THE

PULPIT COMMENTARY,

EDITED BY THE

VERY REV. H. D. M. SPENCE, D.D.,

DEAN OF GLOUCESTER;

AND BY THE

REV. JOSEPH S. EXELL, M.A.

WITH

INTRODUCTIONS

BY THE

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I. SAMUEL.

Exposition

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THE

BOOKS OF SAMUEL.

INTRODUCTION.

THE Books of Samuel are so called not because they were written by Samuel, though possibly some of the materials may claim him as their author, but because they describe his work for Israel; and it is not too much to say of him, that as Moses was the founder, so it was Samuel who reorganised and developed the political constitution of the Jewish nation, and enriched it with institutions which made it capable of taking the high place among the families of mankind to which the providence of God was calling it.

Its training was in every way remarkable. It had spent its childhood in Egypt, and owed a great deal to that progress in mental culture in which Egypt had outstripped the world. But it was in the wilderness, surrounded by the bracing desert, and under the command of one who had mastered all Egyptian learning, that Israel was formed into a high-souled people. And there Moses endowed it with a law, which, if valuable to us chiefly in its typical aspect, contains nevertheless so perfect a re-enactment of the fundamental principles of morality that its "Ten Words" still hold their place as the best summary of the rules that should guide and control human life. In its civil and administrative aspect confessedly there was much in the Mosaic law conceded because of "the hardness of the people's hearts," or, in other words, because of their imperfect state of civilisation; but even this was intended to lead them onwards. Confessedly preparatory and educational, the institutions of Moses were but as a stage or scaffolding to aid in the erection of a more perfect building. But they pointed out what that building was to be, and can equitably be judged only in their relation to it. For we must not suppose that the mass of the people had attained to that high level on which Moses stood. Great as was the impress made upon them by his master mind, and noble as were the qualities of the Israelites themselves, yet as soon as the generation had passed away which had personally known Moses, the nation hurried back into barbarism. Instead of developing and realising the grand ideal which their lawgiver had sketched for

them, they perpetually sank lower and lower. In the narratives contained in the Book of Judges we find them wild, rough, lawless, generous often, but oftener cruel; disgraced by fearful crimes, and punishing them with atrocious barbarity. The priests and Levites appear powerless and apathetic; the judges are brave soldiers, but with little administrative capacity. Even with them Gideon, an early judge, is far superior in character to Samson. Who would have thought that a nation, which seemed fast degenerating into a loose aggregate of Bedouin tribes, contained in it the germ of all that is best and noblest in modern culture, and of that pure and spiritual religion which alone has been found capable of satisfying the wants and longings of the human heart! And it was Samuel who arrested Israel's decay, and placed it upon the pathway which led it, though by an uphill and tangled route, to its high destiny of being the teacher of religion to mankind.

Never did time seem more hopeless than when Samuel arose. The Philistines, strengthened not merely by a constant influx of immigrants, but by the importation of arms from Greece, were fast reducing Israel to the condition of a subject race. It might contend on equal terms with Moab and Ammon, but the same superiority of weapons which had given Greece the victory at Marathonand Platæa made the Philistines more than a match for the rude levies of Israel. Samson with a bone might slay of the enemy heaps upon heaps, but the nation which had helmets and shields, and coats of mail, and swords and spears, must in the long run prevail. When the Assyrians had broken up Egypt into a number of petty districts, Psammetichus united them together again by means of his "brazen men;" for the cuirass made its wearer practically invulnerable. And so the loss of the sea-coast, or the neglect to conquer and secure it in the days of Judah's strength (Judges i. 18, 19), nearly lost Israel her independence, and made her forfeit her noble calling. Content with those rolling downs on which they found abundant pasture for their cattle, the princes of Judah forgot, or had never learned, that the empire of the sea carries with it the mastery of the land.

But just when it seemed that Israel must be crushed out from among the nations Samuel arose. There had been a gleam of comfort under his predecessor Eli. Of the early life of this remarkable man we know nothing. He was the head of the inferior house of Ithamar, the younger of Aaron's sons; but as the chiefs of both the priestly houses held a high place in the commonwealth of Israel, it may not after all be so extraordinary that we should find him at the commencement of the Books of Samuel possessed not only of the supreme civil power, but also of the high priesthood. We so carry back our modern notions into ancient times that any deviation from succession by right of primogeniture seems to us to require explanation. In ancient times it was the family, and not the individual, to whom the succession belonged. The more powerful of the kin, or the father's favourite, a Solomon, and not an Adonijah, took the father's place. It was this probably which led to that wholesale slaughter of relatives

which usually accompanied the accession of an Oriental king. What is really remarkable is that Eli should be Israel's civil ruler. If he was strong enough to take this, no one would dispute with him the priesthood. And here Scripture is absolutely silent.

The whole tone, nevertheless, of the history sets Israel before us as enjoying under Eli a period of greater ease and prosperity than had been its lot under Samson. The hill land of Israel was so easy of defence, and the people so valiant, that under an able leader it repeatedly held its ground against the mail-clad Philistines, and in Eli's days they had lost the supremacy which made even Judah during Samson's judgeship obey their commands. It was only after a long period of slow decay, of which Eli's worthless sons were the cause, that Israel lost its independence and had to submit to vassalage. It is an indication of the greatness of the reverse, that the minds of the people were so embittered against him that they have struck his name and the names of his race out of the genealogies, and have put the worst construction upon the prophecies to which the broken-spirited old man submitted with such touching humility. To this cause perhaps is also due the suppression of all account of his earlier doings. What we have is taken probably from "the Acts of Samuel;" for there is a curious humour and play upon words running through all Eli's sayings such as none but a contemporary would record. Samuel, we may be sure, had a loving regard for Eli, but the people remembered him only in connection with the Philistine invasion and the cruelties which accompanied it, and of which the memory filled them with an intense horror. It was a calamity too great to be fully narrated in history, but the Psalmist speaks of it as the climax of Israel's degradation (Ps. lxxviii. 59—64), when God "greatly abhorred" them, and the mention of it by Jeremiah (ch. xxvi.) roused all Jerusalem to fury. It was thus from its deepest fall that Samuel raised the nation to a new life, and from its shattered ruins built it up into an orderly and progressive kingdom.

The foundation of all his reforms was the restoration of the moral and religious life of the people. Without this nothing was possible. But in spite of all its faults, Israel was still sound at heart, simple-minded and primitive; backward indeed in culture, but free from those debasing and effeminate vices which too often make sensuality the companion of refinement. It was no sickly, sentimental people among whom Samuel preached; and when his words had brought conviction to them, with strong heart they followed him; and so he won for them an alleviation of the Philistine yoke, and prepared the way for its final destruction. In a year when the elements were greatly disturbed—for there was lightning during wheat-harvest—a violent thunder-storm enabled the Israelites, rushing down the steep hill of Mizpeh, to break the terrified ranks of the Philistines, and God by the great deliverance wrought that day set his seal to the prophet's work.

But as long as a man's work depends upon his personal energy it has no enduring existence. Many men who in life have been all powerful have left

behind them nothing more lasting than a Jonah's gourd. Samuel was too wise to trust to mere personal influence. If Israel was to be saved, it must be by institutions which would daily exercise their pressure, and push the people upward to a higher level. He seems to have studied the past history of his nation carefully, and to have clearly seen where its weakness lay. And so he set himself earnestly to the task of giving it mental culture and orderly government; externally security from danger, internally progressive development. The means he employed for the nation's internal growth was the founding of schools, and here the honour of the initiative belongs to him, as well as of the wise development of his institutions. What Walter de Merton long afterwards did for Oxford and England, that Samuel effected for Israel. But as regards the kingdom he was rather the regulator than the initiator of the movement. Still his wise mind saw the ripeness of the times for it, and to him is due its greatness and success.

Thus then, in prophecy and the kingdom, Samuel gave to Israel first education, and secondly constitutional monarchy. Samuel was the first founder of schools, and as the great and primary object of his life had been the internal reformation of the Jewish people, we can well understand how his personal work had led onwards to this attempt to redeem his countrymen from ignorance. In those long years which he spent in perpetual wanderings up and down the land he must have constantly found that a chief obstacle to his work was the low mental state of the people. He had been brought up himself amidst whatever learning the nation had imported with it from Egypt; but Shiloh's sun had set. Was learning to perish with it? Nowhere in Israel were men to be found fit to bear office or administer justice. The decisive failure of one so highly gifted by nature as Saul, and who started with so much in his favour, and under Samuel's guidance, but who seems to have had no ideas beyond fighting, proves that Samuel was right in his hesitation about creating a king. The fitting man was nowhere to be found. Schools were the primary necessity. Through them the whole mental state of the people would be raised, and men be trained to serve God in Church and State. From these schools came forth a David. Without them the brave warrior, but fierce despot, Saul was all that was possible.

At the Naioth, or Students' Lodgings, for so the word means, near Ramah, his own patrimonial inheritance, Samuel gathered the young men who were to lift up Israel from its debasement. He taught them reading, writing, and music; he also impressed their minds with solemn religious services, and apparently made history and psalmody their two chief studies. These schools were termed Schools of the Prophets not only because Samuel was a prophet, and the teachers bore the same honoured name, but because the young men were trained expressly for the service of Jehovah. Of course Samuel did not expect his students to receive the gift of inspiration. That was the most rare and precious of gifts, to be obtained by no education, but bestowed directly by

God; from whom it might come to a herdman, with only such learning as could be picked up in a country town (Amos vii. 14, 15), but was never given except for high purposes, and where there was a special internal fitness on the part of the receiver. But the word has a wide meaning in Holy Scripture. Any religious uninspired service, especially if musical, was called prophecy; David's trained singers prophesied with harps and other instruments (1 Chron. xxv. 1—3). But all of them, inspired and uninspired, went forth to do work for Jehovah; not as priests, not necessarily as teachers, or as musicians, though they were Israel's bards. The institution was essentially free, was open to all comers, and when educated the prophet might return to his farm, or to some avocation of town life. But he was first of all an educated man, and, secondly, he had been taught the nature of Jehovah, how he was to be worshipped, and what was the life which every member of a covenant nation ought to lead.

Thus Samuel's schools not only raised Israel to a higher mental level, but were the great means for maintaining the worship of Jehovah, and teaching the people true and spiritual notions of the nature of God. As such we find future prophets earnest in maintaining them. Incidentally we learn that Elijah's last earthly work was the visitation of the prophetic schools at Gilgal, at Bethel, and at Jericho. He must have restored these schools, for Jezebel had done her utmost to exterminate the prophets. He must also have laboured with masterly energy; for within ten years after Elijah's great victory at Mount Carmel, Ahab, at Jehoshaphat's request, was able to collect at Samaria no less than 400 men who claimed to be "prophets of Jehovah." Of Elisha we have abundant evidence that the main business of his life was to foster these schools, and even personally teach in them (2 Kings iv. 38). What we read of these two men was probably true of all the great prophets. At suitable places there were schools in which they gathered the young men of Israel, and the learning which at Shiloh had been confined within the sacred priestly enclosure was made by them general and national. It ceased to be a special prerogative, and became the inheritance of the whole race. Apparently it culminated in the time of Hezekiah, and then came the Assyrian invasions, and with them the destruction of a high and noble civilisation. But under Ezra and the men of the great synagogue it revived, and Israel became again, and continued to be, a learned and intellectual nation.

This then was one part of the labours of Samuel. He laid the foundation and fostered the rapid growth of a grand system of national education. At Ramah he trained men to be Israel's teachers; but he did not confine himself to this. Most of the great ornaments of David's court were his disciples, and it is probable that large numbers of the wealthy and more promising youth of the kingdom went to his schools simply to learn something of those wonderful arts of reading and writing, which opened so new a world to the youth of a race always distinguished for its intellectual aptitudes. And through them Samuel raised the whole people mentally and morally. Trained men henceforward were

never wanting for high service both at court and throughout the land. Other results followed of which the whole world reaps the benefit. The gift of a series of inspired men would have been impossible had Israel continued in the state of barbarous ignorance into which it had sunk in the time of the Judges. Brave fighting men there might have been plenty; occasionally a man of witty jest and proverb like Samson; an Isaiah never. He and his compeers were educated men, speaking to an educated people, and themselves foremost in the rank of teachers. When inspired prophecy ceased, gradually the scribes took the prophets' place; so much so that in the Chaldee Targum "prophet" is often translated "scribe;" and however inferior their work, yet they kept learning alive. The Old Testament was the fruit of Samuel's schools, and so also was the New. The noble tree which he had planted was still vigorous when our Lord traversed the land of Israel; for none but an educated people could have understood his teaching, and retained it in their memories, and taught it to mankind. If St. Paul added to the teaching of Gamaliel the intellectual training of a Greek university, it was in order that he might give to Christian teaching that many-sidedness which was necessary for its reception by Greek and barbarian as well as by Jew. But side by side with him in equal perfectness stands the Jewish St. John. Who will say which of the two shall carry off the palm? And it was Samuel who laid the broad foundations of that culture which, carried on first by prophets and then by scribes, made the Jews capable of writing the Bible, of translating the Old Testament into Greek, of teaching its principles in most of the cities of Greece, and finally of going forth as missionaries, carrying with them the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The other great labour of Samuel was concerned with the establishment of the kingdom, as an external necessity for Israel's orderly development. And here again we find a man far in advance of his age; for his great aim and purpose was to found a limited, or, as we might even call it, a constitutional, monarchy. To a certain extent he was an unwilling agent; for he saw that the times were not ripe. A limited monarchy is only possible among an educated people, and Samuel's Book of the Kingdom (1 Sam. x. 25) could have had but little influence upon a Saul, who could neither read nor write. Perhaps anarchy is inevitably followed by despotism, and certainly Saul became too like what Samuel feared the king would be. It was only after he had trained David that there was a Jewish Alfred ready to sit upon the throne; and when we read so emphatically that he was a king after God's own heart, we must bear in mind that, with all his private faults, David never attempted to set himself above God's law, or even to pervert it to his own use. He strictly confined himself within the limits of a theocratic king, and his crimes were personal, and as such repented of, and the punishment humbly borne.

But the term theocracy is ambiguous, or at least has two sides according to the nature of its administration. As administered by the high priest it was a failure. The appeal to Jehovah by Urim and Thummim was seldom made, and

then only under exceptional circumstances, and there was no orderly method of carrying out its commands. Those commands themselves were of the most general kind, confined apparently to a simple affirmative or negative. It was thus irregular, fitful, in abeyance in all calm and peaceful epochs, and when called into exercise was liable to terrible abuse, which it even seemed to sanction. When Israel set itself to exterminate the tribe of Benjamin, the people may have supposed that they had a sort of religious approval of their extreme measures in the fact that the oracle had encouraged them to make the third attack (Judg. xx. 28). Really the ferocity was their own, and the priest who had given an affirmative answer to their question may and ought to have been horrified at the cruelty which followed upon the victory, and which he was absolutely powerless to prevent. A theocracy has been tried again in the Papacy, with much the same result, of being actually one of the worst possible forms of government; and, like the theocracy of the time of the Judges, it must necessarily be a snare to the conscience, as claiming or appearing to give a religious sanction to deeds that offend the moral sense.

The theocracy which Samuel endeavoured to establish was that of kingly power in the hands of a layman, but acting in obedience to the written law of God, or to his will as declared from time to time by the living voice of prophecy. It was a monarchy limited by the priest and the prophet, the former taking his stand upon the Mosaic law, the latter with a more free and active force giving a direct command in God's name, appealing to the king's moral sense, and usually representing also the popular feeling. To the old theocracy there had practically been no check, and, what was almost as bad, no person responsible for carrying out its commands. But it seems soon to have fallen into abeyance, and the judges were men raised up irregularly under the pressure of some extreme peril. Usually they did well, chiefly in expelling invaders from the land, but the priest with the ephod took in their exploits little or no share. Under so irregular a form of government there was small chance for the orderly development of the powers that lay dormant within Israel, and which were to make it a blessing to all the nations of the earth.

Samuel's object was to found a monarchy active and powerful for the maintenance at all times of order, but controlled by such checks as would prevent it from becoming a despotism. And here we have the key to his struggle with Saul. Samuel had a hearty detestation of mere arbitrary power, as we know from his own words to the elders (1 Sam. viii. 11—18); but Saul with his body-guard of 3000 men had both the will and the means of making himself absolute. Perhaps all minds of great military ability have a natural tendency to arbitrariness. Unqualified obedience is a soldier's duty, and a general knows that in discipline lies his strength. It is otherwise with a king. He is the best ruler who trains his people to habits of self-reliance, and to do what is right not because he orders it, but because they choose it. A nation drilled to obedience, a Church made orthodox by having its creed forced upon it, loses thereby all moral

strength, because, alike in national and religious life, it is only by the exercise of a moral choice that human nature can advance upward. Samuel was labouring for Israel's growth in all that was good, and the only king of whom he could approve was one under whom Israel would be free to work out its own destiny; and such a king would be no tyrant, but one who would rule in submission to the same law as that which governed the people. The two particulars in which Saul set his own will above the command of Samuel may have been matters of no great primary importance. But the one happened soon after Saul's appointment, and thus showed a very early tendency on his part to make his own judgment supreme; the other was an express order, backed by Israel's past history; and both were given by the man who had called Saul to the throne. But the real point at issue was that Saul was moving so quickly towards despotism, and that when a second trial of him was made he had advanced a long way towards it; and never was despot more thorough than Saul when he stained his hands with the blood of the priests at Nob, and of their innocent wives and children, on the mere supposition of their complicity with David's escape. Possibly, if we knew the particulars, the slaughter of the Gibeonites was a crime of the same deep dye. It is at least significant that the cause of the famine was said to be "Saul and his bloody house." People in those days were not so tender-hearted as to have troubled much about putting a few men of a subject race to death, unless the deed had been done barbarously. The manner of it must have shocked them, or it would not have remained imprinted so deeply upon the conscience of the nation.

In David, trained by Samuel from his youth, we have a noble example of a theocratic king, and that notable fact, which I have already pointed out, that David, in spite of his terrible personal crimes, never set himself above the law, was due we may feel sure to Samuel's early teaching. He had in Joab the very man to be the willing tool of a despot. He would have delighted in playing a Doeg's part. David valued his faithfulness, appreciated his bravery and skill, nay, even used him for his crimes, but he shrank from his lawlessness. God was always in David's eyes greater than himself. His law, often violated in hours of lust, was nevertheless to be bowed before as supreme. And so as regards his subjects, there seems to have been no intentional oppression of them. The idea of law was ever a ruling one in David's mind, and thus he approached Samuel's ideal of "the anointed one," though his fierce passions brought upon him personally deep and terrible stains.

It was thus Samuel's lot to sketch out two of the main lines of thought which converge in Christ. The idea of the prophet and the idea of the king gain under him their shape and proportion. This is especially true as regards the latter. The king is ever in Samuel's eyes "the Messiah," Jehovah's anointed one. Again and again the word occurs with marked prominence. And it was the pregnant germ of a great future with the Jew. He never lost the idea, but carried it onward and forward, with David's portrait for its centre,

as of one in whom Messiah's lineaments were marked in outline, feebly indeed and imperfectly, but with the certainty that a Messiah would come who would fill up with glorious beauty that faint, blurred sketch.

Such then is a brief summary of Samuel's work, and it justifies us in claiming especial importance for this portion of Jewish history, independently of the interest connected with the development of two such extraordinary characters as Saul and David, and with the many remarkable persons grouped around them, such as Eli and Jonathan, and the brave soldiers who formed the court of the two kings.

As regards the external history and description of the Books of Samuel, the following are the points most worthy of notice:—

§ 1. Name.

In Hebrew manuscripts the two Books form but one; it is in the Septuagint that we find them divided, and called the First and Second Books of the Kingdoms. The Vulgate has followed the Septuagint in its division, but calls them the First and Second Books of Kings. Finally, Daniel Bomberg, in the great Hebrew Bible published by him at Venice early in the sixteenth century, adopted this arrangement, and most modern Hebrew Bibles follow his example. But the division is most awkward. Saul's death is separated from David's pathetic lamentation over the fallen monarch, and the break in the narrative prevents the reader from following easily the development of David's character and history. In these days, when no matters of convenience require the disruption of the Book, a great advantage would be gained by once again arranging it as a whole, instead of following the Septuagint in its unphilosophical division. The name there, "Books of the Kingdoms," refers to the two monarchies of Israel and Judah, and is carried on through the two following Books of Kings.

§ 2. Author.

Who was the compiler of the Book of Samuel is absolutely unknown, and we are left also to gather our conclusions as to the date and character of its composition from incidental facts and allusions scattered through the history. One such conclusion forced upon us is that the Book is made up of a number of detached narratives, each of which is complete in itself, and carries the history down into its remoter consequences. Of these narratives we have five or six grouped together in 2 Sam. xxi.—xxiv. without any attempt at arrangement. The execution of Saul's seven sons or grandsons, the list of victories over the Philistines, David's psalm of thanksgiving, his last words, the names of his heroes, and the numbering of the people seem placed thus at the end because the compiler had no means of knowing what was their proper place in the history. The "last words" might fitly form the conclusion of the whole, but the other narratives are entirely out of place, and conceal from the reader how little we know of David's conduct after he had returned to Jerusalem, penitent and

saddened by the death of his beloved but unfilial son. The question thus arises as to what were the materials at the disposal of the compiler of these Books.

§ 3. Materials.

First then and foremost there were the Acts or Memoirs of Samuel himself. For the words of 1 Chron. xxix. 29 literally are, "And the Acts (or matters) of David the king, behold, they are written upon the Acts of Samuel the Roëh, and upon the Acts of Nathan the Nabi, and upon the Acts of Gad the Chozeh." It is interesting to find in these words the archaic title of Roëh (see 1 Sam. ix. 9) still clinging to Samuel, but still more so to find that records were kept apparently by himself. He had been educated at Shiloh among all the learning of the priesthood, and the place, protected by the powerful tribe of Ephraim, had remained unravaged by war, so that whatever records had been laid up with the ark, or written since the days of Joshua, himself no mean scribe, had accumulated there. We may well believe that a youth with such great natural abilities as Samuel had made no ordinary use of such opportunities, and whatever was saved for the use of future times from the wreck of Shiloh was most probably removed through his exertions and wise forethought.

In 1 Chron. xxvii. 24 we also read of "the Chronicles of King David," or, more literally, "the Acts of the Days of King David," *i. e.* a digest of his acts arranged in chronological order. But when we read in 2 Sam. viii. 16, 17 of two officers of David's court, of whom one, Jehoshaphat, was recorder, the other, Seraiah, was scribe, we must not rashly conclude that their duties were historical. The recorder, or, as the word means, remembrancer, was more probably a judge, whose business it was to enrol and publish royal decrees; while the scribe was a state secretary, concerned with the army and with the king's exchequer. It seems to have fallen to the lot of the prophets to write histories, probably for the use of the prophetic schools, and certainly as the result of the bent given to their minds by their studies in those institutions.

Thus henceforward the prophets, and not the priests, became the custodians of Israel's literature. In the Books of Chronicles a numerous list of authors is given, who almost to a man are expressly said to have been prophets or seers. At every prophetic college there would be gathered stores of such writings, and also of psalms and poems. David probably arranged the ritual of the temple after the fashion of Samuel's services (1 Sam. xix. 20), for which reason doubtless psalmody, as we have seen, was called prophesying, and consequently the temple would also have its library of hymns and musical compositions. Moreover, the prophet Gad is also supposed by many to have made the collection of songs and ballads called the Book of Jasher, *i. e.* the Upright, whence was taken David's spirited elegy over Saul and Jonathan. As Gad was David's companion in his wanderings from the time he took refuge in Moab (1 Sam. xxii. 5) till his death, his Acts must have contained full information of all the more important events of David's life.

But it is easy to over-estimate the completeness and extent of these contemporary records. Literature depends very much upon the nature of the material available for writing. Printing followed at once upon the discovery of paper. The copious materials now being brought to Europe illustrative of Assyrian history are the result of the use that people made of cheap tablets of clay. The materials most frequently referred to in the Bible are tablets of metal. With no cheaper or more convenient writing materials Gad's records would be but scanty, and David's psalms must have been for several years chiefly preserved by memory. The Canaanites had certainly known how to prepare skins for writing, and when Samuel's schools had caused a revival of learning, the art was probably restored. Perhaps it had never been entirely lost, and Samuel may have obtained such skins for writing his book upon "the manner of the kingdom" (1 Sam. x. 25); but we can hardly imagine that writing materials were easy to procure until the prosperous days of David's kingdom.

With skins of animals or plates of metal still used in Isaiah's days (Isa. viii. 1, where *tablet* is wrongly translated *roll*), the narratives would be short and each complete in itself. This fact has often been noticed in the Commentary. Thus the narrative in 1 Sam. vii. carries the history down to Samuel's death. The narrative in ch. xiv. carries Saul's history down to the end of his victorious wars. That in ch. xvi. gives us David's history up to the time when Saul began to envy and hate him. We may safely conclude that the Acts of Samuel, of Nathan, of Gad, and even the Chronicles of King David, were not well-digested histories, but a series of brief stories each complete in itself. These the compiler, in days when they had not merely skins, but even rolls made of many skins sewn together, seems to have arranged, adding a note here and there, blending perhaps occasionally several narratives into one, but never attempting to form out of them a consecutive history, such as a Thucydides or a modern writer, formed upon classical models, would have done.

§ 4. Date.

The next question refers to the compiler's date, and here some of our materials are sufficiently decisive. When we are told that "Ziklag pertaineth unto the kings of Judah unto this day" (1 Sam. xxvii. 6), it is plain that he lived after the disruption of Solomon's kingdom. When he thinks it necessary to apologise for Samuel being called a roëh, it is plain that the name had ceased to be honourable, and, by that degradation which happens to so many titles of office or sex, had become a term of dubious respectability. There is too the frequent recurrence of the phrase "unto this day;" the change of the name of Saul's successor from Ishbaal to Ishbosheth; the distinction between Israel and Judah in passages like 1 Sam. xviii. 16, where nothing but subsequent usage would have made a writer so express himself; the note that even princesses wore the same dress as men (the meïl) in 2 Sam. xiii. 18, and so on. But

besides these there are one or two other facts not so generally referred to, and which may be worth noting.

Thus, then, we have seen that the compiler places six narratives at the end of the second Book because, excepting David's "last words," there was nothing in them to show to what period of his reign they belonged. Evidently a considerable interval must have elapsed before tradition had so completely died out as to leave no trace behind for the historian's guidance. The same conclusion follows from his uncertainty as to the chronology of Saul's reign. The compiler uses the formula common in the Books of Kings, but he cannot fill it up. Literally he says, "Saul was one year old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years over Israel." Evidently the numbers *one* and *two* answer to our formula *M* and *N*. The compiler plainly knew neither Saul's age nor the length of his reign. St. Paul (Acts xiii. 21) says that Saul reigned forty years; but not only is forty with Hebrew writers a most indefinite number, signifying a "good long time," but it is very uncertain when these forty years begin and end. They certainly include the seven and a half years during which the house of Saul maintained a show of ruling, and possibly also several years during which Samuel was judge. Some think that as Saul is described as a "young man" (ch. ix. 2) when Samuel anointed him, but had a grown-up son when he was made king, there was a long abeyance, either before he was chosen by lot as king, or possibly between that and his defeat of the Ammonites. But what was hard for the compiler is still harder for us, and the chronology of Saul's reign is beset with difficulties.

On the other hand, the style of the Hebrew is more pure and free from Aramaisms than that of the Books of Kings. Local worship, moreover, and sacrifices are spoken of without any doubt of their propriety, whereas in the Books of Kings they are condemned. It is a further note of antiquity that the compiler never refers to his authorities, nor are there any hints or allusions to late Jewish history. While then we can at best only give a conjectural date, yet we may feel sure that the compiler must have lived at some period between the reign of Rehoboam and the upgrowth of the strong disapproval of worship anywhere except at Jerusalem. The reign of Jehoshaphat is a not improbable era, for "the high places were not taken away" (2 Chron. xx. 33), though idolatry was sternly repressed. Had the compiler lived nearer to David's reign, he would probably have been able to give us more definite information as to Saul's age and the duration of his kingdom.

§ 5. Books of Samuel classed among the "Early Prophets."

The Books of Samuel are classed by the Jews among the "Early Prophets" for the reason given above, that history was their especial study, and the compiler we may feel sure belonged to their order as well as did the writers of the various "books of acts" used by him. The "Early Prophets" comprise the Books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, and all these works were most

probably written for the use of the prophetic schools, and certainly were the result of the mental activity awakened in Israel by Samuel, and maintained by those who after his decease presided over the colleges which he had called into existence.

§ 6. Arrangement.

The Books of Samuel naturally arrange themselves into four parts according to the chief actors. In Part I., consisting of chs. i.—vii., we have the history of Samuel as the restorer of Israel. This again divides itself into two portions, of which the former, consisting of chs. i.—iii., gives us the details of Samuel's birth and early life up to the time when he was acknowledged by all Israel as a prophet; while the latter, chs. iv.—vii., gives us Samuel as judge. With this the period of the Judges closes, and in Part II., chs. viii.—xv., we have the history of the first king, Saul, including the preparation for his appointment, his establishment as king, and his final rejection.

In Part III., chs. xvi.—xxxi., David is the chief actor, but side by side with Saul, and we see the one daily declining in moral worth and external prosperity, while the other is ripening into the full stature of a theocratic king. During most of this period Samuel lived on no unconcerned spectator of the development of Jehovah's purpose, though devoting his own time to the training of the young men who came to his schools. Finally Saul falls so low as to become the dupe of a wicked charlatan, and dies by his own hand in battle.

In Part IV., 2 Sam. i.—xxiv., David is the sole hero of the narrative. In the first section, chs. i.—x., we see him made king, and reigning in glory. In the second, chs. xi.—xvii., his glory is tarnished by personal vices, imitated too readily by his sons; upon these follow bloodshed in his family, rebellion, and the loss of the royal power. In the third section, chs. xix., xx., we see him restored to his throne. In the last, chs. xxi.—xxiv., we have an appendix, the contents of which have been already described. Naturally we long to know how David reigned after so severe a punishment, and would gladly have seen how he retrieved in his later years the crimes of his passion-fraught manhood. But the ways of God are not as the ways of man. A veil is thrown over this portion of David's reign, but we may gather from his last words, and from his psalm of thanksgiving, that he returned to Jerusalem a changed man, and that his last years rivalled in piety his early promise.

7. Literature.

The most important modern works upon the Books of Samuel are, in German, the commentaries of O. Thenius, 'Kurzgef. Handbuch z A. Test.,' 2te Auflage, Leipzig, 1864; C. F. Keil, 'Bibl. Com. ü. das A. Test.,' Leipzig, 1864; C. F. D. Erdmann, in Lange's 'Theol. Hom. Bibelwerk,' Bielefeld, 1873; and Bunsen, 'Bibelwerk, die Propheten.'

On the text of the Books of Samuel there is a useful treatise by L. J. Wellhausen, Göttingen, 1871.

In English the most important commentaries are that in the 'Speaker's Commentary' by the Bishop of Bath and Wells; Bishop Wordsworth's; and the translations of Keil and Erdmann, the latter in Dr. Schaff's edition of Lange Clark, Edinburgh, 1877.

Other illustrative works are Ewald's 'History of Israel;' Stanley's 'Lectures on the Jewish Church;' Robinson's 'Biblical Researches;' Wilson's 'Lands of the Bible;' Thomson's 'The Land and the Book;' and Conder's 'Tent Work in Palestine,' a most valuable addition to our knowledge of the Holy Land.

THE FIRST BOOK OF SAMUEL.

THE FIRST

BOOK OF SAMUEL.

THE EARLY LIFE OF SAMUEL.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER I.

THE GENEALOGY AND BIRTHPLACE OF SAMUEL (vers. 1—8). Ver. 1.—**There was a certain man of Ramathaim-Zophim.** Though Samuel belonged to the tribe of Levi, yet no special mention is made of the fact, because he owed his importance and rank as a judge not to his Levitical origin, but to the gift of prophecy, which was independent of the accidents of birth and station. In the First Book of Chronicles, ch. vi., his parentage is twice given, that in vers. 22—28 being apparently the family genealogy, while that in vers. 33—38 was probably taken from the records of the temple singers, sprung from Heman, Samuel's grandson (1 Chron. vi. 33). His name there appears as Shemuel, our translators not having perceived that it is the same as that for which elsewhere they give the familiar rendering, Samuel. The variations Elkanah, Jeroham, Elihu, Tohu, Zuph (1 Sam. i. 1); Elkanah, Jeroham, Eliab, Nahath, Zophai (1 Chron. vi. 26, 27); Elkanah, Jeroham, Eliel, Toah, Zuph (*ibid.* vers. 34, 35), are interesting as showing that the genealogies in Chronicles were compiled from family documents, in which, as was usual in the case of proper names, there was much diversity of spelling, or possibly of interpreting the cumbrous signs used for letters in those early days. The variations, however, in Elihu (God is he), Eliab (God is Father), and Eliel (God is God) were probably intentional, as were certainly other changes in names, such as that of Ishbaal into Ishbosheth. The name of Samuel's father, *Elkanah* (God is owner), is a common one among the Kohathites, to which division of the sons of Levi Samuel belonged.

The prophet's birthplace was **Ramathaim-Zophim**, no doubt the Ramah which was Samuel's own head-quarters (1 Sam. vii. 17; xv. 34; xvi. 13; xix. 18—23; xxv. 1); the place where he dwelt, wrought, died, and was buried, and the Arimathæa of the Gospels. The Septuagint generally gives the name in full, but this is the only place where it is so written in the Hebrew. Ramah signifies a *height*, and the dual Ramathaim the *double height*, the town being situated on a hill ending in two peaks. But which it was of the many Ramahs, or hill towns, in the Holy Land, is hotly contested; probably it was the Ramah in Benjamin, about two hours' journey north-west of Jerusalem. Its second name, Zophim, is taken from Zuph, Samuel's remote ancestor, with whom the genealogy here begins. Zuph had apparently emigrated from Ephraim, one of the three tribes (Ephraim, Manasseh, Dan) to which the Kohathites were attached, and was a person of sufficient power and energy to give his name to the whole district; called the land of Zuph in 1 Sam. ix. 5. His descendants, the Zophim, had Ramah as their centre, and Elkanah, as their head, would be a man of wealth and influence. Though actually belonging to the tribe of Benjamin, Ramah is said to be upon Mount Ephraim, because this limestone range extended to and kept its name almost up to Jerusalem (see Judges iv. 5, and 2 Chron. xiii. 4; xv. 8, compared with xiii. 19). Elkanah too is called an Ephrathite, *i. e.*

an Ephraimite, no doubt because before Zuph emigrated the family had belonged to Ephraim, it being apparently the practice to reckon Levites as pertaining to the tribes to which they were attached (Judges xvii. 7). The Heb. Ephrathite is rightly rendered Ephraimite in Judges xii. 5, and should be so translated here, and in 1 Kings xi. 26. In Ruth i. 2; 1 Sam. xvii. 12 it means Bethlehemite, that town being also called Ephratah, *the fruitful;* Ephraim has the same meaning, but being a dual, no adjective can be formed from it.

Ver. 2.—As a wealthy man, Elkanah **had two wives, Hannah**—the Anna of Virgil, who very properly gives this name to the sister of the Phœnician Dido, the language of Phœnicia being identical with Hebrew—**and Peninnah.** The word Hannah signifies *gracefulness,* while Peninnah is the *red pearl,* translated coral in Job xxviii. 18, but ruby in Prov. iii. 15, &c. Its ruddy colour is vouched for in Lam. iv. 7. The Hebrew names for women generally bear witness to the affection and respect felt for them; while those for men are usually religious. Though polygamy was a licence permitted to the Jews, it does not seem to have been generally indulged in, except by the kings. Here, as elsewhere, it was the ruin of family life. In Christianity it was marked for final extinction by the rule that no polygamist should be admitted even to the diaconate, and much less to higher office (1 Tim. iii. 2, 12).

Ver. 3.—**This man went up out of his city yearly.** Once in the year Elkanah went up to offer sacrifice before the ark. The original command had required this thrice a year of all Israelites; but though a Levite and a religious man, Elkanah went up but once; and such apparently was the rule in our Lord's time (Luke ii. 41), the season preferred being naturally the passover, while the other feasts gave opportunities for the performance of this duty to those unable to leave their homes at so early a period of the year. The ark was now at Shiloh, a town in Ephraim, about ten miles south of Shechem; for Joshua had removed it from Gilgal (Josh. xviii. 1), not merely because Shiloh occupied a more central position, but as marking the primary rank of his own tribe (1 Chron. v. 1, 2). Its destruction by the Philistines after the capture of the ark (1 Sam. v. 1) was so complete, and attended apparently by such barbarous cruelties (Ps. lxxviii. 60—64), that it never recovered its importance, and Jeroboam passed it by when seeking for places where to set up his calves.

To sacrifice unto the LORD of hosts. This title of the Deity, "LORD (in capitals, *i. e.* Jehovah) of Hosts," is a remarkable one. Fully it would be "Jehovah God of Hosts," and the omission of the word God shows that the phrase was one of long standing shortened down by constant use. And yet, though found 260 times in the Bible, this is the first place where it occurs. "Lord of Hosts" (Lord not in capitals, and meaning *master, ruler*) occurs only once, in Isa. x. 16. "God of Hosts," Elohim-Sabaoth, though rare, occurs four times in Ps. lxxx. 4, 7, 14, 19. The word Sabaoth, hosts, does not mean *armies,* inasmuch as it refers to numbers, and not to order and arrangement. It is usually employed of the heavenly bodies (Gen. ii. 1; Deut. iv. 19; xvii. 3), which seem countless in multitude as they are spread over the vast expanse of an Oriental sky (Gen. xv. 5); and as their worship was one of the oldest and most natural forms of idolatry (Deut. iv. 19; Job xxxi. 26—28), so this title is a protest against it, and claims for the one God dominion over the world of stars as well as in this lower sphere. Its origin then is to be sought at some time when there was a struggle between the worship of the sun and stars and the pure monotheism of the Hebrews. Occasionally the angels are called "the host of heaven" (1 Kings xxii. 19; Ps. ciii. 21; cxlviii. 2), whenever the allusion is to their number, but when the idea is that of orderly arrangement they are called God's armies (Gen. xxxii. 2).

The two sons of Eli . . . were there. The right translation of the Hebrew is, "And there (at Shiloh) the two sons of Eli . . . were priests." Eli apparently had devolved upon his sons his priestly functions, while he discharged the duties only of a judge. His position is remarkable. In the Book of Judges we find a state of anarchy. The people are rude, untutored, doing much as they pleased, committing often atrocious crimes, yet withal full of generous impulses, brave, and even heroic. There is little regular government among them, but whenever a great man stands forth, the people in his district submit themselves to him. The last judge, Samson, a man of pungent wit and vast personal prowess, seems to have been entirely destitute of all those qualities which make a man fit to be a ruler, but he kept the patriotism of the people alive and nerved them to resistance by the fame of his exploits. In Eli we find a ruler possessed of statesmanlike qualities. The country under him is prosperous; the Philistines, no longer dominant as in Samson's time, have so felt his power that when they gain a victory the Israelites are astonished at it (ch. iv. 3). Moreover, he is not only judge, he is also high priest; but instead of belonging to the family of Phinehas, the dominant house in the time of the Judges, he belongs to that of Ithamar. When, to solve the problem, we turn to the genealogies in the Chronicles, we find Eli's house omitted,

though, even after the massacres at Shiloh and Nob, his grandson Ahimelech was still powerful (1 Chron. xxiv. 3), and one of his descendants returned from Babylon as jointly high priest with a descendant of Phinehas (Ezra viii. 2). How long a space of time elapsed between the rude heroism of Samson's days and Eli's orderly government in Church and State we do not know, but the difference in the condition of things is vast. Nor do we know the steps by which Eli rose to power, but he must have been a man of no common ability. Warrior as well as statesman, he had delivered the people from the danger of becoming enslaved to the Philistines. In his own family alone he failed. His sons, allowed to riot in licentiousness, ruined the stately edifice of the father's fortunes, and the Philistines, taking advantage of the general discontent caused by their vices, succeeded in once again putting the yoke on Israel's neck.

Ver. 5.—**A worthy portion.** This rendering is based upon the idea that the Hebrew, which is literally "one portion of two faces," may mean "one portion enough for two persons." But for this there is no sufficient authority, and though the word is a dual, it really signifies the two sides of the face, or more exactly "the two nostrils," and so simply the countenance. The Syriac translation, "a double portion," is based upon an accidental resemblance between the words. As the term sometimes signifies anger from the swelling of the nostrils of an enraged person, the Vulgate translates, "And Elkanah was sad when he gave Hannah her portion; for . . ." The Septuagint has a different reading, *epes* for *apaim*, and though the words look different in our writing, they are nearly identical in Hebrew. This is probably the true reading, and the translation would then be, "*And to Hannah he gave one portion only* (because she had no child, while Peninnah had many portions, as each son and daughter had a share); *for he loved Hannah* (and did not leave her without this mark of affection), *though Jehovah had shut up her womb.*" These portions were of course taken from those parts of the victim which formed a feast for the offerers, after Jehovah and the priests had had their dues. It is plain from this feast that Elkanah's annual sacrifice was a peace offering, for the law of which see Lev. vii. 11—21.

Vers. 6, 7, 8.—**Her adversary also provoked her sore.** The pleasure of this domestic festival was spoiled by the discord of the wives. Peninnah, triumphant in her fruitfulness, is yet Hannah's adversary, because, in spite of her barrenness, she has the larger portion of the husband's love; while Hannah is so sorely vexed at the taunts of her rival, that she weeps from sheer vexation. In vain Elkanah tries to give her comfort. The husband really is not "better than ten sons," for the joy of motherhood is quite distinct from that of conjugal affection, and especially to a Hebrew woman, who had special hopes from which she was cut off by barrenness. In ver. 7 there is a strange confusion of subject, owing to the first verb having been read as an active instead of a passive. It should be, "And so it happened year by year: when she (Hannah) went up to the house of Jehovah she (Peninnah) thus provoked her, and she wept and did not eat." It must be remembered that the Hebrews had no written vowels, but only consonants; the vowels were added in Christian times, many centuries after the coming of our Lord, and represent the traditional manner of reading of one great Jewish school. They are to be treated with the greatest respect, because as a rule they give us a sense confirmed by the best authorities; but they are human, and form no part of Holy Scripture. The ancient versions, the Septuagint, the Syriac, and the Vulgate, which are all three older than the Masoretic vowels, translate, "And so she (Peninnah) did year by year;" but this requires a slight change of the consonants.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*Transitions.* The main facts implied or expressed in this section are—1. A state of national degeneracy. 2. A scarcity of spiritual illumination. 3. A family morally imperfect and troubled, yet rigidly observant of religious duties. 4. A Divine will using that family for the further unfolding of Messianic purposes.

I. An UNBROKEN CONTINUITY runs through the revelations of the Old Testament, analogous to that of the physical order and the education of the individual. It is only ignorance of the Bible that can suppose it to be destitute of the unity in variety which is known to characterise the material creation. Separate books, like diverse strata in the crust of the earth, are preliminary to what is to follow; and the character of the events recorded, and the condition of morality and religious light referred to, must be considered as related to the one general purpose. Sometimes the transition seems to be sudden and abrupt, and a totally new set of subjects appears; but, as in

the reference here to a "certain man," whose life was chiefly spent during the era covered by the latter part of the Book of Judges, so generally connecting links may be found.

II. The CONSERVATION AND DISCIPLINE OF THE CHOSEN RACE are subservient to the development of the Divine purpose in Christ. History is the basis of revelation. Man is not to be saved by abstract truth, but by an historical Christ. The historical Christ is to appear in the "fulness of time," not from the skies, but from a human line well authenticated. Human factors are the transitory element in the Divine unfolding of salvation in Christ. That God should use men, during a long succession of ages, as the channel through which his mercy should embrace all the world, is as natural and reasonable as that he should perfect his will in the beautiful order of the earth by a long series of changes in crude material elements. God did not make imperfect men perfect in order to use them; but showed his wisdom in training and holding together the chosen race just as they were. Degenerate as they were during the period of the Judges, they were not cut off for ever, but chastened and quickened. Thus the process was continued, until the purpose was ripe for the appearing of the Christ, and his proper identification, by the combination of history and prophecy.

III. The FORM AND DEGREE OF REVELATION vouchsafed to an age are largely dependent on the ideas and moral character previously attained to. Man at first entered on life devoid of ancestral literature; and so Adam's descendants, in succeeding ages, inherited less of knowledge and experience in proportion as they were nearer to the founder of the race. It is not wise to import our modern ideas into the minds of those who, in the days of Jacob, Moses, and the Judges, had not been fashioned by our inheritance of knowledge. The devout men and women of Elkanah's time, having acquired knowledge of the existence of hosts of intelligent beings, took a wider conception of God's sovereignty (vers. 3, 11) than was possible to men of an earlier age. God conveyed truth in so far as men were able to bear it. It would be as unnatural for Isaiah's lofty teachings to follow at once on the scanty illumination of the era of the Judges, as for philosophical conceptions to be set before children. Divine wisdom shines through the graduated teaching of Israel's history (Matt. xix. 7, 8).

IV. The EDUCATION OF A PEOPLE, with ulterior view to the world's instruction, by provisional, not final truth, necessitates eras of transition. All through the ages God was educating a race for the benefit of the world; and, as education means steady development, widening vision, the elements of things would form the staple of early teaching. Times came when a new feature had to be introduced, and early arrangements to give place to something more suited to the wider truth to be taught. The occasional vision and message, suited to patriarchal life, were followed by the systematic symbolism and rigid rules appropriate to national consolidation under Moses. The casual illumination of the Judgeship, also, yields to the more steady teaching and guidance of the prophetic schools inaugurated by Samuel. Later on, the early dawn of the prophetic ages gives place to the "dayspring" which reveals the Sun of righteousness. As in nature, so in revelation, stage succeeds stage; transitions are according to law.

V. The INSTRUMENTS FOR EFFECTING A TRANSITION are duly chosen, and are silently, unconsciously prepared for their work. The world little knew of the germinal Divine purpose working out in an obscure home of Mount Ephraim; nor did the "certain man" know how the conflicting elements in his home were being graciously over-ruled to the development of a piety not surpassed in Old Testament history, and the sending forth of one who should be a blessed forerunner of One greater still. Germs of future good lie in undreamed-of places and persons. Out of the vast storehouse of the universe the all-gracious God is constantly preparing some new channel of good to his creatures. In the scattered villages and towns of the land there are being nurtured, unconsciously, the lives that in days hence shall be foremost in the Redeemer's host. "Little Bethlehem," and the lowly Joseph and Mary, were in reserve for the greatest of events. Any new advances to be made by the Church in the future are sure to be provided for by chosen men, possibly unknown to the world, and silently trained by Providence for their work.

VI. PERSONS, PLACES, AND EVENTS, IN THEMSELVES OBSCURE, BECOME IMPORTANT

when associated with the unfolding of high spiritual purposes. It was the connection of Samuel with Christ's glorious kingdom that linked a "certain man" and his wife with the same, and so raised them from obscurity. Spiritual uses give real value to things. The frail and insignificant becomes enduring and important when blended with the interests of the "kingdom that cannot be moved." Every member of Christ's body is precious to him. Names are recorded in heaven which enter on no earthly roll. The life and spirit of every lowly Christian are known by God to exercise a widespread, abiding influence in the invisible sphere. As the kingdom is to be eternal, so, whatever part each one may take in its unfolding, that item will be saved from the transitoriness and oblivion of other toil. Fame in the world is not the criterion and measure of real usefulness. The chief concern should be so to live as to be, in some form useable by God for advancing the glory of Christ. All are morally great when employed in his service to the full extent of their capacities.

VII. A DILIGENT USE OF SUCH LIGHT AS IS BESTOWED, especially in degenerate times, may qualify even obscure men for rendering important service. The family religion of a "certain man" bore its fruit. The moral ground of usefulness lies in character, and character is spiritually strong in so far as improvement is daily made of privileges, however few they may be. Men's fitness to confer benefits on the world is more connected with a wise use of what they have and know, than with the absolute possession of knowledge. A little goodness, and a humble routine of devotion in a dark age, shines the brighter because of the surrounding gloom. From the ranks of pious men in modern times, who cared for piety at home, there have gone forth many sons distinguished for service in the Church of God. It is worthy of note how fixed ordinances and seasons of Divine worship nourish whatever of piety may be struggling here and there against degenerate manners and official corruption. The usual services of the tabernacle and the recurring festivals, though despised and profaned by many, furnished comfort and cheer to the faithful few. In spite of unworthy priests, God is found in his courts by all who seek him.

Vers. 4—8.—*Domestic troubles.* The facts given in this section are—1. Hannah's grief and disappointment. 2. Peninnah's cruel jealousy. 3. Elkanah's efforts to console.

I. PROVIDENCE sometimes seems to RUN COUNTER TO WHAT IS MOST DESIRABLE, in withholding gifts where they would be devoutly valued and wisely used. Humanly speaking, Hannah was the most fit person to be blessed with offspring to be nurtured. The course of nature which finds expression in family life is of God. Though the free element of human action plays a part, yet God is supreme. Providence is over the home of the pious. Poverty and riches, new life and bereavement, are of the Lord. Looked at in its early stages, and tested by our range of vision, the course of Providence is often the reverse of what makes for the joy of the home and the good of the world. Often the illiberal spirit holds wealth, while the loving heart has only good wishes. Many a good, Christlike heart laments that it has not the means of clothing the poor, and sending forth messengers of the cross. Men of very slender abilities and lowly position, but of intense enthusiasm for Christ, may wonder why they have not been endowed with the intellectual and social qualities which would enable them to stem the tide of scepticism, and gain over to Christianity persons now inaccessible to them.

II. PROVIDENCE, for reasons not obvious, sometimes SEEMS TO FAVOUR INFERIOR CHARACTERS, bestowing gifts where there is not the purest spirit to improve them. Peninnah was immensely inferior to Hannah in all that makes character to be admired. If judged by the benefits conferred on some persons, and the disposition to use them, Providence would be said to have erred. The writer of Psalms xxxvii. and lxxiii. had once bitter reflections on this subject. The causes of the Divine conduct lie deep in hidden counsels. The inequalities and disproportions of life clearly show that we see only the beginning of things, and that there is a future where every man shall receive according to his work. It is enough to know, that in the abundant blessings which often fall to the lot of the inferior and the bad, they have experienced goodness and mercy, so as to be without excuse for ingratitude, and that the Judge of all the earth cannot but do right.

III. INTENSE GRIEF IS NATURAL ON THE BLIGHTING OF A SUPREME HOPE. Every one must see the naturalness of Hannah's grief. The ordinary course of nature fosters hope; it is the basis of reasonable expectations. A well-balanced mind lives in strong sympathy with nature's ways, for they are of God, and always beneficent in final issue. God is not displeased with grief, not discontent, when it comes in the order of Providence, even though the grief rise from a wish that he had ordered otherwise. Tears have been consecrated by Christ. The wail over Jerusalem was not unconnected with blighted hope. But so far as men are concerned, the roots of their sorrow frequently lie in their ignorance of God's times and methods. He doth not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men. There is some undeveloped purpose for their good which will yet vindicate his goodness.

IV. To have a deep and SACRED GRIEF INTENSIFIED BY UNMERITED AND CONTINUOUS REPROACH is the climax of domestic suffering. The griefs of private life are sacred. The wounded spirit shuns the inquisitive eye. Sorrow often seeks sad comfort in self-isolation. The cruel jibes of her rival were agony to Hannah's gentle spirit. So the Man of sorrows felt the bitter reproach of his own people as a most painful addition to that secret sorrow he ever carried in his heart. In many an unhappy home there is yet to be found a meek, loving soul grieving over deferred hope of a husband or children saved, and compelled also to bear scorn, and perhaps ill-treatment, from those most dear. A patient, Christlike spirit is the Divine counterpoise of such suffering.

V. LONG YEARS OF MEEKLY-ENDURED TRIAL MAY BE THE DIVINE TRAINING for subordinating natural gratification to high spiritual ends. Completed history gives the clue to the enigmas of its early stages. Posterity has seen that the long trial of Hannah was not without its blessed uses in sublimating her hopes, and deepening her piety. It is a first principle that trial to the devout is essentially a good. The spirit of the sufferer has to grow up to the Divine intent by meek submission. Like many mothers, Hannah might have rested in the simple joy of bearing offspring had not a merciful God prepared means for directing her desires to a higher good. When sympathy with the holy purposes of Christ is developed in the soul, natural desires will fall into harmony with his will, and be laid at his feet. And the deepened piety of a mother tells most powerfully on the subsequent nurture of her child.

VI. It is possible for HIGH RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS TO BE (1) embittered by the presence of wicked jealousies, (2) marred by an outburst of pent-up grief. The holy sanctuary is frequented by the devout and the profane, and the longing heart of a Hannah is fretted by the unkind expressions of a Peninnah. Side by side before the holy throne may be found men and women embittered by the very presence of each other. Divine worship and hallowed festivities should be the occasion when all animosities and vexations of spirit are lost in the calm, holy joy of God's favour. But when the wounded heart is pierced afresh in the house of God, or amidst Zion's rejoicings, the very joyousness of the occasion makes sorrow more sorrowful. Many are the tears shed in the sanctuary! The heart speaks its woes the more that joy becomes the place.

VII. INDISCREET FAVOURS IN A HOME ONLY ADD TO TROUBLE. Monogamy is the dictate of religion and of philosophy. Trouble must arise in society by departure from the prime law. Elkanah's troubles were his own seeking, and no amount of affection ostentatiously bestowed availed to cover the original error, or to lessen the inconveniences of it. Persons committed to conflicting domestic obligations, and beset with difficulty, need to exercise more than ordinary discretion in the expression of their feelings. Even in properly-constituted homes, unwise preferences lay the foundation for alienation and strife.

VIII. MEN OF TENDEREST AFFECTION AND ORDINARY GOODNESS MAY BE INCAPABLE OF FULLY APPRECIATING THE GREAT SORROW OF THEIR HOME. With all his kindness, Elkanah was unable to enter fully into the grief of his wife. Natures move in diverse spheres. Some lack responsiveness to the deepest experiences of their kindred and friends, or they have not the spiritual insight to recognise more than secular elements in trouble. The full bliss of one is not a standard for another. There are incommensurable joys, and joys inconceivable. A husband's love is a

perfect, beautiful thing. A wife's joy in holy offspring is also perfect and beautiful. The presence of the one blessing may console, but cannot compensate for the absence of the other. The "woman of sorrowful spirit" yearned to be the means of advancing Messiah's kingdom, and mourned that the joy was not hers; no assurance of affection could satisfy such an unrealised yearning. And so, good as the love of friends may be, it can never give full rest to the souls that peer into the future, and long to have the bliss of contributing their best to the Redeemer's glory.

Hence the *Practical suggestions*:—1. Be not hasty in forming a judgment on the course of Providence. 2. Cherish sympathy with those whose hopes are deferred. 3. Be careful and sow not in the home, by some irrevocable action, the seeds of permanent discord. 4. Avoid partiality where vows and relationships demand equal treatment. 5. Adore the wisdom that can out of our failings and errors elicit a future blessing.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—8. (RAMAH.)—*A Hebrew family.* The family is a Divine institution. It is the most ancient, most needful, and most enduring form of society; and, in proportion as it accords with the plan of its original constitution, it is productive of most beneficent effects, both temporal and spiritual, to the individual and the community. In times of general laxity and anarchy it has been, in many instances, a little sacred islet of purity, order, and peace, and nurtured the elements out of which a better age has grown. The real strength of a nation lies in its domestic life, and Israel was in this respect eminent above all other ancient nations. Even in the days of the judges, when "there was no king in Israel," and "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges xxi. 25), there were many godly families scattered through the land. One of these was that which gave birth to SAMUEL, the last of the series of the judges, the first of the order of the prophets, and the founder of the Hebrew monarchy. *This* family is introduced with a brief description (vers. 1, 2). The *residence* of the family was Ramah (the Height), or, more fully described, Ramathaim (the Two Heights). Here Samuel was born and nurtured; had his permanent abode during the latter portion of his life; died, and was buried. There is not a more sacred spot on earth than the home which is endeared by tender association and religious communion.

> "A spot of earth supremely blest;
> A dearer, sweeter spot than all the rest."

"Things are not to be valued on account of places, but places for the good things which they contain" (Bede). "God chooses any common spot for a mighty incident or the home of a mighty spirit." Consider the family as—

I. ORDERED BY A GODLY HEAD (ver. 3). His piety was shown—1. By his regular attendance on *Divine ordinances.* He worshipped "the Lord of hosts," not Baalim and Ashtaroth (ch. vii. 4); in the way of his appointment, at the tabernacle in Shiloh, at the proper season, and with the prescribed sacrifices; not according to his own reason or inclination merely, a will-worship which is not acceptable to God. 2. By his sincere and *spiritual service*, in contrast to the formal, worthless, and hypocritical service of others, especially the sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas (ch. ii. 12), and undeterred by their evil conduct in the priestly office. 3. By his faithful performance of his *vows* (ver. 21). 4. By his conversation and *prayer* in his own house (ver. 23). 5. *By his conducting all the members of his family to "the house of the Lord"* (ver. 7), in the exercise of his parental authority, accompanied by instruction and example. The words of the Law of Moses were evidently familiar to him (Deut. vi. 6—9), and happy is the family in which they are obeyed.

II. UNITING IN SOCIAL FESTIVITY (vers. 4, 5). Once a year he took his journey, in company with his family, from Ramah to the central sanctuary of the Divine King of Israel, for the twofold purpose of worshipping (lit., bowing down) and sacrificing before Jehovah. The sacrifice he offered was a peace offering (Deut. xxvii. 7), in which, when the animal was killed, the priest received its breast and right shoulder as his

lawful portion, whilst the rest was given back to the worshipper that he and his family might feast on it before the Lord. Their festivity was—1. *Religious.* It was the festivity of those who were received into communion with God. They were guests at his table, and overshadowed by his presence. It is said of the elders of Israel that they "saw God, and did eat and drink" (Exod. xxiv. 11). And if no such visible sign of his glory now appeared, yet their consciousness of his presence (according to his promise, and symbolised by the ark of the covenant) would give solemnity to their repast, and prevent improper indulgence and revelry, which were but too common in this corrupt time (ver. 14; Judges xxi. 19, 21). It should ever be the same when Christians join in social festivity. 2. *Joyous* (Deut. xii. 12; xvi. 11). Its religiousness did not detract from its gladness, but made it pure, elevating, and refreshing. "The joy of the Lord is your strength." 3. Participated in by the *whole family*, children as well as adults. As the fathers the women and the children took part in idol feasts (Jer. vi. 18), so they should take part in "feasting before the Lord." 4. It also called forth expressions of *affection* (ver. 4). The kindness of God to all should lead to kindness one toward another, and the example of kindness set by the head of the family should be followed by all its members. Even the ordinary family meal may and ought to be such a scene of sacred festivity, but the highest realisation of it on earth is in "the Lord's Supper" (1 Cor. xi. 20). And how great is the blessing which rests upon the family, all the members of which partake together of the "cup of blessing," and are "all partakers of that one Bread."

III. DISQUIETED BY DOMESTIC TROUBLE (vers. 5—8). It was natural that Hannah should feel disappointed at being childless. Her condition was deemed a reproach, and a sign of Divine displeasure. But her grief arose chiefly from the conduct of her rival, Peninnah. There was thus an element of discord and trouble in the family. This trouble—1. Existed where it might have been *least expected.* The family was distinguished by earthly prosperity and genuine piety. But what home is there on earth wholly free from trouble? Beneath the fairest appearances there is seldom wanting a cause of disquiet, to check self-complacency and teach the soul its true rest. 2. Was occasioned by *want of conformity to a Divine ordinance.* The introduction of a second wife by Elkanah was not according to the Divine appointment "in the beginning" (Gen. ii. 24; Mal. ii. 15; Matt. xix. 4). The violation of that appointment had taken place at an early period (Gen. iv. 19); it was sanctioned by long usage; and it was permitted under the Law "for the hardness of their hearts," and until they should be educated up to a higher moral condition. But it was followed by pernicious consequences (Gen. iv. 23; xxx. 8), as it always is in those families and nations where it obtains. Ignorance of the laws of God may mitigate or exempt from guilt; but it does not do away with all the evil consequences of their violation; for those laws are rooted in the fixed relations and tendencies of things. 3. Was immediately caused by the indulgence of improper feeling and *unseemly speech.* Peninnah may have been jealous of the special love shown to Hannah by her husband (ver. 5). She was proud and haughty on account of her own sons and daughters, and, instead of sympathising with her who had none, she made her defect a ground of insult; and trials ordained by Divine providence are peculiarly severe when they become an occasion of human reproach. Finally, she gave free play to "an unruly evil" (James iii. 8), especially at those seasons when it should have been held under restraint. Such things are the bane of domestic life. 4. *Disturbed* the proper performance of sacred duties. Peninnah could have little peace in her own breast, and be little prepared for Divine worship or sacred festivity. As for Hannah, although she did not angrily retaliate, but patiently endured the reproaches cast upon her (affording an admirable example of meekness), yet "she wept and did not eat" (ver. 7), and her joy was turned into mourning. Domestic disturbances tend greatly to hinder prayers (1 Pet. iii. 7). 5. Was *alleviated* by affectionate expostulation (ver. 8). "In Elkanah we have an example of a most excellent husband, who patiently tolerated the insulting humour of Peninnah, and comforted dejected Hannah with words full of tender affection, which was truly, in St. Peter's words, to dwell with them according to knowledge" (Patrick). Let each member of the family endeavour to soothe and alleviate the sorrows of the rest, and all learn to find their own happiness in promoting the happiness of others. 6. Was *over-ruled* by Divine providence for great

good. In her trouble Hannah was led to pray fervently, and her prayer was answered; sorrowing gave place to rejoicing; the family was benefited; and the people of God were greatly blessed. So, in his wonderful working, God "turned the curse into a blessing" (Neh. xiii. 2).—D.

Ver. 3. (SHILÓH.)—*Public worship.* Worship is worth-ship, the honour paid to superior worth; more especially it is the reverence and homage paid to God in religious exercises. Public worship (as distinguished from private and family worship) is designed to give an open expression, before men, of the praise and honour which are his due (Ps. cxlv. 10—12); a purpose which is not fulfilled by those who neglect it, and is forgotten by those who observe it only as a means of obtaining their own spiritual benefit. It is often enjoined in the word of God, and is commended by the example of good men. The conduct of Elkanah is suggestive of useful hints concerning—

I. GOING TO WORSHIP. Persuaded of the obligation and privilege, "he went up out of his city" and home. He did "not forsake the house of the Lord" (Neh. x. 39; Heb. x. 25). Neither the distance, nor the trouble involved, prevented him; nor did the unworthy conduct of many of the worshippers keep him away. He took all his family with him, except when any of them were hindered by sickness or necessary duties (ver. 20). He thought of the purpose for which he went, and made the needful preparation for "worshipping and sacrificing unto the Lord." He was careful to be in time; and, doubtless, sought the blessing of God on his service, entertained the journey with profitable conversation, and came with reverence and self-restraint (Eccles. v. 1).

II. THE OBJECT OF WORSHIP. "The Lord of hosts." He did not worship an "unknown God." Man must worship because he is a man; but he will worship a false or unworthy object, as well as in a wrong manner, unless he be Divinely taught, because he is a sinner. He "knew what he worshipped," even the living and true God, who had revealed himself to his people; Creator, Redeemer, Ruler; holy, just, and merciful (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7). Our knowledge of God is necessarily imperfect (Job xi. 7); but it may be true as far as it goes, and the true idea of God is "the root of all absolute grandeur, of all truth and moral perfection" (John xvii. 3).

III. THE PLACE OF WORSHIP. He went to worship in Shiloh (Deut. xvi. 15), where the tabernacle, made in the wilderness, having been first pitched at Gilgal, had now been standing 300 years. It was the palace of the great King. Here his servants the priests ministered, and offerings were presented by his subjects at his altar in the outer court (ch. ii. 33); the lamp of God (ch. iii. 3), the altar of incense (ch. ii. 28), and the table of shew-bread (ch. xxi. 4) stood in the holy place; and the ark of the covenant (ch. iv. 3) in the holiest of all (Heb. ix. 25). These were symbols of spiritual truth and means of Divine communion (Exod. xxix. 43; Deut. xvi. 11). The ideas that underlay them are fully realised in Christ and his Church, and the symbols are no longer needed; nor is there any more one central and sacred spot "where men ought to worship" (John iv. 20, 23). God draws nigh to us, and we can call upon him "in every place." The presence of holy souls makes all places holy, in so far as any place can be so called.

> "What's hallowed ground? 'Tis what gives birth
> To sacred thoughts in souls of worth."

Common worship, however, renders necessary special places of worship, the declared purpose and holy associations of which make them dear to good men and helpful to their devotions, so that they are sometimes constrained to say with Jacob, "How dreadful is this place," &c. (Gen. xxviii. 17). "A fearful place, indeed, and worthy of all reverence, is that which saints inhabit, holy angels frequent, and God himself graces with his own presence."

IV. THE TIME OF WORSHIP. "He went up yearly," or from year to year, and continued several days. The Law required that the tribes should assemble at the sanctuary three times a year; but in those unsettled times it appears to have been the custom for them to attend only once, probably at the passover. What acts of worship he performed, or what times he observed at Ramah, we are not told. The

Sabbath (though not mentioned in the Books of Samuel) we may be sure was not neglected by him, nor should it be by us. The spirit of continual Sabbath keeping (Heb. iv. 9) is, indeed, of greater importance than the observance of one day in seven; but its observance, with reference to the higher truths which the first day of the week commemorates, is most needful and beneficial.

V. THE MANNER OF WORSHIP. "He went up to worship and sacrifice." His worship consisted of adoration, confession, petition, thanksgiving. It was connected with and embodied in sacrifices of various kinds, and of different significance: expiatory (sin offerings), self-dedicatory (burnt offerings), and eucharistic (peace offerings). They had a real and deep relation to the sacrifice of Christ. From it they derived their worth, and by it they have been done away. Our worship demands *spiritual sacrifices*, the broken and contrite heart, the "presenting of our bodies as a living sacrifice," prayer, thanksgiving, holy and benevolent dispositions and conduct. "By him, therefore (who brings us nigh to God, and makes us capable of serving him aright), let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually," &c. (Heb. xiii. 16.)

VI. RETURNING FROM WORSHIP. After the sacred feast was over, he and his family "rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the Lord, and returned" (ch. i. 19). Morning is a most favourable season for devotion (Ps. v. 3); and those who are about to take a journey or enter on a new enterprise do well to rise up early and seek the Divine guidance and help. Elkanah showed that he was not weary of his devotions, but desired to avail himself to the utmost of the opportunities afforded him; and, by doing so, he obtained the greatest permanent benefit from his visit to the sanctuary. The manner in which we return from public worship greatly influences its permanent results (Matt. xiii. 4, 19; Luke xi. 28). And our aim and endeavour, when we return, should be to sanctify all places, all times, all occupations by the spirit of unceasing prayer and thanksgiving, and so make the whole of life a preparation for the services of the heavenly temple.—D.

Vers. 3, 11. (SHILOH.)—*The Lord of hosts.* There is no subject more worthy of study than the nature and character of God. His perfections are often called his Name, and his Name is expressed by various words, all of which are significant. They are not merely designations, but also descriptions. The word *God* is commonly supposed to mean *the Good One*, but it probably denotes "he on whom one calls," or "he to whom one sacrifices;" the word *Lord* = Giver or Distributor of bread; *Deity* (Sanscrit, *Dyaus*) = the Resplendent, Light-giving Heaven, the Shining One, showing the pure conception which the ancient Aryans (the ancestors of the Indo-European nations) entertained of the Divine Being. But the Bible mentions other names of God, which were either in common use among the Semitic nations, or given by special revelation to the Hebrews; and of these one of the most noteworthy is that of "the Lord of hosts" (Jehovah Sabaoth), which occurs no less than 260 times, this being the first instance of its use (see Max Müller, 'Science of Language,' p. 172; Fairbairn, 'Studies in Philosophy;' Plumptre, 'Biblical Studies'). Observe—

I. ITS HISTORICAL USE. 1. Founded on what had been previously known or revealed. Jehovah Sabaoth = Jehovah, Elohe (God of) Sabaoth (Keil; 2 Sam. v. 10). El (Beth-*El*, Isra-*El*, *El*-kanah, Samu-*El*) = the Strong or Mighty One; used in the plural as "comprehending in himself the fulness of all power, and uniting in himself all the attributes which the heathen ascribe to their divinities." Jehovah (Yahveh) = he who is, or he who will be, the Being, the Absolute One, the Cause and Support of all other beings, the Eternal, the Unchangeable; employed with special reference to his personality, unity, his close relationship to his people, and his promise to be their God; the Proper Name of Israel's God (Exod. iii. 14; vi. 3). Sabaoth (hosts) = the heaven and the earth (Gen. ii. 1; Deut. iv. 19), the angels (Gen. xxxii. 2, where, however, another word of similar import is used; Ps. ciii. 21), and more commonly armies of men (Gen. xxi. 22; Exod. vi. 26; Josh. v. 14). The whole name = "Jehovah, the God of the armies of Israel, the Giver of the victory in battle, of the stars and of the angels." 2. First used when he was about to make a fresh display of his power and grace to his people under their anointed king (ch. iv. 4; xvii. 45; 2 Sam. vi. 27). By Hannah, the most spiritually-minded

person of that age (see Wordsworth's 'Com.'). 3. "Rose into new prominence in proportion as the people came into contact with the Assyrian and Chaldæan races, by whom the worship of the heavenly bodies was systematised into a national religion, and was therefore perpetually on the lips of Isaiah and Jeremiah as a protest against it" (Isa. vi.; Jer. xlvi. 18; xlviii. 15). 4. Most frequently used by the later prophets, "who doubtless sought to counteract by this means the fear which the Jews, as a poor, despised people, had of the power of the Gentiles, and to prove to them that the God in whom they believed had hosts enough to protect them, though they should be devoid of all earthly might wherewith to defend themselves against their enemies" (Roos). 5. Only once employed, in direct statement, in the New Testament (James v. 4); other and still higher revelations of his character being made by Jesus Christ.

II. ITS SUBLIME IMPORT. "God alone is great." 1. *His personality and unity*, as opposed to "the gods many and lords many" worshipped by the heathen; the key-stone of the faith of Israel being, "The Lord our God is one Lord." This is not contradictory to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, which signifies a threefold distinction in the One God. 2. *His supremacy.* He is higher than the highest, the great King and Law-giver, whose will all must obey (Ps. xxiv. 10; Mal. i. 14). 3. *His immensity.* He fills all space; rules over sun, moon, and stars; myriads of angels; nations, families, and individual men. "All are thy servants." 4. *His omnipotence.* "Lord God Almighty." "Power belongeth unto God." "It is the flower of his crown imperial, which he will suffer none to usurp. If the proudest of creatures go beyond the bounds and limits of his present permission, he will send worms to eat them up, as he did Herod" (Owen). "Thine omnipotence is not far from us when we are far from thee" (Augustine). Other revelations have now been given. "God is spirit." "God is light." "God is love." "Our Father which art in heaven." But his name as the Lord of hosts ought often to be an object of devout contemplation.

III. ITS PRACTICAL INFLUENCE. It is adapted—1. *To correct error:* atheism, polytheism, pantheism, positivism, scepticism, secularism, &c. 2. *To elevate our conceptions of him*, and fill us with humility, reverence, and adoration. 3. *To encourage us to pray to him, with strong confidence that we shall be heard* (ch. i. 11; Zech. viii. 21; Matt. xxvi. 53; Eph. iii. 20). 4. *To strengthen us in labour.* "Work: for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts" (Haggai ii. 4). 5. *To incite us to contend against his foes*, to "fight the good fight of faith." "I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts" (ch. xvii. 45). 6. *To console us in trouble.* "The Lord will protect his own" (Ps. xxxiv. 7; Isa. viii. 13). He is the Protector and Avenger of the oppressed (James v. 4). "He calls God the Lord of hosts in order to strike terror into those who think that the poor have no protector" (Bede). 7. *To warn all who disobey his voice, and set themselves in opposition to him and his people.* "Beware, therefore."—D.

EXPOSITION.

HANNAH'S PRAYER FOR A SON (vers. 9—18). Ver. 9.—**After they had eaten . . . after they had drunk.** The Hebrew favours the translation, "After she had eaten in Shiloh, and after she had drunk;" the somewhat forced rendering of the A. V. having arisen from a supposed discrepancy between this verse and ver. 7. Really there is none. The words simply mean that Hannah took part in the sacrificial banquet, though she did so without appetite or pleasure; and thus they connect her visit to the temple and her prayer with the most solemn religious service of the year. To take part in this banquet was a duty, but as soon as she had fulfilled it she withdrew to the temple to pour out her grief before God. There Eli, **the priest**, *i. e.* the high priest, as in Num. xxvi. 1; xxvii. 2, was seated upon, not *a* seat, but *the* pontifical throne, placed at the entrance leading into the inner court of the tabernacle, so that all who came to worship must pass before him. It is remarkable that the tabernacle is called the *temple* (so 1 Sam. iii. 3; Ps. v. 7), or, more literally, the "palace" of Jehovah, his royal residence; and it thus appears that the name had come into use before Solomon's building was erected. The curtains (Exod. xxvi. 1) also had given place to a *mezuzah*, translated *a post*, but really a sort of porch, with doors, as appears from ch. iii. 15 (comp. Exod. xxi. 6; 1 Kings vii. 5).

As the tabernacle remained stationary at Shiloh for 300 years, naturally numerous buildings of a more solid nature grew up around it.

Vers. 10, 11.—**She . . . prayed unto the LORD.** Kneeling down in the inner court, but within sight of Eli, whose throne in the porch probably overlooked the whole inner space, Hannah prays unto "Jehovah of Sabaoth" for a male child. Her humility appears in her thrice calling herself Jehovah's handmaid; her earnestness in the threefold repetition of the entreaty that Jehovah would look on her, and remember her, and not forget her. With her prayer she also makes a twofold vow in case her request is granted. The son given her is, first, to serve not for a stipulated number of years, as was the law with the Levites (Num. iv. 3), but for life; and, secondly, he is to be a Nazarite. We gather from Num. vi. 2 that Moses found this singular institution in existence, and only regulated it, and admitted it into the circle of established and legalised ordinances. Essentially it was a consecration to God, a holy priesthood, but not a sacrificing priesthood, nor one by right of birth, as the Aaronic, but personal, and either for a limited period, or for life. During the continuance of the vow, a Nazarite might (1) partake of no produce of the vine, signifying thereby abstinence from self-indulgence and carnal pleasure. He might (2) take no part in mourning for the dead, even though they were his nearest relatives, because his holier duties raised him above the ordinary joys and sorrows, the cares and occupations of every-day life. Lastly, no razor might come upon his head, the free growing hair being at once the distinctive mark by which all men would recognise his sacred calling, and also a sign that he was not bound by the usual customs of life. By Hannah's first vow Samuel was devoted to service in the sanctuary, by the second to a holy consecrated life. This institution remained in existence unto our Lord's days; for John the Baptist was also consecrated to God as a Nazarite by his mother, though not as Samuel, also given to minister in the temple.

Vers. 12—18.—**She continued praying.** Hannah's prayer was long and earnest, but in silence. She spake not in, but "to her heart," to herself. It was an inward supplication, which only her own heart and God heard. Eli watched, and was displeased. Possibly silent prayer was something unusual. It requires a certain advance in civilisation and refinement to enable a supplicant to separate the petition from the outward expression of it in spoken words, and a strong faith before any one can feel that God hears and knows the silent utterances of the heart (comp. Matt. viii. 8—10). Naturally men think that they shall be heard for their much speaking, and for speaking aloud. Unused then to such real prayer, Eli, as he marked the quivering lips, the prostrate form, the face flushed with earnestness, came to the coarse conclusion that she was drunken, and with equal coarseness bids her "put away her wine from her," that is, go and sleep off the effects of her debauch. Hannah answers indignantly, "No, my lord." She is "a woman hard of spirit" (see marg.), heavy-hearted, as we should say, and she had been lightening her heart by pouring out her troubles before Jehovah. She is no "worthless woman;" for Belial is not a proper name, though gradually it became one (2 Cor. vi. 15), but means *worthlessness*, and "a daughter of worthlessness" means a bad woman. "Grief" is rather *provocation*, *vexation*. Hannah cannot forget the triumph of her rival, exulting over her many portions, while for her there had been only one. Convinced by the modesty and earnestness of her answer, Eli retracts his accusation, gives her his blessing, and prays that her petition may be granted. And Hannah, comforted by such words spoken by the high priest (John xi. 51), returned to the sacrificial feast, which apparently was not yet finished, and joined in it, for "she did eat, and her countenance was to her no more," that is, the grieved and depressed look which she had so long borne had now departed from her. There is no reason for the insertion of the word *sad*.

HANNAH'S PRAYER ANSWERED (vers. 19, 20).

Vers. 19, 20.—**They rose up.** After solemn worship early the next morning Elkanah returned to his home at Ramah, and God answered Hannah's prayer, and gave her the wished-for son. She calls him Samuel, lit. Shemuel (Num. xxxiv. 20; 1 Chron. vii. 2), which was an ordinary Hebrew name, and means "heard of God," not "asked of God," as in the margin of the A. V. It seems to have been the mother's right to give names to her children (Luke i. 60), and Hannah saw in Samuel, whom she had asked of God, a living proof that she had been heard by him. The name, therefore, is of fuller significance than the reason given for it. Ishmael has virtually the same meaning, signifying "God heareth."

THE VOW FULFILLED (vers. 21—28).

Ver. 21.—**Elkanah . . . went up.** When at the return of the year Elkanah went up as usual to Shiloh, Hannah remained at home, purposing to wait there till her son was old enough to be given to the Lord. This followed soon after his weaning, which in the East is delayed much longer than with us. In 2 Macc. vii. 27 we find three years mentioned as the usual period of lacta-

tion, but the chief Jewish authorities make the time one year shorter. At three years old a child in the East would cease to be troublesome; but besides this, there was an order of women attached to the sanctuary (see on ch. ii. 22), and probably regulations for the training of children devoted to the temple service. **The yearly sacrifice**, lit. "sacrifice of days," would include among its duties the carrying to Shiloh of the tithes which were to be consumed before the Lord (Deut. xii. 17, 18), and the payment of those portions of the produce which belonged to Jehovah and the priests, and had become due during the year. **His vow** shows that Elkanah had ratified Hannah's words, by adding thereto a thank-offering from himself.

At Shiloh Samuel was to **abide for ever**; his dedication was to be for his whole life. And when Elkanah prays, **Only the Lord establish his word**, it is evident that he and Hannah expected that a child born under such special circumstances would, like so many children of mothers long barren, be intended for some extraordinary work. The word of Jehovah referred to is that spoken by Eli in ver. 17, which contained not merely the assurance of the birth of a son, but a general confirmation and approval of all that Hannah had prayed for. In ver. 24 the Septuagint reads, "a bullock of three years old," probably on account of the one bullock mentioned in ver. 25; but as three-tenths of an ephah of flour formed the appointed meat offering for one bullock (Num. xv. 8—10), the mention of a whole ephah confirms the reading **three bullocks**. Probably the one bullock in ver. 25 was the special burnt offering accompanying the solemn dedication of Samuel to Jehovah's service, while the other two were for Elkanah's usual yearly sacrifice, and the thank offering which he had vowed. At the end of the verse the Heb. reads, "And the child was a child," the word in both places being *na'ar*, which may mean anything up to fifteen years of age. The child really was about three years old, and the Sept. is probably right in reading, "And the child was with them." Both the Vulgate, however, and the Syriac agree with the Hebrew.

Ver. 28.—**I have lent him.** The word *lent* spoils the meaning. Hannah really in these two verses uses the same verb four times, though in different conjugations, and the same sense must be maintained throughout. Her words are, "For this child I prayed, and Jehovah hath given me my *asking* which I *asked* of him: and I also have *given back what was asked* to Jehovah; as long as he liveth he is *asked* for Jehovah." The conjugation translated *to give back what was asked* literally means *to make to ask*, and so to give or lend anything asked. The sense here requires the restoration by Hannah of what she had prayed for (comp. Exod. xii. 35, 36), but which she had asked not for herself, but that she might devote it to Jehovah's service. At the end of ver. 28 the sing. "he worshipped" is rendered in the pl. by all the versions except the Sept., which omits it. But *he*, i. e. Elkanah, includes all his household, and it may be correctly translated in the pl., because the sense so requires, without altering the reading of the Hebrew. In the sing. it puts an unnecessary difficulty in the way of the ordinary reader.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 9—18.—*Trial sanctified.* The main facts are—1. Hannah, impelled by trouble, goes to the sanctuary and records her wish in a vow. 2. Eli misjudges her character, but hearkens to her self-defence. 3. Eli discovers therefrom her real piety, and helps to create within her heart an assurance of answer to prayer. 4. Hannah enters on a brighter path.

I. IT BRINGS THE SOUL DIRECT TO GOD. It was doubtless good for Hannah to join the family worship, and derive all possible comfort from the festivals which to the devout mind told of a "mercy" which "endureth for ever;" but when sorrow is of the godly sort, when the gentle or heavy hand of God has been duly recognised in trial, the soul needs more than the prayers of others. Heart and flesh then cry out for the living God. There are clearly traceable stages in trial before this result ensues. In the case of Hannah, which is typical of many others, it began with a fond hope deferred, awakening only the anxiety common to such domestic incidents. Then, as time wore on, grief was generated, wearing away the strength of the spirit. Years of silent waiting on Providence followed—wonder, doubt, occasional hope, and corresponding despair filling up the experience. The weary heart would turn sometimes to God, and social worship would be valued as a means of grace, but without relief. Sadder and sadder, increasingly sensible of dependence on God, and impelled by the discovery that not even a husband's love can enter into the deepest sorrow, a strong resolve is taken to seek refuge in God by an act of urgent appeal to him.

Such is the proper issue of all trials when sanctified. There is no morose repining, no internal war against the Supreme Will, no utter abandonment to despair, no resting in the sympathy and counsel, or even prayers, of the Church; the soul wants God, and, as never before, carries its load straight to him.

II. IT LEADS TO THE MERCY-SEAT. There is all the difference between fleeing to God in ignorant desperation, and recognising his covenant mercies in Christ. No doubt there is compassion for every poor dark creature who under the impulse of trouble cries out to the invisible God; but it was not without a reason that the devout Hebrew preferred to retire to the place where the ark of the covenant and the mercy-seat were kept. She knew, as the most enlightened of her people knew, that there was a way to God, and drawing nigh towards the mercy-seat was a distinct recognition of One in whom the troubled might expect to be blessed. Trial still leads us to God, not trusting in our righteousness, but by the "new and living way" consecrated by Christ. And though that invisible mercy-seat is ever near, it is the wont of those who are being blessed by trial to seek the house of God, and there, pleading his mercy, find relief and lay off their burdens.

III. IT MAKES NATURAL DESIRES FOR AN EARTHLY GOOD SUBORDINATE TO HIGH RELIGIOUS FEELING. It is not certain at what stage in the providential discipline the event occurred, but the fact is clear that there was a time in the process when a natural love of offspring, *per se*, became absorbed in a passion for devoting the most precious of gifts to God. It is difficult to trace the purifying process by which pure and lofty spiritual feeling emerges out of the fires, but experience in all ages attests the fact that it does. It is an evidence that trouble is blessed when one can say, "There is none on the earth that I desire beside thee." All good things are intended to be helpful to our higher spiritual life, and it is a sign of spiritual health when the possession of them is sought primarily for the furtherance of religious ends, either in self or in the world. Religion is not in antagonism with nature. It rather purifies and ennobles it. Personal endowments, reasonable desires for family, or influence, or wealth, are laid at the cross when self is lost in zeal for God. There were a *few features in Hannah's experience which correspond with the action of sanctified trial on others.* 1. She learnt the vanity of life apart from God's blessing. Unless he made life rich with the desired good, there was no sense of joy or perfection in life. It is a great gain to learn the lesson of our need of God in order to feel life to be a daily bliss. 2. She, by the action of long trial, was being weaned from dependence on earthly good for the joy of life, and hence was more free to cherish awakening sympathy with the enduring kingdom of God. Disappointment in temporal affairs has often been blessed to a deepened interest in the unseen realities of Christ's kingdom. 3. Her religious sensibilities, being gradually quickened and refined, rendered her increasingly sensitive to the terrible abominations of the age, and hence opened her eyes to see the need of some great reformer of the nation. Thus would the natural desire for offspring merge into the hope that she might send forth *the man*. It is when souls are more alive to their own spiritual condition that they long also for means by which to check prevailing sin.

IV. IT ISSUES IN THE HIGHEST FORM OF PERSONAL CONSECRATION. Solemn vows are the strongest expression of self-surrender. In Hannah's case a mother gives up her body and soul, her present powers and future possessions and influence, specifically to God. It was not possible for female service to go further. The routine service of the Levite, to be entered on at a definite age, was not enough for the now sanctified woman. Her heart was not satisfied even with the prospect of a son who should grow up in blamelessness of life. It was not the personal comfort of the presence in the house of a loving, pious child that stirred the soul to pray: a vision, given of God, of the coming Messiah imparted spiritual tone to her nature, and nothing would, therefore, give satisfaction short of the consecration from infancy, to the service of the sanctuary, of a son, to be thus prepared for holy labours among the degenerate people, and to be a faint type and useful forerunner of a still more blessed Child. Thus, the limits set by nature, the requirements of an emergency, and the prospective honour of Christ are recognised in an intelligent consecration brought about by the all-wise discipline of him who knows how to qualify for noble service. The exalted

ideal of life attained to by this "sorrowful woman" bespeaks the thoroughness of the discipline through which she passed. A young life habituated to the calm and elevating influences of the sanctuary, separated from the sad and sorrow-producing evils of the age, untouched by the artificial appliances of man, and nourished in health without the man-created stimulants which give so much unreality to conduct —a very Nazarite in spirit and in body—this rose before the mind as an object of fond desire, and was laid lovingly at the throne of God; doubtless, also, in prediction of the One true and perfect life.

V. IT QUALIFIES FOR RENDERING CONTINUOUSLY IMPORTANT SERVICE TO THE CHURCH. No better service can be rendered to the Church than to nurture a life in such a way as to impart to it a tone far above the average of spirituality, and while doing that to pour forth from the heart sentiments that shall act as an inspiration to the wise and good in all ages. It was worth while for Hannah to spend years of sorrow, to issue, under the blessing of God, in the superbly beautiful nurture of a son like Samuel, and in the lofty strains of her celebrated song. Sanctified affliction enriches the soul with qualities permanent in value. The invalid gains spiritual power which in daily prayer brings down blessings on those nigh and afar off. The devout mother who has quietly borne reproach for Christ's sake, sweetens home all the rest of her days by her calm faith in God and ever-present gentleness. The merchant who has endured adversity as befits a child of God, gathers from the deep sorrows of his life power to pray and live for imperishable good far in excess of his former capacity. It is *good* to be afflicted.

If these things be so, there arise several *Practical questions* deserving conscientious replies:—1. Is desire for temporal good toned and regulated by regard for spiritual usefulness? 2. Do the private unspeakable sorrows of life draw us nearer to God, or render us sullen and bitter? 3. In our approaches to God do we sufficiently recognise the mercy-seat of the New Testament? 4. Have we ever consecrated ourselves or our belongings to God by deliberate vow, and as far as nature permits, and the claims of religion require? 5. Does our personal consecration, or the devotion of our offspring to God, approach toward the Nazarite ideal consecration of perfect freedom of life from all that is artificial and unwholesome—a holy simplicity?

Vers. 9—18.—*Character misjudged.*—I. A RARE FORM OF WORSHIP. It was a rare thing for a solitary woman to be seen offering prayer without audible words and with a semblance of folly. The vicinity of the sanctuary was the scene of many strange and painful events in those days; but here was singularity combined with and expressive of the deepest piety. Prayer, though not in form of set phrase, is true worship when characterised by the features seen in that of the "sorrowful" woman: such as longing of the heart for a definite object, intense fervour of spirit, reverent submission to the will of God, profound regard in what is sought for the Divine glory, and directed to the Source of all power through the mercy-seat in Christ. The question of set forms of utterance for public worship must be settled by considerations covering the range of history, and the order and welfare of the Church. The heart of the true Christian will contain petitions which no words can anticipate or express. It is not just to prescribe how individuals shall pray, for a living piety must grow according to its inner laws, which partake of our own individuality. Sometimes the Church may witness the spectacle of unusual acts of worship, and it is good for the world when they arise. Spurious worship, eccentricity in the name of religion, can be readily detected. Deviation from ordinary forms where piety is sincere may occur when intense feeling precludes or subdues utterance. Sighs, tears, groans may be prayers. Or the privacy of the request, though it be made under the eye of worshippers in the house of God, is unsuited to the public ear. Many a secret vow is made on the Sabbath in the sanctuary. And sometimes the spirit may know its want, but cannot speak to God for very awe of the Divine presence.

II. A MISTAKEN JUDGMENT. Eli erred in judgment when he classed among the vile the most devout and holy of the age. Here was an instance of the guardian of the sanctuary, and the chief authority in law and religion, judging from appearance, and not from the heart. The causes of the error were probably such as frequently act among men. 1. Natural inability of man to read the real character by casual

outward appearances. The heart is too deep to be penetrated by aid of occasional signs, for the same outward action may proceed from diverse internal motions. 2. Strong tendency in some persons to estimate others by the standard of their own experience. The area of one man's life may be much broader than that of another. The form, therefore, of religion in the one may be far beyond the appreciation of the other. 3. The strong hold on some good men of conventional modes of worship. Religion in some instances has been trained to find outward expression for itself by rule, and hence whatever expression deviates from the conventional type is liable to be regarded with suspicion. 4. In some cases men hold office in connection with public worship whose sympathies are not broad enough for the varieties of character and want that come under their observation.

III. A NOBLE SELF-VINDICATION. The "sorrowful spirit" of the worshipper shrinks from the very thought of being counted vile and a defamer of the place she loved. The cruel pang of the accusation only developed the strength and beauty of her piety. The depth of her sorrow and the utter absorption of her spirit in the one longing of her life, coupled with a sense of her unworthiness to be used in the high service of Messiah, checked any tendency to anger and recrimination. True self-vindication can dispense with passion. Its qualities are calm self-possession even under cruel wrong, a gentleness of spirit which knows how to be firm, a respectful deference to authority when confronting it, a delicate reference to self and the private sorrows that may have occasioned the misapprehension, an abstention from all that would exasperate, and a plain and fearless assertion of innocence. The comfort of the misjudged lies much in the conviction that God knows all. Religion gains much when the injured exhibit the spirit inculcated and exemplified by Christ. It requires much grace to be a Christian indeed. The world is slow to practise what it always in its heart admires, when the misjudged vindicate themselves after the Saviour's example.

IV. A LIGHTENED HEART. It was a morn of joy after the long night of sorrow, when, giving a true interpretation to the official words of the high priest, Hannah rose from prayer and went her way. The free, joyful heart shone forth in the countenance, and gave ease to every common duty of life. When God makes us glad, new energy enters into our nature. Hence, true religion, bringing to men elasticity of spirit, increases a man's power as a citizen, improves his capacity for business, lends lustre to the home, and, in fact, becomes an important element in the material wealth of nations. And what is most important is, the joy which God gives is real, permanent, resting on foundations which abide amid all change. In so far as the really devout are concerned, the lightened heart is the result of—1. The relief natural to true prayer. Even when specific answers are not obtained, the believer is rested and relieved by laying the burden before the mercy-seat. 2. Clear indications of God's acceptance. These vary with the age and circumstances. The high priest was endowed under special conditions with the power of indicating the Divine approval. External channels may convey unmistakably the will of God. The immediate course of events may be seen to correspond to the request. God is at no loss to convey outward intimations that the prayer of faith is not in vain. 3. The inward witness may be given, clear and strong, when God has important ends to accomplish thereby. The Spirit of God is in direct contact with the human, and can make known a truth. Christ's people know his voice. As the Spirit moved St. Paul to go to definite places, so he moves the true heart to believe in coming answer to prayer.

Practical suggestions:—1. Much prayer may be offered when forms of worship are lacking, in the sanctuary, in the city, on the open sea, and at daily toil. 2. Encouragement may be found in remembering that God understands our thoughts "afar off," and when words fail. 3. We should not estimate the value of prayer in others by what we can ascertain of it by our observation. 4. The guardians of pure worship have much need of charity and a discriminating spirit. 5. Errors of judgment should be freely admitted when ascertained. 6. The quiet dignity of truth befits all acts of self-defence. 7. The joy coming from God is the real strength and beautifier of life.

Vers. 19—28.—*Conjugal sympathy.* The facts are—1. Hannah, having independently fixed the future of her offspring, reveals the vow to her husband.

2. Elkanah acquiesces in her vow, and allows her will in respect of time and method of perfecting it. 3. A united and solemn surrender of Samuel to his life work.

I. QUALIFIED WIFELY INDEPENDENCE. Although Elkanah knew his wife's great sorrow, yet in the matters connected with its removal and in the subsequent transactions she evidently followed her own course. It was a great decision to fix a child's lot in life apart from consultation and consent. The spontaneous choice of a name, though harmonious with a mother's secret knowledge of past experiences, was in any case, and more so in Hebrew instances, a bold undertaking. The event of naming furnished, most probably, the occasion for explanation and revelation of the anterior vow, and was faced with the most perfect composure. The mother's feelings are ever to be considered in parting with children as they enter on life's work; but here the time and method appear to have been fixed by the mother taking the initiative, and, contrary to rule, the wife is the prominent figure in the religious ceremonial of dedication, whose set purpose throughout therein attains its goal. No *law of social and domestic life* is more clearly laid down in Scripture than the *subordination of the wife* to the husband, and though there are principles which limit the subordination, and sentiments which convert it into blissful freedom, yet independence of action where offspring are concerned, is as rare as it is, *per se*, undesirable. The high intellectual and moral qualities which render wifely action free and firm within the sphere of private affairs, are perverted when applied to the independent determination of the destiny of a son. The spirit of self-assertion will have no place in a well-ordered home. The grace and the moral power of woman vanish or become enfeebled when deeds are done in secret, and the natural authority of the head of the house is anticipated. Yet there are *conditions* which render such *independence* for a season *both necessary and even religious*. 1. Hannah's conduct was connected with an event in her religious experience too sacred even for a loving husband to be acquainted with. One cannot unbosom, even to the dearest earthly friend, the deep and passionate longings of the soul after God. The child of promise belongs primarily to the one to whom the promise is made, and so a special proprietorship is created which gives right to choice as to the use to be made of the gift. 2. Confidence in a husband's sympathy with lofty religious aims will justify wifely freedom, when that freedom is employed to perfect holy purposes. There are great and noble deeds within the proper right of a husband which he would only rejoice to see independently performed by a confiding wife. Where mutual confidence is fortified by years of common sorrow, no great error will be committed in interpreting religious wishes. 3. The soul that is bent on the realisation of a great religious hope, and has pondered it for years, best knows the means by which it may be secured. None but Hannah could see clearly the need of winning over the assistance of Eli, and the previous interview of the woman of "sorrowful spirit" with the high priest required that she should figure in the great ceremonial of devoting a child to God.

II. WISE HUSBANDLY CONSIDERATION. The legal rights secured by Divine law (Num. xxx. 6—8) are at once surrendered by acquiescence in a holy, God-honouring vow; acceptance of a memorial name; deference to wishes in matters of detail, and cheerful co-operation in completing the vow. Piety and prudence combine in making concessions where pure motives have influenced conduct, and where the ends sought are wise and useful. Exacting men never enjoy the full love and confidence of their home. It would be blessed for many homes were the holy daring of Hannah and the wise, gentle bearing of Elkanah more frequent. The key to such conduct lies not in rigid conformity to excellent rules prescribing spheres of action, nor in mutual watchfulness, but in pure affection for a loving, faithful wife; a quick perception of the special providence which over-rules earthly trials; sympathy with the noble piety that could so spontaneously and cheerfully surrender the realised hope of many a weary year; a conviction that a devout soul so evidently led on by God is by far the safest guide in matters pertaining to completed vows, and an unexpressed joy in the honour of being permitted to join in offering to God the precious treasure he had given. Hence we may learn a few

General lessons:—1. Personal and private decisions based on a supreme regard for the glory of God, and free from selfishness, are sure to be appreciated in a pious

home. 2. A loving recognition of individuality and force of character is essential to perfect domestic harmony. 3. Personal influence in the sphere of home becomes powerful when holy discipline has purged selfishness and brought the spirit into deep sympathy with the kingdom of God. 4. There is no pain, but joy, in sacrifice when our possessions are recognised as truly God's, and we perceive the honour of their being employed in his name. 5. It is a blessed thing for children to be spontaneously consecrated to God by the prayers of self-sacrificing parents. 6. Those who by reason of circumstances cannot serve in the sanctuary, may perhaps be permitted to nurture children for the ministry of the word.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 9 (iii. 3). (SHILOH.)—*The temple of the Lord.* Most of the religious ideas and expressions with which we are familiar had their origin far back in distant ages; and it is interesting and instructive to trace them to their source, and mark their alteration and expansion in the progressive course of Divine revelation. This is the first instance in which the expression "the temple of the Lord" occurs. Notice—

I. ITS SCRIPTURAL APPLICATIONS. 1. *A material structure.* "In the earliest ages God was worshipped without any distinction at any time and at any place, whenever and wherever the promptings of devotion moved in the hearts of his creatures; more especially, however, under the shadow of embowering trees, on hills and mountains, and in places where they had experienced some special manifestations of his favour" (Jahn). The first erection (with the exception of altars) was (1) the tabernacle or tent (Exod. xxv. 8), here called the temple or (more literally) the *palace* of Jehovah, as the royal residence of the king of Israel. Afterwards (2) the temple of Solomon; (3) of Zerubbabel; and (4) of Herod. 2. *The incarnate Word* (John i. 14; ii. 21; Col. ii. 19). 3. *Christian men.* The body of each (1 Cor. vi. 19). The whole assembly (1 Cor. iii. 16; 2 Cor. vi. 16; Eph. ii. 20—22; 1 Pet. ii. 5). Observe the progress:—God *for* us, *with* us, *in* us; Father, Son, Spirit. 4. *The heavenly world.* Although there is no temple *therein* (Rev. xxi. 22), yet heaven is altogether a temple (Rev. vii. 15).

II. ITS MAIN SIGNIFICANCE in all these applications. It is—1. *Set apart for the Lord.* Selected, separated, and consecrated as his possession, and for his use. 2. *Inhabited by him.* His throne is there. He dwells between the cherubim, in fellowship with the redeemed. 3. *Manifests him* in his holiness and love. His glory appears, his voice is heard, his will is declared (Exod. xxv. 22; Heb. iv. 16). 4. *In it service is rendered to him.* At first it was chiefly in outward symbolical acts; afterwards of the man himself, "body, soul, and spirit" (Rom. xii. 1; 1 Pet. ii. 9; Rev. i. 6). In each of these particulars we see the principle of progress, from the natural to the spiritual (1 Cor. xv. 46).

III. ITS SPIRITUAL SUGGESTIONS. 1. *That the place in which man worships is of far less importance than man himself and his possession of a holy character.* No place or building can be *holy* in the full sense of the word. For holiness implies intelligence, affection, freedom; and these make him unspeakably greater than all "the gorgeous palaces and solemn temples" which the earth contains. "To this *man* will I look," &c. (Isa. lvii. 15; lxvii. 1, 2; Matt. xii. 6). "Let more regard be paid to the promotion of religion than the decoration of churches; for although it is a good thing that churches should be beautiful edifices, yet virtue forms their best crown and ornament. It seems to us that the building of handsome churches pertains rather to the Old Testament, whilst the improvement of character and life is the more peculiar work of the Christian dispensation" (Charlemagne, Capitulary of the year 811). 2. *That the pattern to which the character of man must be conformed is Jesus Christ.* He is not only the Living Stone to whom every one must come that he may be built up into the "spiritual house," the Chief Corner-stone on which the whole building rests, but also the perfect Model according to which each and all must be fashioned (Rom. viii. 29). 3. That the character of man is conformed to its Divine pattern *by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost.* 4. *That only those in whom God dwells here will be fit to dwell with God hereafter,* and constitute

the heavenly tabernacle and temple (Rev. xxi. 3). Above all things, *seek to be in the building* which God is rearing for his habitation, and for an everlasting monument to his praise.—D.

Vers. 9—13. (SHILOH.)—*Effectual prayer.* Prayer is converse with God. The general principles which are necessary that it may be acceptable and effectual were exemplified by Hannah in the prayer which she offered at the porch of the tabernacle in Shiloh, whilst other and more special principles were contained therein. She was possessed of great intelligence, sensibility, meekness, and spirituality of mind, and embodied the noblest spiritual element existing amongst her people, even as she was a type of their history (ever rising out of weakness and distress through humiliation, faith, and prayer, into strength, and joy, and triumph). Consider her prayer as—

I. BORN OF DEEP SORROW. "She was in bitterness of soul, and wept sore" (ver. 10). Seemingly forgotten of God, an object of reproach and scorn, without indulging feelings of resentment, unable to tell her trouble to any one else, she betook herself to him who is "a Refuge for the oppressed in times of trouble." Prayer is the best resource at such times; and grief of heart, together with the loneliness which it usually causes, often lead to "the pouring out of the soul before the Lord." What a beneficent power is sorrow in a world like this! And how blessed are the fruits which, through Divine grace, it produces! (Ps. lv. 22; Hosea ii. 15; 1 Pet. v. 7).

II. UTTERED ONLY IN THE HEART (ver. 13). The first recorded instance of silent or mental prayer. The ordinary worshippers at the tabernacle prayed with audible words, and significant gestures; and in the East to this day the people pray in the same manner, and have little or no idea of praying only in the mind. They are more demonstrative than ourselves. "Mental prayer is a lifting up of the mind to God in actual or virtual supplication for what we desire." It is—1. Frequently a *necessity;* inasmuch as it would not be always proper to express in the presence of others the desires of the heart. 2. Presumptively *sincere;* inasmuch as it consists of direct intercourse with the Invisible and Omniscient One, and cannot spring from a desire to be seen or heard of men. 3. Highly *beneficial;* inasmuch as it serves to strengthen the spirit of prayer, and is heard of God (Neh. ii. 4). Even when it does not shape itself in words within the mind, but consists of aspirations and "groanings which cannot be uttered," "he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the spirit" therein (Rom. viii. 27).

III. EXPRESSIVE OF FERVENT DESIRE. Desire is the soul of prayer. It arises from, and is proportionate to, the sense of need. Its intensity is not always manifested by audible words; for sometimes its strength is dispersed and exhausted thereby; whereas silence condenses and increases it. "Deepest waters stillest flow." Our desires cannot be too fervent, or our requests too importunate, provided they be for things which are according to the will of God (Rom. xii. 12; 1 John v. 14, 15).

> "Fervent love
> And lively hope with violence assail
> The kingdom of the heavens, and overcome
> The will of the Most High; not in such sort
> As man prevails o'er man; but conquers it
> Because 'tis willing to be conquer'd; still,
> Though conquer'd, by its mercy conquering."
>
> Dante, 'Div. Com.,' Par. xx.

IV. EXHIBITING GENUINE FAITH. "O Lord of hosts," &c. (ver. 11). Like Abraham, she "believed in the Lord" (Gen. xv. 6); trusted, leant on him, as a child rests on the bosom of a parent. She had exalted conceptions of his character; believed in (1) his living personality, supreme dominion, power, goodness, faithfulness (Heb. xi. 6); relied on (2) his promises, summed up in the assurance, "I will be your God" (Exod. vi. 7; Levit. xxvi. 12); and (3) although she had no express promise of the particular blessing which she desired, yet, inwardly taught, she applied the general promise to herself, and had "confidence respecting things hoped for" (Heb. xi. 1). When express promises are wanting, it behoves us to seek particular blessings with the utmost dependence and submission; but, so far from being prohibited from

seeking them, we are encouraged to do so by the unlimited range of such directions as this: "*What things soever* ye desire, when ye pray," &c. (Mark xi. 24).

V. DISTINGUISHED BY ENTIRE SELF-SURRENDER. Once and again she called herself the "handmaid" of the Lord, as belonging to him, and wholly devoted to his service. Her will she freely offered up in sacrifice to his, and made a fresh surrender of herself in her solemn engagement to render back to him the gift he might bestow. She sought not her own gratification, but his glory and the welfare of his people. "The vow of the Nazarite embodied the yearning of the better part of the nation for a moral and religious reformation, as the only hope of Israel. It symbolised Israel's perfect calling of voluntary self-surrender to God" (Edersheim). When we seek not our own, but make it subservient to higher and larger good, we place ourselves in a line with the Divine purposes, and may entertain sure and steadfast hope of success.

VI. OFFERED WITH STEADFAST PERSEVERANCE. "She continued praying before the Lord" (ver. 12). It was not a momentary ebullition of feeling, but the fixed direction of her whole soul (Gen. xxxii. 26; Luke xi. 8; xviii. 1; Eph. vi. 18).

VII. FOLLOWED BY AN ABUNDANT BLESSING. The benediction of the high priest (ver. 17) was to her an oracle of God, to be in due time fulfilled; whilst the immediate effect on her heart was peace and gladness, and "she went away, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad." "Prayer is heart's ease to the gracious soul."—D.

> "Lord, what a change within us one short hour,
> Spent in thy presence, will prevail to make;
> What heavy burdens from our bosoms take;
> What parched grounds refresh as with a shower!" (Trench).

Vers. 11 (21, 23, 28). (SHILOH.)—*Vows.* "And she vowed a vow." The first recorded instance of a religious vow is that of Jacob (Gen. xxviii. 20; xxxi. 13). Under a sense of obligation to God, he entered into a spontaneous and solemn engagement before him to do what he believed would be pleasing in his sight, joining with it the desire of obtaining certain benefits at his hand. He did not, as it has been said, make a bargain with God; but gratefully repeated what had been virtually promised ("if" or "since God will be with me," &c.), and simply desired those blessings, without which it would be impossible for him to fulfil his purpose. Directions concerning the practice of making vows were given in the Law (Levit. xxvii.; Num. vi., xxx.). The age of the judges was an age of vows. "Then appears a new power of the age, the binding vow—a spasmodic impulse, dangerous to many, yet in the greatest emergencies of life indispensable; bracing up the deepest energies, and working the greatest marvels; often renovating, or else entirely transforming, whole nations and religions; assuming a thousand forms, and in all, while the first fidelity endures, exercising an indomitable power" (Ewald). Jephthah — Samson — Samuel. Vows are seldom alluded to in the New Testament (Luke i. 15; Acts xviii. 18; xxi. 23). In some of their forms, and in so far as they might embody a *legal* spirit, they are done away. But they are not prohibited; and, understood as denoting a solemn binding of ourselves to the service of God, or resolutions and engagements made before him to perform or omit certain definite acts, they are often needful and beneficial. Consider that—

I. THERE ARE CERTAIN THINGS TO WHICH THEY MAY LAWFULLY PERTAIN. 1. *Things over which we possess a rightful authority.* We may not vow what does not belong to us. 2. *Things which ought to be done, independently of vows;* but the obligation of which is felt for the first time, or with unusual force. 3. *Things which are in themselves indifferent;* being right or wrong according to the individual conscience, but with reference to which a vow creates a new obligation. The vow of a Nazarite to abstain from wine, &c. 4. Things, more particularly, that relate to the use of (1) *property* (Gen. xxviii. 22; 1 Cor. xvi. 2); (2) *time;* (3) *influence* over others, especially in the training of children; (4) the *various powers of body and soul* (Rom. xii. 1).

II. THERE ARE SPECIAL OCCASIONS ON WHICH THEY ARE APPROPRIATELY MADE. 1. *Severe trouble*—personal affliction, nearness to death, bereavement; bringing the

invisible and eternal nigh, teaching dependence on God, and exciting desire for his help (Isa. lxvi. 13, 14). 2. *Singular prosperity*—unexpected recovery from illness, extraordinary deliverance from danger, unwonted providential and spiritual benefits, temporal success. 3. *Spiritual exercises*—in public worship, private meditation, religious profession. 4. *Starting-points of life*—a birthday, the first day of a new year, the commencement of a fresh enterprise. These things are often occasions of spiritual illumination and impression, mountain heights that rise above the mists of ordinary life; and it is well to embody the views and feelings then entertained in fixed purposes, definite resolutions, solemn vows for future guidance and help. "Vow, and pay unto the Lord your God" (Ps. lxxvi. 11).

III. THEY SHOULD ALWAYS BE MADE IN A PROPER SPIRIT. With—1. *Due deliberation* (Eccles. v. 2), so as to ascertain "what the will of the Lord is," and what we may reasonably hope to accomplish, lest they should become a burden and temptation. 2. *A sense of dependence on Divine grace;* and not in a self-righteous spirit, as if our service were exceedingly meritorious, and deserved to be richly rewarded. 3. *Humble and earnest prayer for the aid of the Divine Spirit.* Vows made in our own strength are "as the morning cloud and the early dew." 4. *Faith in Christ*, the perfect pattern of self-surrender and self-sacrifice, the way of approach to God, the medium of Divine blessing. "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar" (Ps. cxviii. 27).

IV. WHEN MADE THEY OUGHT TO BE STRICTLY FULFILLED. Their making is optional, voluntary; not so their performance. Their obligation—1. *Changes not with a change of feeling*, even with respect to those things which are, in themselves, indifferent.

"The things which are in insight willed
Must be in hours of gloom fulfilled."

2. *Rests upon the same ground as that of the obligation of promises generally*, and is specially strong because of their sacred character. 3. *Is enforced by the consequences of their observance or neglect.* Their fulfilment is a means of grace. Broken vows undermine the foundations of character, interfere with Divine fellowship, and pave the way to destruction (Eccles. v. 4—6). 4. *Requires their performance with sincerity* (in the sense intended, not by the substitution of something else, not in part merely), *cheerfulness* (Ps. cxvi. 17, 18), and *promptitude.* "Defer not." "There is a Greek mythical story of the treatment of the goddess Juno by Mandrabulus the Samian. This man had, under her auspices, and by her directions, discovered a golden mine. In the first flush of gratitude he vowed to her a golden ram; however, he presently exchanged that for a silver one, and again that for a very small brass one, and that for nothing at all" (Trench). "It is storied of a merchant that in a great storm at sea vowed to Jupiter, if he would save him and his vessel, to give him a hecatomb. The storm ceaseth, and he bethinks that a hecatomb was unreasonable; he resolves on seven oxen. Another tempest comes, and now again he vows the seven at least. Delivered, then also he thought that seven were too many, and one ox would serve his turn. Yet another peril comes, and now he vows solemnly to fall no lower; if he might be rescued, an ox Jupiter shall have. Again freed, the ox sticks in his stomach, and he would fain draw his devotion to a lower rate; a sheep was sufficient. But at last, being set ashore, he thought a sheep too much, and purposeth to carry to the altar only a few dates. But by the way he eats up the dates, and lays on the altar only the shells. After this manner do many perform their vows" (Adams, vol. i. p. 112).—D.

Vers. 13—18. (SHILOH.)—*Undeserved rebuke.* The duty of rebuking others when they do evil is often enjoined (Levit. xix. 17; 1 Thess. v. 14), and is especially incumbent on those who occupy positions of authority. But how seldom is rebuke given or received aright! Eli, the aged judge and high priest, sitting on the judgment-seat, "by a post of the temple of the Lord," and observing a woman exhibiting signs of excited feeling, severely rebuked her for being intoxicated with wine. In his words, and what followed, we have rebuke—

I. UTTERED WITHOUT JUSTICE (vers. 13, 14). There was certainly apparent ground for the judgment he formed; for excitement caused by wine was probably

no uncommon thing at the tabernacle in those corrupt times. But he did not "judge righteously" (John vii. 24). Learn—1. That apparent ground for censure is often found on inquiry to be really groundless. Therefore there should be proof before reproof. 2. That the most excellent are often the most misjudged, especially in religious matters. Whilst sensual excitement was often seen, spiritual excitement was rare. Religious services were formal, cold, and dead; and holy fervour was naturally misunderstood and misinterpreted by superficial observers. So they who were filled with the Spirit on the day of Pentecost were accused of being filled with new wine. And men of large views, disinterested motives, and exalted aims are often condemned by the ignorant, selfish, and unspiritual. 3. That the highest in authority are liable to err in judgment. Infallibility belongs to God alone. The assumption of it by men is rebuked by their own manifest mistakes and failings, and is an insult to heaven. 4. That persons who think that they see clearly the faults of others are commonly blind to their own transgressions (Matt. vii. 3; Rom. ii. 1). Eli was unconscious of his own easily besetting sin, which consisted in his indulgent treatment of his children and their vices. 5. That those who censure others should themselves be undeserving of censure. 6. That our own exposure to judgment should make us cautious in passing judgment on others (Matt. vii. 1—5). 7. That it is the part of charity to put the best construction on their conduct. "Believeth all things; hopeth all things." Eli exhibited a want of knowledge, consideration, charity, and tenderness. How different the High Priest and Judge "with whom we have to do"!

II. BORNE WITH MEEKNESS. Hannah was not only innocent of the vice for which she was rebuked, but was at the time uttering a vow that if the Lord would give her a son he should be a Nazarite, and a life-long protest against that vice and other prevailing evils. Her fervour of spirit was equalled by her calmness, self-control, and discreet answer to the reproach of Eli (vers. 15, 16). Learn—1. That resentment and retaliation toward unjust accusers afford no evidence of innocence. Some persons when rebuked fly into a passion, and utter worse judgments on others than have been pronounced on themselves. 2. That a good conscience can be calm under accusation. 3. That appearances which seem to justify censure should be as fully as possible explained. 4. That those who say they are not guilty of sin should show their abhorrence of sin. "Call not thine handmaid a daughter of Belial" ('a worthless woman'). In her view intoxication was a great sin, and deserving of severe condemnation. 5. How beautiful is "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit." 6. To look to Christ as the perfect pattern of the spirit here exhibited, and the source of the grace which is needed for its exercise (1 Pet. ii. 20—23). "Let me find grace in thy sight."

III. TURNED INTO BENEDICTION (vers. 17, 18). Learn—1. That those who see that they have erred in judgment should be ready to acknowledge their error. 2. That meekness and patience are adapted to change a severe reprover into a kind friend. 3. That the endurance of rebuke in a right spirit is often a means of obtaining a favourable answer to prayer. God himself spoke through the voice of the high priest (ver. 17; John xi. 51). 4. That it also causes perturbation and sorrow to give place to peace and joy (Matt. v. 5, 11). "Strive to rejoice when others use towards thee words of injury or rebuke, or despise thee. For a rich treasure lies hid beneath this dust; and, if thou take it willingly, thou wilt soon find thyself rich unperceived by those who have bestowed this gift upon thee" (Scupoli).—D.

Vers. 13—18.—*Harsh judgment meekly answered.* We hear much of the mothers of eminent men, and it is easy to see whence Samuel derived his elevation of mind, his religious temperament, and the natural aptitude to be a seer and prophet of God. It was from his mother—the sensitive, poetical, devout, unselfish Hannah. Her prayer at the house of the Lord in Shiloh shows her in a noble light. She asked for no vengeance on her adversary Peninnah, who had so often taunted her, but only for a son whom she might devote as a pure Nazarite to Jehovah's service. Her thought recurred to the last great judge of Israel—the Nazarite Samson. The work which he might have performed had been very imperfectly done; and Hannah's devout and patriotic wish was to give birth to one who might repair the failure of Samson, as

well as remedy the evil wrought by the sons of Eli, and work a great deliverance for Israel.

I. PIOUS EMOTION HARSHLY CENSURED. If Hannah's prayer had been mocked by the profane, it had not surprised her; but this was her trial, that the venerable priest, whose duty it was to recognise and encourage religious aspiration, cruelly misconstrued her agitation, and charged her with wickedness. Eli was weak towards men, stern to a woman. He could not restrain his own sons, but he could speak sharply and severely to Hannah. The only palliation of his readiness to impute evil to her lies in the fact that, through his weakness, there had come to be a great license of manners at the time, and women of Israel misconducted themselves at the very seat of worship. Eli took Hannah for one of these, and her holy ardour for the agitation of one unduly excited by wine. Religious emotion, especially in persons of a sensitive and pensive nature, may resemble the effect of "wine wherein is excess" in the eyes of a careless or unsympathetic observer. And this applies to the joyful as well as to the sorrowful in spirit. On the day of Pentecost, when the power of the Spirit descended on the disciples of our Lord, and joy in the Holy Ghost expressed itself in their looks and words, some of the bystanders began to mock and say, "These men are full of new wine." That religious fervour should be unappreciated by worldly minds need cause no wonder. That tears and prayers poured forth before the unseen God should be despised as drivelling superstition, or the flush of spiritual gladness derided as irrational frenzy, by persons of a cold, unbelieving temper, is what may be expected. But it is hard to bear misconstruction from men like Eli, who ought to understand that the spirit of man or woman sometimes faints, sometimes leaps for joy before the Lord.

II. THE EQUANIMITY OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE. When one is quite conscious of innocence he can meet accusations with calmness, and repel them without passion or bitterness. If Hannah had been unguarded in eating or drinking at the feast after the sacrifice in Shiloh, she would probably have given a sharp answer to Eli, and exonerated herself from his charge with some heat of temper. But her conscience was quite clear in the matter. From her vow to make the son for whose birth she prayed a Nazarite, we infer that she was strongly sensible of the evils which indulgence in wine, and consequent licentious excess, had brought on the nation. So her answer to the priest, while firm, was calm, and even meek: "No, my Lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit."

III. THE TRUE RESOURCE OF THE SORROWFUL. "I have poured out my soul before the Lord." Hannah abhorred the kind of evil of which Eli accused her. "Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial." Alas, how many, because they are in low spirits, or vexed with their lot, seek exhilaration in wine or strong drink! It is a gross and dangerous consolation, fit for children of Belial, not for children of God. "Is any afflicted? Let him pray." Is any anxious? Let him by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make his request known to God. To be excited with wine is to have the imagination and passions fired through the flesh and the senses. For a time care or grief may be forgotten, and the mind may seem to become gay and brilliant; but as the appetite grows, and the fallacious pleasure beguiles, there ensues degradation and sorrow upon sorrow; the mind is clouded and enfeebled, and the heart made selfish and gross. How different from the excitement of the praying heart that is "filled with the Spirit!" This takes hold of the best and highest part of our nature, and from this acts on the whole man—subdues sensual passion, scatters delusion, and while it may for a time agitate the frame, as Hannah's was agitated, never disturbs or unhinges the regulative principles of reason and conscience within.

IV. THE COMFORT AFTER PRAYER. Whatever the worth of Eli's personal character, his office gave weight to his words; and when he invoked from the God of Israel an answer to Hannah's petition, she received his words with reverence, and went home with a glad assurance in her heart. Have not we a great High Priest who misunderstands no one, requires no corrective explanation, discourages no suppliant; and is it not he who has said, "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them"? Look to Jesus, and where is your burden? It is gone. Where are your tears? They are wiped away. Where is

your desired thing, your Samuel? It is at hand. Go your way when you have poured out your prayer, for he has heard you, and "let your countenance be no more sad."—F.

Vers. 19—28. (RAMAH and SHILOH.)—*Samuel's birth and infancy.* (*References*—1 Chron. xxix. 29, "the seer;" Ps. xcix. 9; Jer. xv. 1; Acts iii. 24; xiii. 20; Heb. xii. 32; Apoc. Ecclus. xlvi. 13—20.) Consolation and hope were from the first associated with the birth of children (Gen. iii. 15; iv. 1, 25; v. 29; xxi. 6). More than ordinary joy (John xvi. 24) was felt at the birth of Samuel by his mother, because of the peculiar circumstances connected therewith, and the expectations entertained by her of the good which he might effect for Israel. Often as she looked upon her God-given infant she would think, "What manner of child shall this be?" (Luke i. 66), and ask, "How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?" (Judges xiii. 12). Nor did she fail to do her utmost towards the fulfilment of her exalted hopes. The child was—

I. REGARDED AS A DIVINE GIFT (Ps. cxxvii. 4). Every little infant bears the impress of the "Father of spirits" (James iii. 9).

> "Trailing clouds of glory do we come
> From God, who is our home."

The gift of a fresh, new, mysterious human life, with its vast capabilities, is a *great gift*, and demands *grateful acknowledgment* of the Divine goodness; but it is not an *absolute gift;* it is rather a *trust* which involves serious responsibilities on the part of those into whose hands it is placed. God says in effect, "Take this child," &c. (Exod. ii. 9).

II. DESIGNATED BY AN APPROPRIATE NAME (ver. 20). Samuel = heard of God. "The mother names, the father assents, God approves, and time confirms the nomination" (Hunter). Like other personal names in the Bible, it was full of significance; being a *grateful memorial* of the goodness and faithfulness of God in the past, and a *constant incentive* to faith and prayer in the future. "Our very names should mind us of our duty." The name "Samuel" was uttered by the Lord as mindful of his history, and recognising his special relation to himself (ch. iii. 10). The name of a child is not an unimportant matter, and it should be given with due consideration. When parents give their children names borne by excellent men, they should train them to follow in the footsteps of such men.

III. NURTURED WITH MOTHERLY TENDERNESS (vers. 22—25). His mother was herself his nurse (ver. 23), not intrusting him to others, and not neglecting him, whereby many young lives are sacrificed; but thoughtfully, carefully, and constantly ministering to his physical needs, praying over him, and directing his thoughts, with the earliest dawn of reason, toward the Lord of hosts. That she might the more perfectly fulfil her trust, she remained at home, and went not up to Shiloh until he was weaned. Her absence from the sanctuary was justifiable, her worship at home was acceptable, and the service which she rendered to her child was a service rendered to God and to his people. "A mother's teachings have a marvellous vitality in them; there is a strange living power in that good seed which is sown by a mother's hand in her child's heart in the early dawn of the child's being, when they two are alone together, and the mother's soul gushes forth on her child, and the child listens to his mother as a God; and there is a deathless potency in a mother's prayers and tears for those whom she has borne which only God can estimate" (W. L. Alexander). "Who is best taught? He that is taught of his mother" ('Talmud').

IV. PRAYED OVER WITH FATHERLY SOLICITUDE. Elkanah consented to the vow of his wife (Num. xxx. 6, 7), and appears to have made it his own (ver. 21). He was zealous for its performance, and whilst he agreed with her in the desire of its postponement for a brief period, he expressed the wish in prayer, "Only the Lord establish his word" (ver. 23). "*Word*, that is, May he fulfil what he designs with him, and has promised by his birth (vers. 11, 20). The words refer, therefore, to *the boy's destination to the service of God*, which the Eternal has in fact acknowledged by the partial fulfilment of the mother's wish" (Bunsen). HIS PRAYER indicates,

with respect to the Divine word—1. *Confidence in its truth.* He believed (1) that it was *his* word which had been uttered by the high priest (ver. 17); (2) that its Divine origin and faithfulness had been in part confirmed by his own act (ver. 20); and (3) that it would be completely established by his bringing about the end designed. 2. *Desire of its fulfilment.* (1) As a matter of great importance. (2) Deeply felt. "Only." (3) Through the continued and gracious operation of God. "*The Lord* establish his word." 3. *Obedience to its requirements.* In order to its establishment, co-operation on their part was—(1) Necessary. God's purposes and promises are fulfilled in connection with human endeavour, and not independently of it. (2) Obligatory. It had been solemnly promised by them, and was a condition of the bestowment of the Divine blessing. (3) Fully resolved upon. "His father used to open his breast when he was asleep and kiss it in prayer over him, as it is said of Origen's father, that the Holy Ghost would take possession thereof" ('Life of Sir Thomas Browne').

V. CONDUCTED TO THE HOUSE OF THE LORD. As soon as he was weaned (the first step of separate, independent life) "she took him up with her" (ver. 24), and "they brought the child to Eli" (ver. 25). Children are in their right place in the temple (Matt. xxi. 15, 16), and their praises are acceptable to the Lord. Even infants (sucklings) belong to the kingdom of heaven, and are capable of being blessed by him (Matt. xix. 13). Therefore the "little ones" should be brought unto him (Matt. xviii. 14).

VI. DEDICATED TO A LIFE-LONG SERVICE (vers. 25—28), *i. e.* a continual (and not a limited or periodical) service at the sanctuary as a Levite, and an entire (and not a partial) service as a Nazarite. It was done (1) with a burnt offering, (2) accompanied by a thankful acknowledgment of the goodness of God in answer to prayer offered on the same spot several years previously, and (3) in a full surrender of the child. "My child shall be entirely and absolutely thy servant. I give up all my maternal rights. I desire to be his mother only in so far as that he shall owe his existence to me; after that I give him up to thee" (Chrysostom). "For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath granted me my request which I asked of him; therefore I also make him one asked of the Lord all the days that he liveth; he is asked of the Lord" (Keil). So the vow was performed. And in the spirit of this dedication all parents should give back to God "the children which he hath given them."

VII. FOLLOWED BY PARENTAL PRAYERS AND THANKSGIVINGS. "He (Elkanah) worshipped the Lord there" (ver. 28). "And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the Lord" (ch. ii. 1). "And Elkanah went to Ramah to his house" (ch. ii. 11). The sacrifice made in leaving the child behind was great, but it was attended, through Divine grace, with great joy. The more any one gives to God, the more God gives back to him in spiritual blessing. Hannah felt little anxiety or fear for the safety of her child, for she believed that he would "keep the feet of his saints" (ch. ii. 9). What holy influences ever rest on children whose parents pray for them "without ceasing!" and what multitudes have by such means been eternally saved!—D.

"The boy was vowed
Unto the temple service. By the hand
She led him, and her silent soul, the while,
Oft as the dewy laughter of his eye
Met her sweet serious glance, rejoiced to think
That aught so pure, so beautiful, was hers,
To bring before her God.

I give thee to thy God—the God that gave thee,
A well-spring of deep gladness to my heart!
And precious as thou art,
And pure as dew of Hermon, he shall have thee,
My own, my beautiful, my undefiled!
And thou shalt be his child.

Therefore, farewell!—I go, my soul may fail me,
As the stag panteth for the water brooks,
Yearning for thy sweet looks.—

But thou, my first-born, droop not, nor bewail me!
Thou in the Shadow of the Rock shalt dwell,
The Rock of Strength.—Farewell!" (Mrs. Hemans).

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER II.

HANNAH'S SONG OF PRAISE (vers. 1—10). Ver. 1.—**And Hannah prayed and said.** Like the Magnificat, Hannah's hymn of thanksgiving begins with the temporal mercies accorded to herself, but rises immediately into the realms of prophecy, foretelling Christ's kingdom and the triumphs of the Church. From this prophetic element, common more or less to all the hymns of the Bible, most of them have been used in Christian worship, and still merit a place in it, though we in the liturgy of the Church of England now use only two, taken both from the New Testament. In ver. 1, in four strophes of equal length, Hannah declares how, first, her *heart*, the centre with the Hebrews, not merely of the physical, but also of the moral and intellectual life, rejoices in Jehovah; while the exaltation of her *horn*, the symbol of strength and vigour, signifies that this inward joy is accompanied, or even occasioned, by the changed circumstances of her outward lot. Her *mouth*, therefore, is opened wide over her enemies, yet not for cursing and in bitterness, but for joyful praise of the God who has answered her prayers. It is *his salvation*, the being delivered by him, that makes her thus burst forth into thanksgiving. It is a proof too of her faith and spirituality that she thus refers all to Jehovah.

In ver. 2 she gives her reasons for this holy joy. The first is God's absolute holiness; the second his absolute existence, in which she finds the proof of his holiness. Hannah may have meant to express only the language of piety, but she also stated a primary philosophical truth, which was early grasped by the deeply religious instinct of the Hebrews, that outside of God is no existence. Many necessary deductions follow from this fundamental truth, that God alone absolutely exists, and that all other existence is secondary and derived; but no deduction is more certain than Hannah's own, that such a Being must be absolutely holy. In calling him a **rock** she assigns to him strength, calm, immovable, enduring, but a strength which avails for the safety of his people (comp. Deut. xxxii. 4, 15; Ps. xviii. 2). For rocks, as being capable of easy defence, formed the nucleus of most ancient towns, and continued to serve as their citadels.

In ver. 3 she appeals to God's omniscience, 'for Jehovah is a God of knowledges," the pl. being intensive, and signifying every kind of knowledge. As too he weighs and judges human actions, how can men venture to talk so arrogantly before him, lit. *so proudly, proudly.* The last clause is one of those numerous places in which there is a doubt whether the Hebrew word *lo* means *not*, or *by him*. If the negative sense be taken, which the Hebrew spelling favours, the rendering will be "though actions be not weighed." Though wicked actions be not immediately punished, yet Jehovah is cognisant of them, and in due time will requite.

