid periods to himself. And why? Just because this evil principle manifests itself in such a variety of ways. A man who detects worldliness in his neighbour with the greatest ease may be absolutely incapable of seeing it in himself, simply because his own and his neighbour's are so different in form. It is the old story. David boiled over with indignation at the hard-hearted monster who had taken the poor man's lamb; but the fact that he himself had taken another man's wife, gave him no concern whatever.



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It will be readily conceded that the miser is a worldly man. He loves gold for its own sake; he hoards up riches, not with the view of enjoying them, but in order to satisfy an inordinate greed of possession; his chief object in life is to die worth his hundreds, his thousands, or his millions. Though rich, he is frequently tormented with the fear of ending his days in want, and is more anxious for the morrow than the poorest of the poor. The only redeeming point in his character is his self-denial—a truly noble characteristic when associated with a generous disposition—which, however, in his case, loses its value through the sordidness of its aim. Yes, he is a worldly man, beyond the shadow of a doubt. But this is equally true of the man whose manner of life is the very opposite of this—the spendthrift. He values money only in so far as it enables him to make a grand display, to spend his days in riotous living, to gain the goodwill of the empty, useless, pleasure-living society in which he moves. How totally different the latter from the former! How frequently do they despise and condemn each other—the miser the spendthrift, and the spendthrift the miser! And yet they worship, so to speak, at the same shrine; they are victims of the same delusion; they both make this world their all.

This love of the world leads in every case to separation from God. The story of the Fall furnishes an apt illustration of this fatal result. Stript of its poetic setting, what have we there depicted? Covetousness—the desire of material good—the determination to obtain it at all hazards. It was under this guise that sin made its first entrance into human life—sin, which in its turn

“Brought death into our world and all our woe.”

Now mark the effect of the first act of transgression. We are told that when Adam and his wife heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, they “hid themselves” from His presence “amongst the trees.” In other words, the cords of love which up to that point bound man to God were rudely severed. Before this the thought of God filled their souls with joy; they loved to hear His voice in the whisperings of the wind, to see His smile in the merry sunshine, to trace His power in the structure of the heavens; but now all was mysteriously changed, things which previously ministered to their enjoyment became a source of terror.

Why should the love of the world lead to this result? It is because God must be all or nothing to the human soul. The first commandment in the law is—“*Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy might.*” This is not an arbitrary enactment, but it has its ground in the eternal fitness of things. God is the infinitely powerful, the infinitely wise, and the infinitely good, and as such demands the undivided love of man. Anything less than this, not only

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falls below His lawful claim, but also fails to satisfy our profoundest aspirations. As Augustine puts it, "Thou hast made us for Thyself; our hearts are restless, until they find rest in Thee." But it may be asked, Does love to God exclude all other loves? By no means. The second commandment in the law, "*Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,*" is inseparable from the first. It is impossible to obey the one without obeying the other. Obedience that does not regard both is partial, and therefore futile. The reason is plain. God is immanent in creation. The Christian beholds God in everything, and everything in God. Thus it comes to pass that his supreme love—his love to God—intensifies, ennobles, and hallows every other. If you would have an example of the highest type of love—love to God manifesting itself as love to man—go to a Christian home, and you will find it there in all its charm, uniting husband and wife, parents and children, master and servants, making the house a veritable "paradise regained."

There is a sense in which the Christian even loves the world—loves it as no other man can love it—that is, when the term is applied to the wondrous system of nature. He loves sometimes to wander in the fields, where innumerable lovely forms, both animate and inanimate, reveal their beauty to the eye; and at other times to meditate upon the illimitable expanse of heaven, crowded by ten thousand worlds, which all declare the glory of Him who is Lord over all. Paul could not have had this meaning in his mind when he spoke of Demas as having, through loving the present world, made shipwreck concerning his faith. He was thinking rather of the sum-total of those pursuits, pleasures, and ambitions which bind man to earth, hamper his spiritual growth, and lead him to his ruin. The "world" in this sense is God's rival; to love the "world" is to hate God.

What does separation from God imply, and when can it be said to take place? God is everywhere; who can flee His presence? God is a spirit; who can do Him injury? These are questions that have always presented some difficulty. It was asked in the days of Malachi, "*Will a man rob God?*" as if such a thing were beyond the range of possibility. At the day of judgment, those on the left hand will ask the Judge, "*Lord when saw we Thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto Thee?*" as if the things laid to their charge were without foundation. Now, the objectors in the days of Malachi who asked, "Wherein have we robbed thee?" were answered, "In the tithes and offering." And the objectors at the day of judgment will be answered, "*Verily, I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me.*" Evidently, therefore, God—or God in Christ—and His cause are in a very real sense identical; so that he who forsakes the one, of necessity forsakes the other also.



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Separation from the world is an inward process; it takes place in the heart, and cannot therefore be perceived by a man's most intimate friends. But the forsaking of God's cause is the outward expression of this process, the manner whereby it becomes known to all the world. If it is asked why we assert that Demas had forsaken God, the answer is evident; it is because he forsook Paul, who was the representative of God's cause.

This is never the work of a day, though it may sometimes appear such. A professedly religious man commits a flagrant act of sin—or perhaps a punishable crime—which places him at once among the open enemies of religion. We wonder at it; we say in our minds, "What a sudden change! yesterday a saint, to-day an unmitigated villain!" But are we right in saying so? Certainly not. That rash act was simply the culmination of a process that had been going on through a long period. The man had been sailing towards the rapids for months, or perhaps years, only the fact was unobserved; it was not until he was hurled headlong over the precipice into the foaming gulf, that the attention of the world was attracted to it.