In vers. 4—8 Hannah illustrates the working of this attribute of the Deity by enumerating the vicissitudes of human events, which are not the result of chance, but of that omniscience combined with holiness which she has claimed for Jehovah in vers. 2, 3. She begins with the vicissitudes of war; but these are not more remarkable than those of peace, by which the **full**, the rich and wealthy, have to descend to the position of a hireling; while those previously hungry **have ceased**, *i. e.* from labour, and keep holiday. In a nation of small proprietors, where the land was tilled by the owner and those "born in his house," the position of the hireling, the "mean white" of the southern States of America, was lower than that of the slave, especially in Judæa, where the slave was more in the position of a vassal than of a serf or forced labourer. In the next clause the translation may either be, "She that was long barren hath borne seven," or, "Until the barren" &c.; *i. e.* these vicissitudes may even reach so far as to make a barren woman the mother of seven, *i. e.* of a perfect number of children, happily generalised in Ps. cxiii. 9 into "a joyful mother of children." But see Ruth iv. 15; Jer. xv. 9. In this there is also a typical reference to the long barrenness of the Gentile world, to be followed by a fruitfulness far exceeding that of the Jewish Church, while it, prolific once in patriarchs, and prophets, and saints, is now comparatively sterile. In ver. 6 "the grave," Heb. *Sheol*, is "the pit," the hollow vault underground, which is the dwelling of the dead. Lit., therefore, Hannah's words might seem to imply a belief in the resurrection; but her meaning rather was that God brings a man to the very brink of the grave, and then, when all hope seems past, raises him up again. In ver. 8 **beggar** is simply *needy*, but the expressions *dust* and *dunghill* add

dishonour to his poverty. **To set** might more correctly be translated *to make them sit;* sitting, especially on a raised seat, being a mark of honour among Orientals, who generally squat on mats on the ground. In the next clause the A. V. particularises what in the Heb. is quite general. "He will make them possess (or enjoy) a glorious throne." Their seat among the princes is not inherited, but acquired; and though promoted thus to a place among men of hereditary rank, and given an honourable position among them, yet it was not necessarily "the throne of glory," the highest seat. Still even this was quite possible; for while the tribal chiefs and heads of fathers'-houses obtained their rank by inheritance, nevertheless, in early days the judges, and among them Eli and Samuel, acquired rank and power for themselves. Subsequently, under the kings, the great officers of state took their place along with the hereditary princes, but were dependent upon royal favour. In the last clause the word rendered *pillars* is rare, being found only here and in ch. xiv. 4. In both places the ancient versions are uncertain as to its signification, but in the latter it can only mean a crag, or mass of rock. If then the rock-masses of the earth are Jehovah's, and he can lift up and poise upon them the inhabited world (Heb. *tebel*), how much more easily can he raise up a man!

Ver. 9.—**The feet of his saints.** The Heb. written text (*ch'tib*) has *his saint*, sing.; but the word really means not *saint*, i. e. one sanctified and holy, but *pious*, i. e. one lovingly disposed towards God. The sense, therefore, is not affected by the number, but the sing. is more forcible. "He will guard the steps, the earthly course, of each one that loveth him;" while over against this watchful providence, ever exerted for the safe-keeping of all who love the light, stands God's punitive justice, whereby the wicked are finally brought down to the dark silence of the grave. For they had only human strength and prowess upon which to depend, and no man can sustain himself in the manifold conflict of life without help from above.

Ver. 10.—**The adversaries.** In the Heb. the nouns are again sing., though the verb is pl., showing that they are to be taken collectively. Lit. the translation is, "Jehovah—they shall be broken in pieces, whoever it be that contendeth with him;" the word having reference to contentions in a court of law, and the whole verse keeping the administration of justice in view. It proceeds, "Upon him he shall thunder in heaven;" *i. e.* Jehovah, seated on his throne in heaven, shall, as the supreme Judge, utter the sentence; and thunder was to the Hebrew God's voice. **He shall judge the ends of the earth**, *i. e.* the whole earth up to its remotest quarters. The last distich is remarkable. It is a distinct prophecy of David's kingdom, and of the king as the anointed one, but looking onwards to the Messiah, David's greater Son. So distinct a reference to a king before a king existed has made Ewald and others regard the whole hymn as an interpolation of later times. But already Hannah's thoughts had risen to a higher level than the fortunes of the literal Israel. In claiming for Jehovah, her covenant God, the righteous government of the whole world, she prepares our minds for the corresponding thought of Jehovah being the universal Saviour. Very probably the whole national mind was set upon having a king to enable them to make head against the Philistines long before, under Samuel, the desire became so strong as to be irresistible. The thought of a king was in no respect alien from the Jewish commonwealth (Deut. xvii. 14). They had wished Gideon to hold this office (Judges viii. 22); Jotham's parable in Judges ix. described the nation as eager to be thus governed, but the better minds as bent on declining so dangerous a pre-eminence. There is very much to prove that the nation had come to regard the appointment of a king as an eventual necessity, however long delayed. But not here only, but everywhere, the Jewish mind was constantly brooding upon the future. Hannah does no more than every patriarch and saint and prophet of the old dispensation. Prophecies such as that in Gen. xlix. 10 filled the hearts of all alike. And though the present longings of the nation for a king make Hannah's words not unnatural even in their lower sense, yet the truer exposition is that which acknowledges in Israel a people raised up for a special purpose, and the bestowal by God upon its seers for the carrying out of this purpose of the gift of prophecy. And it was this extraordinary gift which bent and shaped the mind of the nation, and filled it with future aspirations; and not a causeless state of the national mind which, excited by vague hopes, made men from time to time give utterance to anticipations which by some strange coincidence always came true.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—10.—*Salvation.* The facts implied and indicated in the song are—1. Hannah's deliverance from grief and realisation of desire are perfected. 2. God is

recognised as the author of the great salvation. 3. Under Divine inspiration Hannah sees in her own personal experience a type of various triumphs which God achieves for his people. 4. She is conscious of an overwhelming joy in her own deliverance, and in the prevision of future triumphs of the Church. 5. A clear and joyous recognition of Christ's final triumph as the climax of all. The burden of this glorious song is the salvation wrought by God, and this may be considered as—

I. TYPICAL. The term "salvation" is very common in the Old Testament, and its application is "exceeding broad," being inclusive of deliverance from evils and a realisation of positive good. It may be applied to an episode in personal experience, as in the case of Hannah, David, and others; a soul's restoration to God through Christ; a nation's rescue from calamity and elevation to relative influence, as when Israel was delivered from the waters of the Red Sea, and later, from the Assyrian hosts; the deliverance of the Church from persecution, as in apostolic days and subsequently; and especially the completion of Christ's triumph over all enemies and the gathering into one of the redeemed children of God (Titus ii. 13; Heb. ix. 28; Rev. vii. 9—17). The episode in the life of Hannah was *typical of all other salvations* to be wrought by the same merciful God. As in the physical world the trained eye can detect what are called "typical forms," so in the records of God's dealings with the saints the spiritually enlightened can see in the personal experience of individuals a foreshadowing of numerous instances yet to occur in human experience. *Omnia in Uno* will hold true here. The elements of all salvations are found in the blessing vouchsafed to the "woman of sorrowful spirit." For there is in her case, as in all, a deep *human need*, arising from a pressure of a heavy burden, and the *non*-realisation of the very end for which life was supposed to be given; utter *despair of human* resources for the removal of the evil and the acquisition of the good; *Divine energy graciously acting* directly on the hidden forces by which sorrow or joy are governed and produced; *Divine patience in working out* the processes by which the want and sorrow shall be made to pass away; *completeness of result* in the bestowment of the very boon so long desired and waited for; *connection of the result* attained with some *ulterior issue* of still wider blessing; and *employment* throughout of *visible and invisible second causes* in working out the purposes of mercy. Each item found reality in Hannah's experience, and has its counterpart in our deliverance from trouble; in the restoration of the lost soul; in the rescue of a nation or Church from destruction; and in the completion of the desire of him who from the travail of his soul looked on through the ages, saw, and was satisfied. Every deliverance of every saint now is a shadowing forth and a prediction sure and certain of the great salvation, in the bliss of which Christ, and angels, and men shall share.

II. OCCASION OF JOY. Naturally salvation in every form brings joy. It is *the* great event of the life. It means freedom, rest, enrichment, full, sunny favour of God. Hannah could not but sing. Moses led the joy of Israel on the shores of the Red Sea. When Saul became Paul the Churches enjoyed "comfort of the Holy Ghost." The fatted calf and dance awaited the restored prodigal son. The very advent of the one true Saviour awoke the chorus of the skies, and heaven will resound with the joyous acclaim of innumerable hosts when the woes of earth are past, and all power submits to Christ (Rev. xix. 1). It is noteworthy that the *joy awakened* by accomplished salvation is *not a mere selfish delight* in one's own happiness. It is *joy in God*. In "*thy* salvation" do I rejoice. "In the Lord" is my "horn exalted." "The heart" is not set on the bliss of a Samuel's love, it "rejoiceth *in the Lord*." Again, it is joy in God *saving through his Anointed*. The "promised seed," the foreordained Messiah, was the spring of all inspired Hebrew expectation of blessing. The birth of a son called forth Hannah's song. It is curiously sweet to notice how like the echo of some distant melody is this song, reminding us of a Child more holy than even Samuel. Surely in the invisible spheres angels recognised here the substance of that hymn they on a later day sang over the plains of Bethlehem. In that severe but blessed discipline of years the spirit of Hannah had been trained to pass over in vision to a salvation more perfect than what Samuel would effect for Israel, and by a Child more truly given of God. The songs of faith and of fulfilment find alike their inspiration in "his King" and

"my Saviour." But the relationship to his chosen One grows closer and dearer as the ages roll on. What shall it be at last! And what joy will it awaken! Also, the *condition of sharing in this joy is twofold*, being personally a saved one, and cherishing full sympathy with "his King." Hannah, blessed with a great deliverance from sorrow and desolation, could sing and, laying all at the feet of God in holy sympathy with the coming kingdom, she found inspiration for song beyond the range of her own experience. A "new song" is learnt on earth, in so far as its first notes, by all who have known in their personal experience *the* salvation of God; and it becomes sweeter and more inspired as the freed spirit sees by faith the blessed day when the ends of the earth shall also see the King in his beauty.

III. REVELATION OF DIVINE PERFECTIONS. In some sense all God's acts are revelations. Nature, as we call the beautiful system around us, is but the shadow of the Eternal Presence. The Eternal Power and Godhead are clearly seen through the visible creation. In the Incarnation of God in Christ we have, therefore, a higher expression of a general truth; so that in one respect the most stupendous and mysterious of all supernatural facts is in keeping with Nature. Especially is every instance of salvation, whether typical or antitypical, individual or national, a revelation to the universe of the ever-blessed One. From Hannah's deliverance from sorrow and desolation, on through the ages of mercy, to Christ's final victory over death and sin, the same attributes are revealed in the deeds and processes by which the salvation in each instance is effected. 1. *Mercy*, as seen in compassion shown to the sorrowful and helpless. 2. *Holiness*, inasmuch as the salvation is wrought out *against* evil powers and persons, *for* only good and pure issues, *by* exacting and nourishing into maturity holy, unselfish motives, and ordaining suffering and deferred good only for pure and blissful ends. 3. *Power*, demonstrating that "beside" him "there is none," as seen in complete control over the hidden forces of Nature, and full realisation of all that is promised. 4. *Wisdom*, counteracting the devices of the proud, and causing the bitterest grief and protracted suffering to contribute at last to depth and fulness of joy. 5. *Faithfulness*, unshaken and firm as a "rock," insuring that all the strength and wisdom of the Divine nature shall be exercised for the final bestowment of the covenanted blessings. The *retrospect of a personal history* was to Hannah the means of *reading the outlines of the manifestation of the Divine glory*, especially in the salvation of the Church. She, like us, saw only the beginnings of things. The remote glory shone through a glass darkly. It was for St. Paul and St. John to declare the same truth in fuller and more precise terms, as the one tells of the "manifold wisdom of God" being made known "by the Church" unto "principalities and powers in heavenly places," and the other, of him who by virtue of what he has wrought out for his redeemed is "worthy" of all that is due to the only Lord of glory. Men are now intent on studying the material framework of the universe; the day will come when the best minds will study with unbounded delight the perfections of God as seen in the restoration of spiritual order, beauty, and joy out of the chaos of sin and sorrow.

IV. INSTRUCTIVE TO THE WICKED. There was a time when the jealous and cruel Peninnah was proud in her strength and abundance. Also Pharaoh, and other oppressors of Israel, could boast of their power and resources. The infant Church in primitive times was as nothing in comparison with the numerical and social power of her enemy. The exceeding proud talk and arrogancy of men who proclaim their vast superiority in secular knowledge to the mass of Christians, is in keeping with the conduct of the kings and princes who "take counsel against the Lord and against his Anointed." But as Hannah's fear and trembling yielded to confidence and joy, consequent on the casting down of her proud enemy and the lifting up of the sorrowful spirit, so the same ever-recurring triumphs of the Redeemer, awakening in his people the song of salvation, reads out in clear and forcible terms the instructive lesson to the proud to "talk" no more, and to the arrogant to "shut their mouth," and to the seemingly prosperous that all "actions are weighed" by him who is a "God of knowledge." It is ever true that no weapon formed against God's children can prosper. In what God has effected for the lowly pious in time past, the proud, the wise, the strong may find instruction; and, if they will, learn both how vain it is to curse in heart or mouth whom God has blessed, and how important for them-

selves that they "kiss the Son," lest they perish, "while his wrath is kindled but a little."

V. INVOLVING GREAT REVERSIONS. Providence vindicated itself for former apparently unequal and undesirable distributions of favour by breaking the bows of the strong and giving strength to the feeble; by causing the self-satisfied Peninnah to feel the lack of a satisfaction not to be obtained by the cruel, and the yearning Hannah to want for nothing more. The once proud mother of many children, from causes in the home life, fails in her joys, while the unfruitful attains to the perfection of earthly bliss. In the one case hopes and joys are smitten; in the other, created. The rich in home delights becomes poor, by possibly erring sons, or enfeebled health; the poor and sorrowful is enriched with a treasure for the use of all ages. Thus does Hannah see in outline the reversions ever occurring in the working out of God's salvation in the individual, the nation, or the Church. 1. In the *human soul* saved by Christ, forces of evil once strong and self-satisfied, lacking nothing, and usurping authority, are brought low, enfeebled, made conscious of their impotence, and finally killed; while the poor, faint, struggling spirit of love and faith is, when once "made alive," girded with strength, satisfied with good, and made finally dominant over the entire nature. Doubts, fears, and mighty temptations are laid low. Hopes, joys, and victories of faith are called forth; and, as a final issue, the once outcast, unhappy soul is enriched with the full bliss of a child of God. 2. In *national affairs*. The strength of Egypt sinks in the sea; the helplessness of Israel puts on the strength of God. The boastful nations that in pride of their resources set aside the practice of righteousness, one by one are brought low by the corruption concealed beneath their material splendour; while the feeble people who live in the fear of God go from strength to strength, and "delight themselves in the abundance of peace." 3. In the *Church*. The wealth, power, and wisdom of Rome and Greece fell before the rising power and spiritual knowledge of poor fishermen. The mighty evils of an age are at length brought down, and the despised "things that are not" are caused to be the most potent and blessed of all agencies.

VI. TRACEABLE TO GOD. Well did Hannah know that her deliverance was of God, and not of man. In all the second causes co-operating towards the completion of her desire she, with true spiritual instinct, saw the work of the First Cause. "The Lord" it was who "killed and made alive." "The Lord" "brought low" the proud rival, and "lifted up" "the woman of sorrowful spirit." He it is who "keeps the feet of his saints," and causes the wicked at length "to be silent." So through the unfolding ages it is "the Lord" who works to destroy the evils of the soul, and to create and nourish the good. All the triumphs of the Church over political scheming, pseudo-learning, violent persecution, and satanic opposition are by the might and power of him who raiseth up the wise and good, checks the rage of man, and in the invisible sphere frustrates the "gates of hell." All things are of God, who worketh all and in all. It is not *crude anthropomorphism* that refers all the processes of individual, national, and Church salvation to the energy of God. It is the most *penetrating philosophy*, born of the inspiring Spirit of God. There are "pillars" or foundations, or bases, of all terrestrial things. We may call this a cause, and that an effect. We may clothe matter with qualities, and point out their uniform and necessary interaction. But still they are all traceable down to some original constitution inherent in the elemental forces and materials; and that constitution, that firm and grand arrangement of invisible "pillars" or bases, is what it is because God made it so, and for no other reason. Wisely and beautifully, therefore, does the prophetess anticipate the philosophies of the coming ages by referring all the agencies and powers involved in the accomplishing of salvation for men to "the Lord." Not unto us, but to thy name be the glory.

VII. CULMINATING IN CHRIST'S PERFECT REIGN. The prophetic eye looks on through the material disorder of Eli's day to a typical King in Zion. The order and prosperity of a David's reign are but the temporal shadow of the enduring order and unfading prosperity of the "Anointed," who is in the highest spiritual sense to "exalt" his "horn," and "judge the ends of the earth." What though, meanwhile, "adversaries" may combine, and the occasional "strength" of the wicked threaten to cast down "the saints;" he that sitteth in the heavens has in reserve his

swift and awe-inspiring forces (Ps. ii.) to shatter all opposition, and ultimately insure a peaceful reign over mankind. It was some years before Peninnah's ground of annoyance to Hannah was removed, and the lowly one was raised to joy and full satisfaction; so, proportionately to the vaster deliverance to be wrought out for mankind, it may require many centuries to cast down all foes and create and perfect the bliss of the redeemed. But the "strength" of the "King" will bring it to pass by a combination of invisible and visible forces more subtle and intricate, but not less obedient to his will, than those which brought a mother's joy to Hannah. Here we see the beautiful unity of all Scripture reference to the final triumph of Messiah. The "serpent's head" is to be "bruised" was consolation to our weeping ancestors, bereft of Eden. In him "all nations shall be blessed" was the grand assurance that made Abraham's life one of large sympathy with the future. "To him shall the gathering of the people be" was the solace of Jacob's dying hour. And thus, aided by Hannah's joyous song of victory, as though already real, the holy, blessed succession ran on, telling of the "kingdom" that "shall have no end," and the day when to the Name that is "above every name" every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that he is Lord and Christ.

From this survey of truth concerning "salvation" note a few important *Practical truths*:—1. See here a beautiful instance of how *a single life's experience*, when under the holy discipline of God, may be rich *in instruction and inspiration for men in all ages*. This is brought about not by mere natural genius, but by a woman's pure and full consecration to Christ, and passionate desire to accelerate the advent of his kingdom. Happy they who can live so as to inspire and help posterity! Let our life become a song of thanksgiving to our successors. This is possible to all in some degree. 2. An underlying current of *faith in Christ's complete triumph* runs through the ancient Church, and this should embolden us. True saints live much in the future, while not careless of present duties. There may be much inspiration for work from the prospect of what is to be. 3. The *effect of true faith* is to *enlarge the vision* and *broaden the sympathies*. Hannah's faith in a coming Christ caused her spirit to be open to those inspirations which carried the vision over the weary ages to the true golden age, and she felt with all the saints in all time. Religion of this kind becomes an expansive power in whatever nature it dwells. 4. The *proper unity of the Church* lies in the *one faith* which holds the life to Christ, whether to come, or having come; and this will insure sympathy with his kingdom and with purity of life, as well as consecration of what is most precious to its realisation.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—10. (SHILOH.)—*Rejoicing in the Lord.* "My heart rejoiceth in the Lord." The song of Hannah, "the Magnificat of the Old Testament Church," was the outburst of her deep and holy joy in the Lord. Whilst watching over the infant Samuel at Ramah, she had silently pondered the ways of God, and the condition and prospects of his people and kingdom. After several years of absence from the central sanctuary at Shiloh, she appears once more at its entrance; and, standing on the well-remembered spot where she had prayed in her distress, she fulfils her vow, and gives back to God the sacred treasure intrusted to her care. The trouble of former years recalled, provocations and inward conflicts ended, the sunshine of Divine favour experienced, cause her full heart to "bubble up like a fountain," and pour itself out in lofty poetic strains (ver. 1). What a contrast does this language indicate between her condition at the time of the previous visit and her condition now! 1. Then her heart was full of grief; now it "rejoiceth in the Lord." 2. Then her "horn" (*strength*, a figure taken from animals whose strength is in their horns, and here first employed. 2 Sam. xxii. 3; Luke i. 69) was trampled in the dust; now it is "exalted," and she is endued with strength and honour "by the Lord." 3. Then her mouth was shut, in silent endurance, beneath the provocation of her adversary (ch. i. 6); now it is "enlarged," or opened in holy exultation, "above her enemies." 4. Then she was petitioning for the help of the Lord; now she "rejoices in his salvation," or the deliverance which he has wrought on her

behalf; and it is "because" of this that she utters aloud her thanksgiving and praise. Her soul with all its powers, like a harp of many strings, touched by the Divine Spirit, gives forth exquisite music. "The Divinely-inspired song of Hannah is like a golden key for the interpretation of the whole book" (Wordsworth's 'Com.'). Compare this song with the song of Miriam and of Deborah. "Those compositions are grand, indeed, and elevated, and worthy of that inspiration which produced them; but they have not that tenderness of spirit, that personality of devotion, and that eucharistic anticipation of good things to come which characterise the hymn of Hannah" (Jebb, 'Sac. Lit.,' p. 395). It is the model after which the song of the Virgin Mary was formed, though there are notable points of difference between them. Considered in relation to the circumstances, and in its general nature, her song was a song of—1. *Gratitude.* Her prayer had been answered in the gift of a son; and, unlike those who look no further than the blessings bestowed upon them, she looked from the gift to the Giver, and praised him with joyful lips. Her heart rejoiced not in Samuel, but in the Lord. 2. *Dedication.* She had given back her child to God, and with him herself afresh. The more we give to God, the more our heart is enlarged, by the shedding abroad of his love therein, and filled with exceeding joy. 3. *Triumph;* remembering how she had been delivered from her adversaries in the past. 4. *Faith* in his continued help. 5. *Patriotism.* She sympathised with her people in their oppression by the Philistines; and, identifying herself with them, she almost lost sight of what God had done for her in the contemplation of what he would do for them. "From this particular mercy she had received from God she takes occasion, with an elevated and enlarged heart, to speak of the glorious things of God, and of his government of the world for the good of the Church." "She discerned in her own individual experience the general laws of the Divine economy, and its signification in relation to the whole history of the kingdom of God" (Auberlen). 6. *Prophetic hope.* She beheld the dawn of a new day, and was glad. In all and above all—7. *Joy in the Lord.* "My heart rejoiceth in the Lord;" not merely *before* him (Deut. xii. 12); but *in* him, as the Object and Source of its joy; in communion with and contemplation of him, and in the admiration, affection, and delight thereby excited. "My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the Lord" (Ps. civ. 34). "When I think of God," said Haydn (on being asked the reason why the style of his music was so cheerful), "my soul is so full of joy that the notes come leaping and dancing from my pen." More especially observe that Hannah rejoiced in—

1. THE PERFECTIONS OF HIS CHARACTER (vers. 2, 3). Such perfections must not, indeed, be thought of as existing in God separate and distinct from each other; they are essential attributes of his living personality, and are all really present in his every purpose and act. What is here declared of God is, that—1. *He alone is "holy."* (1) *Supremely* excellent; whatever excellence exists in any other being falls infinitely short of his (Isa. vi. 3). (2) *Morally* perfect; invariably willing what is right and good; transcendently glorious in the view of conscience (Levit. xi. 44). (3) *Absolutely* existent, which is the ground of his excellence and perfection. "For there is none except thee." "God is the most perfect Being, and the cause of all other beings." His moral perfection is a peculiar distinction of the revelation which he made to his chosen people, needs to be specially magnified in times of corruption, and can only be rejoiced in by his saints. The conception which men form of God is an evidence of their own character, and exerts a powerful influence upon it (Luke i. 49). 2. *He alone is strong.* "A Rock." (1) Firm, unchanging, enduring; a sure foundation for confidence. (2) None can be compared unto him. They may not be trusted in, and they need not be feared. (3) Happy are those who can say, He is "our God." That which is a terror to others is a consolation to them. "The children of a king do not fear what their father has in his arsenal." "Let the inhabitant of the rock sing." But men often speak proudly and arrogantly (ver. 3), as if they were independent of him, and could do whatever they pleased. Let them not boast any more, for—3. *He is the All-wise;* a "God of knowledge" (lit., knowledges), of all knowledge. "The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity" (Ps. xciv. 11; cxxxviii. 6). His knowledge is (1) immediate, (2) perfect, and (3) universal. And, 4. *He is the Judge of*

human actions. He determines how far they may go before they are effectually checked by the manifestation of his power and wisdom (Thenius). "By strength shall no man prevail." He also forms a just estimate of their moral worth, and gives to every man his due reward. His righteousness and justice, as well as his strength and wisdom, when contemplated by the good, fill them with great joy.

II. THE OPERATIONS OF HIS PROVIDENCE (vers. 4—8). The operations of Providence are the operations of God in the natural world, the laws of which are the uniform methods of his activity, and more especially in human affairs; wherein, whilst there is room for human freedom and prudence, and the use of means, his will encircles and overrules all things, and his hand moves in and through those events which are commonly attributed to chance or accident, and directs and controls them for the good of those who love him (Rom. viii. 28). In and by these operations—1. *He manifests the perfections of his character:* his holiness, power wisdom, and justice. "The Lord is righteous in all his ways" (Ps. xcvii. 2; cxlv. 17). 2. He apportions the *different conditions* of men, and accomplishes the *varied changes* of their condition. (1) Makes the strong weak and the weak strong (ver. 4). (2) The full empty and the empty full (ver. 5). (3) Increases the lonely and diminishes the numerous family. (4) Brings into great distress, even to the verge of the grave, and again restores to health and prosperity (ver. 6). (5) Makes poor and makes rich. (6) Brings low and raises up. Prosperity and adversity alike, when received from the hand of God and used aright, become occasions of joy; and the changes of life are morally beneficial (Ps. lv. 19; Jer. xlviii. 11; James i. 9, 10). 3. He does great things, especially for the *lowly* (ver. 8). Stooping to them in their utmost need and shame (Ps. cxiii. 7, 8), and raising them to the highest honour and glory. "God does nothing else," said an ancient philosopher, "but humble the proud and exalt the lowly." "Set thyself in the lowest place, and the highest shall be given thee; for the more elevated the building is designed to be, the deeper must the foundations be laid. The greatest saints in the sight of God are the least in their own esteem; and the height of their glory is always in proportion to the depth of their humility" (Thomas à Kempis). 4. He *supports the earth* and all that is upon it. His dominion is supreme; and he has therefore the power, as he has the right, to do whatever may please him. An unfaltering trust in Providence is a cure of undue anxiety and a cause of abounding peace and joy. "Certainly it is heaven on earth to have a man's mind move in charity, rest in Providence, and turn upon the poles of truth" (Bacon). "The prophets of the Old Testament inculcate with a remarkable perspicuity and decision the overruling agency of God's providence in the affairs of the world. Their whole prophecy is more or less a commentary on this doctrine. . . . . What a basis is laid by it of peace and tranquillity to every thoughtful and most feeling mind; and how different the aspect of the world becomes when we have reason to know that all things in it, and every combination of them, whether in the fortunes of kingdoms or in a more private state, are under the control of an intelligent and gracious Ruler. Were we in the chains of chance, how gloomy would our case be. Were we in the hands of men, too often how fearful, how humiliating, how conflicting. But the impression of the scene is changed when we admit into it the direction of an all-wise and perfect Being, in whose rectitude and goodness we may acquiesce through the whole course of his providential dispensation" (Davison 'on Prophecy,' p. 59).

> 'One adequate support
> For the calamities of mortal life
> Exists, one only;—an assured belief
> That the procession of our fate, howe'er
> Sad or disturb'd, is order'd by a Being
> Of infinite benevolence and power,
> Whose everlasting purposes embrace
> All accidents, converting them to good" (Wordsworth).

III. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF HIS KINGDOM (vers. 9, 10). God is a moral governor, and directs his providential operations with a view to the setting up of a kingdom of righteousness upon earth. This kingdom existed from the first, was more fully

exhibited in the theocracy of Israel, and culminated in the rule of Christ, who "must reign until he hath put all enemies under his feet." In every stage of development it involves conflict. But—1. *He will protect its subjects;* his saints (lit., pious, those who *love* God), against whom the wicked will contend in vain (ver. 9). 2. *He will overthrow its adversaries* (ver. 10); their overthrow being (1) certain, (2) unexpected, (3) complete—"broken to pieces,"—and (4) signally indicative of the interposition of heaven (ch. vii. 10). 3. He will *extend its borders* to the ends of the earth. 4. *And he will clothe with strength,* honour, and majesty the king whom he appoints and anoints for the accomplishment of his purposes. Hannah commenced her song with rejoicing on account of the strength and honour conferred upon herself, and she closes it with rejoicing on account of the strength and honour which would be conferred on him who should be "higher than the kings of the earth." "Let the children of Zion be joyful in their king." "The anointed of the Lord, of whom Hannah prophesies in the spirit, is not one single king in Israel, either David or Christ, but an ideal king, though not a mere personification of the throne about to be established, but the actual king whom Israel received in David and the race, which culminated in the Messiah. The exaltation of the horn of the anointed of Jehovah commenced with the victorious and splendid expansion of the power of David, was repeated with every victory over the enemies of God and his kingdom gained by the successive kings of David's house, goes on in the advancing spread of the kingdom of Christ, and will eventually attain to its eternal consummation in the judgment of the last day, through which all the enemies of Christ will be made his footstool" (Keil).—D.

Vers. 1—10.—*The prayer-song of Hannah.* In her prayer of asking Hannah was intent not merely on having a child, but on giving to the service of God a priest, and to the government of Israel a judge, very different from the sons of Eli—a Nazarite, a second and a better Samson. No wonder, then, that when she brought her son to the sanctuary, her prayer of thanksgiving took a large scope, and revealed even a prophetic fervour. What religious poetess has made such an impression as Hannah with one ode? Reproduced in Ps. cxiii., and yet again in the song of the blessed Virgin Mary, commonly called the Magnificat, it may be said to have continued in devout minds, Hebrew and Gentile, for about 3000 years. The first verse is the introduction, and strikes the key in which all that follows is pitched—a tone of warm and grateful confidence in God. Then follow the praises of the Lord, with some anticipation of better days to come.

I. PRAISE OF JEHOVAH (vers. 2—8). 1. Because of his sublime attributes (vers. 2, 3). "There is none *holy* as Jehovah." The root idea of holiness is always that of separateness from what is evil or profane. The God of Israel was the Holy One, absolutely unique, immaculate, inviolate, and inviolable. None among the gods of the nations might be likened to him. So he called and required Israel to be a holy nation, *i. e.* separate from the nations of the world, who are idolatrous and unclean. So under the New Testament the saints are the separated ones who touch not the unclean thing. "Neither any rock like our God." His protection cannot be invaded. His purpose does not vacillate. His power does not fail. He is the Rock of Ages. This was what made Israel unconquerable so long as faithful to God. The "rocks" of the nations, *i. e.* the gods in whom they trusted, were not as Israel's Rock. "Jehovah is a God of knowledge." Let not the wicked boast proudly. No word of scorn cast at the humble, no haughty glance of the eye, is unobserved by the Lord; and nothing is more certain than that, sooner or later, he will abase the proud. "And by him actions are weighed." In his estimate of human conduct he holds the balances of a perfect equity. 2. Because of his mighty works (vers. 4—8). Ruling in holy sovereignty, God often reverses the conditions of men, lowering the exalted and exalting the lowly. He even kills and makes alive, leads down into Hades, and leads up from it again. Sheol or Hades was no mere pit of extinction from which there could be no uprising. God was able to raise even the dead. Such being his power, what could the boastful effect against Jehovah? What might not the humble hope from him? This is the central thought of Hannah's song, and it is still more finely expressed in that of the blessed Virgin. "He hath showed strength," &c. (Luke i.

51—53). Of the elevation of the despised, celebrated here and in Ps. cxiii., how many illustrations in sacred story! Joseph, Moses, Gideon, before the time of Hannah; and afterwards, David, and the great Son of David, the Man Christ Jesus, and his Galilean apostles. This fact is not to encourage contempt of, or impatience under, earthly dignities; but it is to cheer those who are or may be depressed by worldly disadvantage of poverty or obscurity. God's grace is no appanage of the rich or powerful. Was not Martin Luther a poor miner's son? David Brainerd a small farmer's son? John Bunyan a tinker's son, brought up to follow the same craft? Were not the good missionaries Carey and Knibb apprentices, the one bound to a cobbler, the other to a printer? And are not such men among the princes of God's people? The house of Elkanah was of no eminence in Israel; but thence God was raising up this child Samuel, whom Hannah brought to his courts, to be, if not king, king-maker, and to stand at the head of a line of prophets who should be the guides of the kings and the people so long as the kingdom stood.

II. ANTICIPATION OF BETTER THINGS TO COME. The end of this prayer-song has a prophetic strain (vers. 9, 10). Hannah was confident of God's preservation of his saints, and of the correlative truth of the perdition of ungodly men. Not that he has any pleasure in their death; but that if men will fight against eternal order and righteousness, they must fail in the struggle, they must perish. "As for Jehovah, those who contend against him are broken." The prophetic element shows itself in the closing expressions of the song. The government of Israel at the time may be described as that of a commonwealth, so far as concerns human administration. It was a theocracy, as it had been from the time of the exodus; but the actual administration was carried on through leaders, or judges. The eye of Hannah opened on a new epoch, foresaw a king to whom Jehovah would give strength as his Anointed. It is the first mention of a Messiah in Holy Writ. No doubt Hannah's words are a prediction of David, whose horn of power the Lord was to exalt, giving him a career of victory over all his enemies. But whether or not it was clear to Hannah's mind, the Spirit who rested on her signified a King greater than David, and a more illustrious kingdom. It is he of whom the angel said to Mary. "He shall be great," &c. (Luke i. 32, 33). We see not yet his kingdom. We see not all things put under him. But we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour; and we wait for his appearing and his kingdom. The longings of many generations, the hopes of many Hannahs, the visions of many seers and prophets, O may they come to pass speedily!—F.

Ver. 2. (SHILOH.)—*The Rock of Israel.* "Neither is there any rock like our God." The figurative representations of God which are given in his word enable us to attain exalted, varied, and most impressive views of his character. They are derived from objects with which the lands of the Bible abounded; and no other lands on earth were equally adapted to be the theatre of a Divine revelation for men universally. Of these representations, this is one of the most common. It was first employed by Jacob (Gen. xlix. 24—stone, *eben*, or rock), with allusion, perhaps, to Gen. xxviii. 11, 22; afterwards by Moses (Deut. xxxii. 4, 18, &c.—rock, *tzur* = what is solid, firm, enduring; a support, foundation, as in the text), who was so familiar with the rocks and mountains of Sinai; frequently by David (2 Sam. xxii. 3—rock, *sela* = height, cliff or crag, resorted to as a refuge) and the prophets. Notice—

I. HIS CHARACTER IN ITSELF. 1. *His power.* "To know thy power is the root of immortality." 2. *His unchangeableness* and faithfulness. "I change not" (Mal. iii. 6), with reference to his merciful covenant. 3. *His eternity.* "From everlasting to everlasting." These attributes are ascribed to Christ: "all power" (Matt. xxviii. 18); "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever" (Heb. i. 8—12; xiii. 8). "That Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. x. 4). He is the highest and the only perfect manifestation of God. "Jesus is that Divine Being to whom we can draw near without pride, and before whom we can be abased without despair" (Pascal).

II. HIS SUPERIORITY TO OTHERS. They are—1. *Weak.* Their very strength is weakness compared with His infinite power. 2. *Changeable.* "All men are liars," false, unworthy, and disappointing objects of trust. 3. *Transitory.* They and their works pass away, whilst the rock endures for ever (see Swinnock,—"the

incomparableness of God, —'Works,' vol. iv.). Expect not true or lasting satisfaction from any created object. "Cease ye from man" (Isa. ii. 22). Fear him not (Isa. li. 12, 13).

III. HIS RELATION TO HIS PEOPLE. "Our God." His people are those who live in direct fellowship with him, and show the reality of their fellowship by walking in the light and keeping his commandments. To them he has promised to be all that their true welfare requires. 1. A *support*; "the immovable foundation on which they may stand firm, impregnable, secure." 2. A *defence*, protecting them against their enemies; "a shadow from the heat, a refuge from the storm;" bearing on himself the tempest that would have fallen on them. "He that believeth shall not make haste," or be terrified. 3. A *source* of strength, of peace, and of consolation. "Rabbi Maimon has observed that the word *tzur*, which we translate rock, signifies, when applied to Jehovah, fountain, source, spring. There is no source whence continual help and salvation can arise but our God" (A. Clarke).

IV. HIS CLAIMS UPON ALL. 1. To *trust* in him. 2. Abide in him; not merely fleeing to him in a time of trouble and danger (as a traveller may seek shelter in a hovel while the storm lasts, and immediately afterwards leave it), but making him our habitation and home. 3. To make him our portion and "exceeding joy." "Trust ye in the Lord for ever; for the Lord Jehovah is the Rock of Ages" (Isa. xxvi. 4).

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me;
Let me hide myself in thee." D.

Ver. 3.—*The Divine judgment of human actions.* "By him actions are weighed." It is customary to determine the worth of many things by weighing them. For this purpose a fixed standard is used, and a comparison is made with it by means of a balance and scales or other instrument. Nothing can be more natural than to speak of determining the moral worth of actions in the same manner, and Justice is commonly represented as a woman holding in her hand a pair of scales in which "actions are weighed." In this sense the above expression is employed; not, however, of men, whose judgment is often mistaken or unjust; but of "God, the Judge of all." His judgment is—

I. A PRESENT JUDGMENT. They *are* (now) weighed. According to the ancient Egyptians, there was erected at the entrance of the unseen world a balance or scales, over which the Judge of the dead presided, and by it the character of every man was tested as soon as he died. In one of the scales the figure or emblem of truth was placed, and in the other the heart of the deceased; and the result determined his destiny. This is not an unworthy conception of the judgment to come. But their religion pertained chiefly to what would be in the future, rather than to what exists in the present. And there are many at the present day who never think that they have anything to do with God or his judgment except when they come to die. They forget that the living and all-seeing God "pondereth their goings" (Prov. v. 21), "judgeth according to every man's work" (1 Pet. i. 17), and that to him they stand responsible (Heb. iv. 13—"with whom is the account").

II. ACCORDING TO A PERFECT STANDARD. The estimate which men form of themselves and others is often false, because it is not formed by means of such a standard. As "weights and measures" need to be examined and to be rectified by an imperial standard, so the human judgment and conscience need to be examined and to be rectified by the righteousness of God as declared in the Law and the Prophets and the Gospel of Christ. What is our relation to this standard?

III. ACCORDING TO MOTIVES. The moral worth of actions does not depend upon their "outward appearance," but upon the heart. In the sight of God, who sees hearts as we see faces, the inward motives, principles, and intentions are in reality the actions which are weighed (Prov. xvi. 2; xxi. 2; xxiv. 11, 12; Isa. xxvi. 7). Our ignorance of these necessarily makes our judgment imperfect, even in relation to ourselves. But "he is a God of knowledge," "searches the heart," and perceives the motives which underlie all actions, and which are often so different from what they are thought to be (Ps. cxxxix. 33).

IV. UNIVERSAL. "The Judge of all the earth." It pertains to all actions that

have in them a moral element; to the actions of every individual soul (for each soul stands before him in its separate personality, bearing its own burden of responsibility and of sin, and is dealt with by him as though there were no other); and to every one of its actions, however apparently insignificant, though it cannot be really such because of its relation to God, and its bearing upon character and destiny.

V. EXERCISED WITH A VIEW TO REWARDING EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS WORKS. It is not useless and ineffective; but is attended with important consequences (Jer. xvii. 10). This life is not simply one of probation; it is also, in part, one of retribution. The approbation or disapprobation of God is always followed by corresponding effects in the mind and heart and conscience of men, and often by startling providential occurrences; as when it was said, "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting" (Dan. v. 27, 30); "The world's history is the world's judgment;" and, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (Rom. xiv. 12; 2 Cor. v. 10). Application:—1. "Let a man examine himself." 2. Seek forgiveness of the sins that are past. 3. "Walk before me, and be thou perfect."—D.

Ver. 9. (SHILOH.)—*God's guardianship of his saints.* "He will keep the feet of his saints." Who are his saints? 1. The term is sometimes used as one of reproach, by persons who are destitute of religious life, concerning those who bear the Christian name. Pointing to the inconsistency of some of the latter, they would thereby fain persuade themselves and others that there is no such thing as true godliness to be found in the world. There are, doubtless, many who "profess to know God, but in works deny him." But there would be no counterfeit money unless there were some genuine coin. 2. The word is also used to designate those who have been "canonised;" and who, having gone into heaven, are supposed to have influence with God in the granting of petitions presented on earth. But such a use of it is unscriptural, and the doctrine is false and injurious. 3. The saints of God are those who have been accepted by him through faith in Christ, who do his will and walk in the way to heaven. Their way, indeed, is often difficult and painful, like the uneven, intricate, and stony paths of Palestine, and beset by numerous dangers. But, for their consolation and encouragement, it is promised that "he that keepeth Israel" will "keep their feet" firm and safe, so that they may not fall and perish. The promise is directly of preservation from temporal calamity, but it may be regarded as including also preservation from spiritual failure and destruction. Consider—

I. THE DANGER FROM WHICH HE WILL KEEP THEM. 1. *From wandering out of the way.* Obscurity may gather over it. Other ways may appear plainer, easier, and more pleasant, and tempt them to leave it. Or they may seem more direct and shorter than the circuitous and wearisome path they have to pursue. But kept by him they will not go astray. 2. *From stumbling in the way.* "It must needs be that offences (or occasions of stumbling) come." Some of them consist of—(1) The difficulties of Divine revelation: "things hard to be understood." (2) The mysteries of Divine providence, which have led many to say, "As for me," &c. (Ps. lxxiii. 2). (3) Direct solicitations to evil. (4) "Afflictions and persecutions that arise for the word, whereby many are offended." But "great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall cause them to stumble" (Ps. cxix. 165). 3. *From failing to reach the end of the way.* Some start with bright hopes which are not afterwards altogether fulfilled in their experience: storms gather, enemies threaten, severe conflict must be waged; and they become weary and desponding, and ready to halt. "But the righteous shall hold on his way" (Job xvii. 19; Isa. xl. 31).

II. THE MANNER IN WHICH HE WILL KEEP THEM. By—1. *Providing means of help for them:* the *word*, which is an instrument of guidance, refreshment, and defence; *prayer;* the *fellowship* of those who are travelling in the same way; the ministration of *angels* (Ps. xci. 11; Heb. i. 14). 2. *Watching over them at every step.* They are not alone; but he is with them; and they are "kept by the power of God" (1 Pet. i. 5). 3. *Imparting grace and strength* to them according to their need. "As thy day," &c. It matters not how great the need if "the supply of the Spirit" (Phil. i. 19) be equal to it. And, "My grace," he says, "is sufficient for thee."

III. THE CERTAINTY WITH WHICH HE WILL KEEP THEM. 1. He has a special

interest in them, for they are "*his* saints," "the portion of his inheritance." 2. He has *already done much* for them, which is an earnest of continued preservation. 3. He has *high purposes* to accomplish in them and through them. And, 4. He has solemnly *promised* "never to leave them" (Heb. xiii. 5), and "he is faithful that promised" (Heb. x. 23).

1. Rely upon the promise. 2. Presume not upon your security, nor think that without fulfilling his commandments you can receive his promises. 3. Use the appointed means of grace with all diligence.—D.

Ver. 10. (SHILOH.)—*The King Messiah.* The last word of the song of Hannah is the first mention of the Lord's Anointed, Messiah, Christ. 1. Her language was a direct prediction of the appointment of a theocratic king, for which Samuel preparod the way, and which, under Divine direction, he was the chief agent in effecting. 2. It was an indirect prediction of One who had been long expected (Gen. iii. 14, 15; xii. 1—3; xxii. 17, 18; xlix. 10; Num. xxiv. 17—19; Deut. xviii. 15—19), and in whom the *idea* of such a king would be completely realised. 3. It marks the dawn of a splendid series of prophecies founded on the reign of David, and ever brightening to the perfect day (2 Sam. vii.; xxiii. 1—7; Ps. ii.; cx.; Isa. ix. 9; Dan. ix. 25; Micah v. 1; Mal. iv. 2. Fairbairn, 'Typology,' i. 111; Pye Smith, 'Script. Test.,' i. 169). Consider—

I. HIS REGAL OFFICE. Its general purpose was—1. To *unite* a divided people (Gen. xlix. 10). Nothing was more needed in the days of the judges. 2. To *save* them from their enemies. "Thy salvation" (ch. ii. 1; Ps. xviii. 50; xcv. 1; Matt. i. 21). 3. To *rule* over them, *judge* them in righteousness, and establish among them order, peace, and happiness. "The regal office of our Saviour consisteth partly in the ruling, protecting, and rewarding of his people; partly in the coercing, condemning, and destroying of his enemies" (Pearson 'on the Creed,' Art. ii.). It was the fatal mistake of Israel in all ages to look for an outward, worldly, and imposing, rather than an inward, moral, and spiritual fulfilment of this purpose. The same mistake has, to some extent, pervaded Christendom. "My kingdom is not of this world." "The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." "Alexander, Cæsar, Charlemagne, and myself have founded empires. But upon what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ alone founded his empire upon love; and at this moment millions would die for him" ('Table Talk and Opinions of Napoleon Buonaparte').

II. HIS DIVINE APPOINTMENT. "*His* King." "*His* Anointed" (Ps. ii. 6; xviii. 50). 1. The choice was *of God.* "Chosen out of the people" (Ps. lxxxix. 19). Even Saul, a man after the people's heart rather than after God's heart, was selected and appointed by him. The invisible King of Israel did not relinquish his authority. 2. Founded on *personal eminence.* David. The ancient Persians believed that their ruler was an incarnation of the eternal light, the object of their worship, and therefore rendered him Divine honour. This was a reality in Christ. 3. Confirmed and manifested by the *anointing of his Spirit* (ch. x. 1; xvi. 13; 2 Sam. ii. 4); the outward act being a symbol of the inward endowment (Matt. iii. 16; Luke iv. 18). "God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him" (John iii. 34; Heb. i. 9).

III. HIS GLORIOUS EXALTATION. 1. After a state of *humiliation;* implied in the language here used; also indicated in ver. 8; and typified by the lowly origin of David and his course to the throne. 2. By the *right hand of God.* "He will give strength;" "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. xxviii. 18); exhibited in his resurrection, ascension, and possession of supreme honour, authority, and power. 3. To a kingdom *universal* and eternal. "The Lord shall judge the ends of the earth" (Ps. ii. 8; lxxii. 2—5; cxxxii. 18; Luke i. 31—33, 69). Whilst Jesus lives and reigns in heaven, he also lives and reigns on earth. He does so by the continued and ever-increasing power of his example and teachings, his wondrous life, and still more wondrous death. The truths and principles which he declared and embodied are, at this moment, accepted by the loftiest intellects, the purest consciences, and the tenderest hearts amongst men. Who now reverses a single judgment which he pronounced upon men or things? Who can conceive any character more worthy of reverence and affection than his? The lapse of time has only served to

invest his words and character with fresh interest and power. Other kings and conquerors are fading away amidst the shadows of the past; but he is ever rising before the view of mankind more distinctly, and living in their thoughts, their consciences, and their hearts more mightily. Yea, more, he lives and reigns on earth by his Divine presence, his providential working, and the power of his Spirit. Just as the sun, shining in mid-heaven, sheds down his rays upon the earth; so Christ, the Sun of righteousness (though no longer seen by mortal eye), pours down the beams of his influence upon us continually, and rules over all things for the complete establishment of his kingdom.—D.

EXPOSITION.

SAMUEL'S MINISTRATIONS AT SHILOH (vers. 11—21). Ver. 11.—**The child did minister.** Left by his parents at Shiloh, Samuel ministered unto the Lord; that is, certain duties were allotted him to perform suited to his age; but few at first, when he was but three years old, but increasing in importance as time went on; for the words refer to the whole period of his service, until Eli's death. At first Samuel would be but a scholar, for, as we have mentioned on ch. i. 21, there were, no doubt, regulations for the training of children devoted to the service of the sanctuary. The peculiarity about Samuel was that he was devoted for life, for possibly it was a not uncommon practice for young persons to receive some training at Shiloh; just as we find that Samuel himself subsequently gathered youths round him at Naioth in Ramah for educational purposes. Learning practically was confined to the priesthood, and we can scarcely imagine that the knowledge which Phinehas and the family of Aaron brought with them out of Egypt would be allowed to perish. Samuel certainly had himself received careful instruction (see on ch. x. 25), and this could scarcely have happened if the training of young persons had not been part of the priests' duties at Shiloh. This then explains why Samuel was brought to Eli at so tender an age, and why the charge of so young a child was undertaken without a murmur. **Before Eli** means under his general superintendence. Everything done at Shiloh was done *before Eli*, as being the chief ruler there.

Ver. 12.—**Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial**, *i. e.* worthless men (see on ch. i. 16). **They knew not Jehovah.** He had never been revealed to their consciences, and so his fear had no influence upon their lives. The next words, in ver. 13, are difficult, but lit. mean, "The legal right of the priests towards, or as respects, the people." On this account the Vulgate and several commentators couple the sentence with what precedes: "they knew neither Jehovah, nor their own legal rights." But the word *also* in ver. 15 is incompatible with this rendering; for if what is mentioned there be illegal, so must also the practice be which is recorded here. But neither does *custom* give the sense; for the Heb. has not priest's (sing.) as the A. V., but *of the priests*, of all priests generally, and not of Eli merely and his sons. The right translation is that given by the Sept., Syriac, and Chaldee, namely, "the due of the priests from the people," on which see Lev. vii. 31—35. In the original this is put absolutely "And as to the priests' due from the people, when," &c., but our language requires some insertion to make it read more smoothly. "And as to the due of the priests from the people, the manner of its exaction was as follows: When," &c. But besides the due and legal portion, which, nevertheless, they took in an illegal way, they demanded a part of the flesh reserved for the feast of the offerer, and to which they had absolutely no right (see Lev. viii. 31; 2 Chron. xxxv. 13).

The legal due of the priest was the right shoulder and the wave breast; but before he took them they were to be consecrated to God by the burning of the fat upon the altar (Lev. iii. 5; vii. 31, 34). It is worth observing that the people seem well acquainted with the words of the Law, and are indignant because the priests, its proper guardians, do not abide literally by them. This contempt of the Law distressed their religious susceptibilites, while the cupidity of Eli's sons offended their moral nature. And so **men abhorred the offering of Jehovah.** Lit. it is the *minchah*, the unbloody sacrifice, or meat offering, but it is put here for every kind of sacrificial offering.

Ver. 18.—**But Samuel ministered.** While the miscouduct of Eli's sons was thus bringing religion into contempt, and sapping the nation's morals, Samuel was advancing in years and piety, and was gaining that education which made him fit to retrieve the evil of their doings. He is still styled *na'ar*, a boy; for the word, according to the Rabbins, may be used up to fifteen years (ch. i. 24). In the sense of servaut there is no limit of age; and as it is the word translated "young men" in ver. 17, it probably means there not Eli's sons, but the servants by whose instrumentality their orders were actually carried out. Samuel's dress, an ephod of

white linen, was probably that worn by the Levites in their ordinary ministrations; for the ephod of the priests was richer both in material and colour (Exod. xxviii. 6—8). As being thus the simplest ministerial garment, it was apparently worn also by laymen when taking part in any religious service, as by David when he danced before the ark (2 Sam. vi. 14).

Ver. 19.—**His mother made him a little coat.** The coat, *meïl*, was worn by priests (Lev. viii. 7), by kings and their sons (1 Sam. xviii. 4), by prophets (*ibid.* xxviii. 14), and even by women (2 Sam. xiii. 18). It was an under garment of wool, woven throughout without seam, with holes for the head and arms, and reaching nearly to the ground: when used by women it had sleeves (*ibid.*). Under it they had a tunic or shirt fitting so closely that a man simply so clad was considered naked (1 Sam. xix. 24), and over it priests and Levites wore the ephod, and so also David on the occasion mentioned above (1 Chron. xv. 27). The *meïl* seems, moreover, to have often been a handsome dress, as that of the priests was of purple-blue, with embroidery of pomegranates in three colours, and golden bells (Exod. xxviii. 31—34); and when made of delicate materials for the use of the rich, it and the tunic are the soft luxurious clothing spoken of in Matt. xi. 8. As the *meïl* was the ordinary dress of all classes of people, it was made for Samuel at home, and can have no special meaning; but the ephod shows that he was brought up in the daily practice of holy duties. This annual present, however, of clothing made by the mother's hands proves that the dedication of her son to God was not allowed to interfere with home affections, and both parents and child must have looked forward with joy to happy meetings at each recurrence of the family visit to the sanctuary.

Vers. 20, 21.—**The Lord give thee seed, &c.** The manner in which Eli blesses Elkanah shows that this surrender of a very young child to religious service was not looked upon as imposing a burden upon the sanctuary, but as the bestowal of a valued gift. *Loan* and *lent* by no means give the whole sense, which is in fact beyond the power of our language to express; for the Hebrew is remarkable for its manner of saying a great deal in a few words, by using them indefinitely. Besides the sense, then, of lending the child to God, the Heb. also conveys the idea of Samuel having been obtained by prayer, but by prayer *for Jehovah*. Hannah had not asked simply for a son, but for a son whom she might dedicate to God. And now Eli prays that Jehovah will give her children to be her own (see on ch. i. 28).

ELI'S COMPLICITY IN THE SINS OF HIS SONS (vers. 22—26). Ver. 22.—**Eli . . . heard all that his sons did.** To the profanity and greed described in vers. 12—17 the sons of Eli added unchastity; and their sin was the greater because the women whom they corrupted were those dedicated to religious service (see Exod. xxxviii. 8). The order of ministering women instituted by Moses probably lasted down to the destruction of the temple, and Anna may have belonged to it (Luke ii. 37); afterwards it appeared again in a more spiritual form in the widows and deaconesses of the Christian Church. The word rendered **assembled** means "arranged in bands," and shows not merely that they were numerous, but that they had regular duties assigned them, and each one her proper place and office. The frequent sacrifices, with the feasts which followed, must have provided occupation for a large number of hands in the cleaning of the utensils and the cooking of the food. But though Eli heard of the depraved conduct of his sons in thus defiling those who ministered in the tabernacle, he gives them but the faintest rebuke, and that apparently only because their misdeeds were in everybody's mouth; for the last clause of ver. 23 really is, "For I hear of your evil doings from all this people." Eli's old age may have increased his indifference, but his religious character could never have had much depth or earnestness, to allow him to regard such heinous sins so lightly. It seems even as if he chiefly felt the annoyance occasioned to himself by the expostulations urged upon him "from all this people." Still all that he says is wise and thoughtful. The sins of men in high station do not end with themselves; they make others also to transgress. And as Eli's sons were Jehovah's ministers, and they had led into wickedness those who also were bound to holy service, their misconduct was a sin against Jehovah himself.

Vers. 24, 25.—**Ye make, &c.** Eli's words are very obscure, but "Ye make Jehovah's people to transgress" is upon the whole the best rendering of the clause. Both the Sept. and Syriac have a different reading: "Ye make Jehovah's people cease to worship him." In the next verse there is no sufficient reason for supposing that Elohim, God, here means a **judge**. Elohim was the head of the theocracy, the ruler of Israel in all things, and he would set to rights these delinquencies of "one man against another" by the ordinary exercise of his judicial functions. So far all is easy, and we must translate, "If one man sin against another, God shall judge him." But in the last clause there is one of those plays upon words to which the Hebrew language, with its numerous conjugations, so readily lends itself (see on ch. i. 28); **and**

it is rarely possible to transfer to another language the force of passages in which the sense depends upon the terms in the original having a double meaning. The verb rendered *shall judge* in the first clause is used again by Eli in the second, but in a different conjugation, in which its usual meaning is to *pray*. According to the lexicon, therefore, we must translate: "If a man sin against Jehovah, who shall pray for him?" But surely it was just the occasion in which the only remedy left was intercessory prayer. Bearing then in remembrance the use made by Eli of the verb in the first clause, we must translate: "Who shall act as judge for him?" "Who shall interpose as arbitrator between him and Jehovah to settle the quarrel?" The verb itself, moreover, is a rare and old-fashioned one, and apparently means to *settle a dispute*. So it is used of Phinehas, who by his righteous zeal put an end to the rebellion against God's laws; and accordingly in Ps. cvi. 30, where our version renders "executed judgment," the Vulgate has *placavit, appeased* Jehovah's anger.

The sense then is, In case of wrong done between man and man, God as the supreme Arbitrator settles the dispute; but where the two parties are God and man, what third power is there which can interfere? The quarrel must go on to the bitter end and God, who is your opponent, will also punish you. The same idea is found in Job ix. 33. Naturally to so mild a remonstrance, and founded upon so low a view of the Divine nature, the sons of Eli paid but slight attention, and by thus hardening themselves in sin they made their punishment inevitable, "because it pleased Jehovah to slay them." Man can bring upon himself neither good nor evil except by the working of God's will, and the punishment of sin is as thoroughly a part of God's will as the rewarding of righteousness. An intense conviction of the personality of God was the very foundation of the religious life of the Israelites, and lies at the root of the words of Eli here and of those of Job; and it was this which made them ascribe to God that hardening of the wicked in sin which is the sure means of their punishment. We ascribe it to the working of natural laws, which after all is but saying the same thing in a round-about way; for the laws of nature, in things moral as well as in the physical world, are the laws of God. In ver. 26, in contrast with Eli's sons ripening for punishment, and daily more abhorred of God and man, we have Samuel set before us advancing in age and "in favour with Jehovah and also with men," like him of whom in so many respects he was a type (Luke ii. 52), our blessed Lord.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 11—19.—*Degenerate sons.* The facts given are—1. Eli's sons manifest their extreme wickedness by profaning the worship of God. 2. As a consequence, a grievous scandal is caused, and Divine worship comes into disrepute. 3. In spite of many evil surroundings, Samuel grows up in the blameless discharge of religious duties. 4. Hannah continues to visit and take a deep interest in her son's spiritual life. The sorrowful experience of Eli in old age is sometimes repeated in modern times. Many a good man is bowed down even to the grave by the irreligion of sons of whom better things had been expected. No more painful condition can a father be in than when he scarcely dare name his children to those who ask after their welfare. The world and the Church look on with wonder and pain at the spectacle of vile children issuing from a pious home. The feeling of surprise with which men read of the family of the high priest of Israel becoming so utterly wicked is attended with the conviction that desperately bad youths ought never to issue from Christian homes. Such an event is contrary to all just expectations. The *presumption* that the *offspring of pious parents* would *be holy* is based on various considerations, which for the most part apply to the case of Eli. 1. There are various *promises and statements* to encourage the belief that the *children of the pious* will share in *special mercies* (*e. g.* Deut. xxx. 2, 6; Prov. xxii. 6; Isa. xliv. 7; Mal. ii. 15; 1 Cor. vii. 14). 2. In so far as *susceptibility to religious impressions* is affected by *inherited qualities*, they have an advantage over others. 3. The *means of grace*, instruction, example, and prayer are *more employed* for them than for the majority. 4. The *power of early habit*, which plays so important a part in the formation of character, is likely to *be on the side of godliness* where religious influences early operate. The *causes* which account for the *ungodliness of the children of the pious* are diverse, intricate, and partly inscrutable. A broad margin must be left for the mysterious action of a free being, even under the most favourable conditions. It

is not possible to trace the lines and say where parental responsibility ends and the responsibility of the child begins. The two factors are to be recognised. Moreover, anterior physical causes, operating perniciously through ancestors, may act detrimentally on the mental and moral condition. But allowing for these and other untraceable elements of the case, there are causes of this sad feature of domestic life—

I. IN THE CHILDREN. The *natural depravity* of the heart is a grave fact. It is the first foe to be encountered in seeking a child's salvation. Its subtle power is beyond all knowledge. There may not be the complications of wickedness which exist in the full-grown nature of the adult after years of developed sin, but the power is persistent and insinuating. Eli's children shared this tendency in common with others. The *special propensities inherited* are sometimes very strong, and seem to partake of the force of the old habits of the ancestors from whom they were derived. It is also a fact that where a malformation, or unequal development of the physical system, supervenes on the inheritance of special evil propensities, these latter gain immensely in force. A line of pious ancestors, as a rule, would guarantee freedom from such abnormal developments, because continuous piety tends to the symmetrical development of the entire man; but occasionally there are backward leaps in nature, and old elements reappear. Possibly some of Eli's blood-relatives were not so good as they ought to have been. No doubt grace can subdue even the worst natures, but the elements referred to must be considered in connection with other causes.

II. IN THE TRAINING. It cannot be supposed that Eli was perfect in this respect. Few persons consider how much of care, of wisdom, of forethought, of yearning sympathy, of specific, well-adapted guidance, and of prayer is involved in the "nurture and admonition" required in training children for God. There may be a fatal lack of faith in the very possibility of infant piety; an expectation that, as a matter of course, a child will grow up in sin till an age for conversion arrives; a cold, cruel casting of the spiritual welfare of a child on teachers, attendants, official aids—the parent, under pressure of business, declining to bear his offspring ever on his heart before God; or a lack of discretion in dealing with each soul according to its temperament. Absence of a mother's deep and tender interest tells most prejudicially. An unwise method of instilling religious truth; an assertion of mere authority in severe tones; a lack of discipline to check wrong tendencies; a constant appeal to a sense of fear; an avoidance of the essential truths of the gospel, or a low, grovelling representation of them, may create aversion, awake silent resistance, and finally set the entire nature against what is falsely supposed to be religion. Perhaps there is *no department of religious obligation so little studied as this.* The tender, susceptible nature of children cannot be safely treated without much thought and prayer. No wonder if the promise which hangs on a faithful discharge of most delicate and solemn duties carried on year by year should sometimes not be fulfilled. Parents have need to pray, "Search me and try me."

III. IN EXAMPLE. This is part of training, but, as exercising a perpetual and unconscious influence, it may be regarded as distinct from direct efforts. Children learn more of religion from what they observe in parents than by any other means. The life they see lived is their daily book of lessons. If it is selfish, hard, formal, worldly, no amount of verbal teaching or professed interest will avail. There is no surer encouragement for a child to despise all religion than a discovery of insincerity in the professions of a parent. Real character comes into clear view in the home, and those who, under influence of public considerations, restrain themselves in the world, but give freedom to unhallowed feelings in private, cannot wonder if children do not covet the piety they witness.

IV. IN ASSOCIATIONS. Associations out of the home circle, both in youth and early manhood, exercise much influence over character. It is not every youth that is solely formative on others. Most young people receive more from companions than they impart. The good of home may be largely neutralised by the tone of society outside the home. Eli's sons were not strong enough to counteract the evil tendencies of the age, and their father erred in not taking precautions adequate to the occasion. Probably one reason why the sons of good and eminent men sometimes become notoriously godless is, that the utter absorption of the parent in public affairs,

albeit religious, gradually issues in alienation of sons from home interests and committal to friendships evil in tendency. The charm of novelty is powerful where home life is rendered dull through inattention to the tastes and enjoyments of the young, and hence consent is given to enticing sinners. If, in any instance, there are in *operation* causes, either singly or combined, of the nature referred to, it is *inevitable* that a home, though in some degree pious, should be distressed by the *presence of ungodly sons*. So far as man's conduct determines religion or irreligion in offspring, it would be contrary to the action of natural laws for pious sons to be the product of efforts inadequate to the end in view. If sons are godly in spite of errors and bad influence at home, it is because God in his mercy has brought other and more blessed influences to bear. Even defective training may be ultimately remedied by a more true use of prayer for mercy.

Great sinners. The sons of Eli were the greatest sinners of their degenerate age. From the most favoured home the worst men came forth. All sin is a great evil. It is the curse of man, the abomination of God. In its essence it is rebellion against the All-wise and Holy One. For all lack of conformity to his will implies a will supposed to be a more desirable guide than his, which is insult and insubordination. But the Bible represents some sins as of deeper dye than others. There are beings deserving to be "beaten with many stripes." The tests by which the enormity of sins is estimated are, after reference of all to the perfect purity of God—

I. THE CHARACTER OF THE DEEDS. The deeds perpetrated by the sons of Eli were of the vilest kind. In themselves they were calculated to awaken the intensest disgust and abhorrence of every pure and reverent mind. It is hard to conceive how men blessed with early privileges could sink so low, were it not that modern Christian times have produced the darkest sins in the professedly religious. The sins of open profanation of the sanctuary, of despite to the solemn sacrifice, of pollution in guiltiest lust, were but the outward expression of a state of soul foul, reckless, defiant beyond all description. So, generally, the dark, horrid deeds on which men look are but the indicators of a very hell of iniquity deep down in the soul. There are—

II. THE PRIVILEGES ENJOYED. It added guilt to the sin of the young men that they were the *sons of the priest of God*. It is a grave responsibility to be born of parents endued with any degree of piety. Especially are they under strong obligation to avoid sin who are, by virtue of their connection with the ordinances of worship, taught out of the law of the Lord, and surrounded by the hallowed influences of the sanctuary. Every wise book read, every kind influence exercised, every prayer offered in public, or by parents at home, gives additional light and power wherewith to avoid the paths of sin. It requires a long and hard inward struggle to keep down conscience so as to become a desperate sinner. Men do not sink to lowest depths of vice suddenly. Every successive step is taken against clear light and restraining powers, and when the final surrender to guilty deeds is made, the whole privileges of the past speak out the greatness of the evil. The poor idolater ignorantly causing his sons to pass through the fire to Moloch is less guilty than the sons of Israel's high priest, when, crushing every sacred feeling, they turn from all the light of years to profane the sanctuary by violence and lust. Sodom was vile, but decorous Capernaum viler. The sin of despising a holier Sacrifice than of bulls and lambs is often committed by men blessed with faithful teaching.

III. THE POSITION OCCUPIED. To the eye of the Hebrew the office of priest was most sacred. The reverence cherished for the office was transferred in some degree to the person who filled it. Hence, perhaps, the patience and submission with which the worshippers endured the greed and violence of the guilty sons of Eli. In itself, being a consecration of life to the holiest of employments, and considered, also, as a type of the one perfect Priesthood, there was solid reason for the common sentiment. No position is morally higher than that of him who stands between man and God for the performance of most solemn duties. Hence in all ages it has been recognised that the ministers of the sanctuary, whether priests, as anciently, or pastors and teachers, do exercise an influence which, while increasing the force of

goodness, also aggravates their guilt when sin is committed. Power, when used sinfully, means magnified sin. A professed Christian sinks relatively very low when he does what other men do. A pastor by one act may come under a condemnation from which on earth he will never recover. A judge who sells justice is the most despised of men. A statesman who barters truth and peace for personal greed is worse than a common forger. Holiness is to be loved and sought for its own sake, yet it is helpful to ask, "What manner of persons ought we to be," who stand out in society as rulers, magistrates, pastors, teachers, parents? If the ordinary sinner cannot escape the swift judgment of God, where shall they appear who by virtue of exalted position become intensely and grievously sinful when they sin?

IV. THE NATURE OF THE EFFECTS. Some sins, like the falling of heavy bodies in still water, produce wider and more violent effects than do others. The effect is always pernicious, but when prominent men and professed servants of God sin, the consequences are painfully and conspicuously injurious. The sons of Eli by their crimes not only debased their own nature and *fell* to lower depths of shame, but they brought the holiest services into disrepute, alienated from the sanctuary the feelings of the people, caused intense anguish in the minds of the pious Jews, gave encouragement to wicked men more freely to transgress, and thus did more than others could do to exterminate morality and religion from the land. It is a serious question for every one, and especially ministers and all persons in positions of influence, *how far the neglect of religion* by multitudes is the *natural effect of their own short-comings*. It is a mark of a great sinner when, by reason of his conduct, the "wicked blasphemer." Also, our Lord has branded those as great sinners who wantonly cause offence to "one" of his "little ones." If scepticism and antagonism to Christianity are most lamentable evils, it is a matter of grave consideration how far the presence of these evils is due to the formality, the greed, the gross inconsistencies of those professing to exhibit and love the religion of Christ. It behoves all to see to it that they lift up "holy hands," and speak a "pure language." Otherwise the terrible woes pronounced by the Saviour over would-be religious men may find an application to modern great sinners. Arising from this subject we may notice certain

Practical lessons.—1. The extreme importance of every one forming, by the aid of Scripture and of conscience, a *proper estimate* of the *responsibility* of his position as a professed Christian, a parent, a minister of the gospel, a teacher, or civil ruler. 2. The possibility of undergoing a process of *spiritual decay* by which the *finer sensibilities* of earlier days shall become *almost annihilated*, and deeds be done with impunity which once were most abhorrent. 3. The need of frequent *self-examination*, to ascertain whether the elements of religious degeneracy may be *unconsciously at work* in the soul; the more so as it is characteristic of spiritual declension to make us blind to the fact of declension. 4. The necessity of much prayer, lest, trusting to early privileges and official services, the elements of decay should enter the spiritual life, and, consequently, the duties of self-scrutiny and watchfulness be shunned.

Youthful piety. It is not without significance that the sacred historian breaks the thread of his ordinary narrative by frequent references to the child Samuel (vers. 11, 18, 21, 26; cf. iii. 1, 18). The contrast with ungodly priests is striking. "*But* Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a *child*." "The child was *young*." "The child *grew* before the Lord." Beautiful progression! "Following on" to "know the Lord." "The path of the just" grows brighter. Here in face of evil is the "perseverance of the saints." The case of Samuel may be regarded as a *typical instance of youthful piety*. The frequent allusions to him, combined with the tenor of his subsequent life, go to prove that he was a religious child from earliest days. Humanly his piety was the product of his mother's intense earnestness. Hannah had faith to believe that a child may be God's from the very dawn of life. In essential features his piety was the same as that of all God's people. There were special reasons for its assuming the form it did in that entire and early separation from home. 1. A mother's *prevision* had respect to a *new and higher* office to be created and duly authenticated. 2. *Extraordinary preparation* was needful for the great work to be finally entered on, and such as separation to the hallowed service of the

sanctuary would secure. 3. The mother could thus evince her *freedom from mere selfish gratification* in seeking a child from the Lord, and at the same time do all within her power to advance the coming kingdom. 4. There was a *secret providence* in this *preparing the way* for the *first great step* in the reformation of the people, namely, the authoritative announcement of national disaster (ch. iii. 11, 20). Taking, then, Samuel's as an instance of *typical youthful piety*, we may notice—

I. That YOUTHFUL PIETY IS A POSSIBILITY. Evidently it was in Samuel's case. Since all children are psychologically alike; are born under the same covenanted mercies; and are, therefore, open to the same Divine regenerating influence, the position might be considered as established. But the Church has been slow to believe the truth; and much of the nurture of families seems to proceed on the supposition that, as a rule, at least early manhood must be reached ere piety be regarded as trustworthy. The causes of this unfortunate distrust of child piety are varied. They may be indicated as—1. The habit of *estimating all piety* by the forms and manifestations appropriate to *adult life*, which habit is based on—2. A *misconception* of what constitutes the *essence* of all true religion. 3. The long *continued neglect of the Church*, as a consequence of this misconception, issuing in a *scarcity of youthful* piety. But the possibility of it is seen in—1. The *nature of a child* being *capable* of the *essentials* of true piety. In Samuel, and so in every child, there was a capability of recognising the Great Unseen and Holy One; of cherishing *pure love* for the living, ever-present Friend; of *trusting* on Almighty care with an unusual absoluteness; of *learning* the truth concerning the works and ways of God, both by witnessing and sharing in acts of worship, and listening to special instruction; and of *obedience* to a sovereign Will. Indeed, in some respects the nature of a child, being free from the carking cares of life and the unhappy suspicions of mature years, is much more susceptible of holy, elevating influences than is that of men. 2. The remarkable *welcome to children given by Christ*. The child Samuel was welcome in the house of Jehovah. He "*grew up* before the Lord," and was in "*favour* with God." Thus in his case we see a beautiful congruity with, and may we not say prophetic of, the loving welcome given later on by the blessed Saviour himself, in terms never to be forgotten. Possibly some officious priests might deem the presence of the child clad in sacred ephod an innovation and a nuisance in the tabernacle, just as some in excessive but erring zeal would not have Christ troubled with little ones who could not be supposed to understand his profound teaching. The only recorded instance of Christ being "*much* displeased" is when it was supposed that he was indifferent to the spiritual condition of little children. 3. The *harmony of Hannah's conduct and Samuel's piety with the general tone of Scripture*. Hannah both consecrated and nurtured her son for the Lord, thus exemplifying the precepts, "Train up a child in the way he should go," "Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," and also illustrating the just expectation of the apostle, who seemed to take for granted that pious parents rightly conforming to all their covenanted duties and privileges would have "*holy*" children (1 Cor. vii. 14).

II. That YOUTHFUL PIETY IS VERY DEPENDENT ON CAREFUL NURTURE. All religion needs culture. It is the most delicate as also the most precious of our treasures. The production of piety in children, though of God, as the Source of all grace, is intimately connected with the prayers and faith of parents. Hannah travailed in spirit for a holy child long before Samuel was born, and the succeeding nurture was only an expression of the same earnestness. There is no warrant to think that the world would have been blessed with a pious Samuel apart from the deep piety of a Hannah; and so the presence and growth of piety in our children rests with the Church of God. The very condition of children in a sinful world suggests a care on their behalf most wise, tender, and constant. The *elements of true nurture* are seen in Hannah's care of Samuel. There was—1. The *one* and *perpetual devotement* of the child *to the Lord*—the absolute giving up to the grace of God with a faith that would take no denial. This act was repeated in spirit day by day for years. When leaving him in Shiloh; when silently bowing before God at home; when engaged in making the little ephod; when refitting it, as year by year he grew; when with joyous heart visiting Shiloh at the annual festivals—the mother carried Samuel on her heart before God, and gave him up to be blessed. This is what mothers can ever do for

their loved ones, and they sorely need such care in this sinful world. 2. The *impressive teaching imparted.* Surely Samuel was not placed in the house of the Lord without much teaching suited to his capacity as to the holy life he was to live. It is something to make a child believe that he is the Lord's, to see the beauty and joy of being given up to his service. With exquisite delicacy did Hannah teach her son that he must for ever be holy. The girding with the ephod meant to him, "Thou art a servant of God, a child of the sanctuary, *thou* canst not do any unworthy deeds or speak unholy words. Remember thou belongest to the Lord, my son." Happy they who know the art of showing their sons the beauty of holiness, and the manner of persons they ought ever to be. 3. *Association with the sanctuary.* The hallowed associations of the house of God exercised power over the tender child; and so the principle is set forth that in our nurture of youthful piety we must seek to encourage a love for the worship of the Lord and of all pertaining to his service. It is a great gain when our youth can rejoice in the Sabbath services, feel that in the sanctuary they have a much-loved spiritual home. 4. *Engagement in useful religious work.* It was a wise choice of this mother to divert the child's attention from the evil habits of the age by absorption in works suited to his little powers, and under the immediate eye of a venerable man of God. Whatever love to God may dwell in the heart of a child is strengthened and guarded by being exercised in deeds pertaining to his service. And the service of God is very wide and varied. There are many ways in which youthful piety may be exercised. Let children be caused to feel that they by life, by simple prayers, and by sympathy can bless the sorrowing world, and their piety will grow and the world will be enriched. The momentous interests involved in the presence or absence of youthful piety should awaken deep concern on several

Practical questions.—1. To what extent does it prevail in Church and home? 2. How far the lack of early piety is due to parental neglect, erroneous views, defective Church organisations, or unhealthy literature? 3. In what form can the existing piety of children be more utilised for their own benefit and for the good of the world? 4. How is it possible to render the services of the sanctuary more interesting and helpful to the young? 5. How can the missing link between the youthful and more mature piety of the Church be restored? 6. By what means can Christian parents be led to manifest an all-absorbing concern for the development of piety in their offspring? 7. What would be the effect on the ultimate conversion of the world if the Church could be so wrought upon to exercise faith in the possibility of early piety as to save the need of employing agencies to convert in adult age any who have passed through its hands?

Faith's symbols. Judged by the customs of the age, it was a *daring thing* for Hannah to *clothe her child* with the *ephod,* the every-day robe of the priest, seeing that her son was only a Levite (1 Chron. vi. 19, 23; cf. Ex. xxxix. 27; 1 Sam. xxii. 18). She clearly intended him to be invested with the prerogatives of the priest. The holy daring went further in her making for him the "little coat," which properly was part of the dress of the high priest, and sometimes of princes and nobles. The act is in perfect keeping with the first deed of consecration, and with the tenor of the inspired song. To her prophetic vision this child was from birth ordained to be an extraordinary servant of God, for the reformation of that age and the advancement of that kingdom the glories of which she saw afar. It is not likely that a woman of such strong and exalted hope would be ready to speak out in detail what was in her heart, and yet the force of her faith would demand adequate expression. Some natures are not demonstrative by words, but prefer silent acts to both indicate their thoughts and to nourish their faith and hope. Therefore the clothing of Samuel with the pure "ephod" and the "little coat" was the creation of permanent symbols of faith for his instruction and impressment, and her own satisfaction and support. It is not for mere notice of casual incident that the sacred writer refers to the event, but evidently to set forth valuable truth.

I. FAITH SEES GERMS OF FUTURE GOOD WHERE UNBELIEF WOULD SEE NOTHING. It is probable that neighbours reflected on the eccentric conduct of the mother who so unnecessarily parted with her child. To them he was as other children. The spiritual travail of his birth was hidden from them. But Hannah, being in sympathy

with God's merciful purposes to mankind, saw in her son the man of the future, the defender of the faith, the restorer of pure worship, the consecrated spirit which has spiritual right to do priestly work, and it was rest to her soul to express this faith not by words which might be contradicted, but by a solemn act full of instruction to the child, and a permanent record of what she knew would be. So is it ever. The eye of faith sees in the infant Church of God the promise of a "glorious Church." Simeon saw in a babe the "Salvation" of God. A few poor men saw in the "Man of sorrows" the coming "King of glory." The true believer now sees in the occasional triumphs of the gospel the earnest of a world's subjugation to Christ.

II. FAITH HOLDS MORE THAN CAN BE PUT INTO WORDS. There was no one to whom Hannah could unfold in words all that was grasped by her faith. To her the presence of this holy child in the house of God, serving him in the minor details of daily routine, was virtually the realisation of the prophet's office, and the enhancement of Messiah's glory. "Faith is the *substance* of things hoped for." The essential reality of the remote is already in the heart. The future is as though it were present. Prevision and accomplishment become subjectively one. This holy mysticism of the highest spiritual life is foolishness to the unspiritual, but is a profound and blessed fact in the experience of the true children of God. God's word given is as good as fulfilled, and the soul finds more in the consciousness of this truth than can ever be indicated in language. There is always a vast reserve of religious feeling that can never find expression. Life is more than the forms of life. The "ephod" and "little robe," and the annual visits to the child, were outward signs—symbolical forms—of a something which was too great for utterance. They were the shadows of a great reality too sacred, too rich, too varied in its issues to be set forth in ordinary terms. So likewise our faith holds a Christ more glorious and precious than any terms can utter. He is "*formed* in the heart." He is the "*unspeakable* gift." Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived what is grasped by the Christian's faith as an ever-present treasure. Human speech, in prose or song, falls below the soul's sense of blessedness in Christ.

III. FAITH IS VENTURESOME IN ADOPTING FORMS OF EXPRESSING ITSELF. Holding converse with realities which lie beyond the ordinary mind, it deviates from routine, and carves out new and rare modes of indicating its existence. Hannah could not rest content with telling Elkanah, Eli, and Samuel, in casual conversation and fleeting words, what she knew this ministering child was to be in days to come, and what she knew of the coming kingdom. Jacob made a coat of many colours to gratify a questionable feeling of partiality. Jochebed made a covering of bulrushes to save a precious life, possibly with a trust in a wise Providence. But Hannah had a faith in God, in the revival of religion, in the Messiah's glory, which not only sought vent for itself, but dared to create new and, to the eye of man, questionable forms of expression. Persistently, year by year, as the sacred ephod required readjustment to varying stature, did the faith reassert itself in every stitch and every trial of approval. Innovation it might be, but it was true to faith, and faith loves reality, and seeks congruity between itself and its outward forms. The apostle writing to the Hebrews on the triumphs of faith recognises its heroism, *its superiority to conventional forms, its intense energy in asserting itself* (Heb. xi.). There are modern instances of the same holy daring. Symbolism may, like other things, sometimes be the resort of weak minds and superstitious tendencies, yet it may be a legitimate outgrowth of strong faith. The stately sanctuary; the hushed feeling in listening to the word of God; the surrender of fortune to the propagation of the gospel; the adoption of righteous usages against the current of opinion and custom, are only some of the symbols of a faith that longs and dares to indicate its presence. As feelings grow in power when exercised, so faith nourishes itself by fit permanent expressions, especially when in some bold and truthful deed.

Practical considerations:—1. How far the faith of these times is a reality as distinguished from a formal consent to what is commonly believed. 2. Whether the Church of Christ sufficiently lays hold of the fruition of all future toil in the acquired results of present toil. 3 To what extent the individuality of a powerful religious life proves itself by deeds of daring devotion. 4. The distinction to be drawn between a safe or unsafe symbolism in stated forms of worship, and the natural

spontaneous symbolism of an energetic personal faith. 5. The possibility of a masterful faith in degenerate times, rightfully deviating from established practices, and being used by God as preliminary to great reformations.

Vers. 20, 21. — *Solid character.* The facts are—1. Eli forms a favourable estimate of the conduct and character of Elkanah and Hannah. 2. God enriches them with several children. 3. Samuel advances in years and gains in repute. 4. The sons of Eli, becoming more dissolute, are rebuked by their father. Time had gradually brought out to the view of Eli the solid character of Elkanah and his wife. Their regular attendance on worship at the appointed seasons, and their reverent spirit, were in striking contrast with the degenerate habits with which Eli was too familiar. Their quiet, unassuming conduct harmonised with Hannah's early professions of piety, and the child which they had presented to assist Eli in his ministrations had fully answered his expectations. Here, then, we have solid character :—

I. APPRECIATED BY MAN. The opportunities given through a succession of years had enabled Eli to form a favourable estimate of these obscure dwellers on Mount Ephraim. He was the more glad to give them his priestly benediction because of the rash words with which he once (ch. i. 13, 14) wounded a "sorrowful spirit." It is a blessed thing to enjoy the approval of the good. A good name is a precious treasure. There is a sweet reward for years of toil, and possibly under misapprehension and neglect, in being at last fairly appreciated for what one is and has done. Although there are proud ungodly men who will despise the godly poor, yet the conditions of character being appreciated by the better sections of society are within the reach of the most lowly. These conditions are—1. *Constancy in the discharge of religious duties.* Observance year by year of public worship and of all the ordinances of God is a good sign of a religious spirit. Eli was not wrong in supposing that there must be solid worth in a family that kept to the ways of the Lord when so many neglected religious duties. A man cannot claim a reputation by asking for it. The testimony of faithfulness in religious worship is admitted by all. Fluctuations in religious zeal always awaken distrust. Constancy is an element always honoured. 2. *Manifestation of an unostentatious spirit.* This must have impressed Eli very strongly. The quiet, unpretending spirit of the Levite and his wife gained on the venerable man year by year. And so always the quiet, even tenor of life tells an irresistible story. All sensible men shrink from the egotism and ostentation which sometimes assume the garb of religion. The proper thing for all is an earnest, lowly mind, more concerned with quietly doing what is right and pleasing to God than with making an impression on man. Those who think much of what men will say and think, and make corresponding demonstrations of zeal, are sure to fall into the snare of "eye service." Like the steady influence of light and dew, quiet goodness at home and in the Church and world is a real power. There are thousands of such lives in Christian homes. 3. *Self-denial in God's service.* Though Hannah's joy in giving her heart to God took off the edge of self-denial, yet Eli could not but be deeply impressed with the unusual self-sacrifice of both husband and wife. The true religious spirit of a man comes out in spontaneous offerings to the efficiency of the services of the sanctuary and the advancement of Christ's kingdom. Character expressed in free, unconstrained surrender of money, or time, or sons for religious purposes cannot but be appreciated. It is in the power of all to perform some acts of self-denial for God, and apart from such acts, no professions will establish a reputation in the true Church of God. The *intrinsic value of self-denial* lies much in its freeness, its timeliness, its form. The surrender of a Samuel at such a time, in such a spirit, is an example to all ages. Are there no other Hannahs? Is all the "precious ointment" of the Christian Church exhausted?

II. HONOURED BY GOD. God does not save by virtue of human merit, but through Christ; yet he honours fidelity by his special favour and greater blessing. Hannah had been honoured variously; *e. g.* in being heard, in having a son according to promise, in being permitted to consecrate him to the special service of God, in receiving grace to part with him from home if not from heart, and in being enabled to enjoy a blessed vision of One greater and more holy than Samuel. But the fidelity

wherewith she and her husband had, during the period covered, served God in home and in public life, as also by the general tenor of their lives, was crowned with a great increase of domestic joy. The home of Hannah emptied for God became full. The surrendered child was returned in fivefold form. The long, pining years of early life were followed by old age of blessed satisfaction. Thus do all ages show that "there is that scattereth and yet increaseth." "I sent you forth;" "lacked ye anything?" There is a promise of a "hundredfold" for all that has been forsaken for Christ. In one way or another God will prove that he is not unrighteous to forget the work of faith and labour of love. "Them that honour me I will honour."

Practical lessons:—1. Let the lowly be patient in their endeavour to follow out the light they enjoy in worship and in service. 2. Many individuals and families can win for themselves the precious treasure of human and Divine favour, even though the wealth and fame coveted in the world fall not to their lot. 3. The multiplication of quiet, unostentatious religious characters is an end earnestly to be sought, as adding in every sense to the welfare of the world. 4. The severity of our trials in the cause of Christ, if entered into rightly, is sure to be crowned with blessing.

Vers. 22—26.—*Abandoned.* The facts are—1. Eli in advancing years hears of the abominable deeds of his sons. 2. He remonstrates with them, pointing out the consequences of their conduct. 3. Heedless of the warning, they persist in sin, being abandoned by God. The narrative of the sacred historian seems to take in two extremes—two elements working on in moral antagonism till the one passes away and the other becomes ascendant. The abominations and profanations of Eli's sons, and Samuel's purity and entire devotion to God, are placed in striking contrast. The history of the former is sketched as explaining the course of Providence in the deliverance wrought by Samuel's subsequent conduct. The stage in the course of the dissolute priests here indicated brings into view—

I. FEARFUL PROGRESSION IN SIN. The iniquity of years culminates in the most abominable crimes men could commit. The descent to shamelessness and utter corruption becomes very rapid. One can hardly imagine these vile sons of Belial as once having been gentle youths taught to revere Jehovah's name, and to tread his courts with awe. The *momentum* gained by evil desires when once let loose is among the most fearful features of human experience. It is the same sad story as often told now to the hearts of wailing parents:—disobedience, aversion to holy things, formal observances, secret associations of evil, seared conscience, loss of self-respect, profanation of sacred places, contempt for religion, self-abandonment to lust, defiance of God. What tears fall to earth nightly over erring ones! What blasted hopes lie on life's pathway! What cruel triumphs of sin over all that is fair and strong in human nature! Holy Saviour, many of thy followers share in thy tears once shed over sin finished in righteous doom! (James i. 15). When, when shall the mighty power come in answer to the cry of thy Church to turn back the tide of woe, and drive the curse from the heart and home of man? "How long, O Lord, how long?"

II. DEFECTIVE DISCIPLINE. No doubt Eli, as a good man, deplored the vices of the age, and above all the crimes of his sons, and he performed a father's part in remonstrating with them on account of their deeds, warning them of the dangers to which they were exposed at the hand of the invisible Judge. But the day for warning and remonstrance was past, and the day for swift, unsparing punishment had come. As judge in civil capacity, and as high priest in spiritual capacity, the course of Eli was clear—*immediate banishment* from office and *capital punishment* (Lev. xviii. 6, 20, 29; xx. 10; xxi. 6, 7, 17, 23). We see how a *man good in many respects*, may *recognise duty* and *not perform it*. Eli knew that the sin of contempt for the ordinance of sacrifice, utter disregard of the honour due to God, prostitution of the holiest office to the vilest uses, was past condoning, past covering even by sacrifice. For God, as Eli puts it, makes no provision to pardon and save those who wantonly scorn the means of pardon and salvation. No sacrifice! no intercessor! Yet the appointed judge in Israel is content with a bare declaration of truth, refraining from an exercise of the powers wherewith he is invested for the

vindication of justice and the maintenance of order. *Moral weakness* was the sin of Eli. The imperious claims of God, of public welfare, of religious purity, appealed to the sense of duty in vain, because of some personal sentiment or lack of resolution. Cases often arise in national affairs, Church discipline, home life, where duty comes into collision with private sentiments and personal affection. Sometimes, as with Nathan in accusing David, and Ambrose in placing Theodosius under the ban, moral strength is conspicuous. Often, as with Eli, Jonah, and David in one instance, sense of duty yields to inferior impulses. *True moral courage* is a *quality of high order*. It confers great honour on those in whom it appears, and is a most important element in securing the welfare of the individual, the home, and the public. Its presence in *most perfect Christian* form may be ascribed to the combination of various elements. (*a*) A *natural sense of justice*—a psychological condition in which moral perceptions have more prompt influence than transitory emotions. (*b*) A *careful culture of the conscience* through early years, and in relation to the minutiæ of life. (*c*) *Intelligent faith* in the *inviolability* of *moral law*. (*d*) Formation of the *habit of immediate submission* to *moral dictates*, on the general principle that in morals first thoughts are truest. (*e*) *Strength of will* to *endure present suffering*, as not being the worst of evils. (*f*) A nature *brought fully under* the *quickening influence* of *practical Christianity*, as consisting in radical renewal, obedience to the precepts of Christ, fellowship with a holy God, and perpetual aspiration after holiness. There are *instances still* in which failure in moral courage is the *one great blot* on an otherwise excellent life. Where such occur sin flourishes, and the righteous mourn. The severe hand of justice is frequently the hand of true kindness. Favouritism and subordination of righteousness to personal ends, in public and domestic life, cause iniquity to abound, and sooner or later these will be visited by the judgment of God.

III. DIVINE ABANDONMENT. The sons of Eli were given up by God to their deserved doom. They heeded not remonstrance, for they had gone so far into sin as to be left destitute of that gracious influence from God, without which the soul is held fast in the cords of its iniquity. The outward fact of despising the father's warning was evidence to the historian that God had judicially abandoned them. "They hearkened not, *because the Lord would slay them.*" The solemn truth is clear that *men may persist in sin* so utterly as to be *given up by God* without mercy to *all its consequences*. 1. The *evidence* of this is full. (*a*) Men are sometimes *smitten with death* as a consequence of persistent sin, as in case of Sodom, and the rebellion of Korah, all means of repentance being judicially cut off. (*b*) The New Testament references to the sin against the Holy Ghost, and the apostasy of counting the blood of Christ an "unclean thing." (*c*) The fact that at the end of life the impenitent are given over to look for "tribulation and anguish." 2. The *rationale of this is partly discoverable*. It is not mere arbitrariness, nor is it the effect of imperfect benevolence. (*a*) It is consonant with the *working of natural law*. Physiology and psychology prove that there is a tendency to permanence of character in all. This is especially true of those who persist in strong unhallowed desires. (*b*) There are *transgressions even in society* which admit of *no restoration* to society. (*c*) In a wise and endlessly *ramified moral government* which rests on an eternal right, there can be no proof that a moral Ruler, whose existence is bound up with right and order, is *obliged to cover the past* of free beings who *have deliberately persisted in evil*, by giving them a new power which shall make them different from what they prefer to be. (*d*) The *judicial abandonment* of the intensely sinful acts as a *wholesome deterrent* on the moral universe, by vindicating the holiness of God, and the claim of universal society on the pure, loving life of each of its constituents, and this too while giving to free beings only what they prefer.

Practical lessons:—1. The importance of *guarding against first tendencies* to deviate from the path of purity and truth. 2. The value of early *habits* of devotion, regard for right and purity, as a *preventive* of *habits* of a reverse character. 3. The extreme danger to the Church of a *professional religion* in alliance with a tendency to *sensual indulgence*, and the need of watching closely against such a possible combination. 4. The value of an early *training of the moral sense*, and its constant culture, as against the *inferior elements* of our life. 5. The use of the lessons of

history, as illustrating the terrible power of sin, and the damage done to society and the Church by defective discipline.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 11. (SHILOH.)—*Samuel's childhood and growth.* "And the child did minister unto the Lord before Eli the priest." "And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord, and also with men" (ver. 26). (Ch. i. 24; ii. 18, 19, 21; iii. 1.) "Great is the reverence due to children." It is said of an eccentric schoolmaster in Germany, who lived about 300 years ago, John Trebonius, that he never appeared before his boys without taking off his hat and bowing very humbly before them. "Who can tell," said he, "what may not rise up amid these youths? There may be among them those who shall be learned doctors, sage legislators, nay, princes of the empire." Even then there was among them "the solitary monk that shook the world." But a much greater than Luther (with whom he has been compared—*Ewald*) was the little Nazarite, who with unshorn locks ministered in the tabernacle at Shiloh; and at a very early age he gave signs of his future eminence. "Even a child is known by his doings" (Prov. xx. 11). "The child is father to the man." But what he will be depends greatly on his early training; for "the new vessel takes a lasting tincture from the liquor which is first poured in" (Horace); "the soft clay is easily fashioned into what form you please" (Persius); and "the young plant may be bent with a gentle hand, and the characters engraved on the tender bark grow deeper with the advancing tree" (Quinctilian). Consider—

I. HIS EDUCATION, or the influences to which he was subject, consisting of—1. *Impressions under the parental roof.* He did not leave his home at an age too early to prevent his receiving deep and permanent impressions from the example, prayers, and instructions of his parents. His destination would be explained to him by his mother, and made attractive and desirable; so that when the time came for the fulfilment of her vow he might readily make it his own. The memory of those early days must have been always pleasant to him; and the sacred bond of filial affection would be renewed and strengthened by the annual visit of his parents, and by the yearly present which his mother brought to him (ver. 19). The making of the "little coat" was a work of love, and served to keep her absent boy in mind, whilst the possession of it was to him a constant memorial of her pure affection. The first impressions which he thus received were a powerful means of preserving him from evil, and inciting him to good. "Every first thing continues for ever with the child; the first colour, the first music, the first flower paint the foreground of life; every new educator affects less than its predecessor, until at last, if we regard all life as an educational institution, the circumnavigator of the world is less influenced by all nations he has seen than by his nurse" (Locke). 2. *Association with holy things.* Everything in the tabernacle was to his childish view beautiful and impressive, and overshadowed by the mysterious presence of the Lord of hosts. "Heaven lies about us in our infancy." And the veil which separates the invisible from the visible is then very attenuated. When he afterwards saw how much beneath the outward form was hollow and corrupt, he was strong enough to endure the shock, and distinguished between "the precious and the vile." Association with sacred things either makes men better than others, or else very much worse. 3. *Occupation in lowly services.* Even when very young he could perform many little services in such a place as the tabernacle, and in personal attendance on Eli, who was very old and partially blind. A part of his occupation we know was to open the doors (ch. iii. 15). By means of such things he was trained for a higher ministry. 4. *Instruction in sacred truth,* given by his kind-hearted guardian in explanation of the various objects and services in the tabernacle, and, still more, gained by the perusal of the religious records stored up therein (ch. x. 25). 5. *Familiarity with public life.* "There at the centre of government, he must early have become conversant with the weightiest concerns of the people." 6. *Observation of the odious practices of many,* especially Hophni and Phinehas. For this also must be mentioned among the influences that went to form his character. It is

impossible to keep a child altogether from the sight of vice. External safeguards are no protection without internal purity. On the other hand, outward circumstances which are naturally perilous have often no effect on internal purity, except to make it more decided and robust. "The jarring contrast which he had before his eyes in the evil example of Eli's children could but force more strongly upon his mind the conviction of the great necessity of the age, and impel to still more unflinching rigour to act up to this conviction" (Ewald). But this could only take place by—7. *The power of Divine grace*, which is the greatest and only effectual teacher (Titus ii. 11, 12). The atmosphere of prayer which he breathed from earliest life was the atmosphere of grace. The Holy Spirit rested upon him in an eminent degree, and he grew up under his influence, "like a tree planted by the rivers of water," gradually and surely to perfection.

II. HIS CHARACTER, or the dispositions which he developed under these influences. He "grew on" not only physically and intellectually, but also morally and spiritually, manifesting the dispositions which properly belong to a child, and make him a pattern to men (Matt. xviii. 3). 1. *Humble submission.* 2. *Great docility*, or readiness to learn what he was taught. 3. *Ready obedience* to what he was told to do. How promptly did he respond to the voice of Eli, who, as he thought, called him from his slumber (ch. iii. 5). The watchword of childhood and youth should be "Obey." And it is only those that learn to obey who will be fit to command. 4. *Profound reverence.* For "he ministered before the Lord," as if under his eye, and with a growing sense of his presence. "He was to receive his training at the sanctuary, that at the very earliest waking up of his spiritual susceptibilities he might receive the impression of the sacred presence of God" (Keil). 5. *Transparent truthfulness* and guilelessness. 6. *Purity* and self-control (1 Tim. iv. 12; 2 Tim. ii. 22). 7. *Sincere devotion* to the purpose of his dedication to the Lord. In this manner he gradually grew into the possession of a holy character, and needed not, like many others, any sudden or conscious "conversion" from the ways of sin to the ways of God. Like John the Baptist, "he grew and waxed strong in spirit" (Luke i. 80); and his childhood is described in the very words employed to describe the childhood of our Lord: "And Jesus increased in favour with God and man" (Luke ii. 40, 51, 52).

III. HIS ACCEPTANCE, or the favour he obtained (Prov. iii. 4). 1. *With God*, who looked down upon him with delight, beholding in him the effect of his grace, and a reflection of his light and love. For "the Lord taketh pleasure in his people" (Ps. cxlix. 4). 2. *With men.* The gratification which Eli felt in his presence and service appears in the benediction he uttered on his parents when they visited the tabernacle, and in accordance with which they were compensated with three sons and two daughters for "the gift which they gave unto the Lord" (ch. ii. 20, 21). Even Hophni and Phinehas must have regarded the young Nazarite with respect. And the people who brought their offerings to the tabernacle looked upon him with admiration and hope. So he was prepared for the work that lay before him.—D.

Vers. 12—17. (SHILOH.)—*A degenerate priesthood.* "The best things when corrupted become the worst." It is thus with official positions such as were held by the priests of old. Their positions were an hereditary right, and their duties consisted largely of a prescribed routine of services. It was required, however, that their personal character should accord with their sacred work (Mal. ii. 7); and their influence was great for good or evil. Whilst they reflected in their character and conduct the moral condition of the times, they also contributed in no small degree to produce it. The sons of Eli employed their high office not for the welfare of men and the glory of God, but for their own selfish and corrupt purposes, and afford an example of "great and instructive wickedness." Concerning them the following things are recorded:—

I. CULPABLE IGNORANCE OF GOD (ver. 12). They had no proper conception of him as holy and just, and they did not consider that he observed and hated sin by whomsoever it was committed, and would surely punish it. They had no communion with him, no sympathy with his purposes, and no sense of their own obliga-

tions to him. They were unspiritual men, and practically infidel. And they were such notwithstanding the instructions they received, the opportunities they possessed, and the services they rendered. Although the servants of God, "they knew not God," and were "without excuse." Amidst a blaze of light men may be dark within. "And if the light within thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"

II. OFFICIAL ROBBERY OF MEN (vers. 13, 14). Not satisfied with the liberal portions of the peace offerings which were legally assigned to them (the breast and shoulder), they claimed other and larger portions, to which they were not entitled, and robbed the people for the gratification of their own appetites. What they would have fiercely denounced in others they deemed venial offences in privileged men like themselves. How often do official positions and selfish indulgences blind men to the injustice of their conduct, and harden them in iniquity.

III. WILFUL VIOLATION OF THE LAW (ver. 15). It was required by the Levitical law that the fat should be burnt on the altar before the offering was divided between the priest and the offerer; but instead of doing this, the priest sent his servant beforehand to demand his portion with the fat, that it might be better fitted for roasting than boiling, which was not to his taste. He thus appropriated to his private use what belonged to the Lord, and "robbed God" of his due. It was a gross act of disobedience, sacrilege, and profanity, prompted by the same pampered appetite as his dishonesty toward men; and, in addition, it hindered the people from fulfilling their religious purposes, and made his own servant a partner in his sin.

IV. DESPOTIC EXERCISE OF AUTHORITY (ver. 16). When the people gently remonstrated, and promised to give up their own portion if the fat were first burnt on the altar, it was said to them, "Nay, but thou shalt give it me now, or else I will come and take it by force." Reason as well as right was overridden. Instead of regarding himself as a servant of God for the good of men, the priest made himself a "lord over God's heritage" (1 Pet. v. 3). Having cast aside the authority of God, he made his own arbitrary dictum the law of others, and urged obedience to it by the threatening of force. By the same means, backed by spiritual terrors, he has often sought to accomplish his wishes in every age.

V. INJURIOUS INFLUENCE ON RELIGION (vers. 17, 24). Men abstained from presenting as many offerings as they would have given, or even from presenting them at all, being repelled from the service of God by the evil conduct of his ministers. "Ye make the Lord's people to transgress" (ver. 24). One unworthy priest has often made many unbelievers. Instead of strengthening what is noblest and best in men, he has destroyed it, and made its restoration impossible. And, generally, ungodly conduct on the part of professed servants of God is a great hindrance to the spread of truth and righteousness, and a powerful influence in extending error and evil in the world. "One sinner destroyeth much good." To complete the picture, two other things must be added, viz.—

VI. SHAMELESS INDULGENCE IN VICE (ver. 22). They knew nothing of self-control, gave the rein to their lusts, and indulged in vices which the heathen commonly associated with their idol worship, and which made that worship so terrible a temptation to Israel. The idol feasts at Shiloh were doubtless scenes of gross sensuality; and the sons of Eli scarcely cared to disguise their participation in similar indulgences, and made the tabernacle of the Lord like a heathen temple.

VII. SUPERSTITIOUS USE OF SACRED THINGS (ch. iv. 11). Having become insensible to the presence of the invisible King, they treated his services as a mere outward ritual, which may be performed without any felt inconsistency between it and any amount of immorality. Why should they observe it at all? From self-interest and from superstition. They still supposed that there was some mysterious benefit inseparably connected with the ark, and enjoyed by those who possessed it, apart from their moral and spiritual state. Their religion had become a superstition, like that of the heathen. And hence they took the ark into the battle-field, in sure confidence of their safety, and were deprived of it by the heathen, and they themselves destroyed. 1. It is possible for men to possess the highest privileges, and yet sink into the deepest degradation. 2. The patience of Heaven toward sinners is wonderful, and designed to lead them to repentance. 3. When men despise the goodness of God, and persist in transgression, they are certain to meet with signal punishment.—D

Vers. 22—25. (SHILOH.)—*Ineffective reproof.* A man may possess many amiable qualities, and be, on the whole, a good man, and yet be marked by some defect which mars his character, prevents his usefulness, and makes him the unintentional cause of much mischief. Such a man was Eli. Of his early life nothing is recorded. He was a descendant of Ithamar, the youngest son of Aaron, and held the office of high priest, which formerly belonged to the elder branch of the Aaronic family, that of Eleazar (Num. xx. 26), but which was now transferred to the younger, from some unknown cause, and which continued therein until the time of Solomon. At the age of fifty-eight he became judge, and "judged Israel forty years" (ch. iv. 18). When first mentioned he must have been at least seventy years old. His sons were children of his old age; for some time afterwards they were spoken of as young men (ch. ii. 17), and, as is not uncommon in such cases, he treated them with undue indulgence. He was hasty and severe in reproving Hannah, but slow and mild in reproving them. The inefficiency of his REPROOF appears in that—

I. IT WAS NOT ADMINISTERED IN PROPER TIME. The tendency to go wrong generally appears at an early age; and it must have been seen by him in his sons long before the rumour of their flagrant transgressions reached him, if he had not been blind to their faults. But he had no adequate sense of his parental responsibility, was old and weak, of a gentle and easy-going temperament, and omitted to reprove them (1 Kings i. 6) until they had become too strongly devoted to their evil ways to be amenable to expostulation. A little plant may be easily rooted up, but when it has grown into a tree it can only be removed by extraordinary efforts. If some children are "discouraged" (Col. iii. 21) by too much strictness, far more are spoiled by too much indulgence. "Indulgence never produces gratitude or love in the heart of a child."

II. IT WAS NOT GIVEN WITH SUFFICIENT EARNESTNESS (vers. 23, 24). Gentle reproof may sometimes be most effective, but here it was out of place. 1. It was not *sufficiently pointed* in its application; being given to them *collectively* rather than individually, in *indefinite* terms, by way of *question*, and concerning things which he had *heard*, but into the certainty of which he had not troubled himself to inquire. 2. It exhibited no sufficient sense of the *evil of sin* (ver. 25). He spoke of the consequences rather than of the nature, the "exceeding sinfulness" of sin, and spoke of them in a way which indicated little deep personal conviction. 3. It showed *no sufficient determination* to correct it. He did not say that he would judge them for their injustice toward men; and with reference to their sin against the Lord, which was their chief offence, he simply confessed that he could do nothing but leave them to the judgment of a higher tribunal. "In the case where the rebuke should have descended like a bolt from heaven we hear nothing but low and feeble murmurings, coming, as it were, out of the dust. Cruel indeed are the tenderest mercies of parental weakness and indulgence. And the fate of Eli shows that by such tender mercies the father may become the minister of vengeance unto his whole house" (Le Bas).

III. IT WAS NOT FOLLOWED BY ADEQUATE CHASTISEMENT. The law of Moses in the case of disobedient children was very severe (Deut. xxi. 18—21). But Eli neither observed this law "when they hearkened not to his voice" (ver. 25), nor took any further steps to prevent the continuance of the evil which he reproved. He had none of the zeal for which Phinehas the son of Eleazar was approved (Num. xxv. 11—13); but as a father, a high priest, and a judge he was guilty of culpable infirmity and wilful disobedience (ch. iii. 13). "Osiers," says an old writer, "can never be pillars in the State or in the Church."

IV. IT DID NOT RESULT IN ANY IMPROVEMENT (ver. 25). Their contempt of reproof showed that they were already infatuated, hardened, and abandoned to destruction; or (reading for = therefore), it filled up the measure of their iniquities, and exposed them to inevitable judgment. "He that hateth reproof shall die" (Prov. xv. 10). 1. Reproof is often a solemn obligation. 2. It should be given in an effective manner. 3. When not so given it does more harm than good. 4. When justly given it should be humbly and obediently received.—D.

EXPOSITION.

THE DIVINE JUDGMENT UPON ELI AND HIS HOUSE (vers. 27—36). Ver. 27.—**There came a man of God.** The title *man of God* is the usual appellation of a prophet in the books of Judges, Samuel, and Kings, and as such is applied by Manoah to the angel who appeared to him (Judges xiii. 6, 8). Though the recorded interpositions of the Deity in those times were generally by angels, still the readiness with which Manoah gave his visitant this title makes it probable that prophets did appear from time to time; and the mission of one, though, as here, without a name, is recorded in Judges vi. 8. As regards the date of this visitation of the man of God, we find that Eli was ninety-eight years of age when the ark was captured (ch. iv. 15). At that time Samuel was not merely a man, but one whose reputation was established throughout the whole land, and who was probably regarded not merely as a prophet, but as Eli's successor in the office of judge (ch. iii. 19, 20). But Eli was "very old" (ch. ii. 22) when he rebuked his sons, probably between seventy and eighty, for Samuel is then called a child (ver. 26); whereas he can scarcely have been much less than thirty years of age when the Philistines destroyed Shiloh. In ch. viii. 1—3, when the misconduct of Samuel's own sons led to the revival of the agitation for a king, he is himself described as already "old;" but as he lived on till nearly the end of Saul's reign, he could not at that time have been much more than sixty. Even when God spake by him to Eli he is still described as a boy, *na'ar* (ch. iii. 1), though the higher position to which he had attained, as is proved by his duties, would lead to the conclusion that he was then verging on manhood. As some time would naturally elapse between two such solemn warnings, we may feel sure that the visit of the man of God occurred shortly after Samuel's dedication. Then, as Eli neglected the warning, and the wickedness of his sons grew more inveterate, some eight or ten years afterwards the warning was repeated in sharper tones by the voice of his own youthful attendant. Meanwhile Eli seems himself to have grown in personal piety, but he could do nothing now for his sons. Past eighty years of age, the time of activity had gone by, and resignation was the sole virtue that was left for him to practise. And so the warning given by the mouth of Samuel is stern and final. Ten or fifteen more years must elapse before the ruin came. But the gloom was deepening; the Philistines were increasing in power, and the valour of Israel was decaying as its morality declined; then there was a short violent crash, and the house of Eli met its doom.

The prophet begins by enumerating Jehovah's mercies to "the house of thy father," that is, the whole family of Aaron, in selecting them for the priesthood (on the choice of the house of Aaron, see Exod. xxviii., xxix.), and in richly endowing the office with so large a portion of every sacrifice. These portions are termed literally *firings*, or fire-sacrifices, but the term soon became general, and in Lev. xxiv. 7, 9 is applied even to the shew-bread. Added then to the tithes, and to the cities with their suburbs given them to inhabit, this share of every sacrifice gave the house of Aaron great wealth, and with it they had also high rank. There was no one above them in Israel except the kings. In Sparta we find that one of the endowments of the kings was the skins of animals offered in sacrifice (Herod., vi. 56). Why then do Eli and his sons, who benefit so greatly by them, "kick at Jehovah's sacrifices and offerings?" The word is taken from Deut. xxxii. 15, and refers to the efforts of a pampered steer violently to shake off the yoke. Eli's sons treat the ordinances which have raised them to rank, and given them wealth and power, as if they were an injury and wrong. And Eli, instead of removing them from the office which they disgraced, preferred the ties of relationship to his duty to God and the moral welfare of the people.

Ver. 30.—**I said indeed.** By thus acting Eli became an accomplice in the irreligion of his sons, and God therefore revokes his grant of a perpetual priesthood. The promise had been made to Aaron's family as a whole (Exod. xxix. 9), and had then been renewed to the house of Eleazar (Num. xxv. 13). But the house of Ithamar was now in the ascendant, probably owing to Eli's own ability, who during the anarchical times of the Judges had won for himself, first, the civil power, and then, upon some fitting opportunity, the high priesthood also, though I suppose the heads of the houses of Eleazar and Ithamar were always persons of great importance, and high priests in a certain sense. Eli had now the priority, and had he and his family proved worthy, the possession of this high station might have been confirmed to them. Like Saul in the kingdom, they proved unworthy of it, and so they lost it for ever. Their names, as we have seen above, do not even occur in the genealogies.

I said . . . . but now Jehovah saith. Can then a promise of God be withdrawn?

Yes, assuredly. Not from mankind as a whole, nor from the Church as a whole, but from each particular nation, or Church, or individual. To each separate person God's promises are conditional, and human action everywhere is a co-worker with the Divine volition, though only within a limited sphere, and so as that the Divine purposes must finally be accomplished. Eli then and his sons may suffer forfeit of the promise by not fulfilling the obligations which, whether expressed or implied, are an essential condition of every promise made by God to man. But the high priesthood will continue, and will perform its allotted task of preparing for the priesthood of Christ. "Them that honour me I will honour," states one of these conditions essential on man's part to secure the fulfilment of God's promises.

Ver. 31. —**I will cut off thine arm.** The *arm* is the usual metaphor for strength. As Eli had preferred the exaltation of his sons to God's honour, he is condemned to see the strength of his house broken. Nay, more; there is not to be an "old man in his house." The young men full of energy and vigour perish by the sword; the survivors fade away by disease. The Jews say that the house of Ithamar was peculiarly short-lived, but the prophecy was amply fulfilled in the slaughter of Eli's house, first at Shiloh, and then at Nob by Doeg the Edomite at the command of Saul. There is nothing to warrant an abiding curse upon his family. The third or fourth generation is the limit of the visitation of the sins of the fathers upon the children.

Ver. 32. — **Thou shalt see an enemy.** The translation of ver. 32 is very difficult, but is probably as follows: "And thou shalt behold, *i. e.* see with wonder and astonishment, narrowness of habitation in all the wealth which shall be given unto Israel." The word translated *narrowness* often means an "enemy," but as that for *habitation* is the most general term in the Heb. language for a dwelling, being used even of the dens of wild beasts (Jer. ix. 10; Nahum ii. 12), the rendering an "enemy of dwelling" gives no sense. Hence the violent insertion of the pronoun *my*, for which no valid excuse can be given. But *narrowness of dwelling* means distress, especially in a man's domestic relations, and this is the sense required. In the growing public and national prosperity which was to be Israel's lot under Samuel, Saul, David, and Solomon, Eli was to see, not in person, but prophetically, calamity attaching itself to his own family. His house was to decay in the midst of the progress of all the rest. Upon this denunciation of private distress naturally follows the repetition of the threat that the house of Ithamar should be left without an old man to guide its course onward to renewed prosperity.

Ver. 33.—**The man of thine,** &c. The meaning of the Heb. is here again changed by the insertion of words not in the original. Translated literally the sense is good, but merciful, and this the A. V. has so rendered as to make it the most bitter of all denunciations. The Heb. is, "Yet I will not cut off every one of thine from my altar, to consume thine eyes and to grieve thy soul;" that is, thy punishment shall not be so utter as to leave thee with no consolation; for thy descendants, though diminished in numbers, and deprived of the highest rank, shall still minister as priests at mine altar. "But the majority of thy house—lit. the multitude of thy house—shall die as men." This is very well rendered in the A. V. "in the flower of their age," only we must not explain this of dying of disease. They were to die in their vigour, not, like children and old men, in their beds, but by violent deaths, such as actually befell them at Shiloh and at Nob.

Ver. 34.—With this the sign here given exactly agrees. Hophni and Phinehas died fighting valiantly in battle, and then came the sacking of Shiloh, and the slaughter of the ministering priests (Ps. lxxviii. 64). Upon this followed a long delay. For first Eli's grandson, Ahitub, the son of Phinehas, was high priest, and then his two sons, Ahiah and Ahimelech, and then Abiathar, the son of Ahimelech. It was in Ahimelech's days that the slaughter took place at Nob, from which the house of Ithamar seems never to have fully recovered.

Ver. 35. —**I will raise me up a faithful priest.** This prophecy is explained in three several ways, of Samuel, of Zadok, and of Christ. St. Augustine, who considers the whole passage at length in his 'De Civ. Dei,' xvii. 5, argues that it cannot be reasonably said that a change in the priesthood foretold with so great circumstance was fulfilled in Samuel. But while we grant that it was an essential characteristic of Jewish prophecy to be ever larger than the immediate fulfilment, yet its primary meaning must never be slurred over, as if it were a question of slight importance. By the largeness of its terms, the grandeur of the hopes it inspired, and the incompleteness of their immediate accomplishment, the Jews were taught to look ever onward, and so became a Messianic people. Granting then that Christ and his Church are the object and end of this and of all prophecy, the question narrows itself to this—In whom was this prediction of a faithful priest primarily fulfilled? We answer, Not in Zadok, but in Samuel. Zadok was a commonplace personage, of whom little or nothing is said after the time that he joined David with

a powerful contingent (1 Chron. xii. 28). Samuel is the one person in Jewish history who approaches the high rank of Moses, Israel's founder (Jer. xv. 1). The argument that he was a Levite, and not a priest, takes too narrow and technical a view of the matter; for the essence of the priesthood lies not in the offering of sacrifice, but in mediation. Sacrifice is but an accident, being the appointed method by which the priest was to mediate between God and man. As a matter of fact, Samuel often did discharge priestly functions (1 Sam. vii. 9, 17; xiii. 8, where we find Saul reproved for invading Samuel's office; xvi. 2), and it is a point to be kept in mind that the regular priests disappear from Jewish history for about fifty years after the slaughter of themselves, their wives, and families at Shiloh; for it is not until Saul's time that Ahiah, the great-grandson of Eli, appears, as once again ministering at the altar (1 Sam. xiv. 3). The calamity that overtook the nation at the end of Eli's reign was so terrible that all ordinary ministrations seem to have been in abeyance. We are even expressly told that after the recovery of the ark it was placed in the house of Abinadab at Kirjath-jearim in Judæa, and that for twenty years his son Eleazar, though a Levite only, ministered there before it by no regular consecration, but by the appointment of the men of that town. During this time, though Ahitub, Ahiah's father, was probably high priest nominally, yet nothing is said of him, and all the higher functions of the office were exercised by Samuel. Instead of the Urim and Thummim, he as prophet was the direct representative of the theocratic king. Subsequently this great duty was once again discharged by Abiathar as priest, and then a mighty change was made, and the prophets with the living voice of inspiration took the place of the priest with the ephod. For this is a far more important matter than even the fact that Samuel performed the higher functions of the priesthood. With him a new order of things began. Prophecy, from being spasmodic and irregular, became an established institution, and took its place side by side with the priesthood in preparing for Christ's advent, and in forming the Jewish nation to be the evangelisers of the world. The prediction of this organic change followed the rule of all prophecy in taking its verbal form and expression from what was then existent. Just as the gospel dispensation is always described under figures taken from the Jewish Church and commonwealth, so Samuel, as the founder of the prophetic schools, and of the new order of things which resulted from them, is described to Eli under terms taken from his priestly office. He was a "faithful priest," and much more, just as our Lord was a "prophet like unto Moses" (Deut. xviii. 15), and a "King set upon the holy hill of Zion" (Ps. ii. 6), but in a far higher sense than any would have supposed at the time when these prophecies were spoken.

As regards the specific terms of the prophecy, "the building of a sure house" (1 Sam. xxv. 28; 2 Sam. vii. 11; 1 Kings ii. 24, xi. 38; Isa. xxxii. 18) is a metaphor expressive of assured prosperity. The mass of the Israelites dwelt in tents (2 Sam. xi. 11; xx. 1, &c.; 1 Kings xii. 16), and to have a fixed and permanent dwelling was a mark of greatness. From such passages as 1 Kings ii. 24; xi. 38, it is plain that the idea of founding a family is not contained in the expression. As a matter of fact, Samuel's family was prosperous, and his grandson Heman had high rank in David's court and numerous issue (1 Chron. xxv. 5). Probably too the men of Ramah, who with the men of the Levite town of Gaba made up a total of 621 persons (Neh. vii. 30), represented the descendants of Samuel at the return from Babylon. Nevertheless, the contrast is between the migratory life in tents and the ease and security of a solid and firm abode, and the terms of the promise are abundantly fulfilled in Samuel's personal greatness.

In the promise, "he shall walk before mine anointed for ever," there is the same outlook upon the office of king, as if already in existence, which we observed in Hannah's hymn (ch. ii. 10). Apparently the expectation that Jehovah was about to anoint, *i. e.* consecrate, for them some one to represent him in civil matters and war, as the high priest represented him in things spiritual, had taken possession of the minds of the people. It had been clearly promised them, and regulations for the office made (Deut. xvii. 14—20); and it was to be Samuel's office to fulfil this wish, and all his life through he held a post of high dignity in the kingdom.

But the promise has also a definite meaning as regards the prophets, in whom Samuel lived on. For St. Augustine's error was in taking Samuel simply in his personal relations, whereas he is the representative of the whole prophetic order (Acts iii. 24). They were his successors in his work, and continued to be the recognised mediators to declare to king and people the will of Jehovah, who was the supreme authority in both Church and state; and in political matters they were the appointed check upon the otherwise absolute power of the kings, with whose appointment their own formal organisation exactly coincided. From Samuel's time prophet and king walked together till the waiting period began which immediately preceded the nativity of Christ.

Ver. 36.—**Piece of silver** is lit. a small silver coin got by begging, and the word marks the extreme penury into which the race of Eli fell. Gathered round the sanctuary at Shiloh, they were the chief sufferers by its ruin, and we have noticed how for a time they fall entirely out of view. During the miserable period of Philistine domination which followed, Samuel became to the oppressed nation a centre of hope, and by his wise government he first reformed the people internally, and then gave them freedom from foreign rule. During this period we may be sure that he did much to raise from their misery the descendants of Eli, and finally Ahiah, Eli's grandson, ministers as high priest before Saul. Though his grandson, Abiathar, was deposed from the office by Solomon, there is no reason for imagining that the family ever again fell into distress, nor do the terms of the prophecy warrant such a supposition.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 27—36.—*Impending retribution.* The facts in this section are—1. A Divine message declares to Eli the coming doom of his house. 2. The justice of the judgment is brought home to him by a reference to past privileges enjoyed and sins committed. 3. A painful sign of the certainty of the whole prediction being ultimately fulfilled is given in a reference to the sudden death of his two sons, in due time to be realised. 4. Another faithful servant of God is to be raised up to vindicate the honour which has been despised. The patience of God in allowing men free scope to develope what is in them has its limits. Eli and his sons, though differing in kind and degree of sin, alike are amenable to a law which must be maintained. Although the sons were in the ordinary sense the most guilty, it is significant that the weight of the doom here indicated is intended to fall on the aged parent, thus showing to all ages the solemn responsibility attached to *public* conduct, and the certainty of terrible chastisement of official transgressors, even though they be not cut off from the covenant mercies that cover sin and save the soul.

I. DUTY NEGLECTED AND TROUBLE EVADED ARE SURE TO REASSERT THEMSELVES. Eli got rid of the pressing duty of punishing his sons by substituting a paternal remonstrance, and thus for the time evaded the pain of suppressing the urgency of personal affection and the distress of a family exposure. But "duty" never dies; and the trouble it entails, always passing away when duty is done, continues in aggravated form when duty is neglected. No safer rule in life than to *do* duty when it is due. The demands of justice will be asserted sooner or later, and they gather in force the more they are shunned. The whole visible and invisible forces of nature, the undeveloped resources that lie in the womb of the future, are on the side of *right*, and will converge some day on its maintenance. The first trouble in the path of duty is the least. Embarrassments are born of procrastination; for the rule applicable to imperfect knowledge in the midst of difficult circumstances does not apply to the clear decisions of conscience. No time should ever be lost in vindicating the honour of God, the purity of the sanctuary, and the claims of national righteousness. If *we* do not execute God's will because of the personal inconvenience and pain it may cause, *he will* execute it by other means, and nameless griefs shall follow us. History shows how true this is in national, Church, domestic, and private life.

II. Clear INDICATIONS OF COMING RETRIBUTION are sometimes given, and THEY BECOME in their immediate effects PART OF THE RETRIBUTION. Many are the "servants" of God that come visibly or invisibly to the disobedient with intimations of what is in store for them. The "man of God" who came to Eli is representative of the forms of the Divine voice which comes to the guilty to disturb the ease they had hoped for in neglecting onerous duties. To the fraudulent, the sensual, the unrighteous ruler, the unfaithful parent and pastor, conscience, leading events, and converging circumstances tell the sad tale of coming woe. The lines of justice are straight, and the wicked are compelled to look along them far ahead. *Two important elements* enter into the forebodings of coming retribution. 1. *A revived power of conscience.* The privileges and favours conferred on the house of Eli are brought home to the dormant conscience in contrast with his personal and official conduct. So likewise, by the interaction of the laws of thought, or by converging of painful

events, or by some strong passage of Scripture, or by a faithful friend, or by the silent, reflected light of some holy Christian life, the privileges and favours of bygone years are flashed before the spirit, to the sudden terror and quickened action of conscience. Past mercies cannot be thought of in isolation; by a well-known mental law they raise up the ghosts of former sins committed in the face of mercies. As the aged Eli saw the truth of the words of the "man of God," so do others see their former selves, and feel their inward condemnation. 2. *A conviction of the fixed character of coming events.* "Behold, the days COME." The guilty man sees the dismal train of events, and knows, on highest authority, that the decree is fixed. To the prophetic eye the future is as the present; events that are to be are recorded on the spirit as done, with all their natural effects realised by the discerning mind. Nature, with her usual quiet certainty, was at work elaborating events out of the sins perpetrated by father and sons; and therefore to the Hebrew mind that recognises nature only as the dumb instrument of the Eternal, the coming disasters are recognised properly as the fixed elements of the deserved retribution. There is the *same conviction* in others who have sinned. The human mind, in spite of its sins, answers to the course of nature. It mirrors in its conviction of certain punishment the regularity and fixity with which the laws of nature are at work. In the instance of many a man, powers have been set at work by his sins in virtue of the operation of which family reputation will fade and perish; premature decay will fall to the lot of descendants; sorrow and trouble will cast shadows over their pathway; and life generally will be marred. Yes; and he *knows it now.* The committal of sin is as the unloosing of forces of ill which enter of necessity into all the ramifications of subsequent life. The sorrow and pain consequent on this certain knowledge is no slight element in the retribution experienced.

III. RETRIBUTION AFFECTS THE LIVING THROUGH THE UNBORN, AND THE UNBORN THROUGH THE LIVING. Sin injures and degrades the sinner, but does not end in himself. Every being is related to every other being. Interactions are as real and constant in the moral sphere as in the sphere of physics. An act of sin is an act of will, and therefore the production of a wave of influence which moves on and modifies the totality of life. Wisely and beautifully, then, does the Bible teach truth in harmony with the usual order of things when it represents Eli's sin as cutting off the arm (strength) of his father's house, shortening the days of his children, lowering their position in the world, and causing them to hear the sorrow of seeing a culmination of their ancestor's sin in the "presence of an enemy" to mar the wealth of blessing properly enjoyed by Israel. 1. *A general law* is exemplified in Eli's punishment. The Bible teaches that the sins of the fathers bring woe on children. The course of nature establishes the fact. No man can give out from himself any influence above what his real constitution and character are fitted to produce. A defective moral courage works detrimentally on descendants by example as truly as do imperfect manners. Social laws insure that a lost reputation modifies the relative position of offspring. The degenerate habits of a Hophni and a Phinehas cannot but lessen the years and enfeeble the moral and physical vigour of several generations. God's laws are uniform in all ages and climes. The experience of Eli's family is repeated in the home of the drunkard, the sensual, the educationally neglected, the morally weak, and in the effects of wicked statesmanship. But the law has *two aspects.* The living affect the unborn, but also the known future condition of the unborn affects the condition of the living. Wisely men are constituted so as to be deeply affected by what may happen to their future reputation and their descendants. That the good fame of his house should perish; that his descendants should be reduced in social position, and variously injured in consequence of the guilt of himself and sons, was a bitter element in Eli's punishment. Nor is this a rare case, for as a rule men are more influenced by what comes to their children than by what personal pain they themselves suffer. In his descendants man sees himself repeated in multiplied form. 2. *The general law is subject to limitations.* The evil that comes to posterity through sin of ancestors does not shut out from the mercy that saves the soul. Disgrace, loss of health, early death, poverty may be part of the curse of a father's sin; but through the mercy of God in Christ these sufferers may find renewal of spirit, pardon, and eternal life. "By

one man's disobedience" we all have suffered physically and spiritually; but by one Redeemer we may find power to become the true children of God. It is true Eli's descendants, if renewed, would not become so good and physically perfect men as though the ancestors had not sinned; and we on earth, though saved in Christ, cannot be so physically perfect as though the curse had never fallen on us; yet the spirit will at length be set free from the bondage of corruption, and be perfect before God. 3. *This law is a great and beneficent power in life.* Those who rail against these Biblical announcements of retribution, because they affect descendants, are profoundly ignorant or perverse. The Bible tells only what is in nature, with the additional information that God vindicates his holiness by what occurs in nature. Any objection to the Biblical doctrine is therefore, this fact being admitted, the result of a perverse spirit. Human experience testifies how beneficially the law of retribution works in ordinary affairs. No arithmetic can calculate the amount of woe escaped by the restraining action of a knowledge of this law on human tendencies. On the other hand, the reverse side of the law—the reward of goodness in the happiness of a posterity—is one of the most healthful stimulants and guides of human exertion. It is only the morally-indisposed that do not like law. Did we but know the whole intricate relationships of a moral universe stretching through all time, even the severest laws would then be seen to be an expression of broadest benevolence.

IV. RETRIBUTION ON THE INSTRUMENTS OF ACCOMPLISHING AN ULTIMATE PURPOSE IS COMPATIBLE WITH THE REALISATION OF THAT PURPOSE. As factors in the development of the Jewish economy, both Eli and his sons were instruments in preparing the way for the coming Messiah and the final supremacy of his kingdom. The house of Ithamar inherited, in common with others, the promise made to the Aaronic house. As long as there was need for an earthly high priest to shadow forth the enduring high priesthood of Christ, the promise (ver. 30) to Aaron would hold good. But the completion of that purpose was not frustrated by the disgrace and displacement of the section of the house represented by Eli in consequence of unfaithfulness. God has, in his foreknowledge of what will be required, as also in his resources to provide for the erratic action of human wills according to that foreknowledge, legions awaiting his creative call to come forth and prepare the way for the Christ. He who could "of these stones raise up children to Abraham" was at no loss to dispense with the leadership in his ancient Church of a degenerate family. If the old injured instruments are judicially confined to lower forms of service, as in the case of Ahiah, grandson of Phinehas (ch. xiv. 3), a holy Samuel is raised up for the emergency till a Zadok assumes the orderly high priestly functions; thus teaching us that in spite of all sins and their punishment the kingdom of God must advance. Men may rise and fall, dark seasons of priestly corruption may afflict the Church, apostates may spread consternation; but, foreseeing all, the Eternal has in reserve, and is quietly sending forth, men like Samuel and David and Paul and Luther, men who shall not cease to be employed in the high service of the "Anointed" even when they cease to speak by words.

General suggestions:—1. It is worth considering how much is lost to the world of mental and physical power by the indwelling of sin, and what a valuable contribution to the sum total of a nation's welfare is a righteous life, by conserving and improving and making the most of all the powers of body and mind. 2. The essential folly of all sin is capable of being illustrated in what it entails, fails to avoid, and also takes away from the elements of individual and public well-being. 3. There is a philosophical argument in support of the claims of Christianity in the fact that, as it seeks, and is proved by numerous facts to have the power of perfecting, the moral life, it thereby contains the solution of all our physical and economical difficulties, and needs only to become actual in individual life to constitute a real millennium. 4. There is ample ground in history for confidence in the vindication of right, even though rulers may for a season avoid disaster. 5. In the lives of most men there must be seasons when they are visited by a messenger from God; and it is a question whether, if that messenger be disregarded, another may not come bringing tidings of more terrible things. 6. In any case, where by former sins physical and social evils have come on others, it is an encouragement to know that we may labour

to bring those so suffering to the great Physician for spiritual healing, and that the spiritual health will in some measure counteract the inherited evils. 7. The comforting aspect of retribution lies in that for every one who suffers from it, possibly thousands and millions indirectly gain permanent good in the influence it exerts on existing evils and on otherwise forthcoming evils; and also that the same purpose which thus works out deserved judgment insures the fulfilment of all the promises.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 27—36. (SHILOH.)—*A message of approaching judgment* 1. This message came from God, who observed, as he ever does, the sins of his people, and especially his ministers, with much displeasure, and after long forbearance resolved to punish them (Amos iii. 2; 1 Pet. iv. 17). 2. It came through a man whose name has not been recorded, and who was probably unknown to him to whom he was sent. When God sends a message it matters little by whom it is brought. He often makes his most important communications in a way the world does not expect, and by men who are unknown to fame. The authority of the Lord invests his messengers with dignity and power. And their best credentials are that they "commend themselves to the conscience" (2 Cor. iv. 2). 3. It came through a "man of God," a seer, a prophet, and not directly from God to Eli, the high priest. He chooses for special service men who live near to him, and are in sympathy with his purposes, in preference to those who occupy official positions, but are possessed of little personal worth. For a long season no prophet had spoken (Judges iv. 4; vi. 8; xiii. 6); and when the silence of heaven is suddenly broken, it is an intimation that great changes are impending. 4. It came some time before the events which it announced actually transpired. "The Lord is slow to anger" (Nahum i. 3), and executes judgment only after repeated warnings. Predictions which are absolute in form must often be understood as in their fulfilment conditioned by the moral state of those whom they concern (Jer. xviii. 7; Jonah iii. 4, 9, 10). The purpose for which this message was sent was to lead to repentance, and it was not until all hope of it had disappeared that the blow fell. In substance the message contains—

I. A REMINDER OF SPECIAL PRIVILEGES bestowed by the favour of God, and shown—1. By the *revelation of himself to those* who were in a condition of abject servitude (ver. 27). 2. By his *selection of some*, in preference to others, for exalted and honourable service (ver. 28). 3. By his liberal *provision* for them out of the offerings made by the people to himself. Religious privileges always involve responsibilities, and should be faithfully used out of gratitude for their bestowment.

II. A CHARGE OF GROSS UNFAITHFULNESS (ver. 29). The purpose for which the priests were endowed with these privileges was not the promotion of their own honour and interest, but the honour of God and the welfare of his people. But they acted in opposition to that purpose. 1. By *irreverence* and self-will in his service. "Wherefore do ye trample under foot my sacrifice?" 2. By *disobedience* to his will. "Which I have commanded." 3. By *pleasing others* in preference to him. "And honourest thy sons above me." Eli's toleration of the conduct of his sons, from regard to their interest and his own ease, involved him in their guilt. 4. By *self-enrichment* out of the religious offerings of the people. "The idol which man in sin sets up in the place of God can be none other than himself. He makes self and self-satisfaction the highest aim of life. To self his efforts ultimately tend, however the modes and directions of sin may vary. The innermost essence of sin, the ruling and penetrating principle, in all its forms, is selfishness" (Müller, 'Christian Doctrine of Sin'). When men use the gifts of God for selfish ends they render themselves liable to be deprived of those gifts, and to be punished for their misuse.

III. A STATEMENT OF AN EQUITABLE PRINCIPLE, according to which God acts in his procedure with men (ver. 30). They have been apt to suppose that privileges bestowed upon themselves or inherited from their ancestors were absolutely their own, and would be certainly continued. But it is far otherwise; for—1. The

fulfilment of the promises of God and the continuance of religious privileges depend on the *ethical relation* in which men stand toward him. His covenant with Levi was "for the fear with which he feared me" (Mal. ii. 6, 7); but when his descendants lost that fear they "corrupted the covenant," and ceased to have any claim upon its promised blessings. It was the same with the Jews who in after ages vainly boasted that they were "the children of Abraham." In the sight of the Holy One righteousness is everything, hereditary descent nothing, except in so far as it is promotive of righteousness. 2. *Faithful service is rewarded.* HONOUR FOR HONOUR. "Them that honour me I will honour." Consider—(1) The *ground:* not merely his relationship as moral Governor, but his beneficence in bestowing the gifts of nature, providence, and grace. (2) The *method:* in thought, word, and deed. (3) The *reward:* his approbation, continued service, extended usefulness, &c. 3. *Unfaithful conduct is punished.* "Promises and threatenings are made to individuals because they are in a particular state of character; but they belong to all who are in that state, for 'God is no respecter of persons'" (Robertson). "He will give to every man according to his works."

IV. A PROCLAMATION OF SEVERE RETRIBUTION upon the house of Eli (vers. 31—34). Consisting of—1. The deprivation of *strength*, which had been abused. Their power would be broken (Zech. xi. 17). 2. The shortening of *life*, the prolonging of which in the case of Eli had been an occasion of evil rather than of good. "There shall not be an old man in thine house for ever;" the result of weakness; repeated in ver. 32. 3. The loss of *prosperity;* the temporal benefits that would otherwise have been received. "Thou shalt see distress of dwelling in all that brings prosperity to Israel" (Ed. of Erdmann). 4. The infliction of *misery* on those who continue, for a while, to minister at the altar, and of violent death (ver. 33; xxii. 18). 5. Although these things would not take place at once, their commencement, as a sign of what would follow, would be witnessed by Eli himself in the sudden death of the two chief offenders "in one day" (ch. iv. 11). If anything could rouse the house of Eli to "flee from the wrath to come," surely such a fearful message as this was adapted to do so. Fear of coming wrath, although it never makes men truly religious, may, and often does, arouse and restrain them, and bring them under the influence of other and higher motives. The closing sentences contain—

V. A PREDICTION OF A FAITHFUL PRIESTHOOD in the place of that which had proved faithless (vers. 35, 36). "I will raise up a faithful priest," &c., *i. e.* a line of faithful men to accomplish the work for which the priesthood has been appointed, and to enjoy the privileges which the house of Eli has forfeited. In contrast with that house, it will do my will, and I will cause it to endure; and it will continue to live in intimate fellowship and co-operation with the anointed kings of Israel. It will also be so exalted, that the surviving members of the fallen house will be entirely dependent upon it for a "piece of bread." The prediction was first of all fulfilled in Samuel, who by express commission from God acted habitually as a priest; and afterwards in Zadok, in whom the line of Eleazar was restored; but the true underlying *idea* of a priest, like that of a king, has its full realisation in Jesus Christ alone. The gloomiest of prophetic messages generally conclude with words of promise and hope.—D.

Ver. 30.—*Honour and dishonour.* Concerning the *moral attitude* assumed by men toward God, which is here described, observe—

I. THAT IT IS PLAINLY OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE. "*Me.*" Our relation to others is a light thing compared with what it is to him. This is everything; and knowledge, power, riches, reputation, &c. nothing. 1. Because of his *nature* ("There is none holy as the Lord"), his government (moral, supreme, universal), and his claims. 2. It is *the effectual* test of our character, what we are really and essentially. 3. It is the *principal means* of forming and strengthening it. What are we in his sight? What does he think of *me?*

II. THAT IT IS NECESSARILY ONE OR OTHER OF TWO KINDS. "*Honour* me." "*Despise* me." 1. *Honour;* by reverence (the fundamental principle of the religious life), trust, prayer, obedience, fidelity, living to his glory. 2. *Despise;* by forgetfulness, unbelief, self-will, pride, selfishness, disobedience, sin of every kind. 3.

There is *no other alternative.* "For me or against me" (Exod. xxxii. 26; Jer. viii. 1; Matt. vi. 24; vii. 13, 14; xii. 30).

III. THAT IT IS ALWAYS FOLLOWED BY CORRESPONDING CONSEQUENCES. "I will honour." "Shall be lightly esteemed." 1. *Honour;* by his friendship, appointment to honourable service, giving success therein, open acknowledgment before men here and hereafter. "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." 2. *Lightly esteemed;* by himself, men, angels, despised even by themselves, and cast away among the vile. "He that saveth his life shall lose it." 3. There is a *strict correspondence* between character and consequences, both generally and particularly, in kind and measure. And the joy and misery of the future will be the consummation and the ripened fruit of what now exists (Gal. vi. 7).

IV. THAT ITS CONNECTION WITH ITS CONSEQUENCES IS ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN. Men often think otherwise. But "be not deceived." Consider—1. The *natural constitution* and tendencies of things, as ordained by him who is "above all, and in all, and through all." 2. The recorded and observed *facts* of life. 3. The *express declarations* of him "who cannot lie." "*I will* honour." "*They shall be* lightly esteemed."—D.

Ver. 30.—*Office nothing without character.* The worthlessness of rank or heredi tary position without corresponding wisdom or virtue is a commonplace of moral reflection. But it is startling to find how strongly it is affirmed in Holy Writ of those who hold high office in the house of God. The priesthood in Israel was hereditary, though in point of fact the regularity of the succession was often broken; but such hereditary office was never meant to protect unworthy men like the sons of Eli. Their position was forfeited by their misconduct, and their priestly functions were transferred to other hands. The principle is for all time, and for general application. Does one reach and occupy a high station in the Church? No matter what his line of "holy orders" may be, or who laid hands of ordination on his head, or what functions he is held competent to perform, he must be judged by this test—Does he honour God in his office, or honour and serve himself? Does he so live and act as to commend and glorify Christ? And the same test must be applied to the man professing himself a Christian who occupies a throne on the earth, or who holds high dignity in the state, or who has power as a writer or an orator over the minds of men, or who as a capitalist has great means and opportunities of usefulness. Does he in his station glorify God? If not, his rank, or office, or grand position avails him nothing.

I. THE PIOUS DIVINELY HONOURED. To honour God; think what this implies. To know him truly, to reverence and love him. In vain any verbal or formal homage without the honour rendered by the heart (see Matt. xv. 8). He whose heart cleaves to God will show it in his daily conduct. He will be careful to consult God's word for direction, and observe his statutes. He will openly respect God's ordinances, and give cheerfully for their maintenance, and for the furtherance of righteous and charitable objects. He will honour the Lord with his substance, and with the first-fruits of all his increase. He will worship God with his family, and teach his children "the fear of the Lord." In his place or station he will make it his aim, and hold it his chief end, to glorify God. And, without any vaunting or ostentation, he will show his colours—avow his faith and hope openly. The boy-king, Edward VI., showed his colours when he sat—alas! for how short a time—on the English throne. So did Sir Matthew Hale on the bench, and Robert Boyle in the Royal Society, and William Wilberforce in the highest circles of political life. So did Dr. Arnold among the boys at Rugby, and Dr. Abercrombie and Sir James Simpson among their patients in Edinburgh; Samuel Budgett in his counting-house at Bristol, and General Havelock among his troops in India. These men were not in what are called religious offices; but, in such offices or positions as Providence assigned to them, they bore themselves as religious, God-fearing men. And others there are in places and callings more obscure who are quite as worthy of esteem; those who, in houses of business among scoffing companions, in servants' halls, in workshops, in barrack-rooms, in ships' forecastles, meekly but firmly honour the Lord, and ennoble a lowly calling by fidelity to conscience and to God. The Lord sees and remembers

all who honour him. Nay, he honours them; but after his own manner, not after the fashion of the world. He honours faithful servants in this world by giving them more work to do. He honours true witnesses by extending the range for their testimony. Sometimes he honours those with whom he is well pleased by appointing them to suffer for his cause. St. Paul evidently deemed this a high honour. Witness his words to the Philippians: "Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe in his name, but also to suffer for his sake." Some he calls away in early years out of the world, but they leave behind a fragrant honoured name, and they go to "glory, honour, and immortality" in a better land. It is right to value the good opinion of our fellow-men; but there are always drawbacks and dangers in connection with honour which comes from man. In seeking it one is tempted to tarnish his simplicity of character, and weaken his self-respect. There is a risk of envying more successful, or exulting over less successful competitors for distinction. But it need never be so in seeking "the honour which comes from God only." We seek it best not when we push ourselves forward, but when we deny ourselves, honour him, and by love serve the brethren. And then in our utmost success we have no ground of self-glorying, for all is of grace. Nor is there room for grudging or envying. With the Lord there is grace enough to help all who would serve him, and glory enough to reward all who serve him faithfully.

II. THE IMPIOUS DESPISED. "And they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." Despise the Lord God Almighty! Amazing insolence of the human heart, yet not infrequent. The sons of Eli openly slighted Jehovah by their rapacity in the priest's office, and their profaning the precincts of his house with their debauchery. Long after this, priests of Judah are reproved by the prophet Malachi for despising the name of the Lord of hosts, making his table contemptible by laying on it polluted bread, and dishonouring his altar by offering maimed animals in sacrifice. The warning then, in the first instance, is to those who bear themselves profanely or carelessly in sacred offices, and in familiar contact with religious service. But the sin is one which soon spreads among the people Ezekiel charged the people of Jerusalem with having "despised God's holy things, and profaned his sabbaths" (ch. xxii. 8). This sin is a common thing in Christendom. Men do not in terms deny God's existence, but make light of him; never read his word with any seriousness; never pray unless they are ill or afraid; count Church service and instruction a weariness. The base gods of the heathen receive more respect and consideration from their votaries. Allah has far more reverence from the Moslem than the great God of heaven and earth obtains from multitudes who pass as Christians. They live as if he had no right to command them, and no power to judge them. They lift their own will and pleasure to the throne, and despise the Lord of hosts. With what result? They shall be lightly esteemed. Even in this world, and this life, the ungodly miss the best distinctions. They are not the men who gather about them the highest confidence or most lasting influence and esteem. After they leave the world, a few are remembered who had rare force of character or an unusually eventful career; but how the rest are forgotten! A few natural tears from their nearest kindred, a few inquiries among friends about the amount and disposal of their property, a decorous silence about themselves on the principle that nothing but what is good should be said of the dead, and so their memory perishes. But all is not over. A terrible hereafter awaits the despisers of the Lord. "As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image." The clear alternative in this text is one that cannot be evaded. One may try to assume a negative attitude, and allege that he remains in a state of suspense, and does not find the recognition of a Divine Being to be an imperative necessity; but this is practically to despise the Lord—making light of his word, and pronouncing his very existence to be a matter of doubtful truth and of secondary importance. Reject not wisdom's counsel; despise not her reproof. "To-day, if ye will hear the voice of the Lord, harden not your hearts."—F.

Ver. 35.—*A faithful priest.* In the strictest sense Christ alone is now a Priest. In himself assuming the office, he has for ever abolished it in others. Hence none are called priests in the New Testament, except in the modified sense in which all

who believe in him are so called (1 Pet. ii. 9; Rev. i. 6). But taking the expression as equivalent to "a faithful ministry," consisting of men appointed by Christ to a special service for him (Mal. ii. 6, 7; Acts vi. 4; Ephes. iv. 11; Col. i. 7; 2 Tim. ii. 2), and faithfully fulfilling the purpose of their appointment, it leads us to notice—

I. WHENCE IT IS DERIVED. "I will raise up." 1. He alone *can* do it. From him come natural gifts and, still more, spiritual graces, eminent faith and patience, humility, courage, meekness, tender compassion "on the ignorant and on them that are out of the way," &c. 2. He has *promised* and made provision for it (Jer. iii. 15). "I will build him a sure (enduring) house." "The death of Christ hath a great influence unto this gift of the ministry. It is a branch that grew out of the grave of Christ; let it be esteemed as lightly as men please, had not Christ died for it we had not had a ministry in the world" (Owen, vol. ix. p. 441). He "will be *inquired of*" for it. If Churches would have "good ministers of Jesus Christ," they must seek them from God (Matt. ix. 38).

II. WHEREIN IT APPEARS. "Shall do according to that which is in my heart and in my mind." 1. *Supreme regard* to his will as the rule of character and labour. 2. *Clear insight* into his mind in relation to the special requirements of the time, place, and circumstances. 3. Practical, earnest, and constant *devotion* to it in all things, the least as well as the greatest. Even as "Christ himself." "I have given you an example."

III. WHEREBY IT IS HONOURED. "And he shall walk before mine anointed for ever." 1. Enjoyment of the King's *favour* (Prov. xvi. 15). 2. Employment in the King's *service;* in continued, honourable, beneficent, and increasing co-operation with him. 3. Participation in the King's *glory* for ever. "Be thou faithful," &c. (Rev. ii. 10). "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne" (Rev. iii. 21).—D.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER III.

THE CALL OF SAMUEL (vers. 1—10). Ver. 1.—**The word of the Lord was precious in those days.** Or rather *rare;* it came but seldom, and there was no proper order of persons from whose ranks the "speakers for God" would naturally step forth. It was this which made the revelation of Jehovah's will to Samuel an event so memorable both for the Jewish nation and for the Church; for he was called by the providence of God to be the founder of prophecy as an established institution, and henceforward, side by side with the king and priest, the prophet took his place as one of the three factors in the preparation for the coming of him who is a King to rule, a Priest to make atonement, and also a Prophet to teach his people and guide them into all the truth. **There was no open vision.** Literally, "no vision that broke forth" (see 2 Chron. xxxi. 5, where it is used of the publication of a decree). The meaning is, that though prophecy was an essential condition of the spiritual life of Israel, yet that hitherto it had not been promulgated and established as a fact. The gift had not absolutely been withheld, but neither had it been permanently granted as a settled ordinance. There are in Hebrew two words for **vision**: the one used here, *hazon*, refers to such sights as are revealed to the tranced eye of the seer when in a state of ecstasy; while the other, *mareh*, is a vision seen by the natural eye. From the days, however, of Isaiah onward, *hazon* became the generic term for all prophecy.

Ver. 2.—**Eli . . . could not see.** *I. e.* clearly. His sight was fast failing him, and Samuel, still called a **child**, *na'ar*, but probably, as Josephus states ('Antiq.,' v. 10, 4), now fully twelve years old, was in constant attendance upon him because of his increasing infirmities. Both were sleeping in the temple; for literally the words are, *And Samuel was sleeping in the temple of Jehovah, where the ark of God was.* Of course neither Eli nor Samuel were in the holy place; but, as in ch. i. 9, the word *temple* is used in its proper sense of the whole palace of Israel's spiritual King, in which were chambers provided for the use of the high priest and those in attendance upon him.

In ver. 3 the **lamp** is mentioned as fixing the exact time. Though it is said that the seven-branched candelabrum was "to burn always" (Exod. xxvii. 20), yet this apparently was to be by perpetually relighting it (*ibid.* xxx. 7, 8); and as Aaron was commanded to dress and light it every morning and evening, and supply it with oil, the night would be far advanced and morning near before it **went out.** In the stillness then of the late night Samuel, sunk in heavy

sleep, hears a voice calling him, and springing up, naturally hurries to Eli, supposing that he needed his services. Eli had not heard the voice, and concluding that it was a mistake, bids Samuel return to his bed. Again the voice rings upon his ear, and again he hastens to Eli, only to be told to lie down again.

In ver. 7 the reason is given why Samuel was thus thrice mistaken. **Samuel did not yet know Jehovah, neither was the word of Jehovah yet revealed unto him.** Doubtless he knew Jehovah in the way in which the sons of Eli did not know him (ch. ii. 12), *i. e.* in his conscience and spiritual life, but he did not know him as one who reveals his will unto men. Prophecy had long been a *rare* thing, and though Samuel had often heard God's voice in the recesses of his heart, speaking to him of right and wrong, he knew nothing of God as a living Person, giving commands for men to obey, and bestowing knowledge to guide them in doing his will.

Ver. 8.—But Eli was neither so inexperienced, nor so lost to all sense of Jehovah being the immediate ruler of Israel, as not to perceive, when Samuel came to him the third time, that the matter was Divine. Possibly he recalled to mind the visit of the man of God, and had some presage of what the message might be. At all events he bade Samuel lie calmly down again, because the best preparation for hearing God's voice is obedience and trustful submission.

Ver. 10.—**And Jehovah came, and stood, and called as at other times.** It is something more than a voice; there was an objective presence; and so in ver. 15 it is called, not *hazon*, a sight seen when in a state of ecstasy, but *mareh*, something seen when wide awake, and in the full, calm possession of every faculty. **As at other times** simply means *as before*, as on the two previous occasions. But now, instead of hurrying to Eli, Samuel obediently waits for the revelation of the Divine will, saying, "Speak; for thy servant heareth."

THE MESSAGE TO ELI (vers. 11—18). Ver. 11.—**Behold, I will do.** Rather, *I do*, I am now doing. Though the threatened ruin may be delayed for a few years, yet is it already in actual progress, and the fall of Eli's house will be but the consummation of causes already now at work. **At which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle.** This implies the announcement of some event so frightful and unlooked for that the news shall, as it were, slap both ears at once, and make them smart with pain. And such an event was the capture of the ark, and the barbarous destruction of the priests and sanctuary at Shiloh. The phrase is again used of the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings xxi. 12; Jer. xix. 3), a calamity which Jeremiah compares to the fall of Shiloh (Jer. vii. 12, 14; xxvi. 6, 9), inasmuch as both of these events involved the ruin of the central seat of the Jewish religion, and were both accompanied by revolting cruelties.

Ver. 12.—**I will perform.** Literally, "I will raise up," *i. e.* I will excite and stir up into active energy all the denunciations of the man of God (ch. ii. 27), which hitherto have been as it were asleep and at rest. **All things which.** Better, quite literally, *all that I have spoken.* **When I begin, I will also make an end.** In the Hebrew two infinitives used as gerunds, "beginning and ending," *i. e.* from beginning to end. The Hebrew language constantly thus uses infinitives with great force; as, for instance, in Jer. vii. 9: "What! stealing, murdering, committing adultery," &c

Ver. 13.—**For I have told him,** &c. These words may be translated, with the Septuagint and Vulgate, "For I have told him that I would judge his house," referring back to the message of the man of God; or, with the Syriac, "And I will show him that I do judge his house." **For ever.** *I. e.* finally; his house shall pass away. **His sons made themselves vile.** The verb used here invariably means *to curse;* but "they cursed themselves" does not, without straining, give a good sense. The Septuagint for "themselves" reads *God*, and the Syriac *the people.* Buxtorf says ('Lex. Rab.,' sub תִּקּוּן) that the right reading is *me*, and that this is one of eighteen places where the scribes have changed *me* into *themselves* or *them.* But while thus there is much uncertainty about the right text, the evidence is too uncertain to act upon, and it is best to translate, "His sons have brought a curse upon themselves," while acknowledging that the ordinary rendering would be "have cursed themselves." **And he restrained them not.** The Versions generally take the verb used here as equivalent to one differing only in having a softer medial consonant, כהה = כאה, and translate *rebuked;* but that really found in the Hebrew text signifies "to weaken, humble, reduce to powerlessness." The A. V. takes neither one verb nor the other in the rendering *restrained.* Eli ought to have prevented his sons from persisting in bringing disgrace upon God's service by stripping them of their office. Their wickedness was great, and required a stern and decisive remedy.

Ver. 14.—**Sacrifice nor offering.** The first of these is *zebach*, the sacrifice of an animal by the shedding of its blood; the second is the *minchah*, or unbloody sacrifice. **The** guilt of Eli's sons could be **purged,** *i. e.* expiated, by none of the appointed offerings for sin, because they had hardened themselves in their wrong-doing even after the solemn

warning in ch. ii. 27—36. Hence the marked repetition of the denunciation of finality in their doom. Again it is said that it is **for ever**. It has, however, been well noticed that though the message of Samuel confirms all that had been threatened by the man of God, yet that no bitter or painful words are put into the mouth of one who was still a child. For this there may also be a further reason. The first message was intended to give Eli and his sons a final opportunity of repentance, and, that it might produce its full effect, the severity of the doom impending upon them was clearly set before their eyes. They did not repent. Eli hardened himself in his weakness, and took no steps to vindicate God's service from the slur cast upon it by an unworthy priesthood. His sons hardened themselves in crime, and made their office a reproach. It was enough, therefore, to repeat and confirm generally the terms of the former prophecy, as no moral object would be gained by calling attention to the severity of the coming judgment.

Ver. 15.—**Samuel . . . opened the doors.** In Exod. xxvi. 36; xxxvi. 37, the word used, though translated *door*, really means an opening, protected by a hanging curtain. The word used here means *double* or *folding doors* of wood, and we must therefore conclude that solid buildings had grown up round the tabernacle (see on ch. i. 9), and a wall for its defence in case of invasion, or the assault of predatory tribes. The confiding the keys of these enclosures to Samuel shows that he was no longer a mere child, or he would have been incapable of holding a position of such high trust (on the key as an emblem of authority see Isa. xxii. 22). **Vision**, as noticed above on ver. 10, means something seen by a person awake and in full possession of his senses.

Vers. 16, 17, 18.—**God do so to thee**, &c. This adjuration shows how great had been the agony of Eli's suspense, yet, true to his sluggish nature, he had waited patiently till the morning came. Then he summons Samuel to him, calling him lovingly **my son**, and everything tends to show that there was a real affection between the two. He next asks, **What is the thing that he hath said unto thee?** The A. V. greatly weakens this by inserting the words "The Lord." The original is far more suggestive. Put quite indefinitely, it says, "Whoever or whatsoever be thy visitor, yet tell me all." Then, when Eli has heard the message, he says, **It is Jehovah.** Though he had not had the courage to do what was right, yet his submission to God, and the humility of his resignation, prove that the Holy Ghost had in these years of waiting being doing its work upon the old man's heart. Eli's adjuration, we must further note, was equivalent to putting Samuel upon his oath, so that any concealment on his part would have involved the sin of perjury.

ESTABLISHMENT OF SAMUEL IN THE OFFICE OF PROPHET (ver. 19—iv. 1). Ver. 19.—**And Samuel grew.** His childhood up to this time has been carefully kept before our view; now he passes from youth to manhood. **And Jehovah was with him.** By special gifts, but especially by establishing his words. Spoken by Divine inspiration, they were all fulfilled. So in Eccles. xii. 11 the words of the wise are compared to "nails fastened" securely, and which may therefore be depended upon. But in their case it is experience and sound judgment that makes them foresee what is likely to happen; it was a higher gift which made Samuel's words remain safe and sure, and capable of firmly holding up all enterprises that were hung upon them.

Ver. 20.—**From Dan**, upon the north, to **Beer-sheba**, upon the south, means "throughout the whole country." The phrase is interesting, as showing that, in spite of the virtual independence of the tribes, and the general anarchy which prevailed during the time of the judges, there was nevertheless a feeling that they all formed one people. **Was established.** The same word used in Num. xii. 7 of Moses, and there translated *was faithful*. It is one of those pregnant words common in Hebrew, containing two cognate meanings. It says, first, that Samuel was faithful in his office; and, secondly, that because he was found trustworthy he was confirmed and strengthened in the possession of it.

Ver. 21.—**And Jehovah appeared again.** Literally, "added to appear," *i. e.* revealed himself from time to time on all fit occasions. *To appear*, literally, "to be seen," is the verb used of waking vision (see on ver. 15). **By the word of Jehovah.** Many of the old commentators refer this to the second person of the Holy Trinity, but he is himself Jehovah, as we affirm in the Te Deum: "We believe thee to be the Lord," *i. e.* the Jehovah of the Old Testament, usually translated, in deference to a Jewish superstition, "the LORD." As the Word, Christ is "the Word of God." The phrase really means, "by prophetic inspiration" revealing to Samuel the truth (comp. Isa. li. 16; Jer. i. 9).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—10.—*Light withheld.* The facts given are—1. A lack of the manifest revelations of the Divine will to which Israel had been accustomed. 2. A

consciousness of this want on the part of the few pious in Israel. 3. The continued service of Samuel in the ordinary routine of the sanctuary. 4. The resumption of the manifest revelation by the call of Samuel to receive it. 5. Samuel experiences difficulty in recognising the call of God. 6. Eli renders to him the assistance by which he becomes recipient of the Divine communication. The statement concerning Samuel's continued service in the sanctuary is evidently to prepare the way for the new prophet's summons to important duties. The historian's mind rests primarily on a dreary period during which a valued privilege was not enjoyed.

I. A PROGRESSION OF LIGHT IS NEEDED IN THE CHURCH OF GOD. The ancient Jewish Church was very dependent for its growth in knowledge, in direction for present duty, and in advancing joy in life, upon well-ascertained communications from God. The fragmentary history from patriarchal times onwards acquaints us with many specific instances in which "open vision," as distinguished from individual enlightenment for private uses, was vouchsafed. It is probable that much other light was given than we have record of, as truly as that the apostles received more from Christ than is explicitly contained in the Gospels. The clear light of God was necessary in successive years to enable Israel to do the work required in paving the way for Messiah. Therefore men looked for "vision" through some chosen instrument, and felt that the normal course of Providence was interrupted when, through long and weary years, none was granted. *Substantially* the light has now been given to the modern Church. No one is to "add to or take away from the words of the book" which God has given for the instruction and guidance of his people. But *relatively*, to the perception of the Church and of the individual, there *is still a progression* in what is made known to us. *All* the truth was in Christ before it gradually came forth "in divers manners to the fathers;" and all the truth requisite for salvation is in the word of God. But as occasional manifestations in ancient times brought successive beams of light from the original Source to supply the need of men, so now out of the word of God much light has to break forth for the instruction, guidance, and comfort of the Church. There is all the difference imaginable between adding to the sum of truth by traditions of men or superior "light of reason," and having the things of Christ revealed to us by the Spirit. Our growth in knowledge is consequent on clearer "visions" from God's word.

II. SPIRITUAL RECEPTIVITY IS A CONDITION OF RECEIVING FURTHER LIGHT FROM GOD. The absence of "open visions" in the days of Eli is implicitly accounted for by the circumstance that the official persons through whom the communications usually came were not in a state of mind to be so honoured by God. There seems to be a beautiful adaptation between the fitness of the instrument and the fulness of the truth conveyed. Isaiah's intense spirituality of mind made him a fit instrument for conveying to men the more advanced truth revealed to him. The tone of the Apostle John's nature qualified him for the special quality and degree of truth characteristic of his writings. There seem to be high regulative laws by which God sends forth his light to the spiritual man corresponding to those in the lower sphere of intellect and moral perception. The *application of this principle* is seen in the *history of the Church and of the individual.* When the leaders of the Church have been intent on earthly things, no advance has been made in the understanding of the Scriptures. As protoplastic life must pre-exist in order to the assimilation of protoplasm, so a certain spiritual light and love must dwell in man in order to the absorption into self of light from God's word. No wonder if irreligious men cannot know the mysteries of the kingdom. The highest spiritual truth is not intellectually, but "spiritually discerned." Christ may have many things to say to us, but we, through deficient receptivity, "cannot bear them now." Hence the wisdom of God is often foolishness to men, or the darkness is real because the eye that should see is dim.

III. It is a GREAT CALAMITY FOR ANY PEOPLE TO BE DEPRIVED OF THE LIGHT which ordinarily comes from God for human use. The historian indicates the sad loss from which the people were suffering in this withholding of "open vision." All light is good, only good. It is the chief means of life. It means cheer, safety, development. To be without it in any measure is, in that degree, to be practically blind, and to suffer all the evils of blindness. We mourn over those who cannot see the

sweet, beautiful light of day. Agony enters us when we gaze on men devoid of the light of reason. The wisest grope as in perpetual fear when the pillar of fire and Divine silence show not the way to take. Worst of all when the Church has no guidance suited to its need. There have been periods when the written word has been almost lost to the mass of Christians. There are souls dark, sad, hopeless because no "vision" points to the Refuge from sin and the rest to come. If one could speak out the secret miseries of some who, dazed by exclusive gaze on the light of reason, feel that life is hopeless, the world would scarcely credit the story.

IV. The LACK OF RECEPTIVITY BY WHICH this calamity is experienced is often THE RESULT OF A DEGENERATE, CORRUPT STATE OF MIND SELF-INDUCED AND LOVED. The spiritual unfitness of people and leaders in Eli's day to receive more and frequent "visions" was the creation of their own wicked wills. The calamity of being left for a while was the fruit of their doings. Sin is a blinding power, as also a creator of positive aversion. The natural effect of religious declension is to render men *indifferent* to the value of God's truth for its own sake and for its elevating influence; *incapable of appreciating* and even discerning it in its purity; prone to *set a wrong interpretation* upon it when in any degree it is given; and even, in many instances, *disposed to refer* that which professes to be from God to *any other than the true* source. It is a fair question how much of the professed *rejection of Christianity on reasonable grounds* is really traceable to the pure exercise of the reason under the guidance of an undefiled love of truth. Is not zeal to be free from such holy restraints as Christ imposes often an important element in the case? The finer and most convincing evidences of the truth of Christianity lie in the spiritual beauty and glory of the Christ, and this is a factor which mere intellectual processes cannot assess. How is it that the *unholy* always *welcome* objections to Christianity? It is ever true, "sin lieth at the door." "Ye *will* not come unto me." "Out of the *heart* are the issues of life."

V. The CAUSE OF THE DEGENERACY which issues in a calamitous loss of spiritual light LIES IN A NEGLECT OF SUCH LIGHT AS IS ALREADY GIVEN. The inaptitude of Eli to receive "visions," and of the people to profit by them, was the fruit of a religious decay brought on by inattention to the instructions given by Moses, and a heedless performance of acts of worship. Thus calamity came of abuse or neglect of existing privileges. The principle holds good over a wide sphere. Unfaithfulness in some Churches of Asia led to the dire calamity of a removal of the "candlestick." Apostles sometimes turned from cities that failed to use the opportunities they afforded them. Those who, seeing the "Eternal Power and Godhead" in the "things that are made," glorified not God, had their "foolish heart darkened." An exclusive fondness for one side of intellectual nature, to the habitual neglect of the secret and subtle moral elements in conscience, often results in the folly and wickedness of finding not even a trace of God in the universe. Of many it may still be true, "Hadst thou known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes."

VI. The CORRUPTION OF AN AGE and consequent WITHHOLDMENT OF DIVINE LIGHT is NO PERMANENT BAR TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRUTH. Israel's degeneracy brought its chastisement; yet God had a holy servant in reserve both to remove the impeding corruption and to continue the declarations of God's will. Waters held back by a barrier retain and multiply their force, and in course of time will first sweep away the opposition and then flow peacefully on. God's purposes are an eternal force pressing on into the future. In ancient times a measure of truth was given to the world to make ready a fit time and condition for the Christ to come; and this was done, if not by one unwilling instrument, yet by another when that was swept away. Likewise the Church is to get more truth from the Bible for the "perfecting of the saints;" and in spite of dark seasons it *will rise to a clearer vision* of the truth in Christ by the providential removal of obstructions and the introduction of a more holy and teachable order of men. Man lives and toils, and opposes and dies. God ever lives in full resistless energy.

Practical considerations:—1. It is a question how far errors and theological conflicts are to be associated with a defective spirituality arising from either over-absorption in purely philosophical pursuits, external Church order, or political and

party arrangements. 2. To what extent is it possible to remedy the absence of Divine truth in much of the literature of modern times. 3. By what means the Church and the individual may secure more of that holy, teachable spirit by which alone a fuller vision of truth shall be enjoyed. 4. How far the conduct of controversies of the day respecting Divine truth is defective by not sufficiently taking into account the spiritual condition of men opposed to religion, and whether there is a proper dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit to give eyes to the blind. 5. To what extent, in personal seasons of darkness, the cause lies in our personal indulgence in secret or open sin.

Lowly instruments. The transition from the employment of Eli, as the messenger of God to the people, to Samuel, brings into view important truths concerning the instrumentality by which God effects his purposes concerning man.

I. God always has IN RESERVE AND TRAINING SUITABLE INSTRUMENTS for promoting the ends to be sought in connection with Christ's kingdom. Judged from the outward aspect of things, all around appeared dark and hopeless. There was no one able to cope with the difficulties of the position. A similar condition of things has been found in certain countries during the history of the Christian Church. Some desponding minds would find a correspondence in the prevailing unbelief and daring atheism of modern times. There are also conditions of the individual spiritual life when decay has apparently gone on to utter hopelessness. Missionaries have now and then felt almost the horror of despair in view of nameless barbarities. But two or three saw a little beneath the surface. Hannah was sure of coming deliverance. Elkanah in some degree shared her confidence, and Eli surmised a purpose of the Lord in the presence of the holy child of the sanctuary. And, answering to these better spirits of a corrupt age, there are always a few—"a remnant"—who know and are comforted in the assurance that God has instruments in reserve. As in the case of Samuel, they are *chosen*, in *training*, and *biding their time*. There are instances of this general truth—1. In the *preparation of the earth for man*. From remote times there were already chosen, and qualified, and retained in other forms till fit season, the agencies by which, in spite of catastrophes of fire and convulsion and deluge, the beautiful earth would come forth in material realisation of the thought and purpose of God. 2. In the *infant Christian Church*. The end of Christ's earthly life seemed most disastrous to his kingdom. The corruption and craft of the wicked were dominant, and the removal of the Saviour seemed to human judgment to be the climax of disaster. Yet God had chosen, was training and holding in reserve, the men by whom the evils of the age were to be overcome, and truth and righteousness and love asserted as never before. 3. In *definite periods of the Church's history*. The scholastic subtleties of the middle ages on the one side, the deplorable decay of morals and the prostitution of Church ordinances to gain on the other, caused the earth to mourn. Nevertheless, in the seraphic devotion of here and there a devout monk, in the inquiring spirit of Erasmus, the clear intelligence of Melancthon, and the courage and firm grip of truth by Luther, God had his chosen instruments for producing a wonderful advance in all that pertains to freedom, purity, and Christian knowledge. 4. In the *midst of the evils indicated by modern antagonism to Christianity*. Doubtless the principles advocated, logically wrought out, as they are sure to be when the mass embrace them, contain the seeds of immorality, anarchy, and decay of noblest sentiments; and often there is an eagerness in adopting them which may well cause some to tremble. But *God is alive*, not dead. He has his agencies, fitted, and, so to speak, under restraint. They will be found to consist in the practical futility of all endeavour to get substitutes for a holy religion; the hopeless miseries into which individuals will be plunged; the horror created by the very violence of vice; the natural, never-to-be-quenched instinct which compels man to "cry out for the living God;" the calling forth of wise men of saintly life who are masters in secular knowledge; the silent force of Christian lives in health, sickness, and sorrow; and the aroused prayerfulness of the Church. Men like Samuel are in existence—5. In the *conflict of the individual Christian life*. The dire evils of latent sin, weak resolutions, stains of early years, seem to be a "body of sin and death" from which there is no escape. But God has in reserve the truth, the afflictions, the tenderness,

the quickening power of the Holy Spirit, by which all these shall pass away, and a restored life shall result.

II. The CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE INSTRUMENTS in working out God's will are, SO FAR AS PERSONS ARE CONCERNED, WELL ASCERTAINED. There is great advantage in having the child-life of Samuel sketched in contrast with the habits and principles of those no longer worthy to be the instruments for doing the highest work in the world. The qualities in Samuel that fitted him for his work were purity of life, deep love for God and his sanctuary, personal consecration to any service in which it might please God to employ him, and the humility that disdains not even menial work if God would thus have it. These qualities are really embraced in the one supreme quality—*conformity of will to the Divine will.* In this respect all *human instruments* are *alike* when thoroughly effective. In so far as it is our "meat and drink" to do the Father's will, our nature becomes a fit channel for the Divine energy to work through for spiritual ends. The failure of moral agents lies in the condition of the will. The power of Christian life in prayer, in work, in silent influence, is in proportion as the consecration takes the form of, "Not *my* will, but *thine* be done."

III. The EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INSTRUMENTS used lies essentially in THE POWER WHICH WORKS THROUGH THEM. The excellent qualities of Samuel no doubt exercised a power appropriate to their own nature; but the real work he did was more than the mere natural influence of what he was. It was God who worked, not only within him to will and to do, but also with and by him. Everywhere in Scripture stress is laid on the unseen energy of God acting on the visible and invisible elements of things, and at last bringing all into subjection. The *reality of the Divine power* in the human instrument is *often conspicuous.* The child Samuel did not secure of himself the submission of the people or the deference of Eli. God wrought on their spirits and made them willing to take him as prophet. Saul was the stronger man, but God *used* David to slay Goliath. God, in the case of apostles, had chosen the "weak things of the world to confound the mighty." His grace was sufficient for them. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit."

General lessons:—1. There is the most perfect ground for confidence that agencies will be found for doing any work really essential to the salvation of men. 2. It is important for all so to live and labour that they may be available for any service requisite in seasons of trial. 3. The fitness of each Christian for doing greatest possible good in the world rests with his own diligent self-culture and entireness of consecration. 4. It is essentially necessary that in all effort God be recognised as the Author of all good.

Call to higher service. The service of God is very wide and varied. Every true heart may find some employment therein. "They serve who wait," as also those who simply exhibit a holy life. The weary Christian invalid conveys many an impressive lesson to the strong and vigorous. The patient endurance of adversity may do more good than the enjoyment of prosperity. In making distinctions in the value of service rendered, we are not always in a position to pass perfect judgment. In one respect a lowly Christian may be "greater than John the Baptist." In reference to public functions there are gradations, and in this respect Samuel was called to a higher form of service.

I. There ARE CALLS TO A SERVICE RELATIVELY HIGHER. In the estimation of Hannah and Eli, the early occupation of Samuel in the tabernacle was the initiatory stage of a life-work. Except so far as a pure, simple life in contrast with vileness can teach, Samuel's service was confined to attendance on the venerable high priest. The position for which he was finally called was more conspicuous, of wider influence, and involving the display of superior qualities. The narrative relating the call to this higher service is a *record in spirit* of what has *often transpired in the course of history,* and is *being realised every day.* Abraham, Moses, and David served God, each in his own restricted sphere, when they obeyed the Divine call. As Christ once summoned fishermen to leave their occupation to be fishers of men, so now others hear his voice urging them to leave the ship, the desk, the farm, to do his will in preaching the gospel. To the attentive ear of the devout there are frequent

calls to rise to more arduous positions in the Church, or to enter on some line of private Christian endeavour that shall more truly bless mankind. Let devout men not forget that the Divine call to higher work is not confined to public functionaries. All kinds of workers are engaged on the spiritual temple.

II. There is A SPECIAL FITNESS REQUIRED FOR HIGHER SERVICE. Obviously, only a Samuel trained by a devout mother, accustomed to the hallowed associations of the sanctuary, was suited for the work that had henceforth to be done. The chief elements that qualify for entrance on higher service are—1. *Deep piety;* for as piety is a requisite to all useful spiritual work, so deep piety is required for the more trying forms of usefulness. 2. *Fidelity* in lower forms. He that is faithful in that which is least becomes fitted for superior responsibilities. "Come up higher" is the voice which crowns earthly toil. 3. *Natural aptitude* for new emergencies. God never puts a man in a position for which natural powers when sanctified are unsuited. The wondrous adaptations in the material world find their analogies in the spiritual. 4. *Readiness to endure* what is unknown. God's servants have to enter an untraversed ground, and their qualification for a call to this must embrace a spirit that says, "Here am I." "Speak, Lord." "What wouldst thou have me to do?" The representation given of Samuel, and of others in the Bible, shows that they were endowed with these qualifications. This, also, may be a test by which good men may now judge of themselves. No one ought to think of departing from any useful sphere of labour without severe scrutiny as to capabilities for heavier duties.

III. The FITNESS FOR HIGHER SERVICE IS, IN SOME INSTANCES, UNCONSCIOUSLY ACQUIRED. Growth is not felt while in process, and only when attention is called to it is the fact recognised. Samuel became month by month more pious and true; his aptitudes enlarged, and his courage rose with every discharge of inconvenient duty. He became spiritually wealthy without being aware of it—sure evidence of vital godliness. The disposition sometimes found to complain of one's lot, to hanker after some more showy occupation in God's service, and to watch and plan for personal advancement, is not a good sign. The humble deeds of opening the door, lighting the lamps of the house of God, when done out of pure love for the Lord of the sanctuary, are means of raising the tone of the entire life. To do the smallest deed *for Christ* is blessed, and years of such fond service is an education, the results of which are only brought out to view when a perhaps sudden demand is made for some difficult duty. By his bitter repentance, and the all-absorbing love for Christ consequent on full restoration, Peter little knew that he was becoming the man to lead the Church on to great triumphs.

IV. The MEANS OF CALLING TO HIGHER SERVICE ARE WONDERFULLY SUITED TO THE CIRCUMSTANCE. The miraculous manifestation of the Divine Being was in harmony with the method by which, as Samuel knew from history of the past, God conveyed his will to men. No terror would arise in his spirit, for he was accustomed to reverence the *house* of God, and to feel that God was nigh. A pure, loving heart does not dread God. The more childlike the piety, the more welcome the thought and presence of the eternal Friend. If Samuel was to become a prophet, and the emergency required that a prophet should speak at that juncture; and if, for authentication, Eli must be used, it is difficult to conceive how these ends could be more naturally secured than by the manner in which the call was made. The objections men raise to what they call the *anthropomorphism* of such a portion of Scripture as this are utterly baseless. Does not God reveal himself in the material world by the visible things which are the outward expressions of his mind? Does it make any real difference to him whether he form them by a slow or by a more swift process? Was the first expression, in an act of creation, *slow?* Who, then, shall say that in expressing his moral purposes for men he must not and cannot adopt an outward visible form, by which the mind to be taught shall be surely arrested? Given a revelation to be made, will men prescribe *à priori* and infallibly *how* God is to act in making it? If so, do they not draw on their human views, and create a God of their own? And what is this but *anthropomorphism* of deepest dye? All God's acts are perfect. The call of his servants is by means suited to time, purpose, and condition. Abraham and others after him each heard the Divine voice differently, but naturally, so far as special conditions determine events. There are "diversities of

operations," but "one Spirit." So now it may be by "still small voice," or by suggestion of the wise, or by pressure of circumstances, that his servants receive the assurance that God would have them enter on enlarged responsibilities.

V. It is POSSIBLE THAT A CALL MAY NOT BE CLEARLY DISTINGUISHED AT FIRST. It was not wonderful that Samuel mistook the voice of God for the voice of man. It was Divine tenderness gradually to prepare his mind, through the suggestion of Eli, for a great event. God accommodates his voice of majesty to mortal ears. A spirit like Samuel's, satisfied with the honour of doing anything in the house of God, would scarcely suppose that the greatest of honours was at hand. We are *not sure* that calls to higher service are in *any case immediately clear*. Scripture tells of the fact in many instances without reference to the mental history of the individuals. Abraham's *strong* faith implies special difficulties, and possibly conflicts. Isaiah could scarcely believe that God would use him. Though the disciples knew that Jesus of Nazareth called them to be his servants, doubts subsequently came over them, for they "trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." Good men become so habituated to lines of action, ruling of impulses, and guidance of common events, that at first they cannot recognise a superior will in new openings, new gentle longings, and pressure from without. It is by the use *of ordinary faculties and means* that the *call to duty* is ascertained. Samuel inquired of Eli, and followed the suggestions of the experienced. The great lines of duty are close to all who will take the trouble to know them. Wise men, passing events, openness of spirit, willingness to be led, these are the means by which every perplexed Samuel will be sure to solve his doubts. To know the possibility that God has some unknown duty to indicate, to be saying in heart, when attention is aroused, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth"—this is often the first step to a new career of usefulness.

Vers. 11—14.—*Privileges and cares.* The one great fact here set forth is that God reveals to Samuel—1. The judgment impending over the house of Eli, and its reasons. 2. That Eli had been already informed of its nature. 3. That the judgment when it comes will cause the most intense consternation in Israel.

I. An ENTRANCE ON SUPERIOR PRIVILEGES. Hitherto Samuel had waited on man. Now he is honoured to hear the voice of God, and wait directly on the Divine presence. His acquaintance with the history of his race—acquired from his mother, and the conversation of Eli, and possibly records in the tabernacle—must have caused him to know that, in being thus called to listen to the voice of God, he was about to take rank among the distinguished in Israel. The honour would be esteemed in proportion to the purity of his nature and sense of unworthiness in the sight of God. The question as to *why God* should *raise a mere child to a position of such importance* may admit of partial answer in this instance, though there is always in the Divine choice an element of wisdom which we cannot unfold. If the regular officials of Israel are unfaithful, God may teach men by using the feeblest of instruments, and out of the ordinary course. And it might be important for the new prophet to be properly installed and authenticated before the aged judge passed away, and the ark of God fell into the hand of the foe. It is always a season of solemn importance when a servant of God enters on higher privileges, and becomes a special medium for reaching the world with Divine truth. It may be, as in this case, in quietude, without the knowledge of the restless world. In any instance is it a marked era in a personal life.

II. An UNWELCOME DISCOVERY. Throughout the ten or twelve years of Samuel's service in the sanctuary he had been to Eli as a loving, dutiful, reverent son. To his awakening piety and simple nature the aged high priest would be the most august personage in the world, the representative of the Most High. The quiet good-nature of Eli in relation to himself would impress the youthful mind very favourably. There would be in Samuel's deportment a tenderness and deference suited to age. It would therefore be a *terrible discovery to learn* from the mouth of God that this revered man *was so guilty* as to deserve chastisement *most severe*. The surface of life was removed, and the object of love and reverence stood condemned. The shock to a child's sensibilities could not but be great at first. When honoured character is found to be blasted, the first impulse of the heart is to

give up faith in men and things. But well-balanced holy minds, as was Samuel's, soon recover themselves. He *felt* that God must do right. His horror of sin was in proportion to his purity of life. Therefore, with all the awe, silent and loving, of a true child of God, he would grieve, yet feel that God was wise and good. In *more ordinary forms* the *same discovery is sometimes made.* Children have to learn now and then all at once that the father is discovered to have lived a life of secret sin. The Church is occasionally astounded by discoveries of character not suspected. Even the disciples were unaware of the presence of a thief and traitor as their friend and companion. How many characters have yet to be unveiled!

III. A PREMONITION OF COMING CARES. If we search further for reasons why so terrible a revelation was made to the child-prophet, one might be found in the preparation it gave him for future anxieties. It is well for youth and men to go forth to their career remembering that troubles will come. Samuel's knowledge that disasters of most painful character were close at hand would be morally good and useful. For when cares gather around the soul flees more earnestly to God. The same thing occurred in the instance of the apostles. The honour conferred on them in receiving the truth was weighted with the knowledge that "in the world" they would "have tribulation." Every one who enters on a new course of service must look for cares as part of the lot assigned; and the prospect will not daunt the true heart, but bring it more into contact with the Source of strength.

IV. A REVELATION OF DIVINE PROCEDURE. Samuel, if at all reflective, must have been struck with the *exceeding deliberateness of the Divine judgments.* Here was a case of vile conduct long manifested, and wicked irresolution to put it down; yet, instead of sudden and swift punishment coming on father and sons, there is first a declaration to the father that the judgment is coming, and that all is in train for it; then a lapse of some little time, and a declaration to Samuel that the judgment is fixed and sure; and after that a succession of events that must have occupied a considerable time before the execution of the judgment (ch. iv. 1—11). This calm deliberateness of God is an awful thing for the guilty, and may inspire the patience and hope of the righteous. It is to be seen in the predictions and preparations for the destruction of Jerusalem; in the steady wave of desolation and woe he in due time causes to sweep over apostate nations; in the slow and sure approach of disaster on all who make wealth by fraud, or barter his truth for gain; as, also, in the calm, orderly arrangement of laws by which all who have despised the only Saviour reap the fruit of their ways.

Vers. 15—21.—*Diverse experiences.* The principal facts are—1. Samuel, on entering upon his daily duties, fears to relate to Eli what had been told him. 2. Eli, under the action of conscience, and convinced that something important has been communicated, employs strong pressure to obtain it from Samuel. 3. Eli, hearing the account, recognises the righteousness of the judgment. 4. Samuel's position as prophet is established through the land. Samuel rose a new youth. During one night events had transpired which gave him a new position, wrought a change in his views and feelings, and tinged his life with a great sorrow. Weary with nervous exhaustion, and haunted by the thought of a sad discovery, it was no wonder if he moved more languidly than usual. The brief narrative sets before us a group of facts resulting from the communications made to him during the night.

I. The TRIUMPH OF DUTY OVER FEELING. Samuel had *an onerous duty to discharge.* The old man, weak with weight of years and sorrowful in heart, has to be informed of the seal put on his doom. "No prophecy is of private interpretation" applies here in the sense that Samuel's increased knowledge was not intended as a mere secret for himself. Duties are real though not imposed in form of words, and the sensitive spirit quickly recognises them. The eagerness of Eli to learn all that had been communicated left Samuel no option. Thus duties spring up as soon as increased knowledge is a fact; and when God puts honour on us we must be prepared to face fresh obligations. But duty arising naturally out of new relations is sometimes *counter to legitimate feelings.* "Samuel feared to show Eli the vision." His quick sense saw, as soon as he awoke that day, that he would have to relate a painful story. The natural shrinking of a kindly heart from the infliction of a wound would become more marked as an eager

request was made for information. He knew that Eli would be filled with anguish, both because of the coming doom and the present virtual substitution of another in his place as medium of Divine communication. It is human to dread the infliction of humiliation and pain. There is a lawful sympathy with suffering and pity for disgrace. The judge may weep in passing sentence of death, and yet be a perfect judge. A parent's heart may righteously bleed at the thought of administering severe chastisement. Duty is not confronted by feeling as a foe. Even Christ shrank from taking the cup which a Father's will ordained. But *disagreeable duty is met fully* by the *supremacy of sense of right.* Feeling is suppressed, regard for truth is strong, and immediate and future consequences are left to God. Samuel kept nothing back. Herein lies the triumph of duty. The moral victories of life may be won by the young and inexperienced; for the secret lies not in vast knowledge and critical skill, but in a sound heart, swayed by supreme regard for God.

II. The BODINGS OF A RESTLESS CONSCIENCE. It was more than curiosity that induced the inquiry of Eli. His strong language, almost amounting to a threat, revealed an internal conflict. Conscience is quick in arousing suspicions. Did the aged man half hope that some relaxation of the sentence already passed would come? Did the alternate feeling arise that the specific hour of punishment had been announced? The presence of an *uneasy conscience* is a *fearful bane* in life. No age, no past reputation, no external honours, no official dignity, no formal employment in religious duties, can give exemption from it where sin has been deliberately indulged. It is as an enemy in the home, a spoiler in a city, a ghost along one's pathway. What a power for misery lies in some men! How easily it is aroused by passing events! How it makes men quiver even in the presence of children! How possible it is for even good men to embitter old age by pangs which God will not assuage on this side the grave! How unspeakably blessed they who keep a clean conscience, or have found cleansing and *rest* in Christ!

III. SUBMISSION TO THE INEVITABLE. If Eli had now and then cherished a faint hope that the execution of the sentence against him, already deferred, would be either set aside or modified, all hope vanished as he listened to the simple narrative of Samuel. The terrible tension of his spirit was at once relaxed, and with a reverence and awe which revealed that the religious life, though sadly injured, was true, he could only say, "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good." Poor old man! A study for others in responsible positions in the Church of God. It was well for him that he could thus speak, and give to the saints of all time a form of words exactly suited to them when adversity falls and the heart sinks within. God is merciful even in the chastisement of his erring people, giving them grace to bow submissively to his righteous will. Well is it when men can kiss the rod that smites them! There are, at least, *four characteristics* in a *true submission* to the inevitable. 1. A *distinct recognition of God's acts.* "It is the *Lord.*" No mere blind working of laws, though forces do sweep on bringing desolation to the soul. The true spirit sees God in all the trouble. 2. An *absence of all complaint.* "It is the *Lord.*" That is enough. "The Lord" known in Israel, who made all things, who is the same in all ages, who visited Lot for his covetousness, who kept Moses out of the promised land for his rashness; "the Lord" who raises to honour and crowns life with good, and has only been known as faithful, holy, just, and good. Not a murmur, not a bitter word or resentful feeling, finds place in true submission. 3. *Conformity to the stroke.* "Let him do." The back is bared to the rod. It is duty and privilege to wish none other than the execution of his purpose. 4. *Belief that all is for good.* "Let him do what seemeth him good." "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him." Chastisement of the good, and also direct punishment of the wicked, are in the judgment of God *good.* True submission acquiesces in that judgment. Such has been the submission of the saints in ancient and modern times; and pre-eminently, and with reference to special sorrows, of him who, when bearing a burden which others deserved, said, "Father, not my will, but thine be done."

IV. A GROWING REPUTATION. Samuel's fidelity in discharging a painful duty was a good beginning of an official life. He was furnished with the special knowledge requisite to the emergency of the time. The repeated secret vision in Shiloh, and the outward confirmation of his words before the people, gave him courage, and secured

his recognition in the place of Eli. Thus *three elements* enter into the *gradual acquisition of a reputation.* 1. *Fidelity* in discharge of *known duty.* This gives power to the soul for any further duty, however unpleasant. Temptations overcome in one instance lose force afterwards. Sense of right gains energy in action by each exercise. The basis of substantial character is laid in acts of righteousness. 2. *Continuous help from God.* We cannot go on to new conquests by the mere force of what we have become by previous deeds. As Samuel needed and enjoyed aid from God for his position in life, so every one can only acquire a solid reputation by looking for and using such aid as God may see fit to bestow day by day. 3. *Continued verification of profession by deeds corresponding thereto.* A character attained to by faithful deeds in the past, aided by Divine grace, becomes practically a profession. It is the exponent of principles supposed to be dominant in the life, and men give a certain value to it. But if reputation is to grow and become broader in its base and wider in its influence, the profession of principles of conduct must be verified constantly by actions appropriate to them.

Practical lessons:—1. It is of extreme importance for young and old to cultivate a rigid regard for truth, combined with a tender consideration of human feeling. 2. The discharge of disagreeable duties is greatly helped by the remembrance that they arise out of the circumstances in which God himself has placed us. 3. We should distinguish between wise submission to what God lays on us for discipline, and indolent acquiescence in circumstances self-created, and largely removable by our efforts.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—18.—*The old priest and the child-prophet.* Every imagination must be struck by the contrast between the old man and the child. The more so, that the natural order of things is reversed. Instead of admonition to the child coming through the lips of age, admonition to the aged came through the lips of childhood.

1. THE CHARACTER OF ELI ILLUSTRATED. 1. His good points. The Lord had ceased to speak to or by Eli; but when the old priest perceived that the Lord had spoken to the child, he showed no personal or official jealousy. On the contrary, he kindly encouraged Samuel, and directed him how to receive the heavenly message. He did not attempt to interpose on the ground that he, as the chief priest, was the official organ of Divine communications, but bade the child lie still and hearken to the voice. Nor did he claim any preference on the ground of his venerable age. It is not easy to look with complacency on one much younger than ourselves who is evidently on the way to excel us in our own special province. But Eli did so, and threw no hindrance whatever in the way of the young child. Let God use as his seer or prophet whom he would. Eli was anxious to know the truth, and the whole truth, from the mouth of the child. He had been previously warned by a man of God of the disaster which his own weakness and his sons' wickedness would bring on the priestly line (ch. ii. 27—36). But the evil of the time was too strong for him; and having effected no reform in consequence of that previous warning, the old man must have foreboded some message of reproof and judgment when the voice in the night came not to himself, but to the child. Yet he was not false to God, and would not shrink from hearing truth, however painful. "I pray thee hide it not from me." He meekly acquiesced in the condemnation of his house. Eli had no sufficient force of character or vigour of purpose to put away the evil which had grown to such enormity under his indulgent rule, but he was ready with a sort of plaintive surrender to Divine justice. It was not a high style of character, but at all events it was vastly better than a self-justifying, God-resisting mood of mind. 2. His faults. No meek language, no pious acquiescence in his sentence, can extenuate the grievous injury which, through indecision and infirmity, Eli had brought on Israel at large, and on the priestly order in particular. His virtues may almost be said to have sprung out of his faults. He was benevolent, submissive, and free from jealousy because he had no force, no intensity. He could lament and suffer well because he had no energy. So he commanded little respect because, instead of checking evil, he had connived at it for a quiet life. "There are persons who go through life sinning and sorrowing, sorrowing and sinning. No experience teaches them. Torrents of tears flow from

their eyes. They are full of eloquent regrets. But all in vain. When they have done wrong once they do wrong again. What are such persons to be in the next life? Where will the Elis of this world be? God only knows" (Robertson).

II. THE CHILD CALLED TO BE A PROPHET. We may discern even in "little Samuel" the beginnings of a great character, prognostics of an illustrious career. The child was courageous, not afraid to sleep in one of the priest's chambers alone, no father or mother near. And he was dutiful to the aged Eli, hastening to him when he thought that he had called in the night; and considerate to his feelings, reluctant to tell him in the morning the heavy judgments of which God had spoken. From that night he began to be a prophet. Very soon were the hopes of Hannah for her son fulfilled, nay, surpassed. "Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground." The nature of the first communication made through Samuel gave some indication of the future strain of his prophetic life and testimony. He was not to be one of those, like Isaiah, Daniel, and Zechariah, whose prophecies and visions reached far forward into future times. His function was more like that of Moses, Elijah, or Jeremiah, as a teacher of private and public righteousness. He was destined to maintain the law and authority of God, to rebuke iniquity, to check and even sentence transgressors in high places, to withstand the current of national degeneracy, and insist on the separation of Israel from the heathen nations and their customs. The pith of his life-ministry lay in his urgency for moral obedience.

III. LIGHT THROWN ON THE EARLY TRAINING OF GOD'S PUBLIC SERVANTS. It is acknowledged that some who have been eminently useful in Christian times have been converted in manhood, and their earlier life may seem to have been lost. Paul was so converted. So was Augustine. But these really form no exception to the rule that God directs the training of his servants from childhood. Paul had a good Jewish Rabbinical education, and, besides this, an acquaintance with Greek literature and forms of thought. Having been brought up a Pharisee, he was the more fitted after his conversion to estimate at its full force that Jewish resistance to Christianity on the ground of law-righteousness which he above all men combatted. At the same time, knowing the world, and being from his youth up cultivated and intelligent according to the Greek standard, he was prepared to be, after his conversion, a most suitable apostle of Christ to the Gentiles. A similar process of preparation may be traced in Augustine. His early studies in logic and rhetoric prepared him, though he knew it not, to become a great Christian dialectician; and even the years in which he served his own youthful passions were not without yielding some profit, inasmuch as they intensified his knowledge of the power of sin, and ultimately of the sin-vanquishing power of grace. By far the greater number of those who have served the Lord as prophets, preachers, or pastors of his flock, have been nourished up for such service from early years, though they knew it not. Some of them went first to other callings. John Chrysostom was at the bar; Ambrose in the civil service, rising to be prefect of Liguria; Cyprian was a teacher of rhetoric; Melancthon, a professor of Greek. Moses himself grew up a scholar and a soldier, and no one who saw him in the court of Egypt could have guessed his future career. But in such cases God guided his servants in youth through paths of knowledge and experience which were of utmost value to them when they found at last their real life-work for his name. There is danger, however, in sudden transitions from one walk of life to another, and from one mould of character to another. It is the danger of extravagance. There is a proverb about the excessive zeal of sudden converts; and there is this measure of truth in it, that persons who rapidly change their views or their position need some lapse of time, and some inward discipline, before they learn calmness, religious self-possession, and meekness of wisdom. It is therefore worthy of our notice that God gave Moses a long pause in the land of Midian, and Paul also in Arabia. We return to the fact that the great majority of God's servants in the gospel have grown up with religious sentiments and desires from their very childhood. So it was with John the Baptist, with Timothy, with Basil, with Jerome, with Bernard of Clairvaux, with Columba, with Usher, with Zinzendorf, with Bengel, and many more. So it was with Samuel. His first lessons were from the devout and gifted Hannah in the quiet home at Ramah. From his earliest consciousness he knew that he was to be the Lord's, and a specially consecrated servant or Nazarite. Then he was taken to Shiloh, and his special training

for a grand and difficult career began. Early in his life he had to see evil among those who ought to have shown the best example. He had to see what mischief is wrought by relaxation of morals among the rulers of what we should call Church and State, so that an abhorrence of such misconduct might be deeply engraved on his untainted soul. But at the same time Samuel grew up in daily contact with holy things. The sacred ritual, which was no more than a form to the wicked priests, had an elevating and purifying influence on the serious spirit of this child. And so it was that Samuel, conversant day by day with holy names and symbols, took a mould of character in harmony with these—took it gradually, firmly, unalterably. It gave steadiness to his future ministry; for he was to retrieve losses, assuage excitements, re-establish justice, reprove, rebuke, and exhort the people and their first king. Such a ministry needed a character of steady growth, and the personal influence which attends a consistent life. So the Lord called Samuel when a child, and he answered, "Speak; for thy servant heareth." May God raise up young children among us to quit themselves hereafter as men—to redress wrongs, establish truth and right, heal divisions, reform the Church, and pave the way for the coming King and the kingdom!—F.

Vers. 1—18. (SHILOH.)—*Samuel's call to the prophetic office.* "The Lord called Samuel" (ver. 4).

"In Israel's fane, by silent night,
The lamp of God was burning bright;
And there, by viewless angels kept,
Samuel, the child, securely slept.

A voice unknown the stillness broke,
'Samuel!' it called, and thrice it spoke.
He rose—he asked whence came the word.
From Eli? No; it was the Lord.

Thus early called to serve his God,
In paths of righteousness he trod;
Prophetic visions fired his breast,
And all the chosen tribes were blessed" (Cawood).

Introductory.—1. This call to the prophetic office took place at a time of great moral and spiritual darkness. "The word of the Lord" (the revelation of his mind and will to men) "was rare in those days; for" (*therefore*, as the effect; or *because*, as the evidence of the absence of such revelation) "there was no vision" (prophetic communication) "spread abroad" among the people (ver. 1; 2 Chron. xxxi. 5). (1) The word of God is *needed* by man because of his ignorance of the highest truths, and his inability to attain the knowledge of them by his own efforts. (2) Its *possession* is hindered by prevailing indifference and corruption. (3) Its *absence* is worse than a famine of bread (Ps. lxxiv. 9; Amos viii. 11), and most destructive (Prov. xxix. 18). 2. It was the commencement of a fresh series of Divine communications, which culminated in the teaching of the great Prophet, "who spake as never man spake" (Acts iii. 24; Heb. i. 1). This is the chief general significance of the event. "The call of Samuel to be the prophet and judge of Israel formed a turning-point in the history of the Old Testament kingdom of God." 3. It was given to one who was very young (twelve years old, according to Josephus, when childhood merges into youth; Luke ii. 42), and who held the lowest place in the tabernacle, where Eli held the highest, but who was specially prepared for the work to which he was called. "Shadows of impenitent guilt were the dark background of the picture from which the beams of Divine love which guided that child of grace shone forth in brighter relief" (Anderson). 4. It came in a manner most adapted to convince Eli and Samuel that it was indeed from the Lord (ver. 8), and to answer its immediate purpose in regard to both. Notice—

I. THE VOICE of the Lord. 1. It was heard in the *temple* (vers. 2, 3), or palace of the invisible King of Israel, proceeding from his throne in the innermost sanctuary (Exod. xxv. 22; 1 Sam. iv. 4; Heb. ix. 5); not now, however, addressing the

high priest, but a child, as a more loyal subject, and more susceptible to Divine teaching (Matt. xi. 25, 26). 2. It broke suddenly on the silence and slumbers of the *night;* "ere the lamp of God went out," *i. e.* toward the morning—a season suitable to deep and solemn impression. "Untroubled night, they say, gives counsel best." The light of Israel before God, represented by the golden candelabrum, with its "seven lamps of fire," was burning dimly, and the dawn of a new day was at hand. 3. It called Samuel by *name*, not merely as a means of arousing him, but as indicating the Lord's intimate knowledge of his history and character (John x. 3), and his claims upon his special service. The All-seeing has a perfect knowledge of each individual soul, and deals with it accordingly. 4. It was often *repeated*, with ever-increasing impressiveness. Natural dulness in the discernment of spiritual things renders necessary the repetition of God's call to men, and his patience is wonderfully shown in such repetition. 5. It was in the last instance accompanied by an *appearance*. "Jehovah came, and *stood*, and called" (ver. 10). Probably in glorious human form, as in former days. "Allied to our nature by engagement and anticipation, the eternal Word occasionally assumed its prophetic semblance before he dwelt on earth in actual incarnate life." There could now be no doubt whence the voice proceeded; and even the delay which had occurred must have served to waken up all the faculties of the child into greater activity, and prepare him for the main communication he was about to receive.

II. THE RESPONSE of Samuel. 1. He did not *at first* recognise the voice as God's, but thought it was Eli's (vers. 4—6). For "he did not yet know the Lord" by direct and conscious revelation, "neither was the Word of the Lord *revealed* to him" (literally, made bare, disclosed; as a secret told in the ear, which has been uncovered by turning back the hair—Gen. xxv. 7; 1 Sam. ix. 15; Job xxxiii. 16) as it was afterwards (ver. 21). "We must not think that Samuel was then ignorant of the true God, but that he knew not the manner of that voice by which the prophetical spirit was wont to awaken the attention of the prophets" (John Smith's 'Sel. Discourses,' p. 208). "God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not" (Job xxxiii. 14). How often is *his* voice deemed to be only the voice of man! 2. He *acted up to the light* he had (vers. 7, 8). Three times his rest was broken by what he thought was the voice of Eli; three times he ran to him obediently, uncomplainingly, promptly; and three times he "went and lay down in his place" as he was bidden. The spirit which he thus displayed prepared him for higher instruction. 3. He obeyed the *direction* given him by the high priest (ver. 9). Although Eli could not himself hear the voice, yet he perceived that it was heard by another, showed no indignation or envy at the preference shown toward him, and taught him to listen to the Lord for himself, and what he should say in response. "He showed himself a better tutor than he was a parent" (Hall). 4. He responded in a spirit of *reverence*, *humility*, and *obedience* to the voice that now uttered his name twice (ver. 10). "Speak; for thy servant heareth." His omission of the name "Jehovah" was perhaps due to his overwhelming astonishment and reverence But he confessed himself to be his servant, virtually ratifying of his own accord his dedication to his service, and testified his readiness to "hear and obey." Oh, what an hour is that in which the presence of the Lord is first manifested in living force to the soul! and what a change does it produce in all the prospects and purposes of life! (Gen. xxviii. 16, 17). "We were like them that sleep, them that dream, before we entered into communion with God."

III. THE COMMUNICATION of God to Samuel. 1. It *differed* from the message of the "man of God," which had come some time previously, in that it was more brief, simple, and severe; and was given to Samuel alone, without any express direction to make it known to Eli, who seems to have paid no regard to the warning he previously received. 2. It was an announcement of *judgment on the house of Eli* which would be—(1) Very startling and horrifying to men (ver. 11). (2) The fulfilment of the word which had been already spoken (ver. 12). (3) Complete. "When I begin, I will also make an end." (4) Righteously deserved, inasmuch as his sons had grievously sinned, and *he knew it* as well as the approaching judgment, and restrained them not (ver. 13; James iv. 17). "Sinners make themselves vile (literally, curse themselves), and those who do not reprove them make themselves accessaries" (M. Henry). (5) Per-

manent and irrevocable. "For ever." "I have sworn," &c. (ver. 14). 3. It was very *painful* to Samuel because it was directed "against Eli" (ver. 12—as well as his house), for whom he entertained a deep and tender affection. The "burden of the Lord" was heavy for a child to bear. It was his first experience of the prophet's cross, but it prepared him for his future work. "Woe to the man who receives a message from the gods." 4. It put his character to a *severe test*, by leaving to his discretion the use which he should make of so terrible a communication. Wisdom and grace are as much needed in using God's communications as in receiving and responding to his voice.

IV. THE DISCLOSURE by Samuel to Eli. 1. It was *not* made *hastily* or rashly (ver. 15). "He lay down till the morning," pondering the communication; he suffered it not to interfere with the duty that lay immediately before him, but rose and "opened the doors of the house" as usual, though with a heavy heart; and exhibited great calmness, self-control, discretion, and considerate reserve. He "feared to show Eli the vision" lest he should be grieved, or take it in a wrong manner. 2. It was only made under strong *pressure* (vers. 16, 17). "Samuel, *my son*" (B'ni), said Eli; and "how much is expressed by this one word!" (Thenius). He asked, he demanded, he adjured. 3. It was made *truthfully*, faithfully, and without any reserve (ver. 18). 4. It was followed by a *beneficial effect*. Not, indeed, in rousing the high priest to strenuous efforts for the reformation of his house, which he probably deemed impossible, but in leading him to acknowledge that it was the Lord who had spoken, and to resign himself to his will. No such effect followed the warning previously addressed to him. A similar spirit was shown by Aaron (Levit. x. 3), by Job (i. 21), by David (2 Sam. xviii. 14, 15, 32, 33), by Hezekiah (2 Kings xx. 19), and, above all, by the great High Priest himself (Matt. xxvi. 42). No other Divine message came apparently to Eli or his house. Henceforth there was only the silence that precedes the thunderstorm and the earthquake.—D.

Ver. 10.—*The faithful servant.* "Speak; for thy servant heareth." The well-known picture by Sir Joshua Reynolds, representing the child Samuel in the attitude of prayer, aptly expresses the spirit of his whole life. His own language in response to the call of God does this still more perfectly, and "contains the secret of his strength." It also teaches us how we should respond to the Divine call which is addressed to us, and what is the spirit which we ought ever to possess. For God speaks to us as truly as he spoke to Samuel, though in a somewhat different manner. He speaks to us often, and calls each of us to special service for him; and there cannot be a nobler aim than that of possessing the mind, disposition, and character of a "faithful servant" (Matt. xxv. 21) here portrayed. This implies—

I. CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE MASTER'S PRESENCE. 1. *Peculiar;* not merely a general belief in his omnipresence, such as most persons have, but a realisation of his presence *here;* not as in a dream, but in full waking thought; not as if he were at a distance from us, but "face to face." "Thou God seest me." 2. *Intense;* filling the soul with the light of his glory and with profound reverence (Job xlii. 6). 3. *Habitual;* abiding with us at all times, carried with us into every place, and pervading and influencing all our thoughts, words, and actions.

II. ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE MASTER'S CLAIMS. "Thy servant." His claims are —1. *Just;* because of—(1) What he has *done* for us. He has given us our being, and all that makes it a blessing (ch. i. 11). He has purchased us at a great price (1 Pet. i. 18). "Ye are not your own" (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20). (2) Our *consecration* to him (ch. i. 28). "I am the Lord's" (Isa. xliv. 5). (3) Our *acceptance* by him. 2. *Supreme.* All other claims are inferior to his, and must be regarded as subordinate to them. 3. *Universal;* extending to all our faculties, possessions, &c.

"My gracious Lord, I own thy right
To every service I can pay,
And call it my supreme delight
To hear thy dictates and obey.

What is my being but for thee,
Its sure support, its noblest end;

Thy ever-smiling face to see,
And serve the cause of such a Friend?" (Doddridge).

III. LISTENING TO THE MASTER'S DIRECTIONS. "Speak." "I am waiting to hear thy commands, and desire to know thy will." "What saith my Lord unto his servant?" (Josh. v. 14). "What wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts ix. 6). His directions are given by—1. His *word*, in the law and the gospel. 2. His *providence*, in the various events of life, affording fresh opportunities, bringing new responsibilities, indicating special methods of service. "New occasions teach new duties." "There are so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification" (1 Cor. xiv. 10). 3. His *Spirit;* teaching the meaning and application of the word, suggesting thoughts and activities in accordance with his revealed will, filling the heart with holy and benevolent impulses. "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God" (John vi. 45). "Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters" (watching with the utmost attention for every indication of their will), "so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God" (Ps. lxxxv. 8; cxxiii. 2; Hab. ii. 1).

IV. READINESS FOR THE MASTER'S WORK. "Thy servant heareth;" stands ready to obey—1. *Whatever* thou mayest direct. 2. With my *utmost* strength. 3. *Promptly;* without delay. "When it pleased God to reveal his Son in me, *immediately* I conferred not with flesh and blood, but went" (Gal. i. 15—17). When Ledyard (whose life was the first of many sacrificed to African discovery) closed with the proposal of the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Inland Parts of Africa to undertake a journey in that region, and was asked how soon he would be ready to set out, he replied, "To-morrow morning." The like promptitude should be exhibited by every "good and faithful servant."—D.

Ver. 13.—*Parental restraint.* "And he restrained them not." The parental relation was universally regarded in ancient times as one which involved a closer identity between parents and children, and a more absolute authority on the part of the former over the latter, than would now be deemed just. This fact explains many occurrences in the sacred history. It also makes more apparent the inexcusable conduct of Eli in omitting to restrain his sons from their evil way. To every head of a family, however, belongs a certain measure of authority, and he is responsible for its exercise in "commanding his children and his household" (Gen. xviii. 19) to do what is right, and restraining them from doing what is wrong. Concerning PARENTAL RESTRAINT, observe that—

I. ITS NEED IS URGENT. 1. Because of the strong *tendency* to evil which exists in children. However it may be accounted for or explained, there can be no doubt of the fact. If it be simply, as some say, a desire of self-gratification, and dislike of everything that hinders it—self-will, it is necessary that it should be checked; for those who are trained to deny themselves in very early life, and submit to the will of their parents, are far more likely than others to accept and submit to the will of God when they become conscious of it. "In order to form the minds of children, the first thing to be done is to conquer their will and bring them to an obedient temper. This is the only strong and rational foundation of a religious education, without which both precept and example will be ineffectual. As self-will is the root of all sin and misery, so whatever cherishes this in children insures their after wretchedness and irreligion; whatever checks and mortifies it promotes their future happiness and piety" (The mother of the Wesleys). 2. Because of the evil *examples* by which they are surrounded, and which act so powerfully on their susceptibility to impression and their propensity to imitation. 3. Because of the manifold *temptations* to which they are exposed. However guarded, they cannot be altogether kept from their influence.

II. ITS OBLIGATION IS IMPERATIVE. 1. It is obviously a part of parental *duty*. 2. It is often enjoined in the word of God (Deut. xxi. 15—21; Prov. xix. 18; xxiii 13, 14; xxix. 15, 17). 3. It is clearly adapted to accomplish beneficial results (Prov. xxii. 6). It is thus a duty which parents owe not only to their children, but also to the great Parent of all, who, by the manner in which he deals with his earthly children, has himself set them an example.

II. ITS METHOD IS IMPORTANT. It should be—1. *Timely;* commenced at an early age (Prov. xiii. 24). 2. *Firm* and *just*. 3. With *consideration*, *kindness*, and *patience* (Eph. vi. 4; Col. iii. 21).

"O'er wayward childhood wouldst thou hold firm rule,
And sun thee in the light of happy faces,
Love, hope, and patience, these must be thy graces,
And in thine own heart let them first keep school;
For as old Atlas on his broad neck places
Heaven's starry globe, and there sustains it; so
Do these bear up the little world below
Of education—patience, love, and hope" (Coleridge).

IV. ITS OMISSION IS RUINOUS. 1. To *children* (ch. iv. 11). 2. To *parents* (ch. iv. 18). 3. To the *nation* (ch. iv. 22). "Indulgent parents are cruel to themselves and their posterity" (Hall). How numerous are the facts which justify these statements! "As in individuals, so in nations, unbridled indulgence of the passions must produce, and does produce, frivolity, effeminacy, slavery to the appetite of the moment; a brutalised and reckless temper, before which prudence, energy, national feeling, any and every feeling which is not centred in self, perishes utterly. The old French noblesse gave a proof of this law which will last as a warning beacon to the end of time. The Spanish population of America, I am told, gives now a fearful proof of this same terrible penalty. Has not Italy proved it likewise for centuries past? It must be so. For national life is grounded on, is *the development of, the life of the family*. And where the root is corrupt the tree must be corrupt likewise" (Kingsley, 'The Roman and the Teuton,' Lect. ii.). Therefore (1) let parents exercise due restraint over their children; and (2) let children submit to the restraint of their parents (Exod. xx. 12; Levit. xix. 3; Prov. xxx. 17; Jer. xxxv. 18, 19).—D.

Ver. 18.—*Resignation*. "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good." The sentence which was pronounced on Eli and his house was almost as severe as can be conceived. But the manner in which it was received by him shows that, notwithstanding the defects of his character, he possessed the "spirit of faith," which shone like a spark of fire amidst the ashes and gloom of his closing days. He did not refuse to admit its Divine Author, did not question its justice, did not rebel against it and seek to reverse it, did not fret and murmur and give himself up to despair. His language expresses a spirit the exact opposite of all this. "When Samuel had told him every whit, Eli replied, It is the Lord. The highest religion could say no more. What more can there be than surrender to the will of God? In that one brave sentence you forget all Eli's vacillation. Free from envy, free from priestcraft, earnest, humbly submissive; that is the bright side of Eli's character, and the side least known or thought of" (F. W. Robertson).

I. HE RECOGNISES THE APPOINTMENT OF GOD. "It is the Lord," or "he is the Lord," who has spoken. He believed that the voice was really his, notwithstanding (1) it came to him *indirectly*—through the agency of another; (2) it came in an *unexpected* manner; and (3) it announced what he naturally *disliked* to hear, and what was most grievous. These things sometimes dispose men to doubt "the word of the Lord," and are made excuses for rejecting it. It is not, in its mode of communication or in its contents, "according to their mind." But the spirit of faith ventures not to dictate to God how or what he shall say, and it perceives the Divine voice when those who are destitute of it perceive only what is purely natural and human.

II. HE JUSTIFIES THE RECTITUDE OF GOD. Such justification (Ps. li. 4)—1. Is *implied* in the acknowledgment that it comes from Jehovah, who alone is holy (ch. ii. 2). "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. xviii. 25). 2. *Proceeds* from the conviction that it is deserved on account of the iniquity of his sons, and his own sins of omission (Lam. iii. 39; Micah vii. 9). They who have a due sense of the evil of sin are not disposed to complain of the severity of the sentence pronounced against it. 3. Is not the less *real* because not fully expressed, for *silence* itself is often the most genuine testimony to the perfect equity of the Divine procedure. "Aaron held his peace" (Lev. x. 3; Ps. xxxix. 9, 11).

III. HE SUBMITS TO THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD. "Let him do what seemeth him good." 1. Very *reverently and humbly* (1 Pet. v. 6). It is vain to contend against him. 2. *Freely and cheerfully;* not because he cannot be effectually resisted, but because what he does is right and good; the spontaneous surrender and sacrifice of the will. 3. *Entirely.* "The will of the Lord be done" (Acts xxi. 14).

IV. HE CONFIDES IN THE GOODNESS OF GOD. "Good." "Good is the word of the Lord" (2 Kings xx. 19). Eli could not have spoken as he did unless he believed that—(1) God is merciful and gracious; (2) in wrath remembers mercy, mitigating the force of the storm to all who seek shelter in his bosom; and (3) "out of evil still educes good" (Rom. viii. 28). Let us be thankful for the surpassing motives and influences afforded to us under the gospel (2 Cor. iv. 17; Heb. iv. 15; xii. 10, 11; Rev. xxi. 4; xxii. 3).—D.

Ver. 19—iv. 1. (SHILOH.)—*Samuel the prophet.* "A prophet of the Lord" (ver. 20). "A prophet was a man who drew aside the curtain from the secret counsels of Heaven. He declared or made public the previously hidden truths of God; and, because future events might chance to involve Divine truth, therefore a revealer of future events might happen to be a prophet. Yet, still, small was the part of a prophet's functions which contained the foreshadowing of events, and not necessarily any part of it" (De Quincey, 'Confessions,' p. 27). The greatest of prophets, and more than a prophet, was Moses (Num. xii. 6—8; Deut. xviii. 15; xxxiv 9). After him a prophet arose at rare intervals. With Samuel, who was second only to Moses, a new prophetic era began. He was called to a permanent prophetic work; a type of the future line of the prophets which he virtually founded, and "set for all time the great example of the office of a prophet of the Lord." "In Samuel—Levite, Nazarite, at the sanctuary of Shiloh, prophet, and destined founder of a mightier prophetic power—were united from the first all spiritual gifts most potent for the welfare of the people, and under his powerful control stood the wheels on which the age revolved. . . . He was truly the father of all the great prophets who worked such wonders in the ensuing centuries" (Ewald. See 'Davison on Prophecy;' 'Fairbairn on Prophecy;' 'Prophecy a Preparation for Christ,' by the Dean of Canterbury). The summary of his prophetic activity here given leads us to consider—

I. HIS QUALIFICATION. "And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him" (ver. 19). "And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh (ver. 10): for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord" (ver. 21). 1. *The possession of a holy character,* which was the general condition of prophetic endowment. At the time of his call Samuel entered into a higher knowledge of God, and a closer fellowship with him than he had before; he gradually advanced therein, and his character became more and more perfect. "Equable progression from the beginning to the end was the special characteristic of his life." "The qualifications which the Jewish doctors suppose necessarily antecedent to render any one *habilem ad prophetandum* are truly *probity* and *piety;* and this was the constant sense and opinion of them all universally, not excluding the vulgar themselves" (John Smith, 'Sel. Disc.' p. 250). 2. *The revelation to him of the Divine word*—by voices, visions, insight, intuition, inspiration (ver. 7). "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved (borne along as a ship by the wind) by the Holy Ghost" (2 Pet. i. 21). The communications of God to men have been made in many ways (by dreams, by Urim, by prophecy), and one communication faithfully received and used has prepared the way for another. How long after the Lord first appeared to Samuel he "appeared again" to him is not stated. 3. *The conviction of its Divine origin,* amounting to absolute certainty, and impelling him to speak and act in accordance with the revelation he received.

II. HIS VOCATION. "And the word of Samuel came to all Israel" (ch. iv. 1). He had not only to receive the word from God, but also to utter it to men. He was a spokesman for God, a messenger or interpreter of the Divine will. 1. *The nature and purpose* of his vocation were—(1) *The communication of doctrine;* the teaching of moral and spiritual truth; the declaration of the mind and will of the invisible and eternal King, with special reference to the requirements of the time in which he lived. He was a witness of the presence and government of Jehovah, his nature and

character, his hatred of sin and love of righteousness, his dissatisfaction with merely formal and ceremonial services, his opposition to idolatry, his gifts, claims, and purposes with respect to his people. "The prophetic order in its highest signification was nothing else than a living witness for those eternal principles of righteousness which previous revelation had implanted in the Hebrew race, and through them in the life of humanity" (Tulloch). (2) *The enforcement of practice,* by urgent appeals to the conscience, and presenting powerful motives of gratitude for past benefits, hope of future good, and fear of future evil. "The prophets, beside their communication of doctrine, had another and a direct office to discharge as pastors and ministerial monitors of the people of God. Their work was to admonish and reprove, to arraign for every ruling sin, to blow the trumpet of repentance, and shake the terrors of the Divine judgment over a guilty land. Often they bore the message of consolation or pardon; rarely, if ever, of public approbation or praise" (Davison). (3) *The prediction of things to come;* not simply general results of good or evil conduct, but specific events that could not have been known except by Divine inspiration (ch. vii. 4; x. 2; xii. 17; xiii. 14); an element which became more prominent in subsequent times—the things to come having relation to the setting up of a kingdom of heaven on earth. We need not here dwell upon other matters connected with and growing out of the prophetic vocation of Samuel, viz., (4) his offering sacrifice; (5) his civil magistracy; (6) his presiding over the "school of the prophets;" (7) his recording the events of his time (1 Chron. xxix. 29). 2. *The persons whom his vocation immediately concerned.* (1) The people and the elders of Israel—directing them what to do, exhorting them to forsake their sins, sometimes opposing and condemning their wishes. "His business was to keep all Israel true to the Divine purpose for which they had been made a nation" ('Expositor,' vol. iii. p. 344). (2) The priesthood, as in the case of Eli and his sons. (3) The *king*—teaching him that he was a servant of Jehovah, appointed by him, and bound to obey his laws, and when he departed from them denouncing his disobedience. "Under the protection generally, though not always effectual, of their sacred character the prophets were a power in the nation often more than a match for kings and priests, and kept up in that little corner in the earth the antagonism of influences which is the only real security for continued progress . . . . The remark of a distinguished Hebrew, that the prophets were in Church and State equivalent to the modern liberty of the press, gives a just but not an inadequate conception of the part fulfilled in national and universal history by this great element of Jewish life" (J. S. Mill, 'Representative Government,' p. 41). 3. *The manner in which it was fulfilled:* diligently (Jer. xxiii. 28; xlviii. 10 = negligently); faithfully (not according to his own natural wishes, but God's will); fearlessly; established=found trustworthy—Num. xii. 7; 1 Sam. ii. 35), fully (not shunning to declare all the counsel of God—Deut. iv. 2; Acts xx. 27).

III. HIS CONFIRMATION. "The Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground" (but made them stand firmly, or attain their aim like an arrow which hits the mark—ver. 19). He attested, sealed him as his messenger—1. By bringing to pass the good or evil foretold by him (Num. xxii. 6). 2. By providential and even miraculous occurrences, indicating his approval (ch. vii. 10; xii. 18). 3. By clothing his word with power, so that it was felt by those to whom it was addressed to be the word of the Lord; for there is something Divine within which responds to the Divine without, and every one who is truthful perceives and obeys the voice of eternal truth (John xviii. 37).

IV. HIS RECOGNITION. "And all Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord" (ver. 20). The Divine word was no more rare (ch. iii. 1). 1. His *authority* was universally admitted. It was familiarly known throughout the land that he had been appointed as a regular medium of communication between Jehovah and his people. 2. His *utterances* were widely disseminated, and regarded with reverence. "The word of Samuel came to all Israel." 3. His *work* thereby became highly effective. Its full effect appeared long afterwards. But even before the blow of judgment, which he predicted, fell (some ten years after his call), he doubtless laboured not in vain; and during the succeeding twenty years (ch. vii. 2) he "spent his time in a slow but resolute work of kindling the almost extinguished flame of a higher life in Israel."—D.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 1.—**And the word of Samuel . . . all Israel.** This clause is rightly connected with the foregoing verse of the previous chapter in the Syriac and Vulgate. Attached to the fourth chapter, it gives a wrong sense, namely, that Samuel gave the command for the assembling of all Israel for battle with the Philistines. This is so plainly erroneous that the A. V. dissents from it by translating the *and* in the next clause by *now*. Joined to the previous chapter, it gives the true meaning. Because Samuel spake *by the word of Jehovah*, therefore *his word came to all Israel*, that is, it was a binding and authoritative command throughout the whole land; or, in other words, when Samuel was acknowledged to be Jehovah's prophet he also became the virtual judge of Israel, though probably he did not act with full authority until after Eli's death.

DEFEAT OF ISRAEL AND CAPTURE OF THE ARK (vers. 1—11). **Now Israel**—rather, And Israel—**went out against the Philistines.** During the declining years of Eli, the yoke of the Philistines, which apparently had been shaken off in his manhood, began once again to press heavily upon the neck of Israel. But Israel was still strong enough to make valiant resistance, provoked apparently by the Philistines invading the land, as we find that they had **pitched**, *i. e.* encamped, **in Aphek.** As Aphek means *a fortress*, many places bear the name; but the position of the Philistine camp is fixed by its being near both to Eben-ezer and to Mizpah, and probably, therefore, it was the Aphek in Judah (Josh. xii. 18). Eben-ezer, *the stone of help*, had not as yet received this name (see ch. vii. 12); and apparently it was not a town, but a monument set up in an open plain fit for the purposes of war, and which up to this time had no specific appellation.

Ver. 2.—**In the field** means "in the open country." By a gradual change of language it now signifies cultivated ground, and even an enclosure, whereas in the A. V. it retains its old meaning of unenclosed and uncultivated land (see 2 Kings iv. 39).

Ver. 3.—**When the people were come into the camp.** Before the battle Israel had entrenched itself, so that upon its defeat it had a place capable of defence into which to retire. We find also that their communications were open, so that they could send to Shiloh. The army is called *the people* because battles were not fought in those days by men specially trained, but by all the inhabitants of the country of the proper age. The question, **Wherefore hath Jehovah smitten us?** expresses surprise. The elders had evidently expected victory, and therefore the domination of the Philistines could not have been so complete as it certainly was in the days of Samson. There must have been an intermediate period of successful warfare during which Eli had been their leader. **Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of Jehovah.** This, the remedy suggested by the elders, was to employ their God as a talisman or charm. The ark was the symbol of Jehovah's presence among them, and of their being his especial people, and by exposing it to danger they supposed that they would compel their God to interfere in their behalf. They would have done right in appealing to their covenant relation to Jehovah and had they repented of the sins which had grown up among them, fostered by the evil example of Eli's sons, he would have shown them mercy. But for God to have given Israel the victory because of the presence of his ark in their camp would have been to overthrow all moral government, and would have insured their spiritual ruin as inevitably as would the granting to any order of men now the power of working miracles or of infallibly declaring the truth.

Ver. 4.—**Which dwelleth between the cherubims.** Literally, "which sitteth, *i.e.* is enthroned, upon the cherubim." The idea is not that of Jehovah's habitation, but of his seat in state as Israel's King. In bringing the ark they brought to the camp the throne of Jehovah, as their theocratic Ruler; but **the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark,** representing the immorality of the nation, whose very priests were abandoned men. We are not to suppose that there was any fault in the manner of bringing, because it is said **that the people sent that they might bring the ark** from Shiloh. Levites may have carried it, and priests with the Urim and Thummim have had the charge of every detail. But there was the ill-omened conjuncture of personal immorality with superstitious reverence for mere material symbols, and thereby the presence of the ark only insured, in the moral government of God, Israel's defeat.

Ver. 6.—But they, sure of its talismanic influence, shout for joy as they see its approach, and the Philistines ask the meaning of the **great shout in the camp of the Hebrews.** This name is constantly given to the Israelites by those not belonging to them, and probably has a certain amount of animosity in it, as showing that they were foreigners; literally, *passers over*, people who in the person of Abraham had come from the other side of the Euphrates, and

having began as feeble immigrants, had ended in obtaining possession of the land, and ousting the rightful inhabitants.

Ver. 8.—**These mighty Gods.** In Hebrew *Elohim*, though plural, is used of the one true God, but in this sense has always the verb or adjective belonging to it in the singular. In ver. 7 the Philistines conform to this rule, and say, **Elohim is come**; but here the verb, pronoun, and adjective are all plural, *i. e.* they speak as heathen, to whom polytheism was natural (comp. 1 Kings xii. 28). **With all the plagues.** Rather, "with every plague," *i. e.* with every kind of plague. **In the wilderness.** God did not really smite the Egyptians in the wilderness. The plagues, including the destruction of Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea, had all happened before the Israelites had entered it. But probably the Philistines confused together the plagues of Egypt and the miracles in the wilderness, and even the conquest of Canaan, in one grand but vague whole, and so were ready to give way to despair, as they called to mind the traditions they had heard of these mighty interpositions of God for his people.

Ver. 9.—**Be strong.** But, as is often the case, despair served only to nerve them to bitter determination. The greatness of the danger—for as heathen the Philistines fully believed that the ark would act as a charm—and the fearful alternative of being **servants**, *i. e.* slaves to those who not so very long ago had been slaves to them, made them resolve to do their very utmost. The result was a complete victory.

Ver. 10.—**Israel fled every man into**—better *to*—**his tent.** Their camp stood them this time in no stead. It was stormed by the Philistines, and the whole army fled in confusion. In those days the Israelites dwelt in tents, and to flee "every man to his tent" means that they fled away in every direction, each to his own home. It is in this indiscriminate flight that an army suffers most. As long as men keep together the loss is comparatively slight. But now, thus utterly broken, **there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen**—a terrible slaughter. They are called footmen because the Israelites had neither cavalry nor chariots.

Ver. 11.—Moreover, **the ark of God was taken, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain,** according to the prediction of the man of God. Probably the last resistance was made round the ark, and the sons of Eli at least died "as men" (ch. ii. 33).

THE OVERTHROW OF ELI'S HOUSE (vers. 12—22). Ver. 12.—**There ran a man of Benjamin.** The whole story is told with so much vividness, and is so full of exact particulars, that it must have come from an eye-witness, probably from Samuel himself. According to Jewish tradition, this Benjamite was no other than Saul, but the chronology is at variance with this supposition. The importance in old time, when even roads did not exist, of men capable of running long distances to carry news in war is evident, and many instances are recorded showing the high appreciation in which their services were held Thus the running of the Cushite and of Ahimaaz forms an interesting episode in the pathetic history of Absalom's death (2 Sam. xviii. 19—31). So Herodotus mentions that Pheidippides, when sent to urge the people of Sparta to come to the help of the Athenians against the Persians, arrived there on the second day after his departure from Athens (Herod., vi. 105, 106). Shiloh, apparently, was but a comparatively short distance from Eben-ezer, as the runner arrived there on the evening of the very day on which the battle was fought. The rent clothes and the earth upon the head were the usual signs in token that some great calamity had taken place (2 Sam. i. 2).

Ver. 13.—**Upon a seat**—literally, "the throne"—**by the wayside,** whither his official chair had been removed to some spot near the gate of the city (see ver. 18), and probably commanding a view of the pathway by which a messenger would arrive. There probably for hours he had sat, anxiously awaiting tidings of the ark, which, we may feel sure, he had very unwillingly allowed to be carried away into the camp. **When the man came into the city.** Literally the words are, "And the man came to tell it in the city, and all the city cried out." We are not to suppose with some that Eli, being old and now blind, let the messenger slip by unobserved. A man of his high rank would not be alone, and the mention of his throne suggests that he was seated there in somewhat of official dignity. And so, as the runner drew near, with the symbols of disaster upon his person, the priests and Levites in attendance upon Eli would begin the cry of sorrow, and soon it would spread throughout all Shiloh.

Ver. 14.—**And when Eli heard the noise of the crying,** he asked the meaning of **this tumult.** The word signifies any confused noise, as the splashing of rain (1 Kings xviii. 41), but especially the din made by a multitude of people (Job xxxix. 7). It exactly expresses here the Babel of voices, all asking news at once, which at the coming of the messenger surged around the high priest's throne. He demands the reason, and the uproar is quelled, while "the man hasted, and came and told Eli." Not **came in,** for Eli was without on the wayside, but simply *came to Eli,* being summoned thither by one of the Levites in attendance. Eli, as the chief ruler, was, of course, the person whom he sought, and immediately that he knew where he was, he hasted to him.

Ver. 15.—**Eli was ninety and eight years old.** Until the invention by the Arabs of the present system of numerals, all ancient nations had a most cumbrous system of expressing numbers. The Hebrew method was to attach a value to each of the letters of the alphabet, and then add them together, and thus the eighth and nineteenth letters would between them make up ninety-eight. Such a system led to constant mistakes in copying, and thus the numerals in the earlier parts of the Old Testament are beset with uncertainty. Here the Septuagint has *ninety*, and the Syriac *seventy-eight*. But as Eli was described already as "very old" in ch. ii. 22, the Hebrew text is the most probable. Instead of **dim** the Hebrew has *set*, i. e. Eli was now absolutely blind, as the word expresses the motionless state of the eye when obscured by cataract. In ch. iii. 2 a different word is used, rightly there translated "dim," as the disease is one which comes on gradually. In 1 Kings xiv. 4 we read that Ahijah was blind from the same cause, and the word is there correctly rendered "set."

Vers. 16, 17.—**What is there done, my son?** Literally, What is the thing? Or, as the phrase is translated in 2 Sam. i. 4, "How went the matter?" Eli must have gathered from the words of the messenger that Israel had been defeated; for he expressly says, **I fled**, and his haste, as testified by the added words **to day**, showed that the defeat was a severe one. Eli, therefore, anxiously asks what has happened, and the answer piles misery upon misery, rapidly heaping together four crushing catastrophes. For **Israel had fled before the Philistines; there had been a great slaughter**; among the slain were Eli's two sons; and, worst of **all, the ark of God** was **taken.**

Ver. 18.—At this last sad news the old man's spirit failed; and though it was his own want of a firm sense of duty that had prepared the way for this sad ruin of his country, yet we cannot but respect his deep attachment and reverent love for the symbol of his faith. The rest he could have borne; but that the ark of God, especially intrusted to his care, was now captive in heathen hands was a calamity that broke his heart. **He had judged Israel forty years.** The Septuagint reads *twenty*, but these differences in numbers occur constantly. In either case he would have been well advanced in years before he reached the judgeship, and probably he attained to it slowly; not by one great act, but by the qualities of a statesman, by which he lightened the yoke of the Philistines, and rendered the people for a long time a match for them in war. His character is not that of a hero, but of a wise, patient, and prudent ruler, but one whose good qualities were spoiled at last by his weak partiality for his unworthy sons.

Vers. 19—21.—**His daughter-in-law.** The death of Eli's daughter-in-law is equally tragic with his own. The news of the terrible calamity that had befallen the ark of God brought on a premature delivery; but when she had given birth to a son, the attendant women naturally hoped that the good tidings would cheer the mother's heart. They haste, therefore, to tell her; **but she answered not, neither did she regard it.** This does not mean that she was already dead; if so, the women would not have told her. It means that no private joy could compensate her for the loss of the outward sign and proof that the covenant of Jehovah was with her and her people. The loss of the ark seemed to her to signify the overthrow of her national religion. But she heard, for immediately **she named the child I-chabod.** There is some doubt as to the exact meaning of the word. It may mean *Alas! the glory;* but more probably it signifies *No-glory* — the glory of Israel is no more. In the reason given by the narrator for her sorrow, as summed up in the name given to her child, the deaths of Eli and of Phinehas are included, but her own words refer only to the ark. Literally they are, "The glory is gone into captivity from Israel." There is possibly a reference to this in Ps. lxxviii. 64, where, speaking of the fall of Shiloh, the Psalmist says, "Their priests fell by the sword, and their widows made no lamentation." Others, it may be, like the wife of Phinehas, felt that there was no room for private grief at a time of so great national distress and humiliation.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—11. — *Moral causes of disaster.* Assuming that the first sentence properly belongs to the third chapter, and refers generally to the acceptance of Samuel as prophet by the whole nation, the section (vers. 1—11) sets forth the following facts:—1. Israel, suffering from subjection to the Philistines, enters on war for the recovery of freedom and suffers defeat. 2. Ordinary means failing, recourse is had to the ark of God in order to insure success. 3. The visible presence of the ark at once raises the courage and hope of Israel and fills the Philistines with fear. 4. As a counter-stimulus to conflict, the Philistines stir up their own love of freedom. 5. The battle issues in the heavy defeat of Israel, the death of

Eli's sons, and the capture by the Philistines of the ark of God. There can be no doubt but that the will of God is being wrought out in the triumphs and disasters of national life through all time. The laws by which men are governed are uniform. They are often slow and subtle in operation, and it requires that the whole life of a people be known before we can see the sure working out of the laws that determine success or ruin. It is an advantage to the world that in sacred history we have revealed to us, in concrete form, the principles on which God rules men. The disasters that fell upon Israel in the early years of Samuel's life furnish us with much instruction. We learn that—

I. There is for a PEOPLE A STATE OF PROSPERITY FOR WHICH THEY ARE ORIGINALLY DESIGNED, AND AFTER WHICH IT IS NATURAL FOR THEM TO ASPIRE. Israel, as a people, was constitutionally fitted to enjoy a high degree of national well-being. There are material blessings proper to all nationalities, and especially were these included in the lot promised to Israel through Moses (Deut. xxviii. 1—13). It was quite natural, therefore, for the people in Samuel's time to seek freedom from a foreign yoke, and to strive to regain political influence and internal prosperity. There stands, more or less clear, before the mind of nations and individuals, an ideal of what they ought to attain to. The vision of good, though remote, is a powerful influence in life. Before every State, Church, and home there lies a condition of freedom, peace, and influence for which it is designed by Providence, and which should ever be the goal of effort.

II. The DIVINE FAVOUR IS REQUISITE FOR TRUE SUCCESS IN THE EFFORT TO ATTAIN TO THE GOAL. Israel could not obtain the national blessings so eagerly sought unless the favour of God be secured. This is the record of their entire history. It is the "blessing of the Lord that maketh rich." The life of a nation extends possibly over centuries; and as during the few years of a man's life he may be allowed to strive on without God to the end before disaster is apparent, so the course of centuries alone may reveal whether it is possible for *true*, enduring success to be realised apart from the favour of God. The favour of God means a co-working of the Divine energy with his creatures, so as to secure a convergence of all physical, mental, and social forces towards their welfare. That he should do this without dislocations of nature is as reasonable as that our spirit should, in its measure and mode, strike in on the external forces of matter, and, without violating their laws, cause them to subserve its purposes.

III. The REVEALED CONDITION OF INSURING GOD'S FAVOUR IS CONFORMITY TO HIS WILL. Israel could not expect that God would, as a matter of course, prosper their endeavours after the goal of life. The evils from which the nation suffered were the result of *non*-conformity to the will of God. It is clear that God discriminates between men, and although it may be that God's energy works along lines fixed and uniform, yet, inasmuch as all the lines are his creation, and are coincident with his great law of blessing the good and chastising the bad, it turns out, in every case, that his favour, in specific acts and issues, goes with conformity to his will. Moreover, is there not a very true sense in which it may be said that the whole being of God is in immediate and constant contact with every subtle element in existence? They are all ministers that do his pleasure. God has not banished himself from all spheres of action, so as to be the only powerless Power in the universe.

IV. CONFORMITY TO THE WILL OF GOD LIES IN TWO THINGS:—1. EXERTION. 2. MORAL CHARACTER. The natural craving of Israel for national prosperity could only be satisfied by making strenuous efforts to shake off the Philistines' yoke and develop all the resources of the land, and, further, by the possession of a moral character such as God delights in. It is the will of God that if men will enjoy whatever enters into the conception of a well-developed, prosperous life, they must work for it. But that is only *one side of duty*. We are not only bound to *act*, to *work*, but are bound to BE; and it depends on the kind of persons we are as to the direction and force of our acts. Israel in Samuel's time had a moral character, but not according to the will of God. Every nation and every individual bears a moral character before the eye of God. It is only when our moral condition is a reflex of the righteousness of God that we can be said to have the conformity to his will which is essential to the favour that insures real success to life's effort.

V. RELIANCE SOLELY ON PHYSICAL AND MENTAL EXERTION FOR THE ATTAINMENT OF A DESIRED GOOD IS SURE TO END IN FINAL DISASTER. Israel put forth physical and mental effort to attain to freedom and former prosperity. In this respect there was conformity to the will of God, and an observance, therefore, of the laws of success. But the radical defect in the case was that of an utter carelessness concerning the possession of the character which alone can be acceptable with God. The people lacked all the force which lies in being right with God. Those who strive for the masteries must, we are told (2 Tim. ii. 5), "strive lawfully"—in harmony with all the moral as well as physical laws which govern the enterprise, whatever it be, public or private, relating to commerce, education, or religion. The great practical truth here exhibited is *that it is possible for a people to set heart on the achievement of a purpose* good in itself, to devise means, combine forces, and arouse enthusiasm likely to issue in the desired result; but yet there may be in the *daily life some irreligious, unholy spirit*, which, being known to God, has the effect of causing the *hidden wheels of Providence* so to move as to *render useless efforts otherwise sufficient. Righteousness is the most important factor in life.* Unrighteousness will in the end neutralise all exertion. The seeming prosperity of the wicked is short, and "shall destroy them." Sin saps the foundations of public and private good. True godliness alone makes the most of men.

VI. DISTINGUISHED GOODNESS OF INDIVIDUALS AND REGARD FOR RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS ARE NO SUBSTITUTES FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS OF LIFE. Samuel had become known in Israel. The long lost "open vision" was restored. The people knew that he was a prophet. There was, therefore, so the people reasoned, an evident sign that the favour of God was returning. Their own character was bad enough; but had they not a holy man of God, a superior character, in the sanctuary at Shiloh? Encouraged by this trust and heedless of repentance and reformation, they sought freedom and prosperity by the exertion of their own physical powers. The moral element of conformity to the will of God was despised. Disaster came. In like manner it is in vain for a nation to leave goodness to officials in the Church, and for men of business to leave goodness to their wives and children. God will take no substitute for personal holiness. Not even is the perfect righteousness of the Redeemer of any avail to the man who *will* live in unrighteousness. He is "our righteousness" when our faith in him brings forth the fruits of the Spirit. But the ingenuity of the heart in evil is marvellous. Israel, finding that vicarious goodness is of no avail, has *recourse to a new expedient—outward regard for the symbols of religion.* Men remember historical facts, though they may have lost a perception of their spiritual significance. Had not the waters of Jordan and the walls of Jericho recognised the presence of the "ark of God"? Did it not go before the people to "search out a resting-place" for them? If the presence of a Samuel in the land was not a guarantee of victory, surely all power must submit to this ancient and renowned worker of wonders? And thus the unholy heart imagines that an outward exhibition of the sacred things pertaining to Divine worship will be a practical substitute for the character not possessed. "History repeats itself." Yes; men still trust in the symbols of the Church—creeds more or less orthodox, outward forms of worship, and much else—in vain hope that these will prove a charm by which the crushing power of sin will be avoided and life end prosperously. The most sacred of forms and symbols are a poor refuge for a soul that loves unrighteousness (Ps. xxiv. 3—5).

Practical lessons:—1. Study well *all* the laws of permanent success in secular government, religious organisations, commercial transactions, domestic life, and spiritual culture. 2. Let personal conduct be influenced by the fact that even the salvation of the soul is according to *law* (cf. Matt. xi. 28, 29; Acts iv. 12; x. 43; 1 Cor. ix. 25; 2 Tim. ii. 5). 3. The comparative failure of religious efforts outwardly suitable may be remedied by a revival of the spiritual power. 4. In times of depression and religious weakness in the Church, look not so much to the adoption of new expedients for subduing the world to Christ, as to the spiritual condition of his professed servants.

Unexpected coincidences. It was declared to Eli that a sign of coming judgment on him and his house should be found in the death of his two sons in one day (ch.

ii. 34), and also that an event should occur at which "both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle" (ch. iii. 11). The fulfilment of this prediction was, to the mind of Eli, certain, but the means and occasion were uncertain. It was difficult for the old man to conjecture how God would keep his word. The narrative reveals the unlooked-for coincidences which established the veracity of God.

I. MEN ARE INDUCED TO ADOPT A COURSE OF CONDUCT AT VARIANCE WITH THEIR USUAL PRACTICE. The recent history of Israel proved them to be utterly indifferent to religion. The vile conduct of the priests caused them to abhor the sacrifices of the Lord. In their conflicts with foes they had gone forth at first without the presence of symbols of religion; but now these same people, being *left judicially to the blind guidance* of their corrupt hearts, lead forth to war the "ark of God," and the priests in charge of it. In like manner the ordinary course of the Philistines would be to yield to the force of their knowledge of what wonders had been achieved by the "ark of God" (vers. 6—8), and either refrain from fighting or flee at the first onset. But instead of that, by, doubtless, the subtle, secret action of God on their spirits, the ordinary course was deviated from, and the strongest sentiments of religious superstition were overborne by an urgent appeal to weaker sentiments. The last thing men do is to go in face of religious fears and historic facts. History furnishes parallel instances. The Jews, in their desire to get rid of Christ, although disgusted with Roman supremacy, took the strange course of pleading their loyalty as against his treason. In ordinary affairs, also, men are often found acting on new lines which perplex their opponents.

II. GOD SOMETIMES DOES THINGS THAT ARE NOT ANTICIPATED. The Israelites little thought that God, whose symbols they paraded, would so act on the spirits of their foes as to counteract the natural effect of their own expedient. Man is a very imperfect judge of the ways of God. There are no doubt immutable laws of righteousness on which all his actions are based, and in many spheres we are enabled by a careful study of things to say what is sure to happen. But we see only "parts of his ways." His "thoughts are not as our thoughts." He sometimes does "a new thing." Precedents are being created. An ordinary observer would not have thought that the eternal God would suffer his covenant people to endure serfdom. It was foolishness to the Greeks that a crucified One should be the Divinely-appointed Saviour of the world.

III. By THE COINCIDENCE OF UNEXPECTED HUMAN AND DIVINE ACTIONS THE PURPOSES OF GOD ARE SOMETIMES ACCOMPLISHED. Had not Israel deviated from their usual course in demanding the ark, the sons of Eli would have remained in Shiloh. Had not the Philistines striven hard to overcome religious fears, no defeat would have fallen on Israel. Had God exercised his power as in former times, the ark would not have been captured. But the reverse of these events occurred, and therefore, in accordance with prediction, Eli's sons were on the battle-field, and perished in one day, and "both the ears" of all the people were made "to tingle" with the awful tidings that the "ark of God" was taken. So is it true in other instances that, by the concurrence of events not anticipated, and by the secret action of God along with the human events, his purposes are realised in judgment or in mercy.

General lessons:—1. God holds a complete mastery over the spirits of men, and can, when it pleases him, so act on them as to secure the realisation of his designs without destroying their freedom. 2. The Church may look on with confidence to the fulfilment of all that is said of Christ's kingdom, since God can bring about the desired conjunction of events. 3. Wicked men, emboldened by deferred judgments, may well tremble at the thought that the "day of the Lord" may come as a "thief in the night."

Vers. 12—18.—*Victory in defeat.* The facts given are—1. Eli, aware of the absence of the ark on the battle-field, awaits with anxiety the earliest tidings of the issue of the conflict. 2. A fugitive relates to him and to the people of Shiloh the nature of the disaster that had befallen Israel. 3. The effect of the news on the city is a wailing cry of despair, and on Eli sudden death. By record and tradition the people were familiar with the disasters and sufferings occasionally experienced by ancestors. Influenced by the prediction of the "man of God" (ch. ii. 27), Eli, while

sitting by the wayside, feared the worst. But even he was not prepared for such a climax of calamity. Defeat would bring sorrow, not surprise; for were not the people godless? Slaughter would be regarded with pain as retribution for national sins. Was it not his own fault that his sons had not suffered capital punishment long ago? All that was most sacred and revered in the history of the chosen race, the very glory of God—this to be wrested from the hands of Israel and borne off in triumph by the heathen, who can hear it and live! There is nothing now to live for.

I. TO THE EYE OF MAN GOD SUFFERS DEFEAT. The men of Shiloh may be taken as a type of the worldly, unspiritual mind. They had been instructed to believe that Jehovah was engaged on their side in conflict with the wicked idolatrous nations. The ark had become with them almost synonymous with the Almighty himself. Hence the sudden wail of the city when they, hearing the sad tidings, leapt to the sudden conclusion that now at least the Vanquisher was vanquished. The disaster was a check to his purposes proceeding from his declared enemies. There are *occasions when the surface of events suggests such a thought.* The introduction of sin into the world by an evil power appeared to mar the work of God and defeat his purpose in creating a pure and beautiful world. In the days of Noah the power of evil seemed to triumph, inasmuch as the earth became utterly corrupt. The destruction of the holy hill of Zion, and desecration of the courts of the Lord by the declared enemies of Israel's God, was regarded by the heathen as a proof of his inability to guard his own. To the terror-stricken disciples of Christ it seemed for a while that the "gates of hell" were prevailing against him, and that the kingdom of which prophets wrote and poets sang was prematurely annihilated.

II. The APPEARANCE OF DEFEAT IS OWING TO THE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH GOD IS PLEASED TO CARRY OUT HIS DESIGNS. God does not govern in the moral world by hard mechanical laws, but realises his purposes under the conditions involved in the existence of creatures endowed with freedom and accountability. He adapted his exercise of power to the spiritual condition of Israel. Hence, what is defeat to the human eye may really be fore-ordained and reasonable restraint. Symbol and chastisement were suited to the imperfect state of the religious thought and feeling. If the surrender of the symbol shall issue in better results than its retention, then what seems defeat arises out of the peculiar conditions under which God works his will. The *principle has wide application.* It is a condition of the possible existence of free moral creatures that their life may or may not be marred by sin. If, then, sin mars the world, God's purpose is not really defeated. The forces of evil in the antediluvian age might have been crushed out by the Spirit had God reversed the conditions under which he governed men, and *forced* them to be holy. The visible, transitory life of Christ and his liability to death were, from "the foundation of the world," Divinely-recognised conditions of accomplishing human redemption. The occasional obliteration of religious ordinances and of personal piety often results from the fact that the Church is amenable to the law, "From him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." Finally, so far as we can see, the happiness of a world is reasonably made conditional on the free, responsible action of the world as an interrelated community, in which the good or evil of one is wisely made to affect all the rest.

III. WHAT SEEMS DEFEAT TURNS OUT TO BE A STEP TO FINAL VICTORY. It is the perfection of wisdom to snatch victory from defeat. This is seen in the first effect of the capture of the ark. The dormant conscience of the people was aroused. Righteousness, not charms and ceremonials, must be the antecedent of victory. It will be found that all other apparent defeats of God's designs prove to be *stages toward a higher good.* The curse of sin was the occasion of the "seed of the woman" being promised to "*bruise* the serpent's *head.*" The men of Noah's time procured a sweeter earth and a most weighty warning and encouragement for the use of all future generations. The sighs and tears of desponding disciples yielded to the exultant joy and abounding hope of the kingdom won with his blood who now liveth evermore. And however much sin may now mar the life of the world, there is reason to believe that, under the control of him who is "able to subdue all things to himself," the issue of all will be the vindication of right and the more glorious assertion of God's majesty.

General lessons:—1. It is proper to avoid haste in expressing unfavourable

judgment on events that seem adverse to the final success of Christianity. 2. When great calamities come on the Church, the first effect should be great searching of heart. 3. There is every encouragement, from the history of the past, for strongest confidence in the final triumph of Christ over every foe. *Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy* (Micah vii. 8). *Cast down, but not destroyed* (2 Cor. iv. 9). *Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee* (Ps. lxxvi. 10). *He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet* (1 Cor. xv. 25).

Neutralised usefulness. There is deep pathos and much instruction in the words of the sacred historian as he closes the references to Eli: "And he had judged Israel forty years." A man eligible for so honourable a position, having rendered varied service to his people, dies in a state of blended consternation, grief, shame, and remorse. Not the calm, joyous end of the righteous; not the end cheered by views from Pisgah's peak of a glorious inheritance; but an end amidst a horror of great darkness. "*And he had judged Israel forty years!*" Oh, the exquisite pathos of the Bible!

I. THE POSITIVE GOOD OF A MAN'S LIFE MAY BE LARGELY NEUTRALISED BY HIS WEAKNESSES. The tenor of the narrative suggests that as a whole Eli's life was good. Forty years' discharge of important functions indicates a long series of holy desires and beneficent acts. The natural effect of this would be only for the formation of a sound national character. For in those times, as seen in the instance of Moses and Joshua and others, the moral and material welfare of a people was more entirely dependent on force of individual character in the leader and ruler than on the manifold influences which prevail in modern times. But negative qualities hindered the effect of the good. Thus it is *not enough* for a man—ruler, pastor, or parent—to be *religious at heart*, attentive to routine duties, and "harmless" in conduct. These may fail in their desired issue unless accompanied with the energy and resoluteness of a will that rests only in seeing right done, God feared, and life made holy. The good that some men do with one hand they undo with another. A little sin destroys much good.

II. IT MAY BE A LONG TIME BEFORE THIS NEUTRALISATION OF POSITIVE GOOD IS FULLY DISCOVERED. Eli was not blind to the fact that for years past the condition of the people and priests had degenerated; but some men are slow in detecting their own part in a given result. As he gave more heed to causes outside his own conduct and bearing, so do men still overlook their own contributions of a negative character to the formation of opinion and habit in their too exclusive thought of what proceeds from others. A weak ruler wonders how it is the people are dissatisfied, and perhaps rebellious. A weak parent deplores that his words and deeds are so little heeded at home. Each of these is conscious of sincere motive, upright purpose, and actual toil; but it is only by slow degrees that he comes to see the neutralising process.

III. THE ISSUE THAT REVEALS THE NEUTRALISATION MAY BE OF THE NATURE OF A JUDGMENT. In Eli's case the catastrophe which fell upon the nation and himself was the means of revealing to him, in unmistakable terms, the truth that the element of indecision and moral cowardice in his character had rendered comparatively useless his "forty years" of office. The death of sons and desolation of the Church of God tell of years of honourable care and toil spoiled by irresolution to visit the guilty with punishment and purge the sanctuary of the vile. There are *crises* in the *lives of communities and individuals*. The effect of these is to bring into clearer light the causes of failure. "The day shall declare" "every man's work," "because it shall be revealed by fire." The ruin which comes to a business, a Church organisation, a home, or a reputation, exposes the weak parts of an elaborate superstructure. Although the catastrophe may come about in a natural way, it nevertheless is under Divinely-ordained law, and therefore is the judgment of God.

IV. THE POSITIVE GOOD IN PERSONAL CHARACTER MAY SURVIVE DISASTER TO LIFE'S WORK. The last act of Eli's life was one of homage to religion. The better side of his character asserted itself in his dying moments. His horror and shame and grief on the mention of the capture of the ark of God revealed his loyalty of heart to spiritual religion. The poor old man reaped in pain and death the reward of his

sinful weakness; but while gathering the bitter fruit, he showed his profound interest in the honour and glory of Jehovah by being so sensitive to the reproach brought on the sacred name. We must distinguish between the *ruin of a man's work* and the *ruin of his soul.* In the former there is a grievous chastisement for carelessness and avoidable ignorance; in the latter there is an abandonment to the essential and preferred wickedness of the heart. Eli's heart was right with God, but his will was weak to work as he ought. Those who by faith are on the one Foundation are safe. They may build up a superstructure in personal qualities and in deeds for others, much of which may perish in the fire which tries every man's work, while they may be "saved yet so as by fire" (1 Cor. iii. 11—15).

Practical lessons:—1. We should seek self-knowledge if we would avoid errors in conduct and make the best use of a Christian life. 2. When the results of effort are not satisfactory, strict attention should be given to causes within self. 3. When constitutional or acquired weakness is discovered, it may be counteracted by a care to exercise as much as possible the opposite positive virtue.

Vers. 19—22.—*Ichabod.* The facts given are—1. The wife of Phinehas, hearing the sad tidings of Israel's disaster and of the death of her husband and of Eli, suffers premature labour. 2. The loss of the ark of God contributes more to her anguish of spirit than does the sudden death of her nearest relatives. 3. She deliberately refuses the most natural of all consolations. 4. When dying she gives a name to her child that shall express her sense of the calamity fallen on Israel. The record furnishes us with three typical references to persons greatly affected by the tidings brought from the field of battle. 1. The superstitious populace of the city, who utter a cry of consternation and despair. 2. The public functionary, good but blameworthy, who sees in the event a just judgment, and, being sensible of his personal offence, pays dying homage to the sacred cause with which his life had been identified. 3. A very spiritually-minded individual in private life, whose dying words manifest her extraordinary piety. In the brief reference to the wife of Phinehas we see—

I. The NATURE OF SUPREME CALAMITY. Opinions of men differ with respect to what it is that constitutes the greatest calamity that can fall to the lot of nations, Churches, and individuals. The dying experience of the pious Hebrew mother throws useful light on this question. The ark of God was gone; and also, as its moral cause, the righteousness of the people. Hence, as a people's "glory" lies in the enjoyment of the highest distinction God confers, and the happiness resulting therefrom, it follows that the greatest calamity falls on a people when that distinction and consequent happiness are taken away. The *nature of the supreme distinction enjoyed* depends on the *capacities and vocations* of those concerned. 1. *Israel.* The supreme distinction of Israel was the enjoyment of all that was suggested by the presence of the ark of God. By virtue of its structure, its contents, and uses, the ark was the outward sign of an inestimable good. It meant that Israel was chosen above all people for a holy and far-reaching purpose, in which all nations should be blessed, and that great covenanted blessings were theirs. To them the ark was favour, noble destiny, protection and enrichment, knowledge, holy influence, fellowship with the Eternal. And, in so far as its continued presence was connected with their possession of a character conformable in some degree to its purpose and their own destiny, its abode among them would suggest that they had not become utterly corrupt and unfit for the end for which they were chosen. When, then, the ark of God was allowed to be taken away, there happened, so far as the outward sign was still a correct index to its original and ordinary intent, the direst calamity conceivable. The evidence of being the people of Jehovah was gone! The tables of covenant were lost! The mercy-seat was inaccessible by the appointed means! And, also, the righteousness of life appropriate to the continuance of such blessings and honours was lacking! Marvel not that a wail of woe arose from at least one true heart—"Ichabod!" Loss of men, of commerce, of political influence, of home, of health, of all, was not to be compared with this. For what is *Israel* worth, what *Israel's* function in the world, without Divine favour and blessing? 2. *Nations.* Taking nations generally in their relation to God and one another, their crowning

distinction lies in *righteousness of spirit and conduct*. Population, trade, armies, fleets, science, art, have no permanence, no real value, apart from a healthy national conscience and right doing. If by any means this righteousness disappears, then the greatest calamity has come; and it is only a question of time with respect to the passing away of greatness. God never allows an unrighteous people to attain to the best a nation is capable of. 3. *Churches*. The Christian Church is the body of Christ. It exists as a body to exhibit the spirit and do the work of Christ, the Head. Its highest honour is in doing what Christ would have done in the world. But if a Church, professing to be part of the One Body, so far loses love for Christ and true holiness of life as to fail to answer the practical ends for which it exists, then it suffers a calamity far more serious than depletion of numbers, loss of social status, the pains of poverty, and the fiercest persecution. "Ichabod" was once appropriate to Laodicea (Rev. iii. 15—18). 4. *Individuals*. The highest distinction and bliss of a human being is to be conformed in nature to the holy nature of Christ. This is the permanent crown of life. It could be shown that a soul so blessed will find the most perfect development. This is that for which Christ came, lived, died, and rose again. And it is obvious that *not thus to be saved* is to suffer the greatest loss ever possible to a human being. "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Then, indeed, "Ichabod" is fearfully true. 5. *The ministry of the gospel*. A true ministry must embrace all the teaching requisite for the "perfecting of the saints." A full and perfect gospel means *all* that Christ and his apostles have left us. An examination of the apostolic ministry will show that the great theme on which the inspired preachers chiefly dwelt was the *cross of Christ*. This is the peculiar distinction of the New Testament teaching, and it is a truth which enters directly or indirectly into everything pertaining to Christian life. A ministry is good in proportion as it gives due place to this dominating truth. An aversion to the cross as the apostles preached it is an unhappy sign, as, also, is a mere parade of the term or the symbol. History proves that a Christless ministry is always a failure. "Ichabod" may be affirmed of it. Generally, then, "Ichabod" is true whenever the crowning characteristic has departed; in that lies a supreme calamity.

II. How a just appreciation of a supreme calamity reveals itself. The wife of Phinehas was a study to her attendants. They, in common with the mass of Israel, felt that a sad disaster had befallen them, but *her* extreme anguish and singular conduct were perplexing. The fact was, she formed a just appreciation of what had occurred, and her feelings, words, and conduct were the natural expression of it. The appreciation appears in—1. *All-absorbing concern*. A more striking instance of this is perhaps not to be found in the entire range of sacred history. This unnamed person was passing through the most momentous personal crisis possible to woman; the anguish of nature was enough to absorb every thought and power. Birth of a son was a new demand on attention and care, and the death of a husband was, at such a season, a special occasion of sorrow. Yet all these most important and pressing matters were entirely lost sight of in her soul's utter absorption in the interests of that Divine kingdom which lay so near to her heart. We have read of widows dying under the shock caused by a husband's death, and with his name on the tongue as the last sign of affection and interest; but here the one word is "*Ichabod*." The cause of God was the *one thought*. In like manner will a just appreciation of calamity show itself when *nations have lost the righteousness which exalts*, when Churches have failed in their holy design and have become a reproach, when souls cared and watched for are lost, when a ministry professedly of the gospel leaves out the cross. The whole soul will be filled with anguish and care. 2. *Refusal to accept any substitute*. The highest and most welcome comfort nature can afford to a sorrowing widowed mother is to give her a son. In the love of offspring the heart finds some healing and solace. But, marvel of devotion to the Spiritual and Eternal, this mother refuses to derive compensation from the new-born child! "She answered not, neither did she regard it." The mother's conduct was right and natural; for the cause of God is first and highest. Nature sanctified will not accept a lower transitory good in the place of the higher eternal good. Jerusalem is to be preferred above our "chief joy." No wealth and fame will comfort the statesman who mourns the departure of national righteous-

ness. Eloquence, logic, and elevation of taste are as nothing to one who glories in preaching Christ crucified, if *he* be not preached. 3. *Tremendous effort to awaken regard for the spiritual.* The dying woman made a great effort to think and speak. She loved the dear child, but loved the holy kingdom more; and therefore, to do the utmost in her power to arouse regard for what was too little regarded, she even imposed on her child a name associated with sorrow, shame, and trouble. Thus by this dying exertion did she (1) impress her attendants with her sense of what calamity is, and what should be sought first and chief; (2) direct her countrymen, through her son, to the great need of a radical reformation; and (3) leave him a reminder of what was dearest to his mother's heart. Noble woman! "She hath done what she could." Love of God stronger than love of husband, child, national fame, and even of personal comfort. In times of spiritual calamity the faithful, in proportion to faithfulness, put forth extraordinary efforts. Moses could wish himself blotted out of the book of God (Exod. xxxii. 32).

General lessons:—1. In darkest times God has in reserve a "holy remnant" (cf. 1 Kings xix. 10, 18; John x. 14). 2. The deepest piety may exist where least expected. The wife of the vilest of men (cf. Matt. viii. 10). 3. Adverse circumstances, when met with a determined spirit, may even conduce to exalted piety. The vile husband became the occasion of a more entire and constant trust in God (cf. Ps. ix. 9, 10; xxvii. 10). 4. How truly the requirements of Christ to love him and his cause above all finds response in the most devoted souls (cf. Matt. x. 37; Phil. iii. 8). 5. The piety must be very profound, and wide in its spiritual vision, that can bring all the claims of nature into subordination to the kingdom of God, and feel assured of the essentially rational character of the subordination. 6. The Saviour is a *unique* instance of absorption in the spiritual, and exertion to realise it; and the experience of his people is a fellowship with his sufferings (cf. Matt. iv. 9; xvi. 21, 22; xx. 28; xxiii. 37; xxvi. 38, 39; Luke xxiv. 21—26; John iv. 32; vi. 15; x. 11; Phil. iii. 10). "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—11. (EBEN-EZER and APHEK.)—*Judgment inflicted on Israel.* "Israel was smitten, . . . and the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain" (vers. 10, 11). The law of retribution which prevails in the world is, more especially in the outward life, often slow in its operation, inexplicable, and sometimes apparently partial and imperfect. But in many instances it is manifested in a sudden, clear, and most equitable manner. One of these instances is here described. Hophni and Phinehas were warned in vain, and pursued their evil way. The influence which they exerted on others was pernicious, and their sin was largely shared in by the people. At length the hour of judgment struck. "Israel went out against the Philistines to battle"—not, probably, according to the counsel of Samuel, but according to their own will, and to repel a fresh attack of their most powerful foes and oppressors (ver. 9). They were defeated with a loss of about 4000 men; but instead of humbling themselves before God, the elders expressed their surprise and disappointment at the result. They were blinded by sin, and assumed (as others have often done) that because they were the acknowledged people of Jehovah they would necessarily receive his help according to his covenant, whether they fulfilled their part of the covenant and obeyed his commandments or not. To insure his help more effectually, they sent to Shiloh for "the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth between (is enthroned upon) the cherubim." They looked for deliverance from the ark of the Lord rather than from the Lord of the ark. Hophni and Phinehas, its appointed guardians, readily consented to go with it, not knowing that they were going to their doom; and the aged high priest was too weak to oppose the presumptuous enterprise. The exultation of Israel was speedily turned into humiliation, and the fear of their enemies into triumph; and one of the greatest calamities Israel ever experienced occurred. These events suggest the following reflections:—

I. HOW OFTEN ARE THE UNGODLY EMPLOYED BY GOD FOR THE CHASTISEMENT OF HIS PEOPLE (vers. 1, 2). 1. When those who have been chosen to be separate from and

superior to the ungodly have learnt their ways, it is *just* and appropriate that they should be given up to chastisement at their hands. 2. The chastisement which is thus inflicted upon them is the most *severe* they can experience. "Let us not fall into the hand of man" (2 Sam. xxiv. 14). "The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel" (Prov. xii. 10). 3. In fulfilling their own purposes the wicked are subject to the *control* of God; they can go no further than he pleases, their designs are overruled for good, and when they have done their work they are broken and cast aside like useless saws and axes (Isa. xxvii. 7, 8; Acts v. 28). This is the case with Satan himself. "Satan is a very important element in the Divine economy. God needs him, and he therefore keeps him until he shall have no more use for him. Then will he be banished to his own place. The Scriptures call the wicked heathen tyrant Nebuchadnezzar a servant of God. They might give Satan the same name" (Hengstenberg).

II. HOW VAIN IS THE POSSESSION OF THE FORM OF RELIGION WITHOUT ITS SPIRIT (vers. 3, 4). Israel had a great though superstitious reverence for the ark, and expected that it would "save them out of the hand of their enemies." 1. Excessive devotion to the outward forms and ceremonies, and dependence upon them, is commonly associated with the absence of spiritual life (Matt. v. 20; 2 Tim. iii. 5). 2. Reliance upon such forms arises from the *delusion* that they insure the presence and working of God apart from the spirit in which they are employed. They are, however, neither the *necessary* nor the *exclusive* channels of Divine grace (John vi. 63), and no benefit *formerly* received through them (Num. x. 35) is to be expected, unless there be a right relation to him who has appointed them. 3. The vanity of it is clearly shown in the day of *trial*. "If progress to perfection is placed only in external observances, our religion, having no Divine life, will quickly perish, with the things on which it subsists; but the axe must be laid at the root of the tree, that, being separated and freed from the restless desires of nature and self, we may possess our souls in the peace of God" (A Kempis).

III. HOW NEAR ARE THOSE WHO ARE ELATED IN FALSE CONFIDENCE TO THEIR SIGNAL DOWNFALL (ver. 5). There was a shout in the camp at the arrival of the ark. It struck consternation into the Philistines, who had heard of the wonders wrought by Jehovah in former times (ch. vi. 6), and who, like Israel, supposed that his presence was inseparably connected with the symbol thereof (vers. 6—8). But they speedily regained courage, and obtained a second and greater victory (ver. 9). 1. False confidence is *blind* to its own weakness and danger. 2. It is generally associated with *neglect* of the proper means of safety. 3. Nothing is more *displeasing to God* than pride and presumption; nothing more frequently condemned or more severely punished (ch. ii. 3; Prov. xvi. 18; Isa. ii. 11). "By that sin fell the angels." "We must therefore bear this in mind throughout our whole life, every day, every hour, and every moment, that we never indulge so much as a thought of confidence in self" (Scupoli).

IV. HOW SURE IS THE FULFILMENT OF THE DIVINE THREATENINGS AGAINST THE IMPENITENT (vers. 10, 11; ch. ii. 30, 34). In mercy it may be long delayed; but mercy has its limits, and judgment comes at last (Prov. xxix. 1; Rom. ii. 5). 1. The *priests*, who had so grossly abused their power in many ways, and now exposed the ark of the Lord in battle, were struck down by the sword of his enemies.

> "Wisdom supreme! how wonderful the art
> Which thou dost manifest in heaven, in earth,
> And in the evil world, how just a meed
> Allotting by thy virtue unto all" (Dante, 'Inferno').

2. The *elders and people*, who "asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord," were abandoned to their own devices, and 30,000 of them were slain. 3. The whole *nation*, which had forsaken the Lord, was deprived of the sign of his presence (ver. 11); the place of the sanctuary, which had been defiled, was made a perpetual desolation (Ps. lxxviii. 59—64; Jer. vii. 11, 12, 14; xxvi. 6); and they who would not serve the Lord with gladness were compelled to wear the heavy yoke of their oppressors (Deut. xxviii. 47, 48; 1 Sam. vii. 2, 14).

> "The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small;
> Though he stands and waits with patience, with exactness grinds he all."

"God's judgments are the expressions of his opinion about our guilt. . . . But there is this difference between man and God in this matter:—A human judge gives his opinion in words; God gives his in events. And God always pays sinners back in *kind*, that he may not merely punish them, but correct them; so that by the kind of their punishment they may know the kind of their sin" (C. Kingsley).—D.

The inquiry of the afflicted. "Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us?" (ver. 3). Men are accustomed to meet affliction in various ways. 1. Some meet it *lightly*, and endeavour to laugh at it. But this is possible only when it is not very severe. 2. Others exaggerate it, lose their self-possession, and sink under it into despondency and despair. 3. Others quarrel with it as with an enemy, become embittered and cynical. 4. Others, still, endure it with philosophical (stoical) fortitude, accounting it not an evil, and resolving not to feel it. But this method breaks down in actual experience, and leaves the character unimproved. The truly wise, whilst fully sensitive to its natural influence, and confessing it to be an evil, seek to understand its meaning and purpose, and act in accordance therewith. They adopt this inquiry of the elders of Israel, though in a somewhat different spirit. The inquiry pertains to—

I. THE HAND FROM WHICH IT COMES. "Wherefore hath *the Lord* smitten us?" 1. His dominion is *supreme* and *universal*. 2. His operations are often *indirect*, and to our view intricate and perplexing. Adversity is not the less under his direction and control because it comes by the hand of man. 3. All he does is done in perfect *wisdom, justice*, and *benevolence*. It must be so, even when it appears otherwise (Ps. lxxvii. 19, 20). The mystery which beclouds his ways is itself adapted to beget in us proper feelings toward him. The first necessity in affliction is to settle it in our hearts that "it is the Lord."

II. THE CAUSE TO WHICH IT IS DUE. Whence? Suffering is the result and penalty of violating the natural or moral order which God has established in the world. 1. It may be often traced to the transgression of the sufferer, but not always. Those who are greater sufferers than others are not necessarily greater sinners (Luke xiii. 1—5). 2. It is often due to the transgressions of others with whom we are intimately associated, and in the effects of whose conduct we necessarily have part. 3. It is connected with the sinfulness of the heart, and implies participation in the fallen and corrupt nature of humanity. "This is the key both to the sufferings of the righteous and to many other secrets." Human suffering points, as with the finger of God, to human sin, and should ever lead to self-examination and profound humiliation.

III. THE PURPOSES FOR WHICH IT IS SENT. Herein the fatherly love of God appears; and to those who love him *punishment* is transformed into *chastisement* and a means of blessing (Heb. xii. 11). It is designed—1. To *manifest* the presence and evil of sin, which would not be otherwise properly felt. The consequences of transgression often quicken the conscience to its "exceeding sinfulness," and lead to godly sorrow (Isa. xxvii. 9). 2. To *restrain*, and *prevent* future disobedience (Ps. cxix. 67). 3. To *educate* and *improve* the character—by instructing the soul in spiritual truth, working in it submission and patience, disposing it to sympathy, &c. (Ps. xciv. 12; Rom. v. 3; 2 Cor. i. 4). "All things work together for *good*," i. e. for the perfecting of the character in conformity to "the image of his Son" (Rom. viii. 29). 4. To *prepare* for the experience of higher joy, here and hereafter (2 Cor. iv. 17). 5. To promote the holiness and happiness of *others* in many ways. 6. To bring glory to God (John ix. 3; xi. 4). What is naturally a curse has thus hidden within it a priceless blessing; which, however, is not attained without human co-operation and Divine grace. Affliction has not in itself the power to purify, strengthen, and save.

IV. THE MEANS BY WHICH THESE PURPOSES ARE ACCOMPLISHED. 1. Humility and *penitence* (Job xl. 4; xlii. 6). 2. Filial *trust*; entering into fellowship with Christ in his sufferings, and receiving his Spirit according to his promise. 3. The hope of heaven, where there shall be "no more pain" (Rom. viii. 18).

"Whatever thou dost hate,
Whatever thou wouldst cast away and scorn
As profitless—Affliction never lose;
Affliction never cease to venerate.

For sorrow sanctified bears fruit to God,
Which, in his heavenly garner treasured up,
Shall feed his own to all eternity." D.

Ver. 11.—*Symbol and spiritual truth.* "And the ark of God was taken." The ark was a Divinely-appointed symbol or material sign of spiritual truth, and especially of the presence and majesty, the holiness, mercy, and protection, of the invisible King of Israel. It was a part of a system of symbolical worship which was adapted to an early stage of human culture, and formed an important element in a dispensation introductory and preparatory to "the ministration of the Spirit" (2 Cor. iii. 8). But even under the new dispensation symbolism is not absolutely done away, for Baptism and the Lord's Supper are both symbolic. With special, though not exclusive, reference to the ancient symbol, notice that—

I. THE SYMBOL SERVES IMPORTANT PURPOSES IN RELATION TO THE TRUTH OR SPIRITUAL REALITY WHICH IT REPRESENTS. Its need arises from our being constituted of body and soul, the dependence of thought and feeling on sensible impressions, and the necessary influence of imagination in religion; and it serves—1. To make its nature more *conceivable.* "In the symbol proper, what we can call a symbol, there is ever, more or less distinctly and directly, some embodiment and revelation of the infinite; the infinite is made to blend itself with the finite, to stand visible and, as it were, attainable there" (Sartor Resartus). 2. To make its presence more *certain;* not, indeed, in itself, but in the convictions of the soul. 3. To make its influence more *powerful,* constant, and universal. It should, however, be observed that only the symbols which have been appointed by God may be *authoritatively* used in his worship; that these should be regarded with due reverence; not improperly exalted, not altered, not despised, not handled by unworthy hands; and that no others should be introduced, or only such as do not inculcate error, and do not conduce to superstition or formalism.

II. THE SYMBOL MAY BE POSSESSED WHILST THE TRUTH IS PARTIALLY OR WHOLLY LOST. This comes to pass—1. When the symbol receives an undue share of *attention* in comparison with the truth, which is distinct from it and incomparably more important; when it centres thought upon itself, and hinders rather than helps the soul in its spiritual aspirations. 2. When there is a *moral indisposition* and dislike, on the part of those who possess the symbol, toward the truth. 3. When, in consequence of such dislike, and the lowering of the idea of the truth, the sign is confounded with the thing signified, *identified with it,* and substituted for it. This is ever the chief danger attending the use of symbols in Divine worship.

III. THE RETENTION OF THE SYMBOL WITHOUT THE TRUTH IS WORTHLESS AND INJURIOUS. 1. It fails of its purpose; is a means of grace no more; an empty cistern; a meaningless, unreal, and hollow form. Nehushtan (a piece of brass—2 Kings xviii. 4). 2. It fills men with false confidence, and increases their error, formality, and corruption. 3. It woefully disappoints the trust which is reposed in it, and often leaves them to despair (Gal. v. 1, 2).

IV. THE REMOVAL OF THE SYMBOL IS SOMETIMES NECESSARY TO THE RECOVERY OF THE TRUTH. And this effect is accomplished by—1. Its *correction* of fatal error. In the case of Israel, teaching that the ark was not the same as the Divine presence, and did not necessarily insure it. 2. Causing deep *humiliation.* 3. Leading to earnest inquiry and *prayer.* "They lamented after the Lord" (ch. vii. 2), not after the ark, which had long been restored, and lay in a private dwelling without public honour, and appears to have exerted no influence whatever in the revival of spiritual truth and life that followed.

Conclusion:—1. Symbols are useful when rightly used and held in subordination to spiritual truth. 2. The course of the Divine dealings with men (like that of men with children) is less and less symbolical, more and more spiritual. "They shall say no more, The ark of the covenant," &c. (Jer. iii. 16; Col. ii. 17; Heb. ix. 23). 3. Symbols will completely vanish away in the light of perfect knowledge (1 Cor. xiii. 10—12).—D.

Ver. 11.—*The ark misplaced and lost.* The elders of Israel were chagrined at the defeat suffered by the national army in its attempt to throw off the yoke of the

Philistines. But, instead of seeking the Lord by repentance, they fell on a device to compel him, as they supposed, to give them a victory. Had not the ark been carried round the walls of Jericho, when Israel had no engines of siege to bring against a fortified city; and had not the walls fallen flat to the ground? Why not try its power again? "Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of Jehovah unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies."

I. A SACRED SYMBOL MISUSED. Forthwith the ark was brought into the camp, and the people in their foolish confidence shouted till the earth rang again. A superstitious fear ran through the ranks of the Philistines, but it did not unnerve them for the battle. They gained a signal victory, "and the ark of God was taken." At such a cost had Israel to learn that the ark ought not to be used as a charm or talisman, and that, if so regarded and employed, it could not save them, could not save itself, while the face of God was turned away from the wicked priests and the degenerate nation. It is a lesson for all times. Men are often tempted to rely on religious symbols and appointments, not so much to glorify God therewith as to protect themselves. It is much easier to shout over these than to break off sins by righteousness. So the cross has been worn in many an evil enterprise, and carried into many battles, to defend cruel and rapacious men. So, also, men shout over their Church, their English Bible, their prayer-book, or their sabbath, in a vain confidence that their relation to one of them, or to all of them, will secure the Divine favour, or, at all events, Divine defence, though in character and life they be no better than others who boast of none of these things. But it is all delusion, and they who go into some hard battle of life with no better security are destined to a thorough defeat. The ark of God itself could do nothing for men who by their sins had driven away the God of the ark. What a selfish man wants in religion is to have God bound to take his part and fight on his side, instead of his studying to be on God's side, which is the side of righteousness. Such was the thought of the heathen nations of the East. Each of them had its guardian deity or deities, who were worshipped and propitiated at any cost, in order that they might befriend that particular nation or tribe, and injure its enemies. The gods were expected to give strength and victory to their own people, taking their part whether their cause were just or unjust. The Hebrews sometimes fell into the same way of thinking of Jehovah. He was their national God, and bound as such to fight for them. He was to be praised if they succeeded, to be reproached if they failed in whatever enterprise they undertook. Have not many Christians similar thoughts of God? Almost every great act of rapine has been perpetrated, and every war, however unjust, has been waged, with grave appeal to heaven, and gross usurpers and tyrants have had "Te Deum" sung for their infamous victories. But in vain do unrighteous men claim religious sanctions. God defends the right, and his face is against the wrong-doer. The ark of his covenant, brought into the din and dust of battle by those who were full of sin unrepented of, went into the enemy's hand, and the priests who stood beside it were slain.

II. FOREBODING OF EVIL. The aged Eli sat in his chair of office by the gate of Shiloh, watching the road, eager for early tidings from the army, his heart trembling for the ark of God. The natural fearfulness of old age was aggravated in this case by a reproaching conscience, which told Eli that he ought not to have permitted the ark to be taken without any warrant from the Lord into the turmoil of battle. So he sat foreboding calamity; and when the heavy tidings came to him of the discomfiture of Israel, the death of his sons, and the capture of the ark by the Philistines, Eli fell to the earth without a word, and died. We do not present the pathetic figure of the old priest trembling for the ark as a model for servants of God. The right and noble thing for Eli to have done would have been to resist the desecration of the sacred ark, and to call the people to repentance, that so they might be strong in God before they encountered the Philistines. But he had governed so weakly that he had no moral influence or authority; and his great age, which ought to have brought him reverence, only brought him feebleness; so Eli could but tremble and die. We have seen such feeble saints in our own time; they are always foreboding evil; they are in great alarm about the dangers which beset Christian truth; they sit trembling for the ark. Popery is about to swallow us up! Or, Infidelity is

carrying all before it! Alas for the ark of God! So they wail and lament, and spread misgivings among all who listen to them. But they do little else; they have no vigour in counsel or action to prevent or to remedy spiritual disaster. It is a poor-spirited, ineffective style of Christian character. We want something much firmer and bolder for the defence and propagation of the gospel. We want repentance insisted on, righteousness preached and practised, wrongs redressed, abuses cast out of the Church, and then we need not fear the Philistines. Granted that the times are perilous; there is cause of anxiety, and there is need of prayer. But prayer itself will not gain any victory for those whose hearts and lives are not right with God. Hophni and Phinehas went to the battle-field reeking from their sins. How could God fight by or for them? And the people of Israel, following the bad example in high places, were quite demoralised. Why should they have a victory? Let repentance begin at the house of God. Let iniquity be abhorred and forsaken. So God will be with us, and we need not fear the foe. We shall tremble at his word, but we shall not tremble because of the Philistines. "Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear."—F.

Vers. 12—18. (SHILOH.)—*The judgment of God on the judge of Israel.* "And he had judged Israel forty years" (ver. 18). The life of Eli was lengthened out to ninety-eight years, during the last forty of which he judged Israel. In him we see that—1. The highest official position may be held by one who is destitute of the qualities which it demands. 2. Much excellence is sometimes associated with grave defects. 3. Sins of omission have a ruinous effect on others—the family, the Church, the nation. 4. A good man is not spared when he is guilty of disobedience. The judgment of Heaven is impartial. The last hour of his long life has now come, and in it we see the old man—

I. WATCHING WITH ANXIETY FOR THE ARK (ver. 13). Why does his heart tremble? He has truly an affectionate regard for it. But—1. He has been accessory to its exposure in the battle-field. 2. He is doubtful about its safety. 3. He dreads the consequences of its loss. Already he experiences the evil effects of his sin.

II. RECEIVING THE TIDINGS OF DISASTER (vers. 12, 14—17). "Woe upon woe." 1. The defeat of Israel with a great slaughter. 2. The death of his two sons. 3. The capture of the ark. "With the surrender of the earthly throne of his glory the Lord appeared to have abolished his covenant of grace with Israel; for the ark, with the tables of the law and the Capporeth, was the visible pledge of the covenant of grace which Jehovah had made with Israel" (Keil).

III. SMITTEN WITH THE STROKE OF DEATH (ver. 18). 1. After long and merciful delay. 2. Directly connected with his sin. 3. "Suddenly, and without remedy." Nevertheless, it was his dismay at the loss of the ark that caused his trembling heart to cease to beat; and his love for the sacred symbol lightens up the gloom of his melancholy end.—D.

Vers. 19—22. (SHILOH.)—*Ichabod.* "The glory is departed" (ver. 22). Ichabod = (1) Where is thy glory? (It is departed); (2) The Inglorious; or, (3) Alas! the glory. The last words of the wife of Phinehas. Her piety was—1. *Genuine.* She called the ark "the glory," and, doubtless, had regard not merely to the symbol, but also and chiefly to the Divine presence which it represented. 2. *Peculiar.* Living in corrupt times, the wife of an ungodly man, yet truly devout; a pearl among pebbles, a rose among thorns, a grain of wheat in a heap of chaff. 3. *Eminent.* Her grief at the loss of the ark surpassed her sorrow at the death of her husband and her father-in-law, and swallowed up her joy at the birth of a son. 4. *Early perfected* by death amidst the righteous judgments of Heaven. From her dying utterance learn that—

I. THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS THE TRUE GLORY OF A PEOPLE. It is the source of—1. Their real dignity. 2. Their internal prosperity. 3. Their external influence. In vain do we look elsewhere for these things. "Thy God" (shall be) "thy glory" (Isa. lx. 19; lxii. 2).

II. THE TRUE GLORY OF A PEOPLE MAY DEPART. This takes place when the presence (*i. e.* the favour and protection) of God is withdrawn. 1. It is *caused* by human sin of various kinds. He is not desirous of leaving men, but they are unwill-

ing to fulfil the conditions according to which alone he can dwell among them. 2. It is often held out as a *warning*. 3. It has actually *occurred* (Ezek. x. 18). "Moreover, at that feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner temple, as their custom was, to perform their sacred ministrations, they said that in the first place they felt a quaking and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a great multitude, saying, 'Let us depart hence.'" (Joseph., 'Wars,' vi. 5, 3). The warnings given to the seven Churches of Asia (Rev. ii., iii.) were neglected, and the evils predicted came to pass. The candlestick was removed out of its place (Rev. ii. 5), and darkness and desolation succeeded. "But though particular Churches may fall, our Lord's promise will never fail the Catholic Church: 'Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world'" ('Sp. Com.').

Conclusion:—1. The presence of God should be accounted by us the greatest blessing, and his departure dreaded as the greatest calamity. 2. Whatever contributes to his departure must be zealously renounced or corrected (Lam. iii. 40). 3. No condition is altogether hopeless. "If from *thence* thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him," &c. (Deut. iv. 29). The glory of Israel, which, it was thought, had gone for ever, was restored; and out of the night of sorrow a new day was born.—D.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER V.

THE ARK OF GOD IN PHILISTIA (vers. 1—12). Ver. 1.—**The Philistines took the ark of God.** The silence of Scripture is often as remarkable as what it tells us. From Ps. lxxviii. 60—64; Jer. vii. 12; xxvi. 9, we gather that from Aphek the Philistines marched upon Shiloh, and having captured it, put all whom they found there to the sword, and levelled the buildings to the ground. Especially their wrath fell upon the priests, in revenge for the bringing of the ark to the camp, by which the war was made a religious one, and the worst feelings of fanaticism aroused. Of all this the history says nothing, nor of the measures taken by Samuel under these trying circumstances. From his previous eminence, the government would naturally devolve upon him, especially as Eli's sons were both slain; and evidently he must have managed in some way to save the sacred vessels of the sanctuary, and the numerous records of the past history of the nation laid up at Shiloh. Whatever learning there was in Israel had its seat there; it was probably the only school wherein men were initiated in the knowledge brought out of Egypt; and it is one of the worst and most barbarous results of war that it destroys so much connected with human progress and civilisation, overthrowing with its violent hand as well the means of a nation's culture as the results thereof. Samuel evidently did all that was possible to counteract these evils; and as the Philistine army withdrew into its own country immediately after the destruction of Shiloh, probably to carry home the rich spoils obtained there, he was apparently able to ward off the worst effects of the Philistine invasion, and by rapidly reorganising the government to save the people from utter demoralisation. But upon all this Scripture is silent, because it concerns the history of Israel on its temporal side, and not as it exemplifies God's spiritual dealings with nations and men. **From Eben-ezer** (see on ch. iv. 1) **unto Ashdod.** This town, the Azotus of Acts viii. 40, was with Ekron and other Philistine cities, assigned to the tribe of Judah (Josh. xv. 47), but never actually conquered. It lay near the sea, about thirty-two miles north of Gaza, and is now an unimportant village, still bearing the name of Esdud. Of the five Philistine capitals Ashdod and Gaza were of the most importance, as being the keys of Egypt, and the former was also enriched by the sale of the produce of Arabia, of which it was the emporium.

Ver. 2.—**When the Philistines,** &c. The words are exactly the same as those in ver. 1, viz. "And the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it," marking the simplicity of ancient narrative. **Dagon** is derived by Philo from *dagan*, "corn," and is explained by him as an emblem of the earth's fertility; but as the shape of this national deity of the Philistines was certainly that of a man to the waist, ending in the body and tail of a fish, the true derivation is doubtless that from *dag*, "a fish." It represented, however, not so much the sea, on which the Philistines trafficked, as the fruitfulness of water, which in the East is looked upon as the active principle of life (comp. Gen. i. 20). In one of the sculptures brought from Khorsabad there is a representation of a battle between the Assyrians and the inhabitants of the Syrian sea-coast, and in it there is a figure, the upper part of which is a bearded man with a crown, while from the waist downwards it has the shape of a fish (Layard's 'Nineveh,' ii. 466). Moreover, it is

swimming in the sea, and is surrounded by a multitude of marine creatures. Doubtless this figure represents Dagon, who, nevertheless, is not to be regarded as a sea-god, like Neptune; but as the fish is the product of water, he is the symbol of nature's reproductive energy. Together with Dagon a female deity was commonly worshipped, called Atergatis, half woman and half fish, whose temple is mentioned in 2 Macc. xii. 26. In the margin there she is explained as being *Venus;* but the ideas have only this in common—that Venus also, as rising out of the sea, symbolises life as springing out of water. As Dagon had a temple also at Gaza (Judges xvi. 23), and at the other cities of Philistia (Jerome on Isa. xlvi. 1), he was evidently the chief deity of the nation, and the solemn depositing of the ark in his temple, and **by Dagon,** —literally, "at his side,"—was intended as a public demonstration that the God of the Israelites was inferior to, and had been vanquished by, the national deity of the Philistines.

Vers. 3, 4.—**On the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of Jehovah.** *I. e.* he was in the attitude of adoration, and instead of triumphing over Jehovah, he was prostrate, as if compelled to worship. But his priests perhaps thought that it was an accident, and so they set the image in its place again. They also, we may be sure, took due precaution against any one entering his temple by stealth; but when early on the second morning they came with anxious minds to see whether any new prodigy had happened, they found their god not only prostrate, as before, but mutilated, and **his head and both the palms of his hands were cut off**—not broken off by the fall of the image from its place, but severed with deliberate care, and placed contemptuously **upon the threshold,** *i. e.* upon the door-sill, the place where all must tread. **Only Dagon was left to him.** We cannot in English render the full contemptuousness of this phrase, because Dagon is to us a mere proper name, with no significance. In the original it conveys the idea that the head, the emblem of reason, and the human hands, the emblems of intellectual activity, were no real parts of Dagon, but falsely assumed by him; and, deprived of them, he lay there in his true ugliness, a mere misshapen fish; for *dag,* as we have seen, means a fish, and Dagon is here a diminutive of contempt. In spite of his discomfiture the Philistines were true to their allegiance to their god, because, believing as they did in "gods many," he was still their own national deity, even though he had been proved inferior to the God of Israel, and would probably be rendered more particular and exacting as regards the homage due to him from his own subjects by so humiliating a defeat. For the gods of the heathen were jealous, fickle, and very ill-tempered if any slight was put upon them. After all, perhaps they thought, he had done his best, and though worsted in the personal conflict, he had managed so cleverly that they had gained in fair fight a great victory.

Ver. 5. — Henceforward, therefore, his priests and other worshippers carefully abstained from treading on the door-sill, where his nobler members had lain, **unto this day.** Apparently the Books of Samuel were written some time after the events recorded in them took place, and we have remarkable evidence of the permanence of the custom in Zeph. i. 9, where the Philistines are described as "those that leap on," or more correctly *over,* "the threshold." The custom, so curious in itself and so long continued, bears strong testimony to the historical truth of the narrative.

Ver. 6.—**But the hand of Jehovah was heavy upon them of Ashdod.** *I. e.* his power and might were exercised in smiting them with severe plagues. A question here arises whether, as the Septuagint affirms, besides the scourge of emerods, their land was desolated by swarms of field-mice. It is certain that they sent as votive offerings golden images of "the mice that mar the land" (ch. vi. 5); but the translators of the Septuagint too often attempt to make all things easy by unauthorised additions, suggested by the context; and so probably here it was the wish to explain why mice were sent which made them add, "and mice were produced in the land." Really the mouse was a symbol of pestilence (Herod., ii. 141), and appears as such in hieroglyphics; and by sending golden mice with golden emerods the lords of the Philistines expressed very clearly that the emerods had been epidemic. This word, more correctly spelt hæmorrhoids, has this in its favour, that the noun used here, *ophalim,* is never read in the synagogue. Wherever the word occurs the reader was instructed to say *tehorim,* the vowels of which are actually attached to the consonants of *ophalim* in the text of our Hebrew Bibles. In Deut. xxviii. 27 *tehorim* is mentioned as one of the loathsome skin diseases of Egypt, and though rendered "emerods" in the A. V., is possibly, as translated by Aquila, "an eating ulcer." *Ophalim* need only mean *tumours, swellings,* its original signification being "a hill" (2 Chron. xxvii. 3); yet as the word was not thought fit for public reading in the synagogue, we may feel sure that it means some such tumours as the A. V. describes.

Ver. 7.—**His hand is sore upon us.** The epidemic was evidently very painful, and, as appears from ver. 11, fatal in numerous instances. Connecting this outbreak with

the prostrate condition and subsequent mutilation of their god, the people of Ashdod recognised in their affliction **the hand**, *i. e.* the power, of Jehovah, and determined to send away the ark, the symbol of his ill-omened presence among them.

Ver. 8.—**The lords of the Philistines.** Philistia was governed by a council of five princes, but whether they were elective or hereditary in the several towns is by no means clear. They are called "seranim," from *seren*, "a hinge," just as the cardinals of the Church of Rome take their name from the Latin word *cardo*, which has the same meaning. There is no ground for connecting the word with *sar*, "a prince." When Ewald did so he probably forgot that the two words begin with different letters — seren with *samech*, and sar with *shin*. Seranim is the word constantly used of the lords of the Philistines (Josh. xiii. 3; Judges iii. 3; xvi. 5, 8, &c.; 1 Chron. xii. 9), though after being correctly so styled in 1 Sam. xxix. 2, they are popularly called in vers. 3, 4, 9, *sarim*, "princes." **Let the ark of the God of Israel be carried about unto Gath.** Unwilling to part with so signal a proof of their victory, the lords of the Philistines determine to remove the ark to another locality, but thereby only made the miraculous nature of what was taking place more evident to all. Of Gath but little is known; but Jerome describes it as still a large village in his days, and as situated near the border of Judæa, on the road from Eleutheropolis to Gaza.

Ver. 9.—**And they had emerods in their secret parts.** The verb used here, *sathar*, is found in Hebrew only in this place, but is of common occurrence in Syriac and Arabic. Its ordinary meaning in both these languages is to "cover," "conceal," and the A. V., taking it in this sense, supposes the boils were hidden, and translates as above. But the root has a double meaning, and signifies also "to destroy," though in this sense the Arabic has a slight difference in spelling, namely, *shatara* instead of *satara*. The old versions were evidently at a loss in understanding the meaning, though their renderings are suggestive, except the Syriac, which translates quite literally, but leaves thereby the difficulty untouched of the twofold meaning of the word, and the Syro-Arabic lexicons are uncertain which to choose. Some give, "and the emerods hid themselves in them," in the sense of gnawing and burrowing into the flesh, *i. e.* they became cancerous. Others take the alternative sense, and render, "and the emerods were burst upon them," *i. e.* became fissured and rent, and turned into open sores. Another translation has been proposed, namely, "the tumours or emerods brake out upon them;" but as the verb, both in the Hebrew and the Syriac, is passive, this rendering can scarcely be defended. Upon the whole, the most probable sense is that the tumours buried themselves deep in the flesh, and becoming thus incurable, ended in causing the death of the sufferers.

Vers. 10, 11.—**The Ekronites cried out.** Couvinced by this second and more fatal plague that the ark was the cause of their punishment, the people of Ekron, when it was passed on to them from Gath, protested loudly against its presence. Compelled to receive it until the lords of the Philistines could be convened in council to decide upon its ultimate destination, the plague broke out so heavily among them that they were in utter dismay. For the rendering **deadly destruction** is untenable. Literally the words are, "a dismay of death;" but in Hebrew *death* added to a word of this sort simply means "very great." So "terrors of death" in Ps. lv. 4 are very great terrors. In the next verse we learn that many did die, but the words used here describe the mental agony and despair of the people as they saw the ark, which had wrought elsewhere so great misery, brought unto them.

Ver. 12.—**The cry of the city went up to heaven.** Not the word used in ver. 10, where it is an outcry of indignation, but a cry for help, a cry of sorrow and distress. Though in ver. 10 Ekronites is in the plural, yet in all that follows the singular is used. "They have brought about the ark to me, to slay me and my people. . . . That it slay me not and my people." It is the prince of Ekron who, as the representative of the people, expostulates with his fellow-rulers for the wrong they are doing him. But finally all join in his lamentation, and the whole city, smitten by God's hand sends up its prayer to heaven for mercy.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—5.—*Foreshadowings.* The facts given are—1. The Philistines, acting on polytheistic principles, place the ark in their heathen temple, thus ascribing to it Divine honour, and yet indicating its inferiority to Dagon. 2. During the night their god Dagon falls to the ground. 3. Supposing the fall to be the result of some unaccountable accident, they replace their god, and on the next day find him even broken to pieces. 4. The event is memorialised by the establishment of a superstitious custom. The supernatural and ordinary events connected with Israel's

history have a prophetic significance for future ages. The record is "for our admonition, on whom the ends of the world have come." There is another bondage than that of Egypt, another conflict than that of Dagon and the ark. Here are two powers in collision, and we have given us—

I. A FORESHADOWING OF THE FALL OF HEATHENISM. 1. The *fact is established* that heathenism is *doomed to perish*. The occurrence in the house of Dagon is a single instance, in palpable form, of what has taken place in many lands, and will recur till every idol is abolished. No prediction in Scripture is more clear than that the day will come when paganism will cease to exist (Ps. ii. 8; Isa. ii. 18; xi. 9). Events daily point on to it. Dagons fall in many lands. History is really but the completion of processes set in operation by God in ages past. Destruction is inherent in the essential falsehood of heathenism. The truth of God cannot be converted into a permanent lie (Rom. i. 25). It is a mercy that God has so ordained things that only true worship can endure. 2. *Heathenism is doomed to perish by contact with God's truth.* Dagon might stand erect and receive the homage of men when he and they are left to themselves; but in presence of the ark, the visible manifestation of God's will to the world, he must fall on his face to the earth. Doubtless corruption in men, if left long enough on earth, would cause them to become extinct, because in the nature of things it tends to utter ruin of morals, society, health, and life. It is, however, the purpose of God to extinguish it without extinguishing the race of men, and that too by his revealed truth. Events prove that this has been the process. Britain ceased to be idolatrous when the light of life came to her shores. Hence the missionary enterprise; hence the need of "holding forth the word of life." 3. The *downfall of heathenism is brought about by the secret, silent power of God exercised through his truth.* There is suggestiveness in the hint that the fall of Dagon occurred during the silence of night. The fall was through the unseen power of God, operating by ways men could not trace, and that revealed its existence in its effects. The conquests of the gospel are instrumental. It is not history, though pure and impressive; nor precept clear and useful; nor sublime thought for the intellect; nor mere influence of character, though holy and elevating; but the quickening Spirit, who, in the depths of human nature working by means of the instrument, turns men to God. There is a profound secrecy and mystery in every soul's regeneration. 4. The *final downfall of heathenism* by means of the truth is *brought about after repeated efforts to revive it.* They placed Dagon on his seat again, and rejoiced once more in his sufficiency; but the Unseen Power wrought on with greater energy, till the head and hands, the seat and instruments of power, were cut off. Beautifully does Scripture thus indicate the ebbs and flows of the stream of truth in process of subjugating every principality and power to Christ. A thousand years with God are as one day. He gives free scope to men and principles. Yet the truth will prevail until the earth is "filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the deep."

II. The FRUSTRATION OF ALL EFFORTS TO DISHONOUR GOD'S REVELATION OF HIMSELF. The placing of the ark in the presence of Dagon was intended to indicate a belief in it as a power among men, but as a power *inferior* to that exercised by the Philistines' god. Jehovah was a deity, but yet a conquered deity. Hence the glory due to Dagon. Now the ark represented at that time the specific revelation which God had given for bringing to pass his purpose in the deliverance of the world from the curse of sin. The practical effect, therefore, of the Philistines' conduct was to rob revelation of its supremacy. The tendencies of human nature are constant; and now that the full revelation has been given in Christianity, there is the same effort to dishonour and discredit it before men by placing it in unwarrantable positions. 1. *The insult offered to Christianity.* There are *two forms of insult.* (1) That offered by persons who simply *recognise Christianity as one among the many and equally authorised powers* for promoting the good of mankind. Human society is regarded as a whole, needing, for its intellectual, moral, and material development, a wise use of various educational appliances which God has provided. Religions, philosophies, statecraft, productions of men of genius, are all of God, and equally demand the respect and deference of men. An inspiration from the Almighty runs through them all, since they are his agents. Hence Christianity is just *one* of the

religions of the world, doing its part in common with them. As a philosophy it may have a place among other systems. As useful in the management of peoples, statesmen may lay hold of it in support of other agencies. Christ may adorn the Pantheon in company with other heroes in thought and action. (2) That offered by persons who *regard Christianity as a power inferior to other agencies for influencing human destiny.* There are few who would esteem it inferior *as a religion*, when compared with prevailing forms in *non*-Christian lands; but by some it is held to be inferior as compared with a pure theism and the higher philosophies. Its supernaturalism is branded as the crude product of unphilosophical minds. Its cardinal doctrine of atonement is declared to be at variance with first principles in morality. Unless divested of its outward garb, it is supposed to be unsuited to the higher order of intellect. Its power as a supreme authority is said to be on the wane, and pride is felt in placing its pretensions side by side with those of the modern Dagon. 2. The *rebuke of those who offer the insult.* Without dwelling on the sure disappointment and sorrow which come on those who dishonour Christianity by regarding it as merely one of the various powers equally deserving of respect, it may suffice to point out how—(1) Facts show that *all systems in rivalry* with Christianity *lose their vaunted pre-eminence;* and this too, on the one hand, by the loss of their influence, and on the other by the permanent and growing power of Christianity The wisdom of the Greek ceased to be a ruling force, while the truth of Christ won for him the Roman empire. The cold theism of the eighteenth century sank into obscurity as the great evangelical impulse of the Church of God developed its force The men who pride themselves in antagonism to Christ have never done anything to regenerate the savage, to make the dying-bed peaceful. (2) It is in the *nature of the case* that such a *result should always ensue.* No other religion is so fully attested as Divine. Every other system partakes of the imperfection of its authors; fails in motive power; is more of a criticism on man and his position in the world than a solvent of the deep spiritual cravings of the soul; and is liable to pass out of influence under the analysis of succeeding minds. The policy that would suggest to a statesman the use of Christianity as a tool for government thereby proves its moral instability. The unseen power of the "jealous God" will work in silence, and cause the "Name that is above every name" to have "in all things the pre-eminence." A refuge of lies means trouble and anguish.

General lessons:—1. History confirms faith in the sufficiency of the gospel for the conquest of heathenism. 2. In all use of means the power of the Holy Spirit should be recognised. 3. We must seek proof of the pre-eminence of Christianity in deeds such as no rivals can produce. 4. We may yet expect many boastful claims from human systems before men learn fully the lessons of history.

Vers. 6—12.—*Coercive providences.* The facts given are—1. God visits the men of Ashdod with severe affliction. 2. In their perplexity they remove the ark to another locality. 3. The device proving a failure, and the men of Ekron refusing to receive the unwelcome symbol, a council of authorities decides to return it to Israel. Providence had so ordered events for high moral ends as to bring the ark into captivity The influences were at work in Israel to issue in the result desired. Hence there arose a need for a turn in the course of Providence.

I. The NEED FOR COERCIVE PROVIDENCES ARISES CHIEFLY FROM TWO CAUSES. 1 *Imperfect acquaintance with the Divine will.* These men had some knowledge of the Divine power in the ark, but could not learn the precise will of the strange god One of the first things, therefore, is to prompt to an inquiry as to what is desired But man, especially when grossly ignorant, is indisposed to search for light, and cannot bear very clear light. If men will not act because they do not know, they must be aroused to learn, or to do without knowing; for God's great ways must not be barred and blocked by man. 2. *Unwillingness to be convinced of the Divine will.* The fall of Dagon on the first night aroused the thought of a superior power, and the danger of keeping it from its natural place. This first gleam of light was extinguished by a new trial of Dagon's power to stand. A second failure brought more light, but the expedient of change of abode was adopted to evade the new and clearer suggestion. Men often do not like to know the path of duty. There is much

ingenuity spent in evading the force of Divine teaching. If they will not follow increasing light when their doing so is necessary to the realisation of a Divine purpose, pressure must be brought to bear. Pharaoh, Balaam, and Jonah are instances of this.

II. The KIND OF COERCION EMPLOYED WILL DEPEND ON THE MENTAL AND SOCIAL CONDITION OF THE PEOPLE. Men are influenced strongly by events which touch their interests, and which come in such shape as to be adapted to their ordinary modes of thought and views of things. The people of Ashdod were highly susceptible to religious impressions, and their religious associations were entirely with the honour of their god. Philosophical arguments and high-toned reasons suited to pure Hebraism or Christianity would not have touched them. Moreover, by education and inheritance they were governed by the habit of associating bodily sufferings, when great, with a positive Divine purpose. Now, God governs men according to their capabilities, and reveals his will in ways conformable to their ruling ideas. Whether by miracle or natural coincidences, there is always adaptation to the minds to be influenced. This principle solves many events in Old Testament history, and shows the perfect reasonableness and even propriety of the pressure brought to bear on the benighted Philistines. God fits every rod to the back of the fools he smites, and speaks to every ear in accents suited to its delicacy or obtuseness.

III. The COERCION IS PROGRESSIVE IN INTENSITY. The select body of priests of Dagon first feel the hand of God, then the people as individuals, and then the entire community as such. Also, there was first a rude blow to the religious prejudices of the priestly body, and through them of the people; then an assault on the physical condition of multitudes; and finally a disastrous blow on the prosperity of the state. Men will answer religious arguments by religious arguments, and evade truth if possible; but touch their bodies and their fields, and some earnest inquiry as to the cause and intent will be evoked. Especially does material disaster induce effort to learn the truth when authorities are compelled to deliberate on possible remedies. In national providences the pressure at last reaches the rulers.

General lessons:—1. God uses pressure on each of us when our inclination runs against our true interest and his glory. Lot was led urgently out of Sodom. 2. The pressure used never crushes the will, but develops thought, and opens out lines of conduct for adoption. 3. It is important to study the meaning of events in our lives which are inevitable and disagreeable. 4. The coercive action of Providence will become less or more according as we turn from sin or harden our hearts. "The way of transgressors is hard."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ch. v., vi. 1—9. (ASHDOD, GATH, EKRON.)—*The ark among the heathen.* "And the ark of the Lord was in the country of the Philistines seven months" (ch. vi. 1). The scene is now changed. Whilst there arises in every household in Israel a cry of mourning for the dead, Shiloh is ravaged and burnt with fire, and the yoke of oppression made heavier than before, the hosts of the Philistines return to their own country elated with victory. They carry with them the ark of the Lord, which had never before been touched by unconsecrated hands, or for ages exposed to the gaze of any but the priests; and the interest centres on the sacred symbol amidst its new and strange surroundings. It is first of all taken to Ashdod, three miles from the sea-coast, the chief seat of the worship of Dagon, the national god of the Philistines (1 Chron. x. 10); afterwards to Gath, ten miles distant (the native place of Goliath, and twice the temporary residence of David); and then to Ekron (ch. vii. 14), the most northerly of their cities. Although the other two cities of the Philistine Pentapolis, Gaza, the scene of Samson's death (Judges xvi. 21—30), and Askelon (ch. xxxi. 10; 2 Sam. i. 20), were deeply concerned in the events which attended its presence (ch. v. 8; vi. 17), it does not appear to have visited them. 1. The time of its abode among the Philistines was for them a time of *judgment*. Although the ark when among the people of Israel seemed to be abandoned by God and destitute of power, it was now defended by him and clothed with might. The difference arose from the different circumstances in which it was placed and in both cases it was shown that the possession of institutions

appointed by God does not profit those who refuse to stand in a right relation to God himself, but rather serves to increase their condemnation. Judgment also is executed in many ways. 2. Judgment was mingled with *mercy*. The afflictions which they endured were "less than their iniquity deserved" (Job xi. 6), and were "established for the correction" (Hab. i. 12) of their sins and the prevention of their ruin (Ezek. xviii. 30). The God of Israel has supreme dominion over the heathen, "chastises" them (Ps. xciv. 10) for their good, and never leaves himself "without witness" (Acts xiv. 17). 3. The *design* of the whole was the furtherance of the purpose for which Israel was called, viz. to bear witness to the living and true God, and to preserve his religion separate and distinct from the idolatry and superstition of the heathen. 4. The *effect* of the display of his power in connection with the presence of the ark among them appears here and in their subsequent history. Consider these Philistines as—

I. TRIUMPHING IN THE CAPTURE OF THE ARK (vers. 1, 2). "They brought it into the house (or temple) of Dagon, and set it by Dagon," as a trophy or a votive offering, ascribing their victory to him, and magnifying him as superior to Jehovah. The process described by the Apostle Paul (Rom. i. 18—23) had taken place in them. Their worship was a nature-worship, joined with the embodiment of their "foolish" imaginations in an image with which their god was identified. Dagon was "the god of natural power—of all the life-giving forces of which water is the instrument; and his fish-like body, with head and arms of man, would appear a striking embodiment of his rule to those who dwelt near the sea." When men have fallen away from the knowledge of the true God they—1. *Do honour to a false god;* impelled by the religiousness of their nature, which will not let them rest without an object of worship. 2. *Dishonour the true God*, by declaring him inferior and subject to the false, and by "despising his holy things." The Philistines did not deny the existence of Jehovah; they were willing to account him one among "lords many and gods many," and regarded him as having a local and limited dominion. But the fundamental idea of the religion of Israel was that Jehovah is God alone, and demands the supreme and entire affection of man (Isa. xlii. 8). "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," *i. e.* in my presence. 3. *Give glory to themselves;* are proud and boastful of their wisdom, power, and success. Self is really the idol of all who forsake the Lord. But the triumph of the ungodly is short.

II. SMITTEN BEFORE THE PRESENCE OF THE ARK (vers. 2—4). Almost as soon as they obtained possession of it, the victory which they thought they had obtained over him whose presence it represented was turned into disastrous defeat. 1. Their *god* was cast down and broken in pieces. (1) *Mysteriously.* In the night. (2) *Significantly.* "Fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord," as if in subjection, or rendering worship to the Lord of all. (3) *Irresistibly.* Unwilling to lay the lesson to heart, they "set him in his place again," but only to prove that their efforts on his behalf were abortive (Isa. xlv. 9). (4) *More and more signally.* Their very efforts affording occasion for a greater manifestation of Divine power, and one which could not be, as the first may possibly have been, attributed to accident. "The face, as a sign of its worthless glory and vain beauty, struck down to the earth; the head also, as the seat of the wisdom which is alienated from God and opposed to God; the hands, as a symbol of the powers of darkness which work therein, cut off" (Lange). (5) *Contemptuously.* "Upon the threshhold," as if fit only to be trodden under-foot. Such, however, was the blindness of his votaries, that they henceforth accounted the spot as peculiarly sacred (ver. 3). (6) *Completely.* "*Only* the fish-stump was left." "Thus the kingdom of Satan will certainly fall before the kingdom of Christ, error before truth, profaneness before godliness, corruption before grace in the hearts of the faithful." 2. Their *sustenance* was wasted and destroyed (ver. 6; vi. 4, 5). "Mice were produced in the land, and there arose a great and deadly confusion in the city" (Septuagint). The corn-fields, the chief means of their subsistence and the source of their prosperity, rendered fertile, as they deemed, by the power and favour of Dagon, were wasted by a plague of field-mice (not unknown in the history of other lands) under the special arrangement of Divine providence, that they might learn the vanity of their idol and the supremacy of Jehovah. 3. Their *persons* were afflicted with disease. "The hand of

the Lord was heavy upon them of Ashdod" and "the coasts (territory) thereof," and "smote them with emerods" (vers. 9, 12; either boils or hemorrhoids, bleeding piles—Ps. lxxviii. 66). (1) Painful. (2) Reproachful, because of the moral corruption sanctioned in connection with idolatrous worship (Rom. i. 24—32). (3) Instructive—concerning the self-control and moral purity which the true God requires in men. These things were adapted to show the folly of idolatry, the majesty of God, and the necessity of humiliation before him. Nor were they wholly without effect.

III. INSPIRED WITH DREAD OF THE ARK (ver. 7), for such was evidently the prevailing feeling of the men of Ashdod, and of others subsequently, as more fully expressed in vers. 11, 12. They attributed their afflictions to its presence—"His hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon our god;" and feared a continuance of them. Hence they wished to get rid of it, as the Gergesenes desired Jesus to "depart out of their coasts" (Matt. viii. 34). 1. The religion of the heathen is a religion of fear. 2. The fear of man in the presence of the supernatural bears witness to the sinfulness of his nature, or of his disturbed relations with the Divine. 3. It springs from a conviction or instinct of retribution, which, however, is often mistaken in its applications. 4. A servile, selfish fear drives away the soul from God instead of drawing it near to him, and is contrary to the reverential, filial fear in which true religion has its root (2 Tim. i. 7).

IV. STRIVING FOR THE RETENTION OF THE ARK (vers. 8—12). The effect of their sufferings on the people of Ashdod was to lead them to resolve, "The ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us;" but its removal was deemed a matter of such importance that they called a council of the lords (or princes) of the confederacy to determine what should be done with it. Whilst they may have felt toward Jehovah a like fear to that with which they regarded Dagon, they were unwilling to render honour to him by "letting it go again to its own place" (ver. 11), still less to renounce their idolatry. They wished to retain the ark for their own honour and glory; and so indisposed were they to desist from their attempt, and acknowledge their fault, that even their own priests found it necessary to admonish them against "hardening their hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh" (ver. 6; ch. iv. 8). They sought to effect their purpose by sending it to Gath; and it was only when both Gath and Ekron were still more severely afflicted than Ashdod, many died, and the cry of distress "went up to heaven" (ver. 12), that in a second council they consented to let it go. 1. The devices of men against the Lord are foolish and vain (Prov. xxi. 30). 2. Their continued resistance to his will causes increased misery to themselves and others. 3. Their efforts against him afford opportunities for a wider and more signal display of his power. 4. What they are unwilling to do in the beginning they are, after much suffering, constrained to do in the end.

V. INQUIRING ABOUT THE RETURN OF THE ARK (ch. vi. 2—9). The Philistine princes, having resolved to send it back, called "the priests and soothsayers" together, to show them in what manner it should be done; and the answer they received, though not unmingled with the caution generally exhibited by heathen priests, was wise and good. 1. Men in all ages have had need of special guidance in Divine things. The very existence of a priesthood is a confession of such need. 2. Conviction often forces itself upon the most reluctant. 3. There is in men generally a deep feeling of the necessity of a propitiatory offering in order to avert Divine wrath—"trespass offering" (ver. 3). 4. Even the light which shines upon the heathen indicates the need of the higher light of revelation. Their wisest advisers exhibit uncertainty and doubt (vers. 5, 9).

VI. RENDERING HOMAGE TO THE GOD OF THE ARK. 1. By sending it back to its own place. 2. By the open acknowledgment of their transgression in the trespass offerings they present on behalf of the whole nation. "Give glory unto the God of Israel" (ver. 5). 3. By providing the most appropriate and worthy means of making their offerings. "A *new* cart" (2 Sam. vi. 3). "Two milch kine on which there hath come no yoke" (Num. xix. 2). 4. By the humble attendance of their chief men (vers. 12, 16). 5. By confessing the incompatibility of the worship of Jehovah with the worship of Dagon. "And from this time we hear no more of the attempts of the Gentile nations to join any part of the Jewish worship with their own" (Warburton). Imperfect as their homage was, it was not unacceptable to him "who is a gracious

God and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repents him of the evil" (Jonah iv. 2; Acts xvii. 27, 30).

VII. PERSISTING IN THEIR ATTACHMENT TO IDOLS. We know not all the beneficial effect of the presence of the ark among them, in restraining them from evil and inciting them to good; but we know that—1. They did not renounce their idolatry. 2. They did not cease from their oppression of Israel. And, 3. Were not permanently deterred from making fresh attacks upon them (ch. vii. 7), and by their opposition to the God of Israel "bringing upon themselves swift destruction."—D.

Ver. 3. (ASHDOD.)—*The overthrow of idolatry.* "Behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the Lord." Idolatry still prevails over by far the larger portion of the earth. It is an ancient, persistent, and enormous evil. And we, like Israel of old, are called to be witnesses to the heathen of the living and true God; not, indeed, by keeping outwardly separate from them, nor for that purpose, and the preservation of the truth intrusted to us, by contending against them with the sword; but by going into all the world, and preaching the gospel to every creature. Our only weapons are those of truth, righteousness, and love.

"Nor do we need
Beside the gospel other sword or shield
To aid us in the warfare for the faith."—(Dante.)

When the ark was defended with carnal weapons, it was carried away by the heathen, and placed in the temple of Dagon; but he whom the sacred symbol represented smote the idol to the ground (vers. 1—5). "Wherever he comes with the ark and the testimony, there he smites the idols to the ground. Idolatry must fall where the gospel finds a place." Concerning idolatry, notice—

I. THE NATURE OF THE EVIL. 1. False and unworthy conceptions of *God.* The instinct of worship was possessed by the Philistines; but their worship was rendered to a monstrous image, which was wholly destitute of, and opposed to, the perfections of the true God. It is the same with other idolatrous nations. Of the innumerable gods of India it has been said, "What a lie against his supreme majesty! Their number is a lie against his unity; their corporeal nature is a lie against his pure, invisible spirituality; their confined and local residence a lie against his omnipresence and immensity; their limited and subdivided departments of operation a lie against his universal proprietorship and dominion; their follies and weaknesses a lie against his infinite wisdom; their defects, vices, and crimes a lie against his unsullied purity and perfection." "Having no hope, and without God in the world" (Ephes. ii. 12). 2. Great *corruption* of life and manners; gross sensuality, incessant strife, oppression, cruelty, &c. (Ps. lxxiv. 20). "The land is defiled, and vomiteth out her inhabitants" (Levit. xviii. 25). 3. A *downward tendency* towards still greater darkness, corruption, and misery. "The true evil of idolatry is this. There is one sole idea of God which corresponds adequately to his whole nature. Of this idea two things may be affirmed, the first being that it is the root of all absolute grandeur, of all truth, and all moral perfections; the second, that, natural and easy as it seems when once unfolded, it could only have been unfolded by revelation; and to all eternity he that started with a false conception of God could not through any effort of his own have exchanged it for the true one. All idolatries alike, though not all in equal degrees, by intercepting the idea of God through the prism of some representative creature that *partially* resembles God, refract, and splinter, and distort that idea. And all experience shows that the tendency of man, left to his own imaginations, is *downwards.* Many things check and disturb this tendency for a time; but finally, and under that intense civilisation to which man intellectually is always hurrying, under the eternal evolution of physical knowledge, such a degradation of God's idea, ruinous to the *moral* capacities of man, would undoubtedly perfect itself, were it not for the kindling of a purer standard by revelation. Idolatry, therefore, is not *an* evil, and one utterly beyond the power of social institutions to redress; but, in fact, it is the fountain of all other evil that seriously menaces the destiny of the human race" (De Quincey, 'Leaders in Lit.,' p. 308).

II. THE MEANS OF ITS OVERTHROW. 1. The proclamation of *Divine truth,* of

which the ark may be accounted a symbol; the revelation of the righteous and merciful purposes of God toward men in his Son Jesus Christ. 2. The operations of *Divine providence*, by which heathen lands are rendered accessible, and their inhabitants disposed to pay attention to the truth; not only those which are afflictive, but also those which are benign (ver. 6). 3. The influences of the *Divine Spirit*, by which false systems are shaken as by a "mighty rushing wind," and consumed as with fire, and lost souls are enlightened, purified, and saved. "By my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zech. iv. 6). He works in silence and secrecy; but the effects of his working become manifest to all. The light of the morning reveals them.

III. THE CERTAINTY OF ITS DOOM; from—1. The *adaptation* of the means. 2. The *work* which has been already accomplished, and which is an earnest of and preparation for "greater things than these." 3. The *predictions* of the word (Num. xiv. 21; Isa. ii. 18; Jer. x. 11; Mal. ii. 11).

Conclusion:—1. Pity the heathen "in the compassion of Jesus Christ." 2. "Go ye." "Give ye." "Pray ye." 3. Do all in faith and hope.—D.

Ver. 3.—*Infatuation.* I. OF THE HEATHEN. Samson, calling on the name of Jehovah God, pulled down the temple of Dagon at Gaza, and showed the weakness of the idol. When the Philistines got possession of the ark of Jehovah, they placed it in another temple of Dagon at Ashdod, in order to re-establish the credit of their god. Great must have been their chagrin when they found the god of the victors prostrate before a sacred symbol connected with the God of the vanquished. But it was no easy thing to break their confidence in their own god. They set the idol up again, trying to persuade themselves, perhaps, that the fall had been accidental. The restoration of Dagon, however, only prepared for him and his worshippers a greater discomfiture. As the Philistines would learn nothing from the humiliation of their god, they had to behold with horror his mutilation and destruction. A plague fell at the same time on the people of Ashdod, like the plague of boils that smote the Egyptians in the days of Moses. They were filled with dismay, yet they would not restore to its place in Shiloh that ark which, as they owned, had brought such distress upon them (ver. 7). They carried it from city to city, though in each place the Lord punished them. For some months they continued in this infatuated course. The lesson of the weakness of their own gods they learned very slowly, very reluctantly; indeed, they never turned from their idols. Dreading the judgments of Jehovah, they at last sent back the ark to the land of Israel; but their minds and hearts were not changed. All that they cared for was to be free of this terrible ark, that they might cleave undisturbed to their own gods and their own heathen usages.

II. OF UNGODLY MEN IN ALL NATIONS. An evil habit is reproved, an error refuted, or a vain hope in religion exposed; yet men will not abandon it. They have some excuse for it, and after it has been thrown down they "set it up again in its place." The lesson is repeated with emphasis more than once, and yet it is not learned. Ungodly and self-willed men fall on one excuse after another, rather than give up errors which suit their minds and evils to which they are addicted. They have no objection to keep religion as a talisman; but rather than be called to account concerning it, or compelled to choose between it and their own devices, they will send it away. They prefer even a weak Dagon, who lets them sin, to the holy God, who requires his people to be holy too. The Philistines continued to be heathens, notwithstanding the reproof and humiliation inflicted upon them, just as the Egyptians remained in heathen blindness after all the proofs given to them of the power of Jehovah over their gods and their Pharaoh. Alas! many persons in Christendom have solemn reproofs from God and exposures of their helplessness when he rises up to judgment, yet never turn to him. In their infatuation they first treat the ark with disrespect, then send it away. They dismiss God from their thoughts, and are as mad as ever on their idols.

["This chapter, with the following, strikingly illustrates the non-missionary character of the Old Dispensation. For centuries the Israelites were near neighbours of the Philistines, and yet the Philistines had no particular knowledge of the religion of the Israelites, and only a garbled and distorted account of their history. This religious isolation was, no doubt, a part of the Divine plan for the development of the

theocratic kingdom; but if we look for the natural causes, we shall find one in the narrowness of ancient civilisation, when the absence of means of social and literary communication fostered mutual ignorance, and made sympathy almost impossible; and another in the national local nature of the religion of Israel, with its central sanctuary, and its whole system grounded in the past history of the nation, thus presenting great obstacles to a foreigner who wished to become a worshipper of Jehovah."—Dr. Broadus].—**F.**

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VI.

RESTORATION OF THE ARK TO THE ISRAELITES (vers. 1—12). Vers. 1, 2.—**The ark of Jehovah was in the country**—literally, the field, *i. e.* the territory—**of the Philistines seven months,** during which long time the people wherever the ark was deposited were afflicted in their persons with a most painful malady. The princes determined, therefore, to restore it to Israel, and convened **the priests and the diviners,** that they might advise them as to the manner in which this purpose should be best carried out, lest some error or want of due reverence might only serve to increase their sufferings. It would be the duty of the priests to see that the proper ceremonial was observed in moving the ark, while the diviners would decide what day and hour and special method would be lucky. The importance of the diviner, *qosem*, is shown by his being mentioned in Isa. iii. 2 in an enumeration of the leading orders in the state. He is placed there between the prophet and the elder or senator; but the A.V., displeased perhaps at finding one who practised a forbidden art nevertheless described as practically so valued, translates the word *prudent*. Literally it means a *divider* or *partitioner*, because it was his office to separate things into the two classes of lucky and unlucky. **Tell us wherewith,** &c. Though this translation is tenable, the right rendering is probably *how*. The princes did not assume that gifts must accompany the ark, but inquired generally as to the best method of restoring it. So the answer of the priests and diviners is not merely that expiatory offerings are to be made, but that the ark is to be sent back in such a way as to give proof that Jehovah had intervened, or the contrary (vers. 7, 8, 9).

Vers. 3, 4.—**A trespass offering.** The offering that was to be made when the offence had been unintentional (Levit. v. 15). **Why his hand is not removed from you.** A euphemism for "why your punishment continues to be so severe, without sign of abatement." If healing follows the gift, you will know that the malady was Jehovah's doing. The trespass offering was to consist of **five golden emerods, and five golden mice,** it being an old heathen custom, still constantly practised abroad, of presenting to the deity tokens representing the deliverance wrought for such as had implored his aid. Thus Horace ('Carm.,' i. 5) speaks of the custom of hanging up in the temple of Neptune the clothes in which a man had escaped from shipwreck. Slaves when manumitted offered their chains to the Lares; and the idea is so natural that we cannot wonder at its prevalence. **One plague was on you all.** Rather, "is on you all." It did not cease until the ark had been restored. The Hebrew has *on them all;* but as all the versions and several MSS. read *you all*, the substitution of *them* is probably the mistake of some transcriber.

Ver. 5.—**Mice that mar the land.** The idea of a plague of field-mice is, as we have seen, due to one of those many unauthorised insertions of the Septuagint by which they supposed that they removed difficulties from the way of their readers. As the ancients use the names of animals in a very generic way, any rodent may be meant from the jerboa downwards; but probably it was the common field-mouse, *arvicola arvensis*, still common in Syria, which multiplies with great rapidity, and is very destructive to the crops, and so became the symbol of devastation and pestilence (see on ch. v. 6). When, as Herodotus relates (Book ii. 141), the Assyrian army of Sennacherib had been defeated, because a vast multitude of field-mice had overrun his camp and gnawed asunder the bow-strings of his troops, the Egyptians raised a statue to Hephæstus, holding in his hand a mouse. But very probably this is but the literal explanation by Herodotus of what he saw, while to a well-instructed Egyptian it represented their god of healing, holding in his hand the mouse, as the symbol either of the devastation which he had averted, or of the pestilence with which he had smitten the Assyrian army (see on ch. v. 6).

Ver. 6.—**Wherefore do you harden your hearts, as the Egyptians and Pharaoh?** On this reference to Egypt see on ch. iv. 8. It is remarkable that they so correctly point out that it was the obduracy of the Egyptians which made their punishment so severe. Yet finally even they, in spite of their determined opposition were compelled to let

Israel go. So now the question is whether the Philistines will restore the ark on the warning of one plague, or whether they will hold out till they have been smitten with ten.

Ver. 7.—**Make a new cart, and take**, &c. The Hebrew is, "Now take and make you a new cart, and two milch kine." The transposition of the A. V. throws undue stress upon the verb *make*, whereas the Hebrew simply means that both the cart was to be new, and the heifers untrained and unbroken to the yoke. Both these were marks of reverence. Nothing was to be employed in God's service which had been previously used for baser purposes (comp. Mark xi. 2). No animal was deemed fit for sacrifice which had laboured in the field. The separation of the kine from their calves was for the purpose of demonstrating whether the plague after all was supernatural, and it is remarkable what great care the Philistine priests take against confounding the extraordinary with the Divine. If, however, the kine act in a manner contrary to nature, their last doubt will be removed.

Ver. 8.—**Put the jewels of gold . . . in a coffer.** Instead of jewels the Hebrew word signifies any article of workmanship, and so figures, images wrought in gold. They were to be placed reverentially at the side of the ark, for it had wrought them so great evil that they had learned to look upon it with awe.

Ver. 9.—**His own coast**, or "border." The ark throughout this verse is spoken of as if it were itself a deity. **Beth-shemesh** — *i. e.* "the house of the sun," also called Ir-shemesh, "city of the sun" (Josh. xix. 41) —had evidently been in the time of the Canaanites the seat of this popular idolatry. It was now a city of the priests, situated in the tribe of Judah, on its north-eastern border, next the tribe of Dan, and was the nearest Israelite town to Ekron. If, then, the kine, albeit unused to the yoke, left their calves behind, and drew the cart by the most direct route unto the land of Judah, they would give the required proof that the Philistines were smitten by the hand of Jehovah, and that it was no chance that had happened unto them.

Ver. 12.—**The kine took the straight way.** The Hebrew brings out the directness with which the heifers took the route to Beth-shemesh very forcibly. It says, "And the kine went straight in the way upon the way to Beth-shemesh; they went along one highway, lowing as they went," *i. e.* they went in one direct course, without deviating from it. Nevertheless, their continual lowing showed the great stress that was laid upon their nature in being thus compelled to separate themselves from their calves. **And the lords of the Philistines went after them.** *I. e.* behind them, leaving the kine free to go where they chose. The usual position of the driver of an ox-cart in the East is in front. Conder ('Tent Work,' i. 274) describes the view up the great corn valley of Sorek to the high and rugged hills above as extremely picturesque, and this it is, he adds, which was spread before the eyes of the five lords of the Philistines as they followed the lowing oxen which bore the ark on the "straight way" from Ekron to Beth-shemesh. The ruins of the latter place, he says, lie on a knoll surrounded by olive trees, near the junction of the valley of Sorek with the great gorge which bounded Judah on the north.

THE ARK AT BETH-SHEMESH (vers. 13—20). Ver. 13. **And they of Beth-shemesh.** More exactly, "And Beth-shemesh was reaping its wheat-harvest," the whole population being in the fields. Though a priestly city, we find in ver. 15 the Levites distinguished from the ordinary inhabitants, as though they and the priests formed only the ruling class. **In the valley.** Now called the Wady Surar, branching off into another valley on the south. Robinson ('Later Bibl. Res.,' 153) speaks of the site of Beth-shemesh as a very noble one, being "a low plateau at the junction of two fine plains." The wheat-harvest takes place in Palestine in May, and consequently the disastrous battle of Eben-ezer must have been fought in the previous October.

Ver. 14.—**Stood there, where there was a great stone.** Probably a mass of natural rock rising through the soil. This they used as an altar, breaking up the cart for wood, and sacrificing the kine. In this joyful work all the people seem to have joined, though the sacrifice would be offered only by the priests.

Ver. 15.—**The Levites took down the ark.** Naturally, in a city of which priests formed the ruling caste, the people would be acquainted with the general nature of the regulations of the law. Apparently it was only after the sacrificial feast that they forgot the reverence due to the symbol of Jehovah's presence among them.

Ver. 16.—**They returned to Ekron the same day.** The lords of the Philistines would of course take no part in this rejoicing, but, having seen the ark restored and the people busied in making preparations for the sacrifice, returned immediately home.

Vers. 17, 18.—**The golden emerods.** We have here and in ver. 18 an enumeration of the gifts differing from, without being at variance with, that in ver. 4. They are still five golden emerods, for which the name here is not *ophalim*, but *tehorim*, the word always read in the synagogue (see ch. v. 6). From

its use in the cognate languages it is pretty certain that it is rightly translated in our version. But besides these there were **golden mice, according to the number of all the cities**, &c. The priests had named only five mice, one for each of the lords of the Philistines; but the eagerness of the people outran their suggestion, and not only the fenced towns, but even the unwalled villages sent their offering, lest they should still be chastised. **Country villages.** Literally, "the village" or "hamlet of the Perazi." The Septuagint, a trustworthy authority in such matters, makes the Perazi the same as the Perizzite. Both words really signify "the inhabitant of the lowland," *i. e.* of the plain country of Phœnicia; but from Zech. ii. 4, where Perazoth is translated "towns without walls," and from Ezek. xxxviii. 11, where it is rendered "unwalled villages," we may conclude that it had come popularly to mean an open village, though literally, in both these places, it means "the hamlets of the lowland." **Even unto the great stone of Abel**, &c. All this part of the verse is exceedingly corrupt, and requires large interpolations to obtain from it any meaning. Both the Vulgate and the Syriac retain the unmeaning word Abel; but the Septuagint gives us what is probably the true reading: "and the great stone whereon they set the ark of Jehovah, which is in the field of Joshua the Beth-shemeshite, is a witness unto this day" (comp. Gen. xxxi. 52; Isa. xxx. 8).

Ver. 19.—**He smote the men of Beth-shemesh**, &c. In this verse also the text is undoubtedly corrupt. The Septuagint ascribes the sin not to all the people, but to "the sons of Jeconiah, who were not glad when they saw the ark, and he smote them." But as this reading is not supported by the other versions we may pass it by. The numbers, however, are evidently wrong. Fifty thousand men would imply a population of 250,000 people, whereas Jerusalem itself in its palmiest days never had a population of even 70,000. There were no large cities among the Israelites, but a scattered population living upon their fields, and with a few small walled towns here and there to protect them and their cattle in any sudden emergency. Kennicott, however, has satisfactorily explained the mistake. In the old way of denoting numbers by the letters of the alphabet an *'ain* = 70 had been mistaken for a *nun* with two dots = 50,000. The Syriac has 5000, that is, a *nun* with one dot. We must add that the Hebrew is not **fifty thousand and threescore and ten men**, but "seventy men, fifty thousand men," without any article between, and with the smaller number first, contrary to Hebrew rule. The occasion of the calamity was probably as follows:—As the news of the return of the ark spread from mouth to mouth, the people flocked together to take part in the sacrifice, which would of course be followed by a feast. Heated thereat by wine, perhaps, and merriment, they lost all sense of reverence, and encouraged one another to look into the ark and examine its contents, though the words need not absolutely mean more than that "they looked at the ark." Even so the men of Beth-shemesh, as a city of priests, must have known that death was the penalty of unhallowed gazing at holy things (Num. iv. 20), and it is more than probable that those who were smitten were priests, because in them it would be a heinous sin; for it was a repetition of that contempt for religion and its symbols which had been condemned so sternly in Eli's sons. The mere seeing of the ark was no sin, and had given the people only joy (ver. 13), but as soon as they had received it the priests ought to have covered it with a vail (Num. iv. 5). To leave it without a vail was neglectful, to pry into it was sacrilege. **Because Jehovah had smitten many of the people**, &c. This clause should be translated, "because Jehovah had smitten the people with a great smiting." The sudden death even of seventy men in an agricultural district, especially if they were the heads of the priestly families there, would be a great and terrible calamity, enough to fill the whole place with grief.

Vers. 20, 21.—**Who is able**, &c. Literally, "Who is able to stand before Jehovah, this holy God?" A punishment so severe following upon their unhallowed temerity made the inhabitants of this city of priests eager to pass the ark on to others. They therefore **sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kirjath-jearim** to request them to fetch it away. Kiryath-yarim—for so it ought to be pronounced—means *the city of forests*—Wood-town, softened among us into Wooton. It was chosen apparently simply because it was the nearest town of any importance, and was therefore identified in early Christian times with the modern Kuriet-el-'anab, *grape-town*, the woods having given way to vines, and which is about ten miles off, on the road to Mizpah. Conder, however, doubts the correctness of this view, and places Kirjath-jearim at Sôba (see 'Tent Work,' i. 18—22).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—9.—*Seeking light.* The facts are—1. The Philistines, oppressed by Providence, are uncertain what to do with the ark. 2. They, consulting the priests and diviners, are advised to send the ark away with all due honours and safeguards in case it is sent at all. 3. They are instructed how to carry out the advice, and warned not to refuse so to do. 4. Having done their best, they are to learn the truth from the issue. The incidents recorded furnish an instance of men seeking light. The events of the past few months had clashed with their material interests, and a series of observations had given rise to the opinion that these events were traceable to a restlessness on the part of the Hebrew Divinity. They did not wish to send back the ark. At the same time, there might be some error in the observations already made; and if so, the troubles of the land and the presence of the ark would be a mere coincidence. This then was more than an ordinary case of perplexity. The Philistines knew the ark to be a superior power. Their doubt was whether it was indicating its mind by the events which troubled the land, and if so, what should be their conduct in relation to it. Thus the crude ideas and superstitious conduct of heathens embrace truths which find expression in modern experience.

I. There ARE IN HUMAN LIFE SEASONS OF DEEP PERPLEXITY, WHEN MEN WANT TO KNOW THE TRUTH CONCERNING GOD. More intelligently than the Philistines, we believe in God as *the* Lord of all, and the ever-present Worker in human affairs. Although events move on in well-defined lines of natural order, we know that God uses them to indicate his will, in conjunction with the intimations furnished by his word and Spirit. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord." But amidst the voices that fall on the ear, and owing to dulness of perception, the soul sometimes is in great doubt concerning the mind of God, and what course should be pursued. This is especially true when events run counter to our desires and apparent interests, and when pride of spirit is cherished. Home may be wrecked. Business may bode disaster. Great decisions have to be taken. In each God has a will of his own, and conduct must have primary regard to him. The desire to do right is out of proportion to the perception of what in the particular instance *is* right.

II. The COURSE TO BE ADOPTED FOR THE REMOVAL OF PERPLEXITY. The Philistines proved themselves to be men of good sense by the course they took. The particular methods of obtaining more light will always depend on the spiritual state and previous attainments of those seeking it; yet the main lines pursued will be the same. Summarising then the reference here to men of experience, and the advice given by them, we see a course available for all. 1. *To act on the experience of the past.* The priests and diviners were the embodiments of generations of experience in matters pertaining to the gods. Their advice, therefore, was the product of experience. Likewise for every man there is a rich store of wisdom in the events of his own life, in the records of history, in the judgment of contemporaries. Experience is a process which gradually enkindles and feeds a lamp within the spirit of a man. It is one of God's ways of making our path plain. Especially should the experience of others both show us the line of duty and warn us of the risk of shutting our eyes to the light. The reference to the experience of Pharaoh, under circumstances in some respects similar to theirs, was extremely judicious on the part of the Philistine priests. 2. *To fulfil all known religious obligations.* The advice to send back the ark intact, with due honours and with emblems of confession of sin, was based on the best religious knowledge of the people. The only way of ascertaining the real mind of the Hebrew Divinity was to honour and propitiate it. In this crude conception we have a great principle. Our escape from many perplexities depends largely on our careful performance of such religious duties as are imposed by our present knowledge. No man can know the will of God as he ought unless he obey that will as far as he knows it, and at any cost. If prayer is a clear duty, pray; if confession of sin, confess; if some great act of self-denial, perform it. The perceptive powers are clearer when calmed by true practical religion. The discharge of high duties fits for discerning others. A sound spiritual condition, conserved by daily observance of religious obligations, is a powerful solvent of doubts. "If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of

the doctrine whether it be of God." 3. *To supplement these means by watching carefully for new indications.* The Philistines were to do all in their power to enable them to judge the *significance of coming events.* We cannot always make occasions for Providence to reveal itself; but we can fulfil all conditions for observing clearly, and then can watch the indications of the will which we know does speak to us in daily life, in the word and in the "still small voice." Then, acting in a reverent spirit, straitness will yield to a "large place," and darkness will be made light before us.

General lessons:—1. God has means of helping even the most ignorant to a fuller knowledge of his will. 2. By what wise and unlooked-for methods God accomplishes the realisation of his purpose among men who do not love him! 3. How superior the privileges of those who in mental darkness can cry direct for more light to the Father of light!

Vers. 10—15.—*Restored blessings.* The facts are—1. The kine bearing the ark, contrary to their instincts, go away from their home to Beth-shemesh. 2. The men of Beth-shemesh, seeing the returning ark, leave their occupations, and express their joy in sacrificial worship. 3. The Levites, exceeding their privileges, open the ark and examine its sacred contents. 4. The representatives of the Philistines observe the issue of their experiment and return. The rapid succession of incidents connected with the restoration of the ark illustrates several important truths.

I. The SUPREMACY OF GOD OVER HIS CREATURES. As a human device, the means for ascertaining the will of the God of Israel were excellent; and it is a mark of condescension that God should thus use imperfect men to effect his purpose. The men argued that he who commands disease and the ravages of vermin can, if disposed, effect his will through the agency of other creatures. God is not indisposed to exert his great power, should moral cause exist, even through the actions of men who act up to the measure of light attained to. The departure of the kine from their home and young to a strange land was a remarkable instance of the control of God over the strongest instincts. The seeming unnaturalness of the event is owing to our one-sided views of God's purposes and methods. It was contrary to their nature, as ordinarily exercised, to go from home. It was not contrary to the nature of things for them to do the will of their Maker. 1. It is a *reality in every case of animal life* that God's will is done. All creatures are "HIS." He formed their powers and gave them tendencies. Therefore every creature, in following its ordinary course, is actually carrying out a Divine intent. In this the kine were one with all cattle. Animals exist not for themselves. The end of their existence is moral and spiritual. The fabric of the universe and the lower creatures are for the development of the spiritual and eternal. In the case of the kine a great spiritual end was subserved—the restoration of the ark and consequent development of the "kingdom which cannot be moved." The original appointment of instinct and the specific control of it are acts identical in kind—supernatural. 2. There are *other instances of special control.* Balaam's ass was used to reprove the prophet. The lions were restrained from touching Daniel. In either case, as here, the event was connected with a manifest spiritual purpose; and who shall say that he who governs men and calms the sea shall not be free to control the movements of kine, as truly as when on his way to Jerusalem he guided the ass on which he sat? 3. It is a *means of teaching important truth.* This subordination of the most powerful impulses to the high purposes of God sets forth the truth that the most powerful natural attachments must yield to the requirements of the kingdom of God; as well perhaps as that, in coming years, the inferior creatures will subserve the advance of Christ's kingdom as certainly as that they will share in its blessings (Isa. xi. 6, 7; Matt. xiii. 32).

II. The JOY OF RESTORED BLESSINGS. The men of Beth-shemesh were the first honoured with a sight of the ark, and with the instinct of the true Israelite they appreciated the boon. 1. The *blessing now received was very great.* The significance of the ark to Israel cannot be fully expressed. Its return from captivity meant to the people a reinstatement in the favour of God. Their cry of anguish and the intercession of Samuel had been heard. Likewise the Church, after seasons of chastisement and loss of privilege, knows the greatness of the boon when God

makes "the place of his feet glorious," and comforts Zion with the light of his countenance. 2. The *restoration was unexpected.* Both as to the fact and the means there was no anticipation of what occurred. Men were called from common toils to share in a great spiritual joy. Thus does God in his mercy break in on the cares and sorrows of common life with blessings in excess of our hopes. Israel was not able to devise means of delivery from Egypt, and surprise filled their minds when they saw the salvation of God. Christ's appearance after death even took away the power of utterance (Luke xxiv. 36—41). "For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee." 3. The *expression of joy was natural.* It was most proper for a nature toned by recent chastisement to rush from the occupations of life to bid welcome to the long-wept-for ark of God. The recovery of property, the return of a lost son, nothing, could stir such deep feelings as the sign of the restored favour of Jehovah. The sacrifice of the kine was a form of penitence, homage, and gratitude culminating in highest joy. There is no joy like that of God's assured presence and favour. It is a gladness beyond that of the time when corn and wine increase. "Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing."

III. UNLAWFUL CURIOSITY. A debased condition is not recovered from suddenly. Despite the repentance for past sin and gratitude for return of God's favour, the low tone of life consequent on former practices remained. As a consequence of the singular combination of good and bad qualities at this hopeful turn in affairs, the joy of the day was marred by a wicked, profane curiosity. This was the more culpable because the inhabitants were chiefly Levites, who must have been acquainted with the very strict prohibition to manifest any rude curiosity in reference to the sacred symbols (Exod. iii. 5; xix. 21; Num. iv. 20). 1. *Curiosity, though useful in the acquisition of knowledge, is sometimes wicked.* (1) In *human affairs*, as when it consists in an idle intrusion into the secret business or sorrows of others, or endeavour to obtain information with malicious intent. (2) In *Divine things*, as when it consists in a restless craving to know the secret purposes of God; or an endeavour to subject the Divine nature to the same kind of criticism and analysis as the work of his hand; or a fruitless endeavour to solve the mystery of his sovereignty in relation to the existence of evil; or a rude, irreverent attempt to penetrate into the great "mystery of godliness," the person of Christ. 2. The *wickedness of such curiosity is evident*, because of—(1) The *relation of man to God.* God is the infinite, eternal, holy One, of whom all that is is but the dim shadow. No ideas, no beings, not even the totality of the material and spiritual universe, are commensurate with him. On the other hand, man is only one among many creatures, limited in power, defective in nature, and incapable even of knowing the mysteries within his own breast. The moral evil in man unfits him for the vision of God even so far as that is possible to holy beings. The reverence due to God is due also in measure to man from man when justice and fellow-feeling bar the way to secret things. (2) The *habit is destructive to all that is good.* In no instance is evil better known by its fruits than in that of curiosity carried into Divine and human things. It is the ruin of reverence, which is the essence of worship, the guardian of all that is good in life, the crowning grace of conduct, and the spring of manifold virtues. It, when prevalent, renders man distrustful of his fellows, and loosens the bonds of home. No society can exist where all reverence is dead, and unbridled curiosity *is* its death.

IV. AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY. The five lords of the Philistines witnessed the restoration of the ark and the joy of the men of Beth-shemesh, and they became wiser men. They carried back the information that Jehovah was indeed the Destroyer of Dagon, the Controller of disease, the Lord of the brute creation, and unchanged Friend of Israel. Thus in defeat there was a triumph. Thus have we an indication of what will yet be. The foes of the Church of Christ will learn that he does hold the mastery over all. Ebbs there may be in the prosperity of the Church, but the *power* will reassert itself, and men will marvel both at the means and the fact. A great discovery will be made to all creatures when, after the conflict of ages with the *world-power*, the true Israel of God shall rejoice in the perfect and everlasting presence of their Lord.

Vers. 17—21.—*Trophies and chastisement.* The facts are—1. An enumeration by the Israelites of the golden images sent with the ark. 2. A terrible chastisement on the men of Beth-shemesh for their profane curiosity. 3. An effort to send the ark away, consequent on the terror created. These closing incidents of the restoration introduce for consideration—

I. The TROPHIES WON IN THE CONFLICT WITH foes of the Church of God. The golden emerods and mice were expressions of pagan superstition, and yet of submission to the superior power of Jehovah. In so far as they represented the five lords of the country, they were, in the eyes of Israel, evidence of the extent to which the might of Jehovah had been recognised. As the pot of manna and Aaron's rod were kept as memorials of what God had done, and prophetic of what he would do, so these images were noted in the annals of the time as signs of the same power in conquest. The remembrance of them would inspire courage, and also suggest due fear. The *Church of Christ has won many trophies.* Christ himself has led "captivity captive." He has in many instances snatched learning, science, art, statesmanship, and literature from the hand of the enemy, and made them contribute to the splendour of his kingdom. The extent to which trophies have been gathered deserves a register as truly as that given of the offerings of the Philistine lords. A calm reflection on this subject will inspire the Church for new efforts, and awaken gratitude for the past.

II. CHASTISEMENT FOR SINS OF PROFANITY. The joy of restoration was soon beclouded by the sorrow of death. The death of seventy men for the sin of treating the ark of God profanely raises the question of what there can be in such sins to merit so severe a chastisement. A general answer to such a question is that we are not in a position to determine for God the form, time, or extent of punishment due to sin. None can adjudge sin correctly but the perfectly holy One. There may be far more in an act than comes to the surface. Hence a reverent spirit is mostly concerned to know the fact. But there are a *few considerations* which may throw a little *light on the apparent severity of the chastisement.* 1. The *essential evil of the sin.* Much difficulty arises from not considering that some sins, and this especially, are a most virulent moral poison. They are at the very antipodes to the true spirit of love and obedience. Hence the dire consequences of their prevalence come more sharply into view when we remember the special contagion of example in such cases as these; for profanity of spirit is easily caught from example, and at once lowers the entire nature of a man. 2. The *liability to fall into it.* Not only is the sin heinous, and spread by example, but there is a predisposition to it which gives to the slightest encouragement from without double power. The evil already in man is good soil for such seed. If a sinful nature means aversion to a holy God, then it requires only a small encouragement to turn that aversion into the positive form of disregard of the Divine presence. 3. The *privileges of the transgressors.* Punishment is always proportionate to privilege abused. As officials in the service of God, the Levites were doubly criminal. Those who grow up amidst the sanctities and quiet reverence of the sanctuary or pious home commit deadly sin when they think or act towards God profanely. Had we all the details of the behaviour of the men of Beth-shemesh, no doubt the grossness of their conduct would stand out in fearful contrast with the privileges they had enjoyed as servants of the altar. 4. The *bearing on ages to come.* Every sin bears on the future, and so does its punishment. The deterrent effect of punishment is important; and its infliction with this reference is equitable, seeing that the sin acts on others and in ages to come. The effect of the death of the men at Beth-shemesh was seen in the salutary fear that came on all. "*This holy Lord God!*" It was a great gain to the world to have driven home this great truth. Nor would the effect end there. God has taught the entire world by the terrible things in righteousness which have been recorded. Here is *one* of the means of the education of the future race. Men are more reverent for what they read in the Old Testament. 5. The *infliction of death is a prerogative of God.* God sets the appointed time. Temporal death is not less of God when it comes gradually. Its direct infliction is the form in which he marks his disfavour and impresses his creatures. If seventy men sin, and commit in the civil-religious state of Israel a capital crime (Num. iv. 5, 15, 20), they of course must pay the prescribed

penalty. It is an awful thing to die by the sudden stroke of God, but a more awful thing to be in a state of mind to deserve it.

Practical lessons:—1. Let us keep watch over the first risings of a spirit of levity. 2. Cultivate in young and old, by all conceivable means, reverence for all things connected with the worship of God. 3. Remember that the severity of God is really mercy to his creatures as a whole.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 10—ch. vii. 1. (BETH-SHEMESH and KIRJATH-JEARIM.)—*The return of the ark.* On the taking of the ark Israel sank to the lowest point of degradation. But "when the night is darkest then dawn is nearest." And the return of the sacred symbol was the first gleam of returning day. It was—

I. RESTORED BY DIVINE FAVOUR (vers. 10—12), which was—1. Exceeding *abundant* (1 Tim. i. 14). The people of Israel do not appear to have made any effort for its restoration, but God remembered them, and for their sake constrained their enemies to send back the precious treasure. "That is free love which never has been desired, never has been deserved, and never can be requited." 2. Shown in an *extraordinary* manner. It was brought by creatures acting contrary to their natural instincts, under a Divine impulse, in a direct line to the nearest border-city of Israel—Beth-shemesh (the house of the sun); a sign to Israel as well as the heathen. "Two kine knew their owner as (Isa. i. 3) Hophni and Phinehas knew him not" (Lightfoot). God's favour often comes by the most unlikely agencies and means. His power is universal, and all things serve him. 3. *Unexpected and surprising* (ver. 13). It was the time of harvest, and the men of Beth-shemesh were pursuing their ordinary secular occupations, thinking nothing of the ark, when they suddenly lifted up their eyes and beheld it approaching. It was found by them like "the treasure hid in the field." 4. *Distinguishing.* Shown toward Beth-shemesh beyond other cities, and toward Joshua beyond any other man; for some reason, perchance, in the people as well as in the locality. The city we know was a priestly city (Josh. xxi. 10). "We shall probably be doing them no wrong if we suppose that they regarded its presence as an honour to themselves. It distinguished their township above all the cities of Israel."

II. RECEIVED WITH GREAT JOY (vers. 13—18). We can imagine how promptly they put aside their harvest work and gathered with one accord around the sacred object. Their joy was the joy of—1. *Gratitude* for the favour shown toward them (1 Kings viii. 62—66; Ezra vi. 16, 17). 2. *Devotion* (vers. 14, 15). "They offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices (peace offerings) unto the Lord." 3. *Hope;* for in it they saw a proof of the power of God over the heathen, and a promise of their own freedom and prosperity. 4. And the day of their abounding joy was *commemorated* by means of the *great stone* on which the ark and the coffer containing the jewels of gold were set, "which remaineth unto this day."

III. REGARDED WITH IRREVERENT CURIOSITY (vers. 19, 20). 1. Their *conduct* consisted of "looking into (or upon) the ark." Whether they actually pried into it is uncertain. Whatever may have been the precise nature of their conduct, the spirit in which they acted was their chief offence in the sight of him who "looketh at the heart." There may be much sin in a look. 2. Their *sin* was great; exhibiting want of reverence and godly fear, presumption, perhaps rationalism, recklessness, profanity (Levit. x. 3). A spirit of intelligent curiosity and inquiry is of unspeakable worth, being the principal means of discovering truth and promoting human progress; but it should be ever joined with humility and reverence, as it has been in the greatest minds. "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread." The fact that Beth-shemesh was a city of the priests would lead us to expect better things of its inhabitants. "It is not improbable that in their festive rejoicing they may have fallen into intemperance, and hence into presumptuous irreverence, as it is thought was the case with Nadab and Abihu" ('Sp. Com.'). 3. Their *punishment* was severe; for "of fifty thousand men, seventy died a sudden death" (Hengstenberg; ver. 19). What is sent as a blessing is often turned by men themselves into a curse. 4. The effect was *morally beneficial* on the people generally. "Who is able to stand before this holy

Lord God?" &c. (ver. 20). (1) A conviction of his transcendent and awful *holiness*. "Our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. xii. 29). (2) A feeling of their own deep *sinfulness*, which the former never fails to produce (Isa. vi. 5; Luke v. 8). (3) A persuasion of the necessity of "righteousness and true *holiness*" in those among whom he dwells; for their request to the inhabitants of Kirjath-jearim, "Come ye down, and fetch it up to you," was the expression of something more than selfish dread (ch. v. 7), being caused by the belief that it would be more worthily honoured by others than by themselves. The conduct of a single city sometimes reveals the moral condition of a whole nation. And Israel was evidently not prepared to receive openly and fully the sign of God's presence among them, nor, until they should have passed through long and painful discipline, any further signal manifestation of his favour.

IV. REINSTATED IN RESPECTFUL BUT IMPERFECT HONOUR (ver. 21; ch. vii. 1). From Beth-shemesh it was taken (not to Shiloh, which had been rendered unworthy, and was now perhaps in ruins, but) to Kirjath-jearim (city of forests or woods, Ps. cxxxii. 6), where it was—1. Settled among a *willing people*, and in the house of a devout man—Abinadab, "on the hill." "God will find out a resting-place for the ark." When one people prove themselves unworthy of it, and wish to part with it, he will provide another people of greater worth, and ready to welcome it. "It is no new thing for the ark to be in a private dwelling-house." 2. Placed under special and proper *guardianship*. "Sanctified (consecrated) Eleazar his son to keep the ark from profane intrusion." Even in the most corrupt times there are individual instances of true piety. These are honoured of God, and for their sakes others are spared (Isa. i. 9). 3. *Disassociated* from the tabernacle and its services. After the capture of the ark the desecrated tabernacle appears to have been removed from Shiloh to Nob, where we find it long afterwards (ch. xxi. 6), attended by more than eighty priests, and subsequently to Gibeon (1 Kings iii. 4; 1 Chron. xvi. 39; xxi. 29; 2 Chron. i. 3, 6, 7), where it finally fell into decay and perished; the ark itself remained in Kirjath-jearim about seventy years, when it was removed to the house of Obed-edom (2 Sam. vi. 3, 11. Gibeah = the hill), and shortly afterwards to Jerusalem, where it abode "in curtains" until deposited in the temple of Solomon. The separation was anomalous, preventive of the full observance of the prescribed order of Levitical services, and indicative of the imperfect moral relations which subsisted between the people of Israel and their Divine King. 4. *Long disregarded* by the nation. No public assemblies appear to have met at the place where it stood; no sacrifices to have been offered there, no festivities held, as previously at Shiloh. It is not even mentioned again until the time of David, when it was said, "We inquired not at (or for) the ark in the days of Saul" (1 Chron. xiii. 3). Its neglect was permitted because its proper use was impossible until a thorough internal reformation and more complete union of the nation should be effected. "It was made evident that the nation was not yet worthy to receive the perfect fulfilment of the promise, 'I will dwell in your midst.' They endeavoured to dispose of the ark in the best possible way. It was *buried*, as it were, in Kirjath-jearim until the time when God would bring about its joyful resurrection" (Hengstenberg).—D.

Ver. 13. (BETH-SHEMESH.)—*The ark in harvest.* It was in the time of harvest that the ark was restored to Israel. Whilst the cornfields of the Philistines were wasted by an extraordinary plague, the valley of Beth-shemesh was covered with golden grain, and the men of that city were busily occupied in gathering it in (Ruth i. 6). But at the sight of the sacred symbol they left their secular occupation, gathered around it with great joy, and spent the day in "offering burnt offerings and sacrificing sacrifices to the Lord" (ver. 15). We may regard the harvest as representing *material* blessings, which are more richly bestowed at this season of the year than any other; the ark as representing *spiritual* blessings: "the law which came by Moses," and "the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ;" the throne of grace, and the mercy and grace which are there obtained. And the fact just mentioned suggests a comparison between the former and the latter. Both come from the same hand; but spiritual are *superior* to material blessings, inasmuch as they—

I. REVEAL MORE OF THE DIVINE GOODNESS. Consider them—1. In the *principle* from which they proceed. The one class of benefits from benevolence in general;

the other from benevolence in the form of mercy. "According to his mercy he saved us" (Titus iii. 5). 2. In the *mode* by which they are communicated. The operation of the laws of nature (Gen. viii. 22; Jer. v. 21); the gift and sacrifice of his only begotten Son. "Through Jesus Christ." 3. In the *nearness* with which the great Benefactor comes to us. "Thou visitest the earth" (Ps. lxv. 9); but "blessed is the man whom thou choosest and causest to approach unto thee" (Ps. lxv. 4), in that closer fellowship which those who are reconciled in Christ enjoy, and whose hearts are the temple of thine abode, the habitation of thy Spirit. "Revelation is the voluntary approximation of the infinite Being to the ways and thoughts of finite humanity; and until this step has been taken by Almighty grace, how should man have a warrant for loving him with all his mind, and heart, and strength?" (A. H. Hallam).

II. INVOLVE MORE VALUABLE GOOD. 1. The one pertains to the *body*, the other to the *soul*. 2. The one to man considered simply as a *creature*, needing support; the other as a *sinner*, needing forgiveness, renewal, salvation. 3. The one pertains to *time*, the other to *eternity*; "bread that perisheth," "bread that endureth to everlasting life" (John vi. 27, 51); "that good part which cannot be taken away" (Luke x. 42).

III. PRODUCE MORE EXALTED JOY. "Rejoiced." "The joy in harvest" (Isa. ix. 3). 1. In its relation to *God*. The one is felt less and the other more directly in him. The difference is very much the same as that which exists between the joy felt at receiving a present from a friend at a distance, and that of seeing his face and holding personal intercourse with him. And what are all the harvests which the earth ever produced compared with one smile of the Father's countenance, one whisper of Divine love? (Ps. iv. 6, 7). 2. In its influence on the *heart*; elevating, purifying, enlarging, strengthening, satisfying it. 3. In its power over *circumstances*. The joy of our harvest may be speedily turned into sorrow by bereavement (ver. 19) and other afflictions; but the joy which is felt in God is independent of outward circumstances, lifts the soul above them (Hab. iii. 17, 18), lives in death, and is perfected in heavenly bliss.

IV. INCITE TO MORE COMPLETE CONSECRATION. 1. With respect to the *Giver*. His bestowment of "fruitful seasons, filling our heart with food and gladness," incites to *some* return to him (Exod. xxiii. 14—17); but his bestowment of mercy and grace, to the "whole burnt offering" of the man himself (Rom. xii. 1). 2. With respect to our *fellow-men*. The one incites to the giving of "those things which are necessary for the body" (Exod. xxiii. 11); the other incites (and effectually constrains) to the giving of what is good for the whole man, body and soul; to self-sacrifice, and the "peace offerings" of brotherly kindness, and of charity toward all men. 3. The *whole course* of life; not in one or two acts merely, but in a continued service of love to be completed in eternity.

Conclusion.—1. If God has bestowed upon you temporal good, rejoice not in it so much as in spiritual. 2. If he has withheld it, rejoice in the higher good which is yours. 3. "Seek first the kingdom of God," &c. (Matt. vi. 33).—D.

Vers. 19, 20.—*Irreverence.* I. THE OFFENCE. The Philistines are not blamed for sending away the ark of God on a wooden car. They did not know, or, if they knew, they had no means of observing, the mode of carriage by Levites which had been prescribed in the Mosaic law. In placing the ark on a new car never before used, and drawn by young cows that had never before worn a yoke, the Philistines meant to show respect. But the men of Beth-shemesh, being Israelites, and having Levites among them, knew, or ought to have known, the laws regarding the sacred ark. So they were more severely judged. Their familiar handling of the ark was a presumptuous sin. Irreverence had grown during the years of misgovernment and license through which Israel had passed. It is evident that before the people would have dared to send for the ark to Shiloh, and take it into the field of battle, they must have lost much of the veneration with which their fathers had regarded the symbol of Jehovah's presence. And now the men of Beth-shemesh actually presumed to look into the ark, perhaps to ascertain whether the Philistines had put any gold into it, besides the golden offerings which they had placed in a separate coffer. So doing,

they forgot, or wilfully broke, the law which allowed none of the people at large so much as to approach the ark, and required that the priests should cover it with a veil, before the Kohathites might carry it; and in carrying it those Levites might not lay their hands upon it, but were commanded to bear it on gilt staves passing through golden rings in the four corners of the sacred chest. Indeed the Kohathites, though thus honoured as the bearers of the ark, were forbidden not only to touch it, but even to go into the most holy place to see it covered under pain of death.

II. THE PENALTY. The Lord saw it needful to restore reverence for his law and for the ark of his testimony by striking a blow at presumption which would not be soon forgotten. Accordingly, seventy of the country people at Beth-shemesh were smitten with death. On the same ground, a few years later, was Uzzah the Levite stricken dead because he put his hand on the ark of God. What a warning against irreverence! For this cause men may die close to the ark of the covenant, perish beside the mercy-seat. Nay, that which is the greatest blessing may be turned by presumption into the greatest disaster. The savour of life may be turned into a savour of death. It is especially a warning to those who "name the name of the Lord." The ignorant and profane are judged, but not so strictly as those who "profess and call themselves Christians;" just as the Philistines were afflicted with boils, but the Israelites were visited with death. God is much displeased with listless minds, irreverent postures, and heedless spirits in his Church. No doubt it may be pleaded that such faults come of want of thought, and not of any evil intent; but want of thought is itself a very grave offence in such a matter as the service of God. Even levity is inexcusable; for, at all events in adult persons, it comes of hardness of heart, ingratitude to Christ, neglect of reflection on sacred themes and objects, engrossment of thought and affection with the things which are seen, and an indifference to the presence and purpose of the Holy Spirit. Let us study reverence. "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the holy ones, and to be had in reverence of all that are round about him."—F.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VII.

Ver. 1.—At Kirjath-jearim the people reverently undertook the charge of the ark, and carried out their arrangements so carefully that no further calamity occurred. On its arrival they placed it in **the house of Abinadab in the hill.** More probably *at Gibeah*, as it is translated in 2 Sam. vi. 3, 4. In Josh. xv. 57 a village of this name is mentioned in the tribe of Judah not far from Kirjath-jearim (*ibid.* ver. 60), and probably Abinadab, who lived there, was a Levite, and so his house was chosen, and his son Eleazar **sanctified to keep the ark.** The names of both father and son are common in the Levitical genealogies, and none but a member of this tribe would have been selected for so holy a duty. If, however, the translation *in the hill* be preferred, we may suppose that it was because lofty heights were still considered fit places for Jehovah's worship, or there may even have been a "high place" there, of which Abinadab was the keeper. What exactly were the duties of Eleazar we cannot tell, as the word *to keep* is very indefinite; but probably, after the fearful ruin at Shiloh, all regular services and sacrifices were in abeyance until the return of happier times. Even here it was the men of the city who sanctified Eleazar, and not a priest.

THE REFORMATION OF ISRAEL (vers. 2—6).

Ver. 2. — **While the ark,** &c. The literal translation of this verse is, "And it came to pass, from the day that the ark rested at Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years." The words dwell wearily upon the length of this mournful period, during which Israel was in a state of subjection to the Philistines, with its national life crushed to the ground, and its strength wasted by unjust exactions and misrule. For though the Philistines gave up the ark, there was no restoration of the national worship, nor did they abandon the political fruits of their victory at Eben-ezer. But quietly and calmly Samuel was labouring to put all things right. It was the principle of the theocracy that Jehovah punished his subjects for their sins by withdrawing his protection, and that on their repentance he took again his place at their head as their king, and delivered them. Samuel's whole effort, therefore, was directed to bringing the people to repentance. What means he used we are not told, nor what was his mode of life; but probably it was that of a

fugitive, going stealthily from place to place that he might teach and preach, hiding in the caverns in the limestone range of Judæa, emerging thence to visit now one quarter of the country and now another, ever in danger, but gradually awakening, not merely those districts which were contiguous to the Philistines, but all Israel to a sense of the greatness of their sins, and the necessity of renewed trust and love to their God. And so a fresh spiritual life sprang up among the people, and with it came the certainty of the restoration of their national independence. **All the house of Israel lamented after Jehovah.** The word used here is rare, and the versions all differ in their translation of it. Really it is a happy one, embracing the two ideas of sorrow for sin, and also of returning to and gathering themselves round Jehovah. The Syriac alone retains this double meaning, by saying that "they all cast themselves down after Jehovah," *i. e.* that they sought him with deep humility. Gradually, then, a change of heart came over the people; but the removal of the ark to a more fit place, and the restoration of Divine service with ministering priests and Levites, could take place only after the Philistine yoke had been broken. From ch. xiii. 19—22 we learn how vigilant and oppressive that tyranny was; and the heart of the writer, in inditing this verse, was full of sorrow at the thought that the repentance of Israel was so slow and unready, and that therefore it had to wait twenty years before deliverance came.

Ver. 3.—**If ye do return,** &c. At length everything was ripe for a change, and the reformation wrought privately in their hearts was followed by public action. Samuel's secret addresses had no doubt been watched with anger by the Philistines, but he now ventures upon open resistance; for this public summons to Israel to put away its idols by a national act was a summons also to an uprise against foreign domination. We must suppose that the people had often assured Samuel in his wanderings of the reality of their repentance, and of their readiness to stake everything upon the issue of war. As a statesman, he now judges that the time has come, and convenes a national assembly. But everything would depend upon their earnestness. They were virtually unarmed; they would have to deal with an enemy long victorious, and who held the most important posts in their country with garrisons. Terrible suffering would follow upon defeat. Was their faith strong enough, their courage desperate enough, for so fearful a risk? Especially as Samuel is never described to us as a warrior or military hero. He could inspire no confidence as a general. He himself makes everything depend upon their faith, and all he can promise is, "I will pray for you unto Jehovah" (ver. 5).

Ver. 4.—**Then the children of Israel did put away** [the] **Baalim and** [the] **Ashtaroth.** This must have been done by a public act, by which at some time previously arranged the images of their Baals and Astartes were torn from their shrines, thrown down, and broken in pieces. Of course this was an overt act of rebellion, for these deities were especially Phœnician idols, and subsequently it was the Phœnician Jezebel who tried so fanatically to introduce their worship into Israel in Ahab's time. To cast off the Philistine deities was equivalent to a rebellion generally against Philistine supremacy. Baal and Astarte, the husband and the wife, represented the reproductive powers of nature, and under various names were worshipped throughout the East, and usually with lewd and wanton orgies.

Ver. 5.—**Gather all Israel to Mizpeh.** Mizpah, for so the place should be spelt, means a *watch-tower* (Gen. xxxi. 49), and so is a not uncommon name for spots among the hills commanding an extensive outlook. This was probably the Mizpah in the tribe of Benjamin, distant about five miles from Jerusalem (see Conder, 'Tent Work,' i. 25); and though Samuel may have partly chosen it as a holy place (Judges xi. 11; xx. 1), yet the chief reason was probably its lofty situation, 500 feet above the neighbouring tableau, which itself was 2000 feet above the sea level. It was thus difficult to surprise and admirably adapted for warlike purposes. The gathering of the people at Mizpah was the necessary result of the public insult offered to the Philistine gods, and virtually a declaration of war, as being an assertion of national independence.

Ver. 6.—**They . . . drew water, and poured it out before Jehovah.** While the drawing of water was a joyful act (Isa. xii. 3; John vii. 37, 38), as symbolising the winning from the depths below of the source of life and health, the pouring it out before Jehovah expressed sorrow for sin, and so it is explained by the Chaldee Paraphrast: "They poured out their heart in penitence like water before the Lord" (comp. Ps. xxii. 14). It might here also signify weakness and powerlessness, the being "as water spilt upon the ground, which cannot be gathered up again" (2 Sam. xiv. 14). They further expressed their sorrow by fasting, enjoined "for the afflicting of their souls" upon the great day of atonement (Levit. xvi. 29, 31; xxiii. 27, 32; Num. xxix. 7). And to these symbolical acts they joined the confession of the mouth, acknowledging that "they had sinned against Jehovah."

And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh. That is, he now became the

acknowledged ruler of Israel in things temporal, both civil and military, as he had previously been in things spiritual by virtue of his office as prophet. This was, of course, the result of the decisive action he had taken in summoning this national convention; but the words strongly suggest that there was some direct appointment, or at the very least a national acknowledgment of Samuel's authority, especially as they precede the history of the defeat of the Philistines. He had summoned the people together as Nabi, prophet, and when he said, "I will pray for you unto Jehovah," there was the implied meaning that he would be with them only in that capacity. But when the time came to appoint a general, who would act under him as Barak had acted under Deborah, the great chiefs, probably, who saw in him the prime mover of all that was being done, urged him also to take the command, and upon his consent he became also Shophet or judge.

ISRAEL'S DELIVERANCE FROM THE TYRANNY OF THE PHILISTINES (vers. 7—14). Vers. 7, 8.—**When the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines.** This was perfectly natural, and implied no intention on the part of the Israelites not to fight it out. No dominant nation would permit a subject race to hold such a meeting as Samuel's at Mizpah without having recourse to arms; but the Philistines acted with such promptness and vigour as brought home to the assembled Israelites not merely the conviction that they would have to fight, but that they must do it at once, and with the combined forces of the enemy. In spite, nevertheless, of their fears, they determine to await the attack, and that this decision was taken in faith their own words prove. For they say, **Cease not to cry unto Jehovah our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines.** The words literally are, "Be not silent from crying," &c. Let him mediate for them with God, and they will await the onslaught of the foe.

Ver. 9.—**And Samuel took a sucking lamb.** Samuel now appears as priest, and makes intercession and atonement for them. The lamb was at least seven days old, for so the law required (Levit. xxii. 27), but probably not much older; for the word, a rare one, occurring elsewhere only in Isa. lxv. 25, means something small and tender: this then **he offered for a burnt offering wholly unto Jehovah.** The A. V. translates in this way because *chalil*, "whole," is masculine, while *'olah*, "a burnt offering," is feminine; but *chalil* had in course of time come to be used as a substantive (Levit. vi. 23; Deut. xiii. 16; xxxiii. 10), and is really here in opposition to *'olah*, and so the two together signify "a whole burnt offering," and clearly indicate that the lamb was entirely consumed by fire. *'Olah* means *that which ascends*, and symbolised devotion and consecration to God. *Chalil* intensified this signification, and showed that all was God's, and no part whatsoever reserved for the priest or the offerer. And thus then Samuel's burnt offering implied that the people gave themselves unreservedly to Jehovah. **And Jehovah heard him.** Really, "Jehovah answered him," by the thunder mentioned in ver. 10. For thunder was regarded as God's voice (ch. ii. 10), and in Ps. xxix. we have a poetic description of its majesty and power. Express mention is also made in Ps. xcix. 6 of Jehovah having thus answered the prayers of Moses (Exod. xix. 19), and of Samuel.

Vers. 10, 11.—**As Samuel was offering,** &c. We have here a detailed and lively description of the whole event. The lamb is still burning upon the altar, and Samuel still kneeling before it, when the Philistine hosts appear upon the lofty plateau just below the hill of Mizpah, and marshal themselves for battle. It seemed as if Israel's case were hopeless, and many a heart, no doubt, was bravely struggling against its fears, and scarcely could keep them down. But as the enemy drew near the electric cloud formed in the heavens, and **Jehovah thundered with a great voice** (so the Hebrew) **on that day upon the Philistines.** Alarmed at so unusual a phenomenon, the Philistines hesitate in their advance, and Samuel, seeing their consternation, gives the signal for the charge, and Israel, inspirited by the voice of Jehovah, rushes down the hill upon the foe. Full of enthusiasm, they forget the poorness of their weapons, and the weight of their impetuous rush breaks through the opposing line. And now a panic seizes the Philistines; they attempt no further resistance, but flee in dismay from the pursuing Israelites. Their course would lead them down a huge valley 1000 feet deep, at the bottom of which was a torrent rushing over a rocky bed; nor was their flight stayed **until they came under Beth-car.** Of this place we know nothing, but probably it was a fastness where the Philistines could protect themselves from further attack.

Ver. 12.—**Then Samuel took a stone, and . . . called the name of it Eben-ezer.** We saw on ch. iv. 1 that the place where Israel then suffered defeat, but which now received a more happy name, was an open plain, over which the people now chased their then victorious enemies. Here, then, Samuel set up a memorial, according to Jewish custom, and called its name *Help-stone*. In giving his reason for it, **hitherto hath Jehovah helped us,** there is a plain indication of the need of further assistance. There was a long struggle before them, and Jehovah, who had

aided them so mightily at its beginning, would also help them unto the end. The memorial stood halfway **between Mizpeh and Shen**, both which names have the article in Hebrew, because one signifies *the watch-tower*, the other *the tooth*. It was a steep, pointed rock, but is not mentioned elsewhere. *Dent*, the French for tooth, is a common name for mountains in the Alps and Pyrenees.

Ver. 13.—**So the Philistines were subdued.** Not completely, for we find that they had garrisons in Israel when Saul was made king; but it was a thorough victory for the time, and was followed up, moreover, by an invasion of Philistia, in which Samuel recovered the towns which had been wrested from Israel upon the western borders of Judah and Benjamin. Moreover, the enemy **came no more into the coast of Israel.** That is, all invasions ceased. **And the hand of Jehovah was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.** This, of course, includes the reign of Saul, till within four years of his death; for Samuel continued to be prophet, and to a certain extent shophet, even when Saul was king. The words, moreover, imply a struggle, during which there was a gradual growth in strength on Israel's part, and a gradual enfeeblement on the part of the Philistines, until David completely vanquished them, though they appear again as powerful enemies in the days of King Jehoram (2 Chron. xxi. 16). It is certain, however, that fifteen or twenty years after this battle the Philistines were again in the ascendant (ch. xiii. 19—23), and it was this which made the Israelites demand a king (ch. ix. 16). But it is the method of the Divine historians to include the ultimate results, however distant, in their account of an event (see on ch. xvi. 21; xvii. 55—58); and Israel's freedom and the final subjugation of the Philistines were both contained in Samuel's victory at Mizpah.

Ver. 14.—**From Ekron even unto Gath.** Not that Israel captured these two towns, but they mark the limits upon the borders, within which the Philistines had previously seized towns and villages belonging to Israel, and which Samuel now recovered. **There was peace between Israel and the Amorites.** In Israel's weakness the remains of this once powerful Canaanitish stock had probably made many a marauding expedition into the land, and carried off cattle and other plunder; now they sue for peace, and unite with Israel against the Philistines.

SAMUEL'S CONDUCT AS JUDGE (vers. 15—17). Vers. 15, 16.—**And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.** As long as Samuel lived there was no clear limitation of his powers as shophet compared with those of Saul as king. In putting Agag to death (ch. xv. 33) he even claimed a higher authority, and though he voluntarily left as rule all civil and military matters to the king, yet he never actually resigned the supreme control, and on fitting occasions even exercised it. It was, however, practically within narrow limits that he personally exercised his functions as judge in settling the causes of the people; for **Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh** were all situated in the tribe of Benjamin. Both Bethel and Mizpah were holy spots, and so also, probably, was Gilgal; and therefore we may conclude that it was the famous sanctuary of that name (see ch. xi. 14), and not the Gilgal mentioned, in 2 Kings ii. 1; iv. 38. For this latter, situated to the south-west of Shiloh, near the road to Jerusalem, had no religious importance, and would not, therefore, attract so many people to it as one that was frequented for sacrifice. Probably, too, it was upon the occasion of religious solemnities that Samuel visited these places, and heard the people's suits.

Ver. 17.—**His return was to Ramah.** We have seen that Elkanah was a large landholder there, and Samuel had now apparently succeeded to his father's place. **And there he built an altar unto Jehovah.** This old patriarchal custom (Gen. xii. 7) long continued, and it was only gradually that local shrines and worship on high places were superseded by attendance upon the temple services at Jerusalem. At this time there was especial need for such altars. The established worship at Shiloh had been swept away, the town destroyed, the priests put to the sword, and the ark, though restored, was resting in a private dwelling. Probably Samuel had saved the sacred vessels, and much even of the tabernacle, but no mention of them is here made. We see, however, both in the erection of this altar and all through Samuel's life, that the Aaronic priesthood was in abeyance, and that he was not only prophet and judge, but also priest. In thus restoring the priesthood in his own person he was justified not merely by his powers as prophet, but by necessity. Gradually, with more prosperous times, matters returned to their regular channel; but even when Ahiah, the grandson of Eli, was with Saul (ch. xiv. 3), he was employed not for the offering of sacrifice, but for divining with the Urim and Thummim. On a most important occasion the offering of sacrifice is spoken of as undoubtedly Samuel's right, and when he delayed his coming no mention is made of a priest, but Saul is said to have offered the victim himself (ch. xiii. 9). It is plain, therefore, that we must not tie down the priesthood too tightly to the house of Aaron; for throughout there lies in the background the idea of a higher priesthood, and with this Samuel was invested, as being a type of him who is a Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek (comp. ch. ii. 35).

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*Fitness for service.* The facts are—1. At the request of the terrified men of Beth-shemesh the men of Kirjath-jearim bring the ark to their high place. 2. Arrangements are made in the house of Abinadab for the due care of the ark. 3. The time of the sojourn of the ark in this place, up to the date of Samuel's test of repentance, was twenty years. 4. Towards the close of this period the people long for the full restoration of the Divine favour. A new stage was being entered on in the process of restoration to full privileges, and God must have men fitted to the occasion. The ark could not go to Shiloh for evident reasons; so far as the Divine will could be gathered from the controlled action of the kine, Beth-shemesh was the place for it in which to rest. But the profane conduct of the officials proved that the privilege must be forfeited, and the unmitigated terror of the survivors indicated that they possessed not the spiritual qualifications for the respectful, loving guardianship of Israel's glory. For some reason the men of Kirjath-jearim had a reputation which justified the belief that they dared and could safely convey and keep what their neighbours dare not touch. Their actions justified this belief.

I. NEW FORMS OF SERVICE ARE CONSTANTLY ARISING IN THE UNFOLDING OF GOD'S PURPOSES. There was once a need of workmen to build the ark, of men to bear it, of kine to bring it back, and now of men to carry and keep it in all decency and order. Emergencies are inherent in the outworking of the Church's mission. Ages bring their demands. Education, national affairs, assaults on truth, openings for the gospel in foreign lands, and many other things, call for new lines of action or modifications of old. And thus it will be till the world is brought to Christ.

II. THERE ARE ALWAYS IN RESERVE THE MEN FITTED FOR THE WORK GOD HAS TO BE DONE. If Beth-shemesh cannot supply the men who know how to behave properly towards the sacred symbol, there are others elsewhere. The qualities are being acquired parallel with the providential processes that evolve the new demand. God takes care of all sides of his holy cause. Those disqualified must yield the privilege of new and important service to the qualified, and God knows where these are. In every age he has his chosen, secret methods of laying hold of ability, learning, strength of purpose, and whatsoever else may be required to do his will.

III. THE FUNDAMENTAL FITNESS FOR GOD'S SERVICE ON NEW OCCASIONS IS TRUE REVERENCE AND INTEREST. Many minor qualities were requisite to the bringing and caring for the ark, but the primary was that of proper reverence for the ark of God and due interest in its sanctity and use. The men of Beth-shemesh lacked this; for they lost true reverence in terror and dread, and they were distrustful of their ability to keep the ark with due honour to it and benefit to themselves. Here we have in *incidental contrast a religion* characterised by *dread, and a religion of true reverence.* 1. The *religion of dread* is a sense of infinite holiness and power unrelieved by a recognition of other Divine attributes. The men of Beth-shemesh had been struck with the awful holiness of Jehovah, and of his mighty power expressing holiness in acts of swift judgment. Thus, generally, when religion consists mainly in this there is a shrinking from God's presence; attention to ordinances under the sheer force of conscience. In so far as Christian men—so called—know only such a religion they approximate towards paganism. The *religion of true reverence is a sense of infinite holiness and power toned by a trustful love.* The men of Kirjath-jearim were not perfect, but they had as correct views as their neighbours of the holiness and power of Jehovah; and yet it is obvious, from the quiet, interested manner in which they received and provided for the ark, that they in some degree loved and trusted their God. In true reverence the awe created by ineffable holiness and almighty power is mitigated by the remembrance that HE is merciful and gracious, and cares for his people, even in their self-brought sorrows. When this reverence is perfected in Christian life by a due appreciation of the august majesty and love seen in the sacrificial work of Christ, the heart rests in God with all the reverential love of a child. Duty and privilege then are coincident.

General lessons:—1. We should be on the look-out for any new work God may have for us to do. 2. Never despair of God finding agents for the various enterprises

opened up by his own providence. 3. Cultivate every possible quality, and hold it in readiness for any use which God may make clear. 4. Court the honour and bliss of welcoming to city or home the treasures dear to God, be they ordinances of worship or those commissioned to do his will; for such bring blessings with them—"angels unawares."

Divine reserve. The return of the ark was an outward sign of the returning favour of God, and was so understood by the men of Beth-shemesh. But the full service of the tabernacle, with the ark as its centre and glory, was not established. Nor were the Philistines deprived of their hold on Israel. The Divine power was held in reserve. The set time to favour Zion in plenitude had not arrived. The reasons for this are clear. The people were too degraded to enjoy the full benefit of the services and festivals. A degenerate priesthood, steeped in vice, cannot at once pass on to the holy duties of Jehovah's worship. A regenerative process requires time, and twenty years was not too long for the old generation of priests to die off and give way to men brought up under better influences. The *general truth here set forth is*, that it is in *the heart of God to do great things for his people, but that for good reasons he holds himself*, so to speak, *in reserve*—veiling his glory, bestowing his blessing sparsely. Indeed, there is even a wider application of the truth than in relation to the Church. Take a few illustrations.

I. CREATION. The material and spiritual universe is the outcome of the power and wisdom of God. But vast and intricate as it is, no one can suppose that it is coextensive with all that is in his nature. There are not two infinites. The power and wisdom of God are in excess of what are traceable in the works he has formed. There is a vast *reserve*, which for aught we know may some time come out in an order of things not now conceived or deemed possible. It is a crude philosophy which teaches that God has done all he intends to do in the way of positive creation. Every new spirit that comes into being is an evidence of the Divine reserve.

II. REVELATION. There is a varied revelation of God, but in each case it may be said that, supposing we have learnt all they teach, we "know only in part." For as there is more in God than in his works and word, there is a reserve of truth which may yet be drawn upon. In the gradual bestowment of revelation we see how God keeps back from one age what he gives to another. Christ had many things to say once which his disciples could not then bear to hear. There must be deep and far-reaching principles of the Divine government which underlie the at present revealed facts of the Trinity, atonement, human responsibility, and future punishment; and these are kept out of full view till, perhaps, we become free from the flesh.

III. NATIONAL PROSPERITY. All *true* national prosperity is of God. If it comes not to men, it is because he withholds the blessings desired. The absence of prosperity has a practical side; it means that God reserves good because conduct and motive are not what he approves. There was nigh at hand all the power and wisdom by which Israel should cease to depend on Philistines for axes and coulters, but it came not forth. Had Israel in earlier or later times been more true to God, he would have "fed them also with the finest of the wheat" (Ps. lxxxi. 13—16).

IV. CHURCH PRIVILEGES AND USEFULNESS. "Glorious things" are spoken of Zion. The Church inherits a wondrous destiny. She is to be the envy of the world. Her "feet" are to be "beautiful;" her garments "white;" her influence as the "light" and "salt." And all this not by virtue of what may be in the Church of herself, but because of the power and grace of God within her. If she is "in the dust," we ask the cause; the first answer is, because God stays his hand, keeps the residue of the Spirit, holds himself in reserve. The second answer is, that this Divine reserve is in consequence of the Church having backslidden from her God and disqualified herself from being a vehicle for the full flow of the blessing that is to enrich mankind. The Divine light is to shine from "*golden* candlesticks."

V. PERSONAL RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE. Personal religion is, in one sense, the passing into and dwelling within the soul of the power and love of God—by the Holy Spirit. It is the proper heritage of a believer to enjoy a sense of the Divine favour not known to the unbelieving. A vision of God sweet and blessed comes to the pure in heart. Christ manifests himself as he does not to the world. But the backsliding

soul does not share in the full bliss. "Why art thou cast down?" is often asked. The answer is, there is not the spiritual fitness for *perfect* fellowship. Some "idols" have been cherished. Divine reserve is a discipline to cause the heart to lament after God.

General lessons:—1. There is ample ground for believing that all things shall be subdued unto Christ. His *great* power is yet to be put forth. 2. Inquiry should be made as to the existence of anything in motive, conduct, or spirit which keeps the Church from enjoying the full exercise of the power of God. 3. We may profitably reflect on what might be ours in private life if by our devotedness to God we secured more of the "residue of the Spirit."

Vers. 3—12.—*Ebenezer.* The facts are—1. Samuel calls on the people to prove their desire to return to God by putting away idols and preparing their hearts for a blessing. 2. A response to the call is followed by a summons to Mizpah for prayer and humiliation. 3. A rumoured approach of the Philistines excites fear, and an urgent request for Samuel's intercession with God. 4. While Samuel is engaged in worship God discomfits the assailing Philistines by thunder. 5. The victory is commemorated by raising the stone Ebenezer. This paragraph is to be considered in relation to Israel's true goal in life—to fulfil the Messianic purposes of their existence as a chosen people. Associated with this ulterior object, and subservient to it, was the full favour and blessing of God. This, again, was to be indicated by the restoration in developed form of the holy services and festivals connected with the ark and the sanctuary. The turning-point in the degeneracy had come in a sense of desolation and misery consequent on the recent defeat and the capture of the ark. The return of the ark gently fanned the flickering flame of hope, but as yet the goal was far distant, and the conditions of attaining to it were very unsatisfactory. The narrative sketches, in the instance of Israel, an outline of *true effort towards the goal of life*, and the encouragements to persevere in the effort. The *Christian Church and the individual soul have each* an issue of life to attain to It is also true of them that they start from a relatively low and unsatisfactory position, and will succeed in their endeavour only as they observe conditions inseparable from their position.

I. The MEANS AND CONDITIONS OF REALISING LIFE'S PURPOSE. Confining attention to those involved in this portion of history, we find them to be—1. *A hearty renunciation of all that is alien to the mind of God.* Idols had to be put aside. Man is attached to idols. They may be feelings entertained, passions gratified, favourite motives cherished, customs cultivated, aims kept in view, objects unduly loved. The "covetousness" which clings to forbidden things is "idolatry." In so far as these things absorb our feeling and receive our attention after that God has indicated that they ought not, so far do we set them up as deserving regard and love in preference to himself. The Church and the individual must search and cast aside all that is alien to the mind of God. 2. *Confession of sin and humiliation of spirit.* No soul can attain to its goal, no Church can do its work and acquire purity and freedom, apart from sincere confession and deep humiliation for what is past. Israel's gathering at Mizpah to acknowledge their guilt and bow before God, as though they were "like water spilt on the ground" (ver. 6; cf. 2 Sam. xiv. 14), was a great step towards recovery of strength and joy. Seasons may arise when special services shall alone give due expression to the sense of shame and sorrow for the past; but daily sin needs to be confessed and the spirit to be chastened before the holy One whom we serve. Power for holy deeds grows out of true penitence. 3. *Adaptation of the mind to a better course in the future.* The "preparing" of "the heart" unto the Lord implies a self-control, a searching of the seat of feeling, a cleansing process by such spiritual helps as God may give, a fitting one's self internally for a higher mode of life than yet has been known. Internal, carefully-sought reformation is a guarantee of improved external acts. Most of us are not in a mood adapted to the grand future which God has in reserve. We are to seek it. Fellowship with God more pure, and close, and constant is not the result of accident, but is the issue of an earnest endeavour. 4. *Special prayer for power to live a better life.* The cry of Israel's heart was a prayer for more than human aid to help

them to perfect the renunciation of false gods and the contrition due for sin. And the aid of the prophet's powerful intercession was to give more effect to their own cry. Life, to be blessed in issue, must be one of prayer—an incessant cry for help to live. And, also, recourse must be had to the true Intercessor, who is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." The Church has not duly appreciated this means of accomplishing its purpose in the world. In so far as the individual Christian is a man of prayer, and looks daily to the Intercessor, will he press on till he attains to "the mark and prize of his high calling." 5. *A due recognition of the atonement of Christ.* Not without reason was the "sucking lamb" offered when Israel sought the Lord. The "way to God" was clearly recognised. And the life of man will be right and will press on to a safe and blessed issue only so far as the Lamb of God is recognised as the "way." The Church can fulfil her mission in the world only by faithfully exhibiting the cross of Christ to the guilty and desponding. 6. *Determined conflict with the natural enemies of God and man.* Israel had to fight Philistines. Only on condition of supplementary acts of confession and worship, by earnest conflict with the foe, could they secure peace in their borders, and finally answer their Messianic purpose of existence. In like manner the Church and the individual must "war a good warfare." The militant character should be maintained as long as there is an enemy to Christ in the heart as in the world.

II. The ENCOURAGEMENT TO PERSEVERE TO THE END. The raising of the stone "Ebenezer" was an act retrospective and prospective. The hopes inspired in the mind of Samuel when first he undertook the work of reformation were being justified by events, and he desired the people to share in his expectations. In so far as fidelity has been shown by the Christian Church or by the individual in complying with the requirements of life's true issue, so far is there in every instance a ground of confident expectation. For consider—1. *The primary basis of confidence.* In Israel's case the return of the ark within their borders was a pledge of mercy for the penitent. They were not lost without remedy. And in the more glorious manifestation of God in Christ we have the pledge that there is mercy for all, and that all energy spent conformably to the object of his presence among men will be crowned with success. 2. *The consciousness of being on the side of right.* There is in even the fallen a remnant of the original sense of right which furnishes a ground of appeal, and assures of responsibility. The guiltiest man in Israel knew that to forsake Jehovah was wrong. In turning unto the Lord and seeking his favour the people were sustained by the deep conviction of right in hope of attaining the desired good. The moral support of such a consciousness is great to every one The soul that seeks holiness and eternal life may look on with hope. A voice within declares that, being on the side of eternal right, we must, so far, win. The struggling Church of Christ feels the force of the same conviction which gives the foretaste of victory. 3. *The manifest improvement in one's condition proportionate to desire and effort.* In so far as Israel's desire and effort were sincere and carried through, to that degree did the personal, domestic, and national life rise above the baneful circumstances resulting from former sins. Every good feeling, every tear of penitence, every casting away of idols, left its mark on the surface of society, and indicated what might be expected if only the reformation be carried through. God gives according to our work. Likewise all Christian desire and effort succeed so far as they are genuine. The acquired results of fidelity to God confirm the truth that everything promised shall in due time be realised. Each step in the ascent heavenwards is to a clearer view of the summit of our ambition. 4. *The assured sympathy of the great Intercessor.* Perhaps nothing gave downcast Israel so much encouragement of final restoration to God, with its ulterior consequences, as the effort of Samuel, the chosen prophet, to assure them of his full sympathy. He was their friend, and in him they found solace and hope. As a prefigurement of the one true Intercessor, we see here what reason we have for boldness. The pains which Christ has taken to assure every earnest soul personally, and the Church collectively, of his deep sympathy are most extraordinary. By word, deed, tears, sorrow, death, yes, by resumed life and outpouring of the Spirit, he would have us know that we are not *alone*. The past may be black and full of sadness, but with him as Helper and Friend who may not hope on? 5. *The co-operation of Providence.* Providence

works for men in forms adapted to their mental and spiritual condition. Whether the thunder which discomfited the Philistines was a special exertion of Divine power out of the ordinary course of atmospheric changes, or a coincidence brought about by him who, in the primary settlement of nature, foresees his own relations to his people, and harmonises physical and moral lines, the result abides. God fights for those who fight for righteousness. Providence does not always favour the search after wealth, or pleasure, or ease, but it *does* always favour the Christian in his conflict with sin. A "besom of destruction" is being formed for use against the forces of evil. Never in the history of the world has a case arisen in which defeat has come on any soul that has sincerely trusted in God and conformed to his requirements. They that "trust in the Lord are as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved." The battle is not to the strong, but to those who are under the cover of the Almighty hand.

III. The GROUNDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT, WHEN FAIRLY BROUGHT BEFORE THE MIND, OPERATE IN TWO WAYS. 1. *Retrospectively.* The retrospective survey, which brings the mind in view of facts bearing on the future, also awakens gratitude for what has been already accomplished. It was with no formal thankfulness that Samuel inscribed "Ebenezer;" and the poor wayward people, whose sins had borne such bitter fruit, caught his spirit as they reflected on the mercy that was proved, by recent events, not to be clean gone for ever. Sinful hearts, when penitent, love to look back on even the slightest sign of God's love and care. The development of gratitude itself is the introduction of a new and helpful power in the sore conflict with sin and sorrow. If only men would consider, by careful retrospection, what God has done for them! Men too often dwell on their own deeds and failings, and so nourish despondency. "Be ye thankful" is apostolic exhortation. And, despite all defections, blunders, and disasters of the Church, how tenderly and wisely he has led, chastened, and worked with the people called after his holy name. Powerful reasons still exist for the contending hosts to raise their cheerful, grateful "Ebenezer." 2. *Prospectively.* "Hitherto" is relative. There is a future term in the thought; and its use, as the result of a survey of grounds of encouragement, means that *the heart is bracing itself for new exertions.* Samuel would work on, devising in cheerful spirit new means of further raising the people, while they would avail themselves of his assistance to regain lost joys and honours. A higher tone, a more vigorous effort, would mark the coming years.

Practical lessons:—1. It is very useful in private, domestic, and Church life occasionally to take a solemn review, with appropriate religious exercise, of progress made, and of what God has done for us. 2. We should study more carefully the formative power of a frequent consideration of the mercies of God. 3. When engaged in actual religious work and worship to which God has clearly called us, we may be certain that our general interests will not be allowed to suffer from the hand of enemies, seen or unseen. 4. If we honour God to the extent of our spiritual attainments, power will come for doing him still greater honour.

Vers. 13—17.—*First-fruits of repentance.* The facts are—1. Israel enjoy freedom from the oppression of the Philistines and regain lost cities. 2. Their restless ancestral enemy the Amorite is quiet. 3. Samuel quietly and happily attends to his civil functions. 4. Ramah, the home of Samuel, is blessed with an altar to Jehovah. The mention of these suggestive facts immediately after the reference to the call to repentance and its response exhibit the natural results of the efforts of prophet and people. A fruitful theme is given.

I. In RELATION TO ISRAEL THESE FRUITS WERE MOST IMPORTANT; just such as a nation might well prize. An active, powerful foe was held in restraint. Territory and cities were restored to the government and general influence of a true man of God. Their fathers' foe, who disputed the march of Joshua, and ever lay as a savage beast by their side, was controlled by an unseen hand. An orderly and beneficent civil administration, diligently maintained on religious principles, was enjoyed by the various districts, and the residence of the ruler of the people was conspicuously a centre of religious influence. Blessed fruits of national repentance! When will nations learn the clear lessons of this precious book of God?

II. IN RELATION TO THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF CHRISTIANS THESE FACTS ARE FULL OF SIGNIFICANCE. It is not wise to seek out spiritual meanings from every simple historic fact in the Old Testament. Plain history is not given as a religious enigma to be solved by some transcendental insight. Yet there are analogies between national and individual life, and principles of holiness and righteousness work in the same directions in both. As there is a Babylon both spiritual and historical, so there is the Philistine and Amorite of our great warfare. As treasures change hands in Israel's conflict, so there are valuable possessions in man which may be dominated by opposing powers. Thus, then, we may consider some of the *first-fruits of repentance in Christian life.* 1. The *great world-power is largely subdued and cast off.* The man who in his life has passed through what Israel did in answer to Samuel's call finds that the evil influences of the world around have less hold on him. They are repressed. Their force has been weakened, if not annihilated. 2. *Faculties once governed by unhallowed tendencies are restored to the rightful ruler.* There are, so to speak, cities—seats of power and resource—in every man's nature. While in a sinful course of life these are dominated largely by principles alien to God, and adverse to true self-interest: true repentance brings every faculty, thought, and desire into a willing subordination to him whose right it is to reign. The soul is a "holy land" in which Christ is King. 3. *Deep-seated, corrupt passions are quieted.* There are ancient, very corrupt passions of a fleshly character embedded in human nature. These Amorites of our experience are unusually powerful during a life of sinful indulgence. They grow fat and flourish. One of the first consequences of the new life is to tone them down. The causes of their extreme activity and restlessness are partially removed. A strong hand holds them down in comparative quietude. Their destiny, like that of Israel's cruel foe, is to be utterly destroyed; but even now, compared with former almost irresistible aggressions, there is peace with them. 4. A *considerable degree of prosperity and order is maintained.* The reformed soul has law administered within itself. Every interest, every claim of striving powers and tendencies, is considered and decided in harmony with the law of Christ. The intellect does not absorb the time and energy due to the culture of the emotions, and *vice versâ.* To some degree the inner man is in an orderly, prosperous condition. He is an improved being. 5. The *holy, elevating power of devotion is cherished at the centre of influence.* Samuel's home was the centre of influence in Israel, and it was made by express arrangement conspicuously devout. There is in our nature a seat of supreme influence. The faculties and tendencies of the soul act in subordination to the commanding affection of life. True repentance issues in the heart becoming the seat of a powerful influence dominating all else. There is an *altar there* on which the inextinguishable fire burns, filling with its heavenly glory the entire man. "Old things have passed away; all things are become new." Are these fruits found in all lives called Christian? They ought to be, and are, if "Christian" is more than a name.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—12.—*Steps of return to God.* The whole interest of this passage is moral. No stress is laid on the forms, or even the authorised appurtenances, of religion. The ark, of which we have heard so much, and which had been treated with a singular mixture of superstition and profanity, plays no part in the history. It is left for years in a quiet retreat. Israel had backslidden from the Lord. The steps of their return have a meaning and a moral lesson for all generations.

I. THE FEELING OF A GREAT MORAL AND SPIRITUAL WANT. "The house of Israel lamented after the Lord." For twenty years the ark had been withdrawn, and under the yoke of the Philistines the spirit of Israel seemed to be quelled and stupefied. Even Samuel appears to have held himself in reserve till a time should arrive more favourable for the moral suasion and admonition of a prophet. And heathen worship crept over the land. But at last conscience began to stir, the soul of the people was weary, and there rose a wistful, sorrowful cry after the God of their fathers. This surely is always the beginning of a backslider's restoration. He wearies, and is ashamed of his own ways; feels his folly and wickedness, and then sighs after a forfeited blessedness—laments after the Lord.

II. REPENTANCE PREACHED AND PRACTISED. When the time came for the people to hear him with an awakened conscience, Samuel addressed all the tribes with a voice of moral authority that recalls the admonitions of Moses and the last words of Joshua (ver. 3). And the people obeyed his word, showing their repentance in the most thorough and practical way by "putting away Baalim and Ashtaroth." So must every true prophet or preacher of righteousness summon men to repentance, and testify to them that God will not take their part while their hearts are disloyal to him. It is useless to lament after the Lord and still retain false gods. Our God is not mocked, nor can his favour be gained by mere words and empty sighs.

III. A NEW ORDER BEGUN. At Mizpah, after solemn public confession of sin against Jehovah, "Samuel judged the people of Israel." He seized the opportunity to institute a more authoritative and vigorous administration of public affairs. He knew well the need of establishing order and discipline under the sacred law. And the people consented. So when there is sincere repentance a new order begins. The authority of the law of the Lord over conscience and life is acknowledged, and there is evinced a new obedience.

IV. A FIGHT FOR HOLY LIBERTY. The Philistines had no objection to the Israelite worship of Baal and Astarte; but so soon as they heard of their return to the service of Jehovah and of the increased authority of Samuel, they mustered their forces to attack them. And the faith of the penitent tribes was not yet sufficiently established or assured to prevent their being "afraid of the Philistines." They stood their ground, however, and asked Samuel to pray for them to the Lord. So they got the victory. When a backslider returns to God, endeavouring to regain his self-respect, and to resume his place as a well-doer, he finds that evil rises up within him and fights hard for the mastery. As Pharaoh would not let the people go, and the Philistines would not let them restore religion or regain national independence without a struggle to keep them down, so does sin strive to retain under its yoke the sinner who is escaping through repentance. But let faith appeal to God along with the burnt offering of entire consecration to him. He gives the victory to the weak.

V. GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF HELP FROM GOD. Samuel knew the value to a nation of inspiriting recollections, and therefore set up a stone or pillar to commemorate the great victory. But he was careful to make it a witness not to Israel's prowess, but to Jehovah's timely help. It was Ebenezer, the stone of help. It said "Te Deum Laudamus." The spiritual life has its Ebenezers,—many of them. Nations are ready enough to raise proud pillars and triumphal arches to celebrate their feats in war. Europe has ever so many columns, streets, squares, and boulevards, and bridges named after battles. Let us remember the battles of principle, the fights with temptation through which we have passed. When we have failed, ours is the shame. When we have overcome, to God be the glory. We recommend not remembrance only, but some stone of remembrance. It is a true and wise impulse which has often led Christians to commemorate a great deliverance or consolation vouchsafed to themselves by building a church, an hospital, or an almshouse, or by founding a mission, or some institution of learning or benevolence. Such a stone of remembrance helps him who rears it to resist the tendency to let religious impressions and memories fade from the mind, and it proclaims to others that some men, at all events, have proved God as the Hearer of prayer and the Helper of the needy.—F.

Vers. 2—6. (MIZPAH.)—*A national revival.* The history of religion in the world is largely a history of a series of declensions and revivals; the former being due to the downward tendency of human nature, the latter to the gracious interposition of God. Of this fact the period of the judges affords an illustration. The revival which took place at its commencement (Judges ii. 1—5) is specially worthy of notice; another, and more important, occurring toward its close, is here described. It was—1. *Needed* on account of the condition of the people of Israel. The great defeat which they suffered twenty years before (ver. 1; ch. iv. 1; vi. 1) checked their prevailing sin, especially as manifested in sacerdotalism, formalism, superstition, and presumption; but it by no means cured it. Superstitious veneration for sacred objects passed rapidly, as commonly happens, into unbelieving irreverence (ch. vi. 19) and spiritual indifference; whilst participation in the false worship and corrupt practices of the heathen

continued, and even increased (ver. 4). The law of God was made void, and his presence withdrawn. 2. *Effected*, under God, by the influence of one man—Samuel. Nothing is expressly said concerning him during these twenty years; but he appears to have retired from Shiloh to Ramah, his native place, and it is not likely that he remained there altogether inactive for so long a time. The statement of ch. iii. 20, 21; iv. 1, must be considered as, to some extent, prospective. The oppression of the Philistines was not such as to interfere with him, nor was his activity of such a kind as to cause them much concern. His holy example and quiet labours doubtless contributed greatly to the keeping alive of true piety in the hearts of a faithful few; and when the time came for more public effort he stood ready—in the full maturity of his powers, above forty years of age—to utter the word of the Lord, and to take the leadership of the nation. "During the long oppression of a stormy time the nation at last gathered more and more unanimously around Samuel, like terrified chickens around the parent hen" (Ewald). 3. *Marked* by features of a peculiar nature. Every great religious revival that has been recorded in sacred history or has occurred in the Christian Church has had a character of its own, determined by the wants of the age. And this revival was characterised by the restoration of the moral law to commanding influence on the conscience of the people by means of the prophetic ministry. The office of hereditary priest became secondary to that of inspired prophet, and was even absorbed in it for a while; for Samuel, although not a priest, acted constantly as such in offering sacrifice; and the Levitical law lay in abeyance, or was modified in practice under his direction. "As Moses established the theocracy, Samuel restored its fundamental principles to the supreme place in the national life, and thus in a true and noble sense was its second founder." The revival he was the chief instrument in effecting involved a more complete separation from idolatry, laid the basis of higher internal unity, and was followed by prosperity and independence. In the description of it we observe—

I. A GENERAL CONCERN ABOUT THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD. "And all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord" (ver. 2). 1. Occasioned by the experience of the long and bitter *effects of transgression*. 2. Implying a sense of *misery in the absence of God*. The idols to which men give their affections cannot satisfy the heart (Hosea ii. 7, 8; v. 15, vi. 1). "It is well to feel worn and fatigued with the fruitless search after happiness, that we may welcome our Deliverer" (Pascal). 3. Consisting of an intense *longing after his favour and fellowship*. "The phrase, 'lamented after the Lord,' is taken from human affairs, when one follows after another and entreats him with lamentations until he assents. An example of this is the Syrophenician woman" Matt. xv. (S. Schmid). The sorrow thus felt was a "godly sorrow;" a sorrow which comes from God, is felt for God, and tends to God, and which works genuine repentance, effectual deliverance, and lasting satisfaction (2 Cor. vii. 10). 4. Felt by the *nation as a whole*. "All the house of Israel." And wherever such concern is felt it is a sure sign of God's returning favour. "They inclined after the Lord; they groaned, complained, bemoaned themselves in their following the Lord, as a child followeth his departing parent; they called, cried, and lifted up their voice after the Lord by earnest prayer and supplication. Why? (1) Because God is infinitely more worthy than all ordinances; his presence is valuable in itself. (2) God purposely withdraws, that men may lament after him; as when a mother steps out of a child's sight, and when she seems to be gone the child raises a cry after her. (3) Because sincere lamenting after the Lord may occasion his return" (O. Heywood, iii. 419).

II. AN EARNEST ATTENTION TO THE WORD OF THE LORD (ver. 3). The word was—1. *Revealed* in former days, and included in the law of Moses (Deut. vi. 14). There is not generally so much need of new truth as that the old should be vitalised. How much of dead truth lies in the mind of every man! 2. *Spoken* with new power; opportunely, faithfully, and with holy zeal, by the prophet who had been commissioned to utter it. The preaching of the word is necessary and important in every genuine revival of religion. That word is a fire, a hammer, and a two-edged sword (Heb. iv. 12). 3. *Adapted* to the condition of the people. (1) To *test* the sincerity of their desires and purposes. "If," &c. (2) To *instruct* them in their duty. "Put away the strange gods," &c. Prepare your hearts = "*Fix* your hearts towards, or in trust in, God" (Heb. xiii. 9). (3) To *encourage* them to hope for deliverance. "And he will

deliver you out of the hand of the Philstiines." 4. *Listened* to in a right spirit; with fresh interest, reverence, self-application, and a determination to put it into practice. When the heart is prepared the truth is invested with new meaning and power; as words written on paper with invisible ink are clearly perceived when held to the fire. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. x. 17).

III. A SINCERE RENUNCIATION OF SIN AGAINST THE LORD (ver. 4), which was—1. A *proof* of their genuine repentance; "a heart broken *for* sin, and *from* sin." 2. *Shown* with respect to the transgressions to which they were specially addicted—the worship of Baalim (images or modifications of Baal, the principal male divinity of the Phœnician and Canaanitish nations—the sun-god) and Ashtaroth (images of their supreme female divinity, "the queen of heaven," the Syrian Venus—*Astarte*), and the corrupt practices connected therewith (Judges ii. 11, 13). 3. *Combined* with positive acts of obedience and piety. They not only ceased to worship false gods, but also "served the Lord alone" (Matt. vi. 24). Sin is most effectually broken off "by righteousness" (Dan. iv. 27); an old affection most effectually expelled by a new one. The heart cannot rest without some object of love and trust. And if, "when the unclean spirit is gone out of a man," it be not immediately replaced by a pure spirit, it is sure to return "with seven other spirits more wicked than himself" (Matt. xii. 43). 4. Made by men *individually* and in private; whereby they become prepared to make a national profession, and to receive the Divine blessing. God can bless men only by "turning every one of them from *his* iniquities" (Acts iii. 26).

IV. A PUBLIC CONSECRATION TO THE SERVICE OF THE LORD (vers. 5, 6). At the word of Samuel a national assembly was gathered together at Mizpah for the purpose of openly expressing and confirming the general feeling; and there under the open sky they "yielded themselves to the Lord" (2 Chron. xxx. 8) with—1. Solemn *vows* of obedience to the law of their God. "They drew water and poured it out before the Lord." "We take this act to have been a sign and symbol, or rather confirmation of an oath—a solemn vow. To pour out water on the ground is in the East an ancient way of taking a solemn oath—the words and promises that had gone forth from their mouth being as water spilt upon the ground that cannot be gathered up again" (Kitto). 2. Sincere *humiliation* on account of former disobedience. The symbol just mentioned is interpreted by some as denoting the pouring out of their hearts in penitence. They also "fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the Lord." 3. *Prayers* and supplications for Divine mercy and help. "I will pray for you." "Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us," implying that Samuel had already prayed for them. He gave expression to their desires, and made intercession on their behalf. "So Moses prayed for the people at Rephidim and for Miriam, so Elijah prayed at Carmel, so Ezra prayed at the evening sacrifice, so the high priest prayed for the house of Israel on the day of atonement, and so does our Lord Jesus Christ ever live at God's right hand to make intercession for us" ('Sp. Com.'). 4. Devout *acknowledgment* of the prophet of the Lord as their leader and judge. "And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpah." On that day he commenced his public labours as judge, and a great moral and spiritual reformation was inaugurated. It was a day long remembered (2 Chron. xxxv. 18: "There was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet"), and such a day as every godly man desires to see in this land (Ps. lxxxv. 6; Hos. xiv. 1—3; Hab. iii. 2).—D.

Ver. 6. (MIZPAH.)—*Confession of sin.* "We have sinned against the Lord." When any one has done wrong to another he ought to make acknowledgment and reparation to him (Matt. v. 23, 24). We are directed to "confess our faults one to another" (James v. 16); and there are cases in which we may derive benefit from confessing our sins against the Lord to a godly man. The passage just referred to, however, affords no ground for "auricular confession" to a priest; nor does the commission given to the apostles (John xx. 23), since (in addition to other reasons) it simply conferred authority to declare the ordinances of the kingdom of heaven, and especially the terms or conditions according to which sins are remitted or retained; and the practice of such confession is most injurious. But we ought all to confess our sins to God. Every wrong done to men is a sin against God, and there are multitudes of sins against him that do not directly affect our fellow-men. "In many things we

all offend." And the word of God often enjoins the confession of all our offences before him, and declares it to be the necessary condition of obtaining forgiveness. Consider—

I. WHAT IT IMPLIES. 1. That we see the *essential evil* of sin. "Sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John iii. 4). More generally, it is whatever is contrary to the character and will of God. As he is the only perfect Being, and deserves and claims the supreme love of men, so the root of sin consists in the absence of such love, and the departure of the heart from its true rest; and whenever man departs from God he falls into selfishness, vanity, and misery. Sin is aversion to God and devotion to self (see Tulloch, 'Christian Doctrine of Sin'). "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned," &c. (Ps. li. 4). 2. That we are convinced of the *just desert* of sin. "Howbeit, thou art just in all that is brought upon us," &c. (Neh. ix. 33). 3. That we are resolved upon an *entire renunciation* of sin. This determination springs from a real hatred towards it, and is associated with "hunger and thirst after righteousness." Confession is of the nature of a solemn oath of abjuration. "Whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall find mercy" (Prov. xxviii. 13).

II. HOW IT SHOULD BE MADE. 1. Under a *due impression* of the greatness of our sin. (1) In order to this we must contemplate the holy love of God, his just requirements, his merciful blessings and boundless claims; above all, we must stand before the cross and behold that great sight (Luke xxiii. 48). "There is no better way to obtain the gift of tears for having offended God than meditation on the greatness of God's goodness and of his love which he has shown to man." (2) We must, in the light that shines upon us, consider the particular transgressions we have committed in thought, word, and deed against God, our neighbour, and ourselves,—sins of omission and commission,—and the sinful disposition revealed by them and pervading our whole life (Luke xviii. 13). General confessions of sin without personal and particular application are of little worth. "Usually, the more particular we are in the confession of sin, the more comfort we have in the sense of pardon" (M. Henry). (3) In this manner we shall, by Divine grace, be filled with self-abasement, godly sorrow, and true repentance. "That which makes manifest is light;" and in proportion to the brightness with which the light of truth shines upon us will it manifest our sin (1 John i. 8); just as a sunbeam darting across a room shows us the floating dust that was not seen before (Job xlii. 5, 6). 2. In *sincere*, *frank*, and *unreserved* acknowledgment of our sin; without any attempt to cover, excuse, or palliate it. "Pardon my iniquity, *for it is great*" (Ps. xxv. 11; xxxii. 3—5). 3. With a *turning of the heart to God* in faith and prayer and acts of obedience. "For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee" (Ps. lxxxvi. 5).

"Repentance is heart's sorrow
And a clear life ensuing" (Shakespeare).

III. BY WHOM. 1. Each individual (Luke xv. 21). "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke xviii. 13). 2. Each family. "Every family apart" (Zech. xii. 14). 3. The whole people. Those who have united in sinning must unite in confessing their sin (ch. xii. 19; Ezra ix. 6—15; Dan. ix. 4—19). "We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God."

IV. WHY IT IS NECESSARY. 1. That we may give glory to God. By it we act in accordance with his will, justify him in his dealings with us, and give to him the honour which is his due. "Give glory to God, and make confession unto him" (Josh. vii. 19). 2. That we may be prepared to receive pardon, peace, and salvation. Until we open our hearts to God he will not open his heart to us. We must cease to have fellowship with idols in order that we may have fellowship with the holy One, and become the habitation of his Spirit (2 Cor. vi. 16). 3. That we may have confidence in the fulfilment of his promises. This is conditioned by our fulfilment of his requirements, without which our confidence is vain. "If we confess our sins," &c. (1 John i. 9). "And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John ii. 1).—D.

Vers. 7—14. (EBENEZER.)—*The victory of Ebenezer.* Whenever a people is set right in its relation to God and purified from its sin, it is certain to obtain victory over its

enemies and enjoy prosperity and peace. Israel was now restored from its apostasy, and on the very spot where it experienced an overwhelming defeat twenty years before it gained a signal triumph. We have here—

I. THE GATHERING OF THE ENEMY (ver. 7). 1. So long as the yoke of the ungodly is patiently borne they remain quiet, and do not deem it needful to harass the victims of their oppression. 2. The revival of piety and activity seldom fails to call forth the fierce opposition of evil men. The spirit of good and the spirit of evil are contrary the one to the other, and the more intense the former becomes, the more intense also becomes the latter. The "prince of this world" dislikes to be deprived of his captives, and therefore seeks to prevent sinners from coming to the Lord (Luke ix. 42), and hinders saints from working for him (1 Thess ii. 18). 3. The purpose for which the pious assemble is not always understood by their enemies; their meeting for prayer is sometimes mistaken for an organising of a political or military attack upon them; and their union for any purpose whatever is instinctively felt to bode them no good, and regarded as a sufficient ground for their dispersion. "Now we see here—(1) How evil sometimes seems to come out of good. (2) How good is sometimes brought out of that evil. Israel could never be threatened more seasonably than at this time, when they were repenting and praying; nor could the Philistines have acted more impoliticly for themselves than to make war upon Israel at this time, when they were making their peace with God" (Matthew Henry).

II. THE PREPARATION FOR THE CONFLICT (vers. 7, 8, 9). 1. *Mistrust of self.* "They were afraid of the Philistines." Their experience of defeat and oppression had taught them their own weakness and cured their presumption. The consciousness of human weakness is the condition of receiving Divine strength (2 Cor. xii. 10; Heb. xi. 34). 2. *Trust in God.* "Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us," &c. (ver. 8). Their need impelled them to look to God, whom they called *their* God, with reference to his covenant, and from whom they expected deliverance according to the promise previously given to them (ver. 3). "They have found their God again, after whom they had till now sighed and mourned" (Erdmann). Their urgent request of Samuel was an evidence of their reliance on Jehovah and the proper way of seeking his aid, for Samuel was not only a spokesman for God to men, but also a spokesman for men to God, and he proceeded to exercise the priestly function of mediation by offering sacrifice and making intercession. 3. *Self-dedication*, of which the whole burnt offering was the expression and appointed means, "the sign of complete consecration of the whole man, and here of the whole people;" the sucking lamb being a symbol of their new life now freely devoted to God. Samuel acted as priest at Mizpah and elsewhere by Divine commission under peculiar circumstances; the regular priesthood being in abeyance, the ark separated from the tabernacle, Shiloh desolate, and no other place chosen by God "to put his name there;" and as preparatory to the time "when in every place incense shall be offered to my name, and a pure offering" (Mal. i. 11). "A most important part of the prophetic office was to maintain the spiritual character of the Hebrew worship, and to prevent the degeneracy of the people into such ritualism as they had fallen into at the time our Lord appeared" (Kitto). "Let, then, thy oblation be without earthly affection or self-will of any kind. Look neither to earthly nor heavenly blessings, but only to the will and order of God, to which thou shouldst submit and sacrifice thyself wholly as a perpetual burnt offering, and, forgetting all created things, say, 'Behold, my Lord and Creator, each and all of my desires I give into the hand of thy will and thine eternal providence. Do with me as seemeth good to thee in life and death, and after death; as in time, so in eternity" (Scupoli). 4. *Prayer.* "And Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel" with a piercing and prolonged cry. And with his prayer their own rose up to heaven. "By prayer (if thou use it well) thou wilt put a sword into the hand of God, that he may fight and conquer for thee." A praying army is irresistible. What victories have been achieved by prayer! "The forty years' domination of the Philistines over Israel (Judges xiii. 1) could not be overthrown by the supernatural strength of Samson, but was terminated by the prayers of Samuel" (Wordsworth). Samson only *began* to deliver Israel (Judges xiii. 5); Samuel completed the work.

III. THE RECEPTION OF HELP (vers. 9, 10). 1. It came in *answer to prayer*. "And the Lord answered him." 2. It came at the moment of their greatest *extremity*. "And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel." But man's extremity is God's opportunity (Gen. xxii. 11—14). 3. It came in an *extraordinary* manner. "The Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day." It was, as it were, his voice in answer to prayer. The ordinary forces of nature operated in such a manner as to make it plainly appear that they were directed by his hand (1 Sam. ii. 10). 4. It was most *effectual*. "They were discomfited and smitten before Israel" (Job xl. 9; Ps. lxxvii. 18).

IV. THE PURSUIT OF THE FOE (ver. 11). 1. The sense of the presence of God inspires his people with fresh confidence and courage, and without it they can do nothing. 2. The help of God does not render their *co-operation* unnecessary. It rather calls for the putting forth of their strength. He gives them strength that it may be employed against the enemy, and in the faithful and zealous use of it he gives them more strength, and crowns their efforts with success. 3. Victory over the enemy should be *followed up* to the utmost (Judges viii. 4). "They smote them until they came to Beth-car." How often from not following up a victory are its advantages lost!

V. THE MEMORIAL OF THE VICTORY (ver. 12). 1. The help which is derived from God should be gratefully *ascribed* to him. 2. Thanksgiving to God should be expressed in a *definite* and *permanent* form. 3. One deliverance is an *earnest* of another. 4. The memorial of past deliverance should incite to future confidence, and the continued use of the means in connection with which it was achieved. "Hitherto; for all Jehovah's help is only hitherto—from day to day, and from place to place; not unconditionally, not wholly, not once for all, irrespective of our bearing" (Edersheim). More conflicts have to be waged, and it is only in mistrust of self, trust in God, self-dedication, and prayer that they can be waged successfully. "The life of man is nothing else but a continual warfare with temptation. And this is a battle from which, as it ends only with life, there is no escape; and he who fights not in it is of necessity either taken captive or slain. Because of this warfare thou must watch always, and keep a guard upon thy heart, so that it be ever peaceful and quiet" (Scupoli).

VI. THE MAGNITUDE OF THE RESULT (vers. 13, 14). A true revival is always followed by beneficial and lasting effects. 1. The power of the enemy is broken. "The Philistines were subdued, and came no more into the coasts of Israel." 2. A sure defence is afforded against every attempt they may make to regain their dominion. "The hand of the Lord was against them all the days of Samuel." 3. Lost territory is restored (ver. 14). Along the whole line, extending north and south, from Ekron to Gath. 4. Far-reaching peace is established. "And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites." "When a man's ways please the Lord he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov. xvi. 7). The battle of Ebenezer may be considered one of the decisive battles of the world, inasmuch as it introduced a new order of things in Israel, and contributed in an eminent degree to its subsequent prosperity and power. "The revival of religion has ever had a most important bearing on social and moral improvement. The return of man to God restores him to his brother. Restoration to the earnest and hearty performance of religious duties towards God leads to a corresponding reformation in relative and political duties. Those countries in Europe which have had the greatest religious reforms have advanced most in liberty, civilisation, and commerce. They are not trodden by the iron heel of despotism, and they possess the greatest amount of domestic quiet. It was the revival of religion which secured the Protestant succession to England, and many of the liberties which we now enjoy. It was the revival of religion that gave such a martyr-roll to the Scottish Covenanters, and led to the revolution settlement of 1688. In Israel every revival of religion was succeeded by national prosperity and political independence" (R. Steel).—D.

Ver. 12. (Between MIZPAH and SHEN—the tooth or crag.)—*The stone of help* The setting up of memorial stones was one of the earliest methods adopted for the purpose of recording interesting and important events. These memorials consisted

of a single block or of a heap of stones; they generally received some significant name, or were marked with a brief inscription, and they sometimes became centres around which the people gathered, and were replaced by more imposing structures. The earliest instance mentioned in the Bible was at Bethel (Gen. xxviii. 8). Other instances, Gen. xxxi. 45; Exod. xvii. 15; Josh. iv. 9, 21, 22; xxiv. 26. This memorial was set up—

I. ON THE OPPORTUNE RECEPTION OF DIVINE HELP. Looking backward on the past, let us remember—1. How much that help has been *needed* by us—in sorrow, labour, conflict, danger, which our own strength was wholly inadequate to meet. 2. How often it has been afforded when we were at the point of *despair*. But why, it may be asked, should God have allowed us to arrive at such a point? (1) To teach us the very truth concerning ourselves, and deliver us from a vain confidence in ourselves. "This unfortunate self-reliance forms within us a little favourite sanctuary, which our jealous pride keeps closed against God, whom we receive as our last resource. But when we become really weak and despair of ourselves, the power of God expands itself through all our inner man, even to the most secret recesses, filling us with all the fulness of God" (A. Monod). (2) To produce in us humility and submission, to excite us to fervent prayer, and to strengthen and perfect our faith. (3) To afford occasion for a more impressive manifestation of his power and grace. 3. How completely it has been *adapted* to our need and accomplished our deliverance. Here we are this day, after the trouble and conflict, ourselves monuments of his mercy! "We went through fire and through water: but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place" (Deut. viii. 2; Ps. lxvi. 12; lxxvii. 10; Acts xxvi. 22).

II. IN GRATEFUL RECOGNITION OF DIVINE HELP. Looking upward to heaven, let us reflect—1. How *plainly* the Source of our deliverance now appears. "Hitherto hath the *Lord* helped us." "Not with thy sword, nor with thy bow" (Josh. xxiv. 12). His arm alone has brought salvation nigh. We see it now more clearly than we did before, and as we meditate upon it our hearts overflow with thankfulness. We have not always recognised the Source of our mercies, and therefore often omitted to be thankful; but who can fail to see these signal tokens of his power? "Not unto us," &c. (Ps. cxv. 1). 2. How much we *owe* to the God of our salvation. Everything. 3. How we can best *testify* the gratitude of our hearts. "What shall I render unto the Lord?" (Ps. cxvi. 12). Loud songs of praise. Renewed vows of consecration. Earnest written or spoken words for God. Large gifts of what he has given. Fresh acts of piety and beneficence. These shall be the memorial we now set up.

III. AS A PERMANENT RECORD OF DIVINE HELP. Looking forward to the future, let us consider—1. How helpful the record may be to ourselves in times of conflict and trial. For such times will come; we are liable to forget what has occurred; and it will remind us of him who changes not, and incite us to faith and prayer. 2. How useful it may be to others in similar circumstances. What he has done for us he can do for them, and seeing it they "may take heart again." 3. How conducive it may be to the glory of God. As often as we behold it we shall be stirred to fresh thanksgiving. When we are gone it will still endure. Others will gather around it, and ask the meaning of the "great stone which remaineth unto this day" (ch. vi. 18), and, on being told, will give glory to God. So his praise shall be perpetuated from generation to generation, until it merge into the anthem of heaven.

Conclusion.—1. Let us be thankful for the memorials of Divine help which others have left for our benefit. They are among the greatest treasures the earth contains, and meet our view wherever we turn. 2. Let us do something to add to these treasures, and further enrich the earth. 3. Above all, let us seek to be ourselves the everlasting monuments of the Divine power and grace.—D.

Vers. 15—17. (RAMAH, BETHEL, GILGAL, MIZPAH.)—*Samuel the judge.* The "judges" of Israel were deliverers from oppression, leaders in war, perpetual dictators in national affairs, and supreme arbiters in judicial matters. "All that was greatest in those times was certainly due to them, and some of their names shine eternally like bright stars in the long night of a troubled age" (Ewald, 'History'). Of these judges Samuel was the last and greatest. His superiority appears in — 1. The *character* he possessed. He was free from the vices into which some of the most

distinguished amongst them fell, and surpassed them in the virtues they exhibited. He had higher conceptions of God and his law, held more intimate communion with him, and was altogether of a nobler type of human excellence. His constant aim was to do the will of God; he was upright in heart and life, humble, patient, generous, and full of disinterested zeal and holy energy in seeking the true welfare of men. In these respects he approached as nearly, perhaps, as any of the servants of God under the old covenant the perfection of him who was "without sin." 2. The *method* he pursued. As he effected the deliverance of Israel not by the sword, but by "the word of God and prayer," so he continued to make use of the same means as the most effective in preserving their liberty and increasing their strength and happiness. His method was moral rather than physical. He taught them "to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God" (Micah vi. 8). His policy was one of peace, and he relied on God to restrain the aggression of surrounding nations, and afford protection against their attacks. Nor was his trust misplaced. 3. The *work* he accomplished. Idolatry, which was rebellion against the Divine King, was banished. The principles of the theocracy were confirmed. Order, justice, and peace were established; and closer unity prevailed among the tribes, based upon their common loyalty to their King. "This was the great achievement and crowning point of his service to Israel and the God of Israel; the scattered and disunited tribes became again a nation. The rival tribes Ephraim and Judah make common cause against the common enemy, and the more distant tribes do not seem to withhold their allegiance" (Milman). The labours of Samuel as judge are here summed up in a few sentences, suggestive of some things wherein he was an instructive example to rulers, statesmen, magistrates, and "all that are in authority." Notice—

I. HIS SUPREME CONCERN FOR RELIGION. Samuel was first a prophet, then a "faithful priest," finally a ruler and judge. "His judicial work not only proceeded from the prophetical, but was constantly guided by it. For we may presume not only that he gave legal decisions with prophetical wisdom, but also that, in general, he conducted the affairs of the people as a man who had the Spirit of the Lord" (Nägelsbach). At the different places to which "he went from year to year in circuit"—Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah—he probably taught the word of God and offered sacrifice, combining his prophetic and priestly with his judicial work. At Ramah he built an altar to the Lord, "testifying thereby the power from which alone he could receive either the authority or wisdom to judge." The position of Samuel was peculiar, and his work unusually comprehensive; but it may be observed of every good civil magistrate that—1. He is qualified for his office by his possession of reverence for God. "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God" (2 Sam. xxiii. 3). He feels his responsibility to the supreme King and Judge, by whose providence he has been placed in authority, and has constant regard to his will. 2. His personal piety pervades his public activity. The one is not separated from the other, but is its animating spirit, and thereby he seeks to afford in his judgments a reflection of the perfect judgments of God. 3. His highest desire, knowing that "righteousness exalteth a nation," is to see the people all righteous. That end, he is persuaded, cannot be attained by force; but, as a godly man, he ever seeks it by moral means; and, in his public capacity, he endeavours to do something towards it by restraining the violence of the wicked and protecting the good in their labours "unto the kingdom of God."

II. HIS FAITHFUL ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE. In the theocracy the laws were already given, and Samuel's judicial work consisted in arranging for their proper administration, in which he doubtless availed himself of the method formerly appointed (Deut. xvi. 18—20), reserving to himself the proper interpretation and application of them in more difficult and important cases. For this purpose he went to different centres of the land at stated times, and "judged Israel in all those places." He has been not inappropriately called the Hebrew Aristides. Like him, the faithful magistrate—1. Strives to bring justice within easy reach of every man. 2. Administers it wisely, impartially, fearlessly, without respect of persons (Exod. xviii. 21, 22; 2 Chron. xix. 5—7; Jer. xxii. 3). 3. Devotes himself disinterestedly and diligently to the common weal (ch. xii. 3). "The Hebrew judges were not only simple in their

manners, moderate in their desires, and free from avarice and ambition, but they were noble and magnanimous men, who felt that whatever they did for their country was above all reward, and could not be recompensed; who desired merely to be public benefactors, and chose rather to deserve well of their country than to be enriched by its wealth" (Jahn, 'Heb. Com.,' sect. 22).

III. HIS WISE PROVISION FOR EDUCATION. During the period of his judgeship Samuel appears to have established one or more "schools of the prophets," in which he taught young men sacred knowledge, and, in connection with it, reading, writing, and music, thus preparing them to give instruction to the people, which the Levites had failed to do (ch. x. 10; xix. 20). So a wise statesman, seeing that "for the soul to be without knowledge is not good," and that "the people are destroyed for lack of knowledge," adopts proper means for the education of the young, the diffusion of knowledge, and the advancement of the race (Ps. lxxviii. 5—8). "Education is the debt which one generation owes to another" (J. S. Mill). The schools of the prophets "were hearths of spiritual life to Israel. Their aim was not to encourage a contemplative life (like the cloisters), but to arouse the nation to activity. Every prophetic disciple was a missionary" (Hengstenberg).

IV. HIS CONSISTENT CONDUCT AT HOME. "And his return was to Ramah; for there was his house; and there he built an altar unto the Lord" (ver. 17). There, also, he continued his judicial labours. The faithful magistrate, whilst he does not allow his public duty to interfere with proper attention to his duty to his own household, seeks to make the latter helpful to the former. He exemplifies in his private life the conduct he openly commends to others, and "walks in his house with a perfect heart" (Ps. ci. 2). Though he be not a Nazarite, he is simple, self-denying, and unostentatious in his habits; and though he be not wealthy, he is kind to the poor, hospitable to friends (ch. ix. 24), and liberal towards the Lord (1 Chron. xxvi. 28: "all that Samuel the seer had dedicated"). He recognises the presence and claims of God in his home, sanctifies it by prayer (Job i. 5), endeavours to make it a centre whence holy influences emanate to all, and does all things to the glory of God (1 Cor. x. 31). "The indispensable basis afforded by the home and its eternal sanctity no superior religion and legislation should seek to destroy, or even to disturb; and, on a comprehensive survey, we cannot fail to recognise that there is no other ancient nation in which, during the days of external power, domestic life remained for a long period so vigorous; and, secondly, during the gradual decline of the external power, became so little weakened and corrupted as was the case with Israel" (Ewald, 'Antiquities').

V. HIS LONG CONTINUANCE IN OFFICE. "And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life" (ver. 15). "Simple words, but what a volume of tried faithfulness is unrolled by them!" He pursued his course till he was "old and gray-headed" (ch. xii. 2)—nearly twenty years from the victory of Ebenezer. The appointment of a king relieved him of a portion of the burden; but he still continued to exercise his prophetic office, and, "as last judge, he held in his hands the highest control of the theocracy and the kingdom." He devoted his last years to the training of youthful disciples for future service; and when at length he died, "all the Israelites were gathered together, and lamented him, and buried him in his house at Ramah" (ch. xxv. 1). His protracted labour was an evidence of his public spirit, indomitable energy, and efficient service, and the principal means of raising the nation to its subsequent power and glory.—D.

EXPOSITION.

SAUL (CHS. VIII.—XXXI.).

CHAPTER VIII.

THE great interest of the First Book of Samuel lies in the fact that we have in it the orderly consolidation of two of the main factors in the preparation for the manifestation of our Lord, namely, prophecy and the kingdom. The first seven chapters give us the history of Samuel's birth, and of the gradual development in him of those spiritual powers which finally made him not merely a prophet, but the founder of prophecy as a

permanent and regularly-organised institution of the Jewish Church. The whole of the rest of the book, while adding many interesting particulars about Samuel, is occupied with the establishment of the kingdom and with Saul. We have in him, both in his uprise and his fall, one of the most remarkable personages of the Old Testament. But his character for good and for evil will develop itself as we proceed. Before, however, we can appreciate his history, it is necessary for us to understand something of the vast issues that depended upon the change of government effected in his person. With Samuel, then, and Saul we have come to the time when the prophet and the king take their due place in the development of Israel. They were both essential to its progress, and the accomplishment of its Divine mission, and in Deut. xvii. 14—20, and again *ibid.* xxviii. 36, the establishment of the monarchy is spoken of as a virtual necessity. It was not Israel's highest ideal, far from it. Had religion been as far advanced as in the days of Hezekiah and Isaiah, the theocracy might have existed in such a form as would have insured the national safety. But such as the people were in the centuries which followed the conquest of Canaan, it was rather a high and glorious idea than a fact capable of being realised. It was one of those magnificent thoughts which raised the Israelites so high above the level of ordinary nations, and gave such grandeur and nobleness to the long struggle of their history; but it was a thought, the value of which lay in its giving them a future, towards which their faces were ever turned, and which, by the sublimity of its conception, ever drew them onwards and upwards to all that was best and most Divine.

To be then Jehovah's own subjects, ruled directly by him, a republic with Jehovah for its chief, and its officers speaking at his command, and under his direct influence and control—this was Israel's grand ideal. As a matter of fact, it did not give them peace at home nor security from foreign invasion. It did not even enable them to advance in the path of culture or morality, nor did it so work as to bind the twelve tribes together into a harmonious whole. Throughout the Book of Judges we find the record of a desperate struggle in which Israel again and again is in danger of being utterly destroyed from among the nations, and at the end of this period the Philistines are the dominant power, and Israel is disarmed and virtually at their mercy. The cause of this was that somehow or other the priests and Levites were unable to prevent the people from lapsing into idolatry, and though upon their repentance Jehovah, as their King, did on every emergency raise men to be their saviours, yet the system was too cumbrous and exceptional for ordinary times. It was only in times of trouble that the nation roused itself to the conviction that it was Jehovah's realm, and fought with the heroism which so grand a thought must give it; at other times it sank down each day to a lower level, till all that the last judge, Samson, could do was to arouse the national spirit to a prolonged resistance and a last effort against the dangers and difficulties that were threatening Israel with gradual extinction (see on ch. i. 3).

This powerlessness in war was the inevitable result of having no settled ordinary ruler, whose business it was to convoke the national forces, and provide for the general safety; but it was by no means the worst evil attendant in practice upon the theocracy. In the three last chapters of the Book of Judges we have the history of a fearful crime, punished with equally fearful cruelty. What makes it the more remarkable is that it took place in the days of Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, at a time when the public morality still stood high, and religion had great influence over the people. Now, had there been a king he would have punished the malefactors, as a matter of course; but when it had to be done by an extraordinary gathering of the people in arms, the Benjamites, always a high-spirited tribe, imagined themselves bound in honour to resist an invasion of their territory, and a violent civil war was the result. So embittered did the feelings of the Israelites become at the brave defence of the Benjamites, that when at last they had overpowered them, they burned their cities with fire, and put men, women, children, and cattle to an indiscriminate slaughter. Repenting soon afterwards of their revolting

cruelty, they treated the men of Jabesh-Gilead with almost equal violence, on the pretence of their not having taken part in the war, but really to provide the remaining Benjamites with wives. Now, both at the beginning and end of this narrative, it is carefully pointed out that all this crime and cruelty was the result of the state of anarchy which everywhere prevailed. "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges xxi. 25). There was no regular administration of justice, no person whose business it was to maintain law and order, no one whose authority kept malefactors in awe, and who, when a crime had been committed, would punish it in a regular manner, and with the general approval of all parties; and so every species of villainy could be practised with impunity, until the patience of the community was exhausted, and it visited the offenders with a violence so summary as to make it repent afterwards of its own cruelty.

The position of these three chapters, immediately preceding in the Hebrew the Books of Samuel (for the insertion of the Book of Ruth is a modern attempt at a chronological arrangement), seems intended to point out that the king was as absolutely necessary for the well-being of the Hebrew commonwealth as he was essential for the perfecting of the Messianic idea. It is in Christ's kingdom that the theocracy becomes a realised fact, and Christ is above all things a King. Now in Israel the King was emphatically the Anointed One, *i. e.* the Messiah or Christ (ch. ii. 10, 35; x. 1; xii. 3, &c.). True it is that in Christ all offices must be united, and he must be a Priest to make atonement and a Prophet to teach as well as a King to rule; yet we find in Israel, as the type of Christ's kingdom, that priest and prophet stood at the king's beck. In Solomon we have the delineation of Israel's king in his full power and glory; and we find him thrusting out Abiathar from being high priest (1 Kings ii. 27), appointing the order of service for the priests and Levites (2 Chron. viii. 14), and having the prophets in attendance upon him to record his noble deeds (*ibid.* ix. 29). To Solomon's reign the Israelites ever looked back as giving the ideal of what their "anointed one" should be, and onward they looked to the coming of One who should perfect this ideal, and instead of staining it with sin, as Solomon did, should raise it to the full and vast dimensions of Israelite thought. Most painful must it have been to the nation that each one of its first three kings, though rising every one far above the level of ordinary men, yet fell so very far short of their ideal. And then came the rent in the kingdom, and an ideal king was possible no longer.

But the prophets kept the thought ever alive in the hearts of the people, and in the fulness of time the Messiah came. Meanwhile the establishment of the earthly monarchy was an essential condition for the security, the continuance, and the development of Israel. Without a king Israel could never have performed its work of preparing for Christ. Even the organisation of prophecy was delayed till there was a king, because when a nation has to fight for its very existence there is no room for a literary and educated order of men. Learning would have died out in the middle ages had there not been cloisters into which men who loved mental culture might retire. Still it was not this which made the people cling so tenaciously to the hope held out to them by Moses, but the daily vexation of Philistine misrule. And what the Philistines were to them now all the neighbouring nations had previously been in turn. Throughout the Book of Judges we find a state of things described from which all thoughtful men must have desired deliverance, and the few exceptions, as when they flourished for a time under the strong hand of Gideon, only served to bring out the contrast more clearly between times when they had a ruler and times when they had none. We need not wonder, therefore, at the persistency with which the people urged their demand, even after the dark pictures which Samuel had drawn of what a king might become if he degenerated into a tyrant. But our admiration is due to the patriotism and generosity which made this noble-minded man grant their request, though he knew that he thereby limited his own powers, and gave his sons an inferior place. So also had Moses done before. While he gave Aaron high and perpetual office, he let his own family fall

back into the position of ordinary Israelites. And, moreover, the king whom Samuel chose was a grand hero, though, like so many men gifted with great powers of command, he fell through that self-will which is the besetting sin of ruling natures. Few men can endure the trial of the possession of absolute power, and least of all those endowed with an energetic and resolute temperament. It is a noble testimony that David bears to Saul and his heroic son in the "Song of the Bow" (2 Sam. i. 19—27): "mighty" they were, and "the beauty of Israel," though Saul marred his glory by great and ruinous faults. With Saul, then, the rest of the book is occupied, and it divides itself into two parts—(1) the founding and establishment of Saul's kingdom (chs. viii.—xv.); and (2) its gradual decay and final fall (chs. xvi.—xxxi.).

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SAUL'S KINGDOM (CHS. VIII.—XV.).

REJECTION OF SAMUEL'S SONS (vers. 1—5). Ver. 1.—**When Samuel was old.** As Samuel lived for very many years after this time, till towards the close of Saul's reign, he was probably not more than sixty when this happened. The dates are all very uncertain, but he was probably between twenty and thirty when Shiloh was captured, and no doubt, according to Israelite custom, had married as soon as he arrived at manhood. Then came the most important and active period of his life, during which the ark rested for twenty years in the house of Abinadab, and Samuel was traversing every part of the country, preaching repentance, and preparing the people for a revolt from the tyranny of the Philistines. Upon this followed the victory at Mizpah, and the establishment of Samuel as judge. Now some considerable time would elapse before Samuel so felt the weight of increasing years as to delegate a part of his authority to his sons, and more again before the national discontent at their covetousness became general. The Talmud, however, represents Samuel as being at this time only fifty-two years of age, while Abravanel says seventy, and the latter number is by no means impossible; for as a Nazarite Samuel would lead a life of perfect temperance, and his predecessor Eli lived to be ninety-eight, and died then by an accident. Still, probably, Abravanel's calculation is too high, and we must remember that besides the misconduct of Samuel's sons, there was the growing danger of the re-establishment of the domination of the Philistines to quicken the people's movements. They had garrisons again in Israel when Saul was chosen king, and it was this which made the nation long for a change, but their choice would probably have fallen upon one of Samuel's sons had either of them been worthy. A king they had long wished for; it is only when they saw that none of Samuel's race would give them internal peace and security that they took public action for the appointment of some one else.

Ver. 2.—**The name of his firstborn was Joel.** The names of Samuel's sons are pledges of his faith—Joel meaning *Jehovah is God*, and Abiah *Jah is Father*. The name given in 1 Chron. vi. 28, *Vashni*, is a mistake. It means, "and the second," the name of Joel the firstborn having somehow been omitted. The names of Saul's sons, and even of Jonathan's, unlike those in Samuel's family, bear witness to their religion having been of a curiously mixed character. **In Beer-sheba.** Not, therefore, in any of the places to which Samuel went in person, and which were all near Ramah, his home. Beer-sheba was in the extreme south of the tribe of Judah (see on Gen. xxi. 31), on the Philistine border, and his being able to place his sons there in authority proves, not merely that his rule was acknowledged throughout the whole country, but also that the Philistines did not interfere much with the internal arrangements of the Israelites. Josephus ('Antiq.,' vi. 3, 2) represents only one son as placed at Beer-sheba, and says that the other was judge at Dan, but it may be doubted whether the northern tribes were sufficiently under control to submit to be governed by a southern judge.

Ver. 3.—**His sons . . . took bribes.** This sin was expressly forbidden in Exod. xxiii. 6, 8; Deut. xvi. 19, and it marks the high spirit of the nation that it was so indignant at justice being thus perverted. They **walked not in his way** (singular—so the written text); for Samuel's own administration of justice had been most upright (ch. xii. 4), nor is it laid to his charge that he connived at the misconduct of his sons. On the contrary, after remonstrance indeed, not for his sons' sake, but for the honour of the theocracy, and that the people might be on their guard against a despotic exercise of the power with which they were about to intrust a single man, he superseded not them only, but also himself. His conduct in this trying conjuncture was most admirable, and few commentators have done justice to the man, who, possessed of what was virtually kingly power, yet gave it over for the nation's good into the hands of another.

Vers. 4, 5.—**The elders of Israel.** Here, as

elsewhere (1 Sam. xv. 30: 2 Sam. v. 3; 1 Kings viii. 3, &c.), we have traces of a popular assembly, representing the Israelite nation, and composed probably of the chiefs and heads of fathers-houses. Already in Egypt (Exod. iii. 16, &c.) we find some such body in existence, and it seems to have lasted throughout the whole history of the nation; for it outlived the monarchy, gained increased power after the exile, and continued down to New Testament times. The demand, therefore, for a king, though a sort of revolt against Samuel's authority, was at least made in a constitutional manner, and came before him with all the weight of a formal decision on the part of the representatives of the nation. They put it also in the form of a request, for which they give two reasons. First, the decay of his physical powers—**Behold, thou art old.** Wise and vigorous as his rule had been, yet with increasing years there was less of energy; and the events recorded as having occurred at the beginning of Saul's reign show, that in order to check the increasing power of the Philistines, a leader was needed who was at once daring, resolute, and skilful in war. But there was a further reason—**Thy sons walk not in thy ways.** These words show that the elders had the most perfect confidence in Samuel. They felt that he would not connive at the wickedness of his sons, but would do what was right by the nation. Thus they had everything to hope from the father's justice, while if they waited till his death the sons might resist what was virtually their deposition. That the sons of a judge possessed considerable power see Judges ix. 2. **Make us a king to judge us like all the nations.** *I. e.* just as all the heathen nations have a king. The words are those of Deut. xvii. 14, and were probably intended to remind Samuel that the nation was only asking what had virtually been promised.

Ver. 6.—**But the thing displeased Samuel,** and justly so. For, in the first place, they had determined to have a king without consulting the will of God. Granting that it would give them the security necessary for the nation's welfare and progress, yet so weighty a matter ought not to have been decided without an appeal to Jehovah. Samuel did make it a matter of prayer; the elders were actuated solely by political motives. And, secondly, they undervalued their own religious privileges. They wanted a king such as the heathen had, whereas something far better and higher was possible for them, namely, a king who would be the representative of Jehovah, as the shophet had hitherto been. The nation's real need was not a new power, but the permanent organisation of what up to this time had been a casual authority. And it was Samuel's high office to give the nation this, while he also changed the outward form of prophecy, and made it too into an orderly institution. **A king to judge us.** *I. e.* to govern us, as the shophet or judge had done, only in a more regularly-constituted manner. **And Samuel prayed unto Jehovah.** There had been no such submission to the will of God on the part of the elders; but deeply as Samuel must have been hurt by this determination of the nation to take the government out of the hands of himself and his sons, yet he leaves the decision to Jehovah. Moreover, we must note that it was as prophet that he thus acted as mediator between the people and God; and he gave them his services in this his highest capacity as faithfully when the question was one injurious to himself as he had ever done on more pleasing occasions.

Ver. 7.—In prayer then the answer came to him that the request of the people must be granted, however wrongly it had been urged. In itself it was wrong; **for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.** As we saw above, they wanted no theocratic king, whose first duty would be to maintain the Mosaic law (Deut. xvii. 18, 19), and protect the priest and prophet in the discharge of their legitimate functions; all they wanted was a soldier who would put an end to their state of anarchy, and enable them to cultivate their fields without the danger of seeing the produce swept off by marauders.

Vers. 8, 9.—**According to all the works,** &c. They showed in this the same want of respect and affection for their own institutions and religious privileges which had marked all their history since the day when Jehovah brought them up out of Egypt. And therefore Samuel was to **protest solemnly unto them, and show them.** The two verbs do not mean different things, but the same. "To protest" is to testify, to bear witness, and warn them of the danger they were incurring. And as they were asking not for the development and perfecting of their own institutions, but for a government modelled upon the institutions of the heathen round them, Samuel shows what are the dangers inherent in the establishment of a despot such as the kings of the heathen were. As a rule the kings of Judæa did not resemble the picture drawn by Samuel, but in spite of many blemishes remained true to their allegiance to Jehovah as the supreme Ruler of the nation, and confined themselves within the limits marked out for them by the Mosaic law. **Now therefore,** at the beginning of the verse, is in the Hebrew simply "And now." There is no inference implied in it.

Ver. 11.—**This will be the manner of the king.** On the meaning of this word see ch. ii. 13. Here also it signifies not so much the legal right itself, as the way in which that right was exercised. **His chariots.** The word is singular, both here and at the end of the verse, and though it may be taken, as in the A. V., for a collective noun, "his chariotry," yet the singular is better, because this verse does not refer to war, but to the personal magnificence and grandeur of the king. Instead of the old simplicity in which the judges had lived, he would have a state chariot (see 2 Kings ix. 21), and go forth escorted by horsemen and runners on foot. **To be his horsemen.** Rather, "upon his horses." The whole clause should be translated, "And he will set them for him (*i. e.* for his service) upon his chariot and on his horses; and they will run before his chariot."

Ver. 12.—**Captains over thousands, and captains over fifties.** The largest and smallest divisions respectively of an Israelite army. However objectionable the king's personal state might be, this would fall in with the people's wishes, for it would give them the promise of a well-organised army. Not so the next clause, **to ear**—*i. e.* to plough—**his ground.** Forced labour was one of the most unjust, oppressive, and wasteful exactions of absolute governments, and was the chief cause of the revolt of the ten tribes from Rehoboam (comp. 1 Kings v. 13—16; xii. 4). And yet it was the universal rule in ancient times, and in some countries it has continued even to the present day to be the law that the peasants must at certain seasons give their labour unpaid either to the proprietors or to the state. Naturally, for a nation of agriculturists to have to leave their own fields just when their presence at home was most needed to plough the king's ground and reap his harvest would be a bitter annoyance, because to the loss would be added a sense of wrong. How determinately a high-spirited nation like the Jews did resist this injustice we gather not merely from the indignation felt against Solomon's levies, but also from the reproach cast in Jehoiakim's teeth by Jeremiah, that "he used his neighbour's service without wages, and gave him not for his work" (Jer. xxii. 13). **To make his instruments of war.** Such work must be done; but in well-organised states it is paid for by means of taxes, *i. e.* by a money compensation in place of personal service. In semi-barbarous states forced labour is used, and the national arsenals furnished at the greatest possible expense and vexation to those compelled to labour, and loss to the national resources.

Ver. 13.—**Confectionaries.** Rather, "perfumers" makers of ointments and scents, of which Orientals are excessively fond. It is remarkable that Samuel does not mention the far worse use to which Solomon put their daughters (1 Kings xi. 3), and to a less extent David and some other kings.

Ver. 14.—**Your fields.** The history of the seizure of Naboth's vineyard shows that the kings were not able to exercise this arbitrary power. Jezebel had to use great art and falsehood before she could get possession of the coveted plot of ground. But throughout Samuel describes a despot ruling after the fashion of heathen kings such as the people had desired.

Ver. 15.—**The tenth.** *I. e.* the king will cost you as much as all the ordinances of religion. Still national security would be cheaply purchased at this, or even a greater cost, if the money were well spent; but Samuel says that the king would lavish it not on **his officers**, but on his *eunuchs*, those miserable creatures, so cruelly wronged, and generally so hateful, who ministered to the pleasures of Oriental kings.

Ver. 16.—**He will . . . put them to his work.** Again the hateful forced service, but here not, as in ver. 12, of themselves, but of their households. Instead of **your goodliest young men** the Septuagint reads, "your best *oxen*," which requires only the change of one letter, and is in agreement with the rest of the verse. Samuel would scarcely place their choicest young men between the female slaves and the asses. But while the ass was used chiefly for riding, the ox was, as he still continues to be upon the Continent, man's most faithful and valued friend and fellow-labourer.

Ver. 17.—**His servants.** Literally, "his slaves." Under an absolute monarchy no one is free.

Ver. 18.—**Ye shall cry.** In despair at this cruel oppression ye shall appeal to Jehovah, but in vain. The king was given them at their own request, persisted in even after warning, and they must abide by their choice. It is worth noting that in the northern kingdom a majority of the kings more or less fulfilled Samuel's evil forebodings, and there they were much more completely the product of the temper condemned by the prophet than they were in Judah. The ten tribes roughly snapped the tie which bound them to Jehovah; they discarded the ark and all the services of the sanctuary, and were content with so poor an imitation of them that all piously-disposed men were compelled to abandon their lands and migrate into Judæa (2 Chron. xi. 16); and so the majority of their kings, not being held in check by religious influences, were tyrants. At Jerusalem, on the contrary, most of them were content to remain within the limits of the Mosaic law, and were upon

the whole a series of men far superior, not merely to the judges and the monarchs in old time, but to any European dynasty.

Vers. 19, 20.—**The people refused to obey**—literally, to hearken to—**the voice of Samuel.** The words of Samuel were no doubt formally considered by the elders, and we may be sure that there would not be wanting men to urge attention and obedience to his warning; but when the decision had to be made, whether by vote or acclamation, the majority persisted in their choice, and for a reason which completely justified Samuel's displeasure; for they say—**That we also may be like all the nations.** Their wish was not to develop and perfect their own institutions, but to revolt from them, and escape from the rigour of the Mosaic law. It is remarkable that their nearest neighbours and most inveterate enemies, the Philistines, had no king, but an oligarchy of five princes. Probably it had been argued, in the assembly of the elders, that if the whole power of Israel were gathered into one hand it would be more than a match for the Philistines, whose energy must often have been diminished by discords among its rulers. **That our king may judge**—*i. e.* govern (ch. vii. 17)—**us, and fight our battles.** Here the people had reason on their side. Both the internal administration of justice and the defence of the country would be better managed under a permanent and regular authority than under the judges, whose rule was extemporised to meet difficulties, and had no inherent stability.

Ver. 21.—**All the words.** The elders had of course reported to Samuel all the arguments used in the assembly, and just as previously he had carried his own distress at the national discontent with his government to Jehovah's footstool in prayer (ver. 6), so now, in his mediatorial office as prophet, he carries thither the nation's petition.

Ver. 22.—**Hearken unto their voice.** The Divine consent is now given for the third time to their request (see vers. 7, 9). For the will of God ever leaves the will of man free, even when overruling it to the carrying out of some higher and fore-ordained purpose. Everything was ripe in Israel for the change, but it was due to the moderation and disinterestedness of Samuel that the revolution was made without bloodshed or armed struggle. Ordinary rulers too often resist a popular demand, and stem back the flowing current of thought till it breaks through the opposing barrier, and sweeps with resistless violence all opposition away. Samuel yielded, and the nation trusted him so thoroughly that they left the choice of the king entirely to him, permitted him to settle the terms and limits of the monarchy, or, as we should say, to give the nation a constitution (ch. x. 25), and treated him throughout the rest of his life with the deepest respect. He was deprived neither of his prophetic rank nor of his judicial functions, for "Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life" (ch. vii. 15), *i. e.* he remained to the last a co-ordinate power by the side of a king so self-willed and energetic even as Saul. **Go ye every man unto his city.** Prudence forbade a hasty choice. It would be well to let the agitation subside, or otherwise some busy intriguer among the elders might have managed to get himself selected by the popular voice. We gather from ch. x. 27 that there were leading men who felt aggrieved when the choice fell on none of them. But how wonderful is the confidence reposed in Samuel by the nation, when thus it left to the ruler whom virtually it was setting aside the choice of the person to whom he should cede his powers.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—9.—*Discontent with God's methods.* The facts are—1. In Samuel's old age his sons, being judges over Israel, abuse their office by accepting bribes. 2. This fact is adduced by the people as a reason for asking Samuel to make them a king. 3. Samuel in his grief seeks counsel of God. 4. Samuel is instructed to yield to their request, while protesting against it. 5. The conduct of the people is declared to be an expression of the perverse tendency characteristic of their history. The order of government under which Israel was living had received the special sanction of God, and had, also, grown naturally out of their circumstances. Though often sinful and foolish, it had never before entered into their minds to seek, apart from God, a change in the political settlement inherited from the times of Moses. The deputation which waited on Samuel, asking for a king, was not the expression of a sagacious patriotism, or of profound concern for the spiritual interests of the commonwealth, and ultimately of the world; but of a restless desire for what God would give in his own time, mingled with a dissatisfaction with the system which God then was sanctioning (ch. v. 20, 21). Practically, to Samuel, it meant, *We* can suggest and we demand now a course more agreeable to our views of life and our aspirations than that *you* represent

Samuel's pain was acute and natural, and the concession made to the discontented, though apparently a breach in the Divine order, was in keeping with God's usual treatment of men.

I. DISCONTENT WITH GOD'S METHODS AND TIMES IS VARIOUSLY SHOWN. Men can detect and condemn faults in others which they either do not see or condone in themselves. It is possible for us, in the light of history, to dilate on the sin and folly of Israel while the same temper may be manifested by us in other forms. Discontent with God's methods and times may appear in various relations. 1. *The general government of the world.* It is not often *said* that God has made a mistake in constituting the moral and material universe in such a way that so much sin and suffering should be possible; but the *feeling* is often entertained that it would have been well if some other course had been instituted. There is more of this feeling lurking in some hearts than is supposed. Men dare not face certain of their mental operations. How far the feeling affects theology, philosophical theories, personal rest in God, and fitness for doing the best Christian work, demands serious consideration. 2. *The manner and form in which revelation has been conveyed to man.* Many attacks on the Bible proceed from a discontent with what is conceived to be inadequate to the wants of the world; and in some this feeling has generated the supposed discovery of reasons for discarding the book as a revelation from God at all. The very primitive biographical notices; outlines of tribal history interblended with singular personal experiences; genealogies of uninteresting names; crude ideas and antique customs of strange people—all this in connection with a favoured people, and relieved by streaks of light suited to men of later times, does not seem to be a mode of revelation most likely to survive the advancing intelligence of the world. It is also not the most satisfactory thing for so precious a boon as a revelation to be given in detached portions, to be conveyed originally to men of one country, and to be characterised by a series of supernatural events. Men feel that God has imposed a hard task on them to have to defend and justify what seems open to assault from so many sides. They wish it had been his will to have given his light so unmixed with an ancient human history that the most keen antagonist would be compelled to recognise its presence. To some it really seems as though the form and origin of the contents of the Bible were a misfortune. Of course *this discontent*, silent or expressed, *springs from an imperfect consideration of the real nature and purport of the revelation given*, as well as of the inevitable conditions of *any* revelation that has to be coextensive with the wants of both the first and last ages of the world; and that, moreover, has to be concentrated and verified in a Divine person duly attested by a contemporary evidence harmonious with a chain of antecedent proof. It would be useful to the Church if some one, dissatisfied with the way in which God is affirmed to have made known his will to succeeding ages, would prescribe the right way. 3. *The method of saving men by atonement.* That God does save souls by means of an atonement bearing, in some way, an objective relation to his government, as well as a moral relation to men's lives, is so clearly the *natural* teaching of the Bible that it can only be eliminated by the adoption of a *forced, non*-natural interpretation of fact and statement. The discontent which some feel with the atonement is the reason for what is manifestly a *forced* interpretation of language. Entertaining the crude notion that the atonement is a transaction affecting *three distinct beings*, forgetful of the pregnant fact that it was *God in Christ* who, by sacrifice, effects redemption, and not considering well that all the pain and suffering, supposed to be imposed for the benefit of another, *abide on any theory for the benefit of some one*, they prefer a system in which pardon is based on the merits of a moral change brought on by a display of love in the shame and agonies of the cross! 4. *The means of perfecting holiness in character.* The long and tedious process by which often the soul advances from one degree of purity to another awakens dissatisfaction and fretfulness. Why should so blessed an issue as sanctification be insured by sometimes loss of property, friends, and health? Is it not possible to secure elevation of character apart from tribulation? 5. *The means used for the conversion of the world.* There is not a more common form of discontent than this. The Apostle Peter had to contend with it when he reminded his readers of the thousand years being with God as one day. That a religion demonstrably Divine,

destined to be supreme, so entirely conducive to the temporal as also spiritual interests of all men, should be slow in progress and skill is a puzzle to many. Indolence, wild interpretations of prophecy, and latent scepticism are often but indications of a wish that God had not so ordained the constitution of things.

II. The PLEA FOR DISCONTENT IS PLAUSIBLE. The plea of the Israelites was that Samuel's sons were untrustworthy—the sources of justice were corrupt. The argument urged seemed to indicate a love of purity, concern for the moral welfare of the state, a fine sense of national honour, a real advance from the degradation which had acquiesced in the vices of Eli's sons, and an appreciation of Samuel's own character. But men often pay homage to conscience by creating delusive arguments wherewith to set aside the behests of conscience. This reference to the sons of Samuel was only a pretext; for the evil could have been remedied by demanding their removal. It is clear that the plea was only a cover for a deep aversion, a predetermined plan to get rid of the present system, whether the prophet of God approved or not. Nor is *the discontent of men* with other of the methods of God *without apparent reason.* As in Samuel's time, so now, men who cherish or express uneasiness with respect to God's ways in the government of the world and revelation seize hold of some incident, some human aspect, some partial truth that really does not touch the main issue, and make it the cover for an aversion of deeper moral origin. An everlasting universal government has only had time to exhibit its first principles, and yet some transitory phenomenal inequalities are seized on as grounds of dissatisfaction with what must be of immeasurable range and ceaseless development. From scattered incidents of which the circumstances are not fully known, and from forms of representation suited to men not blessed with full gospel light, the discontented draw a plea for a revelation to the individual man apart from Scripture. To a plain, unbiassed mind an objective revelation and an objective atonement are as truly *facts* as was God's government by judges, and as is his present government of the world in spite of apparent inequalities; but earnest desire to see the world blessed with "true ideas" and "beneficent influences" are pleas for explaining away what is very clear. The plea sounds well; but if men will look deeper it may be found to cover a settled aversion to submit to a ruling not chosen by self. No revealed truth is in moral antagonism with our *true* nature.

III. The EFFECT OF THIS DISCONTENT ON THE LOYAL IS TO AWAKEN THEIR DEEP SYMPATHY WITH GOD. Samuel was deeply wounded, not by the allusion to his sons, but by the people's evident aversion to God's ways and time. That any one should dare to suggest a variation from what God had approved was to him incomprehensible. He felt that God's method and time must be wisest, best, safest, because they were his. As a true man of God, he naturally seeks counsel from on high. In Samuel's displeasure there was an element of surprise, but his dominant feeling was sympathy with all that was of God. *Sympathy with God is one of the natural fruits of piety.* It was seen in Caleb and Joshua when the people were averse to the Divine procedure. Jeremiah knew it when wishing that his head were waters and his eyes a fountain of tears. In "Not my will, but thine be done" it received its highest expression. In *proportion as it is strong* does the resistance of men to the ways of God *cause wonder, shame, and anguish.* To such a soul all the works of God are excellent; they shine with supernal glory. Providences dark and painful are even welcomed as parts of the Father's blessed discipline. What men call imperfections are felt to be only dim intimations of some glorious, loving purpose. "Whatever is is right," comes from the heart when the intellect is baffled. This blessed sympathy with God! This belief which no argument can shake! This glorious optimism resting on the fact that the all-wise and loving One cannot but do right! It is not any so-called Christian that attains to it. Yet it is the truest philosophy; for it is rest in God, content with his will. "Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints."

IV. The DIVINE TREATMENT OF DISCONTENT IS CHARACTERISED BY WONDERFUL PATIENCE. No sudden vengeance came on the rejecters of God. Consolation is poured into the heart of the sorrowing prophet; a reference of their conduct to their ineradicable perversity is made, and they are to have their way under protest (vers. 7—9). This patience is in keeping with the record of God's treatment of Israel in the seventy-eighth Psalm. "He remembered that they were but flesh; a

wind that passeth away, and cometh not again" (Ps. lxxviii. 39). The *same is seen still*. As Christ once "endured the contradiction of sinners," so does God constantly suffer men to raise their voice against his appointments. He is "slow to anger." Calmly he allows men even to deny his existence, to criticise his government, to reject the light of his revelation, to invent ways of their own for securing future blessedness, and to murmur at his means of subduing the curse of sin. In their folly men interpret this patience of God as evidence of the correctness of their position, forgetting that "the day of the Lord" is coming, when men shall reap the fruit of their ways. To the *successors of the prophet* there is still *consolation* in the assurance that their prayer *is* heard, and their honour covered by the honour of their God. Hence the calmness, "the patience of the saints." They often can do little more than "protest" against the unbelief and waywardness of the world. A whole nation on one side and a Samuel on the other does not convert error into truth and folly into wisdom. But none of these things shake the confidence of the few who, in critical seasons, are in deep sympathy with God; for they know, by a varied experience, his vast patience, and are assured that some day feeble men will learn the lesson, perhaps bitterly, that his ways are best.

General lessons:—1. The inconsistencies of men in office furnish occasion for developing the latent evils of their fellows (vers. 3, 4). 2. The deceitfulness of the heart is seen in the eagerness with which men endeavour to justify what dare not be plainly avowed (ver. 5). 3. Human history shows how utterly incompetent man is to form a correct estimate of the ways of God (vers. 5, 8). 4. It is possible for our theologies to be framed more after what we prefer than after what is actually the fact. 5. When the Church of God is distressed because of the aversion to what is revealed, patience and prayer should be combined. 6. The most sore trial to those in deep sympathy with what Christ has approved is to witness, on the part of his professed people, a desire to escape his appointments for something more congenial to unsanctified ambition. 7. Every heresy and departure from God's ways is plausible to many, and may seem to be unchecked, but God never vacates his seat of authority.

Vers. 10—22.—*Permitted, not approved.* The facts are—1. Samuel points out to the people that their desired king will aggrandise himself at their expense, and that, once entering on their course, there will be no deliverance. 2. The people, nevertheless, decide to have a king, and assign the motive of their preference. 3. Samuel, on laying the matter before God, receives a command to make them a king. The question at issue was not whether this or that form of government was intrinsically best, nor whether at some time in the near future God might or might not cause judgeship gradually to develop into kingship; but whether, at this juncture, it was God's will to introduce a monarchy. The references in Deut. xvii. 14—20 were probably a forecast of the events now brought to pass. At all events, God's time for monarchy in Israel was not yet come; the people's had come. The historian sets forth the bearings and result of the controversy. The instance is *unique*, but the principle involved is of frequent exemplification in human affairs.

I. THERE ARE SPHERES OF ACTION IN WHICH GOD ALLOWS MEN TO TAKE THEIR CHOICE OF THE METHODS BY WHICH HIS PURPOSES ARE TO BE WROUGHT OUT. Israel was a nation working out a spiritual issue. The day must come when in the "*seed of Abraham*" all nations shall be blessed. Thus far, politically, this issue was being reached by a peculiar arrangement with as much success as the perverse spirit of the people would allow to any system. When "Samuel told all the words of the Lord unto the people that asked of him a king" (ver. 10), it was understood that, though they were not at liberty to set aside recognition of Jehovah, the institutions of worship, and the moral law, they were free, if they so willed, to adopt political methods of their own. They would not cease to be Messianic in purpose, but they would work toward the goal by a new method unusually characterised by human frailty. There is a *marked distinction in the accomplishment of Divine purposes* through *irrational* and *rational agents*. The one is a channel of necessity; the other the free organ of controllable actions. Every stone falls because it must; every will acts because it wills. The marvel and mystery is that the eternal Will should in the end get its own through, or in spite of, the free action of other wills.

Yet so it is. Likewise there are *differences* in the *ruling of rational creatures*. In one sense every free being can, and is left to, take what course he pleases. He may sin or not sin; he may love God or not; and this, too, while the obligation is most binding. But, nevertheless, God enforces some things and in others allows option. It is *essential* that God be loved; that Christ be the Medium through which saving mercy comes to all, infant and adult; that repentance and faith be exercised by all who hear the gospel call; and that certain duties to man be discharged. These are conditions of safety, purity, and bliss. But it is *not essential to the same degree and in the same sense* that men should pursue their calling in one way only. There is an option left as to how men shall obtain and use their knowledge; what methods shall be followed in pursuit of life's calling; what means taken to promote spiritual culture and material advantage; what social and national arrangements may best subserve the common good. Having laid down the *broad lines* of faith in Christ and righteousness of principle in all things, God seems to *have left a margin* for the exercise of our discretion. It is as though the Eternal would thus mark his estimate of the great prerogative of freedom. He educates the individual and the race by the accumulation of varied experiences, the outgrowth of freedom.

II. Any CHOICE OF MEN, AS TO METHODS of pursuing their course, is ATTENDED WITH INCONVENIENCE IN SO FAR AS IT DEVIATES FROM THAT WHICH GOD CLEARLY APPROVES. Samuel declares to the people that the choice of a monarchy would impose on them inconvenient burdens, and rob them of much of the happiness they enjoyed under the form of government already approved of God (vers. 11—18). Personal pomp and splendour would mean taxation and regal aggrandisement. The sense, therefore, of this warning is that Israel might yet be God's chosen people, subject to Mosaic law, guided in great affairs by prophets, and working to a Messianic goal; but the form of government chosen by man would be more costly and hindering than that at present approved by God. *The teaching is true generally.* There are clear lines of conduct laid down by Providence indicative of the way in which God would have us fulfil our purpose in the world. The man of business will not realise the end in view in so far as his methods are precisely contrary to the teachings of Providence. Statesmen may take a course of their own, heedless of what God prefers; their troubles will be proportionate. It is God's method of developing the full manhood of Christian life that, while walking humbly with him in private, we do not "forsake the assembling of ourselves together." Men who chose a different course may do so, but must bear the consequences of a dwarfed Christianity.

III. NOTWITHSTANDING A CLEAR STATEMENT OF THE PERILS OF DEVIATING FROM GOD'S METHODS, MEN, UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF A MASTERFUL PASSION, WILL SOMETIMES TAKE THEIR OWN COURSE. In vain did Samuel warn the people of the disapproval of God, and the costs of their desired monarchy; they refused to obey his voice, and said, "Nay; but *we will have a king* to reign over us" (ver. 19). It was not whether God approved or not; it was not a question of promoting righteousness; it was not a desire to see the Messianic purposes more speedily realised; but *a longing to be like other nations*, and consequently a desire to be less in direct connection with God as Ruler. The *strength of this passion* is obvious; for it disregards personal loss, the prophet's aversion, and the declared disapproval of God. 1. The *overpowering influence of a passion* may be felt by the *individual Christian*. It is possible for Christian men, when piety is at low ebb, to hanker after the mode of life pursued by the Christless. The prayer of Christ that his people may "not be of the world" is sometimes either forgotten or freely interpreted. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate" may be admitted as a general duty, while its execution is sadly deficient. It is only when the soul has, in unguarded hours, come under the spell of the *world-passion* that the clear lessons of Scripture and of experience are set aside for the paltry gratification of being like other men. 2. The *same passion may lay hold of the Church*. History shows that the Church has not been free from the spell which once laid hold of Israel. The simplicity of Christ has sometimes perished in the attempt to reproduce in the Church the formalities and pomp of the Philistines. "How far the Church can safely conform to the world" is a dangerous question, and should be substituted by "How may the Church best fashion the world to its own pure and lofty standard?"

IV. MEN DEGRADE THEMSELVES in so far as the METHODS THEY ADOPT DO NOT HARMONISE WITH THE SUPREME OBJECT FOR WHICH THEY LIVE. The ordinary reader feels that Israel was self-degraded in preferring to live like heathen nations when another course was open. The ends of Israel's existence were highly moral; the mere love of pomp and splendour had no congruity with this end. What had grand military and regal parade to do with the righteousness which alone exalts a nation, and which was *the* peculiar qualification for advancing Messianic issues? It would not save them from the disasters consequent on loss of righteousness—rather it would aggravate them (ver. 18); nor would it make the practice of righteousness more easy. There is an *intellectual and moral debasement in choice of means for an end not congruous with it*, and in face of warning. The individual Christian and the Church profess to live for spiritual purposes. They degenerate when, from sheer self-will and hankering after the outwardly sensational, they seek to promote private or public ends pertaining to their Christian calling by anything not spiritual in character and tendency.

V. The CHOICE OF METHODS NOT APPROVED BY GOD IS NO BAR TO THE FINAL REALISATION OF THE DIVINE PURPOSE. As when men from discontent with God's provision sought flesh, he sent them quails in abundance, so now he allows their freedom and gives a king. The quails and manna were only means of subsistence. "The life was more than meat." So the government by judges or kings was only method of training the people for their ultimate purpose in life. Men might sicken and die with excess of flesh, but the nation would live on. Trouble and sorrow might arise from a change of form of government, and the people might morally sink in the choice, yet God would overrule all and effect his purpose. The *Church may suffer much from her perverseness*, and comparatively tedious advance will be made in the world; yet Christ will at last subdue all to himself, albeit his foolish people have to learn many a bitter lesson. Likewise *personally* the image of Christ will some day be more perfect in the soul, though late in life, and after many a sorrow induced by our own self-will in deviating from his methods of perfecting character.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—3. (BEERSHEBA.)—*Ignoble sons of an honoured father.* Nearly all that is known of Samuel's household is here stated. He had at least two sons, Joel (Jehovah is God) and Abiah (my father is Jah), whose names were indicative of the devout spirit in which they were given (1 Chron. vi. 28: "And the sons of Samuel, the firstborn, and the second Abiah;" ver. 33: "Heman a singer, the son of Joel;" ch. xv. 17; xxv. 5: "Heman, the king's seer"). During the period of his judgeship they grew to maturity, and toward its close he made them "judges over Israel," and sent them to administer justice in Beersheba, in the southern limit of the land. His influence as judge as well as prophet extended "from Dan even to Beersheba" (ch. iii. 20), and with advancing age he needed assistance in his labours. "It may be doubted whether Samuel acted wisely in making this appointment, especially if, as seems to have been understood, the nomination in his lifetime of his sons to fulfil the functions he had hitherto discharged alone was an intimation that he meant them to be regarded as his successors in such government as he exercised. Nothing of this kind had been done before. And thus, almost unconsciously, perhaps, he was led to give a kind of sanction to the hereditary principle of government which was soon to be turned against himself" (Kitto). He acted according to his judgment of what was best, and doubtless with disinterestedness. There is no reason to suppose that he failed to train his sons in the right way, or that he was aware of their conduct at Beersheba "and restrained them not." He is not, therefore, to be blamed. No man is infallible. The plans of the wisest men are often marred by the misconduct of others. And this appointment was, in its result, disastrous.

I. THEIR ADVANTAGES WERE GREAT. They were sons of one of the most faithful and eminent servants of God, had the benefit of his instruction and example in private and public, studied perhaps in a school of the prophets, were well acquainted with the law, held in honour for their father's sake, placed in responsible positions. All

these things, we might have expected, would have made them circumspect, just, and devout; and they should have done so. How, then, can we account for their defection? 1. Goodness is not hereditary. "The sinner begets a sinner, but a saint doth not beget a saint" (M. Henry). Hereditary relationship exerts a powerful influence on the mind and disposition, but nothing but Divine grace can change the heart.

> "Rarely into the branches of the tree
> Doth human worth mount up: and so ordains
> He who bestows it, that as his free gift
> It may be called" (Dante, 'Purg.' vii.).

2. Education is not omnipotent. When children of a good man turn out badly, it may generally be traced to some defect of training, through attention to other duties, absence from home, inconsistency at home, unwise methods, excessive strictness, unjust partiality, undue indulgence, maternal carelessness, intimate association with evil companions (in some cases unknown and unpreventable). We do not know enough of Samuel's household to say that it was wholly free from such influences. But the most perfect education is limited in its power over character. 3. Power is a perilous trust. It presents temptations which are sometimes too strong for men who under other circumstances might not have fallen. It is a severe test, and a sure revealer, of character (Luke xii. 45). Power shows the man. 4. Each man is responsible for his own conduct. He is endowed with the power of choosing or refusing good and evil, and no external circumstances can fully account for the choice he makes. "Every man shall bear his own burden" (Gal. vi. 5). "As the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son," &c. (Ezek. xviii. 4).

II. THEIR CONDUCT WAS BASE. "His sons walked not in his ways" of truth, integrity, self-denial, and true godliness; but "turned aside" from them to—1. Covetousness, or the undue love of earthly possessions. "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim. vi. 17—19). "Covetousness is idolatry" (Luke xii. 15; Col. iii. 5). "It is the idolatry of the heart, where, as in a temple, a miserable wretch excludes God, sets up gold instead of him, and places that confidence in it which belongs to the great Supreme alone." It was one of the necessary qualifications of judges that they should be "men of truth, hating covetousness" (Exod. xviii. 21). Nothing is more corrupting than "the narrowing lust of gold." 2. Bribery (Exod. xxiii. 6, 8; Deut. xvi. 18, 19). 3. Perversion of justice (Prov. xvii. 15). 4. Their conduct in all these things was so persistent and flagrant that it was known to "all the elders of Israel." They openly abused their power for selfish ends, trampled on the law which **they** were appointed to "magnify and make honourable," and wrought against the purpose which Samuel spent his life in effecting.

III. THEIR INFLUENCE WAS PERNICIOUS. Not only did they bring misery upon themselves, and occasion bitter sorrow to their aged father; but they also—1. Inflicted grievous injury on those with reference to whom they "took bribes and perverted judgment." 2. Set a bad example to all men (Ps. xii. 8). 3. Brought their high office into contempt. 4. Contributed directly to a national revolution. How true it is that "one sinner destroyeth much good!"—D.

Vers. 4—22. (RAMAH.)—*Israel's desire for a king.*

> "The old order changeth, giving place to new
> And God fulfils himself in many ways,
> Lest one good custom should corrupt the world" (Tennyson).

Introductory.—The desire of Israel for a king, as expressed by their elders to Samuel, was a turning-point in their history. 1. This desire was *not new*. It existed long before (Judges viii. 22; ix. 9). But new circumstances had arisen,—the greater order and unity resulting from the labours of Samuel, the misconduct of his sons, the threatening attitude of surrounding nations,—causing it to become stronger and more general, and to issue in a definite and fixed determination. The elders simply gave expression to what the heart of the people was set upon. 2 The object of their desire was *not essentially wrong*. It had been foretold that kings should arise in

Israel (Gen. xvii. 6, 16; xxxv. 11; Num. xxiv. 17). Provision had been made in the law of Moses for the choice of a king, and directions given concerning the manner in which he should govern (Deut. xvii. 15—20); and, more recently, intimations had been afforded that the time for his election was at hand (ch. ii. 10, 35). His appointment was only in *apparent* contradiction to the fundamental principle of the theocracy, that "God was their King," for it was not intended to supersede the Divine authority; he was to be the viceroy or deputy of Jehovah, as the judges had been; and he might be better adapted than they to the present condition of the people. Nevertheless, the transition was in one aspect from a higher to a lower order of things, from a *direct* to a *mediate* theocracy; it tended to set the invisible Ruler in the background, and it was fraught with imminent peril. 3. The *sinfulness* of their desire consisted in the sort of king they sought and the spirit they manifested; whereby they, in effect, rejected the Lord as their King. "If they had simply desired a king to be given them according to the law of God (Deut. xvii. 15), that should govern them in equity, and such an one as feared God, they then had not offended; but now they do ask a king of a preposterous desire only that they might be like unto other nations; yet God, having purposed to erect among his people a kingly throne, and to raise unto them a king of whose seed Messiah should come, took this occasion to accomplish his purpose, so turning their evil and inordinate desire unto a good end, as God can convert the evil thoughts and actions of men to serve for his own glory" (Willet). 4. Their desire was *fulfilled*, and the transition peaceably effected through the agency of Samuel, who yielded to their request because he perceived the good which was hidden therein, and that in the providence of God the time was come for a king to be appointed (ch. ix. 16). "Israel was in the position of a boat which has been borne down in a swift stream into the very suction of the rapids. The best would be that she should put back; but if it be too late for this, then the best is that there should be in her a strong arm and a steady eye to keep her head straight. And thus it was with Israel. She plunged down the fall madly, rashly, wickedly, but under Samuel's control steadily" (Robertson). "He had to guide the difficult transition of Israel's political organisation from a Divinely-ruled republic into a regularly-constituted monarchy." "To mediate between the old and the new was, indeed, the peculiar position of Samuel. He was at once the last of the judges, and the inaugurator of the first of the kings. Take the whole of the narrative together—take the story first of his opposition, and then of his acquiescence, in the establishment of the monarchy. Both together bring us to a just impression of the double aspect in which he appears; of the two-sided sympathy which enabled him to unite together the passing and the coming epoch" (Stanley). His calmness, moderation, breadth of view, practical adaptation, and lofty devotion to God and his people were herein exhibited in an eminent degree. "Samuel is one of the few great men in history who, in critical times, by sheer force of character and invincible energy terminate the previous form of a great existing system—at first against their own will, but afterwards, when convinced of the necessity, with all the force and eagerness of their nature; and who then initiate a better form with the happiest results, though amidst much personal suffering and persecution" (Ewald, 'History').—D.

Vers. 4—22. (RAMAH.)—*The popular desire for a king.* "Make us a king to judge us like all the nations" (ver. 5). This narrative teaches us—

I. THAT THE POPULAR DESIRE, ALTHOUGH IT MAY BE PLAUSIBLE, IS OFTEN REPREHENSIBLE (vers. 4, 5). 1. *Its alleged grounds were insufficient.* (1) The old age of Samuel. But due respect to him and gratitude for his past services should have prevented their desire to set him aside; and the prosperity that attended his rule during many years should have led them to wish for its continuance as long as possible. They were inconsiderate, forgetful, unthankful, hasty, and unjust. (2) The misgovernment of his sons. But they might have been removed from their office without the office itself being abolished. It is better to try to mend an institution than to destroy it. (3) To be like other nations. But Israel was designed to be unlike them, and superior to them (Levit. xx. 26); and most of the miseries they had suffered arose from conformity to their ways. The wish *to be like others* is a fruitful

source of sin and woe. The cause of truth and righteousness in the world is greatly damaged when those who should be the guides of the ignorant and the wicked become their servile followers. "Palestine in ancient times was pre-eminently a land of kings. Every district, nay, every considerable city, had its king and its court. In most cases the king was an autocrat, absolute and irresponsible, lawgiver, judge, and executor, the source of all honours, offices, and emoluments, the commander of the army, the dispenser of favours, the awarder of punishment. The rights, claims, and prerogatives of royalty extended to every person, and to every relation of life. The king was the master, the people were his subjects, nay, slaves—his property. In a better sense he was the common father of the community, they his children, with all the kindlier duties and obligations implied and included in this most sacred of human relations. Royalty thus constituted and administered was selected by Jehovah as the synonym and exemplar of his special relation to the Hebrew people" (Thomson, 'Bibliotheca Sacra,' vol. xxx.). (4) The threatening attitude of the Philistines (ch. ix. 16) and the Ammonites (ch. xii. 12), which was doubtless referred to in the interview of the elders with Samuel. But the Lord of hosts, who had hitherto delivered them, was able to do so still; and to rely upon a new institution for safety instead of upon him was to lean upon a broken reed. "Instead of seeking for the cause of the misfortunes which had hitherto befallen them in their own sin and want of fidelity toward Jehovah, they searched for it in the faulty constitution of the nation itself" (Keil). 2. *Its real grounds were blameworthy.* (1) Dissatisfaction with the government which had been Divinely appointed and sanctioned. When the hearts of men are right with God they are not disposed to complain of his ordinances. (2) Distrust of the presence and might of their invisible King. "God was not sufficient for them without a creature prop." "Their demand of a visible earthly sovereign was in disparagement of that extraordinary Providence which had distinguished them from the nations of the earth, and taken them by a privilege under an immediate theocracy. Their sin was founded in a revolt from God, in the abdication of a perfect trust and reliance upon his providential government in that method in which with respect to them he had ordered it. But their fault, though uncommon in its form, is not at all in its principle. Something to *see* and nothing to *believe* is the wish and propensity of more than the Israelites" (Davison 'on Prophecy'). (3) Impatience, presumption, and self-will. "God gave them judges, . . . and afterwards they desired a king" (Acts xiii. 20, 21). Instead of first seeking to know the will of God, and then waiting his time for a change, if it should seem good in his sight, they thought that they knew what was best, took counsel of their own hearts, and, having chosen their course independently of him, proceeded forthwith to follow it up, and resolved to have their own way. They were thus disloyal to their Divine King, to whose direction and control they were bound to submit. (4) The love of worldly pleasure, power, and glory. They desired a king not merely (*a*) that he might judge them without interruption, by the law of hereditary descent; but also (*b*) that "he might go out before them and fight their battles" (ver. 20); and, still further (*c*), that he might hold a splendid court, and gratify their ambition and lust of shining or making a boastful display. They wished to be thought in no respect inferior to the surrounding nations. It was a result to which prosperity too often leads. The worldliness from which the misconduct of Samuel's sons proceeded was but a symptom of a widespread evil. "The secret spring of their rebellion was the ambition of their leaders, who could live no longer without the splendour of a regal court and household. 'Give me' (say they, as the prophet Hosea makes them speak, ch. xiii. 10) 'a king and princes,' where every one of them might shine a distinguished officer of state. They could get nothing, when their affairs led them to their judge's poor residence in the schools of the prophets, but the gift of the Holy Ghost (ch. x. 10; xix.), which a courtier, I suppose, would not prize even at the rate of Simon Magus, or think it worth the bribing for a piece of money. This it was, and only this, that made their demand criminal" (Warburton, 'Div. Leg.,' Book V.). How often has their sin been repeated in the history of nations! "All the tragical wars of the Greeks or barbarians, whether civil or foreign, have flowed from one fountain—from the desire either of riches, or of glory, or of pleasure; for in pursuit of these things the human race brings on its own destruction" (Philo Jud., 'In Decalog.').

II. THAT THE POPULAR DESIRE IS NOT UNFREQUENTLY AN OCCASION OF GREAT TROUBLE TO A GODLY MAN (vers. 6—9). "The thing was evil in the eyes of Samuel." He saw that it was wrong, felt disappointed and grieved, and was at first altogether opposed to it, and disinclined to listen to those by whom it was expressed, "because," says Josephus, "of his inborn sense of justice, because of his hatred of kings, as so far inferior to the aristocratic form of government which conferred a godlike character on those who lived under it." "For kings are many, and the good are few" (Dante). 1. As a good man has no greater joy than to see the people seeking what is right and good, so he has no greater sorrow than to see them "going after vain things which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are vain" (ch. xii. 21). Abraham (Gen. xviii. 23), Moses (Exod. xxxii. 18, 31), Elijah (1 Kings xix. 10). The Psalmist (Ps. cxix. 158), Jeremiah (Jer. ix. 1), Paul at Athens (Acts xvii. 16). 2. The grief he feels is of the noblest kind. (1) Unselfish. Samuel did not resent or complain of what was said concerning his old age or his sons' misgovernment; and if he was not absolutely indifferent to the injustice done to himself, yet his trouble arose chiefly from other and higher considerations. (2) Patriotic. (3) Divine. He was concerned, above all things, for the honour and glory of God. His own loyalty to him made him quick to resent the disloyalty of others, and his sympathy with his purposes filled him with holy jealousy lest they should be defeated or in any way hindered. He felt in some degree as God himself feels. 3. His resource in trouble is prayer to God. "And Samuel prayed to the Lord" (ver. 6); probably all night, as on a subsequent occasion (ch. xv. 11). Such had been the resource of his devout mother in her distress. Nor is there any other so effectual (Ps. lv. 22; Phil. iv. 6). 4. In communion with God he finds abundant consolation and help. God takes upon himself the burden of his servant who has laboured and suffered for his sake (Ps. lxix. 7). "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me." He assures him that it is "no strange thing that has happened unto him." "According to all the works which they have done," &c. (ver. 8). He removes his perplexity, tells him what to do, and gives him strength to do it. "Hearken unto their voice," &c. (ver. 9). All questionings cease when the Divine voice speaks, and, with the morning light, Samuel goes forth humbly, fearlessly, and cheerfully to deliver his message to the elders.

III. THAT THE POPULAR DESIRE, WHEN IT IS WRONG, SHOULD BE REBUKED, AND ITS EVIL EFFECTS DECLARED (vers. 10—18). It may not be allowed to pursue its course without warning on the part of those who feel that it is wrong, and to whom a Divine message comes. 1. This message *consists* of—(1) A testimony against its sinfulness. "Hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly (testify) unto them" their sin, and the displeasure of Heaven. (2) A declaration of the evils involved in its fulfilment. "Show them the manner (*mishpat*) of the king that shall reign over them," *i. e.* his regal rights, claims, privileges, and prerogatives; not what might be *de jure*, according to "the manner of the kingdom" (ch. x. 25; Deut. xvii. 14), but would be *de facto*, according to the custom of the kings of the heathen nations whom they wished to resemble. We have here a picture of "the dark side of the institution" in contrast with the theocracy:—(*a*) Its ruling motive—personal aggrandisement and indulgence. "He will take for *himself*, *his* chariots, *his* horses," &c., whilst for *your* welfare he will care nothing. (*b*) Its arbitrary and oppressive character. "He will take your sons" to be his personal attendants (ver. 11) for military and agricultural service (ver. 12), your daughters for domestic service (ver. 13), your land to give to his attendants (ver. 14), a tenth of your corn and wine to reward his officers (imposing heavy taxation—ver. 15), your servants and cattle "to put them to his work" (ver. 16), and a tenth of your sheep; "a great retinue, a great table, a standing army, great favourites, great revenues" (M. Henry); and you yourselves will lose your political and social liberty, and become his slaves (ver. 17). (*c*) Its helpless and hopeless misery (ver. 18)—brought upon yourselves, causing you to cry out to God for help, "and the Lord will not hear you in that day." "The yoke once assumed you must bear for ever" (1 Kings xii. 4). 2. The message must be *declared* faithfully and fully, whether men will bear or forbear. "And Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people" (ver. 10). 3. The *purpose* of such declaration being to lead them to consideration and repentance, and, if they still persist, to

throw the responsibility for the result upon themselves alone. The watchman who warns the wicked, even if they turn not from their way, "hath delivered his soul" (Ezek. xxxiii. 9); and the faithful minister is "unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish" (2 Cor. ii. 15).

IV. THAT THE POPULAR DESIRE IS SOMETIMES EFFECTUALLY CORRECTED BY BEING GRATIFIED (vers. 19—22). 1. In spite of every admonition, men can and do *persist* in their sinful desire. "Nay; but *we will* have a king over us." Their self-will appears more plainly than before. Expostulation only makes it stronger. They will have their way. And God, who coerces not whom he has endowed with moral freedom, permits them to do so. 2. By their persistency they even *obtain* of him the fulfilment of their request. "Make them a king," is his final response to Samuel, who "rehearsed the words in his ears," and now dismisses them "every man unto his city," to await the speedy accomplishment of their desire. The evil which would have resulted from its refusal is thus averted. The principle of the theocracy is preserved. Jehovah continues to rule over Israel; and they recognise his authority in so far, at least, as to leave the selection and appointment of a king in his hands. His sovereign will encircles and controls their purposes. But he does not, by granting their request, sanction their sin. On the contrary—3. In its fulfilment he inflicts upon them a just *chastisement*, and teaches them, by the experience of its legitimate results, the folly of their devices. Their first king is a man after their own heart, reflects their sin, and brings overwhelming calamity on himself and them. "I gave thee a king in mine anger" (Hosea xiii. 11; Ps. cvi. 15). "God, when he is asked for aught amiss, showeth displeasure when he giveth, hath mercy when he giveth not. The devil was heard in asking to enter the swine, the apostle was not heard when he prayed that the messenger of Satan might depart from him." 4. He *prepares* them thereby to receive as their ruler "a man after his own heart" (ch. xiii. 14), who shall conduct them to power and honour, and foreshadow him who is higher than the kings of the earth. How wonderfully are the Divine purposes fulfilled in and through the errors and sins of men! "In a very remarkable sense the *vox populi* was the *vox Dei*, even when the two voices seemed most utterly out of harmony. . . . The Jews were asking for heavy punishment, without which the evil which was in them could not have been brought to light or cured. But they were asking also for something besides punishment, for that in which lay the seeds of a higher blessing. Beneath this dark counterfeit image was hidden the image of a true King reigning in righteousness; the assertor of truth, order, unity in the land; the Helper of the poor, who would not judge after the sight of his eyes, nor reprove after the hearing of his ears; but would smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips would slay the wicked" (Maurice).—D.

Ver. 6.—*The benefit of prayer.* "And Samuel prayed unto the Lord." The blessings obtained in answer to prayer are real and manifold. Some of them are outward and material—daily bread, health, safety, life. God is "in all, above all, and through all," the personal and free Ruler of the universe, and able to grant our petitions for temporal good in harmony with the established order of nature. The mind and will of man can produce changes in the material world without disturbing that order; much more can the eternal mind and will do the same. Other blessings are inward and spiritual—wisdom, righteousness, peace, and joy. The "Father of spirits" has access to the human spirit, interpenetrates it as light the atmosphere, holds communion with it, and disposes it to holiness. Spiritual blessings are incomparably more valuable than material. What we *are* determines our relation to surrounding objects. And beneficial changes wrought *within* are followed by similar changes in the world without. "In prayer we make the nearest approaches unto God, and lie open to the influences of Heaven. Then it is that the Sun of righteousness doth visit us with his directest rays, and dissipateth our darkness, and imprinteth his image on our souls" (Scougal).

> "Speak to him, thou, for he hears, and spirit with spirit can meet.
> Closer is he than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet" (Tennyson).

In illustration of the spiritual benefit of prayer let us consider how Samuel, who "prayed unto the Lord" in his trouble, and "rehearsed all the words of the people in the ears of the Lord" (ver. 21), was comforted and helped in time of need. What a different man he was when he came forth from communion with his Almighty Friend to speak to the elders of Israel from what he was when he went from them, "displeased" (ver. 6) and distressed, to pour out his heart before the Lord! "What profit shall we have if we pray unto him?" 1. *Relief* for a burdened heart. It is often a great relief to tell our trouble to an earthly friend; much more is it to pour it forth into the bosom of God. "No other God but the God of the Bible is *heart to heart*" (Niebuhr). "They went and told Jesus" (Matt. xiv. 12). 2. *Sympathy* under bitter disappointment. Samuel seemed to have "laboured in vain and spent his strength for nought." But God sanctioned his work, identified himself with him, shared his disappointment, and took his burden on himself. In rejecting his faithful servants men reject the Lord. "Why persecutest thou me?" (Acts ix. 5). He sympathises with them (Heb. iv. 5); and one smile of his more than compensates for apparent failure and the frowns of the whole world. "By degrees two thoughts calmed him. The first was the feeling of *identification* with God's cause. The other element of consolation was the Divine *sympathy*. Atheism and revolution here, as elsewhere, went hand in hand. We do not know how this sentence was impressed by the infinite mind on Samuel's mind; all we know is, he had a conviction that God was a fellow-sufferer" (Robertson). 3. *Guidance* in great perplexity. The will of the Lord, it may be, is at first hidden or obscure, but in fellowship with him the mists and clouds that prevent our seeing it are cleared away, the sun shines forth, and our way is made plain. We see "the light of this world" (John xi. 9). "The vocation of man is the sun in the heavens of his life." "The secret of the Lord" (the counsel or advice, such as a man gives to his friend) "is with them that fear him" (Ps. xxv. 14). God tells his secrets only to his friends. "The meek will he guide in judgment: the meek will he teach his way" (Ps. xxv. 9). "He will guide you into all the truth" (John xvi. 13). 4. *Submission* to the supreme will. That will is always wisest and best; it cannot be altered or made to bend to ours; and one of the chief benefits of prayer is that thereby we receive grace which disposes us to accept humbly and cheerfully what at first appears evil in our sight. We are made of one mind with God. 5. *Strength* for painful duty. It may be to "protest solemnly" (ver. 9) against the course resolved upon by others, to alter our own course and expose ourselves to the charge of inconsistency, to face opposition, danger, and death. But God never appoints us a duty without giving us strength to perform it. "Habitual prayer constantly confers decision on the wavering, and energy on the listless, and calmness on the excitable, and disinterestedness on the selfish" (Liddon). 6. *Composure* amidst general excitement. Whilst the elders clamour, "Nay; but we will have a king over us," Samuel is unmoved. He calmly listens to their decision, takes it back to God in secret prayer, and then comes forth and says, "Go ye every man to his own city." "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee" (Isa. xxvi. 3). Hurricanes revolve around a centre of perfect calm. Outside the charmed circle the tempest may rage furiously; within it all is peace. Such is the heart and mind kept (garrisoned) by the peace of God (Phil. iv. 7). 7. *Confidence* in a glorious future. "The Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake" (ch. xii. 22). He works out his purposes by unexpected methods, overrules human perversity, and makes the wrath of man to praise him (Ps. lxxvi. 10). "What will the end be?" it was said at a time of great and general anxiety to an eminent servant of God (Dr. A. Clarke), who replied, with a beaming countenance, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men."—**D.**

Ver. 22.—*The unwise demand granted.* The government by judges fell into discredit. Samuel, indeed, was without reproach; but when advancing age made the burden of public affairs too heavy for him, his sons, to whom he naturally delegated his authority, proved unrighteous rulers. They do not seem to have been licentious, like the sons of Eli, but they were covetous, and corrupted the fountains of justice by taking bribes. What a persistent thing sin is! How it repeats itself! How hard it

is to eradicate it! Samuel's lifelong example of integrity was lost upon his sons. The terrible fate of Eli's family was lost on them too. To the dignity of justice, to the honour of truth, they were indifferent for filthy lucre's sake. Then the elders of Israel asked Samuel to set a king over them.

I. THE IMPROPRIETY OF THE REQUEST. 1. It followed a bad precedent. The experiment had been tried about 150 years before. The people asked Gideon to be their hereditary prince, and that hero declined the proposal, as inconsistent with a pure theocracy. After his death Abimelech was king for three years; but his career began in cruelty, ended soon in disaster and death, and no one from that time had sought the royal dignity. 2. It proceeded on a wrong principle. The desire to be as the other nations round about was in flat contradiction to the revealed purpose of God that Israel should be separate as a people unto him. The wish to have a king to lead them out to battle betrayed a thirst for war unworthy of a holy nation, and a mistrust of the Lord's power to defend them. Here, indeed, is the point in which they departed from the permissive law regarding a king recorded in the seventeenth chapter of Deuteronomy. A regal government was not to be reckoned inconsistent with the theocracy, provided the king was not a foreigner, and was chosen by Jehovah, whose vicegerent he should be. The elders asked for a king not after the mind of the Lord, but after the pattern of the heathen round about.

II. REASONS OF THE DIVINE CONSENT. 1. A headstrong people must learn by experience. The elders and people of Israel were warned of the risk they ran. A king such as they desired would restrain their ancient liberties, and subordinate all their rights and interests to the maintenance of his court and army. They heard Samuel's warning, and persisted in their demand. So the Lord bade his servant make them a king. If men will not take advice, let them have their way. Wisdom seldom comes to wilful men but through sharp lessons of the results of folly. 2. The way must be prepared for the king and the kingdom that God would choose. It is important to remember that Divine purposes are accomplished on earth not by direct fiats of authority or exertions of power, but through long and complex processes of human action and counteraction, by the corrections of experience, the smart of suffering, and the recoil from danger. It was God's design to constitute Israel into a kingdom under a sure covenant—a kingdom which should furnish the basis for glowing prophetic visions of the kingdom of Christ; but this design was not to be fulfilled abruptly, or by a sudden assertion of the Divine will. The way was prepared by the failure of all other devices for holding together the Hebrew people. First the government by judges lost credit; then the kingdom as set up by popular desire failed; so that the tribes, seeing the ruin of their own devices, might be ready to receive the kingdom as God would have it, and the man whom he would choose to "feed Jacob his people and Israel his inheritance."

III. ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE SAME PROCESS. 1. Men have set up their own devices in the administration of the Church; and with what result? They have not been content with an unseen Lord and King. The early patriarchates may be described as a government by judges; but men were not content therewith, and Latin Christianity set up an ecclesiastical and spiritual supremacy on earth, a Saul-like kingship at Rome. Those parts of the Western Church which broke away from this doomed kingdom at the Reformation, for the most part gave power to secular princes in exchange for their protection. All such arrangements are temporary devices; but they are witnesses and preludes to something higher and more Divine. They prepare the way for the reign of Jesus Christ, as the broken, confused reign of Saul prepared for the strong kingdom of David. 2. Inward Christian experience can tell a similar tale. What plans have to be tried and found wanting, what thrones of confusion in the heart to be subverted, before the Lord alone is exalted! We are permitted to have our own way that we may learn how small our wisdom is, how vain are our devices. We exalt our own righteousness, our own will, our own religious confidence. It is our Saul; and the issue is confusion and disorder, till we renounce our pride and vainglory, and receive the Son of David, Jehovah's true Anointed, to reign over and rule in us. Self-religion starts thus—"Nay; but we will have a king." The religion which is taught of God says, "Blessed be the king that cometh in the name of the Lord!"—F.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER IX.

SELECTION OF SAUL AS KING BY THE VOICE OF PROPHECY. GENEALOGY OF SAUL (vers. 1—27). Ver. 1.—**A man . . . whose name was Kish.** The genealogy of Saul is rendered obscure by the Hebrew custom of abbreviating such records by the omission of names. The family documents were no doubt kept in full, but when transcribed, as here and in the First Book of Chronicles, only a summary is given, and as the omitted links are not always the same, great difficulty is necessarily the result. The most satisfactory genealogy is that given by Schaff from a comparison of Gen. xlvi. 21; 1 Sam. ix. 1; xiv. 51; 1 Chron. vii. 6—8; viii. 29—33; ix. 35—39, and is as follows: 1. Benjamin; 2. Becher; 3. Aphiah, perhaps same as Abiah; 4. Bechorath; 5. Zeror, or Zur; 6. Abiel; 7. Ner; 8. Kish; 9. Saul. Very many links, however, are omitted, among whom must be placed Matri, mentioned in 1 Sam. x. 21; and Jehiel, mentioned in 1 Chron. ix. 35 (and see *ibid.* viii. 29). He is described as the first settler and coloniser of Gibeon, and as husband of Maachah, a daughter or granddaughter of Caleb. The spelling of his name with an *'ain* forbids our confounding him with Abiel, as is done by Schaff and most commentators, and whom, apparently, he preceded by many generations. In the two places referred to above a large family of sons is ascribed to him; but as, first of all, the lists do not agree, as, moreover, they are said to dwell with their brethren in Jerusalem (1 Chron. viii. 32), and as Ner, the father of Kish, is mentioned in the second list, it is pretty certain that we are not to regard them as his actual children, but as the leading names among his posterity. The fearful cruelty recorded in Judges xx. 48 may well account for the hopeless entanglement of Benjamite genealogies. An ancestor of Saul must, of course, have been among the 600 who escaped to the rock Rimmon, but he could have saved only his own life. **A mighty man of power.** Really, "of wealth." Saul, like David afterwards, was sprung from an affluent family, whose landed property was situated at Gibeah, about four miles north of Jerusalem, afterwards known as Gibeah of Saul.

Ver. 2.—**He had a son, whose name was Saul.** I. e. *asked*, a name usually given to a firstborn son. **A choice young man.** This is a double translation of the Hebrew word, and consequently one half or other must be wrong. It may either be a participle, *elect* or *choice*, and is so rendered by the Syriac and Vulgate; or an adjective, *young*, the rendering of the Chaldee, and virtually of the Septuagint, which gives *well-grown*. This is the preferable translation; for the word constantly occurs coupled with virgin (Deut. xxxii. 25; Isa. lxii. 5, &c.), for one in the full flower of manhood. Saul could not, therefore, have been the runner of ch. v. 12, though, as we read that Jonathan his son was a grown man two or three years afterwards (ch. xiii. 2), he must have been at least thirty-five years of age, after making allowance for the early period at which the Jews married. His noble appearance and gigantic stature were well fitted to impress and overawe a semi-barbarous people, who were better able to form an estimate of his physical qualities than of the high mental and moral gifts possessed by Samuel.

Ver. 3.—**The asses of Kish . . . were lost.** So strangely is the trivial ever united with events most solemn and weighty, that Saul set out upon this journey, in which he was to find a kingdom, with no other object than to look for some lost asses—Hebrew, "she-asses." As used for riding (Judges x. 4), the ass was valuable, and as these were probably kept for breeding, they were allowed more liberty than the males, and so strayed away.

Ver. 4.—**Mount Ephraim.** Though Gibeah, Saul's home, was in Benjamin, it was situated on this long mountain range (ch. i. 1). **The land of Shalisha.** I. e. *Three-land*, and probably, therefore, the region round Baal-shalisha. It takes its name from the three valleys which there converge in the great Wady Kurawa. **The land of Shalim.** *I. e.* of jackals; probably the same as the land of Shual, also = jackal-land (ch. xiii. 17). The very name shows that it was a wild, uninhabited region. The derivation *hollow-land* is untenable.

Ver. 5.—**The land of Zuph.** See on ch. i. 1. This Levite ancestor of Samuel had probably occupied and colonised this district after the disasters recorded in the last chapters of the Book of Judges. **Lest my father,** &c. A mark of good feeling on Saul's part, and a proof of the affectionate terms on which Kish and his family lived.

Ver. 6.—**In this city.** Probably Ramathaim-zophim, *i. e.* Ramah, Samuel's dwelling-place and property. Confessedly, however, Saul's route hither and thither in search of lost cattle is very obscure, and it is difficult to reconcile this identification with the statement in ch. x. 2, that Rachel's sepulchre lay on the route between this city and Gibeah of Saul. Nevertheless, Ramah was certainly in the land of Zuph, whence too it took its longer name (see on ch. i. 1); and it is remarkable that Jeremiah

(ch. xxxi. 15) describes Rachel's weeping as being heard in Ramah. It seems extraordinary that Saul should have known nothing of Israel's chief ruler, and that his servant was acquainted with him only in his lower capacity as a person to be consulted in private difficulties. He describes him, nevertheless, as **an honourable man**, or, more literally, an honoured man, one held in honour.

Ver. 7.—**The bread is spent in our vessels.** In the East a great man is always approached with a present, and offerings of food were no doubt the most usual gifts (ch. xvi. 20). Those made to the false prophets are contemptuously described in Ezek. xiii. 19 as "handfuls of barley and pieces of bread." **A present.** The word is rare, and apparently is the technical name for a fee of this kind, half payment and half gift.

Ver. 8.—**The fourth part of a shekel.** Apparently the shekel, roughly stamped, was divided into four quarters by a cross, and broken when needed. What was its proportionate value in Samuel's days we cannot tell, for silver was rare; but in size it would be somewhat bigger than a sixpence, and would be a very large fee, while the bread would have been a small one. It very well marks the eagerness of the servant that he is ready to part with the considerable sum of money in his possession in order to consult the seer. The whole conversation is given in a very lively and natural manner.

Ver. 9.—**Beforetime,** &c. This verse is evidently a gloss, written originally by some later hand in the margin, in order to explain the word used for seer in vers. 11, 18, 19. Inserted here in the text it interrupts the narrative, and is itself somewhat incomprehensible. The Septuagint offers a very probable reading, namely, "for the people in old time used to call the prophet a seer," *i. e.* it was a word used chiefly by the common people. Prophet, *nabi*, is really the older and established word from the beginning of the Old Testament to the end. The word *roëh*, used in this place for seer, is comparatively rare, as a popular word would be in written compositions. It refers to that which is seen by the ordinary sight, to waking vision (see on ch. iii. 1, 10), whereas the other word for seer, *chozeh*, refers to ecstatic vision. *Roëh* is used by Isaiah, ch. xxx. 10, apparently in much the same sense as here, of those whom the people consulted in their difficulties, and they might be true prophets as Samuel was, or mere pretenders to occult powers. The present narrative makes it plain that *roëh* was used in a good sense in Samuel's days; but gradually it became degraded, and while *chozeh* became the respectful word for a prophet, *roëh* became the contrary. Another conclusion also follows. We have seen that there are various indications that the Books of Samuel in their present state are later than his days. Here, on the contrary, we have a narrative couched in the very language of his times; for the writer of the gloss contained in this verse was displeased at Samuel being called a *roëh*, but did not dare to alter it, though taking care to note that it was equivalent in those days to calling him a *nabi*.

Vers. 11, 12.—**As they went up.** Ramah was situated on a double hill, whence its name Ramathaim (ch. i. 1). As, then, *they go up the ascent*—so the Hebrew, literally—they meet maidens on the way to the well, and ask them, **Is the seer**—the *roëh*—**here?** They answer, Yes; **behold, he is before you.** *I. e.* they are to go straightforward, and farther on in the town they will find him. **He came to-day to the city.** As Saul's servant knew that this city was Samuel's abode, the words must mean that he had just returned from visiting one of those places, probably, to which he was in the habit of going as judge. From ch. xvi. 2 we learn that Samuel went occasionally even to distant places to perform priestly duties. **In the high place.** Hebrew, Bamah. Samuel, we read, had built an altar at Ramah (ch. vii. 17), and probably the present sacrifice was to be offered upon it. Such altars, and the worship of the true God upon high places, were at this time recognised as right, and were, in fact, in accordance with, and were even the remains of, the old patriarchal religion. But gradually they were condemned, partly because of the growing sanctity of the temple, but chiefly because of the tendency of religious rites celebrated in such places to degenerate into nature-worship, and orgies such as the heathen were in the habit of holding on the tops of mountains and hills. We thus find in the Bible an illustration of the principle that rites and ceremonies (as not being of the essentials of religion) may be changed, or even abolished, if they are abused, or lead on to evil consequences.

Ver. 13.—**As soon as . . . straightway.** This is too forcible a rendering of the Hebrew particles, and makes the talk of these water-carriers even more garrulous than it is in the original. The latter word should be omitted, as they simply say that on entering the city Saul and his servant would easily find Samuel; for he would not go up to the feast till all was ready, nor would the people begin till he had arrived, because it was his office to bless the sacrificial banquet. The pious custom of asking a blessing on meals, our Lord's "giving of thanks," is inherited by us from the Jews.

Ver. 14.—**When they were come into.** More correctly, "As they were going into the city." This agrees with what is said in ver. 18, that Saul and Samuel met in the

gateway. As Ramah occupied two hills, the Bamah would be on the summit of one, while the city probably nestled between them.

Ver. 15.—**Now Jehovah had told Samuel in his ear.** Literally, "had uncovered his ear," as in Ruth iv. 4; 2 Sam. vii. 27. The phrase is taken from the pushing aside of the head-dress in order to whisper, and therefore means that Jehovah had secretly told Samuel.

Ver. 16.—**That he may save my people out of the hand of the Philistines.** Though Samuel had lightened the yoke of the Philistines by his victory at Mizpah, yet he had by no means altogether broken their power. It is so constantly the habit of the historical books of the Bible to include the distant and ultimate results of an act in their account of it, that we must not conclude that what is said in ch. vii. 13—15 was the immediate consequence of Samuel's victory. Especially, when it said that "the hand of Jehovah was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel," it is plain that Saul's successful wars are included in the writer's summary of events, inasmuch as Samuel's life was prolonged until nearly the close of that monarch's reign. The words further show that Saul's office was essentially military, though this is too much emphasised in the A. V., which renders by **captain** a word which really means *prince, chief.* Saul, as a Benjamite, belonged to the bravest and most warlike tribe of Israel, and one whose country was the seat of perpetual combat with the Philistines. **Their cry is come unto me.** Plainly, therefore, Israel was again suffering from Philistine domination.

Ver. 17.—**Jehovah said unto him.** Literally, "Jehovah answered him." When Samuel saw the young stranger, struck by his towering height, he wondered within himself whether this were the destined hero who was to win freedom for Israel. The affirmation, therefore, came in answer to the question asked by his heart. **The same shall reign over my people.** More literally, the margin, 'restrain in," *i. e.* coerce, control. The A. V., preferring as usual a general to an exact rendering, loses this plain indication that Saul's would be a strict and stern rule.

Ver. 18.—**In the gate.** The same preposition is used here as that translated "*into* the city" in ver. 14. The contradiction which many commentators suppose that they find between the two verses arises from their not remembering that prepositions constantly lose their original meaning. Literally the preposition means *in the middle*, but its common meaning is simply *within.* So with us *immediately* has lost all reference to the middle, though derived from that word, and signifies *directly, at once.* Saul, then, and his servant were just going (it is a present participle) *within* the city when they meet Samuel coming out, and accost him **in the** very portal.

Vers. 19, 20.—**Go up before me.** Addressed in the singular to Saul, to whom, as the future king, Samuel pays every mark of honour. The next words, **Ye shall eat,** include Saul's servant. **I will tell thee all,** &c. Intended not merely to set Saul's mind at rest, but also to prepare him for the great news he was to hear. So, too, the information that the asses were found, given to him before he had even hinted at the object of his visit, would convince him of the reality of Samuel's prophetic powers. **On whom is all the desire of Israel?** Rather, "To whom belongs all that is desirable in Israel? Is it not for thee, and for thy father's house?" The words were intended to indicate to Saul, though in an obscure manner, that the supreme power in Israel would be his. Why trouble about she-asses? They might be beautiful, and a valuable property for a husbandman; but he was about to become a king, to whom would belong everything that was best and most precious.

Ver. 21.—**Wherefore then speakest thou so to me?** Though Samuel's words contained the promise of supreme power,—for to whom less than a king could all that was desirable in Israel belong?—yet Saul probably regarded them as a high-flown compliment, such as Orientals love to use, and gave a modest and proper answer. Benjamin, already the smallest tribe, had been so crushed that its power must have been very small, and Saul's house, though opulent, was not a leading one; how then could one of its members expect so high a dignity? For **families of the tribe of Benjamin** the Hebrew has "tribes," probably owing to some confusion with the words "tribes of Israel" just before.

Vers. 22, 23.—**Into the parlour.** Strictly the cell or room attached to the chapel of the high place, now used as the *guest-chamber*, wherein the thirty chief men, who came as invited guests, were to dine. The rest of the people would be in the open air. There Samuel not only placed Saul in the seat of honour, but also his servant, as representing the king's officers of state, and commanded the cook to set before **him** a **portion** that had been reserved. This was the shoulder; but whether it was the left shoulder, of which the laity might eat, or the right shoulder, which was sacred, as belonging to the priest (Levit. vii. 32), is not mentioned. If the latter, it was Samuel's own share, and he may by his prophetic authority have assigned it to Saul, in token that the priesthood would be subject to the royal power. Be this, however, as it may, it was the portion of honour, and it seems that Samuel, on receiving intimation the previous day of Saul's visit (ver 16), had given orders

that it should be carefully reserved for him (ver. 24). He now orders it to be set before Saul, with **that which was upon it**, *i. e.* all the flesh and the fat not appointed to be burnt upon the altar.

Ver. 24.—**And Samuel said.** Samuel's name is not given in the Hebrew, and though inserted by the Septuagint and Vulgate, it is so only by a manifest error. The Syriac and Chaldee, like the Hebrew, make the cook the speaker. The right translation is, "And the cook lifted up the shoulder with that which was upon it, and set it before Saul, and said, 'Behold, that which hath been reserved is set (a participle, and not the imperative) before thee; eat, for it hath been kept for thee unto the appointed time of which he (*i. e.* Samuel) spake, saying, I have invited the people.'" The word translated in the A. V. *since I said* is one which means *saying*, and nothing else; and as what goes before contains no verb to which *saying* can refer, it is plain that there is an ellipse. But if the cook be the speaker, the meaning is plain, as follows:—When on the previous day the revelation was made to Samuel that Israel's future king would present himself on the morrow, the prophet at once made preparations to receive him with due solemnity, and for this purpose arranged a sacrifice, and invited thirty of the chief citizens of Ramah to assemble at the high place, and sit at the banquet with him. And then it was, when telling the cook of his invitation, that he gave orders that the portion of honour should be carefully reserved, to be set at the fitting time before the stranger. The chat of the cook is entirely after the manner of ancient times, and would show Saul how completely his coming had been foreseen and provided for.

Ver. 25.—When the feast was over they went down from the high place, and having entered the city, proceeded to Samuel's dwelling, where he **communed with Saul upon the top of the house.** The Septuagint has a very probable reading, namely, "And they spread a bed for Saul upon the roof, and he lay down;" but the Syriac and Chaldee agree with the Hebrew. Without communicating to Saul that he was to be king, which was not revealed to him till the next day (ch. x. 1), Samuel might be anxious to impress on Saul's mind the great principles of the theocratic government, and also the nature of the remedies necessary for Israel's recovery from its present misery.

Vers. 26, 27.—**It came to pass about the spring of the day.** This is not a separate act from **they arose early**; for the A. V. is wrong in translating the next clause, "Samuel called Saul to the top of the house." Saul had slept there, and, wearied out with his long wanderings and the excitement of the previous day, was fast asleep when Samuel came to him. The Hebrew is, "And they rose early; for at the spring of the day Samuel called to Saul upon the house-top, saying," &c. And no sooner had Saul risen than they started upon his journey home, and as soon as they had left the city, at some fitting spot, Samuel bade the servant go forward, and as soon as he and Saul were alone he spake unto him **the word of God.** And by that Divine word he who had left his father's house in search of lost asses was summoned to a post which, if one of the greatest dignity, was full also of danger, and burdened with solemn responsibility. And while on the human side Saul proved not unworthy of a royal crown, in his relation towards God he failed, because he let self-will and earthly policy prevail in his heart over obedience and trust in God.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—10.—*Divine consideration.* The facts are—1. Saul the son of Kish, a wealthy Benjamite, and remarkable for stature and goodliness, seeks his father's asses. 2. Not finding them, he fears lest his father should be anxious about his own safety, and suggests a return home. 3. His servant advises a recourse to a distinguished man of God then in those parts. 4. Obtaining a small present, Saul resolves to consult the man of God concerning the lost asses. A great crisis has come in which the dangerous elements at work in Israel's heart might lead to much mischief. The chief motive for desiring a king being a craving for outward display, and a corresponding distrust and dislike of God's more unseen and immediate direction of national affairs, it was evidently possible for steps to be taken which would ruin Israel's prosperity. The narrative relates to us a series of Divinely-governed events, apparently trivial, which prevented that calamity and insured the national safety.

I. GOD'S REGULATION OF IMPERFECT DESIRES AND DANGEROUS ASPIRATIONS. There is no harm in desire for monarchy *per se*; but the form it assumed in this instance was defective, and it revealed a moral tendency which, if fed by appropriate nourishment, would lead to a frustration of Israel's true work in the world. The saving feature in their conduct was their deference to Samuel. The instruction conveyed to him to

select a king was consistent with the fact that God was displeased with their request (ch. viii. 7; cf. Hosea xiii. 11). The solution of the apparent discrepancy lies in the circumstance that God does not leave his people to the full bent of their own heart. He mercifully regarded their condition, and governed their tendencies in such a way as to make the best of a bad case. *This is true,* more or less, *of all men not yet judicially abandoned.* There is a force of evil in men enough to destroy them speedily but for the restraining power of God. The mental operations of sinners are governed by an unseen hand, and often directed to their advantage, when, otherwise, evil would ensue. *There have been ages in the history of the Church when conspicuously unhallowed desires and worldly aspirations* have not been left to work ruin, but *have been chastened, controlled, directed* to objects better than they, left to themselves, would have chosen. The age of Constantine would have been more calamitous for religion had not the Head of the Church governed rising tendencies and provided moderating influences.

II. GOD'S CARE IN MEETING MAN'S WEAKNESS. Not any man would suit Israel as king at that time. There were conditions in the state of the people which needed to be wisely met. The people were impressible by the outward physical aspect of things; they required a leader of social position to command respect; and their own hankering after likeness to other nations rendered it important that their king should have some moral character; at the same time, being their choice, he must be a representative of the weaknesses and wisdom of the age. Hence the care of God in directing Samuel to Saul, a man of commanding appearance (ver. 2), of wealthy family (vers. 1—3), of quiet, plodding, God-fearing disposition,—as seen in occupation, in his concern for his father, and in his deference to the prophet,—and yet of no deep, intelligent piety. This *Divine care is no novelty in history.* 1. *It is constant*—coextensive with the history of the race. Even fallen Adam was cared for in temporal things. The order of Providence, the adaptation of his Word to varying exigencies of life, the appointments in his Church for the perfecting of the saints, are only some instances of a care that never faileth. 2. *It is secret.* Israel little knew, while those asses were wandering from home, that their God was caring so wisely and tenderly for them. Silent as the light is the voice that orders our path; more subtle than either is the hand that guards our spirit. By day and night his hand leads, even to the uttermost parts of the earth. 3. *It is beyond all desert.* Even when Israel was in spirit rejecting him he cared for them. "How shall I give thee up?" is the feeling of the Father's heart. He rewards us "not according to our iniquities." The daily mercies of God are more than can be numbered, and they come because he delighteth in mercy, not because we earn them by obedience and love.

III. GOD'S LEADING BY UNKNOWN WAYS. While restraining and regulating Israel's tendencies, an unseen hand is leading the son of Kish by a way he knew not. In the straying of asses and in the following their track we first see natural events; but behind and in them all we soon learn to see God gently leading Saul from a quiet, rural life to undertake a great and honourable responsibility. It is *not strange for God to lead by unknown paths* those whom he chooses for his service. Abraham did not know the full meaning of the secret impulse to leave Ur of the Chaldees. Joseph's imprisonment was not man's sole doing. Egyptians in the court of Pharaoh saw not the hand guiding Moses into a knowledge of their legislation and their learning. Likewise is it *true in the bringing of men to a knowledge of Christ.* Many a simple circumstance has brought a wanderer to a greater than Samuel. And in *the Christian life* we are led by circuitous, untrodden paths to duties, privileges, joys, and eternal rest. God is Guide and Counsellor—by monitions of conscience, by word of truth, by voice of friends, by barred pathways of life, by yearnings created within, by events great and small.

General lessons:—1. Let us have faith in God's mastery over all that is in man. 2. Let us believe that he will provide for his people suitably to their need. 3. Let us keep our heart and eye open to the guidance of the unseen Power, and not despise events that seem trifling in themselves.

Vers. 11—17.—*Man's accidents God's ordinations.* The facts are—1. On entering the city Saul inquires for the seer, and is informed that he is present for a special

religious service. 2. Following the directions given, he meets Samuel ascending to the high place. 3. Samuel is already instructed by God to expect during the day the man whom he is to anoint as king. 4. On seeing Saul, an intimation is given from God that he is the chosen man. In some respects this narrative of events resembles what is occurring every day in every land, for we have here a set of independent actions converging on a common result. No single meeting of men occurs in society without a variety of acts and movements having directly or indirectly preceded it as links in the chain of causation. But the speciality in this instance is the information that the meeting of Saul and Samuel was pre-ordained of God. Hence the incident is an illustration of the double side of what to men may appear to be only ordinary human occurrences. An uninformed person would have said that it was accidental that the asses went astray, and that maidens directed Saul to their city, where Samuel happened to be. To Saul it so appeared; but, guided by the inspired narrative, we know that the "accident" was "fore-ordained" without destroying its really accidental character. We may notice what light the record before us throws on the general question of special providences.

I. We SEE HERE THE FREE ACTION OF MANY INDEPENDENT WILLS. In so far as asses exercise will, those were free in straying from home on that day. The action of Kish in selecting Saul rather than any one else to seek them was quite his own. The readiness of Saul to obey his father and not find a substitute in the toil was unconstrained. The mental and emotional antecedents of the citizens prompting their will to arrange for Samuel to visit their city were natural, and operated on wills perfectly independent. The suggestion of the servant that Saul should not return, but go to this very city, arose spontaneously; and Saul's concern for his father was relieved by considerations which he freely yielded to. The action of Samuel, amidst his many public engagements, was free in deciding to offer sacrifice, and, so far as we can see, not exclusively connected with an expectation of meeting the coming king in that particular place. In addition to all these free and independent acts, there were events which tended to turn the free acts in the one direction. Lack of pasture in certain places may have influenced the asses to take the course they did. The distance to be traversed was just such as to bring Saul to the vicinity of Samuel where persons were at hand to answer his questions. The difficulty of approaching the prophet with a proper token of respect was overcome by the casual possession of a small coin. *This analysis of fact accords with what may be affirmed of thousands of incidents every day.* Independent lines of force converge on one point and issue in an historical resultant. In no case recorded in Scripture does any supreme power take away freedom of action.

II. The FREE ACTION OF MANY IS ATTENDED BY THE UNRECOGNISED ACTION OF GOD. In the instance before us this is obvious, for it was ordained that Samuel should meet with Saul on that very day, though they were so far apart (vers. 15, 16). Whether it was "chance" that took Saul to that city or some influence exerted on him is easily answered by the fact that it was God's purpose for Samuel to see and anoint him. God's fore-ordination does not wait on "chance." The same reasoning would show that even the course taken by the asses, though free, was not without God's action. The inspiration of Samuel's conduct is a primary fact of the prophetic office. It is *possible to start difficulties* in relation to this subject; but *they are difficulties of ignorance, not of knowledge,* and therefore lose much of their force. We do not even *know what* the free act of will is, though we know the *fact.* We know that our actions are free, and yet that we *are* influenced by others. The point of junction between the external influence and the free act of our will has never been detected; therefore, any difficulties which men raise against these narratives in the Bible lie equally against all interaction of free natures. The *Scripture doctrine is that God does act on man without destroying his freedom.* God is not a *latent* energy. He assures us that he is a real Power, working in some "mightily to will and to do," and striving with others. The highest government is only possible on this supposition. The *possibility of what are called special providences* resolves itself into the *free action of a supreme Spirit on created spirits,* so as to secure their free and independent action, and at the same time cause that action to converge on given points. We even can do that in some degree with children and feebler natures. Why do men wish to

banish the eternal energy from all participation in human affairs? Do not these events with their issue stand out as a microcosm of the great converging lines which in the far-distant future are to issue in one glorious resultant—the realisation of a holy will through the free and independent action of created wills?

III. The RECOGNITION OF GOD'S ACTION COMES OUT IN THE RESULT. The Divine action is silent, unobserved, often unknown while in process. Samuel saw it as a reality when Saul stood before him. The story of the asses and of the search then had another meaning. Men see not one half of the realities of life. The true, real world is the unseen. The great transactions are wrought in the inner man. We are often led by a hand we do not see, and drawn on by a sweet influence we cannot define. Only the more spiritual, saintly souls discern God. But as Samuel saw what God had been doing, so we at last come to see what God hath wrought. That will be a wondrous recognition of the all-working Spirit when a vast redeemed race shall, in review of life's chequered course, sing the new song, and exclaim with deep significance, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto *thy name* give glory."

IV. The DIVINE REASON FOR THE EXERCISE OF THIS SILENT POWER. The compassion of God for his wayward people (ver. 16) was the spring of the particular direction he gave on this day to the course of Saul and Samuel. Every small series of events affecting individuals and families is, so far as relates to the action of God in them, governed by some Divine reason. Though trouble be brought on, the reason is still one of mercy. The retributions of Providence are in mercy to the universe he governs. And it may certainly be said of the sum-total of events, that when the great result shall be attained, it will be known then, if not before, that all was the expression of a compassion which sought to save the erring world from its own miseries.

General lessons:—1. The perfect government of God is secured by his mastery of every detail in the action and willing of his creatures. 2. There is consolation for his people in the fact that he directeth the spirit of man, and can subdue *all* things to himself. 3. It is blessed to go forth daily with the assurance that God works with us, in us, and for us, and will therefore perfect that which concerneth us.

Vers. 18—24.—*Shadows of coming events.* The facts are—1. Saul, on accosting Samuel, is invited to stay with him, is assured of the safety of the asses, and is caused to know that great honour is in store for him. 2. Saul, taken by surprise, desires to have further explanations of the language used. 3. Samuel entertains Saul with all the honours due to a distinguished guest. The position of Samuel was one of relative advantage, for Saul was ignorant of the Divine intent, while he knew the purpose of God. The course taken by Samuel was as follows:—First he intimated to Saul that it would be well to accept his proffered hospitality, as he had a communication to make which would draw out his interest (ver. 19). Then he relieves his care about his father's property, and awakens more curiosity by the further intimation that the choice things of Israel were in reserve for him and his father's house. To prevent hasty explanations, he next induces him to take his place in an entertainment as chief guest; thus by a significant act preparing him and the people for something more definite. And with all the kindliness and courtesy due to distinction, he threw a gleam of light on the strange proceeding by reminding him that though his presence there seemed accidental, it was not quite so, as he was the person for whom the dish of honour had been reserved (ver. 24). Thus was the nomination of Saul as the king shadowed forth. In all this the prophet acted in his official capacity as representative of God. May we not see here how God prepares us for disclosures of his will?

I. The FULL TRUTH GOD WOULD HAVE US KNOW IS BROKEN UP AND MADE CLEAR BY DEGREES. The prophet here was slightly opening the veil before the eyes of Saul; he was qualifying his sight for dazzling splendour. And that is just what all the prophets of God have done and are doing for us. They intimate to us that there are great truths in reserve, and so speak to us by the way as to indicate in dim outline what some day will stand out in eternal clearness. The figures, the types, the allusions to the "unspeakable," the reminders that we are but disciples, children—all are foreshadowings of great realities on which the mind will in future gaze. "We know

in part." It is true *the Bible is all we need* for salvation, and contains more spiritual truth than elsewhere to be found; but in one sense it is to men a treasure, and we are only fitted to receive out of it a dim intimation of *the* truth, as Saul was fitted only to receive from the mind of the prophet a portion of what was there for him. The *process by which God's truth* was given to the world—by allusion, dim prophecy type, historical examples foreshadowing *the* Christ, till at last the full announcement came—is another illustration of the gentleness and wisdom wherewith God has "spoken" to men.

II. The FULL HONOURS GOD HAS IN RESERVE FOR HIS PEOPLE ARE GRADUALLY REVEALED. Saul wondered what distinction was awaiting him. He felt unworthy of such language as that used by the prophet. His wonder was not satisfied at once. Men have been known to die under the sudden declarations of bliss awaiting them. Equally so God has in reserve for all who are one with Christ a crown, a glory, an honour, which though we know by name, we know not in reality. "We know not what we shall be." There is a joy and glory unspeakable. There are things which an apostle could not utter. Future realities are only dimly shadowed forth by earthly words and symbols. A full vision of coming honours might paralyse the strongest frame.

General lessons:—1. Deep interest in the welfare of the Church of God will suppress all feelings of personal jealousy. 2. A good man will enter heartily into new methods recognised by God, even though at first they were distressing to his own heart. 3. The qualities of gentleness and courtesy towards God's servants have the highest sanction, and do much to facilitate private and public business. 4. The keenest sense of unworthiness is that experienced when God confers on us the choice honours and treasures of his kingdom. 5. The transition to the full glory of the future will be natural and easy in so far as we avail ourselves of the shadowings forth of the reality contained in God's word.

Vers. 25—27.—*Interest in public affairs.* The facts are—1. After the public intimation of Saul's coming distinction Samuel converses with him in private. 2. On sending him away on the next day Samuel will have no one present at the moment of parting. Saul is passive. Samuel is still the most important. As yet all had been public. Enough had been said to call up from Saul's heart feelings and aspirations which in his quiet life had lain dormant (ver. 19). He now felt that God had *something* for him to do in Israel, and his heart revealed sentiments answering to the shadowed honour. It was fit, therefore, to commence privately on topics connected with the condition and prospects of Israel. The invitation to the privacy of the house-top for this purpose was thus in keeping with Samuel's wise procedure, and a good illustration of his deep interest in the public welfare. The most probable explanation of the conduct of Samuel certainly is, that his concern for the welfare of the nation and of the coming king irresistibly prompted him to converse on the wants of the age, and the responsibilities of Saul's new position as a chosen servant.

I. IT IS THE DUTY OF A RELIGIOUS MAN, AND IN KEEPING WITH HIS CHARACTER AND PROFESSION, TO TAKE A DEEP INTEREST IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS. Samuel's interest in affairs was, it is true, official, as head of the state, but the official acts had their root in a deep personal longing for the prosperity of Israel. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem." "They shall prosper that love thee," was the feeling which every true descendant of Abraham was supposed to entertain. The best days of Israel's history show that the pious were proud of their country, its institutions, its rulers, its laws, and the order and purity of its administration. 1. *The state claims our interest.* (1) *The law of benevolence* supports this claim. Every man in the state is our neighbour; his comfort and peace and safety depend on the administration of affairs; we can only reach the individuals by doing our part to render affairs useful to all. (2) The *principles of religion are applicable to state affairs.* Faith in Christ and repentance toward God are not the whole of practical religion, though they are the spring and support of many other feelings and principles. Righteousness, purity, supreme regard for the Unseen, kindliness and generosity, unselfishness and truth, can find expression in laws, in commercial arrangements, and in foreign and domestic policy. Loyalty to these religious principles requires that we see that they are recognised everywhere. (3) The *adaptation of Christianity to the entire life of man* is one of

the *most commanding evidences of its Divine character*. It professes to make *all* things new. It forms the true, perfect manhood. A religion which is seen practically to enter into every sphere of human activity, as the conserving "salt," carries with it the proof that it comes from the Creator of man and of society. He, then, who loves his Christianity, and would advance its conquests, must show by his interest in the State that it is "profitable unto all things," even to public affairs. (4) The *great calamities brought on communities* have resulted from the *predominance in state affairs of irreligious principles*. When "rulers of Sodom," men of godless lives, are left to have charge of affairs, when the holy and conscientious leave their country's business to persons with whom they would not leave their own private affairs, disaster has come, and will ever come. There can be nothing in such a line of conduct at variance with Christian character or profession. The enforcement of righteousness all over the world must be right. To love Christ supremely, and to labour that souls may be converted to him, is no more inconsistent with promoting righteousness in state affairs, and watching its progress there with keen interest, than with seeing that our private business is honestly transacted.

II. EMERGENCIES WILL ARISE WHEN INTEREST IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS MAY FIND DISTINCT EXPRESSION. The emergency which developed Samuel's deep interest did not create it. There is a fountain of strong feeling and righteous thought in a truly good man's nature. Crises in a people's history bring out the latent feeling, and shape it into word or deed. There should not be a day on which a Christian does not bear all the interests of his country on his heart, and give them some direct or indirect support. But in the changes of human affairs, and in the incessant struggle between the good and evil forces of society, there arise now and then opportunities for every righteous man to do his best towards securing a righteousness in the State.

III. The MANNER IN WHICH INTEREST IS SHOWN WILL DEPEND ON POSITION AND OPPORTUNITIES. Samuel showed his interest by discussing with Saul the general question of the people's welfare, and by fitting his mind for coming responsibilities. Every Christian can express his interest intelligently, faithfully, kindly, and prayerfully by seizing the opportunities appropriate to his situation in life. But prayer for kings and rulers, personal observance of the course of events, acquaintance with the real needs of the country, encouragement of a sound, righteous, political literature, support to men of tested character, exercise of powers conferred by law, infusion into controversies of a generous, truth-loving spirit—these are means within reach of most, and cannot but issue in blessing to all. The *interest thus due to public state affairs* is also due by the Christian to the *general affairs of the Church of God*. Every one should bear on his heart the welfare of the body of Christ, and do all he can to heal its wounds, cleanse its spirit, and insure its highest happiness and prosperity. Do men sufficiently identify their personal religious interests with those of the one Church? Is the oneness of the body of Christ properly appreciated? Do our prayers and tears flow forth as they ought for the *kingdom of God?*

General considerations:—1. The causes of so little interest in public affairs by many Christian people. 2. How Christian people can manifest a proper interest apart from the painful contentions to which they are perhaps constitutionally unfitted. 3. The degree of sympathy due to good men who from sense of duty enter into the perils and annoyances of public life, and how it can be expressed. 4. The question of how much of national trouble, sorrow, and poverty is connected with neglect on the part of the morally powerful sections of society. 5. How far Christian men are really making love of righteousness and truth and peace superior to social customs and party ties.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—25. (GIBEAH, RAMAH.)—*The king desired by the people.* 1. The *choice* of the first king of Israel was made by Samuel, prophet and judge, as the highest authority under God in the nation; and it was afterwards confirmed by lot, wherein the Divine will was openly expressed (ch. x. 21). "The history of the world cannot produce another instance in which a public determination was formed to appoint a

king, and yet no one proposed either himself or any other person to be king, but referred the determination entirely to God" (Scott). 2. In *making choice* of Saul, Samuel believed that he would be acceptable to the people, and fulfil the purpose for which they had desired a king, in saving them out of the hand of the Philistines (ch. ix. 17) and the children of Ammon (ch. xii. 12); and he appears to have expected that he would be faithful to the principle of the theocracy, and rule in obedience to the Divine will. He did all that lay in his power that this expectation might be realised; he entertained a strong affection for Saul; and it was only when the latter proved utterly unfaithful to his trust that he reluctantly and sorrowfully abandoned him to his fate. 3. His choice was *directed* by a higher wisdom than his own, which saw the end from the beginning. Whilst the Divine King of Israel sanctioned what was good in their desire, he fulfilled it in such a manner as to convince them of what was evil in it, and to accomplish far-reaching purposes which the prophet himself did not foresee.

> "The ken your world is gifted with descends
> In the everlasting justice as low down
> As eye doth in the sea, which though it mark
> The bottom from the shore, in the wide main
> Discerns it not; and, nevertheless, it is,
> But hidden by its deepness" (Dante, 'Purg.').

"Saul is not selected by them, but given to them; whom they adopt and embrace they know not why; and who, whether or not he is able to guide and govern them, proves to be a faithful representative of their own state of mind, a very type and embodiment of that character and those habits of mind which they themselves are exhibiting" (Maurice). "The theocratic principle was more fully developed in the reaction than could have happened had the king been truly pious, so that we may say that Saul was chosen by God, because in his omniscience he foresaw that he would not turn to him with his whole heart. Saul and David are in necessary connection. On the threshhold of royalty God first shows in Saul what the king of Israel is without him; then in David what the king is with him. Both are types or representatives. The events which befell them are actual prophecies, which first of all passed into fulfilment in the history of the Israelitish monarchy, and then through the whole history of the world" (Hengstenberg). The following chapters record the development of the successive stages of the Divine method according to which the popular desire was gratified and corrected. The man destined for king was—

I. FITTED BY PECULIAR QUALIFICATIONS (vers. 1, 2). Notice—1. *His family relationship.* He was the son of Kish, of the family of Matri (ch. x. 21), of the tribe of Benjamin; his cousin (or perhaps uncle—1 Chron. viii. 33) being Abner, afterwards "the captain of his host" (ch. xiv. 51); his name—Saul = asked—being "an omen of his history." Kish was a man of wealth and good social position, a fact which would gain for his son general respect; he appears to have been an affectionate father (ver. 5; ch. x. 2); and he resided at Gibeah (ch. x. 26), "a hill," formerly a place of notorious profligacy (Judges xix.), and subsequently the seat of Saul's government, but was buried at Zelah (2 Sam. xxi. 14). Of him nothing more is known. Benjamin was the smallest of the tribes of Israel (ver. 21), but the most warlike of them (Gen. xlix. 27). The selection of a king from it, therefore, would not be likely to excite the jealousy of the other tribes, whilst he would doubtless prove an able leader of their armies. There was in Saul "the strange union of fierceness and of gentleness which run, as hereditary qualities do often run, through the whole history of that frontier clan" (Stanley). 2. *His personal appearance.* He was in the prime of manhood, and of lofty stature and great warlike beauty (ver. 2; ch. x. 23, 24). "Great stress is laid upon this, because his distinguished stature, with the impression of bodily prowess which it conveyed, helped much to recommend him to the choice of the people. When, after a long peace, there was no man of distinguished renown among them, and when in battle much less depended upon the military skill than upon the bodily prowess of the chief in single combats, or in the partial actions with which most battles commenced it was natural enough that the people should take pride in the gigantic proportions of their leader, as calculated

to strike terror into the enemy and to inspire confidence in his followers; besides that, it was no mean advantage that the crest of the leader should, from his tallness, be seen from afar by the people" (Kitto). 3. *His mental and moral characteristics.* He was possessed of little mental culture. He had not been instructed in the schools of the prophets (ch. x. 11). His life had been spent in retired, rustic occupation, in which he was so absorbed that he was less acquainted with the political and religious movements of his time than his own servant (ver. 6). He was obedient to his father (ver. 4), tenderly concerned about his feelings (ver. 5), persevering in labour, and ready to take advice even from one beneath him (ver. 10). He exhibited a courteous, modest, and humble bearing (ver. 21; ch. x. 21). He was, in his earlier career, capable of prudent reserve (ch. x. 16, 27); patriotic, zealous, fearless, energetic (ch. xi. 6), resolute, and magnanimous (ch. xi. 13); and he had a strong sense of the value of religion and religious institutions. But underneath these qualities there lay others of a different nature, which his subsequent course revealed, viz., waywardness, rash and fiery impulses, impatience, the love of display, pride and self-will, and morbid tendencies to distrust and jealousy; and instead of overcoming them by the aid of Divine grace, he yielded to them, until they gained the entire mastery over him, choked the good seed which was sown in his heart (Matt. xiii. 22), and caused his ruin. God sees the latent as well as the manifest dispositions of men, and adapts his dealings toward them accordingly.

II. GUIDED BY SPECIAL PROVIDENCE (vers. 3—14). These verses furnish a practical commentary on what was said by Hannah concerning the operations of Providence (ch. ii. 7, 8). In leaving his home in Gibeah, at the direction of his father, in search of the lost asses, travelling through the hill country of Ephraim, the land of Shalisha, of Shalim, and of the Benjamites, to the land of Zuph (ch. i. 1), and going in search of the "seer" (*roëh*), Saul acted freely, and according to his best judgment; but his three days' journey and all connected with it—his lack of success, his desire to return, his servant's advice, his destitution of food, his servant's possession of a coin for a present, his meeting with "young maidens going out to draw water," his presence in the city at a certain time—were ordered by God to the attainment of an end of which he had no conception. "All these incidents and wanderings were only preparations and mediate causes by which God accomplished his design concerning Saul." His providence—1. Often makes *insignificant* events productive of important results. It is truly astonishing how the very greatest things depend upon events which are generally regarded at the time of their occurrence as of little account. Of this the lives of individuals and the history of nations afford innumerable illustrations. "What is it that we dare call insignificant? The least of all things may be as a seed cast into the seed-field of time, to grow there and bear fruits, which shall be multiplying when time shall be no more. We cannot always trace the connections of things; we do not ponder those we can trace, or we should tremble to call anything beneath the notice of God. It has been eloquently said that where we see a trifle hovering unconnected in space, higher spirits can discern its fibres stretching through the whole expanse of the system of the world, and hanging on the remotest limits of the future and the past" (Kitto, 'Cyc. of Bib. Lit.,' first ed., Art. 'Providence;' Knapp's 'Theology'). 2. Makes *accidental* circumstances subservient to a pre-arranged plan. "The thread of every life is entangled with other threads beyond all reach of calculation. Those unforeseen accidents which so often control the lot of men constitute a *superstratum* in the system of human affairs, wherein, peculiarly, the Divine providence holds empire for the accomplishment of its special purposes. It is from this hidden and inexhaustible mine of chances—chances, as we must call them—that the Governor of the world draws, with unfathomable skill, the materials of his dispensations towards each individual of mankind" (Isaac Taylor, 'Nat. Hist. of Enthusiasm'). 3. Overrules *human plans,* in harmony with human freedom, for the fulfilment of Divine purposes (Prov. xvi. 9, 33).

III. INDICATED BY DIVINE REVELATION (vers. 15—25). Such revelation.—1. *Was primarily and directly given* to one who lived in closest fellowship with God. Samuel was like the lofty mountain peak, which catches the rays of the morning sun long ere they reach the valleys below. On the day before Saul came to the city (of Ramah), the prophet, ever watching and listening for the indications of the Divine

will concerning the future king, was fully instructed therein by "the word of the Lord" (ch. iii. 21), which contained (1) a promise of *sending* him (ver. 16), (2) a direction to *anoint* him, (3) a statement of the *purpose* of his appointment, and (4) an expression of *commiseration* for the need of the people. Nothwithstanding they had rejected God, he had not rejected them, but still calls them "my people," and in wrath remembers mercy. The long-suffering of God toward transgressors should teach his servants forbearance, and incite them to renewed efforts for their welfare. It appears to have been after Samuel had received the Divine message that he invited the people (perhaps the elders who had formerly waited upon him) to a sacrificial feast, and arranged for the worthy entertainment of his chief guest (ver. 24). The displeasure which he previously felt at their request (ch. viii. 6) has now given place to disinterested and earnest desire for its fulfilment. 2. *Harmonised with, and was confirmed by*, the operations of Providence. Samuel is expecting the fulfilment of the promise given to him, and already is on the way from his own house in the city to offer sacrifice on the height (the loftier of the two hills on which Ramah was situated), when he sees the towering form of Saul, a stranger to the place, who has come up into the midst of the city according to the direction of the maidens at the foot of the hill, and the inner voice with which he is so familiar says to him, "Behold the man," &c. (ver. 17). There is nothing in the simple dress of the prophet to indicate his dignity; and as he passes onward Saul "draws near to him in the gate," and in reply to his inquiry concerning the seer's residence, receives the answer, "I am the seer." Seldom has the meeting of two persons shown more clearly the co-operation of the revealed word with the guiding providence of God or the unity of the purpose by which both are pervaded, or been followed by more momentous results. 3. And its communication required a *gradual preparation* on the part of him to whom it chiefly pertained, in order that it might be received aright. This Samuel sought to effect—(1) By awakening in Saul new and elevated thoughts and hopes (vers. 19, 20); directing him to go up before him, as a mark of respect, inviting him to be his guest, telling him that he would "reveal to him his innermost thoughts," setting his mind at rest from lower cares, and assuring him of the highest dignity. "For whom is every desirable thing in Israel?" (ver. 20). (2) By giving him honour in the presence of others (vers. 22—24); appointing to him the chief place among his thirty guests, appropriating to him the best portion of the meal, and intimating that the honour had been reserved for him in foreknowledge of his arrival. (3) By holding confidential and prolonged conversation with him (ver. 25), pertaining "not to the royal dignity, but surely to the deep religious and political decline of the people of God, the opposition of the heathen, the causes of the impotency to oppose these enemies, the necessity of a religious change in the people, and of a leader thoroughly obedient to the Lord" (O. von Gerlach). In this manner Saul was prepared for the more definite indication given on the following morning. A gradual preparation of a somewhat similar kind is often needed by men when about to receive a Divine commission.—D.

Ver. 9. (RAMAH.)—*Perplexity.* "Peradventure he can show us our way." Here is a picture of a young man perplexed about his way. Consider—

I. THE OBJECT OF HIS PERPLEXITY. It is a common thing for a young man to be uncertain and anxious with reference to—1. The *ordinary business* of life. He knows not, it may be, the particular vocation for which he is most fitted, or which affords the best prospect of success. Leaving his father's house,

> "The world is all before him, where to choose
> His place of rest, and Providence his guide."

But he is doubtful whither to direct his steps. He meets with disappointment in his endeavours. "The bread is spent" (ver. 7), and he has no money in his purse. Under such circumstances many a one has first awoke to a sense of his dependence on God, and his need of his guidance, or has sought him with a fervour he has never displayed before. His loneliness and distress have been the occasion of spiritual thought and high resolve (Gen. xxviii. 16, 20; Luke xv. 18). 2. The *chief purpose* of life. As each vocation has its proper end so has life generally. It is something

higher than the finding of strayed asses, the recovery of lost property, or "buying and selling and getting gain." Even the dullest soul has often a feeling that it was made for a nobler end than the gratification of bodily appetites, or the supply of earthly needs. But "what is the chief end of man?" Alas, how many know not what it is, nor the means of attaining it; miss their way, and wander on "in endless mazes lost!" 3. The *true Guide* of life. Who shall tell thee "all that is in thine heart" (ver. 19)—declare its aspirations, and direct them to their goal? Where is he to be found, and by what means may his favour be obtained? Books and teachers abound, and to them the young man naturally turns for instruction; but how often do they leave him in greater perplexity than ever. "Where shall wisdom be found?" (Job xxviii. 12). "To whom should we go?" "We must wait patiently [said Socrates] until some one, either a god or some inspired man, teach us our moral and religious duties, and, as Pallas in Homer did to Diomede, remove the darkness from our eyes" (Plato). "I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things" (John iv. 25). "Sir, we would see Jesus" (John xii. 21).

II. THE METHOD OF HIS PROCEDURE. The course which it behoves him to take is that of—1. *Diligent inquiry* concerning the object of his desire. It exists, and a firm belief in its existence is the first condition of such inquiry. There may be healthy doubt about its nature, but absolute scepticism is destruction. Inquiry is the way to truth. It must be pursued with quenchless zeal and ceaseless perseverance. And if so pursued it will not be vain (Prov. ii. 4, 5). 2. *Ready reception of light*, from whatever quarter it may come. Truth often comes from unexpected sources. The true inquirer is reverent and humble, and willing to receive information from the most despised (vers. 10, 11).

> 'Seize upon truth, where'er tis found,
> Amongst your friends, amongst your foes,
> On Christian or on heathen ground;
> The flower's Divine, where'er it grows.'

3. *Faithfully acting up to the light he possesses.* "Well said; come, let us go." Inquiry alone is insufficient. The duty that lies plainly and immediately before us must be performed.

III. THE SUCCESS OF HIS ENDEAVOUR. 1. *He is brought face to face with the best Guide.* "I am the seer" (ver. 19). The best service that men and books, including the Scriptures themselves (John v. 39, 40), can render is to bring us into direct communion with the Prophet of Nazareth, "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." Our perplexity ends only when he manifests himself to us and says, "I that speak unto thee am he." "Master, where dwellest thou? Come and see" (John i. 38).

> "And what delights can equal those
> That stir the spirit's inner deeps,
> When one that loves, but knows not, reaps
> A truth from one that loves and knows?" (Tennyson).

2. He rises into a *higher region* of thought and feeling, and receives all the direction that he really needs. His anxiety about earthly affairs is relieved (Matt. vi. 32). The true purpose of life is shown him (Matt. vi. 33). He has "an unction from the Holy One, and knows all things" (1 John ii. 20). He is "turned into another man," and "God is with him" (ch. x. 6, 7). 3. He attains great *honour and power.* Saul is not the only one who has gone forth in the performance of lowly duty and found a kingdom, or to whom a temporary loss has been an occasion of permanent and invaluable gain. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."—D.

(A SACRAMENTAL ADDRESS.)

Ver. 13. (RAMAH.)—*Guests at a sacred feast.*—"For the people will not eat until he come, because he doth bless the sacrifice; and afterwards they eat that be bidden." This language refers to a feast provided on the high place of the city where Samuel dwelt. 1. It was a sacrificial feast. The victim (a thank offering) having been

slain, and its blood sprinkled about the altar, a portion of it was burnt in the sacred fire, and the rest reserved for food. "The thank or praise offering was the expression of the worshipper's feelings of adoring gratitude on account of having received some spontaneous tokens of the Lord's goodness. This was the highest form (of the peace offering), as here the grace of God shone prominently forth" (Fairbairn, 'Typology'). 2. It was attended by numerous guests—thirty persons—distinguished in some way from others, and specially invited by Samuel. "The participation by the offerer and his friends—this family feast upon the sacrifice—may be regarded as the most distinctive characteristic of the peace offering. It denoted that the offerer was admitted to a state of near fellowship and enjoyment with God, shared part and part with Jehovah and his priests, had a standing in his house and a seat at his table. It was, therefore, the symbol of established friendship with God, and near communion with him in the blessings of his kingdom; and was associated in the minds of the worshippers with feelings of peculiar joy and gladness" (Fairbairn). 3. It required the presence of Samuel himself in order that the guests might properly partake thereof. "The blessing of the sacrifice must mean the asking of a blessing upon the food before the meal. This was done at every common meal, and much more at a solemn festival like this. The present, however, is the only *recorded* example of the custom" (Kitto). "It refers to the thanksgiving and prayer offered before the sacrificial meal" (Keil). Now this feast may be regarded as a foreshadowing of the Lord's Supper. A greater than Samuel is the Master of the feast (Matt. xxvi. 18; John xiii. 13, 14). Our Lord has provided it by the sacrifice of himself — of which the ancient sacrifices were a type, and the Holy Supper is a memorial. And he himself comes to preside at his own table. As his guests—

I. WE AWAIT HIS PRESENCE. "The people will not eat until he come." His presence is—1. Necessary to the feast. The bread and wine are not simply memorials, they are also symbols; and in order to partake of them aright we must "discern the Lord's body." "Without me ye can do nothing." 2. Promised by himself. "There am I in the midst of them" (Matt. xviii. 20). "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice" (John xvi. 22). "Lo, I am with you alway" (Matt. xxviii. 20). The sacred ordinance itself is a permanent assurance of his presence. 3. Realised in the heart. We look not for his *real presence* in the material emblems, but in the believing heart. "I in them" (John xvii. 26; xiv. 21; Ephes. iii. 17). In a different spirit from that in which the words were originally spoken, we ask, "What think ye, that he will not come to the feast?" (John xi. 56). We await his coming with reverence and humility, contrition, and faith, and ardent desire. O that he may appear to each of us, saying, "Peace be unto you," and be "known in breaking of bread." "Blessed are they that wait for him" (Isa. xxx. 8; John xx. 29).

II. WE DESIRE HIS BLESSING. "He doth bless the sacrifice," and in doing so he also doth bless his guests. 1. As of *old*, when he often gave thanks before the meal (Matt. xiv. 19; xv. 36; Mark xiv. 22; Luke xxiv. 30; John vi. 23; 1 Cor. xi. 24). 2. As the ever-living Intercessor, representing his people, and rendering their prayers and praises acceptable to God. "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the Church will I sing praises unto thee" (Heb. ii. 12). 3. As when he went away, still stretching forth his hands in benediction toward his disciples, and enabling them to be "continually praising and blessing God" (Luke xxiv. 51—53). "Stretch forth, O Lord, in blessing toward us thy hands, that were nailed for our redemption to the bitter cross!"

III. WE PARTAKE OF HIS PROVISION. "And afterwards they eat that be bidden." We do not merely look upon the emblems of his body and blood, but we eat and drink, and thereby signify—1. Our participation in the benefits of his death—forgiveness, peace, and righteousness. 2. Our fellowship with him in his sufferings and death, his spirit and life, his strength and joy (John vi. 53). "And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John i. 3). 3. And our union and communion with each other, through fellowship with him, in love and gladness. "For we being many are one bread, and one body" (1 Cor. x. 17). Let us, then, "rejoice before the Lord." The cup is "a cup of blessing" (thanksgiving). The service is intended to be a service of joy—joy in the Lord; in the contemplation

of his glorious character, in the reception of his manifold benefits, and in the anticipation of "the marriage supper of the Lamb."—D.

Vers. 26, 27; ch. x. 1—8. (RAMAH.) — *Saul privately anointed king.* "And Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head." There is in the life of almost every man some day beyond all others, the events of which serve to determine his future course. Such a day was that which is here described in the life of Saul. On the preceding day he had been guided by Providence to Samuel, and led by means of his conversation to entertain exalted expectations concerning his future destiny. "And when they were come down from the high place into the city, Samuel communed with Saul upon the top of the house" (ver. 25). "And a bed was spread for Saul on the roof, and he lay down" (LXX., Vulg.). "The roofs in Judæa were flat, with a parapet around them. To be lodged there was considered an honour. In fine weather it was not unusual to sleep in the open air, but the place might occasionally be covered with a tent" (Geddes). Strange thoughts must have passed through his mind as he rested there under the silent stars. He rose early to prepare for his journey, and watched the morning dawn over the distant hills, ushering in the most eventful day of his life. Then the voice of Samuel called to him from below, saying, "Arise, and I will send thee away." The prophet accompanied him, as a mark of respect, along the street, toward the end of the city (Ramah). But before parting from him he directed him to send his servant forward, that he might communicate to him alone "the word of God." And in this private interview Saul was—

I. APPOINTED TO THE HIGHEST DIGNITY (ver. 1). 1. *By a rite of consecration.* "Taking a vial, he anointed Saul, thus placing the institution of royalty on the same footing as that of the sanctuary and the priesthood (Exod. xxx. 33; Levit. viii. 10), as appointed and consecrated by God and to God, and intended to be the medium for receiving and transmitting blessing to the people" (Edersheim). "Anointing with oil was a symbol of endowment with the Spirit of God; as the oil itself, by virtue of the strength which it gives to the vital spirits, was a symbol of the Spirit of God as the principle of Divine and spiritual power" (Keil). "Two very good reasons they (the Jews) render why God did command the use of such anointing oil as in respect of the action. First, that it did signify the Divine election of that person and designation to that office; from whence it was necessary that it should be performed by a prophet who understood the will of God. Secondly, that by it the person anointed might be made fit to receive the Divine influx." "In respect to the matter they give two reasons why it was *oil*, and not any other liquor. First, because, of all other, it signifies the greatest glory and excellency. Secondly, they tell us that oil continueth uncorrupted longer than any other liquor. And, indeed, it hath been observed to preserve not only itself but other things from corruption; hence they conclude it fit their kings and priests, whose succession was to continue for ever, should be anointed with oil, the most proper emblem of eternity. Beside, they observe that simple oil without any mixture was sufficient for the candlestick; but that which was designed for unction must be compounded with principal spices, which signify a good name, always to be acquired by those in places of greatest dignity by the most laudable and honourable actions" ('Pearson on the Creed,' Art. ii.). 2. Accompanied with *an act of homage.* "And kissed him." The kiss was given on the mouth, the hand, the feet, or the garment, and was a token of friendship, affection, and, in the case of princes, of reverence and homage (1 Kings xviii. 19; Ps. ii. 12; Hosea xiii. 3). 3. And with *a statement of its significance.* "Is it not?" &c. "Hath not the Lord anointed thee to be ruler over his people, over Israel? And thou shalt rule over the people of the Lord, and thou shalt save them out of the hand of their enemies" (LXX.). His appointment was of God, and the purpose of it was the deliverance of his people. The manner in which he received it shows the change which had already taken place in his feelings (ch. ix. 21). When God has work for a man to do, he has power to dispose and prepare him to do it.

II. ASSURED OF CONFIRMATORY SIGNS (vers. 2—6). The events which Samuel predicted were *proofs* of the Divine interposition, *means* of Saul's further preparation, and *emblems* of his future dignity and power. 1. *First sign*—his royalty was an

appointment made by God. By it he would be convinced that it was not made by Samuel merely, but by God, who fulfilled his words (ch. ix. 20); at the same time he would be taught to leave lower cares, and aspire after the highest things. "Inwardly free, and consecrated to the Lord alone, he is to pursue his way *upward*." 2. *Second sign*—his royalty was an honour shared with God, and held in subordination to him (vers. 3, 4). A part of the offerings that were about to be presented before Jehovah in Bethel would be presented to Saul, but only a part of them; the greater portion would be given to Jehovah as a sign of the supreme homage due to the invisible King of Israel, while he was to accept the lesser portion as a sign of his subordinate position under him. "That this surprising prelude to all future royal gifts is taken from bread of offering points to the fact that in future some of the wealth of the land, which has hitherto gone undivided to the sanctuary, will go to the king" (Ewald). God commands us to "honour the king" (1 Pet. ii. 17), but the honour which is due to himself may not be usurped by man (Matt. xxii. 21; Acts xii. 23). 3. *Third sign* — his royalty was an endowment dependent upon God, and effectually administered only through his grace. Coming to the hill (Gibeah) of God, near the city (Gibeah, his home), where there stood a garrison of the Philistines (or perhaps a pillar erected by them as a sign of their authority), which could hardly fail to impress upon him with great force the main purpose for which he had been appointed king, he would meet a band of prophets descending from the high place (of sacrifice), playing instruments of music and prophesying (speaking and singing in ecstatic utterances the praises of Jehovah, declaring his greatness, and his victory over his adversaries), and—(1) He would be imbued with a Divine power. "The Spirit of Jehovah will come upon thee." (2) He would catch the spirit of the prophets, and join them in their ecstatic utterances. "Thou wilt prophesy with them." (3) He would undergo a surprising transformation. "And will be turned into another man." When he had turned his back to go from Samuel, "God gave him another heart" (ver. 9), but the prediction of the prophet was more completely fulfilled afterwards (ver. 10). The fulfilment of these predictions shows that apparently accidental events are clearly foreseen by God, human affairs are under his direction and control, and "the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will" (Prov. xxi. 1), and that "the teachings of Providence unite with the teachings of revelation and of the Holy Spirit to show men their duty and their destiny."

III. ADMONISHED OF FUTURE DUTY (vers. 7, 8). In relation to—1. *Circumstances.* "Do thou what thy hand findeth," *i. e.* what circumstances indicate to be thy duty. His own judgment would have to be exercised, but he would not be left to it alone. 2. *God.* "For God is with thee," to observe, direct, and aid thee. The firm belief in his presence is a mighty preservative from the neglect of duty, and a powerful incentive and encouragement to its performance. 3. *The prophet*, through whom he would receive "the word of God," in obedience to which he was bound always to act. "Gilgal, on the south-western bank of the Jordan, was then, from all indications, one of the most holy places in Israel, and the true centre of the whole people; it had a like importance before, and much more then, because the Philistine control reached so far eastward that the middle point of the kingdom must have been pressed back to the bank of the Jordan. There the people must have assembled for all general political questions, and thence, after offering and consecration, have marched forth armed to war" (Ewald). Thither he was to gather the people; not, indeed, immediately, but when circumstances indicated that it was the proper time to prepare for war with the Philistines, which was the main object of his appointment. Samuel promised to meet him there, offer burnt offerings (dedicatory) and peace offerings (eucharistic), and tell him what to do; and directed him to wait seven days, and to do nothing without him. The direction was explicit, it set a limit to his authority, and its neglect was the first step in his disobedience (ch. xiii. 13). When God places men in positions of authority, he teaches them the obligations which they involve; and if they fail it is not from want of knowing them.—D.

Ver. 17.—*The man, yet not the man.* I. THE SANCTION GIVEN BY THE LORD TO SAUL'S ELEVATION. Instances may easily be adduced in which the writers of the

Old Testament ascribed to the Lord directly what was only indirectly recognised or permitted by him; but in the present case there is obviously more than Divine allowance. Jehovah pointed out Saul to the prophet Samuel, and commanded that he should be anointed captain, or king. We account for this on that principle of Divine government which allows to men that which they most wish for, in order that they may learn wisdom from the result. The people of Israel had not asked the Lord for such a king as he might see fit to choose and appoint. They had asked the prophet for a warlike chief like the kings of the nations and tribes around them, and the Lord saw meet to let them have what they desired; the young giant Saul was just the style of man they sought, cast in the very mould they admired, and one that would teach them some painful lessons through experience. Therefore, though the Lord foresaw the disappointing career of Saul, he authorised Samuel to anoint him privately, and afterwards sanctioned his public selection and elevation to the royal dignity. Here was a leader to suit the fancy of the people—strong, impetuous, valiant. Let them have Saul for their king. Such is the way of the Lord to this day, and in individual as well as national life. He admonishes and corrects us by letting us have our own way and be filled with our own devices. We are apt to complain in our disappointment at the result, that God himself sanctioned our course. No. We did not ask him to show us his way, that we might do his will; but took our own way, did our own pleasure; and he allowed, nay, facilitated our desire. Let the issue teach us to be more wary and more humble in time to come.

II. EARLY PROGNOSTICS OF SAUL'S FAILURE. 1. The manner of his entrance on the page of history. How different from the first mention of David, faithfully keeping the sheep before he was anointed to be the royal shepherd of Israel, is the first appearance of the son of Kish in search of his father's stray asses, and visiting the venerable prophet Samuel with no higher thought in his mind than to learn, if possible, where those asses were! He did not even know Samuel by sight, though he lived but at a short distance. He seems to have been an unreflecting rustic youth, with none of those premonitions of greatness which come early to the wise, and tend to give them seriousness of purpose and elevation of aim. 2. Indications of a fitful mind. We read nothing of Saul's bearing before Samuel when informed of the destiny before him. Probably he was stunned with surprise. But so soon as he left the prophet new currents of thought and feeling began to flow through his heart. A mood of mind fell on him more grave and earnest than had appeared in him before. The Old Testament way of saying it is, that "God gave him another heart;" for the change which passes on a man under the consciousness of a high vocation suddenly received is none the less of God than it is evidently born of the occasion. He sees things in a new light, feels new responsibilities; new springs of feeling and new capacities of speech and action reveal themselves in him. But Saul took every influence by fits and starts. He quickly gained, and as quickly lost. There was in him no steady growth of conviction or principle. When he fell in with men of religious fervour he was fervent too When he met the prophets chanting Jehovah's praise he caught their rapture, and, joining their procession, lifted up his voice also in the sacred song. But it was a mere fit of piety. Of course Saul had been educated in the religion of his fathers, and in that sense knew the God of Israel; but it seems evident, from the surprise occasioned by his appearance among the prophets, that he had never shown any zeal for the glory and worship of Jehovah; and the sudden ecstasy at Gibeah, having no foundation of spiritual principle, came to nought. Alas! men may sing spiritual songs with emotion who have no enduring spiritual life. Men may catch the infection of religious enthusiasm, yet have no moral health or soundness. Men's faces may glow with a fine ardour, and yet soon after be darkened by wicked passion. Pulses of high feeling and moods of noble desire may visit minds that yet are never moved by Divine grace, and therefore are liable to be mastered, after all, by evil temper and base envy. Occasional impulses are not sufficient. "Ye must be born again."—F.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER X.

SAUL ANOINTED TO BE KING, AND SIGNS GIVEN HIM CONVINCING HIM OF THE TRUTH OF HIS APPOINTMENT (vers. 1—16). Ver. 1. —**A vial of oil.** Hebrew, "the vial of oil," because it was that same holy oil with which the priests were anointed (Exod. xxix. 7). Throughout Holy Scripture the office of king appears as one most sacred, and it is the king, and not the priest, who is especially called Messiah, Jehovah's anointed (ch. ii. 10, 35; xii. 3, 5; xvi. 6, &c.), because he represented the authority and power of God. **And kissed him.** *I. e.* did homage to him, and gave him the symbol and token of allegiance (see Ps. ii. 12). **Is it not? . . .** A strong affirmation often takes the form of a question, especially when, as probably was the case here, surprise is manifested. Saul, on whom the occurrences of the previous day must have come as strange and unintelligible marvels, was no doubt still more embarrassed when one so old and venerable, both in person and office, as Samuel solemnly consecrated him to be Israel's prince (see ch. ix. 16), and gave him the kiss of fealty and allegiance. Samuel, therefore, answers Saul's inquiring looks with this question, and, further, gives him three signs to quiet his doubts, and convince him that his appointment is from God.

Ver. 2.—The first sign—**Thou shalt find two men by Rachel's sepulchre.** In Jer. xxxi. 15 (quoted in Matt. ii. 18) Rachel's sepulchre is connected with Ramah, but in Gen. xxxv. 19 it is placed near Bethlehem. The whole of the geography of Saul's wanderings is very obscure, but Wilson ('Lands of the Bible,' i. 401) places **Zelzah** at Beit-jala, to the west of Bethlehem, in the neighbourhood of the Kabbet Rahil, or Tomb of Rachel. Though both are now in the tribe of Judah, yet by a slight rectification of the frontier, in conformity with Josh. xviii. 11—28, Zelzah would be on the border of Benjamin, and there may have been local reasons for Saul and his companion not taking the most direct route for Gibeah. The news given by these men, that the asses were found, would set Saul's mind at rest, and, freed from lower cares, he would be able to give his thoughts entirely to preparation for the higher duties that were before him. For an interesting note upon the journey of Saul home see Wilson, ii. 36.

Ver. 3.—The second sign was to be the presenting of an offering to him out of their sacrificial gifts by three men going on a pilgrimage to Bethel. He would meet them **not in the plain of Tabor,** but at the oak, *ēlon,* of Tabor. Many attempt to connect this *ēlon-Tabor* with the *allon,* or oak, under which Deborah, Rachel's nurse, was buried (Gen. xxxv. 8), and suppose that Tabor is a corruption of the name Deborah. This is scarcely possible, and it is better to acknowledge that we know nothing of the site of this tree, except that it was on the road to Bethel. This was one of the places which Samuel used to visit as judge (ch. vii. 16); but these men were on a pilgrimage thither because since the days of Jacob it had been a sacred spot, and a chief seat of the old patriarchal worship, for which see ch. ix. 12.

Ver. 4. — These pilgrims would **salute** Saul, *i. e.* give him the usual friendly greeting of travellers, and would then present to him, a stranger, two loaves of the bread intended for their offering at Bethel. By so doing, in the first place, they acknowledged him as their lord (see ch. ix. 7; xvi. 20), and, secondly, they indicated that the king would henceforth share with the sanctuary the offerings of the people. And Saul was to **receive of their hands** the present, as being now his due, for by anointing him Samuel had designated him as king.

Ver. 5.—The third sign was to be his taking part with the prophets in their religious exercises in **the hill of God**—really Gibeah, his own home. Gibeah is strictly a rounded hill, while Ramah is a height. This *Gibeah ha-Elohim* was probably that part of the hill on which the "high place" was situated, and which was evidently outside the city; for Saul, on his route homeward, met the troop of prophets descending from it. For "Gibeah of Saul" see ch. ix. 1; but, as Conder remarks, this name was given to a district as well as to a town, inasmuch as Ramah is described as situated within it—ch. xxii. 6 ('Tent Work,' ii. 111). **The garrison of the Philistines** was probably on some height in this district, and, coupled with the mention of similar military posts elsewhere (ch. xiii. 3; xiv. 4), shows that most of the tribe of Benjamin was subject to that nation, and disarmed (ch. xiii. 19); but probably, as long as the tribute was paid, its internal administration was not interfered with. **A company of the prophets.** At Gibeah Samuel had established one of his "schools of the prophets," by means of which he did so much to elevate the whole mental and moral state of the Israelites. The word rendered *company* literally means a cord or line, and so a *band* of people. These prophets were descending from the Bamah (see on ch. ix. 12), where they had been engaged in some religious exercise, and were chanting a psalm or hymn to **the**

music of various instruments. Music was one of the great means employed by Samuel in training his young men; and not only is its effect at all times elevating and refining, but in semi-barbarous times, united, as it is sure to be, with poetry, it is the chief educational lever for raising men's minds, and giving them a taste for culture and intellectual pleasures. The musical instruments mentioned are the **psaltery**, Hebrew, *nebel*, a sort of harp with ten strings stretched across a triangle, the longest string being at its base, and the shortest towards its apex; the **tabret**, Hebrew *toph*, a tambourine struck by the hand; the **pipe**, Hebrew, *chalil*, i. e. "bored" or "pierced," so called from the holes bored in it to make the notes, and being probably a sort of flute; and, lastly, the **harp**, Hebrew, *cinnor*, a sort of guitar, chiefly used for accompanying the voice, and sometimes played with the fingers, and sometimes with a plectrum or quill. There is nothing to indicate that there was only one of each of these instruments, so that the articles would be better omitted. No doubt every prophet was playing some one or other of them. **And they shall prophesy.** The conjugation used here is not that employed for the prediction of future events, but means, literally, and "they will be acting the prophet," the right word for men who were in training for the prophetic office (see 'Prophecy a Preparation for Christ,' 2nd ed. p. 50). They were really engaged in chanting God's praises with fervour, and this was no doubt one of the methods employed by Samuel to refine and spiritualise their minds. Years afterwards David was thus educated, and learned at one of Samuel's schools that skill in metre and psalmody which, added to his natural gifts, made him "the sweet singer of Israel." For *prophesying* in the sense of playing instruments of music see 1 Chron. xxv. 1—3, and in the sense of chanting, 1 Kings xviii. 29.

Ver. 6.—**The spirit of Jehovah will come upon thee.** The Hebrew means, will come mightily upon thee, will come upon thee so as to overpower thee. **And thou shalt prophesy.** Shalt act as a prophet (see above). Albeit untrained, thou shalt be carried away by religious fervour, and join in their singing and psalmody. **And be turned into another man.** New thoughts, new emotions shall take possession of thee, and in addition to the bodily strength for which hitherto thou hast been famous, thou shalt be filled with mental power, making thee eager for action, and capable of taking the lead among all men, and in all emergencies. We have an instance of this enlarged capacity in the vigour with which Saul acted against the Ammonites.

Ver. 7. —**Do as occasion serve thee.** Literally, "do for thyself as thy hand shall find," *i. e.* follow the end of circumstances, and do thy best. This is the flood-time of thy fortunes; press onward, and the kingdom is thine own, for **God is with thee,** and success is sure.

Ver. 8.—**Thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal.** We find in ch. xiii. 8—13 a meeting at Gilgal so exactly parallel to what is arranged here that we cannot help looking upon this, again, as a sort of sign to be fulfilled at a later period. It is no argument against it that Gilgal was the place where in the mean while Saul was solemnly inaugurated king; for he was appointed in order that he might deliver Israel from the Philistines (ch. ix. 16), and we may feel sure that this grand purpose would form the subject of conversation between the prophet and the soldier, either on the house-top or the next morning. In this conversation Gilgal would be selected as the place where Saul would assemble Israel for the war of independence (so Rashi and other Jewish interpreters); and so great an enterprise must necessarily be begun with religious rites, and Saul was to wait a full week for the prophet's coming, both to try his faith, which ought to have been confirmed by the fulfilment of the three appointed signs, and in order that the war might be undertaken under the same holy auspices as his own election to the kingdom. The two years' interval, were it really so long, would give time for Saul's character to develop under the forcing influences of royalty, and it would then be proved, when he felt himself every inch a king, whether he was still as amenable to the Divine authority as when he was first summoned from obscurity to mount a kingly throne. But, really, the words in ch. xiii. 1 do not justify this conclusion, and most probably the occurrences mentioned in that chapter followed immediately upon Saul's confirmation as king.

Ver. 9.—**God gave him another heart.** The Hebrew is remarkable: "When he turned his shoulder to go from Samuel, God also turned for him another heart," *i. e.* God turned him round by giving him a changed heart. He grew internally up to the level of his changed circumstances. No longer had he the feelings of a husbandman, concerned only about corn and cattle; he had become a statesman, a general, and a prince. No man could have gone through such marvellous events, and experienced such varied emotions, without a vast inward change. But it might have been only to vanity and self-complacency. Saul's change was into a hero.

Vers. 10, 11.—**To the hill.** Hebrew, "to Gibeah," his home. **He prophesied.** Took part in prophetic exercises (see on ver. 5).

On seeing this, the people of Gibeah, who **knew him beforetime,**—Hebrew, "from yesterday and the day before," but equivalent to our phrase "for years,"—asked in surprise, **What is this that is come unto the son of Kish?** What makes him thus act in a manner unlike all our long past experience of him? **Is Saul also among the prophets?** From this question two things are evident: the first, that the schools founded by Samuel already held a high place in the estimation of the Israelites; the second, that Saul had not shared in that education which so raised the prophets as a class above the mass of the people. Probably also Saul's character was not such as would have made him care for education. A young man who, while living in his neighbourhood, knew so little about Samuel (ch. ix. 6), could not have had a very inquiring or intellectual frame of mind. Of course Samuel could not, by gathering young men together, and giving them the best education the times afforded, gain for them also the highest and rarest of gifts, that of direct inspiration. Even when Elisha, the friend and attendant upon Elijah, asked his master for an elder son's portion of the Divine spirit, Elijah told him that he had asked a hard thing (2 Kings ii. 10). The disparity then that the people remarked between Saul and the prophets was that between a rich young farmer's son, who had been brought up at home, and cared only for rustic things, and these young collegians, who were enjoying a careful education (comp. John vii. 15). How good that education was is proved by the fact that at David's court all posts which required literary skill were held by prophets. No man could found schools of inspired men; but Samuel founded great educational institutions, which ended by making the Israelites a highly-trained and literary people. Saul's prophesying was not the result of training, but came to him by a Divine influence, rousing the slumbering enthusiasm of an energetic but fitful nature.

Ver. 12.—**One of the same place**—*i. e.* Gibeah—**answered and said, But who is their father?** The Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read, *But who is his father?* But this would be a foolish reply to the question, "What has happened to the son of Kish?" The meaning rather must be, You ask about the son of Kish; but what has birth to do with prophecy? None of these young men have inherited these gifts, and if Saul can take part in their prophesyings, why should he not? Kish, his father, is no worse than theirs. **Is Saul also among the prophets?** Under very different circumstances Saul once again took part in the exercises of these youthful prophets (ch. xix. 24), and evidently on both occasions with such skill and success as prove the readiness of his genius; and so struck were the people at the strange power which he thus evinced, that their expression of wonder became fixed in the national mind as a proverb. Saul was a man of great natural ability, and yet not the sort of person whom the people expected would be made king. He probably could neither read nor write, and from his extreme height was perhaps awkward and bashful; as he suffered afterwards from fits of insanity (ch. xvi. 14), he may always have been flighty and wilful; and altogether, though possessed of marvellous gifts, was certainly the very opposite of Samuel's well-trained and orderly scholars.

Ver. 13.—**He came to the high place** Saul had met the prophets coming down from the Bamah; but the same religious fervour, which had made him take so earnest a part in the prophesyings of the young men, urged him now, after parting from their company, himself to go up to the high place, there to offer his prayers and praises to God.

Vers. 14—16.—**Saul's uncle.** According to ch. xiv. 50, 51; 1 Chron. viii. 33, this would be Abner. The conversation probably took place after Saul had returned from the Bamah and gone to his own home, for in so brief a summary much necessarily is omitted. It is curious that the conversation should have taken place with the uncle, and not with the father; but possibly the latter was too well pleased to have his son back again to be very particular in his inquiries. Not so Abner. He was evidently excited by his nephew's visit to the prophet, and struck perhaps by the change in Saul himself, and would gladly have heard more. But Saul does not gratify his curiosity. **Of the matter of the kingdom . . . he told him not.** It was not merely prudent, but right to keep the matter secret. An able man like Abner would probably have begun to scheme for so great an end. Saul's silence left the fulfilment of the prophet's words entirely to God.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—8.—*Supports to faith and duty.* The facts are—1. Samuel privately anoints Saul as the chosen of God. 2. He gives him four signs of the Divine sanction of the act of anointing. (1) The safety of the asses, and his father's sorrow. (2) The spontaneous gift of sacrificial bread near Bethel. (3) A welcome by the

prophets at Gibeah. (4) An inspiration from God to prophesy. 3. He instructs him on the completion of the signs to act on his own judgment, with the assurance that God is his helper. 4. He finally directs him to wait at Gilgal for himself, there to receive further guidance. The course taken by Samuel was the natural completion of his protracted intercourse with Saul. The hour had come in which the symbolism of the recent feast and the foreshadowings of suggestive language must receive definite form in word and deed. As one chosen of God to high office in his government of Israel, Saul is anointed with oil; and Samuel voluntarily gives him what he must have valued above all price, the kiss of homage and of congratulation, thus indicating his perfect readiness to fall in with the new order, and his tender interest in the king's prosperity. A new era of responsibility opened up to Saul. He had to go forth, believing himself to be God's chosen servant, ready for the onerous duties attaching to great honours. But a man could not thus have his faith taxed without craving for encouragement. There were, in the circumstances of Israel and of Saul, obvious reasons for this private announcement and anointing. The deliberate act of such a man as Samuel must go far to banish doubt. But still human nature needs many supports, and God is very considerate of our frame. The day might come when difficulties and disappointments would recall the primary misgivings of the reality of the Divine call. Hence the provision made by Samuel for the encouragement of Saul.

I. THERE IS ALWAYS IN GOD'S SERVICE A NEED OF SUPPORT TO FAITH AND DUTY. Others have been summoned to a life requiring strong faith and unfailing courage in duty. 1. *There is a call to special service.* Abraham was called to be a pilgrim in a strange land, and to thereby secure a seed in whom all should be blessed. Moses was called to surrender the wealth of Egypt, and to lead God's people to freedom. The apostles were bidden to leave house and business for Christ's sake. Every true pastor and Christian worker recognises a voice which, in commanding separation to his service, puts honour on the servant. The instrument by which each is called may be human, as truly as it was a human hand and voice that set apart Saul. The evidence of the call may be clear. But tedious toils have to be borne. Events will not realise the expectations of a too sanguine temperament. Abraham needed the support of occasional manifestations, as well as of fulfilled predictions. Moses could not go without "signs." Christ promised proofs that he was sending forth his disciples. 2. *There is a call to Christian life.* This is the most blessed summons to privilege, honour, and obligation. The call to Christian life is endless in its form and manner and seasons. It may come in infancy, when we are unconsciously made new creatures in Christ; or in mature years, by the preacher's voice, the written word, the loss of friends, and the adversities of life, or the still small voice in the heart. There may be instances in which it is as clear as was Samuel's voice and hand to Saul; and a wonder and sense of unworthiness may arise as sincere and deep as was his. But times will come when a horror of great darkness falls on the spirit; the difficulties of one's path will raise the question as to the reality of that call which once seemed so clear, and the possibility of maintaining the distinct line of duty once entered on A man cannot find support simply in retrospect of what was a marked change in his life; he needs something else to convince him that all is right, that the past change was not an illusion.

II. The SUPPORT GIVEN IS VARIED—ADAPTED TO THE ENTIRE NEED. Saul needed to be assured of the *fact* that it was God, and not merely man, who appointed him; he had it in the *fourfold fulfilled prediction* (vers. 2, 3, 5, 6). He needed the sympathy and concurrence of the religious portion of Israel; he was assured of it symbolically by the *worshippers* spontaneously offering him nourishment. He needed the *co-operation* of the most important *educators of the age;* he was assured of it in the symbolical welcome given to him by the company of prophets, the then rising power, which in years hence was to exert so great an influence on the national life. He needed, moreover, a power and wisdom in excess of that inherited from his father, and acquired during years of private life; he had it given when the spirit of the Lord made him another man. Wisely, therefore, were these arrangements made for the servant of God. They are beautifully congruous with the position of Saul, and the age in which he was called to act. An examination of the lives of Abraham,

Moses, and the apostles will show that an equally wise arrangement was made for the support of their faith and duty. So modern servants of God can point to promises fulfilled, in a blessing on their toil, as evidence that they were not mistaken in the call to work; and their once distrustful heart becomes strong in the consciousness of a power not their own. In a different, though not less real, way the individual Christian finds varied support to his belief that God has called him into the kingdom, and made him a "king and a priest;" as also to his discharge of the duties appropriate to his high and holy calling.

III. The REALISATION OF THE PROVIDED SUPPORT ENSUES ON THE EFFORT TO EXERCISE THE FAITH AND TO DISCHARGE THE DUTY. When Saul acted on the belief that Samuel was a true prophet speaking and acting for God, he found all to turn out as he had been promised. The exercise of such faith as he had, in the first instance, put him in possession of the supports to faith for future times; and the discharge of duty, so far as made clear, led to a discovery of the supports to duty that would be his in the more conspicuous acts of life. So was it with Abraham, and Moses, and the apostles. Every true servant gets encouragement, not by waiting, but while "going on his way," and doing the deeds appointed. The Saviour said to the palsied, "Put forth thy hand." In the attempting of the impossible act the faith came and grew. Faith finds nourishment for itself, and waxes strong in proportion as it is exercised.

General lessons:—1. We may render valuable service by timely sympathy and co-operation with those called to occupy difficult positions. 2. The most unassailable Christian evidence is that to be gained in a life of entire devotion to Christ. 3. Full confirmation of our hopes and beliefs will come in so far as we are faithful to carry into action what confidence we already have.

Another man. The mind of Saul was evidently overcharged with the great things which had so unexpectedly been brought before his attention. His imagination must have been filled with those pictures of royal state and lofty duties which are ever in Eastern minds associated with kingship. But he was scarcely able to frame an adequate conception of what Samuel meant by saying, "Thou shalt be turned into another man." There are several grades of transformation brought before us by ordinary life and by Scripture.

I. "ANOTHER MAN" IS SOMETIMES MADE BY TOTAL CHANGE OF CIRCUMSTANCES. We all are partly subject to our surroundings; but some natures happen to be in circumstances which appear to be quite alien to the development of what is in them. They are repressed; the strong forces of their life refuse to come forth; they are comparative nonentities; if no change occurs in their relative position they will pass away from life unknown and almost useless. There are in some persons mental faculties which, being predominant, but not drawn out by appropriate nutriment and exercise, give to the individual an appearance of stupidity and vacuity. A poet's soul encompassed by everything antagonistic to its development will be miserable as a lark that cannot rise. But when the unnatural restraints are removed, and the dispositions and faculties of individuals are placed amidst circumstances favourable to their proper development, there comes a change as rapid, as fresh, and striking as when the light and rain of spring call forth the bulb from under the dull earth into a form of beauty and sweetness. An observer of life cannot but have met with many cases of this.

II. "ANOTHER MAN" IS SOMETIMES MADE BY SPECIAL ENDOWMENTS FOR OFFICIAL DUTIES. This was the case with Saul. It is the teaching of Scripture that "every good and perfect gift" cometh from God. He gave wisdom and cunning to the men who framed the choice work of the tabernacle (Exod. xxxi. 2—6). Reason is his gift, though too often used against him. The Old Testament speaks of special gifts for men called to lead on the people of God. The endowment of Saul was in harmony with that of Moses and Joshua. The contrast of the men as *not* endowed and endowed is striking. The figure of Moses after he went forth in the *name of Jehovah* dwarfs the Moses feeding Jethro's sheep. The timid, questioning, spiritually ignorant men who followed Christ as long as they dared, and "thought" that he 'would have redeemed Israel," can scarcely be recognised as the men who, when endowed with power from on high, stood forth on the day of Pentecost, and with

calmness and fearlessness, expounded the spiritual nature of his kingdom who was crucified. Spiritual power works marvels in men.

III. "ANOTHER MAN" IS MADE WHEN THE SOUL IS RENEWED BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD. This is the most radical of all changes; it is more than an enlargement of the ordinary powers, more than the gift of discrimination by which ordinary duties can be discharged; it is the renovation of that deep, subtle spring of feeling and willing which determines the character of the entire life. The will of a man is supposed to be the key to his destiny; but the change wrought by the Holy Spirit seems even to penetrate into the mysterious rear of the will, and insure that it shall issue in acts of repentance, of faith in Christ, of supreme love for God, of delight in holiness. The *reality of the transformation* is seen in the new aims, the new joys, the new acts of the soul, the new outward form of life, the new spiritual discernment of the spiritual and unseen, the new hidden secret which no words can reveal, the new absorption in Christ.

IV. "ANOTHER MAN" IS MADE WHEN WE ATTAIN TO THE COMPLETE REDEMPTION FOR WHICH CHRIST DIED. Relatively to a life of sin, the regenerate life of the Christian on earth is a new creation, he is "another man;" and likewise, relatively to the imperfect, struggling life we spend on earth, that which awaits us beyond is a new creation. When the full stature of a man in Christ is attained, and becomes clothed upon with a body "like unto his own glorious body," then may it be most truly said of each, he is "turned into a new man." How unlike our former selves will be that perfectly holy, tearless, strong, joyous, unwearied life, exercised in a "spiritual body," created in special adaptation for the new activities and joys of the kingdom of heaven.

General considerations:—1. Reflect on what the world may lose by careless disregard in our social life of the adaptation of circumstances to aptitudes and abilities. 2. There is room for every man to examine himself and see whether his religion is really the product of a radical renewal by the Holy Spirit. 3. With so lofty a destiny before us as Christians, the inquiry should arise, how it is that we are so little affected by the prospect, and by what means we can more fully live under the inspiring "powers of the world to come."

Limitations of prerogative. Saul was told that when the promised "signs" came upon him he might do as occasion required, and for the assigned reason that God was with him (ver. 7). This great freedom immediately receives a limitation in the command to wait at Gilgal till Samuel came and offered sacrifice, and gave further instructions. The royal prerogative was to be exercised under limitations. Here the question of civil and spiritual power is brought into distinct concrete form as the natural outcome of Israel's history. The analogy between Israel and all other nations cannot be established in detail with respect to this question; but, nevertheless, there are a few truths of general application illustrated in the restrictions put by the prophet of God on the actions of Israel's king.

I. The ULTIMATE ENDS FOR WHICH GOVERNMENTS EXIST ARE SPIRITUAL. There is a difference between the immediate concern of a government—namely, with protection of life and property, the repression of crime; scope for the free action of citizens, and for the development of national resources—and the ultimate end for which Providence designs it and all other institutions. Man's body exists for his spirit. Society, in the mind of God, exists for the spiritual welfare of individuals. There is an evolution progressing towards a world-wide righteousness, and governments are one of the agencies which are to subserve this issue. Attention to the material and intellectual interests of a people may be to rulers an end in itself, but not to God. Governments may subserve this spiritual end without consciously entering into questions pertaining to its nature and varied means for securing it. A faithful discharge of definite functions, on approved principles, cannot but help on the purpose for which God is himself governing mankind.

II. The CHURCH OF GOD IS THE TRUE WITNESS-BEARER AND THE MEANS OF ACCOMPLISHING THESE SPIRITUAL ENDS. Samuel was the representative of the spiritual power. He had authority to assert the Messianic truth, to educate the people in harmony with that truth, and to demand that the king should govern in such a way as to allow free scope to the spiritual work. He and the religious community were

one in this respect. And the living Church of Christ is the assertor of Messianic truth—claiming to hold what Christ has given, pointing to the spiritual reign of Christ over every heart and home as the goal of all effort and the hope of the world; and the witness-bearer, calling upon rulers to observe in their administration the principles of righteousness, truth, and benevolent regard, which God alone will honour with his blessing.

III. CIVIL RULERS ARE BOUND TO ACT IN HARMONY WITH THE WITNESS-BEARING OF THE CHURCH. Saul was bound, morally, and as a condition of stability to his throne, to recognise Samuel in his capacity as prophet of God, working, with all the devout, for Messianic purposes. He must not ignore the spiritual power, and thus dishonour God (ver. 8; cf. ch. xiii. 8—10); nor must he arrogate its functions. His duty lay in administering government on the principles of righteousness, and so as not to bar the way to the realisation of the Messianic purpose. And knowing as we do that in the truth given by Christ, and borne witness to by the living Church, there are all the sound principles of human progress as well as of personal salvation, every government is morally bound to act on them, and is guilty of fearful presumption if it professes to supplant them by creations of its own. As surely as decay at the root of a tree will issue in its fall, so surely will every government perish which acts on other principles than those asserted by the living Church of God. No government can successfully wage war with the one living Church, which, by example, word, and deed, preaches righteousness, and claims the right to do so.

IV. The CHURCH IS BOUND TO CONFINE ATTENTION TO HER OWN PROPER FUNCTIONS. Samuel left Saul to "do as occasion" might "serve" (ver. 7). He simply claimed that there was another power in the development of Israel's life beside the civil, and that Saul must recognise this. The exercise of the power had reference to general principles of conduct, and the securing of Messianic purposes. The Church of Christ is bound to avoid everything that would be inharmonious with her spiritual nature and uses. To be the educator of the state conscience, to assert her own independence as a spiritual community for spiritual purposes, this is the function of the Church in relation to the civil power, as illustrated in the conduct of Samuel, involved in the spiritual nature of Christ's body, and confirmed by the adversities and prosperities of history.

General considerations:—1. How far the controversies connected with spiritual supremacy are the result of a deviation from the simplicity of purpose characteristic of apostolic times. 2. To what extent calamities have befallen the world by the professing Church being more concerned for the assertion of power than for the preaching and practising of righteousness. 3. Whether history does not show that an earnest Church, solely bent on preaching the gospel, and enforcing it by example, exercises more real power over the destinies of nations than a Church ever watchful to limit the powers of civil rulers.

Vers. 9—17.—*The reasonableness of incongruities.* The facts are—1. Saul experiences the truth of all that Samuel had told him. 2. Being met by a company of prophets, Saul, under an inspiration from God, also prophesies. 3. The people remark on the incongruity of Saul's being among the prophets. 4. Saul's uncle, being too inquisitive in the matter of Samuel's intercourse with him, is not gratified. The general reader of the Bible is struck with the incongruity between Saul's antecedents and his sudden participation in the gifts of prophecy; and men generally have sympathised with the surprise which expressed itself in the proverb, "Is Saul among the prophets?" Too frequently the event here recorded is left as one of the strange, unaccountable things scattered over the page of sacred history, furnishing to the mind more of perplexity and embarrassment than of instruction and aid to faith. It will, however, be found that in the course of Providence the seeming incongruities play an important part, that they are not essentially unreasonable, and are all reducible to a common principle.

I. The COURSE OF PROVIDENCE PRESENTS NUMEROUS INSTANCES OF STRIKING INCONGRUITY. Whatever the precise definition of incongruity, the thing itself may be found in the form of conduct, association, relation, and means. Leaving out all instances resulting from human folly and eccentricity, we may notice a few in the order of

Providence as seen in—1. *Conduct.* Saul's is a case in point. He was an instrument in the hand of God of producing the strange impression indicated by the familiar proverb. To the Jews in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost there was an unaccountable incongruity in the speech and bearing of men who, up to that time, had been timid, obscure followers of the Crucified. Considering the reputed character of Peter as a rash, impulsive man, it was, in the judgment of his companions and in the light of his denial, scarcely congruous to commit to him the "key" of the kingdom. And the joyful songs which rose from the apostles when in the stocks were strange music to their warders. Modern history is not without its notable instances. 2. *Associations.* For Saul to be associated with a prophetic order was a marvel. That a glorious star should lead wise men from afar only to a babe in a manger, and that the hosts of heaven should sing on the birth of a helpless child, was an association rare and astonishing. The most perplexing incongruity to many is that the Eternal One should for a term of years be in association with a frail body, with all the sorrowful incidents inseparable therefrom. 3. *Relations.* We find this in Saul's case; for men can see no congruity between his ecstatic excitement as prophet and the office of king to which he was being called. The relation of John the Baptist, an austere, unsociable ascetic, as forerunner to the mild, approachable Christ, struck men as remarkable, and needed the vindication that "wisdom is justified of her children" (Matt. xi. 16—19). It also occurred to John as a most incongruous thing that he should have to baptize the holy Saviour (Matt. iii. 13—15). 4. *Means.* As a means of qualifying Saul for the discharge of kingly functions this prophetic excitement seemed to be most unsuitable. So, likewise, to many there is no propriety in the uplifting of a brazen serpent as a means of restoring health to the poisoned. Naaman could not think the Jordan better than the rivers of his own country. The cross of Christ was despised by the Greeks as foolishness—a most incongruous means for the subjugation of the world to him who died thereon.

II. The SEEMING INCONGRUITIES IN THE COURSE OF PROVIDENCE ARE RELATIVE TO OUR IGNORANCE. That is incongruous only which is not understood. "Things are not what they seem." Our surprises and astonishments are often the index of our lack of knowledge. It may not be possible in every instance to find a complete solution, but some clue may be found if we will consider all the events of Providence as interrelated, and throwing light on one another. The reasonableness of incongruities may be illustrated by taking as a typical instance *the conduct of Saul.* The appearance of a prophetic order at that juncture, under the direction of Samuel, was a necessary feature in the moral elevation of the people. The stagnant indifference of men could be best aroused by urgent zeal. The reasonableness of Saul's excitement resolves itself into that of the order. We are to remember that a *coming good* in Messiah's reign was *the* hope of the true Israel. In so far as their conviction was deep, and was attended by a corresponding pity for present degradation, it, when full on the spirit, would not unnaturally produce an excitement proportionate to the susceptibility of the temperament and the external occasion, and the utterance of the truth would be measured by the degree of excitement. Therefore the educational value of these men was great, and they were obedient, in their extravagance, to the laws of mind and the urgency of religious conviction. Now it was reasonable for Saul to share in this gift—1. *For the people.* It would call their attention to him, and prepare them for the subsequent action of Samuel. 2. *For Saul himself.* He was to be king, and the people imagined that their king would be after the pattern of other kings. But Israel's king must rule in harmony with the spiritual destiny of the nation. He must be in sympathy with prophets. 3. *For the order of prophets.* This order was one of the great powers in fashioning the future of the people of God. It therefore was interested in the character and aspirations of whatever king might be chosen. Saul's endowment with their own gift would assure them that he was worthy of their support, and would not be as the kings of the nations. The incongruity was most reasonable.

III. The TRUE SOLUTION OF ANY INCONGRUITY IN THE COURSE OF PROVIDENCE IS TO BE FOUND IN THE SERIES OF WHICH THE EVENT IS BUT ONE. Saul's conduct, regarded in relation to the antecedents of Israel's life, and the gradual preparation of the world for Christ, stands out as most fit and useful; therefore, natural. No one can rightly

judge of Scripture events who does not consider the course of Providence as a development from the imperfect to the more perfect. The place and power of every molecule in the universe are relative to the antecedent and subsequent movements of the whole. Astronomers have met with perturbations and irregularities which seemed incongruous with all they knew, but in time they discovered the place of these so-called irregularities in the mechanism of the heavens, and they became at once beautiful regularities. The issue of redemptive methods will throw light on the process.

General lessons:—1. The most unlikely of men may be called to do God's will in forms unlooked for. 2. The varied gifts requisite to an office will be forthcoming to all whom God calls to the office. 3. We should be careful to keep our mind free from prejudice against methods which, though unusual, may be of God. 4. A deep and patient study of the Bible as a whole is the only means of learning the beauty and harmony of his ways. 5. A true philosophy will induce us to suspend our judgment on some subjects until we can see more clearly the relation of the past to the future.

Wise reticence. The notice taken of an inquiry by Saul's uncle is evidently for the purpose of bringing in bold relief Saul's wisdom in being reticent on the important matters concerning the kingdom. It is probable that the bearing of Saul indicated that something unusual had transpired, and the prophesying would only confirm the suspicion. Saul's replies do not make clear whether the uncle was designedly prying into what he knew were secrets, or was simply seeking general information. But in either case Saul formed a proper estimate of his own position, and manifested a proper reserve.

I. A DEGREE OF RETICENCE IS ESSENTIAL TO A WISE LIFE. "There is a time to speak, and a time to be silent." Reticence, however, is more than silence; it is deliberate silence where speech is possible and sought. It may be considered with reference to—1. *Its source.* In every case its source is in the will acting freely in the form of a negative judgment. But still this judgment may in some persons be connected more with temperament than with an enlightened estimate of what is proper. The wise reticence is that which comes from a just estimate of what is due to the occasion and the subject-matter. 2. *Its proper subject-matter.* This must be determined by a calm judgment on the right of others to know what we know, and the utility of unveiling our knowledge. But taking a general view of human life, we may say that reticence is due to—(1) *Our deepest religious experience.* There are depths in the soul which no eye but God's can penetrate, and there are experiences there so sacred, tender, and awful that it would be a species of profanity to endeavour to unfold them in form of speech. If, for purpose of seeking assistance, reference is made to secret experiences, the surface only is to be touched. No one who reveres the sacredness of religious life will attempt to pry into what is secret between the soul and God, or to probe wounds which "shame would hide." (2) *Private and domestic affairs.* There are in every life interests which belong to no one else; and in home there are solemn secrets on which the cold, critical eye of the world must not be allowed to gaze. Much of the sweet, binding influence of home lies in the unforced reticence of its members. (3) *Secrets pertaining to office.* Office in Church, State, or commerce implies knowledge to be used only for specific purposes in relation thereto. No one is fit for office who cannot control his tongue and resist temptation to speak. 3. *Its value.* As a *habit of mind*, when distinguished from sullen reserve, the result of mere temperament, it gives power to the possessor. It reveals a sober, discriminating judgment, a strength of purpose that can resist inducement, and a profound regard for the sanctities of life. In *society* it, wisely exercised, insures confidence, renders transaction of affairs easy, and promotes respectful, courteous bearing. In *religious associations* it tends to reverence, devoutness of spirit, and sincerity. 4. *Its dangers.* It is, if not carefully guarded, likely to degenerate into a love of secrecy, an unnaturally close, reserved habit of mind. In religious life its excess may put a check on the free utterance of life's sorrows and cares even to God, and also deprive the Church of the benefits of a rich experience.

II. WISE RETICENCE WILL ALWAYS BE CONSISTENT WITH TRUTHFULNESS. It is possible to state partial truth in such a way as virtually to lie, and to be silent when silence may be designed to convey a false impression. Saul was truthful in his reticence. He answered questions; he did not volunteer information. Had he been pressed he most likely would have declined to answer. Christ was reticent when pressed on the question of John's baptism, and when examined by Pilate, but no false impression was conveyed. In cases of difficulty it is better point blank to refuse information than incur the risk of suspected prevarication. Inquisitive men should be plainly rebuked rather than put off with questionable answers.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 10. (GIBEAH.)—*A company of prophets.* This is the first mention of "a company (cord, chain, or band) of prophets" (Nabhis). There were previously individual prophets. And on one occasion the seventy elders prophesied (Num. xi. 25), and Moses said, "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them." But until the time of Samuel there was no association or community, college or school, of prophets. 1. His language shows his intimate relation to this "company," of which he was doubtless the founder, and appears subsequently as president (ch. xix. 20); for it is not likely that there were now several such "companies," as in later times (1 Kings xx. 35; 2 Kings ii. 3, 16; iv. 38). 2. Its formation was due to a newly-awakened religious life among the people, and intended as a means of deepening and extending it. 3. It arose about the same time as the establishment of the monarchy, and furnished a regular succession of prophets, by whom the word of the Lord was spoken for the guidance and restraint of the king. "Samuel saw the need of providing a new system of training for those who should be his successors in the prophetic office, and formed into fixed societies the sharers of the mystic gift, which was plainly capable of cultivation and enlargement. As it was a leading crisis of the dealings of God with men, unusual operations of the Spirit marked the time of Samuel; but they were not confined to him, though he is far the most conspicuous figure" ('Heroes of Heb. Hist.'). Notice their—

I. SPIRITUAL CALLING. They are called prophets with reference to their vocation or profession. But this was founded upon an individual and inner call by the Divine Spirit. Dwelling on the high ground of Divine contemplation, they were often visited by breezes of spiritual influence to which others were strangers, borne along in an ecstasy beyond their own control, and impelled to give utterance to the overflowing feeling of their hearts; and some of their number were chosen by God to be the recipients of the gift of prophecy in the highest sense. Their calling represents that of the Christian ministry, and more generally the vocation of all Christians (Acts ii. 17; Ephes. v. 18, 19).

II. FRATERNAL UNION. They formed a "company," a voluntary, organised society, apparently dwelling together in the same place, and pursuing the same mode of life. The bond of their union was the common spirit they possessed; and their association contributed to their preservation and prosperity, and their power over others. "They presented the unifying, associative power of the prophetic spirit over against the disruption of the theocratic life, which was a legacy of the time of the judges" (Erdmann). Of Christian union the like, and much more, may be said (John xvii. 21; Acts ii. 46; iv. 23).

III. MUSICAL SKILL. "And before them a psaltery (cithara), and a tabret (tambourine), and a pipe (flute), and a harp (guitar);" stringed, percussion, and wind instruments of music (ver. 5; Gen. iv. 21; xxxi. 27; Exod. xv. 20). They made a religious use of music, and cultivated it with great care. It prepared them for high and holy emotion (2 Kings iii. 15), and gave appropriate expression to it. It strengthened the feeling to which it gave expression, regulated it, and stirred in others a similar feeling. Their sacred music was the germ of the splendid choral service of the temple in subsequent time.

"What passion cannot music raise and quell?
When Jubal struck the chorded shell,
His listening brethren stood around,
And wonder on their faces fell,
To worship that celestial sound;
Less than a god they thought there could not dwell
Within the hollow of that shell,
That spoke so sweetly and so well.
What passion cannot music raise and quell?" (Dryden)

IV. PROPHETIC UTTERANCE. "And they shall prophesy." Poetry, like music, is the natural vehicle of strong emotion. And in it they recited and sang in an impassioned manner the praises of God, and the wonders which he had wrought on behalf of his people (1 Chron. xxv. 1, 3).

V. POPULAR REPUTATION. The manner in which they were spoken of by the people generally (ver. 11) shows the important position they occupied, and the high estimation in which they were held. When the professed servants of God are so regarded—1. It is an evidence of their worth and consistency. They commend themselves to "every man's conscience." If, being faithful to their vocation, they are despised, it only reveals the evil character of their despisers; and it is not honour, but shame, to be commended by foolish and wicked men (Luke vi. 26). 2. It indicates the prevalence of a right sentiment in society. 3. It affords a favourable condition of bearing witness for God and successful spiritual labour.—D.

Vers. 11—13. (GIBEAH.)—*Saul among the prophets.* "Is Saul also among the prophets?" Of the three signs of which Saul was assured, the occurrence of the last alone is particularly described. "And the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them." "Turned into another man" (ver. 6). It was "the most important for his inner life." "Through this sign his anointing as king was to be inwardly sealed." In what is here recorded we see an instance of—

I. SURPRISING TRANSFORMATION. The question was mainly one of surprise. The change was—1. *Sudden.* In what are called "sudden conversions," indeed, there is often a secret preparation of mind and heart. Even in the case of Saul the surprise would not have been so great if his recent interview with Samuel and its effect upon him had been known. 2. In extraordinary *contrast* to his previous life, wherein he had exhibited little interest in or aptitude for spiritual exercises. Four or five days ago among them wholly occupied with the care of oxen and asses—dull, moody, and silent; now in a transport of religious emotion, and "speaking in a new tongue!" 3. *Supernatural.* It was plainly due to the "Spirit of God," *i. e.* (in the Hebrew conception) the direct, invisible, operative energy of God, whether put forth in nature or in man, in imparting mental or physical force for great enterprises, in promoting moral improvement, in producing exalted states of feeling, or in acts of the highest inspiration (Gen. i. 2; Exod. xxxi. 3; Num. xxiv. 2; Judges xiii. 25; 2 Sam. xxiii. 2; Isa. xi. 2); and (according to the fuller revelation of the New Testament) the holy, personal, Divine Spirit of God and of Christ. The expression (here used in this book for the first time) is not employed with respect to Samuel, whose intercourse with God is represented as more voluntary, self-conscious, intimate, and continuous than that which it here denotes.

II. SYMPATHETIC ENTHUSIASM. Saul was drawn into sympathy with the Divine enthusiasm of the "company of prophets." 1. The links which unite men are secret, subtle, and mysterious, and the influence which some men exert over others is extraordinary. 2. Human influence is a common condition of Divine. 3. The contagious power of strong emotion is often seen in religious revivals, and to some extent also in other public movements. "Ecstatic states have something infectious about them. The excitement spreads involuntarily, as in the American revivals and the preaching mania in Sweden, even to persons in whose state of mind there is no affinity to anything of the kind" (Tholuck). "As one coal kindles another, so it happens that where good is taught and heard hearts do not remain unmoved—Acts xvi. 13, 14" (Hall).

III. SPIRITUAL ENDOWMENT. "And one of the same place answered," in reply to

the question (asked somewhat contemptuously and sceptically), "What has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also" (whose relationship and antecedents are so different) "among the prophets? and said, But who is *their* father?" "Who is he that teacheth these prophets, and causeth the spirit of prophecy to rest on them? Nor is there any cause for astonishment in this; for the same holy, blessed One who teacheth these prophets teacheth also this one" (Kimchi). "Prophetical perfection is not a matter that is conveyed from father to son. Under these circumstances the son may be a prophet, though the father is not so" (R. Levi Ben Gersom, quoted by Ed. of Smith's 'Sel. Dis.'). 1. Spiritual gifts are not the result of natural relationship. 2. They are due to the free and sovereign operation of the Divine Spirit, "dividing to every man severally as he will." 3. When they are bestowed on ourselves they should be received with humility, and when they are observed in others they should be regarded without envy, and with admiration and thankfulness.

IV. PARTIAL CONVERSION. "And when he had made an end of prophesying, he came to the high place" (ver. 13). His inspiration was transitory, and the change which he had undergone, great as it was, and in the direction of a renewal of his heart in righteousness, did not involve such renewal. "This transformation is not to be regarded as regeneration in the Christian sense, but as a change resembling regeneration which affected the entire disposition of mind, and by which Saul was lifted out of his former modes of thought and feeling, which were confined within a narrow, earthly sphere, into a far higher sphere of his new royal calling, was filled with kingly thoughts in relation to the service of God, and received another heart—ver. 9" (Keil). 1. Great spiritual gifts may be possessed without the possession of a new heart (Num. xxiv. 35; xxxi. 8; Matt. vii. 22; 1 Cor. xiii. 2). 2. There may be considerable moral reformation, much spiritual feeling, correct orthodox beliefs, outward profession of piety, and strict observance of religious ordinances, whilst the supreme affection or ruling purpose of the soul remains unchanged (Matt. xiii.). 3. A real renewal of the heart is manifested by its permanent fruits (Matt. vii. 20; John xv. 16; Heb. iii. 14). "If Samuel is the great example of an ancient saint growing up from childhood to old age without a sudden conversion, Saul is the first direct example of the mixed character often produced by such a conversion. . . . He became 'another man,' yet not entirely. He was, as is so often the case, half converted, half roused. . . . His religion was never blended with his moral nature" (Stanley)

> "Let not the people be too swift to judge,
> As one who reckons on the blades in field
> Or e'er the crop be ripe. For I have seen
> The thorn frown rudely all the winter long,
> And after bear the rose upon its top;
> And bark, that all her way across the sea
> Ran straight and speedy, perish at the last
> E'en in the haven's mouth. Seeing one steal,
> Another bring his offering to the priest,
> Let not Dame Birtha and Sir Martin thence
> Into Heaven's counsels deem that they can pry;
> For one of these may rise, the other fall" (Dante, Par. xiii.).—D.

Vers. 14—16. (GIBEAH.)—*Inquisitiveness.* Inquiry after truth is a necessary and invaluable exercise. But inquiry, when it is directed to matters in which we have no proper concern, degenerates into vain curiosity, or mere inquisitiveness. And this often appears both in relation to Divine affairs (Gen. iii. 6; Deut. xxix. 29; 1 Sam. vi. 19; Luke xiii. 23; Acts i. 6) and human affairs (John xxi. 21). Of the latter we have here an illustration. Saul, having reached his home, was asked by his uncle concerning his journey and interview with Samuel. "Whither went ye?" "Tell me, I pray thee, what Samuel said to you." This man was doubtless acquainted with the popular agitation about a king, but what his precise motives were we are not told. Such inquisitiveness as he displayed—

I. MANIFESTS A WRONG DISPOSITION. 1. An unrestrained desire of knowledge. There must be self-restraint in this desire, as in every other; else it leads to recklessness, irreverence, and pride. 2. An unjust disregard of the rights of others. The

claims of family relationship are sometimes exaggerated so as to ignore or interfere with those rights. It is imagined that they justify the expectation of an answer to any inquiry, however little it affects the inquirer. 3. Uncharitable and suspicious thoughts about the conduct of others, expressed in impertinent and annoying questions, which naturally cause resentment and discord. It may be added, that persons who are "busybodies in other men's matters" (1 Pet. iv. 15) are seldom so diligent and faithful in their own as they ought to be. The proper province of every man affords plenty of scope for his attention and effort (2 Thess. iii. 11; 1 Tim. v. 13).

II. REQUIRES TO BE PROMPTLY CHECKED. 1. Out of *due regard to higher claims.* What Samuel said to Saul was intended for him alone, and to divulge it would be a breach of duty. 2. Lest the information given should be used to the *disadvantage* of him who gives it. Who knows how Saul's uncle would have employed the knowledge of his having been appointed king by the prophet? He might have done irreparable mischief. Many excellent projects have been frustrated by an untimely disclosure of them. 3. For the *good* of the inquirer himself. The gratification of his curiosity tends to increase his inquisitiveness, the mortification thereof to its cure. It was for the benefit of the Apostle Peter that the Lord said, "What is that to thee? Follow thou me."

III. SHOULD BE CHECKED IN A RIGHT MANNER. Judiciously, discreetly, and, more particularly—1. With *strict truthfulness.* "He told us plainly that the asses were found" (ver. 16). Saul spoke the truth, but not the whole truth; nor was he in the circumstances described under any obligation to do so. "A fool uttereth all his mind; but a wise man keepeth it till afterwards" (Prov. xxix. 11). 2. With *due courtesy.* By a blunt refusal and rude repulsion Saul might have alienated his uncle, and turned him into an enemy. "Honour all men." "Be courteous." 3. With *few words* or *resolute silence.* "But of the matter of the kingdom whereof Samuel spake he told him not." There is a "time to keep silence" (Eccles. iii. 7; Amos v. 13). "Then he (Herod) questioned him with many words; but he answered him nothing" (Luke xxiii. 9). Our Lord himself is thus an example of silence to us when addressed with questions which it would not be prudent or beneficial to answer. "Silence is golden."

Conclusion.—1. Check the tendency to curiosity in yourselves, so that it may not be checked, disappointed, and reproved by others. 2. In checking it in others seek their improvement rather than your own dignity and honour.—D.

EXPOSITION.

PUBLIC SELECTION OF SAUL AS KING (vers. 17—24). Ver. 17.—**Samuel called the people together unto Jehovah to Mizpeh.** For the reason why Mizpah (so the name should be spelt) was chosen as the place of meeting see ch. vii. 15. **Unto Jehovah.** Because in some way the Divine presence there was indicated; possibly by the high priest having been summoned thither with the Urim and Thummim.

Ver. 18.—**And said . . .** Samuel first points out in his address to the assembled people that Jehovah always had done for them the very thing for which they desired a king. They wished for deliverance from the Philistines, and **Jehovah had delivered them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all kingdoms that oppressed them** (the A. V. wrongly inserts "and of them"). But their deliverance by Jehovah had been made dependent upon their own conduct; they were required to repent them of their sins, and purge the land from idolatry, before victory could be theirs. What they wanted was national independence freed from this condition, and secured by an organisation of their military resources.

Ver. 19.—Samuel, therefore, protests unto them, **Ye have this day rejected your God,** because what you want is a divorce of your national well-being from religion. Nevertheless, God granted their request, it being a law of his providence to leave men free to choose. The king was, however, to be appointed by him, the selection being by lot. **By your thousands.** The natural subdivision of a tribe is into families; but when Moses distributed the people into thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens (Exod. xviii. 25), the numerical arrangement was probably made to yield as far as possible to the natural, so that about a thousand men more or less of the same kin should be classed as a family. Hence the terms are synonymous here, and in Num. i. 16; x. 4; Josh. xxii. 14, &c.

Ver. 21.—**The family of Matri,** or **of the**

Matrites. Matri is not mentioned anywhere else: and numerous as are the omissions in the genealogies, we can scarcely suppose that the name of the head of one of the main subdivisions of a tribe could be passed over. The conjecture, therefore, is probable that Matri is a corruption of Bikri, *i. e.* a descendant of Becher, for whom see 1 Chron. vii. 8. After the lot had fallen upon this family they would next cast lots upon its smaller subdivisions, as in Josh. vii. 17, 18, until at last they came to households, when first Kish, and finally Saul was taken. The latter, foreseeing that this would happen, had concealed himself. For though a noble change had taken place in him (ver. 9), yet no really worthy man was ever promoted to high office without having to overcome his own unwillingness, and no one probably ever worthily discharged solemn duties without having felt oppressed and humbled with the consciousness of his own unfitness to undertake them. As a matter of fact, Saul was now called to a most weighty responsibility, and he failed and was rejected, though not without proving that he was a man of extraordinary genius and power. And it never can be said of him that presumption was the cause of his fall, or that he hastily undertook serious duties in the spirit of light-hearted levity.

Ver. 22. — **They inquired of Jehovah further, if the man should yet come thither.** More correctly, "Is any one as yet come hither?" The Septuagint and Vulgate translate as if there were an article before "any one" (Hebrew, *a man*), and give, "Is the man coming hither?" But the Hebrew text is the more satisfactory. For the object of the inquiry, made by the Urim and Thummim, was to find Saul, wherever he might be; and the enigmatical way of putting the question, Is any one as yet come? was regarded as more reverential than asking directly, Is Saul come? **Among the stuff.** *I. e.* the baggage, as in ch. xvii. 22, where it is translated "carriage." The people, collected from all Israel, would come with wagons and provisions, and such arms as they could procure; for very probably the Philistines would interrupt such a meeting, as they had that convened formerly by Samuel (ch. vii. 7). Naturally, therefore, they would follow the regulations of an army, and so arrange their baggage as to form a place of defence in case of attack. See on ch. xvii. 20.

Vers. 23, 24.—**And when he stood.** This rendering spoils the poetic force of the original, where the rapidity of their action is expressed by three preterites following hard upon one another. The Hebrew is, "And they ran, and took him thence, and he stood forth (see ch. xii. 7) among the people, and he was taller," &c. And now Samuel presents him to the multitude as "the chosen of Jehovah," and the people shout their assent by saying, "Let the king live." For this the A. V. puts our English phrase, but the Hebrew exactly answers to the French *Vive le roi!*

THE EVENTS WHICH FOLLOWED IMMEDIATELY UPON SAUL'S ELECTION (vers. 25—27). Ver. 25.—**The manner.** The difficult word already discussed in ch. ii. 13; viii. 11. Here, however, it is not used for rights so exercised as to become wrongs, but in a good sense, for what we should call a *constitution*. The heathen kings were despots, subject to no higher law, and Samuel, in ch. viii. 11—18, speaks with merited abhorrence of their violation of the natural rights of their subjects; but under the theocracy the king's power was limited by laws which protected, in the enjoyment of their privileges, the people, the priests, and the prophets. The latter class especially, as being the mouthpiece of Jehovah, formed a powerful check upon the development of despotic tendencies. In sketching Saul's kingly rights Samuel would be guided by Deut. xvii. 14—20, and would give the king his true position as the representative of Jehovah both in all matters of internal administration and of war. **And laid it up before Jehovah.** Probably by the side of the ark. We are not to suppose that Samuel wrote this at Mizpah. He would fully explain to Saul and the people there what a theocratic king ought to be, and would afterwards draw up a formal document both as a memorial of what had been done, and for the use of future sovereigns, and place it within the sanctuary. It is noteworthy that this is the first notice of writing since the days of the illustrious scribe Eleazar.

Vers. 26, 27.—Saul did not at once enter upon his duties, but **went home to Gibeah, and there went with him, not a band of men,** but *the host*, or *the force*, i. e. those brave men **whose hearts God had touched.** Whatever was noble and valiant accompanied him, to take counsel for the nation's good; **but the children of Belial,** *i. e.* worthless, good-for-nothing creatures (see ch. i. 16; ii. 12), **despised him.** In the A. V. the antithesis between *the force*, the strength and bravery that went with Saul, and the *worthlessness* which rejected him, is lost by the mistranslation of both words. The Septuagint, on the contrary, strengthens it by rendering "sons of strength" and "pestilent sons." As there was a garrison in the district of Gibeah, this proceeding was likely to embroil Saul with the Philistines, and probably was so intended. They **brought him no presents.** Apparently, therefore, the people did bring him presents; and as these would chiefly consist of food, they would be useful only for maintaining a body

of men. This, too, would scarcely escape the notice of so watchful an enemy, and yet until Saul smote one of their garrisons they did nothing; but then, forthwith, they invaded Israel so promptly, and with such overwhelming numbers, as seems to prove that they had been busily making preparations meanwhile to maintain their empire. **He held his peace.** Literally, "was as one that is deaf." Had Saul not controlled his anger, a civil war would have been the result, and the lordly tribes of Ephraim and Judah might have refused a king chosen from the little tribe of Benjamin. In fact, Judah never does seem to have given a hearty allegiance to Saul. The Septuagint, followed by Josephus, offers a not improbable different reading, which involves but a very slight change in the Hebrew. Uniting the words with the next chapter, they translate, "And it came to pass, after about a month, that Nahash the Ammonite," &c. The Vulgate has both readings.

HOMILETICS

Vers. 17—25.—*Casting the lot in life.* The facts are—1. Samuel, in calling the people together to exercise their choice, reminds them of their sin. 2. Proceeding to a choice by lot, Saul is taken. 3. For reasons secret to himself, Saul is not forthcoming when sought. 4. By acclamation the people recognise him as their king, and thereupon receive from Samuel instructions relating to the new form of government. During the intercourse of Samuel with Saul the people were waiting for the fulfilment of the promise implied in the prophet's words (ch. viii. 10). In this section we have the consummation of their desire for change in the form of government. Its details are essentially Hebrew, but its teaching is world-wide.

I. MEN FINALLY COMMITTING THEMSELVES TO A SELF-WILLED COURSE ARE FURNISHED WITH OPPORTUNITY FOR CONSIDERING THEIR RESPONSIBILITY. The self-willed character of Israel's conduct had been emphatically marked and denounced by the prophet in the first instance (ch. viii. 6—10). Had they received his rebuke in a becoming spirit, they would, during the interim, have repented of their decision, and have entreated that the old order might continue until such time as it might please God to alter it. Sometimes, as here, God takes men at their word, and yet, before an irreversible committal to their choice is made, another chance is given to retreat if they so willed. It was thus that Pharaoh was dealt with when it was in his mind to prefer self-will to the will of God. Nineveh had an opportunity of persisting in sin or turning from it. To erring Christians in Asia a chance of retracing their steps was given (Rev. ii. 21). Providence raises up for us all some voice or circumstance which, before a final step is taken, sounds the last warning, and creates a definite consciousness of unfettered responsibility.

II. EVERY REVIEW OF GOD'S DEALINGS WITH HIS PEOPLE ONLY CONFIRMS THE UNREASONABLENESS OF SELF-WILL. The reference to God's all-sufficing care in the past, and the magnitude of the deliverances effected (vers. 18, 19), was both a justification of Samuel's former remonstrance, and a new demonstration of the sinful folly of the resolve to have a king. It was considerate on the part of Samuel to draw their attention to the past before translating their resolve into accomplished fact; for in the impetuosity of life the will is apt to be misled by delusive reasons, which in calmer moments vanish before the light of history. The axiom that God's way and time are best shines in full lustre whenever we consider the works he has wrought. If ever blind self-will urges on to a course agreeable to taste, and apparently sustained by reason, we cannot do better than take a survey of what God has done for us when we were obedient to his will. There are deliverances in the life of every one, and a quiet reflection of these when we are under the temptation to embark on some questionable career will prove a wholesome check, at least it will vindicate the ways of God when judgment overtakes our folly.

III. MEN IN CARRYING OUT THEIR PURPOSE FALL INTO PERPLEXITY WITH RESPECT TO WHAT IS BEST. To desire a king is one thing, to select one another. In Israel there were diversities of opinion concerning the qualities requisite to their regal representative. As they took their own way in having a monarch, there was a fitness in his being, with respect to culture, morality, patriotism, and religion, an embodiment of the average attainments of the nation. The choice was thrown upon the people as a whole, and they were conscious of the difficulty. Sinners must take the

consequences of self-will, as did Balaam when his path was hedged with obstacles, and Jonah when he preferred to go to sea. The difficulty in case of Israel was incidental, and soon removed by the mercy of God; but the principle holds good that the very first step of a self-willed course is attended with embarrassment. All nature is at war with wrong. Sin is a condition of disorganisation.

IV. WHEN GOD PERMITS ACTION TO MEET SELF-CREATED DIFFICULTIES, IT IS WISE TO USE MEANS MOST APPROPRIATE TO THE END IN VIEW. Although the difficulty of finding a king truly representative of the age was self-created, God permitted action in reference to it as truly as though he had originated the resolve for a king; and under such circumstances, guided by Samuel, the wisest means were adopted for overcoming the difficulties of the case. As the nation willed a king, every one had equal choice, and was, theoretically, in the absence of precedents, equally eligible. Abstractedly there was as much reason against one being chosen as against another. The jealousies and envies consequent on a preferential choice might prove a source of perpetual intrigue. The "lot" was believed to meet these requirements of the case, and therefore was adopted. In *this particular the conduct of Israel* under Samuel's guidance is *worthy of imitation in many seasons of difficulty independent of self-will.* In every life there are emergencies when men are at their wits' end. Home has to be provided for, business improved, sons placed out in the world, embarrassments in the Church removed. Our wisdom lies in considering all the facts, and then deliberately adopting those means which seem to us to be most suited for the occasion. And if, in a spirit of prayer, we are able to consult the "lively oracles," there is no doubt that in the main the right steps will be taken, as in the case of the disciples (Acts i. 13—26). We in our way "cast the lot" when we take a choice of possible means and commit our way to the Lord.

V. THERE IS REASON TO BELIEVE THAT IN USING THE BEST MEANS AT OUR DISPOSAL IN A RIGHT SPIRIT GOD WILL DIRECT THE MEANS TO THE BEST RESULT. God approved of Israel's use of the "lot" as just to a community where political equality was recognised, and as least likely to engender jealousies and strifes; and *because he approved*, and because the people believed that, though the lot was "cast into the lap, the whole disposing thereof was of the Lord" (Prov. xvi. 33), he graciously so controlled the intricacies of the free actions of men as to insure the result which, in relation to Israel's conduct and aspirations, was best. The deep conviction dwelt even in the heart of imperfect Israel that God exercises complete and constant control over all the subtle and intricate actions and movements of men. When it is said of Christ that he is "Lord of all," the language is not that of courtesy, but of fact. It means *power* to act, to direct, to control. If there is any sense in Scripture on this subject, and any congruity in our primary notions of the *almighty, ever-present, free, living God*, we must believe that he can and does hold a mastery over every atom, every resolve, in all time and circumstances. Unbelief in his supremacy over will and action and matter and force is most irrational. The *real energy* of God is the most philosophical of all beliefs; and therefore we see that he can direct the "lot" while allowing fullest, most conscious freedom. Let men but have *faith in God.* This is the great lack. "O ye of little faith!"

VI. IT BECOMES MEN TO REJOICE IN THE RESULT OF THE USE OF MEANS APPROVED BY GOD IN SO FAR AS IT IS EXPRESSIVE OF HIS WILL. In the shout, "God save the king," the people no doubt expressed their gratification in seeing their self-will realised; but blended with this there was a distinct recognition of God as the Disposer of the lot. Saul's self-concealment seems to indicate that his sense of responsibility, and perhaps feeling of awkwardness in handling public affairs, may have moderated his joy, yet he must have felt that God's will was being done as well as man's. Realised preference may carry its own chastisement with it; yet in so far as God has enabled us to obtain something better than would have been possible had we been left alone without his kind control, we may heartily rejoice. Leaving out the weakness and sin of man in this transaction, are we not reminded of a time when the true King, the King of the spiritual Israel, shall be welcomed with a joy unspeakable? The "King in his beauty" shall be glorified in all who believe, and by every heart and tongue of the purified, perfected kingdom.

General lessons:—1. It is useful to obtain seasons, free from strong impulse, for

calmly considering the wisdom and justice of our main lines of conduct. 2. One of the great helps in battling with sinful propensities lies in occasional studies of the mercies of God. 3. It will add strength to purpose and comfort in trouble to remember that God always works with those who use means approved by him. 4. One of the cures for modern unbelief is to be found in a more frequent and reasonable exposition of what is contained in the primary and necessary beliefs of men. 5. If the heart remains true we need never fear undertaking responsibilities put on us by Providence.

Vers. 26, 27.—*Sympathy and disparagement.* The facts are—1. Saul is followed by a band of men brought into sympathy with him by the Spirit of God. 2. He is despised by a depraved section of the people. 3. He takes no notice of the disparagement.

I. The SIMPLE FACTS GIVEN ARE EXCEEDINGLY NATURAL. For in Israel there were men anxious for a king, and pledged to sustain one; and men, as in all communities, corrupt, unreasonable, prone to disapprove of anything not done solely by themselves. Equally natural was it that he who had graciously regulated Israel's self-will should incline some, by voluntary personal attendance, to assure the monarch of sympathy in seeking honourably to discharge the duties of his onerous office. The principal facts here recorded are of constant recurrence. Chosen ones enter on grave responsibilities; they need the support which flows from hearty sympathy; God provides it by his secret action on human hearts; the entrance on duty renders them objects of criticism, and men of depraved natures assail them with reproach and abuse; having confidence in their appointment, they move on, relying on coming events for their self-vindication.

II. The MOST ILLUSTRIOUS INSTANCE ON RECORD OF THE TRUTH HERE EXPRESSED IS THAT OF OUR SAVIOUR. The parallel is remarkable in the most prominent features. 1. *He was* the true, perfect, *anointed One*, chosen of God to rule over the true Israel, and introduced into publicity by a control of intricacies more lasting and complicated than those of the lot at Mizpah. 2. His *rulership* was to be *coextensive with the whole of God's people*—over a holy nation more complete and united even than was Israel before the dispersion of the ten tribes; and a rulership conducted on principles of righteousness more sweeping in their range and fruitful in consequences than those embodied by Samuel in the book laid up before the Lord (ver. 25). 3. *He*, as bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, *was in need of the sympathy of true, loving hearts* in bearing the burdens and cares of his exalted position; and such hearts were drawn to him both from the human and the angelic spheres. 4. *His appearance among men* was the occasion of *the most severe and relentless criticism* ever issuing from suspicious, captious minds. His social connections, his habits of life, his requirements of obedience, his claim to save all mankind, were assailed from the first to the last. 5. *He "held his peace."* He did "not strive nor cry," nor "lift up his voice in the streets." He was "meek and lowly in heart," and bided his time. What though hated and scorned? He knew what was coming. He saw "from the travail of his soul, and was satisfied."

III. WHAT IS TRUE OF CHRIST IS in a measure TRUE OF ALL WHOSE LIVES ARE CONFORMABLE TO THE OBJECT OF HIS SUFFERINGS. Every disciple is a chosen one, sustained by God-created sympathy, laden with responsibilities as well as honours, criticised and despised by "men of Belial," and confident that, in due time, his righteousness will come forth as the light, and his judgment be established as the noonday.

General lessons:—1. Let our concern be that we are among the chosen ones called to be kings and priests unto God. 2. Let us accept and yield sympathy from and to all who are doing God's work in the world. 3. Let not disparagement shake our confidence, as though some strange thing had befallen us. 4. Cherish faith in the slow but sure triumph of all that is Christly.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 17—25. (MIZPAH.)—*Saul publicly chosen.* There are critical days in the history of nations as well as in the life of individuals. One of these days in the history of Israel was that which is here described. What had taken place hitherto was only private and preparatory. The people themselves must now take their part in relation to the choice of a king; yet in such a way as to recognise the fact that he was really chosen by God, "the only difference between God's appointment of the judges and Saul being this, that they were chosen by internal influence; he by lots, or external designation" (Warburton). For this purpose Samuel summoned a national assembly to Mizpah, the site of an altar to Jehovah, and the scene of signal victory over the Philistines (ch. vii.). Thither the chief men of the tribes repaired in great numbers, and, collecting their travelling baggage in one place (ver. 22), presented themselves before him for his instructions. He was desirous of correcting the wrong state of mind which they had exhibited in requesting a king; of showing them that Saul was appointed by the Lord, and not by himself merely (ch. viii. 5); of securing their united and hearty acceptance of "him whom the Lord chose," so that the purpose of his appointment might be effected; and of guarding as far as possible against the abuse of the royal power. With these ends in view he spoke and acted on that eventful day. The choice of Saul was—

I. PRECEDED BY A SALUTARY REPROOF OF SIN (vers. 18, 19). 1. Based upon the *gracious help* which their Divine Ruler had afforded them. He brought them out of Egypt, delivered them from the hand of Pharaoh and his hosts, and saved them from all who afterwards fought against them and oppressed them. Remembrance of the compassion, faithfulness, and aid of God, so great, so long-continued, and so effectual, should lead men to cleave to him with all their heart (Josh. xxiii. 11), even more than fear of the consequences of disobedience (ch. viii. 11). The goodness of God, as displayed in "his wonderful works to the children of men," is the mightiest incentive to repentance of sin and the practice of righteousness. 2. Consisting of a charge of *flagrant disloyalty.* "And ye have this day rejected your God," &c. Their conduct was *unreasonable*, inasmuch as no other could do for them what he had done; *ungrateful*, viewed in the light of the past; and *wilful*, because, in spite of expostulation, they had said, "Nay, but a king thou shalt set over us" (ver. 19). It was, therefore, inexcusable, and deserving of severest reprobation. And it must be plainly set before them, that they might be convinced of their guilt, humble themselves before the Lord, and seek his pardon. "Therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you" (Isa. xxx. 18). "The Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake" (ch. xii. 22). 3. Associated with instruction concerning the *proper course* they should pursue. "And now present yourselves before the Lord," &c., at his altar, where your relation to him may be set right, and his guidance may be afforded. Although sinful requests may be granted by God, yet the spirit in which they are made must be renounced. And the ready submission of the people to the direction of Samuel shows that his reproof was not without effect.

II. CONDUCTED UNDER THE SPECIAL DIRECTION OF GOD (vers. 20—22). 1. He determined, by means of the sacred "lot," *who should be their king.* "As the result of the lot was regarded as a Divine decision, not only was Saul to be accredited by this act in the sight of the whole nation as the king appointed by the Lord, but he himself was also to be more fully assured of the certainty of his own election on the part of God" (Keil). "The lot is cast into the lap (bosom of a garment), but from Jehovah is all its decision" (judgment) (Josh. vii. 19; 1 Sam. xiv. 37; Prov. xvi. 33). "A lot is properly a casual event, purposely applied to the determination of some doubtful thing. As all contingencies are comprehended by a certain Divine knowledge, so they are governed by as certain and steady a providence. God's hand is as steady as his eye. Now God may be said to bring the greatest casualties under his providence upon a twofold account:—(1) That he directs them to a certain end; (2) oftentimes to very weighty and great ends" (South, i. 61). 2. He indicated, in answer to special enquiry, *where he was to be found.* Assured beforehand of what the result would be, and out of the same diffidence, modesty, and humility as he had previously exhibited

(ch. ix. 21), Saul "preferred to be absent when the lots were cast." Hence inquiry was made (apparently by *Urim* and *Thummim*) concerning him (ch. xxii. 10; xxiii. 2), and the response of the oracle was definite and conclusive. God mercifully adapts his modes of communication with men to their common modes of thought, their capacity and need; and those who humbly and sincerely seek his guidance are not long left in uncertainty. His communications to men, moreover, carry in themselves the evidence of their Divine origin to those who truly receive them, and are further verified by the events to which they lead (ver. 23). 3. He presented him before them, through his recognised servant, as *chosen by himself*. "See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people?" (ver. 24). The conduct of Samuel herein was singularly generous and noble. He did not exhibit the slightest trace of jealousy or distrust of the king into whose hands his own power as civil magistrate was just about to be transferred. "No man ever resigned the first power in the state into other hands with so much courtesy, tenderness, dignity, and grace." Having ascertained the will of the Lord concerning his people, he aimed at nothing else but to carry it into effect.

III. CONFIRMED BY THE GENERAL APPROBATION OF THE PEOPLE (vers. 23, 24). Although the choice was of God, it was necessary that it should be recognised and accepted by them; and their approbation—1. *Accorded* with the commendation of Samuel. 2. Was *influenced* by Saul's outward appearance: "higher than any of the people from his shoulders upward"—just such a man as they wished "to go out before them and fight their battles." 3. And was *expressed* in the acclamation, "God save the king" (literally, May the king live). The people had now the object of their desire; but the Divine providence which had guided Saul guided them to the result. Nations, as well as individuals, are subject to the direction and control of him "who stilleth the noise of the sea and the tumult of the people." "Every act of every man, however it may have been against God in intention, falls exactly into the even rhythm of God's world-plan."

IV. FOLLOWED BY PERMANENT REGULATIONS FOR THE MONARCHY (ver. 25). "The manner (*mishpat*) of the kingdom" = "the laws and rules by which the kingly government was to be managed" (Poole), and differs from "the manner (*mishpat*) of the king" (ch. viii. 11); being designed by the wisdom and forethought of Samuel to guard against the evils incident to royalty. "Thus under the Divine sanction, and amidst the despotism of the East, arose the earliest example of a constitutional monarchy" (Kitto). But there was no stipulation or compact between the people and the king. His rights and duties were prescribed by the will of God, whose servant he was. His power was restrained by the living voice of prophecy, and sometimes justly opposed by the people themselves (ch. xiv. 45). "This much, however, is clear upon the whole, that the king of Israel was not an unlimited monarch, as the defenders of the Divine right of kings and of the passive obedience of subjects are wont to represent him" (Michaelis, 'Laws of Moses,' i. 286). The regulations for the monarchy were—1. *Founded* upon the existing law of Moses (Deut. xvii. 14—20), although, doubtless, not entirely confined to it. The king must not be *ambitious*, occupied in military preparations and aggressive wars, vying with heathen despots, relying on "an arm of flesh" rather than on God. He must not be given to *sensual indulgence*, forming a large harem and luxurious court; nor to the accumulation of *wealth*, taxing and oppressing the people for that purpose. But he must make himself familiar with "the law," and humbly obey it like his brethren (2 Kings xi. 12). His work was not to make new laws, but to administer those which Jehovah had given, and "do all his pleasure." "Then must he constantly bear in mind that above him there abides another King—the Eternal; and that only in as far as he works together with God, and consequently with all spiritual truth, can any earthly monarch be a king after the heart of the King of kings" (Ewald). O that Saul had borne these things in mind! 2. *Expounded* in the hearing of the people. 3. *Recorded* and carefully preserved for future reference. "That the law of the king should not be a dead letter, that royal self-will should be kept within bounds, was to be the care, not of a representative popular assembly, but of prophecy, which stood as theocratic watchman by the side of royalty" (Oehler).—D.

Ver. 24. (MIZPAH.)—*God save the king.* For the first time in the history of Israel there now arose the cry of "Long live the king" (*Vive le roi*), which was to be so often repeated in subsequent ages (2 Sam. xvi. 16; 2 Kings i. 19; xi. 12). The nations of the earth have since undergone vast and varied changes. Great empires have arisen and disappeared. The theocratic kingdom of Israel, in its outward form, has long ago passed away; and the kingdom of Christ, in which its spiritual *idea* has been realised, has grown up amidst the kingdoms of the world. But the old acclamation is still often heard at the accession of a monarch, and in it Christians as well as others may and ought to join. The acclamation is expressive of—

I. CHEERFUL RECOGNITION OF HIS DIGNITY. 1. As *appointed* by Divine providence. The invisible and eternal Ruler of the universe is the Source of all law and order, and is ever working in the world for the purpose of bringing out of the evil and confusion that prevail a state of things in which "righteousness, peace, and joy" shall abound. And in connection with and subserviency to this design he has ordained civil government (Dan. iv. 32; John xix. 11). "The powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. xiii. 1), *i. e.* human government generally is appointed by him, although no judgment is expressed by the apostle concerning the Divine right of any one form of government or particular office beyond others. When a ruler is directly chosen by the people he is still a "minister of God." 2. As *representing* the supreme authority and power of "the Most High, who ruleth in the kingdom of men." There is in every government an element which is Divine; a reflection, however dim and distorted, of that Divine power which is above all. But that government is most Divine which is the fairest exhibition of wisdom and truth, righteousness and justice, mercy and loving-kindness;" "for in these things I delight, saith the Lord" (Jer. ix. 24). "By me (wisdom) kings reign and princes decree justice" (Prov. xviii. 15). Reverence for God should be expressed in giving honour to those who, in their high office, represent God, and "to whom honour is due." "Fear God. Honour the king. Submit yourselves to every ordinance of men for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king as supreme," &c. (1 Pet. ii. 13, 14)—*supreme*, i. e., not in all things, but in those over which he has legitimate authority. In a theocracy, where the laws of God were identical with those of the state, the sphere over which that authority extended was larger than that which properly belongs to any existing government. 3. As *ministering* to human good. Even the absolute rule of a Cæsar or a Czar is unspeakably better than anarchy. "He is a minister of God to thee for *good*" (Rom. xiii. 4). He exists for the good of the community; and although the good which he is able to effect and ought to aim at is necessarily limited, he "does not bear the sword in vain." He bears it for the protection of the good against the bad. And under his sway, when he uses his power aright, his subjects are able to "lead a peaceable and quiet life, in all godliness and gravity."

II. FERVENT DESIRE FOR HIS WELFARE. "May the king prosper" ('Targum'). 1. The preservation of *his life*, which is of great importance to the well-being of the nation, and is often exposed to imminent danger from the exalted position he occupies. 2. The possession of *strength and wisdom*, justice and the fear of God (2 Sam. xxiii. 3). Adequate sympathy is not always felt with "kings and those who are in authority" in their arduous duties and extraordinary difficulties. 3. The *prosperity* of his reign. The desire thus felt should be expressed in prayer to the supreme Ruler and the Giver of every good and perfect gift (1 Tim. ii. 1, 2). "We (Christians) do intercede for all our emperors without ceasing, that their lives may be prolonged, their government secured to them, their families preserved in safety, their armies brave, their senates faithful to them, the people virtuous, and the whole empire at peace, and for whatever, as man or Cæsar, an emperor would wish" (Tertullian, 'Apology,' ch. xxx.).

III. LOYAL DEVOTION TO HIS GOVERNMENT. 1. *Personal obedience* to its laws. "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates" (Titus iii. 1). "Ye must needs be subject." (Acts iv. 19; v. 29; Matt. xxii. 21.) 2. *Strenuous opposition* to its enemies. 3. *Faithful endeavour* to promote its efficiency and prosperity. This is plainly our duty as citizens; and whilst, under the protection afforded us, we also seek as Christians in various ways to extend the kingdom of Christ, we thereby make the work of good government easier, and

secure the wisest and most just and honourable men for its accomplishment. So far from being contrary to each other, the Christian religion and civil government are mutually helpful, and each has its part under Divine providence, the one more and the other less directly, in bringing about the time when "the people shall be all righteous."

"When all men's good (shall)
Be each man's rule, and universal peace
Lie like a shaft of light across the land,
And like a lane of beams athwart the sea,
Through all the circle of the Golden Year" (Tennyson).—D

Vers. 26, 27. (MIZPAH and GIBEAH.)—*Friends and opponents in godly enterprise.* It was a saying of Socrates that every man in this life has need of a faithful friend and a bitter enemy—the one to advise him, the other to make him look around him. This saying was more than fulfilled in Saul, who, on being chosen king, was followed by a band of faithful friends, and despised and opposed by "certain worthless men." The same thing often happens, under different circumstances, to other men, and especially to the servants of God when they enter upon some new enterprise which has for its aim the furtherance of his kingdom, and deeply affects men's interests and passions. In relation to such an enterprise we have here an illustration of—

I. THE DIVERSE DISPOSITIONS OF MEN, as—1. Often *existing* when not suspected, and notwithstanding all that is done to harmonise them. When the people shouted, "Long live the king," the dissatisfaction that lurked in many breasts was little surmised. Samuel did all that lay in his power to bring about a complete union of the tribes; but his efforts did not altogether succeed. Reason and persuasion, though they ought to be employed to the utmost, frequently fail to conciliate men because of the different disposition of their hearts. 2. Commonly *manifested* by special events. The honour conferred upon the leader of a new movement, or the decisive action taken by him, serves to "reveal the thoughts of many hearts." A single circumstance sometimes, like a flash of lightning in the darkness, suddenly lays bare to the view what was previously hidden. 3. Clearly *distinguished* as belonging to one or other of two classes: "the host" (sons of strength, LXX.) "whose hearts God had touched," and "sons of worthlessness." "He that is not with me is against me" (Matt. xii. 30). The demands of certain enterprises, like those of Christ himself, render neutrality impossible.

"Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of truth with falsehood, for the good or evil side;
Some great cause, God's new Messiah, offering each the bloom or blight,
Parts the goats upon the left hand, and the sheep upon the right,
And the choice goes by for ever 'twixt that darkness and that light" (Lowell).

II. THE INESTIMABLE WORTH OF FRIENDS. Their worth is always great; but it is especially so in a time of *need*, when new and responsible positions have to be occupied, arduous duties to be performed, numerous enemies to be encountered. Their *counsel* and *support* are indispensable; their very *presence* is a mighty encouragement. "Whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage" (Acts xxviii. 15). Their worth depends upon—1. Their *hearty sympathy* in spirit and aim. A merely formal adherence is of little value; and if there be an inward and ardent devotion, it is "from the Lord" (Ps. cx. 3). And when God impels a man to useful service he does not leave him without those who sympathise with him. 2. Their *perfect unanimity* in arrangement and method. 3. Their *practical co-operation* in labour and conflict. They "went with him," formed his body-guard, and stood ready to defend and help him. In this manner their sympathy proved itself to be genuine, and rendered most effectual service. Would that all who are favourable to noble enterprises, and all members of Christian Churches, rallied thus around their "leaders!" (Phil. i. 27).

III. THE PRUDENT TREATMENT OF OPPONENTS. "How shall this man save us?" "Shall Saul reign over us?" (ch. xi. 12). It is not improbable that they who thus spoke belonged to the princes of Judah and Ephraim, and were *envious* at his election. They were certainly *unbelieving*, neither recognising the hand of God therein, nor looking further than man for deliverance. They were *contemptuous*, deeming him unfit to rule over them. "This man." And they were *disloyal and disobedient*. The law said, "Thou shalt not revile the gods (= God, or the judges), nor curse the ruler of thy people" (Exod. xxii. 28); but they "despised him, and brought him no presents," like others, as an expression of their submission. They might, therefore, have been justly punished as traitors. Yet "he was as though he were deaf;" although he heard them, he did not retaliate, but went on his way in silence. This is often the best way of treating opponents, and it displays—1. *Great self-control.* 2. *Much wisdom and foresight.* To attempt at this time to punish these men might have produced civil war. It is sometimes necessary that gainsayers should be answered, but in most cases they do least mischief by being let alone, and are soonest silenced by silence. 3. *Strong confidence* in Divine help, and the success which it insures. In contending against those whom God calls to do his work men contend against him, and faith calmly leaves them in his hands, to be dealt with as he may think fit (Acts v. 39; Rom. xii. 19).

Conclusion.—1. Expect to find opposition in the way of duty. 2. Let the forbearance of God toward his enemies teach you forbearance towards yours. 3. Be thankful for the sympathy and help of earthly friends, and still more for the sympathy and help of the Lord.—D.

Vers. 26, 27.—*Illusive Presages.* A mild, clear morning may be followed by a stormy day. A prince may begin to reign with gentleness who afterwards becomes proud, ruthless, impatient, even harsh and bloodthirsty. There are few instances of this in history so pathetic as the case of Saul, who began his reign with every indication of a magnanimous character, yet was soon deteriorated by the possession of power, and made himself and all around him most unhappy. In him we see how good impulses may be overcome by evil passion, and what fair promise may come to nought. In order to catch the lessons of warning and admonition which come from the tragic story of Saul, it is necessary to do full justice to the bright beginning of his career.

I. HIS RELIGIOUS SENSIBILITY. We know that his prophesying left little trace behind; but that Saul was quickly susceptible of religious impressions is plain enough, and this in his early days must have awakened fond hopes regarding him in the breasts of those who were zealous for the Lord of hosts.

II. HIS ATTRACTION FOR THE FERVENT SPIRITS OF THE NATION. We are told, with a sort of *naïveté*, how his height impressed the people at large, and was pointed to even by Samuel. So the Greeks gloried in the huge Ajax, and in the towering form of Achilles. It is not said or implied, however, that Saul himself showed any pride in the admiration which his grand appearance won. The significant thing is, that he drew after him "a band of men whose hearts God had touched." They saw in his eye, or supposed they saw, the fire of a kindred enthusiasm. Here was one, they thought, worthy to be king of a holy nation. So they formed a body-guard round him as the Lord's anointed. Their mistake is not at all an isolated one. Ardent young men often fail in discernment of character, and attach themselves to questionable leaders. Let no one count it enough that some good people think well of him, and assume his warmth of spirit as sufficient evidence of his being "born again." A man is what he is in the enduring habits and controlling principles of his character and life. Value the good opinion of the wise, if they have opportunity to see the unexcited tenor of your conduct; but do not count it a sure mark of grace that you have at some time felt a glow of religious ardour, and that others in the same mood have hailed you as brother, or even leader, in the Church of God. After all the attraction exerted by Saul over the fervent spirits of his time, he hardened his own heart, and the Lord departed from him.

III. HIS PATIENCE AND MAGNANIMITY. There were exceptions to the general approval with which Saul was raised to the throne. Some held aloof, and scoffed at

the confidence which was placed so rashly in the tall Benjamite. They disliked him all the more that the devout rallied about him; for they themselves were "sons of Belial," men whose hearts the Lord had not touched. It was a serious risk for the young king to have a disloyal faction, treating his authority with open contempt. Yet Saul bore it quietly. He "held his peace." Nor was this a mere politic delay till he should be strong enough to crush the malcontents, for there is no mention of his ever having called these sons of Belial to account. Surely this was a fine point of character—to bear obstruction so patiently, and be content to earn public confidence by his kingly bearing and exploits. It was a virtue beyond the expectations, and even the wishes, of his people. Who that saw that young king could have imagined that he who was so patient would grow so restless as he did; and he who was so magnanimous would become almost insane with envy, and chase his own son-in-law among the hills of Judæa, thirsting for his blood? So hard is it for a man to be known! Virtue may leap to the front, and show itself on some auspicious day; but vice lurks in the rear, and may prove the stronger. When its day comes it will take the mastery, and then the fair promise of youth is succeeded by a wilful, selfish, ignoble manhood. You meet a man with bloated face and reckless bearing, a companion of fools, half a rogue and half a sot. Yet, could you have seen him twenty years ago, you would have looked on a healthy, happy, kindly boy, the hope of his father's house, the pride of his mother's heart. But there was a weak point in him, and strong drink found it out. So it has come to this degradation. Virtue is laughed at; self-respect is gone; the boy is sunk and lost in this gross and shameless man. Or you see one who is hard and mercenary, inexorable to those who fall into his power, indifferent to the works of genius and to the efforts of philanthropy, occupied always with his own moneyed interest. Yet, could you have seen him thirty years ago, you would have looked on a young man who loved art, or letters, or religion, and seemed likely to develop into a cultured and useful citizen. But in an evil hour the passion of worldly acquisition seized him; or, rather, that which had long been dormant and unperceived began to rule over him, as his opportunities for acquisition widened, and so his bright beginning has resulted in this sordid and ignoble character. Human deterioration, the disappointment of youthful presages of goodness—it is a painful subject, but one which moral teachers may not neglect. It is difficult to stop the evil process once it has begun; and the beginning may be so quiet, so little suspected! It is difficult to know one's self, or any one else, and to say whether it be only a good impulse one has in his youth, or a rooted principle. Some men certainly turn out much better than they promised, but some turn out much worse. Let us watch and pray.—F.

EXPOSITION.

CONFIRMATION OF SAUL IN THE KINGDOM (CHS. XI., XII.).

CHAPTER XI.

THE DEFEAT OF THE AMMONITES (vers. 1—13). Vers. 1, 2.—**Nahash the Ammonite.** The same name is found in 2 Sam. x. 2 as that of the father of Hanun, who treated David's ambassadors so shamefully, and probably they mean the same person. He is there said to have shown kindness to David; and as we read in 2 Sam. xvii. 25 that Abigal (so the Hebrew, not Abigail as the A. V., who was David's wife), Amasa's mother, was the daughter of Nahash, and as Abigal was the sister or half-sister of Zeruiah, David's aunt, there seems to have been some relationship between them. The Ammonites were old enemies of the Israelites, alleging that Israel had taken possession of territory east of the Jordan which rightfully belonged to them (Judges xi. 13); but after their defeat by Jephthah their power was so broken that they allowed a century to elapse before they ventured again to assert their claim. Nahash, apparently after other invasions (ch. xii. 12), now attacks Jabesh-Gilead, a city in the half-tribe of Manasseh, which had been cruelly treated by the Israelites (Judges xxi. 10), but apparently had risen again from its ruins. Its inhabitants were willing humbly to submit to Ammonite rule; but Nahash will grant them no other terms than that they should let him **thrust out**—Hebrew, bore through—**all their right eyes**, not from any special spite against them, but as an insult to all Israel. No better proof could be given of the disorganisation of the nation

than that a petty despot should venture to show his contempt for it in so offensive a way.

Ver. 3.—The elders who govern the town know nothing of a king having been appointed, nor do they send to Samuel to ask him, as the judge, to protect them; but they request a seven days' respite, that they **may send messengers unto all the coasts of Israel**, and Nahash, feeling sure that no combined action would be the result, grants their request, that so Israel far and wide might know of his triumph.

Vers. 4, 5.—Among other places **the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul**, where they make no appeal to him, but tell their sad **tidings in the ears of all the people**. Powerless to help, they can only weep; but in the midst of their lamentation **Saul came after the herd** (Hebrew, following the oxen) **out of the field**. Saul was not driving a herd of cattle home, but had been ploughing, and, labour being over, was returning with the team of oxen.

Ver. 6.—**And the Spirit of God came upon Saul**. Rather, *descended mightily* upon Saul (see ch. x. 6). No miraculous influence is here meant; far more full of meaning and piety is the lesson so constantly taught in the Book of Judges, that all mighty and noble acts are from God (Judges iii. 10; vi. 34; xi. 29; xiii. 25; xiv. 6; xv. 14, &c.). Even the heathen saw in enthusiasm something Divine, for it means the having God within. The energy with which Saul acted was strictly natural, but yet as truly Divine; and it is a sign of the irreligion of modern days that it can see and hear of great and heroic achievements and assign no part in them to God. In the days of Samuel and the judges the whole glory of such acts was ascribed to God. But equally now, whenever men are moved to noble acts, it is "the breath of God" that descends upon them and inspires them.

Ver. 7.—Acting then with Divine enthusiasm, Saul cut into pieces a yoke of oxen, **and sent them throughout all the coasts of Israel by the hands of messengers**. For a similar act see Judges xix. 29. Probably Saul cut the oxen into twelve pieces, and sent one to each tribe, with the threat that in case of disobedience their oxen would be similarly treated. The threat was moderate in that it did not touch their persons, but severe as regards their property, the labouring ox being man's faithful friend and servant. It is important also to notice that Saul speaks not only in his own name, but also in that of Samuel. It was as the man chosen of Jehovah to be king by the voice of his prophet that he acted, and so as one possessed of legitimate authority; and it seems also that Samuel went with him in person to the war (ver. 12). And the result answered to the energy with which Saul acted, for the **fear of Jehovah**—or, rather, "a terror from Jehovah"—**fell on the people, and they came out with one consent**, or, as it is rendered far more correctly and forcibly in the margin, "as one man." United by the kingly power, it was a nation that rose to defend one of its injured members.

Ver. 8.—**He numbered them in Bezek**. This place was in the tribe of Issachar, and must be distinguished from that mentioned in Judges i. 3, 4, which was in Judah, and too remote from the scene of operations. And here Saul appears as the commander-in-chief; for the numbering included the forming of battalions, arranged in thousands, hundreds, and fifties, and the setting officers over them. These, naturally, were the chief men in each district. The result would be that, coming to Bezek, the appointed rendezvous, a disorderly multitude, they would leave it as an army arranged in order, and Saul, in the many difficulties that would arise, would have his first opportunity of showing his powers of command. **Children of Israel, . . . men of Judah**—the distinction which ended in the disruption of the nation. Judah, too, with its 30,000 men, is but poorly represented, nor is it a sufficient explanation of the small number who came that the tribe had enough to do at home in making head against the Philistines. As a matter of fact, Judah always stood apart until there was a king who belonged to itself. Then, in David's time, it first took an active interest in the national welfare, and it was its vast power and numbers which made him so powerful. Had it been so nearly overpowered by the Philistines, it could not so suddenly have sprung forth with a might which made it well-nigh a match for all the rest.

Ver. 9.—**To-morrow, by that time the sun be hot**. As Bezek is about twenty miles distant from Jabesh-Gilead, Saul would probably march most of the way that evening, and then, halting for food and sleep, would continue his advance early the next morning.

Ver. 10.—**To-morrow we will come out unto you**. This was apparently intended to throw the Ammonites off their guard, as they would suppose that the men of Jabesh-Gilead had given up all hopes of deliverance.

Ver. 11.—**They came . . . in the morning watch**. By a forced march Saul came upon the unsuspecting Ammonites just before daybreak, when sleep is deepest; and as his host was unwieldy, he arranged it in three divisions, assigning to each a different route, that they might not impede one another on the way, and might also cut off the retreat of

the enemy. As the fighting went on for five or six hours, **until the heat of the day**, the Ammonites must at first have made some resistance; but when all three divisions of Saul's army had come up, they were so utterly routed that "no two of them were left together."

Vers. 12, 13. — **The people said unto Samuel.** Even after this glorious victory the people turn to Samuel, and doubtless his presence and influence had had great weight in gaining obedience to Saul's command (ver. 7). They now, with the old tumultuous violence, demand that those who had opposed Saul's election should be put to death. Probably the ringleaders of Saul's opponents were some of the elders disappointed at not being chosen themselves (see on ch. x. 27). But Saul displays, first, the kingly virtue of clemency, saying, **There shall not a man be put to death this day**—a decision politic as well as generous, for bloodshed would have led only to future feuds; and, secondly, piety, in so humbly ascribing to Jehovah the salvation that had been wrought in Israel.

SAUL SOLEMNLY CONSECRATED AS KING (vers. 14, 15). Ver. 14.—**Let us go to Gilgal.** The famous sanctuary (ch. vii. 16) of that name, situated lower down, in the Jordan valley, near Jericho. It was not far from Jabesh-Gilead, and naturally the victorious host would move from the field of battle to the nearest religious spot to consecrate their king.

Ver. 15.—**They made Saul king.** This is not to be interpreted, with the Septuagint, of a second anointing of Saul, but of his confirmation in the kingdom by the unanimous voice of the nation, whereas the first election of him at Mizpah had met with opposition. **Before Jehovah.** *I. e.* with religious ceremonies conducted by Samuel and the high priest. The difference between Saul's election at Mizpah and the confirmation of it at Gilgal is much the same as between the first proclamation of a king and his coronation. The latter is the nation's acknowledgment of his sovereignty, and the solemn consecration of him to his high office. **Peace offerings** were tokens of joy and gratitude, and were followed by a feast. At this there was great rejoicing, because the king whom they had desired had so quickly proved himself worthy to be their head.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*The relative power of evil and good.* The facts are—1. The Ammonites, in pursuit of the enterprise previously arranged for (see ch. xii. 12; cf. viii. 5), threaten Jabesh-Gilead. 2. The inhabitants in terror seek to make a covenant with their enemy. 3. This being insolently refused, a respite of seven days is granted, during which external aid is to be sought. The narrative is evidently designed to trace the circumstances under which the discontent and base insinuations of "men of Belial" (ch. x. 27) were practically shown to be baseless. This was a war of revenge undertaken by the strong against the weak, and the facts as a whole set forth three important truths of general interest.

I. EVIL IS STRONG RELATIVELY TO THE FAITHFULNESS OR UNFAITHFULNESS OF GOD'S PEOPLE. Ammon was Israel's ancestral foe (Deut. xxiii. 4; Judges xi. 4). The prosperity of one seemed incompatible with that of the other. When, under the inspiring leadership of Jephthah, the Ammonites were utterly smitten, their strength was brought down to its proper proportions. Had Israel continued faithful in the improvement of privileges enjoyed as the chosen race, their moral and political strength would have proportionately advanced in harmony with the promises given through Moses (Deut. xxviii. 1—14). The relative position of the representatives of good and evil had entirely changed when Nahash in pride of strength threatened Jabesh-Gilead. Even the partial reformation effected through Samuel had not yet placed Israel beyond the fear of well-organised foes. God's people are strong when holy, true, and diligent in use of the advantages of their position. The truth thus taught is *exemplified in Church history, in modern society, in private and domestic life.* 1. *Church history* testifies that *the energy of evil and its range have been proportionate to the faithfulness of the Church* to its lofty mission as conserver of God's truth and witness for Christ among men. The Ammonites have multiplied, become insolent, and have awakened fear only when the Christian Israel have lost their first love and failed to keep their solemn vows. 2. *Modern society feels that the growth of evil is another form of weakened spiritual grace.* There may be, in the unseen sphere of spiritual

"principalities and powers," seasons when energetic spontaneous exertions are made to overcome the influence of the gospel. But to speak of the portentous growth of spiritual ignorance, disregard of religion, infidelity, and open vice, especially in large centres of population, is but another way of saying that the professed followers of Christ have not been as earnest and united in effort as he would have them to be. It is in the nature of light to get rid of darkness, of salt to remove corruption. The grave problem of the age may require many elements—social, sanitary, educational, political—for its solution, but men feel that *the* chief requirement is higher spiritual power in Christians. 3. *In private and domestic life* the power of evil depends on personal fidelity to what God has given and imposed. The remnants of sin in our nature lose force in so far as we faithfully seek cleansing by the indwelling of the Spirit, and keep a strong hand on the first uprising of unholiness. The force of external temptation diminishes in so far as our cultured holiness of disposition furnishes it with no affinity within. And as domestic life is but the first social form of the life cultured in private, its spiritual evils become formidable or feeble in so far as the soul is true to its God.

II. DANGERS IMPENDING FROM THE GROWTH OF EVIL MAY INDUCE RECOURSE TO THE TRUE SOURCE OF DELIVERANCE. The dangers threatening Jabesh-Gilead sprang from the action of a spiritual law. Israel *never* had been in real peril during any seasons of obedience to God. In the present instance the danger, which was brought on by a train of sad defections in years gone by, was very real, and became so pressing that, in utter desperation, the people turn their thoughts towards the king. The miseries consequent on past sins aroused a cry for the lawful deliverer. This was one of the results of the partial reformation. Much is gained when men are impelled to have recourse to the agencies and sources of power which God has specifically ordained for their help. There are illustrations of this in life. 1. *The soul is often driven, in desperation, to Christ for help.* Men do awake to the fact that destruction awaits them. The jailor's cry to the Apostle Paul has been repeated by thousands. Sin and judgment are terrible realities. But often men, when oppressed with fear of coming doom, endeavour to find relief by various expedients. At last, half in despair and half in hope, they turn to him who is *the* Anointed One to secure redemption to Israel. 2. *In the spiritual conflict a sense of need impels to a use of Divine aids.* Some men, trusting too freely to merely human wisdom, find that disaster comes in the Christian conflict. Principles become gradually weaker, and there is a risk of a loss of place in the commonwealth of Israel; but after a bitter experience they remember and recognise the means of defence and freedom. Weary, sad, conscious of inability to cope with the foe, they seek closer fellowship with Christ, and a more earnest use of the sword of the Spirit. 3. *The modern Church is driven by the sheer magnitude of social dangers to have recourse more fully to the radical cure of all ills—the gospel.* Thoughtful Christians see that no mere social reforms and sanitary arrangements, or scientific discoveries, will avail to arrest the real dangers of human nature. The evil is great, the risks desperate; the full gospel, presented with all the energy and self-denial and love which the Christian spirit can call forth, is the only means of spiritual deliverance. The material and social will follow. Whatever others may do, the Church must betake herself with apostolic zeal to the ancient lines of action.

III. EVENTS IN THE NATURAL ORDER OF PROVIDENCE AFFORD OPPORTUNITY FOR THE VINDICATION OF GOD'S SERVANTS. It is instructive to notice how long lines of intricate events, and working out collateral purposes, converge in securing for the anointed king an opportunity of answering by deeds the aspersions and insinuations of disaffected men. The growth of Ammon's power for evil consequent on Israel's religious defection, and the gradual reformation that had for some years been progressing in Israel,—these with all their subsidiary events,—created occasion for an appeal to Saul. He "held his peace" when "men of Belial" reviled, but Providence was working in his behalf. There are "wheels within wheels." *The same order is ever going on.* The Saviour's earthly life and subsequent resurrection is a case in point. Righteous men, whose motives have been misinterpreted and characters maligned, have committed themselves in silence to God, and he has brought forth their "righteousness as the light," and their "judgment as the noonday." **And,**

also, all events are converging to the vindication of Christ's claim to be King of kings and Lord of lords.

General considerations:—1. What may be the *special* causes of the relative progress of irreligion in different localities? 2. To what extent the prevalence of irreligion and of influences adverse to the gospel are traceable to the unfaithfulness of the Church in generations gone by, and how best to counteract the effect of such historic unfaithfulness on the public mind. 3. In how many ways do professing Christians sometimes endeavour to compromise with their natural enemy? 4. What opportunites does Providence naturally open for the vindication of our personal claim to be true servants of Christ?

Vers. 4—11.—*The perfecting gift.* The facts are—1. The message brought to Gibeah throws the inhabitants into grief and consternation. 2. Saul, on hearing the tidings, is aroused by the Spirit of God to summon the nation to follow him and Samuel. 3. The people responding to the call, help is assured to the men of Jabesh. 4. The result is the utter defeat of the Ammonites. The effect of the appeal of the men of Jabesh on the people of Gibeah, on Saul, and subsequently on the conflict with the foe, brings out three truths of wider range than the particular instance recorded.

I. AN IMPERFECT APPRECIATION OF THE RESOURCES PLACED WITHIN THEIR REACH ACCOUNTS FOR SOME OF THE TROUBLES OF MEN. "The people lifted up their voices and wept." Their hearts sank within them; the boding ruin of Jabesh was the precursor of their own. This conduct was the effect of a non-appreciation of the position they then held under the care of God. Had they duly considered the significance of the return of the ark, the value of the reformation already inaugurated, and the lessons of history (Judges vii. 7), they must have seen that an appeal to their God-approved king, in humble dependence on God, would have in some way saved their brethren of Jabesh. *Men in all ages have lost much good and brought on much misery by not adequately considering the resources put within their power.* 1. *The earth, air, and sea* have been for ages full of God's hid treasures for the use of man; there lie powers to heal, to accomplish work, to promote the material and domestic good of all. Neglect or forgetfulness of their presence for generations deprived men of physical blessings now enjoyed by rich and poor. Doubtless other resources are close at hand, if only we duly appreciated them, and sought them in the right way. 2. In *the human constitution* there are valuable powers which, in numberless instances, are not duly considered and developed. Faculties lie dormant which might contribute to the wealth, culture, and comfort of the possessor and society. The material and intellectual loss to the world of undeveloped powers is enormous. The occasional results of education only reveal the extent of our deprivation of possible good. 3. In *the Christian there are gifts of the Spirit* not sufficiently stirred up. In the ordinary gifts of the Spirit there is generally a reserve of power in excess of the exertion put forth. In maintaining the conflict with sin and in doing deeds of love more might be accomplished by a proper estimate and use of what already dwells in the renewed soul. 4. In *the reserved power of God, dependent for its exercise on the prayer of faith, there is a vast store of blessing not often touched.* The Divine energy has not all been expended. Largely, in connection with the progress of Christ's kingdom, it is dependent for its outflow on the effectual fervent prayers of his servants. We are to prove him, whether he will not open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing. 5. In *the provision for the renewal and forgiveness of the most guilty* there is a resource not always appreciated. Many men continue to carry their guilt and yield to the impulses of a depraved nature because they forget or do not duly consider WHO stands by them mighty to save. Did they but truly "*know* the gift of God, and who it is" that speaks to them of salvation, they would not go hither and thither, sad, and weary, and tearful, but would ask of him, and he would give them "living water."

II. THERE IS A PERFECTING GIFT FROM GOD REQUISITE TO DEVELOP AND TURN TO BEST ACCOUNT MUCH ELSE BESTOWED BY GOD. Saul was already a powerful man, chosen by the nation, and recognised by God as king. He was endowed with prerogative and latent capabilities. The tidings which caused wailing among the men

of Gibeah because of their non-appreciation of their true position were the occasion of a remarkable display of courage and energy on the part of Saul, and that because "the Spirit of God" came upon him. Whatever the precise nature of this higher gift, its practical effect was to draw out all that was in the man and the king, and to enable the powers already bestowed to act for the benefit of Israel. It perfected all else done for Saul. *There is a relation of dependence in the blessings God bestows on us.* Some come to full development only when allied with another, which, therefore, may be called a higher good. The physical energy for defeat of Ammon lay in Israel. The gift of Saul turned it all into victory. The same relation is seen amongst us; *e. g.* material wealth is a boon not to be despised, often the gift of God; but for its full development and enjoyment it needs another gift—health of body and generosity of spirit. Great mental abilities are of God; the additional gift of a devout, lowly spirit insures their most perfect use. Home adorned and enriched by all that wealth, art, and domestic affection can contribute is a precious blessing; yet its joys are more full and varied, its affections more pure, and its sorrows more endurable, when the higher blessing of personal religion is supreme there. The external privileges of religion, free use of the word of God, instruction and care of pious parents, associations of the sanctuary, entreaties of pastors and friends, are among the greatest mercies enjoyed by men; yet even these are raised to their highest value only when the Holy Spirit comes down, like "upper and nether springs" to water the "south land."

III. GOD SOMETIMES EFFECTS HIS PURPOSES AMONG MEN BY INDIRECT ACTION UPON THEM. In the accomplishment of Divine purposes, in the physical, mental, or spiritual spheres, a variety of combinations are often requisite. To the deliverance of Jabesh-Gilead it was needful to arouse the people as well as the king. It was by the tremendous energy of the king, aroused by the direct action of the Spirit of God, that their instant co-operation was secured. The *law of indirect action widely prevails.* That the Eternal is in direct, constant, energetic contact with each being is certain. He "*upholds* all things by the word of his power." Yet, if language may be so used to indicate a mystery, the import of his energy on men is not always immediate. The energy of one spirit acting on another is, so to speak, a refraction of a force originally in God, and coloured by the character of the medium through which it passes. There are many illustrations of the general truth of indirect action. 1. In *the sphere of mind* much is accomplished by powerful intellects affecting a few with their ideas and feelings, who, being more in contact with the masses, give forth the truth or the emotion tinged by their own peculiarities. 2. In *the sphere of spirit*, religiously considered, a large proportion of what we call *influence* is of this character. Not only do superior Christians act on a wide area by means of the few who come under their personal attention, but much of the action of God on the world is through his people. *His light* is not seen by many except mediately in the beautiful lives of the holy. *His love* acts on the hard heart of man through the compassion he directly produces in the followers of Christ. Men see by holy deeds and spiritual achievements that "God is with" his people, and are thus influenced by God to submit to his blessed sway.

General lessons:—1. It behoves every one to search and see what talents, and means of becoming holy, and of advancing Christ's kingdom, lie unused. 2. It should be a matter of serious inquiry how much of our wailing and fear are the result of a guilty forgetfulness or distrust of God's readiness to bless our endeavours. 3. If we are in possession of valuable blessings, and they do not yield all the joy and satisfaction reasonably to be looked for, we should find out what is that higher gift not yet sought from God. 4. The Church and the Christian have need to inquire how much of the non-success of endeavour is due to lack of receptivity for the highest gift of all, the rich outpouring of the Holy Spirit. 5. Every one should so live as to be a fit and perfect vehicle for the transmission of the healing, saving power of God on mankind.

Vers. 12—15.—*The concurrence of human and Divine action.* The facts are—1. On the completion of the victory over the Ammonites, the supporters of Saul desire the punishment by death of the "men of Belial" who had reviled him. 2. Saul,

recognising the merciful help of God, refuses to mar the joy of victory by personal retaliation. 3. At the invitation of Samuel the people assembled in Gilgal for the recognition of Saul as victorious king, coupled with thanksgiving to God. To an ordinary observer looking on the conflict between Israel and Ammon, it would seem to be simply a struggle of men with men. The preceding verses (6—11) show that an element more than human entered into the conflict, and Saul gratefully refers to this in saying, "To-day *the Lord* hath wrought salvation in Israel." The subsequent celebration of worship by Samuel was a recognition of the same fact.

I. It is THE CONCURRENCE OF GOD'S ACTION WITH THAT OF MAN WHICH BRINGS ABOUT RESULTS OF A JOYOUS CHARACTER. The personal will and muscular and mental energy of Saul, aided by the co-operating powers of the people, led to the defeat of the Ammonites. That was the visible human element. But these powers were set at work and sustained by the action *directly* on the nature of Saul by the Spirit of God (ver. 6), and *indirectly* through the awe inspired thereby on the minds and bodies of the people. The issue, therefore, is to be ascribed to concurrent action of the human and Divine, the latter partly direct and partly indirect. In a general way it may be said that all effects realised by man are by this concurrence of action. For even when they exercise their power of willing and devising in a wrong direction, it is only possible in consequence of the energy of God sustaining those powers of volition and thought. But the more specific sense in which the concurrence is true may be seen by taking instances. 1. In *the realisation of Messianic purposes.* The appearance of Christ on earth was the result of a long double line of action. The descendants of Abraham freely cherished the hope of Messiah, and by effort of their own will they contributed, as described in the Old Testament, the human line of action towards this issue. But all this time, and along with all these acts, the Spirit of God was at work, making them willing to be a separate people, controlling events to secure their isolation, inspiring their prophets with rapt vision of the future, and at last coming on the one honoured among women for the perfecting of all that had been hoped and laboured for (Luke i. 27—35). 2. In *the production of the Bible.* In revelation, as a whole, we have a long train of human events intertwined with a successive manifestation of the Divine will. The Bible is the record of the combination. This holy Book itself is what it is, in its historical portions, because human hands gathered out the selected facts in pursuance of a principle given of God. Moreover, the devout exercises of human spirits in such portions as the Psalms were free, yet concurrent with a Divine influence in their initiation; and as also in the selection of them subsequently for the benefit of mankind. 3. In *the victories achieved by Christianity.* The victories of Christianity have come about by the free effort of individual minds combining under forms of Church organisation. Men have spoken, written, entreated, sympathised, prayed. Some critics ascribe all success in heathen lands to sheer force of superior intelligence and moral influence; and in civilised lands to what of moral excellence there may be in connection with a great superstition, enforced as this is by a zeal that takes captive the uncritical. But *the* solution is that God is a co-worker with the Church. The human and Divine action are concurrent, the one being the vehicle through which the other operates. 4. In *the sanctification of the soul.* The work to be done before the human soul can rise to the highest form of life is enormous. Few men consider what is involved in "*entering into the kingdom of heaven*" even on earth. To rise to the life of the "kingdom" means work, conflict, suppression, elevation, excision, nurture, self-denial, aspiration, ambition, persistence within a sphere into which only the eye of God can penetrate. Yet all the expenditure of energy the greatest mind can command is of itself inadequate. We are conquerors and "more than conquerors through Christ," who helpeth us. He "worketh within us to will and to do." In this subtle concurrence of the Divine and human the highest form of life is realised for the "whole body, soul, and spirit."

II. It is BEFITTING TO SEIZE OCCASION FOR RECOGNISING GOD'S CONCURRENT ACTION WITH US IN BRINGING GOOD ISSUES TO PASS. It was fit that Saul should publicly recognise the hand of God in his first victory. The spontaneity of the act, and the magnanimous spirit that would not mar the joy of the victory by personal retaliation on his despisers, indicate that at this period of his history he possessed some

excellent moral qualities, which certainly were strengthened by this public expression of them. Samuel's participation in the common joy was also proof of the good feelings of Saul. 1. It is *good to pause in life's struggles and consider gratefully our personal indebtedness to God's power working with us.* There are dangers in activity. Absorption in the outgoing of our own energy may unconsciously induce the belief that by "our own arm" have we gotten the victory. Occasional reflection of the need and fact of the Power that "worketh all in all," with deeper dependence on God, awaken gratitude, give tone to our own exertions, and sustain hope of final triumph. 2. It is *good in families to seize opportunities for recognising God's help.* The parent whose business has prospered, whose children are being happily settled in life, whose home has been kept free from great calamities, or who has come out of severe trials with honour, will do well to remember who giveth power to be rich, ordereth right paths, sheltereth from "the destruction that wasteth at noonday," and raiseth the needy from the dust, and not be ashamed to let his household know how much he owes to God. Such conduct will bear blessed fruit. 3. It is *good for nations to recognise God in signal deliverances.* God works with and for every nation that loves and seeks righteousness. National homage is as proper as individual worship. Thanksgiving services are of Scriptural authority. The precedents are numerous in the Old Testament. It is no doubt owing solely to the fact that Christianity had not permeated nations as a whole, when the New Testament was written, that no precedents are found in its records. Yet the Church as such held special services for prayer and thanksgiving (Acts iv. 23—33). Those who contend that vigorous human action is the true and only form of homage to God overlook the fact that there is in good results *more than human action*, and that positive acts of worship, in recognition of dependence and in expression of gratitude, not only pay honour to whom honour is due, but exercise a beneficial reflex influence on the worshippers. Such acts quicken the public conscience, raise thought to a higher level, nourish the religious feeling, offer excellent occasions and topics for instruction, strengthen the national sentiment, awaken the kindly interest of class for class, call forth the more generous and restrain the harsher impulses of life.

General lessons:—1. It should be a question with individuals and nations as to whether they in their aims and spirit fulfil the conditions on which alone the concurrent action of God can proceed. 2. Much of the non-success of effort may arise from an insufficient recognition of God as a co-worker with us. 3. Things and private persons rise in honour and influence as they display a generous magnanimity. 4. The joy of great salvation should be undiminished by the intrusion of any bitter human feeling.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—15. (GIBEAH, BEZEK, JABESH.)—*Saul's first victory.* Although Saul had been privately anointed and publicly chosen king, he did not immediately assume royal state. Guided, doubtless, by the counsel of Samuel, and perceiving from the disaffection of certain men (ch. x. 27) that the nation was not yet quite prepared for the change, he did not deem it prudent to do so. Returning to his former mode of life at Gibeah (ver. 5), he awaited some further indication of his call to be "captain over the Lord's inheritance." "Nothing but true, royal action for the welfare of the state, alike bravely undertaken and firmly carried out at the right moment, could win for him that real deference, that joyful, voluntary co-operation for state purposes from all his subjects, without which his sovereignty must ever remain most feeble and equivocal" (Ewald). It was not long ("a month," LXX.) before the opportunity for such action occurred. He proved himself equal to the occasion, and his patience was justified and rewarded. His position as a *military leader* was fully vindicated by the result, and his sovereignty was heartily recognised by all the people. This is the chief historical significance of his warlike enterprise or *campaign* against the Ammonites for the relief of Jabesh-Gilead. Observe that it was—

I. UNDERTAKEN IN A RIGHTEOUS CAUSE (vers. 1—4). If ever war is justifiable (and it seems impossible that it should be altogether avoided), it is when undertaken,

as in this case—1. *To repel hostile aggression.* The Ammonites were old enemies (Deut. ii. 19; xxiii. 3, 4; Judges iii. 13; x. 7; xi. 5). They were a nomadic, predatory, cruel, and idolatrous people. For some time Nahash, animated by the desire of war and conquest, "the malady of princes," had assumed a threatening attitude (ch. xii. 12), and now laid siege to the capital of Gilead, a part of the Israelitish territory belonging to the half-tribe of Manasseh, beyond the Jordan. His aggression was—(1) Without adequate ground. He probably revived a claim previously asserted and refuted (Judges xi. 12—15). But men readily find pretexts for a course to which they are disposed. "From whence come wars?" (James iv. 1). (2) Revengeful. He wished to avenge the defeat long before inflicted by Jephthah. Hatred between nations tends to perpetuate itself, and to become intensified; and successes in war often sow "dragon's teeth" that produce a subsequent harvest of strife and misery. (3) Proud, boastful, and cruel (ver. 2). 2. *To aid imperilled brethren.* Between the people of Jabesh and the Benjamites, especially, there was an intimate connection (Judges xxi. 12—14). Their condition was now degraded, fearful, wretched; and although it was due to their want of patriotism, faith, and courage, yet it did not deprive them of a claim upon the sympathy of their brethren, but was a powerful appeal to their compassion. The appeal of the poor, the oppressed, the slave cannot be unheeded without sin (Prov. xxiv. 11, 12). 3. *To avert a common danger.* The siege of Jabesh was evidently intended as the first step in an attack upon all Israel. The distress of the people of Gibeah arose not merely from sympathy with their brethren, but also from fear for themselves, and a sense of helplessness against so powerful an adversary. Saul's enterprise was thus one of self-defence. 4. *To maintain the Divine honour.* The Ammonites worshipped Moloch (Molech, or Milcom), "the abomination of the children of Ammon" (1 Kings xi. 7), and sought his honour in opposition to that of Jehovah. It was a part of the calling of Israel to extirpate idolatry, and it was commanded them concerning the Ammonites, "Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever" (Deut. xxiii. 6). In their wars with the heathen they acted under a Divine commission. The religious wars which have been waged under the Christian dispensation have sometimes been undertaken from lofty motives, but they have not had the same justification, and the honour of God ought to be sought by other and more effectual means.

II. WAGED WITH HOLY ENTHUSIASM (vers. 5—11). Enthusiasm = God in us. It was—1. *Inspired by the Divine Spirit.* On returning from the field, and learning the cause of the people's distress, "the Spirit of God came upon Saul, and his anger was kindled greatly." There is an anger which is not sinful (Mark iii. 5; Ephes. iv. 26). The feeling of resentment is a weapon put into our hands by God against injury, injustice, and cruelty of every kind. (1) The anger of Saul was incited by the same spirit as previously constrained him to utter Divine praises. (2) It was a feeling of wrath and burning zeal against wrong. (3) It was directed towards the welfare of his people and the honour of God. (4) It qualified him for a great enterprise; led him to assume the leadership of the nation to which he had been appointed, and to summon the tribes to rally around him. The gifts of the Spirit of God are various, and adapted to the requirements of the age. 2. *Shared in by all the people.* (1) "The fear of Jehovah fell on the people," *i. e.* a fear inspired by him. "In Saul's energetic appeal the people discerned the power of Jehovah, which inspired them with fear and impelled them to immediate obedience" (Keil). That power is able to fill a whole nation, as well as an individual, with new emotions and impulses. (2) Under its influence "they came out as one man" (with one consent). (3) Mustered under the leadership of Saul in Bezek, near to Bethshan. A common danger often draws men into closer union and co-operation than peace and prosperity. 3. *Expressed in a confident assurance of help.* "To-morrow, by the time the sun be hot, ye shall have help" (ver. 9). Faith looks upon that which is believed as if it were already an accomplished fact. 4. *Manifested in energetic action.* His promise was not in words merely, but was followed up by deeds (ver. 11). "It was night when Saul and the armed multitude which followed him broke up from Bezek. Little did he know how well the brave men of Jabesh would requite the service (ch. xxxi. 8—13). Strange that Saul's first march should have been by night from Bethshan to

Jabesh, the same route by which at the last they carried his dead body at night" (Edersheim).

III. ATTENDED WITH EXTRAORDINARY SUCCESS. 1. The *defeat* of the enemy—sudden, unexpected, and complete. "Two of them were not left together," and their king, Nahash, was slain (Josephus). "Those that walk in pride he is able to abase" (Dan. iv. 37). 2. The *deliverance* of the oppressed, who were not afterwards wanting in gratitude or courage. 3. The *cessation* of disaffection (vers. 12, 13). 4. The united and joyful *devotion* of all Israel (vers. 14, 15).

Observe—1. We have other enemies to encounter than those of flesh and blood (Ephes. vi. 12). 2. We must contend against them not simply for our own safety, but for the good of our fellow-men. 3. It is only by the help of the Lord that we can prevail.—D.

Vers. 12, 13.—*Generosity toward enemies.* Some men are subject to noble impulses, under which they rise to a higher level of thought and feeling than that which they ordinarily occupy. The difference is sometimes so great that they do not seem to be the same persons. But the change is transient, and they speedily relapse into their former state. Their character is one of varying, wayward, and uncertain moods rather than high, steadfast, and consistent principle. Such a man was Saul. The impulse under which he spared his enemies after his victory over the Ammonites (probably due, as other impulses were, to the influence of Samuel, who may have accompanied him to the battle—vers. 7, 12) displayed extraordinary magnanimity. The act is the noblest recorded of him, and stands out in strong relief against the dark background of his subsequent career. "Saul herein showeth his piety, humanity, wisdom. Hitherto he declareth himself an innocent man and a good prince; but afterward he forgot his own rule, when he would have killed Jonathan (ch. xiv. 45). This mutability in Saul and changeable nature, in falling from clemency to cruelty, from piety to profanity, from a good governor to become a tyrant, doth show that these virtues were not thoroughly grounded in him, but only superficially infused" (Willet). Let us regard him as a pattern of a principle which ought always to be exhibited. His generosity toward his enemies was shown—

I. UNDER STRONG PROVOCATION, arising from—1. The recollection of their *past conduct* towards himself (ch. x. 27). He could not altogether forget it, and when he was disposed to put it away from his thoughts, he was reminded of it by others. Nothing is more provocative of wrath than brooding over the wrongs that have been received. On the other hand, the surest way to forgive is to forget. 2. The feeling of *natural resentment* toward them. "Revenge is sweet," say men who are not restrained by Divine wisdom and grace; and they are especially apt to say it when they have the *power* to avenge themselves, and when they persuade themselves that *justice* and *prudence* require that the wrong should not go unpunished. They *do* require it, doubtless, in some cases; but how large a place does the desire of gratifying personal animosity hold in most instances in which men seek to inflict punishment on others. "Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work" (Prov. xxiv. 29; xx. 22). 3. The *urgency* of others. Men are only too prone to indulge wrath without such an incitement, but they are often led by it to go beyond their own judgment and feeling, and he who, like Saul, overcomes it gains a double victory. "Thereby he gained another victory—(1) over himself—he restrains himself in the exercise of a right; (2) over the anger of those who demanded that justice be executed; (3) over his former opponents, who now clearly see that which, under the influence of haughty contempt, they had doubted; and (4) over the whole people, who must have been carried along by him in the path of noble moral conduct, and lifted above themselves to the height on which he stood" (Erdmann).

II. IN A ROYAL MANNER. "There shall not a man be put to death this day." 1. *Promptly.* If he had waited till the morrow his purpose might have changed. When a generous emotion fills the heart it should be at once translated into word and deed. First thoughts in things moral, unlike first thoughts in things intellectual, are always best. Hesitation and delay dim their brightness and weaken their power. 2. *Decisively.* Saul spoke like a king. He refused to stain his laurels with blood.

And whilst he resolved not to punish his enemies, he declared his determination that none other should punish them. "Where the word of a king is there is power." 3. *Completely.* "Not a man." Not a single example was to be made, but his clemency was to extend to all. In the same royal manner we may and ought to show mercy. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

III. FROM A PROPER MOTIVE. "For to-day the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel." "Not only signifying that the public rejoicing should not be interrupted, but reminding them of the clemency of God, and urging that since Jehovah had shown such clemency upon that day, that he had overlooked their sins and given them a glorious victory, it was only right that they should follow his example and forgive their neighbours' sins without bloodshed" (Seb. Schmid). Saul showed—1. Regard for the *transcendent excellence of mercy.* Nothing is more beautiful or more pleasing to God, and its exercise is necessary that we may obtain mercy (Matt. vi. 15). He is "merciful and gracious." "Mercy rejoiceth against judgment." (Prov. xxv. 21; Rom. xii. 19, 20; James ii. 13.)

> "It becomes
> The throned monarch better than his crown;
> His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
> The attribute to awe and majesty,
> Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
> But mercy is above this sceptred sway;
> It is enthroned in the heart of kings,
> It is an attribute to God himself,
> And earthly power doth then show likest God's
> When mercy seasons justice" ('Merchant of Venice').

To return good for good and evil for evil is natural, to return evil for good is devilish, but to return good for evil is Divine. 2. Gratitude for the *abounding goodness of God.* His hand was fully recognised in recent victory and deliverance. His kindness to us should constrain us to be kind to others, and his forgiveness is shown to have been experienced only when it leads us to forgive (Matt. xviii. 35). 3. Desire for the *welfare of men.* "The Lord hath wrought salvation *in Israel,*" to whom these "worthless men" belonged. Even such men are objects of his forbearance and benevolence. "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good" (Matt. v. 45). He does them good, and thereby seeks to subdue their hostility toward himself (Ezek. xxxiii. 11). We ought to exhibit the same spirit, and by doing so we shall promote the general peace and happiness. "Be ye therefore merciful, even as your Father also is merciful" (Luke vi. 36).—D.

Vers. 11—13.—*Saul at his best.* Self-control, promptitude, courage, capacity, ascription of praise to God, forbearance towards men, these are all exhibited by the young king. Alas, that from such heights he fell!

I. SELF-CONTROL. Though hailed as king at Mizpah, Saul was in no haste to assume regal state. He resumed his country life at Gibeah, waiting till the Lord should call him forth in some emergency to take command of the army of Israel. In this he followed the example of the judges, who, so to speak, won their spurs before they wore them—first wrought some deliverance for their country, and then assumed the government.

II. PROMPTITUDE. News of the doom which threatened the town of Jabesh reached Saul as he returned home from the field, following his oxen with a farmer's slow and heavy step. In a moment he was another man, no more a seeker of asses, or a follower of oxen; but a leader of men, prompt and resolute. And such energy did he show that in a few days he had rallied a large army to his standard.

III. COURAGE AND CAPACITY. Saul had no time to train or discipline his forces, but he managed to gain an advantage for them. He lulled the enemy to security, and then, surprising their camp by night, fell on them with impetuous fury. So completely were they dispersed that, as the graphic historian says, "two of them were not left together."

IV. ASCRIPTION OF PRAISE TO GOD. After the victory Saul showed no disposition to vain boasting. Nothing could be better than his *Te Deum laudamus*—"To-day Jehovah hath wrought salvation in Israel."

V. FORBEARANCE TOWARDS MEN. Saul was urged by the exultant people to put to death those who had opposed his elevation; but he would not have the lustre of his victory darkened by such a deed of vengeance, and, not only ruling his own spirit well, but checking the intolerance of others, he said, "There shall not a man be put to death this day."

Yet from this moral elevation Saul miserably fell. He who seemed to be the rising hope of Israel became one of the most hapless and tragical personages in all his nation's history. He who showed at first patience and self-control became a restless, jealous king. His great fault was wilfulness, leading to the most foolish impatience, and wretched envy. He who executed his first military exploit so skilfully, and with such complete success, became notorious for his failures. And, at last, he who had shown such fearless readiness to set upon the Ammonites was afraid to encounter the Philistines (ch. xxviii. 5). Not that his natural courage had died out of him, but the sustaining faith in God was gone. "God is departed from me, and answereth me no more." He who was so averse to shed the blood of disaffected subjects shed the blood of many faithful men, as of the priests of the Lord, and hurled the javelin from his own hand again and again at the worthiest of all his subjects, hating him without a cause. 1. The true character of a man will show itself. No veil will cover it; no prudential consideration can bind it. Sooner or later it will have its way. 2. The higher the promise of virtue, the greater the momentum of him who falls from his integrity, the farther he goes into evil. 3. The path of the wilful and proud is one of waning light and thickening darkness; but "the path of the just is as the shining light, which shines more and more until the perfect day."—F.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XII.

SAMUEL'S EXHORTATION TO THE PEOPLE AT GILGAL. This speech of Samuel is not to be regarded as a farewell address made upon his resignation of his office; for though a new power had been introduced, and Samuel's sons excluded from the succession, yet it was only gradually that a change was made in his own position. He was still judge (ch. vii. 15), and on extraordinary occasions came forward with decisive authority (ch. xv. 33). But as Saul gathered men of war round him (ch. xiv. 52), the moral power possessed by Samuel would be overshadowed by the physical force which was at Saul's command. But no formal change was made. It had been the weakness of the office of the judges that their power was irregular, and exercised fitfully on special occasions. Such a power must fall into abeyance in the presence of the regular authority of a king surrounded by armed men. Without any direct deposition, therefore, or even still retaining the form of his office, Samuel would henceforward chiefly act as the prophet, and Saul as Jehovah's king.

The address divides itself into three parts:—1. The testimony to Samuel's integrity as judge (vers. 1—5). 2. The reproof of the people for their disobedience and ingratitude (vers. 6—17). 3. The Divine testimony to Samuel's uprightness and teaching (vers. 18—25).

SAMUEL'S INTEGRITY (vers. 1—5). Ver. 1.—**I have hearkened unto your voice.** See ch. viii. 7, 9, 22.

Ver. 2.—**The king walketh before you.** *I. e.* you have now one to protect and lead the nation, whereas my business was to raise its religious and moral life. The metaphor is taken from the position of the shepherd in the East, where he goes before his flock to guide and guard them. On this account the word shepherd or pastor is used in the Bible of the temporal ruler (Jer. ii. 8; xxiii. 4, &c.), and not, as with us, of the spiritual guide. **My sons are with you.** This is no mere confirmation of the fact just stated that he was old, but a direct challenge of their dissatisfaction with his sons' conduct, as far at least as concerns any connivance on his part, or support of them in their covet-

ousness. Samuel says, You know all about my sons; I do not profess to be ignorant that charges have been brought against them. Give full weight to them, and to everything said against them and me, and then give judgment.

Vers. 3, 4, 5.—**Witness against me.** Literally, "answer," as in a court of justice to the formal question of the judge. **His anointed.** *I. e.* the king (see on ch. ii. 10, 35; x. 1). **Whose ox, . . . whose ass?** See on ch. viii. 16. **Of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith?** Bribe should be rendered *ransom*. Literally it signifies a covering, and was used of money given by a guilty person to induce the judge to close or "blind his eyes," and not see his sin. It does not mean, therefore, any bribe, but only that given to buy off a guilty person. Such persons are generally powerful men who have oppressed and wronged others; and the knowledge that they can cover their offence by sharing their gains with the judge is to this day in the East the most fruitful source of bad government. The people all bear witness to Samuel's uprightness, nor is there any contradiction between this and their desire to have a king. His internal administration was just and righteous, but they were oppressed by the nations round them, and needed a leader in war. And in Samuel's sons they had men, not vicious or licentious, but too fond of money, and so neither fit to be their generals in war nor their judges in peace. We gather from ch. xxii. 2 that though Saul proved a competent leader in war, he was not successful in the government of the country in peace.

SAMUEL'S REPROOF OF THE PEOPLE (vers. 6—17). Ver. 6.—**It is Jehovah that,** &c. In the Hebrew Jehovah is put absolutely, without any government, and the Septuagint rightly supplies *is witness*. Samuel had said, "Jehovah is witness against you;" the people in answer shouted the last word, "Witness" (see end of ver. 5, where *He is* is supplied). Then Samuel solemnly repeats Jehovah's name, saying, "Even Jehovah that advanced Moses and Aaron." This rapid interchange of words brings the whole scene vividly before us, whereas nothing could be tamer than the A. V. **Out of the land of Egypt.** Samuel begins with this as the first act of Jehovah as Israel's King; for the theocracy began with the deliverance from Egypt.

Vers. 7, 8.—**Stand still.** Literally, *station yourselves, take your places, stand forth* (see ch. x. 23). **That I may reason with you.** Literally, "that I may deal as judge," *i. e.* that with all the authority of my office I may declare that Jehovah has acted justly by you, and that you have dealt unjustly with him. **Righteous acts.** The margin, *benefits*, is wrong. Samuel vindicates God's dealings with them against the charge of his having failed to protect them implied in their demand for a king.

Ver. 9.—**When they forgat Jehovah their God.** The theocracy, as we have seen (ch. x. 18), was a moral government, under which idolatry and the immorality attendant upon it, as being rebellion, were punished by Jehovah's withdrawing his protection, and the consequent subjection of the nation to foreign rule. It was the repeated sin, therefore, of the people which made Israel's history so chequered. Sisera (Judges iv. 2), the Philistines (*ibid.* iii. 31), and Eglon, king of Moab (*ibid.* iii. 12), are mentioned as three of the earlier oppressors of Israel, but are given here in the reverse order to that found in the Book of Judges.

Ver. 10.—**We have served** [the] **Baalim and** [the] **Ashtaroth.** *I. e.* the numerous Baals and Astartes, which were worshipped under various titles by the heathen. For though representing the same power, each people had their own epithets for their own particular personification of the god (see on ch. vii. 4).

Ver. 11.—**Bedan.** Numerous ingenious explanations of this name have been given, but the only probable account is that Bedan is a misreading for Barak. The two names are very similar in the Hebrew, and the two most ancient versions, the Septuagint and the Syriac, actually have Barak. **And Samuel.** This is even more puzzling than Bedan. We cannot suppose that Samuel, who hitherto had confined himself to the old deliverances, would thus suddenly introduce his own name. In mentioning only them he had avoided everything that would grate upon the ears of the people, but this would look like giving way to personal vexation. Some, therefore, would read Samson; but this, though found in the Syriac, is supported by no other version. Possibly some scribe, mindful of Samuel's recent achievement at Mizpah, wrote his name in the margin, whence it was admitted into the text. **And ye dwelled safe.** Literally, "in confidence," in security. With sin came danger and unquiet; upon repentance, not only was their country free from danger, but their minds were at rest.

Ver. 12.—**Nahash the king of the children of Ammon.** This makes it probable that there had been threats of war, and even incursions into the Israelite territory, by Nahash before his attack on Jabesh-Gilead. We thus, too, should be able to account for the rancour displayed in his wish so to treat the men of that town as to make them a reproach to all Israel; for his hatred of Israel may have grown in intensity in the

course of a harassing war, or he may have learnt to despise a people incapable of offering a regular resistance. At all events, Samuel describes Nahash as giving the final impetus to the desire of the nation for a king. **When Jehovah your God was your king.** See Judges viii. 23.

Ver. 13.—**Behold the king whom ye have chosen! . . . behold, Jehovah hath set a king over you.** We have here the two sides of the transaction. The people had desired a king, chosen and appointed by themselves, to represent the nation in temporal matters; Jehovah gave them a king to represent himself, with authority coming from God, and limited by God. Most, too, of the kings of Judah were as truly representatives of Jehovah as any of the judges had been, and David even more so. **Desired** is rather "demanded," "required." They had done much more than desire a king.

Ver. 14.—**If ye will fear,** &c. This verse, like Luke xix. 42, is left unfinished, and we must supply *well*, as in Exod. xxxii. 32. For the verse cannot be translated as in the A. V., but is as follows: "If ye will fear Jehovah, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment (Hebrew, the mouth) of Jehovah, and if both ye and the king that reigneth over you will follow Jehovah your God, *it shall be well.*" Samuel piles up one upon another the conditions of their happiness, and then from the depth of his emotion breaks off, leaving the blessed consequences of their obedience unsaid. "To follow Jehovah" implies willing and active service as his attendants, going with him where he will, and being ever ready to obey his voice.

Ver. 15.—**Against you, as it was against your fathers.** The Hebrew has "against you and your fathers," and so the Vulgate, for which the Septuagint reads, "against you and your king," as in ver. 25. The text is probably corrupt, and to make sense requires the insertion of some such words as those given in the A. V., with which the Syriac also agrees.

Ver. 16.—**Stand.** Better *stand forth*, as in ver. 7; take your places in solemn order.

Ver. 17.—**Wheat harvest.** Barley was fit for reaping at the Passover, and wheat at Pentecost, *i. e.* between the middle of May and the middle of June. Jerome, on Amos iv. 7, testifies that during his long residence in Palestine he had never seen rain there during June and July; but Conder ('Handbook of Bible,' p. 221), says, "Storms still occur occasionally in harvest-time." **He shall send thunder.** Hebrew, *voices*, and so in ver. 18 (see ch. ii. 10; vii. 9).

DIVINE TESTIMONY TO SAMUEL'S INTEGRITY (vers. 18—25). Ver. 18.—**Jehovah sent thunder and rain** Rain in Palestine falls usually only at the autumnal and vernal equinox, and though thunder-storms are not unknown at other times, yet, by the general testimony of travellers, they are very rare. Naturally, therefore, this storm deeply impressed the minds of the people. Though not in itself miraculous, the circumstances made it so.

Ver. 19.—**Pray for thy servants.** On Samuel's mediatorial office see ch. vii. 5, 8.

Ver. 20.—**Ye have done all this wickedness.** The *ye* is emphatic, and to give its force we should translate, "Ye have indeed done all this evil." **From following Jehovah.** See on ver. 15.

Ver. 21.—**For then should ye go after vain things.** The word *for* is omitted in all the ancient versions, and the sense is complete without it: "And turn ye not aside after *tohu*," the word used in Gen. i. 1, and there translated "without form." It means anything *empty, void*, and so is often used, as here, for "an idol," because, as St. Paul says, "an idol is nothing in the world" (1 Cor. viii. 4). So Isaiah (ch. xliv. 9) calls the makers of idols vanity, Hebrew, *tohu*, i. e. empty people, with no sense in them. The word is used again at the end of the verse — **which** idols **cannot profit nor deliver; for they are** *tohu*, emptiness.

Ver. 22.—**For his great name's sake.** Though Samuel in ver. 14 had described their well-being as dependent upon their own conduct, yet in a higher light it depended upon God's will. He had chosen Israel not for its own sake (Deut. vii. 7, 8), but for a special purpose, to minister to the Divine plan for the redemption of all mankind, and so, though individuals might sin to their own ruin, and the nation bring upon itself severe chastisements, yet it must continue according to the tenor of God's promises (see on ch. ii. 30), and through weal and woe discharge the duty imposed upon it.

Ver. 23.—**God forbid,** Hebrew, "Far be it from me." **That I should sin . . . in ceasing to pray for you.** In no character of the Old Testament does this duty of intercessory prayer stand forward so prominently as in Samuel (see ver. 19); nor does he rest content with this, but adds, **I will teach you the good and the right way.** This was a far higher office than that of ruler; and not only was Samuel earnest in discharging this prophetic office of teaching, but he made provision for a supply of teachers and preachers for all future time by founding the schools of the prophets.

Ver. 42.—**For consider,** &c. Samuel concludes his address by appealing to the mighty deeds wrought in old time by Jehovah for his people; literally, it is, "For consider how grandly he hath wrought with you."

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—5.—*Character a power.* The facts are—1. Samuel reminds the people that he (*a*) has carried out their wishes in setting a king over them, (*b*) is now a very old man, and (*c*) has spent the whole of his life among them. 2. He appeals to God in asserting that the whole of his official life has been free from self-seeking. 3. The people freely admit that his public conduct has been honest, considerate, and free from greed. The meaning of Samuel's reference to himself is to be sought not in egotism, but in a desire to find a basis for his intended argument and appeal. The actual weight of counsel depends not on the abstract wisdom of the language used, but on the readiness of the hearers to give heed to the speaker and their conviction of his integrity of purpose. Samuel appeals to character in order to secure moral power in argument. He availed himself of the privilege of honoured age.

I. CHARACTER IS A GROWTH. A human being is mutable in purpose and disposition, and time is requisite in order to insure fixity of either. Character lies in determinateness, permanent fixity. Morally it is the form, style, and expression the life eventually assumes. It remains a long unsettled question as to what determinateness some men's nature is to come. In so far as instability itself is an undesirable quality, its presence is the sign of permanent badness. But even in the absence of instability, men suspend their judgment of their fellow-men because all good qualities in them are regarded as only tentatively established in the soul. The true progress of a life is secured when holiness of disposition becomes so gradually master of every faculty as to be the distinctive, invariable mark of the man. Obviously, this character is a passing of an inner silent force into all the avenues of thought, feeling, and action, repeating its self-manifestations in these day by day, till those who know the individual are compelled to see that such is the natural, fixed, reliable style of his life.

II. The CONDITIONS OF ITS POWER ARE TWOFOLD—one in the individual himself, and the other in observers. 1. *Constancy and steadiness of growth* is one condition. It is this which creates a belief that the man is true. There is a strong belief that fluctuations in conduct and opinion are signs of either weakness or actual badness. Those who watch the steady, early growth of a doubtful plant, and observe how by the action of a powerful law it at length assumes a given type of leaf and bud, know then what they have in sight, and treat it accordingly. So a quiet advance in goodness is essential to the acquisition of power in character. 2. The *existence in observers of a sense of right is another condition.* The power which a holy, consistent character has over all grades of men implies that there is something in them which, in virtue of its own nature, pays homage to goodness. Men *know and inwardly revere the right.* In this moral necessity of judgment we have a clue to the deference often paid by bad men to the good; the uneasiness of the vile and unjust in presence of purity; and the strong hold which the holy gospel of Christ has secretly over even the most daring of its opponents.

III. The POWER OF CHARACTER IS SOMETIMES DEVELOPED BY UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES. It may exist as the result of a growing, unconscious influence over observers. Neither party may be aware of its real force. Many a man exercises more power on society than either he or others contemplate. The degree to which the present condition of the world is owing to this silent, unconscious influence of holy, consistent characters is beyond all conception. The fact should be a comfort to those whose lives seem to be barren of usefulness because no great deeds are chronicled. But now and then events transpire which bring out the depth of reverence and respect cherished for, it may be, an ordinary quiet Christian man.

IV. It is ALLOWABLE TO USE CHARACTER AS A MEANS OF URGING IMPORTANT CLAIMS. Samuel was right in referring to his long consistent life. He could honestly, and without self-glorying, speak of his having never enriched himself by his office. He was within the limits of modesty in claiming some credit for consistency, for his object was to enforce the claims of God. Thus the Apostle Paul referred to his manner of life, his self-denying labours, in order to win among Corinthians attention

to the message he delivered, and counteract the insinuations of false brethren (2 Cor. xi.). There are occasions when a pastor, a teacher, and parent may fitly refer to their general character as furnishing a reason for attention to their appeals.

Practical lessons:—1. It is of supreme importance to be well established in strong religious principles early in life; roots set in virgin soil strike deep and thrive steadily. 2. We should watch carefully against tendencies to instability, and at the same time not think over much about what men think of us. 3. No man who is ambitious to obtain power of character will get it: it comes to those who are concerned to *be* good rather than to have the power which goodness confers. 4. We honour God when we pay honour to those who bear his image. 5. The quality of holy self-sacrifice is that in official persons which most impresses observers, and should, after the Saviour's example, be cultivated by all persons in things small and great.

Vers. 6—15.—*The immutable condition of well-being.* The facts are—1. Samuel, having shown his right to be heard, calls on the people to hearken to his argument. 2. He refers to historic instances to show that trouble always came with unfaithfulness to God, and prosperity with a return to fidelity. 3. He reminds them that their desire for a king implied distrust of God. 4. Recognising the new order of things, he insists that the adversity or prosperity of the nation rested where it always had — on their own disobedience or obedience to God. Samuel, having gained a respectful hearing, proceeds to urge his argument with the view to convince Israel that constant obedience to God will be in future, on their part, the only rational conduct. The principles involved are universal, and they imply what some have recklessly denied or questioned, namely, the essential reasonableness of religion. Changing the historic allusions for corresponding facts in modern experience, the identical argument could be urged with equal force upon many who fain would escape the yoke of Christ as being inconsistent with the claims of human reason.

I. CONFORMITY TO THE WILL OF GOD IS THE SUPREME CONDITION OF WELL-BEING. Israel would, as a people, dwell in safety, be rich, prosperous, and, in fact, realise all the best ends of national existence, in proportion as they obeyed the Lord God. The interactions of material agencies, and the habits of irrational beings, in so far as they flow from necessary physiological laws, are conformed to the Divine will. The possession by man of moral freedom renders it possible for him to be resolutely and knowingly out of accord with the same. *The will of God is variously expressed, though always one.* In external nature, in constitution of mind, in moral relations, in social laws, in Scripture there are harmonious expressions of will varying according to the subject-matter and occasions. It being in the power of man, as free, to conform in feeling, in purpose, and actual outward movement of will to what God reveals of himself, perfect life, personal, social, and national, lies in that conformity, and that alone. *The continuous act of obedience is conformity.* Observing physical, mental, and moral laws in every detail of life; acting in harmony with the revealed requirements of repentance and effort after holiness; constant exercise of faitb in Christ as the revealed means of the highest spiritual life—this course of action is a fulfilment of the conditions of blessedness, the prelude to final likeness to Christ.

II. THAT SUCH CONFORMITY IS THE CONDITION OF WELL-BEING IS A TRUTH ATTESTED BY HISTORY. It could be shown by independent lines of proof that religion, as consisting in true conformity to God's will, is essentially reasonable, and that, conversely, sinful men are most irrational. But Samuel knows human nature, and, therefore, he deals with the concrete facts of history, and points out how the past records of Israel's national life establish his contention. GOD gave them freedom from Egypt by Moses and Aaron. Disobedience and neglect entailed subjection to Sisera and the Philistines. A return to God brought deliverance once more. Therefore history connected prosperity with due recognition of God, adversity with disobedience. *Every sinful nation and individual is deluded by fallacy.* There is induced, by the blinding effect of moral corruption on the intellect, a belief that the miseries endured are not connected with moral causes. But a fair induction of the facts of public and private life will demonstrate Samuel's position, that when the soul or the nation has been true to God it has enjoyed the truest prosperity. The very prosperity of fools is in the long run their destruction. The merriment of the impious, like the brilliant

glare of a rocket, yields to a more conspicuous reverse. Pious men may not in some instances be equal, in power and general social usefulness, to men not pious; yet, given men of equal natural abilities, the pious will do more and better than the *not* pious. Every-day life is full of cases in which men, by conforming to the gospel law of repentance and faith, at once place themselves and their homes in a new and better relation to all material and mental laws; and rise from poverty, disease, ignorance, and shame to comfort, health, fair attainments, and honour. A nation of *true Christians* would be a model to the world in all excellence and acquisitions and happiness.

III. ALL ATTEMPTS TO EVADE THE CONDITION OF WELL-BEING ARE FRUITLESS. Samuel's reference to Israel's desire for a king, in connection with his argument and closing appeal, evidently means that the people were under the delusive impression that their troubles and dangers were in some way associated with the external form of government under which they had hitherto lived. But Samuel points out the sin involved in this thought—it was distrust of God's all-sufficiency; and he also indicates that the attempted substitution of a form of government for the practice of righteousness is utterly vain. *Human nature is constant in its self-revelations.* This attempted substitution of what is formal and outward for what is moral and inward is of common occurrence. Nations often cry out for changes of form of government when the real need is a change in disposition and conduct. Nominal Christians present an outward, and, in emergencies, a more elaborate, form of worship in place of the sacrifice of the penitent and contrite heart. It is *hard to learn the lessons of history;* but all its testimony confirms what could be, *à priori*, shown to be true—that however good external arrangements may be *per se*, they are as fruitless to secure a nation's highest good, a Church's truest prosperity, and an individual's most vigorous and joyous piety, in the absence of a faithful conformity to the whole will of God, as was Israel's acquisition of a king fruitless to insure, apart from righteousness of life, safety from danger and internal prosperity. "Abide in me." "For *without me ye can do nothing.*"

IV. THE TRUTH THUS VINDICATED CAN BE VERIFIED IN SPITE OF PAST SINS AND ERRORS. Samuel admits the existence of the king as a fact, though having its origin in sin and folly. He does not cut Israel off from the hope of proving the truth of his contention, that well-being depends on conformity to the will of God. Under their new and, as he thinks, unjustifiable arrangements they may, if they will, verify the correctness of his teaching; and hence the urgent appeal. The *sins and errors of men in the past have had the natural effect of placing them in disadvantageous circumstances* for the fullest development of piety. Even in so-called Christian countries the social arrangements and customs, the habits of thought, the methods and principles of commerce, the form and spirit of legislation, and the attitude of class toward class, are the expression of the faults as well as of the virtues of our ancestors. They to that extent impede the full expression of the gospel spirit. The same holds good of antecedents in private and Church life. *Nevertheless, God gives* to nations, Churches, and individuals *opportunities for testing the value of conformity to his will*, and each may prove its sufficiency by new acts of obedience. Here we have a philosophy of life which each may experimentally establish.

General lessons:—1. Conformity to the will of God being the immutable maxim of life, care should be taken to ascertain that will as distinct from our own wishes; and, when ascertained, all the force of our nature should be bent on insuring its observance. 2. It is well to fortify conduct by an appeal to the reasonableness of a religious life, since in a struggle reason and faith are both helpful. 3. In all times of restlessness and dissatisfaction deeper search should be made than into the outward forms of life, for the outward change is no sure cure for the inward unrighteousness. 4. Gratitude to God for permission to recover lost prosperity best shows itself in renewed consecration to him.

Vers. 16—25.—*The outward sign.* The facts are—1. Samuel, to confirm his argument, calls for thunder and rain during the wheat harvest, thus imperilling their property. 2. The people, awed by the event, entreat for his intercession. 3. Samuel encourages hope on the ground of God's mercy, and promises to pray for and instruct

them. 4. He makes a final appeal, setting forth the blessed and sad alternative consequences. Samuel knew well with whom he had to deal; and, therefore, besides securing a deferential hearing in virtue of age and character, and enforcing the reasonableness of conformity to God's will, he now calls attention to a display of Divine power in a form suggestive of the material disasters that may come if they should, by disobedience, come into collision with that power. Men soon feel the force of an argument that touches their property. The natural force of his previous statements would compel the assent of reason, and secure the echo of conscience. But in morally weak men the clear light of reason is apt to become eclipsed by the uprising of wilful desires, and the voice of conscience dies away amid the clamours of passion. It was, therefore, great kindness, an act of beautiful, Divine consideration, to introduce another means of insuring the impressment of the lessons conveyed

I. OUTWARD SIGNS ARE HELPFUL TO RELIGION. Manifestations of God's presence and power in impressive forms, in some instances miraculous, are aids to faith and practice. There is a modern tendency to dispute this. Even some Christian apologists speak of the miraculous events recorded in Scripture as rather a hindrance than an aid to faith. The difficulty proceeds from a defective comprehension of all the facts that enter into a consideration of the question. No doubt moral truth is its own witness; no doubt reason recognises what lies within the range of her vision. The whole sum of truth we have in Christ, and in the records associated with his name, enables us to say, "This is the Son of God." The personal experience of the man who is one in life with Christ is superior to all "external evidences." But obviously all this applies to men in the full light of Christian truth, and can have no appreciable bearing on the gradual education of the world by a chosen nation, through "here a little and there a little," as men were morally and intellectually fit to receive it. Observe more specifically—1. *General education by outward signs is universal.* By education we mean development of the entire nature, rational and moral. We have to regulate life and unfold its capabilities by means other than the mere subjective effect of what is perceived and appreciated as rational or moral. (1) In *childhood* the mind accepts truth on external authority. Its movements, its receptivity, and its resistance to certain influences are often determined by the appearance of an external power, which either awakens fear or insures unquestioning submission. (2) In *mature life* we are influenced not by subjective truth alone, but by external authority in form of testimony on matters of importance. This testimony has sometimes sufficient force to compel conduct against inclination, and create fear as determinant in action. Also in government the exercise of external power insures on the part of many a respect in practice for moral truth which otherwise would not exist. (3) In *the formation of opinion* we are constantly looking out for an external confirmation. That is, we do not live intellectually even by the sheer light that is within. In so far as external confirmations are necessary for some of our opinions, we are dependent on powers outside us for the direction our own thought, and, consequently, conduct, will take. That these powers, human it may be, do not act suddenly and miraculously is not to the point, for the *principle contended for* is education by outward signs. 2. *Spiritual education of men by appropriate outward signs is a fact recognised throughout all time.* The three means, irrespective of inspiration of the heart by the Holy Spirit, of spiritual education—presentation of truth to the moral perception, the convincing of the judgment by reasons, and the suggestive power of outward signs—are found in the whole course of history, from the day when Adam's conscience recognised the moral force of the Divine command because Divine, appreciated the argument of life or death as the alternative of obedience or disobedience, and looked on the "tree" as a visible sign of a power worthy to be feared, unto the latest observance of the Lord's Supper, affording an outward sign of a power merciful in its almightiness. (1) The *entire dispensation covered by the Old and New Testament was characterised by the outward sign in a miraculous manner.* Abraham desired to know by some means that he should inherit the land (Gen. xv. 8), and the sign was given. Moses had granted to him a sign of his delegation (Exod. iv. 1—5). The blackness and darkness around Sinai were visible demonstrations to inspire the too rash people with becoming awe. Signs and wonders were one means by which Nicodemus recognised the "Teacher come from God" (John iii. 1, 2; cf.

Acts ii. 29). The excision of the miraculous element may be consistent for those who exclude God from direct action in the education of mankind, but it is an illogical act when done by believers in a personal "living God." The Bible is a very consistent book. (2) In *so far as the Bible record is an education of mankind, it*, containing a faithful account of the visible signs of the past, *causes those signs to be a formative influence still.* The visible manifestations during the ages covered by Biblical records not only made people then know and feel the reality of God's presence and power to a degree that otherwise would not have been possible, but they cause the "ends of the earth" to be more thoroughly convinced of it. It takes much effort to shake men out of their indifference to the Unseen, to strengthen faith in an ever-ruling Power. The Bible comes to the aid of our reason and conscience, and by these recorded facts helps us to live as though we saw him who is invisible. Those who object to the reality of miracles in the past because, forsooth, similar do not occur now, and are not needed, forget how much of their present faith in God is due to the combination of these ancient miracles with the spiritual element that abides. We may have a spiritual appreciation of the truth of Christianity which amply satisfies us; but that spiritual Christianity so appreciated is impossible apart from the stupendous "outward sign" of an Incarnation and Resurrection. (3) The *facts consequent on the establishment of Christianity are outward signs* which continue to furnish aid to faith. The indirect result, in the continued existence of the Jews as an essentially separate people, is impressive. The direct effects, in the salvation of souls, the pure, elevating spirit, and the social ameliorations naturally flowing from Christianity, are signs and wonders which indicate the mighty power of God. 3. *Spiritual education by outward signs is very reasonable.* This will be admitted so far as relates to our children, and also the formation of character by outward signs of power that are not miraculous. Therefore the controversy is limited to the reasonableness of the outward miraculous signs related in the Bible. Here observe, those who admit that the Incarnation, "God manifest in the flesh," was a reality, and not a figure of speech, have conceded the principle; and if it was the Divine intention by this miracle to save men in Christ, where is the difficulty of admitting that by miracle God wrought the way for Christ, and educated the world for the event? If the escape is sought in the supposed number of miracles in Old Testament times, then who is to tell God how *many* he shall work? Where do wisdom and propriety begin and end? Let any one try and settle what and how often God shall work. Moreover, it is all a delusion as to the vast number of miracles. Genesis covers at least 2800 years, and yet not over twenty-two miracles, or strictly open manifestations, are recorded during **that** period, giving an average of one in 127 years. Further, what more reasonable than, *e. g.*, this of the "thunder"? The people have had the truth, and reason has been appealed to; but they are weak, as history proves. God is the supreme Power, but they evidently need to be impressed, so that the lessons just given may abide. Fear thus produced will act with consciousness of moral truth and force of reason, and consequently it is an act of great mercy to render them this additional aid, just as it is an act of kindness to enforce lessons on children by an authority which they can appreciate.

II. THERE ARE SPECIAL ENCOURAGEMENTS TO CONFORMITY TO GOD'S WILL set forth by his prophets, justified by reason and conscience, and supported by outward signs. It is instructive to note how God's methods have respect to the whole man. Moral obligation is placed before the conscience (vers. 13—15), reason is appealed to (vers. 7—11), fear of disobedience is aroused by outward sign of supreme power, and now the hopes of the soul are to be sustained by appropriate considerations. Would that men who sneer at the Old Testament records had the heart to study its spiritual teaching! They would see how beautifully the terrible and the mild blend to meet the needs of the real man. The encouragement is threefold. 1. *An assurance of God's great mercy.* "Fear not." He "will not forsake his people." This "fear not" comes to the sinful soul still. It came with the angels' song over the plains of Bethlehem; it was heard by the "little flock;" and the conscience-smitten jailor heard the same. God "hath not forsaken" mankind. Not for what virtue he sees in perverse, ungrateful men, but "for his own sake" he saves the penitent. As Israel had "for his own sake" been made his people, with prospective reference to the

introduction of the Messiah and the future education of the world, so in the redemption wrought by Christ every man on earth is embraced in a covenant of mercy, sealed with the "blood that cleanseth from all sin." To know that God is merciful and gracious, that all his terrible displays of power are in love, this brings cheer to the entire race of man. If only despisers of the gospel knew the richness of its mercy for all men, they would surely not seek to hinder its acceptance by this sorrowing world. 2. *The prayer and sympathy of the faithful.* Samuel assures Israel that he will bear them on his heart. His affection for them and his spiritual duty to them were such that not to continue to pray would be sin (ver. 23). This encouragement has every one who is called on to conform to the will of God. The Church pleads "for all men." The penitent and struggling are especially on the heart of God's faithful children. In thousands of homes daily prayer is made for persons never seen and unknown by name. 3. *Continuous instruction.* As long as Samuel lived he would teach them "the good and the right way." No doubt, like the Apostle Peter, he would also devise means so that they should have his wise words "after" his "decease." It requires "line upon line, precept upon precept," to keep men in the safe and blessed pathway; and how fully is this secured to us in the "lively oracles"! By the written word, by the suggestions of the Holy Spirit, by the wise counsel of friends, God teaches us the way in which we should go. We are not left to wander at our will, or to follow the contradictory voices of men. There is "a sure word of prophecy which shineth as a light in a dark place."

General lessons:—1. A study of the signs of God's presence in human affairs will prove a salutary restraint on sinful tendencies. 2. It becomes the true Christian to manifest tender sympathy for men who are spiritually weak and erring. 3. Great influence is gained over men when we can convince them that, though they are very sinful, God is merciful and waiting to bless. 4. The element of fear in religion, to be healthful, must be supplemented by that of hope and confidence.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS

Vers. 1—25. (GILGAL.)—*Samuel's admonitions to Israel.* 1. The *occasion* of his admonitions was the full recognition of the first king of Israel by the national assembly, and his retirement from the more active duties of his office as judge. He was not mortified at parting with power, nor did he wish to reverse the change which had been effected. He cheerfully acquiesced in the will of God, and cordially united with the people in giving honour to the "Lord's anointed" (vers. 3, 5). Yet he might not allow them to suppose that there was nothing blameworthy in their desire for a king, as they were apt to do, or enter upon their new career in perilous self-complacency, without warning them of the rocks ahead. He spoke not merely as judge, but also as a prophet and "faithful priest" (ver. 19). 2. The *form* which they assumed is varied. They consist generally of a *dialogue* between him and the elders; partly of an *apology*, or defence of his official conduct; partly of a *narration* of the dealings of God with Israel; and partly of exhortations, warnings, and promises closely connected together. The whole may be conceived of as a judicial scene occurring before the invisible Judge, in which Samuel, having vindicated himself as against the people, sets forth their sin against God, who himself confirms his words in the thunderstorm (Job xxxviii. 1), which leads them to confess their transgression and seek the intercession of the prophet, who consoles and admonishes them, and assures them of his continued help. The language is direct and rugged and full of force. 3. The main *subject* is the course of sinful perversity which Israel had pursued in desiring a king; the chief *aim* to produce a humble and penitent state of mind, and lead to the maintenance of a proper relation to the invisible King. His former words may be compared (ch. iii. 11—14; vii. 3—6; viii. 10—18; x. 17—19); also the words of Moses (Num. xvi. 25—30; Deut. xxix.), and of Joshua (Josh. xxiv.). He speaks of *their course* as—

I. ADOPTED WITHOUT SUFFICIENT REASON (vers. 3—6) in the light of his just administration. He sets himself, as it were, before the tribunal of the invisible Judge, and before the king,—himself, "old and grey-headed," on the one hand, Israel on the

other,—and seeks an open vindication (as public men are often under the necessity of doing); not, however, so much from regard to his own dignity as to their welfare and the honour of God. We have here—1. *A challenge*, on the part of Samuel, to bear witness against him. "Behold, here I am," &c. (ver. 3). It is a common temptation for men in authority and power to use their position for selfish and unjust purposes, such as (1) appropriating wrongfully what belongs to others, (2) defrauding them of what is their due, (3) oppressing the poor and weak, and (4) perverting the proper course of justice, especially in the case of the rich and strong, for the sake of "a gift" or bribe. How have these evils prevailed in every age! But Samuel had consciously wronged no one, and if any can show that he has done so, he stands ready to make restitution (Luke xix. 8). His conscience is "as the noontide clear." "No doubt he found himself guilty before God of many private infirmities; but for his public carriage he appeals to men. A man's heart can best judge of himself; others can best judge of his actions. Happy is that man that can be acquitted by himself in private, in public by others, by God in both" (Hall). 2. *A testimony*, on the part of the elders, to his integrity (ver. 4); ready, explicit, and with one voice. It is almost impossible for men in public office to be faithful without making enemies. If Samuel had any, they now nowhere appear; and his character shines forth "as the sun when he goeth forth in his might" (Judges v. 31). 3. *An invocation*, on the part of both, to the Lord and his anointed to confirm the testimony (ver. 5); thereby making it more solemn and memorable. Why, then, seeing his government was so unblamable, did they wish to set it aside? Their testimony to him was a sentence of condemnation on themselves for their inconsideration, ingratitude, and discontent. The force of the testimony was increased by his further invocation of the Lord as he who had "appointed Moses and Aaron, and brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt" (ver. 6). As the appointed and faithful leader of Israel, even as they, no other was necessary, and his rejection was the rejection of the Lord. With this he passes on to speak of their course as—

II. MARKED BY AGGRAVATED TRANSGRESSION (vers. 7—12) in the light of the righteous dealings of God in past time. "Now therefore stand forth," &c. (ver. 7). He and they now change places; he becomes their accuser, and *reasons* or contends with them (in order to convict them of sin) "concerning the righteous acts of Jehovah," who had acted justly in his covenant relation with them throughout their whole history, faithfully fulfilled his promises, inflicted punishment only when it was deserved, and bestowed upon them the greatest benefits (Ezek. xxxiii. 17; Micah vi. 2). These acts include—1. *A wonderful deliverance* (ver. 8) from a crushing oppression, in compassion to the cry of the needy, through the instrumentality of men raised up for the purpose, with "a mighty hand and an outstretched arm," and completed in their possession of the land of promise. This deliverance is always regarded as the foundation of their history. "History was born in that night in which Moses, with the law of God, moral and spiritual, in his heart, led the people of Israel out of Egypt" (Bunsen). 2. *Repeated chastisements* (ver. 9), rendered necessary by forgetfulness of God, varied (the Canaanites, the Philistines, the Moabites), and with a view to their moral improvement. "Notice here Samuel's prudence in reproof. (1) By his reproof of their ancestors he prepares their minds to receive reproof; (2) he shows that their ingratitude is old, and so worse, and they should take care that it grow no stronger; (3) he chooses a very mild word, 'forget,' to express their offence" (Pool). 3. *Continued help* (vers. 10, 11), through penitence and prayer, by means of successive "saviours,"—Jerubbaal (Gideon), Bedan (Barak), Jephthah, Samuel (ch. vii. 10; referring to himself in the third person, because now speaking as the advocate of Jehovah),—against their "enemies on every side," and in their safe preservation unto the present time. "And ye dwelled safe." But what return did they make for all his benefits? As soon as they saw the threatening attitude of Nahash (ver. 12), they forgot the lessons of the past, lost their confidence in God, trusted in an arm of flesh, and recklessly and persistently demanded a king, virtually rejecting the Lord as their king. Former experience of the goodness and severity of God greatly aggravates present transgression (ver. 19).

III. INVOLVING PERILOUS RESPONSIBILITY (vers. 13—15) in the light of present circumstances. "Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen," &c. Although

they had taken the initiative in the matter, he had reserved to himself the authority of appointing him, and abides the supreme Ruler over both people and king (ver. 12). In the new order of things—1. *They are specially liable to forget* this primary truth, and to trust in man, and hence he impresses upon them once and again the fact that "the Lord God is their king." No earthly monarch can release them from their responsibility to him, and no human help can save them apart from him. "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes" (Ps. cxviii. 9). 2. *They can prosper only by being faithful to him.* "If ye will fear the Lord," &c., it will be well with you and your king. But—3. *If unfaithful, they will expose themselves to heavy judgments*, as their fathers had done before them. Wherein, then, have they improved their condition? What a perilous course have they entered upon! And how can they hope to avoid its consequences except by profound humiliation, and seeking the Lord "with full purpose of heart"?

IV. NECESSITATING SINCERE REPENTANCE (vers. 16—18) in the light of approaching judgment. "Now therefore stand and see this great thing," &c. Hitherto the words of Samuel appear to have produced little effect; something further was necessary that they might not be spoken in vain; and, in response to his prayer, the thunder crashed above the heads of the great assembly, and the rain fell in torrents around them—things "incomprehensible to a Hebrew" in time of harvest. The miraculous sign—1. *Corroborates* the word of truth as well as the Divine commission of him who uttered it, and confirms the testimony borne to his integrity. The voice of the supreme Judge answers the appeal which had been made to him (ver. 5), and there is "an end of all controversy" (Heb. vi. 16). 2. *Is significant* of the Divine displeasure at their sin, and of terrible judgments (Exod. ix. 28). "Hereby the Lord showed his power, and the people their foolishness in not being contented to have such a mighty God for their protector, who could with thunder and rain fight for them against their enemies, as he did for Israel against the host of Pharaoh, and not long before this against the Philistines. And, beside, it appeared with what small reason they should be weary of Samuel's government, who by his prayer could fetch down rain and thunder from heaven" (Willet). "God had granted their desire; but upon them and their king's bearing toward the Lord, not upon the fact that they had now a king, would the future of Israel depend; and this truth, so difficult for them to learn, God would, as it were, prove before them in a symbol. Did they think it unlikely, nay, well-nigh impossible, to fail in their present circumstances? God would bring the unlikely and seemingly incredible to pass in a manner patent to all. Was it not the time of wheat harvest, when in the East not a cloud darkens the clear sky? God would send thunder and rain to convince them, by making the unlikely real, of the folly and sin of their thoughts in demanding a king" (Edersheim). 3. *Is designed* to effect a moral end, in filling them with salutary fear. "That ye may perceive that your wickedness is great" (ver. 17). And it is not in vain; for "all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel" (ver. 18), thus solemnly avouched to be his prophet. God is never at a loss for means to accomplish his purposes, and goes beyond his usual method of operations when the occasion demands it. The end of his dealings with men is to bring them to repentance and make them holy.

V. NOT EXCLUDING CONSOLATION AND HOPE (vers. 19—25) in the light of the great name and merciful purposes of God. By means of repentance and faith men place themselves within the circle where the "consuming fire" of Divine wrath (Rom. i. 18; Heb. xii. 29) is transformed into the genial beams of Divine grace; and "he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (1 John i. 9). We have here—1. *A description of a penitent people* (ver. 19), overwhelmed with fear, freely and fully confessing their sin, rendering honour where they had formerly shown ingratitude and disrespect, and seeking Divine mercy in the way in which they had reason to believe it might be obtained. 2. *An exhortation to an amended course of life* (vers. 20, 21). (1) A consoling word. "Fear not." (2) A reminding and humbling word. "Ye have done all this wickedness." (3) A restraining word. "Turn not aside from following the Lord" (as ye have done in your distrust and self-will). (4) A directive word. "But serve the Lord with all your heart" (in faith, and love, and entire consecration). (5) A warning word. "And turn ye not aside" (from God to any false object

of trust, idols). (6) An instructive word. "For they are vain" (utterly empty and disappointing). 3. *An assurance of mercy and grace* (ver. 22), resting on—(1) His relationship. They are still "his people." (2) His name—his revelations of power and salvation to his people, and his honour and glory before all the nations. (3) His good-will. "Because" (he will not forsake his people, because) "it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people." Whatever benefits he has conferred have proceeded from his pure benevolence, and are a pledge of further benefits (Jer. xxxi. 3). His free and unmerited love is the sinner's chief hope. 4. *A promise of continued aid,* on the part of Samuel, in intercession and instruction (ver. 23). "In this he sets a glorious example to all rulers, showing them that they should not be led astray by the ingratitude of their subordinates or subjects, and give up on that account all interest in their welfare; but should further persevere all the more in their anxiety for them." 5. *A final admonition to steadfast obedience* (vers. 24, 25), without which both people and king will be overwhelmed in destruction. In keeping with the tone which pervades these admonitions, and as in foresight of coming evils, they end with a warning.—D.

Ver. 2. (GILGAL.)—*Piety in old age.* "Old and grey-headed." On speaking of himself as "old and grey-headed," Samuel immediately afterwards made reference to his childhood. "I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day." He loved to linger (as old men are wont) over his early days; and in his case there was every reason for doing so, for they were surpassingly pure and beautiful. One of the chief lessons of his life is that a well-spent childhood and youth conduces greatly to a happy and honoured age. Consider him as an eminent illustration of piety in old age.

I. OLD AGE IS PRESUMPTIVE OF PIETY, inasmuch as—1. Piety *prevents* indulgence in vices that tend to shorten life. How many are brought by such vices to a premature grave! When, therefore, we see an old man we naturally infer that he has been a good man, nor can there be any doubt that he has exercised much self-control. Samuel was a Nazarite. 2. It has a *direct tendency* to prolong life by producing healthful virtues. "The fear of the Lord prolongeth days" (Prov. x. 27). 3. It has the *promise* of many days. "With long life will I satisfy him" (Ps. xci. 16). "Even to old age I am; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you" (Isa. xlvi. 4). "A good old age" (Gen. xv. 15). "Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in his season" (Job v. 26). 4. It is *commonly* associated with long life. There are, doubtless, exceptions, the causes of which are not far to seek, but this is the rule.

II. OLD AGE IS MADE HONOURABLE BY PIETY, because of—1. Its maintaining the *respect* which is naturally felt for the aged. Among the Spartans, when a hoary-headed man entered their assemblies, they all immediately rose, and remained standing till he had taken his place; and it is enjoined in the law of Moses: "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man" (Levit. xix. 32). But this injunction assumes the possession of godliness, without which old age neither deserves nor receives appropriate reverence. 2. The beauty and *perfection* of character which it develops. There is beauty in the fresh-springing corn, but there is still greater beauty in "the full corn in the ear," bending under its golden burden. A good old man, matured in character by long growth, and abounding in "the fruit of the Spirit," is one of the noblest sights on earth. He is a king amongst men. "The hoary head is a crown of glory if it be found in the way of righteousness" (Prov. xvi. 31; xx. 29). 3. The *conflicts* and perils that have been passed. "An old disciple" (Acts xxi. 16), or "such an one as Paul the aged" (Philem. 9), is like a veteran soldier bearing on him the scars of many a hard-fought battle, and wearing the honours conferred by a grateful country. He is like a giant of the forest, standing erect when the storm has laid his companions in the dust. 4. The *good* that has been done in past time, and lives to bear witness to the doer, and "praise him in the gates." We value the young for the good they may hereafter effect, the old for the good they have already accomplished. "Them that honour me I will honour."

III. OLD AGE IS RENDERED USEFUL BY PIETY, for thereby it—1. Furnishes a

convincing *evidence* of the truth and power of religion. When faith survives doubts, temptations, difficulties, its very existence is an argument for the reality of that which is believed, a proof of the practicability of a religious life, and a commendation of its unspeakable worth. 2. Sets forth an impressive *example* of the spirit of religion—humility, trustfulness, calmness, patience, resignation, cheerfulness (Gen. xlviii. 21; Deut. xxxiii. 1; Josh. xiv. 10, 12; xxiii. 14; 2 Sam. xix. 32). 3. Bears valuable *testimony* for God, and continues in prayer and labour on behalf of men. "They shall still bring forth fruit in old age," &c. (Ps. xcii. 14, 15; lxxi. 14, 17, 18). Although some services are no longer possible, others, often more valuable, may, and ought to, be rendered till the close of life. 4. Affords wise *counsel* to the younger and less experienced. Wisdom is proverbially associated with age. Those who have seen and heard much of the world, and had long experience of life, may be expected to know more than those who are just starting out in their course. Their judgment is less influenced by passion and impulse; they look at things in a clearer light, and in a calmer frame of mind, and are more likely to perceive the truth concerning them.

> "Whose ripe experience doth attain
> To somewhat of prophetic strain."

Much of the inspired wisdom of the Scriptures is based upon the sanctified experience of the aged. "Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance" (2 Pet. i. 15, 12—14; 1 Pet. v. 1, 5). "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John iii. 18). "Little children, love one another."

IV. OLD AGE IS GREATLY COMFORTED BY PIETY. It has its drawbacks and troubles. Bodily infirmities increase, the mental powers lose their vigour, and friends become fewer (Eccles. xii.). It is also liable to moral failings, such as irritability, fretfulness, despondency, and excessive carefulness, which need to be guarded against. "When I consider in my mind, I find four causes why old age is thought miserable: one, that it calls us away from the transactions of affairs; the second, that it renders the body more feeble; the third, that it deprives us of almost all pleasures; the fourth, that it is not very far from death" (Cicero 'on Old Age'). But notwithstanding such things, it has, "with godliness," abundant compensations, consisting of—1. Pleasant *recollections* of the past, especially of the Divine benefits that have been received. "Surely I will remember thy wonders of old" (Ps. lxxvii. 11). 2. Wide *observation* of the works and ways of God. "I have been young, and now am old," &c. (Ps. xxxvii. 25). 3. Inward support and *consolation* derived from communion with God. "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Cor. iv. 16). "The glory of the old age of the godly consists in this, that while the faculties for the sensible no less than mental enjoyments gradually decline, and the hearth of life gets thus deprived of its fuel, the blessings of godliness not only continue to refresh the soul in old age, but are not until then most thoroughly enjoyed. The sun of piety rises the warmer in proportion as the sun of life declines." 4. Bright *prospects* of the heavenly home—"a house not made with hands," the vision of God, perpetual youth, reunion with parted friends, perfect and endless blessedness. As the world of light draws near, some of its rays seem to shine through the crevices of the earthly tabernacle that is falling into decay (Gen. xlix. 18; Luke ii. 29, 30). "The state in which I am now is so delightful, that the nearer I approach to death, I seem, as it were, to get sight of land; and at length, after a long voyage, to be getting into the harbour. O glorious day! when I shall depart to that Divine company and assemblage of spirits, and quit this troubled and polluted scene" (Cicero). "If the mere conception of the reunion of good men in a future state infused a momentary rapture into the mind of Tully; if an airy speculation—for there is reason to fear it had little hold on his convictions—could inspire him with such delight, what may we be expected to feel who are assured of such an event by the true sayings of God" (R. Hall). "I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better" (Phil. i. 23; 2 Tim. iv. 6—8).

Observations:—1. Let us be thankful for the consolations of religion in "the time of old age." 2. Let the aged cherish the dispositions by which it is made beautiful

and useful. 3. Let the young honour the aged, and not forsake "the counsel of the old men" (1 Kings xii. 8). 4. Let them also remember that they will grow old, and so live that they may then be honoured and happy.—D.

Vers. 3—5. (GILGAL.)—*Integrity in public office.* "Behold, here I am: witness against me before the Lord." It is a noble thing for a man in any position of life, but especially in exalted, public, and responsible office, to "do justly and love mercy" as well as to "walk humbly with his God;" to continue for many years in the fulfilment of his duty with strictest integrity and unselfish devotion to the public good. Of this Samuel was an illustrious pattern. Concerning integrity in public office, observe that—

I. It is generally, and not improperly, EXPECTED, because of—1. The superior knowledge which one who fills such an office is assumed to possess (Ezra vii. 25). 2. The important trust which is reposed in him. "Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful" (1 Cor. iv. 2). 3. The powerful influence which he exerts over others, for good or evil (Prov. xxix. 2).

II. It is beset by numerous TEMPTATIONS, such as—1. To prefer his ease and pleasure to laborious and self-denying duty (Rom. xii. 8). 2. To use his power for the enrichment of himself and his family, to the disregard of the general welfare, and even by means of extortion, fraud, and oppression (Acts xvi. 22; xxiv. 26). 3. To seek the praise of men more than the praise of God, and to yield to the evil wishes of the multitude for the sake of personal advantage (John xix. 13).

III. It lies open to public CRITICISM, for—1. The conduct of a public man cannot be wholly hidden from view. 2. His responsible position invites men, and gives them a certain right, to judge concerning the course he pursues; and, in many instances, his actions directly affect their persons, property, or reputation. 3. As it is impossible to restrain their criticism, so it is, on the whole, beneficial that it should be exercised as a salutary restraint upon those "who are in authority." Happy is he in whom "none occasion nor fault can be found, forasmuch as he is faithful" (Dan. vi. 4).

IV. It is NOT always duly APPRECIATED, but is sometimes despised and suspected. 1. The reasons of the conduct of one in public office are not always fully understood, nor the difficulties of his position properly considered, nor the motives of his actions rightly interpreted. 2. Evil-doers, to whom he is "a terror," may be expected to hate and speak ill of him. "What evil have I done?" said Aristides, when told that he had *every one's* good word. 3. Men are apt to be envious of those who are exalted above them, and to forget their past services if they do not favour the gratification of the present popular feeling. Samuel was not the only judge who experienced ingratitude. "Neither showed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely, Gideon, according to all the goodness which he showed unto Israel" (Judges viii. 35).

V. It sometimes requires to be openly VINDICATED, for the sake of—1. Personal character and reputation. "I have not taken one ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them" (Num. xvi. 5). 2. Truth, and righteousness, and the honour of God. How often, on this account, did the Apostle Paul vindicate himself, in his epistles, from the accusations that were made against him! 3. The welfare of the people themselves, on whom misrepresentation and unfounded suspicions exert an injurious influence.

VI. It is certain, sooner or later, to be fully RECOGNISED. 1. Time and circumstances bring real worth to the light. 2. There is in men a sense of truth and justice which constrains them to acknowledge and honour the good. 3. God takes care of the reputation of those who take care of his honour. There comes a "resurrection of reputations." The judgment of one generation concerning public men is often reversed by the next. "There is nothing hidden that shall not be made manifest." "And the righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance."—D.

Vers. 8—12. (GILGAL.)—*Doctrine in history.* This is an important chapter in the history of Israel. In it are set forth certain truths of universal import, which are also illustrated, though less distinctly, in the history of other nations. They are such as follows:—

I. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD (ver. 8). "It hath pleased the Lord to make you his people" (ver. 22). Of his own free and gracious will, always founded in perfect wisdom, he raises up a people from the lowest condition, confers upon them special blessings and privileges, and exalts them to the most eminent place among the nations of the earth (Deut. xxxii. 8; Acts xvii. 26, 27). As it was with Israel, so has it been with other peoples. His right so to deal with men cannot be questioned, his power therein is manifested, his undeserved goodness should be acknowledged, and the gifts bestowed employed not for selfish ends, but for his glory and the welfare of mankind.

II. THE SINFULNESS OF MEN. "They forgat the Lord their God" (ver. 9). So constantly and universally have men departed from God and goodness as to make it evident that there is in human nature an inherited tendency to sin. "It is that tendency to sinful passions or unlawful propensities which is perceived in man whenever objects of desire are placed before him, and laws laid upon him." As often as God in his great goodness has exalted him to honour, so often has he fallen away from his service; and left to himself, without the continual help of Divine grace, his course is downward. "In times past the Divine nature flourished in men, but at length, being mixed with mortal custom, it fell into ruin; hence an inundation of evils in the race" (Plato. See other testimonies quoted by Bushnell in 'Nature and the Supernatural'). "There is nothing in the whole earth that does not prove either the misery of man or the compassion of God; either his powerlessness without, or his power with God" (Pascal).

III. THE CERTAINTY OF RETRIBUTION. "He sold them into the hand of Sisera," &c. (ver. 9).

> "The sword of Heaven is not in haste to smite,
> Nor yet doth linger, save unto his seeming
> Who, in desire or fear, doth look for it."—(Dante, 'Par.' xxii.).

"Morning by morning doth he bring his judgment to light; he faileth not" (Zeph. iii. 5). "History is a voice for ever sounding across the centuries the laws of right and wrong. Opinions alter, manners change, creeds rise and fall, but the moral law is written on the tablets of eternity. For every false word or unrighteous deed, for cruelty and oppression, for lust or vanity, the price has to be paid at last; not always by the chief offenders, but paid by some one. Justice and truth alone endure and live. Injustice and falsehood may be long-lived, but doomsday comes at last to them in French revolutions and other terrible woes" (Froude, 'Short Studies').

IV. THE BENEFICENCE OF SUFFERING. "And they cried unto the Lord, and said, We have sinned," &c. (ver. 10). Underneath what is in itself an evil, and a result of the violation of law, physical or moral, there is ever working a Divine power which makes it the means of convincing men of sin, turning them from it, and improving their character and condition. A state of deepest humiliation often precedes one of highest honour. It is only those who refuse to submit to discipline (Job xxxvi. 10) and harden themselves in iniquity that sink into hopeless ruin.

V. THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER. "And the Lord sent . . . and delivered you," &c. (ver. 11). "*Then* they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses" (Ps. cvii. 6, 13, 19, 28). As it was with Israel throughout their history, so has it been with others, even those who have had but little knowledge of "the Hearer of prayer."

> "In even savage bosoms
> There are longings, yearnings, strivings
> For the good they comprehend not,
> And the feeble hands and helpless,
> Groping blindly in the darkness,
> Touch God's right hand in that darkness,
> And are lifted up and strengthened" ('The Song of Hiawatha').

VI. THE PREVALENCE OF MEDIATION. "Then the Lord sent Moses and Aaron" (ver. 8). "And the Lord sent Jerubbaal, and Bedan, and Jephthah, and Samuel"

(ver. 11). He sent help by men specially raised up and appointed, and deliverance came through their labours, conflicts, and sufferings. One people also has been often made the medium of blessing to others. And herein we see a shadowing forth of the work of the great Mediator and Deliverer, and (in an inferior manner) of his people on behalf of the world.

VII. THE INCREASE OF RESPONSIBILITY on the part of those who have had the experience of former generations to profit by, and who have received higher privileges than they (vers. 12, 19). "Now all these things were written for our admonition," &c. (1 Cor. x. 11). "Two things we ought to learn from history: one, that we are not in ourselves superior to our fathers; another, that we are shamefully and monstrously inferior to them if we do not advance beyond them" (Froude).—D.

Ver. 23. (GILGAL.)—*Intercessory prayer.* "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you." "I bless God," said Mr. Flavel, the Puritan, on the death of his father, "for a religious and tender father, who often poured out his soul to God for me; and this stock of prayers I esteem the fairest inheritance on earth." And another eminent man said that he "set a greater worth upon the intercessions of the good than upon all the wealth of the Indies." The people of Israel esteemed the prayers of Samuel on their behalf in like manner. They had experience of their amazing power and worth (ch. vii. 8, 9); they were in great need of them; they appear to have thought that he might cease to offer them on account of their past treatment of him, and they entreated him, saying, "Pray for thy servants," &c. (ver. 19). His reply was, "Moreover as for me," &c. Every true Christian, as "a priest unto God," an intercessor with God for his fellow-men, ought to adopt this language as his own. It expresses—

I. AN ACKNOWLEDGED OBLIGATION, which—1. Arises out of the fact that it is *one of the principal means of doing good* to others—obtaining invaluable blessings for them. Of the fact there can be no doubt (James v. 16). Why it should have been ordained as such a means we cannot fully tell; but it is plainly in accordance with the intimate relationship and mutual dependence of men; teaches them to feel a deeper interest in each other, and puts signal honour upon eminent piety. The principle of mediation pervades all things, human and Divine. 2. Is *an essential part of the duty of love* which we owe to others; the force of the obligation being determined by the nearness of their relationship, and the extent of their claims upon our love and service—our kindred and friends, our country, mankind. 3. Is *often expressly enjoined in the word of God.* "Pray one for another" (Luke xi. 5; 1 Tim. ii. 1). "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask (of God), and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death" (1 John v. 16). 4. Is *inculcated by the example of the best men*—Abraham, Moses, Job (Job xlii. 8, 10), Samuel and all the prophets; above all, by the example of our Lord himself, who has prayed for us all, and through whose intercession we present our prayers and hope for their acceptance.

II. A POSSIBLE OMISSION. Intercessory prayer may *cease* to be offered. It is sometimes omitted from—1. *Want of consideration* of others; the worth of their souls, their lost condition, the love of God to them, the ransom that has been given for them. Attention is so absorbed in other objects that they are uncared for. The more we think of them, the more we shall feel and pray for them. "Love for souls *as* souls is not a passion of earthly growth. It is a holy fire from heaven. But how can we have it; how can it be begotten in our hard hearts? The only true method is to draw near to them, and to look at them—to look on them in the light of reason and revelation, of immortality and of God" (C. Morris). 2. *Deficiency of love* and desire for their salvation. 3. *Unbelief.* 4. *Delay* in the fulfilment of our requests, and apparent denial of them. But remember that sincere prayer is never offered in vain, and "pray without ceasing." God knows best when and how to answer our petitions.

III. A DEPRECATED SIN. "God forbid that I should" (far be it from me to) "sin against the Lord," &c. The sin of its omission is spoken of in direct relation to *him*, and consists in—1. *Disregarding his benevolent designs concerning others.* "The Lord will not forsake his people," &c. (ver. 22). If he loves them and seeks their

welfare, we should do the same. 2. *Disobeying his declared will concerning ourselves.* He has not only commanded us to intercede for others, but the very position in which he has placed us is a plain indication of his will. "Ye who remember Jehovah, leave yourselves no rest, and give him no rest," &c. (Isa. lxii. 6, 7). 3. *Burying in the earth the greatest talent that he has intrusted to us.* 4. *Grieving the Holy Spirit,* who is ever inciting those in whom he dwells to "cry unto God day and night." "Quench not the Spirit." Whilst the devout should be urged by these considerations to "continue instant in prayer," others should remember that it is possible to place an improper reliance on the intercessions of the good, especially in expecting to obtain benefit from their prayers whilst they neglect to pray for themselves or walk in "the good and right way."—D.

Ver. 24. (GILGAL.)—*The good and right way.* "Only fear the Lord," &c. Samuel assured the people that (as a priest) he would continue to pray for them, and (as a prophet) to show them the way of happiness and righteousness (Acts vii. 4). Of this way the text may be taken as a further explanation, and gives—

I. ITS DESCRIPTION. 1. *Filial reverence.* Fear not (be not terrified—vers. 17, 18, 20); but fear (with a lowly, affectionate, trustful reverence), implying a knowledge of his character and saving purposes, in so far as he has revealed them to men; in our case, of him who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." 2. *Practical obedience.* "And serve him." Recognise yourselves as servants, his servants, and act accordingly. "Fear God, and keep his commandments" (the practical expression of the principle): "for this is the whole of man" (Eccles. xii. 13). The two may not be disjoined (Josh. xxiv. 14; Ps. ii. 11). "The life of service is work; the work of a Christian is obedience to the law of God" (Hall). 3. *Thorough sincerity and wholeheartedness.* "In truth, with all your heart." Do not suppose that it is sufficient to render an outward and formal service; or a partial service, in which the love of idols may be united with the love of God. "Serve him only" (ch. vii. 3). "God will put up with many things in the human heart; but there is one thing he will *not* put up with in it—a second place. He who offers God a second place offers him no place; and he who makes religion his first object makes it his whole object" (Ruskin).

II. ITS NECESSITY. "Only." You *must* walk in it, whatever else you do; for it is *only* by doing so that you can—1. *Avoid walking in the evil and wrong way.* The "vision of life" which the great Teacher saw and described contained only two ways, the broad and the narrow, and there is no other. 2. *Escape the destructive consequences of that way.* You have already entered on a perilous course, *only* (in order that you may escape the end to which it naturally conducts), "fear the Lord," &c. "If ye still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both you and your king" (ver. 25). "The way of transgressors is hard." "It leadeth to destruction." 3. *Receive, and continue to receive, the blessings that have been promised.* "The Lord will not forsake his people," *only* (in order that you may enjoy his favour), "fear," &c. "I will pray for you, and teach you," *only* (in order that you may be really benefited thereby), "fear," &c. (Jer. vi. 16; Isa. i. 19).

III. ITS INCENTIVE. "For consider how great things he hath done for you." The motive here is not fear of punishment, nor hope of reward, nor even the sense of right, but *gratitude* and love. 1. *What benefits;* so great, so numerous, so long continued—temporal and spiritual (vers. 6—11). 2. *Toward you,* in comparison with others (ver. 22). 3. *He hath wrought.* He, and no other; freely and graciously. "Free love is that which has never been deserved, which has never been desired, and which never can be requited." "We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love" (1 John iv. 17). But in order that his love may be perceived and its influence felt, in awakening love, we must *consider,* fix attention upon it, especially as manifested in "his unspeakable gift" (1 John iv. 10). Our responsibility in regard to "salvation" depends directly on the power we possess of directing attention to Divine truth, and considering it with a real and earnest desire to know it, and live according to it; and by this means, as ice is melted by the sunbeams, so the heart is softened, renewed, and sanctified by the Spirit of truth. "O that they would consider!"—D.

Ver. 23.—*The good man's weapons.* There was a vein of misgiving evident in the words of Samuel. Perhaps the new king and his triumphant soldiers ascribed it to the timorousness of old age; but the seer looked further into the future than they, and if he felt bound to warn them of the danger they would incur by rebelling against the commandment of the Lord, he gave them at the same time an assurance that he would do all in his power to preserve them from such wickedness and its inevitable consequences. The man of God could never forget Israel. But what could he do in old age for this intractable people? The reins of government had been taken out of his hands; and it had never been his duty, now less than ever, to go out to battle. What remained for him to do? Must he not let king and people take their own course—sow as they pleased, and then reap what they sowed? Nay. Samuel would not, under a plea of helplessness, withdraw himself from all care for Israel's future. There remained to him the two greatest weapons for moral effect—prayer and teaching. The one points to God in heaven, the other to men on the earth. Such are a prophet's weapons, and they are mightier than a king's sceptre or a warrior's sword. That the intellectual and the moral are the highest forms of greatness and usefulness is a truth which has established itself throughout all history. The most illustrious and influential of the Hebrew race were the prophets. Moses, Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, none of the kings compare with these, except David and Solomon, and they because they had qualities resembling those of the prophets—the one of them a poet, and the other a sage. In like manner the greatest of the Greeks were not their warriors or rulers, but such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle—the men who thought and who taught. That unique and ancient people, the Chinese, regard as by far their most important man the sage Confucius. Their most powerful emperors have been comparatively little men. Our modern nations too have had their characters moulded by their thinkers and teachers far more than by their princes and soldiers; and a nation's character makes its history as much as its history shapes its character. There is a supreme illustration of this truth. Unspeakably the greatest effect ever produced by one personality on the human race has been exerted by the man Christ Jesus. The widest, deepest, and most beneficial influence has issued from him; and he began that mighty movement, which has outlasted many governments, and shows no symptom of weakness or decay, by the very instruments or weapons which were named and used by the prophet Samuel, viz., prayer and instruction. Jesus prayed; Jesus taught. How weak in comparison were the men of the sword—Herod, and Pontius Pilate, and Pilate's imperial master at Rome! Jesus had no worldly title, and used no carnal weapon. If he was a king, it was to bear witness to the truth. The weapons by which he overcame were these—he prayed, and so prevailed with God; he taught, and so prevailed with men. In the same manner he continues to animate and strengthen the Church. He makes continual intercession in heaven; and by the abiding of his words and the living guidance of his Spirit he gives continual instruction on earth. In the very beginning of the Church the apostles showed their deep appreciation of this truth, and refused to be drawn aside from that way of highest usefulness which their Master had shown to them. They would concentrate their energies on moral and spiritual work. "We will give ourselves to the word of God and to prayer." Paul was of the same mind in his apostolate. He relied on weapons "not carnal, but mighty through God." He foresaw, and it is evident from the writings of Peter and John that they too in old age foreboded, evil days, as Samuel did in his declining years; but those apostles knew no better course to recommend to the faithful than that which Samuel followed—to pray always, and to teach sound doctrine. Evil might come, even apostasy might ensue; but the elect would be proved and purified, and after troubled days the kingdom would ultimately be set up in "the sure mercies of David," and the confusion of the time of Saul would be past for ever. No emphasis is laid on rite or ceremony. Samuel was a priest, and lived in a dispensation of religion which gave great scope for ritual. But we are left to assume that the rites prescribed through Moses were observed at this period. We hear wonderfully little about them. Samuel was intent on teaching that "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." How weak and puerile to lay the stress of our religion on the observance of ritual, or the performances of a priesthood! T e way to make and

keep a people Christian is not to sing masses for them, or multiply altar ceremonies and celebrations, but to pray, and to "teach the good and the right way," of obedience to conscience and to God. Whoso would serve his own generation well, let him pray, and let him by example, and persuasive speech or writing, preach righteousness. These are the good man's weapons, and these through God are mighty. Mischief may go on, as Saul went on to distress the people of God; but prayer and teaching quietly counteract the mischief, and prepare the way for a revival of piety and the reign of the "King of kings and Lord of lords."—F.

EXPOSITION.

SAUL'S PROBATION AND FAILURE (CHS. XIII.—XV.).

CHAPTER XIII.

WAR AGAINST THE PHILISTINES (ver. 1—ch. xiv. 46). Ver. 1.—Saul's age and length of reign. **Saul reigned one year.** This verse literally translated is, "Saul was one year old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years over Israel." In its form it exactly follows the usual statement prefixed to each king's reign, of his age at his accession, and the years of his kingdom (2 Sam. ii. 10; v. 4; 1 Kings xiv. 21; xxii. 42, &c.). The rendering of the A. V. is too forced and untenable to be worth discussing. As we have seen before, the numerals in the Books of Samuel are not trustworthy; but the difficulty here is an old one. The Vulgate translates the Hebrew literally, as we have given it; the Septuagint omits the verse, and the Syriac paraphrases as boldly as the A. V.: "When Saul had reigned one or two years." The Chaldee renders, "Saul was as innocent as a one-year-old child when he began to reign." In the Hexaplar version some anonymous writer has inserted the word *thirty*, rashly enough; for as Jonathan was old enough to have an important command (ver. 2), and was capable of the acts of a strong man (ch. xiv. 14), his father's age must have been at least thirty-five, and perhaps was even more. As regards the length of Saul's reign, St. Paul makes it forty years (Acts xiii. 21), exactly the same as that of David (1 Kings ii. 11) and of Solomon (*ibid.* xi. 42); and Josephus testifies that such was the traditional belief of the Jews ('Antiq.,' vi. 14, 9). On the other hand, it is remarkable that the word here for *years* is that used where the whole number is less than ten. The events, however, recorded in the rest of the book seem to require a longer period than ten years for the duration of Saul's reign; thirty-two would be a more probable number, and, added to the seven and a half years' reign of Ishbosheth (see 2 Sam. v. 5), they would make up the whole sum of forty years ascribed by St. Paul to Saul's dynasty. It is quite possible, however, that these forty years may even include the fifteen or sixteen years of Samuel's judgeship. But the two facts, that all the three sons of Saul mentioned in ch. xiv. 49 were old enough to go with him to the battle of Mount Gilboa, where they were slain; and that Ishbosheth, his successor, was forty years of age when his father died, effectually dispose of the idea that Saul's was a very short reign.

OCCASION OF THE FIRST WAR AGAINST THE PHILISTINES (vers. 2—7). Ver. 2.—**Saul chose him.** Literally, "And Saul chose him," the usual way of commencing the narrative of a king's reign. He probably selected these 3000 men at the end of the war with the Ammonites, to strengthen the small body-guard which he had gathered round him at Gibeah (ch. x. 26). As being always in arms, they would become highly disciplined, and form the nucleus and centre of all future military operations (see on ch. xiv. 52). He stationed these on either side of the defile in the mountain range of Bethel, so exactly described in Isa. x. 28, 29, where Sennacherib, as we read, leaves his carriage, *i. e.* his baggage, at Michmash, and after defiling through the pass, arrives at Geba. Gibeah, where Jonathan was posted with 1000 of these picked warriors, was Saul's home, and his son would have the benefit there of the aid of Kish and Abner, while Michmash was the more exposed place, situate about seven miles north-east of Jerusalem. Conder ('Tent Work,' ii. 110) describes this defile as "a narrow gorge with vertical precipices some 800 feet high—a great crack or fissure in the country, which is peculiar in this respect, that you only become aware of its existence when close to the brink; for on the north the narrow spur of hills hides it, and on the south a flat plateau extends to the top of the crags. On the south side of this great chasm stands Geba of Benjamin, on a rocky knoll, with caverns beneath the houses, and arable land to the east; and on the opposite side, considerably lower than Geba, is the little village of Michmash, on a sort of saddle, backed by an open and fertile corn valley." This valley was famous for producing excellent barley. **Every man to his tent.** This with us would be a warlike phrase; but as the mass of the Israelites then dwelt in tents,

it means simply their dispersion homewards; and so the Syriac translates, "He dismissed them each to his house" (see Ps. lxix. 25).

Ver. 3.—**In Geba.** By this garrison the Philistines commanded the further end of the defile, and they had also another outpost beyond it near Gibeah itself (ch. x. 5). Probably neither of these garrisons was very strong, and Saul may have intended that Jonathan should attack them while he held the northern end of the pass, which would be the first place assailed by the Philistines in force. As regards the word translated *garrison*, attempts have been made to render it *pillar*, and to represent it as a token of Philistine supremacy which Jonathan threw down, while others, with the Septuagint, take it as a proper name; but the word *smote* is strongly in favour of the rendering of the A. V. **Let the Hebrews hear.** Saul must have intended war when he thus posted himself and Jonathan in such commanding spots, and probably all this had been sketched out by Samuel (see on ch. x. 8). He now summons all Israel to the war. It is strange that he should call the people "Hebrews," the Philistine title of contempt; but it is used again in ver. 7, and of course in ver. 19. The Septuagint reads, "Let the slaves revolt," but though followed by Josephus, the change of text is not probable.

Ver. 4.—**That Saul had smitten.** Though the achievement was actually Jonathan's, yet it belonged to Saul as the commander-in-chief, and probably had been done under his instructions. **Israel was had in abomination with the Philistines.** They must have viewed with grave displeasure Israel's gathering together to choose a king, and Saul's subsequent defeat of the Ammonites, and retention with him of a large body of men, and so probably they had been for some time making preparations for war. Saul, therefore, knowing that they were collecting their forces, does the same, **and the people were called together after Saul.** Literally, "were cried after him," *i. e.* were summoned by proclamation (comp. Judges vii. 23, 24; x. 17, where see margin). For **Gilgal** see ch. vii. 16; xi. 14. This place had been selected because, as the valley opens there into the plain of Jordan, it was a fit spot for the assembling of a large host. For its identification see Conder, 'Tent Work,' ii. 7—12.

Ver. 5.—Long before Saul could gather Israel the Philistines had completed their preparations, and invaded the country in overwhelming numbers; but **thirty thousand chariots** compared with **six thousand horsemen** is out of all proportion. Possibly the final *l* in Israel has been taken by some copyist for a numeral, and as it signifies thirty, it has changed 1000 into 30,000. Or, simpler still, *shin*, the numeral for 300, has been read with two dots, and so changed into 30,000. **They came up, and pitched in Michmash.** Saul had withdrawn eastward to Gilgal, and the Philistines had thus placed themselves between him and Jonathan. There is a difficulty, however, in the words **eastward from Beth-aven;** for as this, again, was east of Bethel, it puts the Philistines' camp too much to the east. As it is not, however, the regular phrase for eastward, some commentators render, "in front of Beth-aven." "It means 'the house of naught,' and was the name originally given to the desert east of Bethel, because of its barren character" (Conder, 'Tent Work,' ii. 108). The Philistines, however, had come in such numbers that their camp must have occupied a large extent of ground.

Ver. 6.—**The people were distressed.** Literally, were squeezed, pressed together, were in difficulties. The Philistines had so promptly answered Saul's challenge, that the Israelites, forgetting their victory over Nahash, whose men, however, had probably very inferior arms to those worn by the Philistines, lost courage; and even the picked band of 2000 men dwindled to 600. As for the mass of the people, they acted with the most abject cowardice, hiding themselves **in caves,** of which there are very many in the limestone ranges of Palestine. David subsequently found safety in them when hunted by Saul. Also **in thickets.** The word as spelt here occurs nowhere else, nor do the versions agree as to its meaning. Most probably it signifies *clefts*, rifts or fissures in the rocks. The next word, **rocks,** certainly means precipitous *cliffs;* and thickets or thornbushes would scarcely be placed between caverns and cliffs, both of which belong to mountains. **In high places.** This word occurs elsewhere only in Judges ix. 46, 49, where it is rendered *hold*. But this meaning is not supported by the ancient versions, and it more probably signifies a vault or crypt, which better suits the hiding-place next mentioned, **pits,** *i. e.* tanks, artificial reservoirs for water, with which most districts were well supplied in Palestine, even before its conquest by Israel. They were absolutely necessary, as the rains fall only at stated periods, and the chalky soil will not hold water; when dry they would form fit places for concealment.

Ver. 7.—**Some of the Hebrews.** A contemptuous name for Israel (see ver. 3). If the reading is correct, it must be used here of a cowardly portion of the people (as in ch. xiv. 21), for the insertion of **some of** in the A.V. is unjustifiable. But by a very slight change, simply lengthening the stalk of one letter, we get a very good sense: "And they went over *the fords of* the Jordan **to the land**

of Gad and Gilead," *i. e.* to the mountainous district in which the Jordan rises.

SAUL'S RASH SACRIFICE (vers. 8 — 14). Ver. 8.—**Seven days, according to the set time.** See on ch. x. 8. The lapse of time between Samuel's appointment of the seven days during which Saul was to wait for him to inaugurate the war of independence, and the present occasion, was probably not so great as many commentators suppose; for ch. xiii. 1 is, as we have seen, wrongly translated, and everything else leads to the conclusion that the defeat of the Ammonites, the choice of the 3000, and Jonathan's attack on the garrison at Geba followed rapidly upon one another. As the Philistines would rightly regard Israel's choice of a king as an act of rebellion, we cannot suppose them to have been so supine and negligent as not at once to have prepared for war. **Had appointed.** The Hebrew word for this has been omitted by some accident. It is given in the Septuagint and Chaldee and some MSS. The whole importance of the occurrence arose out of its having been appointed by Samuel on his selection of Saul as king.

Ver. 9.—**A burnt offering**, &c. The Hebrew has the definite article, *the burnt offering and the peace offerings*, which were there ready for Samuel to offer. **He offered.** Not with his own hand, but by the hand of the attendant priest, Ahiah, who was, we know, with him. Possibly, nevertheless, the Levitical law was not at this period strictly observed.

Ver. 10. — **That he might salute him.** Literally, "bless him," but the word is often used of a solemn salutation (2 Kings iv. 29). It is evident that Samuel came on the seventh day, and that Saul in his impetuosity could not stay the whole day out.

Ver. 11.—**What hast thou done?** The question implies rebuke, which Saul answers by pleading his danger. Each day's delay made his small force dwindle rapidly away, and the Philistines might at any hour move down from Michmash upon him at Gilgal and destroy him. But it was the reality of the danger which put his faith and obedience to the trial.

Ver. 12.—**I have not made supplication unto Jehovah.** Literally, "I have not stroked the face of Jehovah," but used of making him propitious by prayer (Exod. xxxii. 11; Jer. xxvi. 19). **I forced myself.** Saul pleads in his justification the imminence of the danger, and perhaps there are few who have faith enough to "stand still and see the salvation of Jehovah" (Exod. xiv. 13).

Ver. 13.—**Thou hast done foolishly.** Saul had not only received an express command to wait seven days, but it had been given him under special circumstances, and confirmed by the fulfilment of the appointed signs. He knew, moreover, how much depended upon his waiting, and that obedience to the prophet's command was an essential condition of his appointment. Nevertheless, in his impatience and distrust of Jehovah, he cannot bide the set time; not really because of any wish to propitiate God, but because of the effect to be produced upon the mind of the people. It was tedious to remain inactive; his position in the plains was untenable; at any moment his retreat to the mountains might be cut off; and so he prefers the part of a prudent general to that of an obedient and trustful servant of God. And we may notice that there is no confession of wrong on his part. His mind rather seems entirely occupied with his duty as a king, without having regard to the higher King, whom it ought to have been his first duty to obey.

Ver. 14.—**Jehovah hath sought him a man after his own heart.** The language of prophecy constantly describes that as already done which is but just determined upon. As David was but twenty-three years of age at Saul's death, he must now have been a mere child, even if he was born, (see ver. 1). But the Divine choice of Saul, which upon his obedience would that day have been confirmed, was now annulled, and the succession transferred elsewhere. Years might elapse before the first earthly step was taken to appoint his successor (ch. xvi. 13); nay, had Saul repented, we gather from ch. xv. 26 that he might have been forgiven: for God's threatenings, like his promises, are conditional. There is no fatalism in the Bible, but a loving discipline for man's recovery. But behind it stands the Divine foreknowledge and omnipotence; and so to the prophetic view Saul's refusal to repent, his repeated disobedience, and the succession of David were all revealed as accomplished facts.

CONTINUANCE OF THE WAR (vers. 15—18). Ver. 15.—**Samuel . . . gat him up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin.** Samuel would pass by Gibeah on his way to his own home at Ramah; but he seems to have tarried there to encourage the people; and probably he carried instructions from Saul to Jonathan to unite his forces with him, as we next find the father and son there in company. Even if this be not so, yet friendly relations must have continued between Saul and Samuel, as the latter would otherwise certainly not have chosen Saul's home for his halting-place; nor would he go thither without seeing Jonathan, and giving him aid and counsel. **Saul numbered.** See on ch. xi. 8. After summoning the whole nation there did not remain with him ever as many as a third of his selected band.

Ver. 16.—**In Gibeah of Benjamin** This

is an arbitrary change of the A. V. (in company with the Septuagint and Vulgate) for *Geba*, which is the word in the Hebrew text. Our translators no doubt considered that as *Gibeah of Benjamin* occurs in the previous verse, this must be the same place. But our greater knowledge of the geography of the Holy Land enables us to say that Geba is right; for, as we have seen, it was at one end of the defile, at the other end of which was Michmash; and here alone could the small army of Saul have any chance of defending itself against the vast host of the Philistines. However much we may blame Saul's disobedience, he was a skilful soldier and a brave man, and his going with his little band to the end of the pass to make a last desperate stand was an act worthy of a king.

Vers. 17, 18 — **The spoilers.** The conduct of the Philistines is that of men over-confident in their strength. They ought to have pounced at once upon Saul in the plain of Jordan, where their cavalry would have secured for them the victory, and then, following Samuel's and Saul's route, have seized the other end of the defile, and overpowered Jonathan. But they despised them both, and regarding the country as conquered, proceed to punish it, as probably they had done on previous occasions, when no one had dared to make resistance. Leaving then the main army to guard the camp at Michmash, they sent out light-armed troops to plunder the whole land. **One company turned unto the way . . . to Ophrah, unto the land of Shual.** This company went northward, towards Ophrah, a place five miles east of Bethel. The land of Shual, *i. e.* fox-land, was probably the same as the land of Shalim in ch. ix. 4. **Another company,** &c. This went eastward, towards Beth-horon, for which see Josh. x. 11. The third went to the south-east, towards the wilderness of Judæa. Zeboim, and all the places mentioned, are in the tribe of Benjamin, which had committed the offence of making for itself a king. To the south Saul held the mountain fastnesses towards Jerusalem.

DESCRIPTION OF ISRAEL'S EXTREME STATE OF OPPRESSION (vers. 19—23). Ver. 19.—**There was no smith.** This accounts for the contemptuous disregard of Saul by the Philistines. The people were disarmed, and resistance impossible. Apparently this policy had been long followed; but we need fuller information of what had happened between Samuel's victory at Mizpah and Saul's appointment as king, to enable us to understand the evident weakness of Israel at this time. But probably this description applies fully only to the districts of Benjamin, near the Philistines. The people further away had arms with which they defeated the Ammonites, and Saul and his men would have secured all the weapons which the enemy then threw away. But evidently no manufacture of weapons was allowed, and no one as far as possible permitted either to wear or possess arms.

Ver. 20.—**The Israelites went down to the Philistines.** *I. e.* to their land. This could only have applied to the districts near the Philistines, unless we suppose that they set up forges also at their garrisons. **To sharpen.** The verb chiefly refers to such work as required an anvil and hammer. As regards the implements, not only do the versions disagree in their renderings, but the Septuagint has a very curious different reading, to the effect that at harvest-time the Israelites had to pay the Philistines three shekels for repairing and whetting their tools. The **share** is more probably a *sickle*. The **coulter** is certainly a *ploughshare*, as rendered in Isa. ii. 4; Joel iii. 10. Of the **ax** there is no doubt; and the **mattock** is a heavy hoe for turning up the ground, as spades for that purpose are scarcely anywhere used, except in our own country.

Ver. 21.—**A file.** Margin, *a file with mouths*. The word only occurs here, and is translated a file on the authority of Rashi. Almost all modern commentators agree that it means *bluntness*, and that this verse should be joined on to the preceding, and the two be translated, "But all the Israelites went down to the Philistines to sharpen his sickle, and his ploughshare, and his axe, and his mattock, whenever the edges of the mattocks, and the ploughshares, and the forks, and the axes were blunt, and also to set (so the margin rightly) the goads." The Israelites were thus in a state of complete dependence upon the Philistines, even for carrying on their agriculture, and probably retained only the hill country, while their enemies were masters of the plains.

Ver. 22.—**There was neither sword,** &c. Armed only with clubs and their farming implements, it is no wonder that the people were afraid of fighting the Philistines, who, as we gather from the description of Goliath's armour, were clad in mail; nor is it surprising that they despised and neglected Saul and his few men, whom probably they regarded as an unarmed mob of rustics. The Ammonites probably were far less efficiently armed than the Philistines, who, as commanding the sea-coast, could import weapons from Greece.

Ver. 23.—**And the garrison,** &c. When the Philistines heard that Saul with his six hundred men had joined the small force already at Geba with Jonathan, they sent a body of men to occupy an eminence higher up in the defile which lay between Geba and Michmash (see on ch. xiii. 2). The

purpose of this was to keep the route open, that so, when they pleased, they might send a larger body of troops up the defile in order to attack Saul. It would also keep a watch upon his movements, though they could have had no expectation that he would venture to attack them. It was this garrison which Jonathan so bravely attacked, and by his success prepared the way for the utter defeat of the enemy.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—7.—*The great antagonism.* The facts are—1. Saul, entering on the military organisation of his kingdom, forms a select force under the command of himself and Jonathan. 2. The defeat of the Philistine garrison by Jonathan is announced to all Israel. 3. This first success arouses the hostility of the Philistines, who threaten Israel with overwhelming numbers. 4. The effect of this display of force is to dishearten the followers of Saul who waited at Gilgal. The presence of the Philistines within the borders of Israel was inconsistent with the privileges originally granted, and was a perpetual source of danger and annoyance. One of the ends contemplated in seeking a king was to clear the promised land of foes. The normal state of the people of God was only realised when the land was the exclusive home of the descendants of Abraham. The reformation, in slow yet steady progress, created the ambition and effort to cast out the enemy. Saul's movements, therefore, were a correct expression of national feeling, and in harmony with the high purpose of Israel's existence. In this attempt to subdue the great enemy of the kingdom we have an historic representation of the great conflict which is ever being waged between the spiritual kingdom and the evils which largely hold possession of the world; and in the varying experience of Israel we see shadows of truths that find expression in Christian times.

I. The EXISTENCE OF THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST INVOLVES A CONFLICT WITH A WATCHFUL, POWERFUL FOE FOR THE POSSESSION OF THE EARTH. The separate existence of Israel, combined with the promise made to Abraham (Gen. xv. 7), and the spiritual purpose to be wrought out for the glory of God, rendered war with the Philistines at this time inevitable. The existence of Christ's kingdom in the actual separation to himself of those who form his Church, combined with his right to be King of every land and heart, and the prediction that he shall have the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession, involves ceaseless strife with men, spirits, customs, laws, principles, purposes, and all else, visible and invisible, that is incompatible with his full and blessed sway. Light is not more opposed to darkness, life to death, purity to corruption, than Christ and his holy rule are opposed to much that now governs human society.

II. The EARLY EFFORTS OF THE FAITHFUL ARE ENSAMPLES FOR FUTURE CONDUCT, AND THE TRIUMPHS WON ARE AN EARNEST OF WHAT MAY BE ON A LARGER SCALE. The early efforts of Saul and his followers were characterised by faith in their mission as people of God, loyalty to the Divine cause they represented, courage and self-denial for the good of the land, unity of aim and concentration of strength. They had a right to believe in success, because the promised land was for Israel, and not for the idolatrous Philistine. The victory at Geba was a pledge of coming events. The war against sin has been carried on ever since the first promise cheered the heart of our fallen ancestor. But we may regard the exertions of the early Christian Church as the first organised effort, under the laws of the kingdom of Christ, for the extirpation of all sin and evil. The early Christians were fine examples of clear and deep conviction that they were the servants of Christ, and had a Divine mission to work out in an antagonistic world. And the splendid triumphs won, though, compared with the area of sin, as small as was the capture of Geba relatively to the whole possessions of the Philistines, are an indication of what awaits the Church if only, laying aside internal strifes, worldly policies, self-indulgence, she will but brace her energies to the perfecting of the conquests already made. Novelties we need not; the old weapons, the old spirit, the old consecration, the old singleness of aim, will pull down strongholds still.

III. The ANTAGONISM MAY GROW IN INTENSITY AS A CONSEQUENCE OF SUCCESS. Up

to a given point success in war arouses more thoroughly the energies of the defeated. The acquisition of Geba made Israel more than ever detestable to the Philistines, and developed their resources. The same effect was produced by the triumphs of Pentecost (Acts iv.). Subsequently rulers took counsel, being afraid "whereunto this would grow" (Acts v. 24), unless more severe measures were taken to suppress it. It was the necessarily aggressive spirit of Christianity, combined with its growing influence, that aroused the fierce, persecuting spirit of ancient Rome. The more a pure Christianity is urged on men, the more do evil passions arise in resistance. It is probable that there are seasons when the "principalities and powers" of the unseen world combine in all fierceness to arouse human antagonism to the gospel. The bitter hostility and outspoken defiance of the present day are in instructive coexistence with Christian efforts and triumphs surpassing in range any recorded in history.

IV. HOPE OF FINAL VICTORY DEPENDS MORE ON OUR FAITH IN GOD THAN ON THE WEAKNESS OF THE FOE. The followers of Saul became disheartened when they heard of the tremendous efforts of the Philistines. As Peter on the sea looked away from Christ at the waves, and began to sink, so these men lost hope when, forgetting the "mighty God of Jacob," they fixed attention on the forces of the enemy. It was not a question of few or many Philistines, but of faith in their God. The *faint-heartedness of Israel finds its counterpart in modern times.* The vast area over which evil reigns, the desperate vices that enchain thousands, the extent to which society is impregnated with principles alien to the gospel, the utter absorption of millions in matters purely material, the fierce assaults made on the supernatural character of Christianity, and the growing positiveness and intellectual licence of many who fight under the stolen banner of "science"—these signs of power are brooded over, and the heart sinks for fear. This *faint-heartedness is as irrational as it is sinful.* Is Christ a living Saviour? Is he *the Lord of all?* It is a simple question of *fact.* If *not*, then our Christianity is a delusion; we are without hope in the world, and life is an insoluble, awful, heart-piercing enigma. But *if he is*, then *who* are men, or *what* are their resources? They are but creatures of a day, and their strength perishes. He *must* reign. On his own head his crown shall flourish.

General lessons:—1. Every Christian should inquire how far he, in loyalty to Christ and full conviction of his triumph, is doing his part in the common work of the Church. 2. It is a matter of inquiry how far we may be impeding the progress of Christianity by compromising with the world in hope of lessening antagonism. 3. It should guide our conduct to remember that the severest holiness of life, blended with the tenderest love, has ever accomplished the most enduring spiritual work. 4. It will tend to nourish faith in the sufficiency of God if we, by thought and prayerfulness, habituate ourselves to actual fellowship with him.

Vers. 8—16.—*Representative temptations.* The facts are—1. Saul, waiting at Gilgal for Samuel, gives orders for the observance of sacrificial worship. 2. Towards the close of the ceremony, and before the full time was expired, Samuel makes his appearance. 3. In reply to Samuel's remonstrance, Saul assigns the reasons for his conduct—the discouragement of the people, the non-arrival of Samuel, and the threatening attitude of the foe. 4. Samuel charges Saul with having failed to keep the commandment of God, and declares that his family shall not succeed to the throne. 5. Samuel retires to Gibeah, whither Saul and his son also go with their followers. Whether the appointment to meet at Gilgal was that mentioned in ch. x. 8, or a subsequent arrangement, does not affect the fact that, in view of measures to be taken conjointly, Saul had been distinctly *commanded by God*, through the prophet, to wait seven days till Samuel came. Evidently it was a distinct understanding that in the coming effort to rid the land of the Philistines the *spiritual power*, represented by the prophet of God, was to be prominent. Thus would the "manner of the kingdom" (ch. x. 25) be recognised, and Israel's ruler, though a king, would still be the agent for working out a spiritual destiny. It was of immense importance that, having a king like unto other nations, Israel and the monarch should still be made to feel that, not the form of government, but the blessing of God granted in answer to prayer, and on due recognition of the spiritual institutions, was

the most important thing. And the command to wait for the *spiritual* guide and ruler was eminently fitted to impress Saul and the people with the undiminished authority and value of the spiritual head. There is no evidence that the *end* of the seven days had come, only that it was nigh. Even had it come, the Author of the command was responsible for consequences, not Saul. The first duty of a subject is to obey law. Saul had no right to break the commandment of his King. The assumption of the control of spiritual functions violated a great principle in the eyes of the people. It would mean, the prophet of God can be dispensed with; the king can invent ways other than God's of meeting pressing dangers; rigid obedience to God's command is not expedient at all times; the religious arrangements in the recent settlement of the kingdom, impeding as they do the military movements, are defective; all must, by pressure of events, come into the monarch's hands. Thus the very essence of the constitution, as approved by God and explained in act and word by Samuel (ch. ix. 26, 27; x. 1, 8, 25; xii. 13, 14), was set aside.

I. LIFE INEVITABLY BRINGS WITH IT TEMPTATIONS TO SACRIFICE CLEAR DUTY TO SINFUL EXPEDIENCY. The difficulties surrounding Saul seemed to rise from the natural course of events. The defection of many of his followers was as readily accounted for, by the overwhelming force of the enemy and the inactivity enforced by the absence of Samuel, as it was, from a heathen point of view, pregnant with disaster. The military power of the nation, in being thus subject to spiritual arrangements, was less an arm of strength than a monarch might desire. The first operation of the subordination of man's skill and force to the religious element of the national life was by no means promising. Was it not expedient to act without the spiritual authority as at present constituted? Now this temptation was no "strange thing." It was just an early and sharply-defined form of what Saul would be liable to all his days; for events and his own imperfect nature would constantly conspire to raise the question as to whether he would not better hold his own in war if he were not troubled by *non*-military considerations. The spiritual character of the kingdom would continually test his loyalty to God. His case was not singular. 1. *Moral life on earth involves trial.* Created moral existence is not possible apart from liability to the rival claims of duty to God and regard for self, in some form supposed to be more or less expedient. Temptation grows out of the conditions under which we live. 2. *Every special course of life is attended with temptations peculiar to its nature.* Saul as king would feel the pressure of what, as a man living in obscurity, he would not have known. Israel chosen of God to traverse the desert and attain to freedom and rest in Canaan were open to trials of faith which, as bondmen in Egypt, would not have come to them. Our Saviour himself endured temptations in virtue of his *unique* position as Founder of a spiritual kingdom.

II. It is A MERCIFUL PROVIDENCE WHEN REPRESENTATIVE TEMPTATIONS COMING EARLY IN LIFE'S CAREER ARE UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES MOST FAVOURABLE TO RESISTANCE. The circumstances of a temptation tell wonderfully in the act of resisting. Should it find the mind predisposed by dallying with evil, or should it come in the absence of clear and recent indications of duty, with a sudden impulse, or insinuating itself into intricate considerations and engagements, the chances of its success would be increased as compared with opposite conditions. This temptation to sin came on Saul when he was free from the entanglements of a court and domestic politics; it was in sharp contrast *with a most explicit command;* it was counter to the recent instance of God's help in presence of a great danger (ch. xi. 4—14); and it came when his moral sense was at its best. Inasmuch as during coming years Saul would inevitably feel the force of temptations to assert his own methods and will as being apparently better than those indicated by the spiritual requirements of the kingdom, it *was really a mercy that this representative temptation came when it did, and in a form most easy to resist.* If resisted, a principle would assume an incipient form of habit. The moral strength of the man would be developed by exercise. Success over the foe, consequent on the first triumph *of faith in God and submission to his spiritual order,* would be a memorial for future inspiration. We *have here a clue to the solution of other trials.* It is too often imagined that the trial of Adam, of the Israelites at the Red Sea, of Christ in the desert, and of the apostles during the dark days of the crucifixion and death, were arbitrary, severe, and, at least, without a clear

trace of kindness. But consider—1. *Life in each case was liable to many temptations.* It was inseparable from Adam's existence as a man on earth, from Israel's march to and occupation of Canaan, from our Saviour's position among men and the evil spirits who would act upon his soul, and from the apostolic career in face of Jewish and Gentile antagonism, that temptation again and again, in forms peculiar to each, would arise. So, also, with every man's life. 2. In each case the *conditions for resisting representative temptation of what was coming were most favourable at the entrance on the career.* Man in Eden was pure, free from bad impulse, independent of entanglements and want, familiar with the emphatic and recent command. Israel at the Red Sea had just seen marvellous and repeated tokens of the sufficiency of God to shelter them and ward off danger, and the command to go forward to the sea was explicit. Our Saviour when tempted of the devil was fresh from the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as yet not worn down by ingratitude and scorn, filled with the call to enter on his work in founding a *spiritual* kingdom. So, likewise, when a monarch, or pastor, or Church, or any individual first enters on an office or work, there is a freedom from the entanglements which spring from mixed relationships, an *éclat* which inspires hope, a sense of responsibility which makes the spirit sober and watchful, and a fame to win which appeals to the noblest sentiments of duty and honour. 3. *Resistance in each case would impart a moral force which would be of great advantage in all subsequent conflicts.* Had Adam said a final "nay" to the tempter, his moral conquest over all other temptations would have been comparatively insured. Imperfect as Israel were in the desert, their moral power was greatly strengthened both by the act of faith at the Red Sea and the consequent victory over Pharaoh. As One who had conquered in the desert, our Lord would doubtless confront the later temptations to exchange poverty and want and spiritual rulership for the pomp and outward splendour of an earthly kingdom with a more equable spirit. And the endurance of the apostles during those dark and harrowing hours prior to the resurrection would only render their faith a mightier power wherewith to face the persecution of men and the seeming tardiness of the world's subjugation to Christ. So, likewise, those who are brought by Providence to bear temptation under favourable conditions when entering on a career actually receive a great mercy. They are enabled thereby, if they will, *to gain power for life and to qualify for higher service.* This will find illustration also with the young. Their early trials, under good conditions, make them more competent to cope with all that is sure to follow.

III. SIN COMMITTED UNDER CONDITIONS FAVOURABLE TO THE RESISTANCE OF TEMPTATION BECOMES THEREBY AGGRAVATED IN CHARACTER. *Saul's sin was great.* It was marked by deliberation and yet by extreme folly. He "forced himself." The command was so clear, the risks of disobedience so palpable, that only a perverse ingenuity could persuade him to disobey. The effort to silence the conscience always aggravates a crime. Prompt, unquestioning obedience is due to clear commands. Man is not responsible for anything but duty. *The folly was conspicuous.* To break a clear command in order to offer an act of worship is the perfection of foolishness. Only a "lying spirit" could induce a man to honour God by dishonouring him. The blind reasoning of the heart when once clear duty is trifled with is extraordinary. It would be a wonderful revelation of perverted intellect if we could read the processes of thought by which men are led to force themselves to deliberate acts of sin.

IV. THE PUNISHMENT FOLLOWING ON SIN INCLUDES THE LOSS OF THAT FOR WHICH THE SIN WAS COMMITTED. Two consequences ensued on Samuel's exposure of Saul's sin—the forfeiture of his family's permanent possession of the throne of Israel, and the withholding of immediate interposition on behalf of the nation. Now it is obvious that Saul had yielded to the temptation in hope thereby of inspiring his followers to action, and of insuring the stability of his throne for himself and family in the subjugation of his foes. There was an eminent propriety in Saul's sin being visited by a loss of the kingdom to his family. He was the people's king—chosen because they desired a monarch. Therefore it was in harmony with the usual course of Providence that, though he sinned, he should be allowed to rule, and thus by his infirmities be the rod for their chastisement. Although representing in his virtues and failings the people who demanded a king, he was afforded by the recent trial a good opportunity of conforming to the higher spiritual order, and of thus becoming

by degrees educated into the loftier spiritual aims of the national life. Therefore, failing to rise to the level essential to the Messianic conception of the kingdom, he proved the moral unfitness of his principles and methods for transmittal to successors. Have we not here *a truth of constant recurrence?* Sin is committed to realise a purpose, and the purpose is not realised, but is missed by the very act of sin. Our first parents sought the rest of satisfaction in taking the forbidden fruit; but whatever rest they had before was lost in the act of disobedience, as also the kind of rest sought by the deed. The unhappy man who, under pressure of circumstances as trying to him as the hosts of Philistia were to Saul, forces himself to commit a fraud in order to insure relief and final success in his enterprise, learns to his cost, when once the act is committed, that mental relief is further off than ever, and a remorseless course of events ultimately brings on ruin to the enterprise. "He that seeketh his life shall lose it."

General lessons:—1. When pursuing a path of duty, impatience with God's ways should be strictly suppressed, or it will lay us open to the pressure of strong temptations. 2. In the high service of God we may be placed in circumstances of extreme peril, but these should never shake confidence in his all-sufficiency. 3. Sometimes the loftiest path of duty is "to be still," and pray for grace "to enter not into temptation." 4. The Christian is warranted, by the fact of the existence of "the kingdom," as also by the experiences of the past, to believe that above all the forces that threaten the Church there is a Power that sometimes restrains its manifestation for purposes of discipline. 5. It is a profitable study for the Church to consider how far prayer is not effectual in consequence of the constant breach of plain commands. 6. It is the sign of a guilty conscience, and of the hardening effect of even one sin, that plausible reasons are ready at hand to justify conduct. 7. If we prove ourselves unfit for service by our lack of spirituality, Providence will sooner or later remove us for others more spiritual.

Vers. 17—23.—*The ramifications of evil.* The facts are—1. In the absence of Divine interposition, and consequent on Saul's inability to resist advance, the Philistines develop their forces and plunder certain districts of country. 2. As a matter of policy on their part, and as one result of Saul's transgression, the Philistines deprive the people of the ordinary means of conducting warfare. 3. This state of things necessitates Saul's protracted inactivity, and inflicts considerable inconvenience on the people with respect to their daily pursuits in agriculture. Although we cannot say precisely what course events would have taken had Saul, in loyalty to God, awaited the arrival of Samuel (vers. 8—10), yet the whole history of Israel and the recent promises made through Samuel (ch. xii. 20—25) lead to the belief that, as when Jabesh-Gilead was in danger help came from God (ch. xi. 6), so now the Philistines would have been scattered by a Power more than human. The facts given in this paragraph appear to be designed to prepare the way for the narrative of Jonathan's heroism in the following chapter; at the same time they illustrate, in themselves, some truths of wider range than Israel's political and social condition. We have here an instance of—

I. THE DEPRESSING INFLUENCE OF A SENSE OF GUILT ON THE CONDUCT OF AFFAIRS. The military inactivity and general helplessness of Saul after Samuel's interview with him (vers. 11—14) are in striking contrast with his energy at other times, and are not altogether to be ascribed to the absence of special Divine interposition. The explanation is to be sought in his personal conviction of sin. There was no joy, no hope, no spring in his soul, no eagerness for a close conflict with the foe; and that, too, because a sense of sin brought moral paralysis upon his entire nature. The sense of guilt is not always present in men, but *when it is brought home to a man it exercises a depressing influence on his entire life*, and seriously affects the transaction of affairs. Conscience, when guilty, not only "makes cowards of us all," but it robs life of brightness, drains the springs of hope, fetters the operation of the faculties, and impairs the sum total of energy. No man's life is made the most of as long as some unrepented and unforgiven sin haunts his spirit. This is the reverse side of another fact, namely, that the soul possessed of the peace and joy of the reconciled

is in a condition to render its best service to the world, and to attain to the most perfect development of its powers. The wisdom of every one oppressed with a sense of guilt is to humble himself before God, and seek in Christ forgiveness and power for a truer life in future.

II. THE MANIFOLD RAMIFICATIONS OF EVIL. The sin of Saul did not begin and end with himself. His failure in duty affected the general interests of his kingdom. Even the brief narrative before us enables us to see how directly and indirectly the following circumstances were connected with his disobedience—namely, the inability of Israel to assail the threatening host; the depredations of the three divisions of the Philistine army; the private and social misery over a considerable area inseparable from the raids of the invader; the cutting off of the ordinary means for waging successful war; the impediments to the pursuits of trade and agriculture; the general humiliation and dread brought on the *non*-combatants of the land; and the withdrawal for a while of the counsels and encouragements of the prophet of God. The truth thus exemplified in the instance of a monarch's sin *finds expression also in every sin, and especially in sins of persons in responsible positions.* No sin can end in the act or in the person of the sinner. It impairs the tone and force of the entire man; it adds another item to the germs of future sorrow and shame; it further disqualifies for conferring on the world spiritual good; it gives a stronger taint of evil to the current of thought and feeling which flows out from the inner man to the world. Sin in us is as a wave of influence that spreads out, by laws of association and impulse, over the whole area of the spirit, and modifies all conduct for the worse. Especially is this true of persons in office and of parents. A monarch's official acts reach all classes. A parent's sin ramifies through the home—inducing, it may be, loss of peace, certainly loss of hallowed influence over children, and possibly ruin to health in offspring.

III. UNFAITHFULNESS IN THE SERVICE OF GOD DEPRIVES US OF A MOST IMPORTANT MEANS OF ACCOMPLISHING OUR MISSION AS CHRISTIANS IN THE WORLD. The scarcity of smiths and weapons of war is evidently associated by the historian with the disobedience of Saul. It is possible for Christian men engaged in the endeavour to maintain and extend the kingdom of Christ to be brought into an analogous condition as a consequence of their manifest unfaithfulness. In our conflict with the world it is of supreme importance that we make use of the ever available and potent instrument—*influence of character*. With this as a weapon we can accomplish much, by the blessing of God. If this be lost, if by our manifest inconsistencies before the world we virtually place this instrument of war at the feet of the men whom we seek to bring to Christ, then we shall be as powerless with them as was Saul and his people when the Philistines had control of their smiths and weapons of war.

General lessons:—1. The general spiritual power of our life will be in proportion as we keep pure, or, in case of falling into sin, at once humble ourselves before God and seek for pardon and a right spirit (Ps. li. 6—13). 2. It is an encouragement to holiness and obedience to know that the ramifications of righteousness may become as wide as are those of sin. 3. It is a mercy to know that, though the enemy may sometimes triumph over the servants of Christ because of their weakness of character, yet the eternal Source of strength is in reserve, and will manifest himself.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—7. (MICHMASH, GIBEAH, GEBA, GILGAL.)—*The trumpet sounded.* "And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, Let the Hebrews hear." 1. The great conflict between good and evil which has been waged from the first (Gen. iii. 15) has been concentrated in every age on some particular issue. At this time it was whether Israel and the worship of the true God or the Philistines and the worship of idols should prevail. It was thus of the highest importance in relation to the kingdom of God upon earth. 2. The Philistines were old enemies and powerful oppressors (Judges iii. 3; x. 7; xiii. 1; 1 Sam. vii. 2). During the administration of Samuel they were held in check (ch. vii 13), although they appear to have had military posts or garrisons in the land (ch. x. 5; ver. 3), and the

overthrow of one of these by Jonathan (at Geba, four miles north of Gibeah, and opposite Michmash) gave the signal for renewed conflict. Having evacuated Michmash, where he had stationed himself with an army of 2000, Saul summoned all the men of Israel to gather to him at Gilgal; but the advancing hosts of the enemy filled the country with terror, so that he was left with only 600 followers, and found it necessary, after his interview with Samuel, to join his son Jonathan at Gibeah (Geba) (vers. 2, 16; ch. xiv. 2). Meanwhile the enemy occupied Michmash, whence three companies of spoilers issued, plundering the plains and valleys. A second and greater exploit of Jonathan, however, drove them out of Michmash, and it was followed by a general engagement, in which large numbers of them were slain, and the rest "went to their own place" (ch. xiv. 23, 31, 46). 3. The conflict to which Israel was summoned represents that to which Christians are called. It is a conflict with physical and moral evil, with the world, the flesh, and the devil (John xv. 19; 2 Cor. x. 4; Ephes. vi. 12; 1 Pet. ii. 11; 2 Pet. v. 8; 1 John ii. 16), and with men only in so far as they are ruled by sin, and in order to their salvation; a conflict which is good ("the good fight of faith"—1 Tim. vi. 12) and necessary, and affords full scope for whatever warlike instincts and energies are possessed. What does the sound of the trumpet signify? (1 Cor. xiv. 8).

I. A BLOW HAS BEEN STRUCK AGAINST THE FOE. The greatest blow that was ever inflicted upon the "power of darkness" was struck by "the Captain of our salvation" in his life and death and glorious resurrection (John xii. 31; xvi. 33; 1 John iii. 8); and in the spirit and power of his victory his followers carry on the conflict (Matt. x. 34). At times there seems to be something like a truce, but it never lasts long; and when a fresh blow is struck by "a good soldier of Jesus Christ' it—1. *Reveals* the essential difference between the spirit that is in "the Israel of God" and "the spirit that is in the world." 2. *Intensifies* their antagonism (ver. 4). 3. *Commits* them to more definite and decisive action. And to this end the fact should be proclaimed. "When Saul the king of the Hebrews was informed of this (ver. 3), he went down to the city of Gilgal, and made proclamation of it over all the country, summoning them to freedom" (Josephus).

II. THE ENEMY IS MUSTERING HIS FORCES (ver. 5), which are—1. Exceedingly *numerous*, "as the sand which is on the sea-shore." 2. *Skilful*, crafty, and deceitful (2 Cor. xi. 14). 3. Very *powerful*. There is at the present day an extraordinary combination of anti-christian agencies (2 Tim. iii. 1—9; Rev. xiii. 11—18), threatening Christian faith and practice, which might well fill us with fear, did we not believe that "they that be with us are more than they that be with them" (2 Kings vi. 16). "The spirits of the unseen world seem to be approaching us. Times of trouble there have been before; but such a time, in which everything, everywhere, tends in one direction to one mighty struggle of one sort—of faith with infidelity, lawlessness with rule, Christ with antichrist—there seems never to have been till now" (Pusey).

III. THE FAITHFUL MUST RALLY AROUND THEIR LEADER. The gathering forces of the enemy should constrain us to closer union, and the proper centre of union is he of whom the greatest kings and heroes were feeble types and shadows. 1. He has been Divinely *appointed*, and claims our obedience and co-operation. 2. He is fully *qualified* as "a Leader and Commander of the people." 3. He is the only *hope* of safety and success. "God is with him" (ch. x. 7).

"With force of arms we nothing can,
Full soon were we down-ridden,
But for us fights the proper man,
Whom God himself hath bidden.
Ask ye, Who is this same?
Christ Jesus is his name;
The Lord Sabaoth's Son;
He, and no other one,
Shall conquer in the battle" (Luther).

IV. THE SUCCESS ALREADY ACHIEVED GIVES ASSURANCE OF VICTORY (ch. xi. 11; ver. 3). 1. What triumphs has he gained in former days! 2. They are an earnest

of "still greater things than these." 3. And they should inspire us with the confidence and courage which are needful to participation in his victory and glory (Rev. xvii. 14; xix. 11). "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."—D.

Vers. 8—15. (GILGAL.)—*The first wrong step.* All men are subjected in life to various tests which prove "what spirit they are of." These tests may appear insignificant in themselves (like that which was applied to Adam and Eve—Gen. ii. 17), but they involve important principles, and the manner in which they are endured is followed by serious consequences. The position of Saul necessitated a trial of his fidelity to the fundamental principle of the theocratic kingdom, viz., unconditional obedience on the part of the king to the will of God as declared by his prophets. He was directed (1) to wait for Samuel seven days, and (2) to attempt nothing till he came (ch. x. 8). He omitted the former and did the latter, and thus took his *first wrong step*—a step never retraced, and leading to a course which ended on the fatal field of Gilboa. Observe—

I. ITS APPARENT EXPEDIENCY. His conscience told him that it was not right, as he virtually acknowledged in the defence he offered for his conduct (vers. 11, 12). Yet he persuaded himself (as others are accustomed to do) that it was venial, expedient, and even necessary, because of—1. *The pressure of worldly circumstances.* "Because I saw that the people were scattered from me," &c. Resources diminish, and danger is imminent. When they are considered in themselves alone, anxiety and fear increase, and temptation becomes strong to make use of any means of relief that may be presented. How often are men tempted by the plea of necessity to disobey the voice of conscience! The tempter says, "It is better to steal than starve, better to sin than perish." 2. *The disappointment of religious expectations.* "And that thou camest not at the appointed time." "Help has been long waited for, but it comes not; nor is it likely, now that the seventh day is drawing to a close, that it will come at all. The promise has not been fulfilled. The time for action has arrived, and the long delay indicates that the most expedient course must be taken. Nothing else remains. If there be any blame, it cannot be attributed to one who has waited so long, has been left in such extremity, and acts for the best." 3. *The efficacy of ceremonial observances.* "And I forced myself, and offered a burnt offering." Inasmuch as such an offering was required on entering upon his enterprise against the Philistines, he could not hope to succeed without it, and he had at all times great regard for the external ceremonies enjoined by the law (ch. xiv. 33, 35). A doubtful or wrong act is often supposed to be blameless when performed in connection with sacred rites, or with a righteous end in view (John xvi. 2); and disobedience is sometimes clothed in a religious guise, its real nature being thereby obscured to the view of conscience, and its commission rendered easy. 4. *The prospect of immediate advantages.* Apparent and immediate good is the first and last and most powerful incentive to departure from the path of duty. "The tree was good for food, and pleasant to the eyes," &c. (Gen. iii. 6). "And the history of Adam is as ancient as the world, but is fresh in practice, and is still revived in the sons of Adam."

II. ITS REAL CULPABILITY. "What hast thou done?" said Samuel, speaking as with the voice of God, and seeking to arouse his conscience and lead him to repentance. He had been guilty of—1. *Disobedience to a plain commandment.* "Thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God" (ver. 13). The fact could not be denied. He had not waited *all* the appointed time, and he had acted without Divine direction. He had rejected the supreme authority of the Divine King, and no excuse that might be made could do away with his guilt. "Sin is not estimated by God according to its outward form, but according to the amount and extent of the principle of evil embodied in that form." 2. *Distrust of promised help.* Men sometimes wait long for the fulfilment of Divine promises, but not long enough; and their lack of perseverance shows weakness or absence of faith. The force of adverse circumstances is exaggerated by being exclusively dwelt upon; doubt of the power of God prevails through disregard of preservation from harm hitherto afforded; and as faith unites the soul to God, so unbelief severs it from him, leaves it a prey

to disquiet and impatience, and leads it to adopt worldly and godless expedients. Unbelief was the root of the transgression of Saul, as it is of the transgression of men generally. 3. *Formality in religious service.* A burnt offering was a symbol and expression of consecration, and when offered aright, in a spirit of obedience, it honoured God and obtained his blessing; but when wrongly offered it was worthless, dishonoured him, and was abomination in his sight (ch. xv. 22; Prov. xxi. 27. Isa. i. 13). It is the same with other outward forms of service. "Saul is a specimen of that class of persons who show a certain reverence and zeal for the *outward forms* of religion, and even a superstitious reliance on them, but are not careful to cherish the *inner spirit* of vital religion" (Wordsworth's 'Com.'). 4. *Self-will, pride, and presumption.* In disobeying the will of God he set up his own will as supreme, and was guilty of pride, "by which sin fell the angels." It is not said that he offered sacrifice with his own hand, and he may have simply directed it to be done by the priest who was with him (ch. xiv. 18); nor is it certain that if he had done so he would have gone beyond the privilege and prerogative possessed by other kings. His sin did not consist of intrusion into the priestly office. It was nevertheless very great. "He had cast away his obedience to God. The crown he thought was his own. From that moment he fell; for all our good qualities retain their ascendancy over our evil passions by the presence and power of God claiming them as his." "Samuel, according to modern expositors of the story, was angry because he felt that he was losing his own influence over the mind of the king. No; he was angry because the king was so much the slave of his influence, or of any influence that was exerted over him for a moment; because he was losing the sense of responsibility to One higher than a prophet, to One who had appointed him to rule not in his own name, but as the minister and executor of the Divine righteousness" (Maurice).

III. ITS EXCEEDING FOLLY. "Thou hast done foolishly" (ver. 13). The folly of the sinner appears in his—1. *Being deceived by the appearances of things*—the magnitude of danger, the false promises of advantage, the specious arguments of expediency. He is like the foolish man who built his house upon the sand, instead of "digging deep and laying the foundation on a rock" (Luke vi. 48). He is infatuated, fascinated, and under a glamour cast over his mind by his own evil desires and the spell of the tempter. 2. *Making light of the enormous evil of sin.* It is the only real evil. But he is thoughtless, ignorant, and foolish enough to account it a trivial thing, which may be easily excused and passed by. As he who says in his heart "No God" is called a "fool," so he who deems it a little matter to offend him is appropriately designated by the same name. "Fools make a mock at sin" (Prov. xiv. 9); and he who makes light of sin makes light of God. 3. *Leaving the only path of safety and honour.* "For now" (if thou hadst obeyed his commandment) "the Lord would have established thy sovereignty over Israel for ever." 4. *Entering on a course of certain loss and misery.* (1) *Inward*—weakened moral power, increased tendency to sin, unsteadiness, rashness, &c. What a man does once he is almost certain under similar circumstances to do again. Saul's subsequent course was a continuation and complete development of the same kind of transgression as he now committed. He was already so blinded by sin as not to repent. (2) *Outward.* "But now thy sovereignty shall not continue," &c. (ver. 14). The sentence "embodied the principle that no monarchy could be enduring in Israel which did not own the supreme authority of God," and it declared that Saul's crown would not be transmitted to his descendants; but not until afterwards was he personally rejected from being king (ch. xv. 23). Having failed to endure the trial to which he was subjected, he was left by Samuel (ver. 15), and nothing is further recorded of his intercourse with the prophet for some years. "He had not even accomplished the object of his unseasonable sacrifice, viz., to prevent the dispersion of the people" (Keil). O that he had waited a little longer! "Saul lost his kingdom for want of two or three hours' patience."

1. Beware of the first wrong step. "It is always marked by a peculiarity of evil which does not attach to any subsequent offences" (Miller). *Principiis obsta.* 2. If you have taken such a step, instantly repent of it. "It is not sinning that ruins men, but sinning and not repenting, falling and not getting up again."—D.

Ver. 14. (GILGAL.)—*A man after God's own heart.* This expression occurs only here and in the quotation (Acts xiii. 22), "I have found David the son of Jesse (Ps. lxxxix. 20), a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will." 1. It was uttered by Samuel on the occasion of his *reproving Saul* for not obeying the commandment of the Lord (ver. 13). 2. It formed a part of the announcement of the *purpose of God* to appoint another man to be "captain over his people" in consequence thereof. The time of its fulfilment was not defined, nor was it known to the prophet who he should be; it is uncertain even whether David was yet born. 3. It was descriptive of *his character in contrast to that of Saul*, and it had respect to him in his public official capacity as theocratic sovereign rather than in his private moral life, although it is impossible wholly to separate the one from the other. He would obey the commandment of the Lord, and, as it was predicted of "a faithful priest" (ch. ii. 35; iii. 10), "do according to that which was in his heart and in his mind;" he would "serve the will of God in his lifetime" (Acts xiii. 36), and second and carry out his purposes concerning his people (Isa. xliv. 28); he would be truly "his servant," and therefore his throne would continue and (in the full realisation of the theocratic idea it represented) be established for ever (Ps. lxxxix. 19—37). In "a man after God's own heart" (such as David was) there is—

I. THE RECOGNITION OF THE WILL OF GOD as supreme. His will is above that of king and people; declared in manifold ways, it is the rule of human life; and he who perceives it most clearly and observes it most humbly and constantly approaches nearest to perfection. Saul paid but little regard to it, and, when it was opposed to his own inclination or judgment, set it aside and went his own way. With David it was otherwise. In his royal office especially he embodied the spirit of loyalty to the invisible King of Israel, and of zeal for his law and ordinances. "The vain caviis of infidels appear to have arisen from not considering that the phrase to which they object may be interpreted with equal propriety as referring to the Divine *purpose*, design, or intention as to designate peculiar *favour* and affection. The latter undoubtedly was true, yet the former is most clearly the meaning intended here" (Poole).

II. THE CONVICTION OF THE CALL OF GOD to his service. Unlike Saul, he felt deeply and constantly that he was individually an object of Divine regard, and appointed to do a certain work from which he neither desired nor dared to shrink. And a similar feeling exists in every true servant of God. "The life of David is the life neither of a mere official fulfilling a purpose in which he has no interest, nor of a hero without fear and without reproach; but of a man inspired by a Divine purpose under the guidance of a Divine teacher" (Maurice).

III. DEVOTION TO THE HONOUR OF GOD from the heart. Although Saul possessed many admirable qualties, he sought to honour God by outward sacrifices rather than real obedience, his noblest deeds were the offspring of sudden and transient impulses, and his predominant motive was his own honour and glory. "He had none of the work of Divine grace upon the heart, turning impulses into principles, ruling all actions by the law of an unseen Judge. He never experienced what the apostle calls the powers of the world to come, that is to say, the sense of God, of another world, smiting upon his soul through the veil of visible things, and making him feel the presence and the real, awful personality of his Maker. His soul was not like David's, a harp touched by the hand of the Almighty, and attuned to celestial melodies. It was only an instrument over which the wind swept wildly, waking a fitful and irregular music which soon died away into the confused murmurs of a harsh and tuneless discord" (A. Blomfield).

IV. DEPENDENCE ON THE HELP OF GOD for success. Saul was proud of his own strength, and both in ruling the people and contending against their enemies he relied on his own skill and prudence, and "an arm of flesh." David trusted in God for everything. "He never represents himself as a compound of strength and weakness. He represents himself as weakness itself—as incapacity utter and complete. The Lord is his strength. He has faith in God as his physical Inspirer or Protector. He has a deeper, a far deeper instinct than even that—the instinct of a communion, personal, practical, loving, between God, the Fount of light and goodness, and his own soul, with its capacity of darkness as well as light, of evil as well

as good. In one word, David is a man of faith and a man of prayer" (Kingsley, 'Four Sermons').

V. REPENTANCE AT THE REPROOF OF GOD on account of sin. The heart of Saul trembled not at the word of the Lord. When the prophet said, "What hast thou done?" he offered excuses for his conduct, and when on a subsequent occasion he was constrained to say, "I have sinned," his confession was insincere and hypocritical. How different was it with David when Nathan said to him, "Thou art the man." "Never was repentance more severe, or sorrow more sincere; so that he may justly be said (his repentance included, though not his fall) to be a man after God's own heart" (Yonge).

VI. SYMPATHY WITH THE PEOPLE OF GOD in their experience. He identified himself with them, made their varied joys and sorrows his own, and thereby (as well as by other means) promoted their highest good. His character "gathered into itself—so far as might be—all the various workings of the heart of man. This is the special attribute of the life and character of the son of Jesse. There is a hard, narrow separateness of soul marked in every line of the character of Saul. He is a wayward, wilful, self-determined man, well-nigh incapable of any real sympathy with others. Such an one could learn little of the workings of the human heart, which is so immeasurable in the multitude and compassion of its tones. Deep as were his sorrows, he never knew the grace of contrition. Thus his dark heart is full of sullenness and suspicion, inviting the entrance of the evil one, who came at his bidding, and closed with yet sterner bars all the avenues of his soul. In every one of these particulars David is the most complete contrast to Saul" (Wilberforce, 'Heroes of Heb. Hist.').

VII. SINCERITY IN HIS WHOLE RELATION TO GOD and in the main course of his life. "What are faults—what are the outward details of life, if the inner spirit of it, the remorse, temptations, true, often-baffled, never-ended struggle of it be forgotten? . . . David's life and history, as written for us in those Psalms of his, I consider to be the truest emblem ever given of a man's moral progress and warfare here below. All earnest souls will ever discern in it the faithful struggle of an earnest human soul towards what is good and best; struggle often baffled, down as into entire wreck, yet a struggle never ended; ever with tears, repentance, true, unconquerable purpose begun anew" (Carlyle, 'Heroes').—D.

Vers. 16—23. (MICHMASH.)—*Under the heel of the oppressor.* "Now there was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel" (ver. 19). The invasion of the Philistines produced great fear and distress among the people. Many hid themselves in caves, and thickets, and cliffs, and vaults, and pits; others fled across the Jordan; those who followed Saul did so with trembling (vers. 6, 7); his army melted away—some deserted to the enemy, or were pressed into their service (ch. xiv. 21); their homes and fields were plundered by marauding bands (ver. 17; ch. xiv. 22), which went forth from Michmash without fear of resistance, for the people had been disarmed and deprived of the means of making weapons of war, and even of sharpening their implements of husbandry (2 Kings xxiv. 14) when they became *blunt* (literally, "there was bluntness of edges;" A. V., "they had a *file*"), except at the pleasure of their oppressors (ver. 21). "The result of the burdensome necessity of going to the Philistines was, that many tools became useless by dulness, so that even this poorer sort of arms did the Israelites not much service at the breaking out of the war" (Bunsen). How long this state of things continued is not recorded; but it was sufficiently long for those who remained with Saul and Jonathan (ver. 22) to be left without "sword or spear," or any regular armament. Their condition was thus one of helplessness, dependence, and wretchedness, and affords a picture of that to which men are reduced by error and sin. In it we see—

I. THE MANIFEST FAILURE of a self-chosen way. "Nay; but we will have a king over us" (ch. viii. 19). They have a king self-willed like themselves; but their way fails, as the way of those who prefer their own plans to the guidance of God must ever fail. 1. In delivering them from the evils of which they complain (ch. viii. 5), or which they fear (ch. ix. 16). 2. In preserving to them the advantages which they possess. "Ye dwelled safe" (ch. xii. 11). Where is their safety now?

3. In procuring for them the good which they desire—liberty, power, victory, prosperity, honour, and glory (John xi. 47, 48; Rom. x. 2, 3). How completely do the prospects that lure men onward in their self-chosen way vanish before them as they advance!

II. THE MISERABLE SUBJECTION of those who forsake God. "They have rejected me" (ch. viii. 7). With what result? They are "delivered unto the will of them that hate them" (Ezek. xvi. 27; Deut. xxviii. 48), and endure—1. Oppression that cannot be effectually resisted. "Of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage" (2 Pet. ii. 19), and without the means of freeing himself. 2. Increased difficulty, toil, and trouble in the necessary pursuits of life. Life itself without the friendship of God is a burden too heavy to be borne. 3. Shame and contempt continually (ver. 4). "Is this the grandeur and power which they fondly expected under their king? Was it for this they rejected the Shield of their help and the Sword of their excellency?"

III. THE MERCIFUL PURPOSE to which trial is subservient. "The Lord will not forsake his people" (ch. xii. 22). Their distress has some alleviation, and it is designed (in his abounding goodness)—1. To convince them of the evil of their way. 2. To teach them to put their trust in God, and serve him in truth (ch. xiv. 6). 3. To prepare them for help and salvation.

Learn that—1. The highest wisdom of man is to submit to the wisdom of God. 2. The service of God is the only true freedom; the way of honour and happiness. "To serve God is to reign." 3. They who refuse the free service of God fall into the forced service of their enemies. 4. In the greatest of earthly calamities there is no room for despair. "If from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him" (Deut. iv. 29).—D.

Ver. 13.—*Tried and found wanting.* I. THE STORY. Saul's bright morning was a very short one, and his sky soon gathered blackness. Beginning with popular acclamation, succeeded after the exploit in Gilead by popular enthusiasm, he lost in a very short time the respect of his subjects. Beginning with a Divine sanction signified through the prophet Samuel, and with appearances of religious fervour, he quickly forfeited the favour of the Lord and the good opinion of the prophet. The ship of his fortunes had hardly left the harbour, with sails set and flags flying, before it ran aground on a rock of wilfulness, and though it kept afloat for years, it ever afterwards laboured uneasily in a troubled sea. The critical question for Saul was whether or not he would be content to act simply as executant of the Divine will. Samuel had pressed this upon him again and again. Would he wait on God, and act for him; or would he act for and from himself? Would he lead the people still to look up to Jehovah as their real King and Lawgiver; or would he imitate the heathen kings, who themselves took the initiative, and then called on their gods to be propitious to them, giving them success in their expeditions and victory in their combats? Would Saul do his own will, expecting the Lord to follow and favour him; or would he set the Lord always before him, follow and obey his voice? It is a great mistake to think that Saul was hardly dealt with on a point of small importance. The principle at stake was great, was fundamental. The test was definite, and was applied in the most public manner before all the army of Israel. The courage which had been roused against the Ammonite invaders of Gilead was now turned against the still more formidable Philistines. The gallant Jonathan struck the first blow, and then his royal father, knowing that the Philistine army could and would be very soon mobilised (as the modern phrase is) and hurled against Israel, summoned his people to arms. But, alas, the greater part of them were afraid to come, and in the threatened districts hid themselves. So the king found himself at Gilgal in a terrible plight, at the head of a small and dispirited force. He must have known that, unless Jehovah came to their help, all was lost. Let it not be said that it was unreasonable to judge and punish a man for anything done by him in such an emergency. Saul had received long notice of this week of patience. On the morning when Samuel anointed him three signs were given him, all of which had been exactly fulfilled. Then he had been told that he would have to tarry seven days at Gilgal for the coming of Samuel to offer sacrifice. But he had forgotten this. The word of the

prophet had made no lasting impression on his mind. There was nothing profound about the man. He had no controlling reverence for God, no abiding faith. So he acted from himself, only calling on God to help him in what he was going to do, instead of waiting to know what the Lord would have him to do, and acting as his servant. He bore the strain of anxiety for days, but not till the end of the time appointed. The troops (if one may give such a designation to hastily-collected and ill-armed levies) were faint-hearted, and but loosely attached to the standard of their king. They wondered why the sacrifice was delayed. They feared that God would be displeased, and not fight for them. Then Saul, impulsive and unwise, ordered that the sacrifice should proceed. Rather than wait a few hours more, he violated the direction he had received from the prophet of the Lord, and betrayed once for all an unreliable character and presumptuous heart.

II. THE LESSONS. 1. God rules men on large principles, but proves them by specific tests. His law is great and equitable; the trial of obedience to it is sometimes quite minute. In the garden within the land of Eden man and woman were put under a rule of universal obedience to the voice of the Lord, and they were tested by this specific requirement, to abstain from the fruit of one of the trees in the garden. Lot, his wife, and daughters were rescued by angels from a doomed city, and enjoined to flee to the mountains; "but his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt." Hezekiah, devoutly referring everything to God, had great deliverances, and a prosperous reign; but failing to consult the Lord when a flattering embassy came to him from Babylon, he revealed vain-glory lurking in his heart, and broke down the wall of defence which his previous piety had reared round his throne. Saul was tested more than once, but this one trial at Gilgal was enough to prove his unfitness to rule over God's heritage. The fact is, that one act may show character as clearly and decisively as a score or a hundred could do; not, indeed, an incidental act of inadvertence or error, but a thing done after explicit instruction and warning. He who breaks through the line of obedience at one point, out of self-will, is not to be depended on at any point. He disentitles himself to confidence by one instance of misconduct, not because of its intrinsic importance, but on account of the key which it gives to his inward tone of character. 2. One action, hastily performed, may carry irremediable consequences. Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, and he could never reverse that fatal act. Cain struck down his brother, and was from that day a wanderer and an outlaw on the earth. Esau sold his birthright, and never could recover it. Moses erred once at the rock in Kadesh, and forfeited his entrance into the promised land. The sins of those who are penitent are forgiven; but there are consequences of sinful habits, nay, even of one sinful act, which have no cure or corrective. It is well that this should be kept sternly before the eyes of men; for the moral nature of many is slippery and self-excusing, and they are too ready to count on impunity, or on finding some easy corrective for what they do amiss. The truth is, that one action may spoil a whole life, and, indeed, may hurt not oneself only, but many others also; just as Saul's impatience at Gilgal injured not himself alone, but the nation of Israel during all his unhappy reign. 3. He whom God will exalt must first learn patience. For want of this was Saul rejected from being king. By means of this was David educated for the throne. The son of Jesse was privately anointed by Samuel, as the son of Kish had been. Thereafter he came into public notice by his promptitude and bravery against Goliath, just as Saul had come into public favour by similar qualities against Nahash. So far their paths may be said to have corresponded; but then they quite diverged. Saul, impatient, behaved foolishly, and fell. David, when tried, "behaved himself wisely," made no haste to grasp the sceptre, waited patiently till God should lift him up. So when the time at last came for his elevation, he knew how to reign as God's king on the hill of Zion. How beautiful is this in the Son of David, the meek and lowly One, who, because he patiently observed the will of God, has now a name above every name! Jesus pleased not himself. He always spoke and acted as in behalf and by direction of his Father in heaven. Therefore has God highly exalted him. 4. It is a dangerous thing to ask for, or accept, a vicegerent of God on earth. It betrays unbelief rather than faith, and it entails tyranny and confusion. What a calamity it has been to the Latin Church to have an alleged vicar of Christ on earth! The arrangement

quite falls in with the craving for a spiritual ruler who may be seen, and the uneasiness of really unspiritual men under the control of One who is invisible. So there is a Popedom, which began indeed with good intentions and impulses, as did the monarchy of Saul, but has long ago fallen under God's displeasure through arrogance, and brought nothing but confusion and oppression on Christendom. We are a hundred times better without any such vicegerent. Enough in the spiritual sphere that the Lord is King. Our Divine Saviour, now unseen, but in due time to appear in his glory, is the only as well as the blessed Potentate, Head of the Church, Captain of the host, Lord of all.—F.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XIV.

JONATHAN SMITES THE PHILISTINE GARRISON (vers. 1—15). Ver. 1.—**Now it came to pass upon a day.** Literally, "And there was a day, and Jonathan," &c.; or, as we should say, And it happened one day that Jonathan. The phrase means that Jonathan's brave feat took place not many days after the garrison had occupied the cliff, probably only two or three, but without definitely stating how many. **He told not his father.** Not only because Saul would have forbidden so rash an enterprise, but because secrecy was essential to any chance of success: probably too the purpose came upon him as an inspiration from above.

Ver. 2.—**Saul tarried in the uttermost part of Gibeah.** *I. e.* the part nearest Geba. **Under,** not **a,** but *the* **pomegranate tree,** the well-known tree at Migron. Saul evidently shared to the full in the love of trees common among the Israelites (see ch. xxii. 6). The Hebrew word for pomegranate is Rimmon, but there is no doubt that the tree is here meant, and not the rock Rimmon (Judges xx. 45, 47), so called probably from a fancied resemblance to the fruit. **Migron,** said to mean a *cliff,* was apparently a common name for localities in this mountainous district, as in Isa. x. 28 we read of one lying to the north of Michmash, whereas this is to the south.

Ver. 3.—**Ahiah, the son of Ahitub.** (See on ch. xiii. 9.) It is interesting to find the house of Eli recovering at last from its disaster, and one of its members duly ministering in his office before the king. It has been debated whether he was the same person as Ahimeloch, mentioned in ch. xxi. 1, &c., the supposition being grounded on the fact that Ahiah is never spoken of again. But he may have died; and with regard to the argument drawn from the similarity of the names, we must notice that names compounded with *Ah* (or Ach), brother, were common in Eli's family, while compounds with *Ab,* father, were most in use among Saul's relatives. Ahiah or Ahijah means *Jah is brother;* his father is Ahitub, *the brother is good;* why should he not call another son Ahimelech, *the brother is king?* **Jehovah's priest in Shiloh.** This refers to Eli, the regular rule in Hebrew being that all such statements belong, not to the son, but to the father. **Wearing an ephod.** Literally, ephod-bearing. The ephod, as we have seen on ch. ii. 18, was the usual ministerial garment; but what is meant here is not an ordinary ephod of linen, but that described in Levit. viii. 7, 8, wherein was the breastplate, by which Jehovah's will was made known to his people, until prophecy took its place. All this, the former part of the verse, must be regarded as a parenthesis.

Ver. 4.—**Between the passages.** *I. e.* the passes. **A sharp rock.** Literally, "a tooth of rock." Conder ('Tent Work,' ii. 112) says, "The site of the Philistine camp at Michmash, which Jonathan and his armour-bearer attacked, is very minutely described by Josephus. It was, he says, a precipice with three tops, ending in a long, sharp tongue, and protected by surrounding cliffs. Exactly such a natural fortress exists immediately east of the village of Michmash, and is still called 'the fort' by the peasantry. It is a ridge rising in three rounded knolls above a perpendicular crag, ending in a narrow tongue to the east, with cliffs below, and having an open valley behind it, and a saddle towards the west, on which Michmash itself is situate. Opposite this fortress, on the south, there is a crag of equal height, and seemingly impassable. Thus the description of the Old Testament is fully borne out—'a sharp rock on one side, and a sharp rock on the other.' The southern cliff was called **Seneh,** or 'the acacia,' and the same name still applies to the modern valley, due to the acacia-trees which dot its course. The northern cliff was called **Bozez,** or 'shining,' and the true explanation of the name only presents itself on the spot." Conder then describes how, "treading perhaps almost in the steps of Jonathan," after arriving on the brink of the chasm, or defile of Michmash, they were able to descend Seneh, even with horses and mules. "I noticed," he says, "that the dip of the strata down eastward

gave hopes that by one of the long ledges we might be able to slide, as it were, towards the bottom. It is not likely that horses had ever before been led along this ledge, or will perhaps ever again cross the pathless chasm, but it was just possible, and by jumping them down one or two steps some three feet high, we succeeded in making the passage. . . . Though we got down Seneh, we did not attempt to climb up Bozez. . . . Horses could scarcely find a footing anywhere on the sides of the northern precipice; but judging from the descent, it seems possible that Jonathan, with immense labour, could have 'climbed up upon his hands and upon his feet, and his armour-bearer after him' (ver. 13). That a man exhausted by such an effort could have fought successfully on arriving at the top can only be accounted for on the supposition of a sudden panic among the Philistines, when they found the enemy actually within their apparently impregnable fortress."

Ver. 5.—**Was situate**, &c. The word thus translated is that rendered *pillar* in ch. ii. 8, and the verse should possibly be translated, "And the one tooth (or crag) was a rocky mass on the north over against Michmash, and the other was on the south over against Geba" (not *Gibeah*, as the A. V.; see ch. xiii. 16). But the word is omitted in the versions, and may be an interpolation.

Ver. 6.—**Uncircumcised.** An epithet of dislike almost confined to the Philistines. But underneath the whole speech of Jonathan lies the conviction of the covenant relation of Israel to Jehovah, of which circumcision was the outward sign. Notice also Jonathan's humble reliance upon God. **It may be that Jehovah will work for us**, &c.

Ver. 7.—**Turn thee.** The Hebrew seems to have preserved the very words of the young man, and the difficulty in reudering this phrase arises from its being a colloquial expression. "Face about" would be our phrase; but the sense is, "On with you; I will follow."

Ver. 9.—**Tarry.** Hebrew, "be still," "stand still," the word used by Joshua of the sun (Josh. x. 12, 13); but not the word rendered **stand still** just below, where the Hebrew has, "We will stand under us," *i. e.* we will stop just where we were.

Ver. 10.—**A sign.** The waiting of the garrison for Jonathan and his armour-bearer to mount up to them would be a sign of great indifference and supineness on their part; but what he rather meant was that they were to regard it as an omen. Kimchi has a long digression in his commentary on this place to show that there was nothing superstitious in their looking for a prognostic to encourage them in their hazardous undertaking. God, he says, bade Gideon go to the camp of the Midianites to obtain such a sign as Jonathan looked for here (see Judges vii. 11).

Ver. 11.—**Both of them discovered themselves.** They had crept up the precipice unseen, but at some convenient spot near the top they so placed themselves that the garrison must see them, and waited there till their presence was observed. **Behold, the Hebrews.** There is no article in the Hebrew. What the Philistines say is, See! Hebrews come out of the holes wherein they had hid themselves.

Ver. 12.—**Come up to us, and we will show you a thing.** The Philistines thus give Jonathan the very omen he had desired. The last clause is a popular phrase, and expresses a sort of amused contempt for the two adventurers. Raillery of this sort is not at all uncommon between the outposts of two armies.

Ver. 13.—**Upon his hands and upon his feet.** Of course a single stone rolled down upon them while thus clambering up the precipitous side of the cliff would have sent them to the bottom; but the Philistines, apparently considering the ascent impossible, seem entirely to have neglected them. The youthful appearance of the two no doubt contributed to throw them off their guard. **And they fell before Jonathan.** The brevity of the Hebrew very well expresses the rapidity of Jonathan's action. Used to mountaineering, he was ready, as soon as he had reached the summit, to commence the attack, and the Philistines, little expecting so vigorous an onslaught from so feeble a force, were surprised, and made but a slight resistance. The armour-bearer also behaved with a bravery like his master's.

Ver. 14.—**Within as it were an half acre of land, which a yoke of oxen might plow.** The Hebrew for this long circumlocution is, "within about a half furrow of a yoke of land." The Septuagint translates, "with darts and slings and stones of the field," but the other versions give no support to this rendering. The Israelites, like most ancient nations, were accustomed to measure land by the quantity which a yoke of oxen could plough in a day,—something really less than an acre,—so that the A. V. gives the right sense. When Jonathan made his attack, the garrison probably, not knowing how few their assailants were, ran in confusion to the narrow tongue of land where the exit was, and getting in one another's way, were soon panic-stricken and helpless.

Ver. 15.—**Trembling.** *I. e.* "terror," "fright." **In the host.** Hebrew, "in the camp," *i. e.* the main camp at Michmash, contrasted with **the field**, *i. e.* the open country, in which the soldiers were foraging

for supplies. **The people.** *I. e.* the camp followers, as opposed to the soldiers. All these were terrified by **the garrison** rushing down the pass, with tidings of the attack magnified by their fears, and who communicated the alarm to **the spoilers,** who, having now for a fortnight met with no resistance, had probably discontinued all measures of precaution. **The earth quaked.** This may be taken literally, but is more probably a poetical description of the widespread terror and confusion which prevailed far and near. **So it was a very great trembling.** Literally, "and it became a terror of God;" but the name of the deity (Elohim, not Jehovah) is constantly used in Hebrew to express vastness.

DEFEAT OF THE PHILISTINES (vers. 16—23). Ver. 16.—**The watchmen,** &c. Conder says ('Tent Work,' ii. 115), "The watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin must have seen clearly across the chasm the extraordinary conflict of two men against a host, as the 'multitude melted away, and they went on beating down one another.' The noise in the host was also, no doubt, clearly heard at the distance of only two miles, and the army would have crossed the passage with comparatively little difficulty by the narrow path which leads down direct from Geba to Michmash, west of the Philistine camp. Thence the pursuit was towards Bethel, across the watershed, and headlong down the steep descent of Aijalon — that same pass where the first great victory of Joshua had been gained, and where the valiant Judas was once more, in later times, to drive back the enemies of Israel to the plains." **The multitude.** The Hebrew is, "And behold the tumult (the word is so rendered in ver. 19, margin) was reeling and going . . . and thither." Of course *hither* has dropped out of the text before *and thither* (comp. ch. xiii. 8). The Septuagint and Vulgate both read "hither and thither." Tumult means the din made by a confused mass of people, and so the crowd itself. **Melted away** does not give the exact meaning. The Philistines were not dispersing, but were *reeling,* moving to and fro purposeless, and in confusion. It may mean, however, to *shake* or *melt with terror,* as in Isa. xiv. 31, where it is rendered *art dissolved.*

Vers. 17, 18.—**Number now.** On hearing from the watchmen that fighting was seen on the other side of the ravine, Saul commands the roll to be called, that he may learn who has made the attack, and finds only his son and the armour-bearer missing. Uncertain what their absence might mean, **he said unto Ahiah, Bring hither the ark of God.** The Syriac, Vulgate, and Chaldee support this reading, but the Septuagint has *ephod,* and **there can be** no doubt that this is the right reading; for the verb rendered *Bring hither* is never used of the ark, but only of the ephod; nor was the ark used for making inquiry of God, but the ephod with the breastplate inserted in it. The rest of the verse is a gloss added by some scribe struck at this strange mention of the ark, which we know was still at Kirjath-jearim. It is itself corrupt and ungrammatical, being, "For the ark of God was in that day and the children of Israel." Still both the reading *ark* and the gloss are very ancient, being found in the versions, except the Septuagint, as above.

Ver. 19.—**Withdraw thine hand.** Saul, impatient of delay, cannot wait till the will of God is made known to him. There would have been no real loss of time, and he might have been saved from the errors which marred the happiness of the deliverance. But this precipitancy very well shows the state of Saul's mind.

Ver. 20.—**Saul and all the people . . . assembled themselves.** Margin, *were cried together,* i. e. summoned by trumpet-note. The Syriac and Vulgate, however, make the verb active, and translate, "And Saul and all the people with him shouted and advanced to the battle." **Discomfiture.** Rather, "dismay," "consternation," as in ch. v. 9.

Vers. 21, 22.—**Round about, even.** All the versions by a very slight alteration change this into *turned,* which the A. V. is forced to supply. With this necessary correction the translation is easy: "And the Hebrews who were previously with the Philistines, and had gone up with them into the camp, turned to be with the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan." It appears, therefore, that certain districts of the Israelite territory were so completely in the power of the Philistines that they could compel the men to go with them, not perhaps as soldiers, as is our custom in India, but as drivers and servants. These now turned upon their masters, and were reinforced by the Israelites who had taken refuge in Mount Ephraim. It is noteworthy that these subject "Hebrews" retain the name of contempt given them by their masters.

Ver. 23.—**Over unto Beth-aven.** Hebrew, "the battle passed Beth-aven," *i. e.* no rally was made there. In ver. 31 we read that the pursuit continued as far as Aijalon. For Beth-aven see on ch. xiii. 5.

SAUL'S RASH COMMAND (vers. 24—35). Ver. 24.—**The men of Israel were distressed that day.** The word is that used in ch. xiii. 6 of the state of terror and alarm to which the Israelites were reduced by the Philistine invasion; here it refers to their weariness and faintness for want of food. **For Saul had adjured the people.** Hebrew, "had made the people swear." He had recited

before them the words of the curse, and made them shout their consent. His object was to prevent any delay in the pursuit; but in his eagerness he forgot that the strength of his men would fail if their bodily wants were not supplied. But though worn out and fainting, the people faithfully keep the oath put to them.

Ver. 25.—**And all they of the land.** Hebrew, "the whole land," or, as we should say, *the whole country*, which had risen to join in the pursuit. **Honey upon the ground.** The wild bees in Palestine fill fissures in the rocks (Deut. xxxii. 13; Ps. lxxxi. 16) and hollow trees with honey, till the combs, breaking with the weight, let it run down upon the ground. A similar abundance of honey was found by the early settlers in America.

Ver. 26.—**The honey dropped.** More correctly, "Behold, a stream (or a flowing) of honey."

Ver. 27.—Jonathan, who had not been present when his father **charged the people with the oath**,—literally, "made the people swear,"—dipped the end of his staff hastily, so as not to hinder the pursuit, **in an honeycomb**—Hebrew, "into the honey wood," *i. e.* into the hollow branch or trunk out of which the honey was flowing (but see Cant. v. 1). **His eyes were enlightened.** *I. e.* made bright and clear, the dimness caused by excessive weariness having passed away. But this is a correction made by the Jews (*kri*), and the written text (*c'tib*) has "his eyes saw," which is more forcible and poetic. When the A. V. was made the *kri* was supposed to be authoritative, but most modern commentators have come to the opposite conclusion.

Ver. 28.—**And the people were faint.** There is great diversity of opinion whether this be part or not of the speech of the man who informed Jonathan of the oath forced on the people by Saul. It makes, perhaps, the better sense if regarded as the continuation of the history, and inserted to justify Jonathan's disapproval of his father's hasty command. The right rendering is *were weary*, as in the margin and Judges iv. 21.

Ver. 29.—**My father hath troubled the land.** *I. e.* hath brought disaster upon it (see Gen. xxxiv. 30; Josh. vii. 25). This disaster was the incompleteness of the victory, owing to the people being too exhausted to continue the pursuit.

Vers. 30, 31.—**For had there not been now a much greater slaughter?** This clause is really an indicative: "For now the slaughter of the Philistines is not very great." Nevertheless, the pursuit was continued as far as the pass of Aijalon, and though, owing to the increasing weariness of the people, but few of the Philistines were overtaken, nevertheless it would compel them to throw away their arms, and abandon all the booty which they had collected. For **very faint** the Hebrew has *very weary*, as in ver. 28.

Ver. 32.—**The people flew upon the spoil.** The written text has, "And the people set to work upon the spoil, and took sheep," &c., but as the sentence is not very grammatical the *kri* has corrected it from ch. xv. 19. The versions have either "greedily desired," or "turned themselves unto." The people who had waited until evening, when the oath forced upon them by Saul was over, then in their hunger broke the law doubly: first in killing calves with their dams on the same day (Levit. xxii. 28), and secondly, more seriously, in so killing them "on the ground" that the blood remained in the carcase. The law enjoined the utmost care in this respect (*ibid.* xvii. 10—14), but the people were too weary and hungry to trouble about it.

Vers. 33, 34.—**Ye have transgressed.** Better as in the margin, "dealt treacherously," *i. e.* faithlessly, to the covenant between Israel and Jehovah. **Roll a great stone unto me this day.** Or, as we should say, *this minute;* but the Hebrew uses "this day" for anything to be done at once (see on ch. ii. 16). The purpose of this stone was to raise up the carcases of the slaughtered animals from the ground, so that the blood might drain away from them. On tidings of this arrangement being dispersed throughout the army, the people obey Saul with the same unquestioning devotion as they had shown to his command to abstain from food.

Ver. 35.—**And Saul built an altar unto Jehovah** as a thank offering for the Divine favour in gaining so great a victory. **The same was the first altar,** &c. Literally, "As to it he began to build an altar unto Jehovah." On these words the question has arisen whether the meaning be that Saul began to build an altar, but with characteristic impetuosity left off before he had completed it; or whether on that occasion he commenced the custom followed by David (2 Sam. xxiv. 25) of erecting altars as the patriarchs had done in old time. The latter interpretation is more in accordance with the usage of the Hebrew language, and is approved by the translations of the Septuagint and Vulgate.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—12.—*Inspiration in Christian enterprise.* The facts are—1. Jonathan on his own responsibility, and without his father's knowledge, resolves on an attack

upon the Philistine garrison. 2. He expresses to his armour-bearer his hope that God will help, and also the ground of that hope. 3. He proposes to regard the first encouragement from the enemy to ascend the cliff as a sign of coming success. 4. The sign appearing, Jonathan advances in confidence of victory. The recent transgression of Saul was now bearing some bitter fruit in his comparative inactivity and helplessness. It is not likely that Jonathan was ignorant of the displeasure of the prophet of God, or was surprised at the embarrassment which had come upon his father's affairs. In seasons of disaster and wrong there are select men of God who mourn the sins of their superiors and the woes of their country. Being one of this class, Jonathan may be regarded as exhibiting some of the highest results of the instruction and influence of Samuel during the slow reformation subsequent to the victory at Ebenezer. It is in God's heart to have pity on his people and to deliver them; but at this juncture can we not discern a wise propriety, not unmixed with retribution on the king, in conferring the honour of deliverance upon a man of piety, whose heart evidently yearned for the highest good of Israel? Thus do we see here, as in many other instances, how readily, and where not looked for, God raises up instruments to effect his purposes when the ordinary instruments fail through sin. Private enterprise can often accomplish what, in consequence of a loss of the right spirit, organised and official effort is utterly powerless to perform. The enforced inactivity of Saul, the desolations of the spoilers, and the multitudes of refugees in the caves of the mountains, must have produced a most depressing effect on the king and his followers. In their extremity, under an inspiration most pure and noble, help came in the daring enterprise of Jonathan, as recorded by the historian. It is possible that a secular mind on reading the narrative may regard the story as just one of those records of military adventure that are to be found in the annals of all warlike nations. But we are to form our estimate of the event by the light of Scripture; and when we consider it in connection with God's revealed purpose to work out the Messianic covenant through a chosen race, the tenor of Jonathan's life, and especially his words declaring his faith in God (ver. 6), we must then see here not a wild freak of a daring soldier, nor even a clever device for achieving merely military distinction, but a true and noble inspiration to accomplish a great work in the name of God, and for the ultimate realisation of the Divine purposes. It may be assumed that, under the present conditions of the kingdom of Christ in the world, there is frequent and full scope for endeavours corresponding, in their relation to the organised efforts of the Church and in their chief characteristics, to the effort of Jonathan in its relation to the monarchy. Likewise the same inspiration is needed for the more perfect development and successful use of the organised forces of the Church. While nations live in sin, fearful evils fester in our crowded towns, debasing and dangerous customs hold multitudes in bondage, avenues to the human mind lie untraversed by Christian men, and possibly propriety degenerates into a rigid, obstructive conservatism, there is room for men and women who dare to go and do what seems impossible, and for a fresh baptism on the hosts of God to inspire them to deeds of valour and self-denial. It is possible that spurious forms of enthusiasm may arise, and may pass for heaven-created zeal. Contagion of sentiment may obtain the force of a torrent. The emotional element in religion may be abnormally developed, and incline, under stimulus, to deeds which no sound judgment will justify. But grant all this, and more, and yet it is true that there is a pure inspiration in the service of Christ much to be coveted. Let us consider the *characteristics of such a true inspiration.*

I. IT IS DISTINGUISHED BY INDIVIDUALITY. Whether it be found in private action or in the combined effort of the Church, it does not appear as the mere product of organisation, nor as a revival of stereotyped custom. Jonathan's inspiration began in his own heart. It was, in the shape it took, the natural outcome of the man. Considerations of the position of affairs aroused his nature, but he was no copyist, no waiter upon other men's deeds. Keeping the secret from his father was essential to the more perfect individuality of his feelings and his enterprise. Ideas grow in power over us when we nourish them. Sometimes, like the Apostle Paul and Jonathan, we do better not to "confer with flesh and blood," but brood over our thought and purpose, by the aid of the Spirit of God, till they become a power which must work

outwards in forms true to our own personality. There is far more individuality in the Christian Church than is at present developed. When a Christian is, as the result of brooding over things, so permeated with a conviction of his obligation to Christ, a yearning to save men from sin, and a spirit of self-sacrifice, as to be mastered by these forces, he will find out some way in which his natural aptitudes and capabilities may be turned to account in Christ's service. All great and beneficial movements have borne the stamp of individuality, from the labours of the Apostle Paul on, by Luther, up to the latest endeavours to save the waifs of our city population.

II. IT CONTEMPLATES AN END CONFORMABLE TO THE END FOR WHICH CHRIST DIED. Jonathan reveals his piety and his intelligence in using language to his armour-bearer to the effect that he thought it probable that the Lord might save through his instrumentality. He sought the salvation which God loves to accomplish, and for which the order of Providence was working. It is our privilege to take a wider and more spiritual view than even a devout Hebrew. There is an end contemplated by God, and being wrought out by the great sacrifice on the cross, with its concomitant influences—a multitude that no man can number redeemed out of every nation, kindred, and tribe from the bondage and pollution of sin. Whoever sets his heart on any good work, conformable, and therefore tributary, to that issue,—be it social amelioration, rescue of lost ones from vice, sanitary improvements, diffusion of knowledge,—is so far sharer in the true inspiration. But especially is that a true and noble inspiration which not only aims at ends which, being good and moral, are so far conformable and helpful to the end for which Christ died, but aims at that spiritual salvation on which the heart of Christ was supremely set when he gave himself a ransom for us. This is the longed-for issue of all those noble workers at home or abroad who visit the abodes of sin, and seek, as though they cannot refrain from it, to gather the poor degraded ones into the Saviour's blessed fold.

III. IT IS CHARACTERISED BY FREEDOM FROM PERSONAL VANITY. Jonathan's motives were transparently pure. There was none of the restlessness of the inactive soldier craving for opportunity to display prowess; no regard for self in his self-denial and risks. His references to the Lord and the saving of the people he loved reveal a true, generous, self-sacrificing spirit. It is when works of benevolence, and especially works strictly spiritual, are devised and carried through in this spirit that we are under the influence of a true inspiration. A love of praise, a desire for prominence, fondness for being counted a great and successful worker, an unreasonable sensitiveness to apparent neglect, and kindred feelings, are the "little foxes" that steal the grapes.

IV. IT IS MARKED BY IMPLICIT DEPENDENCE ON THE POWER OF GOD. Jonathan showed prudence and skill in the ascent of the precipice and in the encouragement he sought for advancing by means of the "sign;" but the feat passes out of the category of "reckless," or even, in the common usage of the term, "daring," when we note that, having the sign as a kind of answer to the prayer of his heart, he rested his success not on his skill or strength, but on the Lord, with whom there "is no restraint to save by many or by few." He was inspired every step of the way up the rocks by trust in the ever-present Power which shields the faithful and works the wonders of redemption for his people. Here lies the *secret of the true inspiration* that has wrought so powerfully in the Church of God in its purest and most successful eras. The apostles felt that it was not of man, but of God, to save. A few feeble Jews were mighty, *through God*, to the pulling down of many a stronghold. It is this which enables the missionary to toil on amidst the loathsome vices of the savage, and the friend of the outcast at home to attempt what none others dare.

V. IT IS MARKED ALSO BY THE BUOYANCY OF HOPE. When Jonathan said, "It may be that the Lord will work for us," it was not to express uncertainty, but to cheer a man of less faith, and to indicate the belief that God was about to use him in his service. He rightly interpreted his yearning to be used as an inspiration of God, and when the "sign" came that assured him that his heart's desire was accepted, he moved on with a cheerful spirit. "Come up after me: for the Lord hath delivered them into the hand of Israel." The modesty of the assurance! "The hand of *Israel*;" not "*my* hand." This buoyant spirit that looks on in hope founded on deep conviction of God's faithfulness inspires every one who is truly called to labour

for Christ. The tone of the apostles all through their toils is one of cheer. The golden gates of the eternal city seem ever to shine before them, and they hear already the new song. Every one on whom this true apostolic succession has come enters into sympathy with them, and no longer toils with dejected brow and despairing heart.

General lessons:—1. There is abundant encouragement for Christian work in the historically illustrated fact that God does accomplish great results through feeble and varied means. 2. It is a question with each of us whether we really believe that there "is no restraint with the Lord," and whether lack of faith in this great truth does not explain much in our life and labour which we deplore. 3. We may ask ourselves whether there is anything in the present state of the Church and the world affording scope for our special exertion after the manner of Jonathan's. 4. It should be an inquiry as to whether we are open to receive and welcome an inspiration from the Lord to enter on some work involving self-denial and difficulty. 5. If we think we are inspired to undertake some difficult work for Christ, we should discriminate between sudden impulse and mature irresistible longing; and, seeking counsel of God, follow the signs of Providence.

Vers. 13—23.—*God's faithfulness to his own.* The facts are—1. Jonathan and his servant ascend the precipice and slay, on a narrow strip of land, about twenty men. 2. A panic arising, from a combination of causes, the commotion attracts the attention of Saul's sentinels. 3. It being ascertained that Jonathan was engaged against the Philistines, inquiry is sought of God, by Saul, through the priest Ahiah. 4. The tumult among the Philistines increasing, Saul abruptly stops the inquiry and leads on his followers to battle. 5. The deserters and the fugitives fall on the rear of the retreating Philistines. The historian sums up the narrative of events in this section by the suggestive words, "So the Lord saved Israel that day." It was "the Lord," working through the instrumentality of a noble-hearted man and the events concurrent with his action—not withholding the reward of fidelity, notwithstanding the questionable conduct of the king. "It is the Lord," must be the verdict of history, not only of their deliverance, but of many others in all time.

I. GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IS SEEN IN PERFECTING THE WORK WHICH HE INSPIRES. There can be no doubt but that Jonathan received this "good and perfect gift" of inspiration, to seek the salvation of his country, from God. We have seen that it could not have been a mere human, earth-born impulse. There may be a point at which the human free aspiration becomes touched with a Divine power; but, as a whole, the impulse is of God. The narrative tells us how certainly God wrought for the perfecting of that which he saw in the heart. Not a step of his way did Jonathan find to be a practical denial of the truth of his inward prompting. Thus the life of the true man of God is crowded with evidences of the Divine faithfulness. He who begins a "good work" within us will carry it through. He is "not unrighteous to forget our work of faith and labour of love." He will "perfect that which concerneth us." "Loving his own," he loves "to the end." Abraham, under an inspiration from God, went forth, and all through his pilgrimage he found Jehovah to be a covenant-keeping God. In our painful and protracted endeavours, in obedience to an aspiration born from above to rise to the heights of holiness and to bless others, we shall find him faithful who hath promised never to leave nor forsake us.

II. IN MAINTAINING HIS FAITHFULNESS TO HIS PEOPLE GOD CAUSES VARIED INFLUENCES TO CONVERGE ON THE DESIRED RESULT OF EFFORT. The Divine faithfulness is not arbitrarily and absolutely manifested. It is seen in realising the desired end by a succession of events naturally connected. Jonathan's exertions were put forth as though all rested on the courage of his own heart and the strength of his own arm. The narrative shows us how an unseen hand upheld the brave soldier, and caused diverse things to converge on the one issue: *e. g.* the young soldier's skill, tact, and courage; the folly of the defenders in allowing him a footing on the narrow pathway of the upper part of the precipice; the fear aroused through ignorance of the full facts of the assault; the panic spread from post to post—strengthened, possibly, by a slight shock of earthquake; the onward movement of Saul's troop; and the opportunity created for the rallying of fugitives and deserters (vers. 21, 22).

Such an historical episode is of great value to us, as indicating in distinct, traceable incidents *the reality of that Divine wisdom and power* which ever *presides over all the efforts of Christians* to rid themselves and the world of sin. It illustrates as on a picture the great formula of faith—"All things *work together* for good to them that love God." As "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera," and as even holy angels are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation," so may it be said, in the case of every one who strives to purify himself from all sin, or seeks by some bold or ordinary endeavour to win the world over to Christ, "all things are yours,"—are being governed by the Lord of all so as to subserve the one holy end to the attainment of which your hearts are inspired.

III. IN MANIFESTING HIS FAITHFULNESS TO HIS PEOPLE GOD PERMITS THE IMPERFECT TO SHARE IN THE BLESSINGS PROCURED BY THE MORE PERFECT. Primarily, it was God's compassion for Israel and his covenant with Abraham that must account for this new deliverance. Secondarily, it was a reward to Jonathan's fidelity and self-consecration. Saul had shut himself out of the honour and privilege of obtaining deliverance for the nation. Even now his old folly and rashness reappear, in religiously beginning to seek counsel, thus honouring God, and then in irreverently discontinuing to seek that counsel, through his impetuous haste to join in the pursuit, thus preferring the impulse of his heart to the declared will of God. Nevertheless, even Saul derives great advantage from the prowess of the good and devout Jonathan. God, in his mercy, does not sacrifice the final interests of his people to the folly of a leader. Thus, also, Joseph's brethren shared in the prosperity won by their holy and wise brother. The inferior Christians of to-day participate in some of the outward blessings accruing to the faithful as the result of their fidelity.

General lessons:—1. It would be a profitable study to note in detail, over the field of sacred and Church history, and in the sphere of private Christian enterprise, to what a large extent the world is indebted for spiritual, material, and educational good to the honour God has put on the labours of the most faithful of his servants. 2. We may be perfectly sure in the pursuit of any holy enterprise, to which personally we may feel inadequate, that God, with whom is "no restraint," will develop helping circumstances. 3. The helping circumstances desiderated will arise, not at first, but only as we faithfully press along the line of duty. 4. The cumulating record of God's faithfulness to his people through the long ages should make us calm, strong, and immovable in the most perilous of enterprises undertaken for Christ.

Vers. 24—35.—*Unwise zeal and moral obtuseness.* The facts are—1. Saul by a rash vow causes great distress among the people and diminishes the fruits of victory. 2. Jonathan, unawares, takes food contrary to his father's prohibition, and on being informed of the truth, deplores the unwisdom of the vow. 3. As a consequence of the enforced exhaustion, the people at the close of the day violate the ceremonial law by a voracious meal of flesh unduly prepared. 4. Saul, professing to be shocked at their sin, provides means by which the offence may be avoided, and raises an altar unto the Lord. The turn in affairs brought on by Jonathan's heroism was most welcome to Saul, as it seemed to be the return of the prosperity which had received a check in his own sin at Gilgal. There had been no expressions of sincere penitence, nor, as far as the narrative gives light, any effort to regain former relationships to Samuel. The impulsive rush from the inquiring priest to join in the pursuit revealed a state of mind which at once accounts for the curse pronounced on any one who should dare to take food. The facts included in the section before us furnish a conspicuous instance of unwise zeal and moral obtuseness.

I. UNWISE ZEAL. The zeal of Saul was conspicuous enough. As in the case of Joshua (Josh. viii. 8—13), there was an intense desire to put into a single day all the exertion possible in order to make the victory over God's enemies more complete. There was clearly in his mind an idea that he was doing God service (ver. 33). But the unwisdom of the zeal is equally conspicuous; for it prevented, by the physical weakness induced, the very end designed (vers. 29, 30): it caused pain and annoyance to an obedient people, who, while submissive, must have lost some respect for their monarch's judgment; it exposed the best man of the day to a great peril, and

the people to a strong temptation to commit excess. *Unwise zeal may be considered variously.* 1. *As to form.* It assumes diverse forms according to the circumstances of the case. (1) Sometimes the *aim may be wrong,* as when the Jews in apostolic times, in their zeal, not according to knowledge, sought most energetically to perpetuate a decaying ceremonial. The same is true of all who compass sea and land to make mere proselytes to their order or sect, or to bring modern feeling and usage back, in matters of minor significance, to the style of the past. (2) Often the *method is wrong,* as in the case of Saul. Men have not always the wisdom to conserve or develop, as the occasion may demand, their energy suitably to the end in view. There is an enormous waste in the world from this cause. Perhaps no man, in his daily calling, is free from this form of unwise zeal. We see illustrations of this in the untiring effort of some to be justified before God by their own deeds of righteousness; in the constant and painful flow of penitential tears and self-inflicted sorrows as means of the forgiveness which comes only by calm trust in Christ; and in the wild and ill-considered agencies sometimes used to win careless men to Christ. (3) Sometimes the end is good and the method, but the *time is unsuited.* It might be good for Israel to chase the foe with full energy, and also good to fast, but the time was not suitable for the conjunction of the two. It is mistaken zeal to concentrate all strength on the edification of a Church when multitudes are living outside the fold of Christ. Wisdom lies much in doing work at the right season. 2. *As to origin.* Saul's unwise zeal arose from his impulsive temperament not being chastened and regulated by a diligent use of the counsel which was always available to him as king from God. This radical error accounts for the ill-balanced judgment which could not see the effect of a long fast on physical energy, for the rash utterance, for the eager springing at the first chance to escape from the helpless position consequent on recent transgression, and for the egotistical reference to avenging *his own* enemies. The origin of unwise zeal in most instances is connected with deficient waiting upon God. The knowledge of men may be defective, their temperament may be impulsive, their prevision of a low grade, their self-regulation a matter of emotional pressure rather than of reason; and yet if such men would, remembering their obvious imperfections, devoutly wait on God for his guidance, and seek daily grace to govern themselves, they would avoid many blunders in practice. Imperfectly-balanced men will never do work in life perfectly. We must lay to our account a large proportion of foolish deeds in Christian and secular enterprise. The calming, enlightening power of devotion is not fully recognised. 3. *As to consequences.* In Saul's case, as already indicated, it induced trouble and pain to his people, interfered with the most perfect success of Jonathan's effort (vers. 29, 30), lowered himself in the eyes of his subjects as a king deficient in judgment, and, by exercise, intensified the defective qualities which gave rise to it. We have here a summary of what always attends unwise zeal. Every foolish display of energy, even in a good cause, brings distress to those who have the interests of religion and humanity at heart. Being a waste of power, and therefore a violation of the moral and social laws by which God brings the highest results to pass, it impedes the subjugation of evil to good, and the final triumph of God's kingdom. The world is suffering still from erratic courses, destitute of sound judgment, pursued in the name of religion; from a concentration of energy on superficial instead of on radical evils; and from an undue application of resources to the curative methods, in frequent oversight of the preventive.

II. MORAL OBTUSENESS. The moral obtuseness of Saul's character had manifested itself in his evident inability to see at Gilgal (ch. xiii. 8—10) the stupidity of seeking to please God by an act of worship which itself was a violation of his explicit commands. Character becomes more fixed as time passes on; and here we see Saul so morally obtuse as not to perceive that, while condemning a ceremonial offence on the part of the people (ver. 33), he was unconscious of the folly of his own conduct, and of the moral offence both of laying on the people a serious hindrance to victory and of preferring his own wild impulse to the counsel of Jehovah. *Moral obtuseness* may be regarded in reference to—1. Its *causes*—e. g. inherited dulness of conscience, imperfectly-formed moral discrimination in early years, growing habituation to formal religious acts, the influence of a low state of public morality, and postpone-

ment of sincere repentance after known transgressions. 2. Its *manifestation*—e. g. in rigid external observances to the neglect of spiritual culture, combination of religious zeal with positive indulgence in immoral feelings, ease in detecting palpable offences in others with self-complacent views of one's own condition, insensibility to the truth which awakens the finer spiritual feelings of other men, and coarse treatment of the sensitive. 3. Its *danger*—e. g. in being inaccessible to many of the most elevating influences, rendered more dense by every repeated exercise, and productive of a delusive self-righteousness which becomes more self-assertive in proportion as inward unholiness prevails. 4. Its *treatment*—e. g. by distinct personal teaching of the most discriminating and pungent character, placing the individuals in close association with persons of fine spiritual discernment and delicacy of character as a striking foil, prompting to acts that will tend to reveal the inward incompetency, and special prayer for the quickening of the life-giving Spirit.

General lessons:—1. Cultivate a refined moral sensibility in youth as a basis for life. 2. Men in office need prayer for special spiritual wisdom. 3. When sin has been committed it should be repented of at once, and special prayer made lest its inward influence be to lower the tone of feeling.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—15. (GEBA, MICHMASH.)—*The heroism of Jonathan.* "Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised," &c. (ver. 6). The character of Jonathan is one of the bravest, most generous, devout, and blameless in history. Of his earliest years nothing is recorded. When first mentioned he was in command of a thousand soldiers (ch. xiii. 2), and his overthrow of the Philistine garrison in Geba was "the first act of the war of independence;" but (as in the case of Moses—Acts vii. 25) it failed to deliver his people from oppression. His attack upon the enemy's camp at Michmash, which is here described, resulted in victory. He inherited the physical strength and courage of Saul; but in other respects presented a contrast to his father; exemplified the best, as the latter exemplified some of the worst features of the age, and set a pattern of *true heroism* for all time.

"What makes a hero? an heroic mind
Expressed in action, in endurance proved."

I. EXALTED ASPIRATIONS (ver. 1) which—1. *Are cherished in adverse circumstances* (ch. xiii. 22; ver. 2). Instead of being crushed by adversity, "an heroic mind" bears it patiently, rises above it, and aspires to higher things (Acts xxi. 13). In its midst it shines all the more brightly, like gold purified by the fire. 2. *Lead to courageous projects.* Jonathan often looks across the ravine between Bozez and Seneh (vers. 4, 5), and revolves in his mind how he can strike a blow at the apparently inaccessible fortress of the enemy; and at length goes forth secretly in the night or at early dawn, attended only by his armour-bearer. To communicate his project to others, even if it were as yet clear to himself, would be to hinder or defeat its accomplishment. He feels called to attempt something great, and "confers not with flesh and blood." 3. *Are inspired by the Divine Spirit.* More of "the mind of the Lord" was doubtless made known to Jonathan than to the king, notwithstanding the presence of the priest with him (ver. 3). What appears presumption to others is often to one Divinely taught the simple path of duty.

II. EMINENT FAITH (ver. 6), including—1. *A firm conviction of the covenant relation of God* to his people. "These uncircumcised" in opposition to Israel. Jonathan's thought was not of himself, but of his people, and of the promises and purposes of God concerning them. 2. *A lofty conception of the unlimited power of God* to save them. "There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few" (2 Chron. xiv. 11; Micah ii. 7). In comparison with his might the strength of man, whether much or little, is nothing. He has often used "the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty" (1 Cor. i. 27, 28), and he can do so again. Faith is shown in contemplating the power of God, and is thereby greatly increased. 3. *Humble reliance on the gracious co-operation of God* on their behalf. "It may be that the Lord will work for us." He is ready and able to afford help, but whether it will be given in connection with a particular course of action is,

without express direction or promise, uncertain; and the indications of his will should be followed with humility, hopefulness, and confidence. "The measure of faith is the measure of God's help." "All things are possible to him that believeth."

III. PRUDENT WATCHFULNESS (vers. 9, 10). 1. *In contrast to reckless adventure.* Faith in God gives insight into the hidden principles and tendencies of things, teaches the adoption of appropriate means, and makes men calm as well as fearless when others lose self-control, and adopt foolish and dangerous expedients (Acts xxvii. 25, 30). 2. *In ascertaining the prospects of success.* If the enemy are on the alert and exhibit courage, it will be vain to expect to take them by surprise (ver. 9); but if they feel themselves secure in their position, are careless and slack, and blinded by self-confidence, "the Lord hath delivered them into the hand of Israel" (ver. 12). 3. *In working wisely with a view to that end.* God works by means, and not without them, and the wisest means are the most successful.

IV. DARING ENERGY (vers. 11—14) in—1. Enduring great *risk.* 2. Putting forth immense *effort.* "Jonathan climbed up on his hands and knees." It is a severe as well as a dangerous climb to reach the point where the conflict begins. 3. Following up every *advantage* to the utmost. "When he came in full view of the enemy they both discharged such a flight of arrows, stones, and pebbles from their bows, crossbows, and slings that twenty men fell at the first onset, and the garrison fled in a panic."

V. INSPIRING SYMPATHY (vers. 7, 13). A believing and heroic spirit begets the same spirit in others. 1. At first those with whom it comes into closest contact—it may be a *single individual.* 2. Afterwards a *host* (vers. 21, 22). 3. And their aid *contributes to the general result.* "The history of battles should teach us the mighty power of sympathetic relations."

VI. DIVINE APPROVAL. 1. *Expressed in the overthrow of the enemy*—bringing them into confusion (ver. 15), turning them against one another (ver. 16), and saving Israel from their oppression, as well as in the Providential ordering of all things that contributed to it. 2. *In commendation of "the spirit of faith"* in which the enterprise was undertaken and carried out. 3. *Recognised by all the people.* "He hath wrought with God this day" (ver. 45)—wrought effectually through his favour and power. The day was won by Jonathan; still more by God. "So the Lord saved Israel that day" (ver. 23). And to him the glory must be ascribed.—D.

Vers. 16—23. (GIBEAH.)—*Impatience in seeking Divine counsel.* "Withdraw thine hand" (ver. 19). In order to ascertain the will of God two things are necessary:—1. A special method of communication. In ancient days it was "by dreams, Urim, and prophets" (ch. xxviii. 6). The Urim (light, illumination) and Thummim (perfection, completeness, truth) were symbols of some kind or other attached to or placed within the folded breastplate connected with the ephod of the high priest (Exod. xxviii. 30; Num. xxvii. 21). "The question brought was one affecting the well-being of the nation, or its army, or its king. The inquirer spoke in a low whisper, asking one question only at a time. The high priest, fixing his gaze on the 'gems oracular' that 'lay on his heart,' fixed his thoughts on the light and perfection which they symbolised, on the holy name inscribed on them. The act was itself a prayer, and, like other prayers, it might be answered. After a time he passed into the new, mysterious, half ecstatic-state. All disturbing elements—selfishness, prejudice, the fear of man—were eliminated. He received the insight he craved. Men trusted in his decisions, as with us men trust the judgment which has been purified by prayer for the help of the eternal Spirit more than that which grows only out of debate and policy and calculation" (Smith's 'Dic.'). "When at length a visible king reigned by Divine appointment, the counsel of the Urim and Thummim passed into the public ministry of the prophets, which modified and controlled the political organisations of the kings" ('Bible Educ.,' iv. 37). We have now the written word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. 2. A proper spirit of inquiry—humility, sincerity, faith, patience, and perseverance. Saul "inquired of the Lord" (Judges i. 1; xx. 27; ch. x. 22), but not in a right manner, impatiently breaking off his inquiry before the answer came, and commanding the priest to desist from pursuing it. In like manner many persons begin to pray, and forthwith cease, instead of "continuing instant in prayer;" ask, and wait not to receive; call upon God under the pressure of trouble, and neglect to

do so when it has passed away. Such impatience in seeking to "understand what *the will of the Lord* is"—

I. ARISES FROM UNDUE CONCERN ABOUT SECONDARY MATTERS. 1. *The need of human effort*, as if nothing else were necessary to success (Ps. xxiii. 16, 17; cxxvii. 1, 2). 2. *The gain of earthly honour or other advantages.* Saul was eager to obtain, beyond everything else, the glory of a victory over his enemies. 3. *The loss of a favourable opportunity.* But "there is no time lost while we are waiting God's time. It is as acceptable a piece of submission to the will of God to sit still contentedly when our Lord requires it as to work for him when we are called to do it" (M. Henry).

II. PROVES SINFUL INDIFFERENCE TO THE HIGHEST OBJECT. 1. *Inappreciation of its worth.* Men often imagine that their own wisdom and strength are sufficient, and that it can be done without. 2. *Indisposition to bow to its authority.* They love to have their own way. 3. *Incredulity as to its communication* at the right time and in the right manner. They disbelieve the promises as well as reject the conditions of obtaining them.

III. EXHIBITS RECKLESS DISREGARD OF THE LORD HIMSELF. By—1. *Seeking him in an insincere, inconsistent, and hypocritical manner*, which the cessation of prayer plainly shows (Job xxvii. 10). 2. *Preferring personal and immediate convenience to his honour*, and desiring his help only in so far as it may be conducive to self-interest. 3. *Disobedience to his will;* for to act without the knowledge of that will when it may be obtained is a manifest act of disobedience (Isa. xxx. 1).

IV. INVOLVES DISASTROUS CONSEQUENCES. 1. Destitution of the highest counsel and aid. 2. Unpreparedness for duty and conflict. 3. A course of recklessness, sin, trouble, and humiliation (vers. 24, 37, 39, 44, 45). "Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually" (Hosea xii. 6). "I will *hear* what God the Lord will speak," &c. (Ps. lxxxv. 8).—D.

Vers. 24—46. (MICHMASH, AJALON.)—*Rashness.* "Cursed be the man that eateth any food until evening," &c. (ver. 24). Rashness is often a cause of trouble; and some persons might profitably ponder the advice once given by the town-clerk of Ephesus, "Do nothing rashly" (Acts xix. 36). It is also, sometimes, very sinful, as it was in Saul. Whilst pursuing the Philistines, and wishing to exterminate them, he imposed a solemn oath upon the people not to take food until the evening under penalty of death. This rash oath was followed by two others of a similar nature (vers. 39, 44), all indicating the recklessness and wilfulness of his course. His concern for the law (vers. 33, 34), his erection of an altar (ver. 35), his asking counsel of God before going to spoil the enemy by night (ver. 37), his eagerness to ascertain by lot the cause of the silence of the oracle (ver. 41), were not an exhibition of genuine piety; they were rather a substitute for it, and the fruits of an unsanctified, blind, and passionate zeal; and the death of the noble Jonathan, if it had taken place, would have completed his folly and sin. Consider his rashness as—

I. REVEALING A WRONG STATE OF MIND. 1. *Inconsideration.* His oath was uttered without deliberation (Eccles. v. 2). He did not consider whether it was according to the will of God, nor what its consequences might be. He did not afterwards reflect how far the transgressions of others and the silence of Heaven might be due to his own fault, and he did not apparently recognise his fault when plainly set before him. 2. *Insincerity.* "It did not proceed from a proper attitude toward God, but was an act of false zeal in which he had more regard to himself and his own kingly power than to the cause of the kingdom of Jehovah" (Keil). 3. *Vain-glory.* "That I may be avenged on *mine* enemies." "In this prohibition there was a secret pride and misuse of power, for he desired to force, as it were, a complete victory, and then appropriate the glory of it to himself."

II. IMPOSING A NEEDLESS BURDEN upon others. Once and again it is said "the people were faint" (vers. 28, 31). They were exhausted with severe and prolonged exertion, famished with hunger, and unable to continue the pursuit. Their suffering was great, their power diminished, their temptation strong. But Saul had thought only of himself. Rulers should seek the welfare of their subjects rather than their own glory; and all men should consider the effect of their resolutions, promises, and commands on other people, and use their influence over them for their good.

III. OCCASIONING GRIEVOUS SIN in them (vers. 32—35). They avoided one offence only to commit another with a rashness equal to that of Saul himself (Gen. ix. 4; Deut. xii. 16; Levit. iii. 17; vii. 27). He censured and checked them. Would that he had also censured and checked himself! But men who severely condemn the faults of others are often blind to their own, even when the former reflect and are occasioned by the latter (Ps. xix. 12, 13). The altar, erected doubtless with a view to the presentation upon it of thank offerings for the victory, was still more needed for the sin offerings (expiatory) which ought to have been offered on behalf both of ruler and people (Levit. iv. 13, 22).

IV. IMPERILLING INNOCENT LIFE. Not having heard the oath, Jonathan, in unconsciously violating it (ver. 27), was morally blameless. Yet his act could not be passed by with due regard to the great name in which the people had been adjured. It interrupted Divine communications (ver. 37), and resulted in his being chosen by the lot (ver. 42). Again Saul should have been led to consider his own error as its cause, and a trespass or guilt offering might have sufficed (Levit. v. 4). To inflict the "curse" would be wholly unjust, as is implied in Jonathan's simple, mild, and submissive remonstrance (ver. 43). But Saul's last oath was more reckless than his first; it was ignorant and wilful, showed more concern about the literal fulfilment of his word than humble and faithful obedience to a higher will, and brought him to the brink of a great crime.

> "Take then no vow at random: ta'en in faith
> Preserve it; yet not bent, as Jephthah once,
> Blindly to execute a rash resolve,
> Whom better it had suited to exclaim,
> 'I have done ill,' than to redeem his pledge
> By doing worse" (Dante, 'Par.' v.).

V. BRINGING DEEP HUMILIATION (ver. 45). The ominous silence of the people (ver. 39) is followed by their unanimous and resolute voice, in which reason and justice, conscience and God, speak with irresistible might. They set their will in opposition to his, and he is compelled to submit. His purpose is frustrated. "The son is raised above the father, and the people above the king." But although his sin is now forced home upon him, of voluntary submission there is no sign. Rashness and self-will are sure to meet with a check, and happy is he who lays to heart the lesson which it teaches.

VI. DEFEATING ITS OWN AIMS (ver. 46). "My father hath brought disaster on the land," &c. (vers. 29, 30; Josh. vii. 25). The completeness of the overthrow of the enemy is marred. The opportunity of inflicting a fatal blow upon them is lost. "And there was sore war against the Philistines all the days of Saul" (ver. 52). That which begins in rashness ends in disappointment and grief.—D.

EXPOSITION.

JONATHAN'S DANGER AND DELIVERANCE (vers. 36—46). Ver. 36.—**Let us go down after the Philistines by night.** Saul, conscious that he had prevented the victory from being so decisive as it would otherwise have been, proposes to repair his fault, now that the people have taken food, by continuing the pursuit during the night. The people render the same unquestioning obedience as before, but Ahiah gives counsel that they should first ask the approval of God. **Let us draw near hither.** *I. e.* to the altar which Saul had just set up. Ahiah may have done this because he disapproved of Saul's project, or because generally God ought to be consulted before undertaking anything of importance. Already the neglect of this had led to no good results (see ver. 19).

Vers. 37, 38.—**He answered him not.** From this silence Saul concludes that some sin has been committed, and therefore calls together **all the chief of the people**—literally, "the corner stones" (Judges xx. 2)—to inquire who was the guilty person, and wherein he had sinned.

Ver. 39.—**He shall surely die.** With despotic violence, without waiting to learn what the offence was, and judging simply by consequences, because he was delayed in following up the pursuit, he takes a solemn oath that the offending person shall be put to death. Thus twice in the same day he was guilty of the sin of rash swearing. The

people condemn him by their silence. They had obeyed him with ready devotion; but now they listen in terror to the rash and violent words which condemn to death the young hero by whom God had that day wrought deliverance for them.

Vers. 40, 41.—As God also condemned Saul by his silence, the Urim and Thummim giving no answer, he places himself and Jonathan on one side, and the people on the other, and determines to cast lots. He then prays, **Give a perfect lot**, or, as in the margin, "Show" (literally, give) "the innocent." This is undoubtedly the meaning of the Hebrew, while the rendering of the text is taken from Kimchi. There are few mistranslations of the A. V. which have not some good Jewish authority for them, as King James's translators were singularly well versed in Jewish literature, while they seem strangely to have neglected the still higher authority of the ancient versions. These generally translate "Give holiness," a phrase equivalent to "Show the truth." The Septuagint and Vulgate add explanations, which, however, throw no light upon the passage.

Ver. 44. —**God do so**, &c. Again Saul takes an oath to put Jonathan to death, supposing himself bound by his former words. But he must have been pained beyond measure at the miserable consequences of his rashness, and have bitterly reproached himself for thus twice marring the happiness of the day by unhallowed oaths. Jonathan's trespass, committed unwittingly, required nothing more than a trespass offering for its expiation, nor did the silence of the Urim and Thummim imply any fault in him. The fault lay in Saul having imposed an oath upon the army; that oath had been broken, and a formal expiation must be made. But Saul was by nature a despot, and could endure nothing that seemed even for the moment to stand in his way.

Ver. 45.—**The people said.** They had hitherto shown their disapproval of Saul's conduct by their silence; now they decide that Jonathan shall not die, and their decision was right and godly. Saul might feel bound by his rash oath, but the consciences of the people told them that an oath to commit a crime is an oath to be repented of as a sin, and not to be performed as a duty. They do not say, however, **God forbid**, but "Far be it." The name of the Deity is constantly taken in vain in the A. V. without adding either beauty or energy to the word of God. But even if it did, what right have translators to add energy to the word of God? **He hath wrought with God this day.** The argument of the people is wise and good. Jonathan's whole conduct on that day proved an especial presence of God with him. It would be morally wrong and an offence against religion to condemn that which God approved, and the people therefore set their oath against the king's oath, and prevail.

Ver. 46.—**Saul went up**, &c. Thus, as the final result of his self-will, Saul had to discontinue his pursuit of the Philistines, and their power, though weakened by the overthrow, remained unbroken.

SUMMARY OF SAUL'S WARS, AND ACCOUNT OF HIS FAMILY (vers. 47—52). Ver. 47.—**So Saul took the kingdom.** Instead of *so* the Hebrew has *and*, rightly; for this is no result or consequence of Saul's victory over the Philistines, but a mere historical introduction to the summary of his wars. The more correct translation would be, "When Saul had taken the kingdom over Israel, he fought," &c. Saul's reign was valiant and full of military glory. He was, in fact, in war all that the people had longed for, and not only did he gain independence for Israel, but laid the foundation of the vast empire of David and Solomon. But it is not the purpose of Holy Scripture to give us the history of all Saul's valiant exploits, but only of his moral probation and failure. Of wars we read more than enough in profane history; here we read of the formation of character, and how a hero in the midst of noble and worthy feats of arms may yet lose something nobler and worthier—the favour of God. **On every side.** Moab and Ammon were on the east, Edom on the south, Zobah on the north-east, and the Philistines on the west. Zobah lay beyond Damascus, and, from the accounts given in 2 Sam. viii. 3—8; x. 6, must have been a powerful state. **He vexed them.** The verb is a judicial one, used of punishing the guilty, and might be translated "he chastised them." The Syriac and Vulgate give the real sense—"he was victorious."

Ver. 48.—**He gathered a host.** So the Syriac and Vulgate, but the margin is probably the true meaning, "He wrought mightily," or valiantly.

Ver. 49. —Saul's family and kindred. Three sons only of Saul are here mentioned, apparently those slain at the battle of Mount Gilboa, where, however, Ishui is named Abinadab (ch. xxxi. 2, as also in 1 Chron. viii. 33; ix. 39). A fourth son, Esh-baal, subsequently called Ishbosheth, is omitted. The daughters, Merab and Michal, are mentioned because of the history in ch. xviii. 17—21.

Ver. 50.—**Saul's wife was Ahinoam, the daughter of Ahimaaz.** We have noticed on ver. 3 the fondness of the family of Eli for names beginning with *Ah*, "brother." It does not justify us in concluding that Ahinoam was a descendant of Eli, but she may possibly have been so. **Abner**, whose name is here given in its strictly proper form

Abiner, was Saul's first cousin, both Kish and Ner being sons of Abiel (comp. ch. ix. 1).

Ver. 51.—**The son of Abiel.** There can be little doubt that the right reading is *sons*, and not *son*. We thus get an intelligible statement—"And Kish the father of Saul, and Ner the father of Abner, were sons of Abiel."

Ver. 52.—The summary ends with two important particulars respecting Saul's kingdom—the first, that the Philistines were powerful and dangerous enemies to Israel all his days; the second, that in order to carry on the war with them he ever kept around him the nucleus of a standing army. In thus forming a "school of heroes" he raised the whole spirit of the people, and took an essential and necessary step for maintaining Israel's freedom. With much of the despot in him, Saul had grand qualities as a soldier, and for many years admirably fulfilled the primary object for which he was chosen. And while he was thus giving the nation internal security, Samuel was teaching it how to use its growing prosperity, and was raising it in the scale of intellectual worth. If in the time of the judges we have Israel in its boyhood, as in the Sinaitic desert we have it in its infancy, under Saul and Samuel it reached its manhood, and became a powerful, vigorous, and well-ordered community, able to maintain its freedom, and with means for its internal development in the schools of the prophets, which ended in making it not merely enlightened itself, but the giver of light to the rest of mankind.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 36—46.—*Seeking counsel of God and keeping one's word.* The facts are—1. Saul, following his own impulse, desires to pursue the Philistines during the night, but is restrained by the priest advising to seek counsel of God. 2. No answer coming from God, Saul concludes that sin has been committed, and resolves that the sinner when discovered shall die. 3. A lot being taken, it falls on Jonathan, who admits having tasted honey, and submits to the sentence. 4. Saul, again solemnly consigning his son to death, is confronted by the people, who claim and rescue Jonathan's life on the ground that he was doing God's work that day. Rash impulse was the besetting sin of Saul. Being by Divine arrangement more than a military leader, it was his duty to seek guidance from God in times of uncertainty. Men of cooler judgment doubted whether it was wise to urge on all through the night men who had been worn down by fasting all day, and were scarcely free from their evening meal. The priest evidently saw that Saul's haste and the unexpressed hesitation of the people could be best dealt with by consulting the Urim. The Divine silence at once indicated that something was wrong, and according to precedent it was necessary to ascertain where it lay. The ceremonial wrong was Jonathan's, the moral Saul's. The moral degeneracy of Saul was not only seen in his impulsive neglect of God's counsel, but also in the self-complacent zeal with which he sought out the breach of his own rash command, and in the unnatural harshness of his sentence. People are sometimes better than their rulers, and hence the popular sense of justice demanded that in this instance royal authority and national custom should give way before the manifest will of God. Jonathan must not die, even though a king's word be broken. The three prominent matters of the narrative are seeking counsel, keeping one's word, and safety in God.

I. SEEKING COUNSEL. It is the part of wisdom in life's affairs to seek counsel of God; and although sometimes no counsel is given, its absence is very instructive, and the causes of it are ascertainable. In the case of Saul both duty and privilege demanded a frequent appeal to God. On the occasion before us the need was real, the method was at hand, and response was possible, and a lack of response was itself of value. Our common human relation to God is not unlike that of Israel's king. 1. *There is for every one frequent need of Divine counsel.* Life, even under the direction of the clearest reason and purest natural impulses, is not safe; for sin has disturbed the nature of the best of men. It is not always that that which at first seems good and safe turns out in the end to be so. What to do in private, domestic, and public affairs, and what proportion of time and strength to give to various claims, are questions pressing on every conscientious mind. In matters pertaining to religious belief, culture, and enterprise, we each, if life be not stagnant, require more than earthly wisdom. The heart of man is sensible that it is not in him infallibly and safely to "direct his steps," and hence in all lands it instinctively

though often in ignorance, cries out for the living God (Prov. xvi. 9; Jer. x. 23). 2. *There is a method at hand.* The Urim was not far from Saul. By a study of God's will as seen in his word, his providence, the yearnings of a sanctified heart, and the voice of his people, we may gain guidance in addition to that private illumination which unquestionably comes in answer to true prayer. No rule can be laid down for individuals. Each day's circumstances must suggest the means we use to ascertain the will of God. 3. *There is reason for looking for a response to our seeking.* It was a tacit understanding with Saul on the settlement of the kingdom (ch. ix. 25—27; x. 24, 25) that he might count on the guidance of God. Samuel's exhortations and instructions all through proceeded on this assumption. Nor was God's silence on the present occasion contrary to this; for it was of itself a significant indication of the mind of God. Saul knew its meaning. The exhortations to us to "seek the Lord," the distinct promises that he will "hear," the many instances on record in which men sought and followed the Lord, raise an assurance that the seed of Jacob shall not seek his face in vain (Isa. xix. 1). The answer may come in unlooked-for forms,—in the clearing of our moral perceptions, the secret bent given to the purified heart, the opening up of courses of action, or a concurrence of events and influences,—but come it will some time if we are sincere and earnest. 4. *The absence of response is often accountable.* We know why Saul's seeking for counsel was in vain. There are frequent instances in which the silence of God is conspicuous. He was silent when the Psalmist cried unto him to "awake" (Ps. xxxv. 22—24); when defiled men cried unto him (Isa. i. 12—15); when amidst the storm men were in fear (Matt. viii. 24—26); when in presence of a wounded heart he would not heed captious men (John viii. 6, 7); and when questioned by one who had no right to assume a tone of authority (John xix. 9). Even though our holiness of life, or at least consistency, be real, and our supposed need be urgent, it is possible that the discipline of faith and patience is the reason for no response.

II. KEEPING ONE'S WORD. Saul felt bound in honour to keep his word, even at the cost of his son's life. He found himself in an awkward position, for it would reveal an irresolution unfavourable to authority if he should overlook his son's deed under a plea of ignorance which any one might make; and, on the other hand, as the people did believe Jonathan's plea, and held him to be the real victor of the day, it would expose Saul's folly and injustice if he should take away so valuable a life. Such was Saul's sense of the importance of keeping his word, that all must be sacrificed to it. 1. *There is a fictitious truthfulness.* The bare doing as he had said, and merely because he had said it, was Saul's ideal of truthfulness. Here, then, was a vague apprehension of a grand virtue, and a crude presentation of moral obliquity as being identical with it. Truth is a virtue entering into the depths of life; and had Saul been really a man of truth, he would have considered Jonathan's case on its own merits, have honestly admitted the folly and sin of his own rash declaration, and have sacrificed his own repute to the general interests of righteousness. There is *much fictitious truthfulness in the world.* Some men, by sheer obstinacy of disposition, will do as they say simply because they said it, heedless of the injury it may do. To keep to what one has acknowledged to be binding is supposed to be truthfulness in act, and yet many will be rigorous in the observance of some moral obligations and careless of others. To avoid theft and murder is coincident with deeds of lying and selfishness. A similar fictitious truthfulness is seen in the careful outward observance of days without cherishing the spirit in accordance with them, and in the performance of acts of worship as a substitute for the homage of the soul. 2. *Real truthfulness is a quality of extreme importance.* Saul confessed this in his zeal for the fictitious; as do all men in their devices to secure an appearance of it, and their instinctive homage to the reality when presented in word or deed. Real truthfulness does not apply merely to correspondence of statement with occurrence. It is another name for *reality* in thought, feeling, *life;* and it applies to our relation both to man and God. The conformity of our nature with what is befitting a creature of the Holy One is the real truthfulness. Hence, nothing enters the New Jerusalem that "maketh a lie." Hence, regeneration is a renewal "in the image of him" who created us. Hence, also, in so far as we are like unto him who is "the Truth," all our relations to men are pure, lovely, honest—the natural outcome of

"truth in the inward parts." This quality is essential to the most perfect social confidence; for it renders fraud, deceit, selfishness, dissimulation, distrust impossible, and the reverse virtues real, whenever it is dominant in human nature. Attention to this in education is supremely important.

III. SAFETY IN GOD. Jonathan's life was safe in God's care in spite of zeal for a fictitious regard for truth on the part of his father. The voice of the people demanding his release was the voice of God, and the honour put on Jonathan during the previous day was evidence to all but the obstinate king of a favour much to be desired. He who had gone forth in the service of the Lord with true, honest heart, and had been shielded in the dangerous enterprise, was not forsaken by his God when now the rashness of man encompassed his life with peril. Thus, the custom of Eastern rulers keeping their word when once uttered (Judges xi. 30—39; Matt. xiv. 9), personal consistency, and royal authority must give place where God makes manifest his approval. Does not the position of Jonathan lead our thoughts on to our own in a greater day of trial? We are not to be tried by the variable impulse of man or established custom, but by impartial justice. What God declares shall be done when our day's battle is over will be done in truth. If he acquits us then, who is he that condemneth? His favour will save from a worse calamity than any that threatened Jonathan; and the practical question is how to come into such relation to God that the universal demand of justice shall be for our not perishing. The answer is—"There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. viii. 1); "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth" (Rom. viii. 33).

General lessons:—1. We are consistent with our privileges when not only our calamities and great affairs, but our ordinary actions, are made subject to Divine guidance (Phil. iv. 6). 2. It is especially desirable to seek counsel of God when we are conscious of restlessness and ill-regulated impulse. 3. Faithfulness requires that, a promise or engagement being made, we keep our word even at much personal cost; but when such loss would occur, generosity requires of the gainer that it be not wholly insisted on (Ps. xv. 4; Luke vi. 31; Ephes. iv. 32). 4. Truthfulness in character is the opposite of sinfulness, for sin is a practical lie (Gen. iii. 1—5; 1 John ii. 4). 5. Our final safety rests not on the past untarnished purity of life (Rom. iii. 10; 1 John i. 8), but on our being identified with Messiah's life and purpose (John xiv. 19; Rom. viii. 35—39).

Vers. 47—52.—*Gradation in service.* The facts are—1. Saul's warlike efforts issue in the general discomfiture of his enemies. 2. The domestic relations of Saul are incorporated in the record of facts pertaining to gradual unfolding of the Divine purpose. 3. During all his conflicts with the Philistines Saul shows prudence in strengthening his military position. The section gives a summary of the military operations of Saul's reign and of the success of his efforts, and also places on the page of sacred history the names of the members of his family. Judged by rules applicable to ordinary historical records, the brief reference to his wars may appear to have little or no moral significance, and the allusion to his father, his wife, and children to be merely a matter of Jewish antiquarian interest. But the Bible was composed under the guidance of a higher than human wisdom; and both in what it includes and omits there is a relation to the higher spiritual issues in which the events of Jewish history culminated. There had been given to Saul the opportunity of rendering service to Israel, both by setting them free from the oppression of enemies and by inspiring the nation with a spirit conformable to the great Messianic purpose for which they existed. He failed to enter into the high spiritual aspirations suitable to a ruler of the chosen race, and therefore history simply records the fact that his life was spent in the rendering of the lower kind of service. Repression of the foe was service, but of an inferior type. He missed a chance of doing a more glorious and enduring work.

I. THERE IS A GRADUATED SERVICE POSSIBLE TO MEN. The possibilities of Saul's life when entering on his public career are manifest. They were not realised, though he, using certain natural abilities, succeeded in rendering valuable service as a warrior. Of every human being it may be said, as he enters on life, there is a

possibility of conferring few or many, small or great, benefits on his kind. The conditions of rising to the higher grade of service are the possession of appropriate natural abilities and an occasion for employing them. These conditions being given, it rests with his will to rise to the higher level or to be content with the lower. Secular and spiritual are not always good terms to indicate spheres of activity, because every act can and ought to be spiritual in its tone and principle. But for our present purpose we may use the terms in the common acceptation. There are grades of service—1. *In the secular sphere.* It may not be easy to construct a scale that shall in detail exhibit the relative value of labour, but there are broad outlines which are always recognised in civilised society. Manual toil is not comparable with mental. That service which relates to the material condition of mankind is inferior to that which bears on the moral. Whatever produces temporary effects is of less value than that which issues in the enduring. There are men who remain all their days on the lowest level, and there have been some who rose from that position to almost, if not quite, the highest in the scale. No man's contribution to the common weal is to be despised, but every man is bound to rise as high as possible in the scale of valuable service. 2. *In the spiritual sphere.* As in ancient times there were "hewers of wood and drawers of water," subordinate, in the common work of the chosen race, to men of loftier aspiration and more refined occupation, so in the Christian Church there are diversities in gifts and service. Generically all true Christians are equal in privilege of position and in function as witness-bearers for Christ. And there is no room for boasting or invidious comparisons, as it is the "grace of God" which worketh all in all. Yet as a matter of fact, arising partly from great diversity in natural capacity and partly from causes in the individual will, there are distinct gradations in kind and value of service rendered, as tested by the strength of principle involved and the enduring character of the effect. There are men who devote time and means only to the preservation of the outward organisations of the Church. Others, nourishing their own piety with care, minister consolation and instruction to the sick and ignorant. Others, again, by a wonderfully holy and beautiful life at home, as well as quiet zeal outside, train souls for Christ, and leave an imperishable impress on the world.

II. The GRADE OF SERVICE ATTAINED TO DEPENDS CHIEFLY ON A WISE USE OF EARLY OPPORTUNITIES. Had Saul cherished the spirit awakened by his converse with Samuel and the subsequent inspiration from God (ch. ix. 25—27; x. 9), and strengthened it by obedience in the hour of trial (ch. xiii. 13), far nobler service would have been recorded of him than that he made war with the Philistines all the days of his life. His successor David entered on a higher sphere. Of course both in the secular and spiritual spheres natural capacity and education are important determinants, as also the occurrence of favourable opportunities. But, as a rule, the position we occupy depends on our disposition to improve such opportunities as now and then fall to the lot of most persons. Hundreds are "hewers of wood and drawers of water" all their days because in early life they failed to seize the chance of developing their own powers. In science and literature there are men who, when raw youths of meagre education, laid hold of some passing opportunity for self-improvement which opened the way to still higher advantages. In the Church there are and have been noble men who, carefully nourishing the sacred gift of a new spirit and availing themselves of some chance of doing good, rose from obscurity to the distinction of ambassadors for Christ, "whose praise is in all the Churches." There are Sauls and Davids still.

General lessons:—1. While thankful for being permitted to render the smallest service to the Church and the world, we should "covet earnestly the best gifts" (1 Cor. xii. 31). 2. Youths and persons young in the Christian life should be impressed with the importance of the due improvement of their position. 3. Whenever possible we should look favourably upon any effort to enter on a wider range of usefulness. 4. The standard of service, as to aim, method, and spirit, by which our aspirations should be regulated, is the life of Christ.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 36, 37. (AJALON.)—*Drawing near to God.* Of the fallen house of Eli, one at least, Ahiah (Ahimelech—ch. xxi. 1), the grandson of Phinehas, appears to have been a faithful servant of God. When the people, having ended their pursuit of the Philistines and satisfied their hunger, rested around their gleaming camp-fires, and Saul proposed a nocturnal expedition against the enemy so as "not to leave a man of them," he devoutly and courageously interposed with the words, "Let us draw near hither unto God." He had already witnessed the effects of the king's rashness, feared its further results, and felt that "it was dangerous to undertake anything without asking counsel of God" (see ver. 19). His language is suggestive of—

I. THE EXERCISE OF A RELIGIOUS PEOPLE in prayer. It is—1. *A possibility.* For God is "nigh at hand, and not afar off" (Deut. iv. 7; Ps. cxlv. 18; Jer. xxiii. 23). He has provided a way of access—an altar (Heb. xiii. 10), a sacrifice, and a high priest (Heb. vii. 19; x. 20—22; Ephes. ii. 18). The throne of God is not only a throne of glory and of judgment, but also a throne of *grace.* "The Lamb is in the midst of the throne." 2. *A privilege.* What higher privilege or honour can be conferred than to hold intercourse with so glorious a Being? What greater benefit than his fellowship, counsel, and aid? (Ps. lxxiii. 28). 3. *An obligation,* arising out of his relationship to men, and indicated by his word, by conscience, and the deepest needs and impulses of the soul. "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you" (James iv. 8; Ps. xliii. 4). "Ye people, pour out your heart before him" (Ps. lxii. 8).

II. THE VOCATION OF A FAITHFUL MINISTER with respect to this exercise. It is—1. *To bear a fearless testimony concerning it before the people:* setting forth the supreme claims of God upon their homage, reminding them of their want, reproving their forgetfulness, and teaching them the good and right way (ch. xii. 23). 2. *To exhibit a devotional spirit in his intercourse with them.* He who exhorts others to pray should be himself a man of prayer, and speak to them by his example as well as by his words. Exhortation to them is often less beneficial than intercession for them. "We will give ourselves continually to prayer" (Acts vi. 4). 3. *To invite them to sincere union with him* in seeking the face of God. "Let *us* draw near." "Let us pray"—not merely with the lips or in outward form, not regarding iniquity in the heart; but humbly and sincerely, with one accord, with a true heart, and in full assurance of faith (Ps. lxvi. 18; 1 Tim. ii. 8).

III. THE INFLUENCE OF TIMELY INTERVENTION on the part of a good man. "*Then* (when both king and people were about to set forth without seeking Divine counsel) said the priest," &c.; and he did not speak in vain (ver. 37). Such advice and prayer are generally effectual—1. In *restraining* from the pursuit of a wrong course—a doubtful or dangerous enterprise, devotion to worldly objects, following selfish and revengeful inclinations, &c. A single "word in season" sometimes prevents much mischief. 2. In *constraining* to the performance of neglected duty. The inquiry which Saul had broken off was now formally resumed, though not on his part in a right spirit. 3. In *obtaining* the possession of needful good. It is not always what is sought. There may be delay or refusal in granting a definite answer; but the experience thereby gained is itself beneficial, and the necessary condition of obtaining the highest good.

IV. THE INSTRUCTIVENESS OF UNANSWERED PRAYER. "He answered him not that day" (ch. xxviii. 6, 15). The silence of God is significant. It indicates—1. *The presence of sin,* which hinders the communications of Heaven, as a cloud intercepts the beams of the sun (Isa. lix. 2; Lam. iii. 44; Hosea v. 15; James iv. 2, 3). 2. *The duty of its discovery,* by means of diligent inquiry and self-examination (Josh. vii. 13; Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24; Lam. iii. 40). 3. *The necessity of humiliation,* removing "the accursed thing," and turning to God with full purpose of heart, so that he may cause his face to shine upon us. "Praying will either make a man leave off sinning or sinning will make him leave off praying." In the former case his path is upward into the light, in the latter it is downward into darkness and despair.—D.

Ver. 45. (AJALON.)—*Remonstrance with rulers.* The obedience which subjects owe to the commands of a ruler is not absolute, but limited by their obligation to a higher law. When he determines on measures which are not good they have a right to remonstrate, and are sometimes bound to do so. Concerning the remonstrance of the people with Saul (after yielding notable obedience in other things—vers. 26, 34, 36), observe that it was—

I. JUST; in opposition to an unreasonable, arbitrary, and cruel decision (ver. 44), in defence of the innocent, and impelled by "an enlightened conscience and generous enthusiasm."

II. DEVOUT; recognising the hand of God in the victory of Jonathan, testifying their gratitude for the deliverance wrought through him, and obeying a higher will, thereby indicated, in preference to that of the king.

III. RESOLUTE; whilst stating the ground of their determination, manifesting a disposition to carry it into effect, and binding themselves by a united and solemn oath to do so.

IV. SUCCESSFUL. They prevailed, Jonathan was rescued, a great crime was prevented, and Saul was checked and warned in his despotic career. When the people remonstrate in the same manner they may expect the same success.—D.

Ver. 45. (AJALON.)—*Co-operation with God.* "He hath wrought with God this day." Apart from the power of God man can do nothing. In opposition to it he is defeated and crushed. Only in co-operation with it can he accomplish anything great or good. As in the material, so in the moral and spiritual world it is our wisdom, strength, and dignity to be "labourers together with God" (1 Cor. iii. 9; 2 Cor. vi. 1). Notice—

THE AIM of this co-operation. 1. To overcome sin and misery amongst men. 2. To promote righteousness and happiness in ourselves and others. 3. To extend the kingdom and glory of God.

II. THE MEANS. 1. Studying the laws or modes of God's working (Eccles. iii. 14) and the manifold intimations of his will. 2. Trusting in him, firmly resting on his promises, and patiently waiting their fulfilment. Oftentimes "our strength is to sit still." 3. Using with diligence the strength he gives, still depending on him "who worketh all in all" (1 Cor. xii. 6; Phil. ii. 13; Isa. xxvi. 12).

III. THE RESULT. 1. Conscious approbation of God. 2. Effectual aid. 3. Certain achievement. "In due season we shall *reap* if we faint not."—D.

Vers. 47—52. (GIBEAH.)—*Saul's sovereignty and wars, his army and family.* From this summary observe that—

I. THE PEOPLE OF GOD ARE BESET BY NUMEROUS ADVERSARIES. Moab, Ammon, &c.—"on every side," of varied character, imbued with the same enmity, and threatening their existence. Conflict is necessary to self-preservation.

II. THE CHASTISEMENT OF THE WICKED IS INFLICTED BY SUITABLE AGENTS. "And Saul took the kingdom," &c. "Whithersoever he turned himself he chastised them. For this work he was well qualified by warlike courage and skill, indomitable energy and zeal, and in it he met with success. God often employs men to carry out his purposes who possess little of the spirit of obedience.

III. DIVERSITY OF CHARACTER IS OFTEN MANIFESTED IN THE SAME CIRCUMSTANCES. "Now the sons of Saul were Jonathan, and Ishui (Abinadab), and Melchishua." The fourth, Esh-baal (Ishbosheth), is not here mentioned. "And the names of his two daughters were Merab and Michal," &c. (vers. 49—51). What a contrast of character is presented in this family—*e. g.* between Jonathan and his father and sister (Michal). Hidden hereditary influences and special associations may have contributed to the difference, but much more the voluntary use or abuse of preliminary conditions, outward circumstances, and spiritual gifts.

IV. THE MISUSE OF POWER IS THE RUIN OF ITS POSSESSOR. "He gathered a host" (ver. 48), or acquired power. He formed a standing army, as it had been predicted (ch. viii. 11, 16; xxii. 7). He employed his power for his own aggrandisement. "If he could have done as he wished, there would have been an end to the supremacy of God in Israel. Rude despotism would have usurped its place" (Hengstenberg).

Samuel's antagonistic working preserved the principle of the theocracy, and Saul's kingdom departed from him (Dan. iv. 31).

V. THE PERVERSITY OF MEN INVOLVES THEM IN SORE DISTRESS. "There was sore war," &c. (ver. 52). "Very different had been the state of things when Samuel ruled Israel (ch. vii. 13). And the people who looked for protection to an arm of flesh rather than to God, who was their King, were punished by that instrument—Saul—which they had chosen for themselves in order that they might be saved by it" (Wordsworth's 'Com.').

VI. THE KINGDOM OF GOD MUST PREVAIL OVER ALL OPPOSITION, whether from open adversaries or disloyal adherents. That which seems to hinder it is often made a means of its furtherance. The Divine purpose concerning it cannot be defeated. It endured, wrought, and was developed amidst all the vicissitudes of Israel's history until the advent of "the King Messiah," and it is still advancing toward its perfect and eternal consummation (1 Cor. xv. 24, 25).—D.

Vers. 47, 48.—*The restless king.* When a locomotive engine slips off the rails, it would do little harm if it could stop at once; but its momentum carries it forward. It ploughs up the way, it dashes over an embankment, and drags ever so many carriages and passengers to destruction. So is it with the deflection of a man of force and influence from the right course. If he would stop at once, or if he should soon die, the mischief might be small. But the momentum of his character and position drives him on; he goes further and further from the straight lines of righteousness, and in the end not only hurls himself on ruin, but pulls many after him to their hurt. It was so with king Saul. He sinned, and the prophet Samuel intimated to him the Lord's displeasure. Had the king stopped there, no great damage might have been done; but he could not stop. The vehemence of his nature, and what seemed to be the necessities of his position, drove him on. He became more and more arbitrary. So we see him in this chapter of the history issuing the most unreasonable restrictions and commands, lenient when he should have been strict, and severe when he should have been lenient. By his rashness he very nearly turned to mourning the signal triumph over the Philistines which crowned the faith and valour of Prince Jonathan, and from that day he fell even below his own subjects in his perception of right and wrong, forfeited their respect, and became more and more wayward and unreasonable. Yet he had successes—great successes as a warrior. His martial temper and skill did not leave him, and all the surrounding nations felt his heavy hand. Not content with defending the territory, Saul organised and disciplined the army of Israel, so as to be able to use it in aggressive war, and smite the nations which had at various periods oppressed his country. Whithersoever he turned himself he was victorious. And yet Saul did not conduct those wars or win those victories in a manner worthy of a servant of Jehovah. There is no trace of his having command or counsel from God. There is no reference to the fulness of Divine promise regarding the land such as one sees in the thoughts of David when he enlarged the territory of Israel till they possessed all that the Lord had assigned to the posterity of Abraham. Saul struck right and left as the mood seized him, and "whithersoever he turned himself" he conquered. This is worth noting. A man may have many successes in life; nay, may have them in the Church, and in vindication of sacred truth, yet not have them as a Christian ought, and so not please God. Especially may this be the case in ecclesiastical and theological controversy. One may be quite on the right side, and may strike heavy blows at errorists and heretics all round, just as he "turns himself," and yet have no communion with the God of truth whom he seems to serve, obey motives unworthy of a servant of Christ, and indulge a harsh and wilful temper such as God cannot approve. Restlessness indicates an undisciplined, unhallowed energy. Restfulness belongs to those who submit all their plans to God, and lay all their energies at his feet. No men are so deaf to expostulation and so hard of recovery as those who try to keep an accusing conscience quiet by ceaseless activity. They turn hither and smite, thither and smite again. Perhaps they attack what deserves to be smitten; but it is a bad sign of themselves that they are never still before the Lord, letting his word search them. Under ever so much noise of debate

and controversy, what hollowness may lurk, what degeneracy! Alas, it is so easy to go wrong, and having gone wrong once, easier to do it again. And then it is so hard to accept blame before God or man, and to submit to correction. Why not brandish our swords, and show ourselves brave Christian soldiers? Will not this compensate for our faults? O foolish Saul! O more foolish followers of the restless, haughty king! Lord, keep us back from all presumptuous sin!—F.

EXPOSITION.

FINAL REJECTION OF SAUL (CH. XV.).

CHAPTER XV.

DIVINE COMMAND TO PUNISH THE AMALEKITES, AND ITS EXECUTION BY SAUL (vers. 1—9). Ver. 1.—**Samuel also said.** Better literally, "And Samuel said." There is no note of time, but probably a considerable interval elapsed before this second trial of Saul was made. God does not finally reject a man until, after repeated opportunities for repentance, he finally proves obdurate. David committed worse crimes than Saul, but he had a tender conscience, and each fall was followed by deep and earnest sorrow. Saul sinned and repented not. Just, then, as Eli had a first warning, which, though apparently unconditional in its terms (ch. ii. 27—36), was really a call to repentance, and was only made irrevocable by his persistence for many years in the same sins (ch. iii. 11—14), so was it with Saul. The prophet's words in ch. xiii. 13, 14 were a stern warning, and had Saul taken them to heart, God would have forgiven him his sin. He repented not, but repeated the offence, and so the sentence was confirmed. When, then, critics say that we have two accounts of Saul's rejection, and that he is represented as having been set aside first for one reason and then for another, their objection arises entirely from a false view of God's dealings with mankind. Alike promises and threatenings, blessings and punishments are conditional; for there is no heathen fatalism in Holy Scripture, but mercy waiting to triumph over justice. God, then, was not willing lightly to cast away so noble an instrument as Saul. His first sin too had been committed when he was new in the kingdom, and in a position of danger and difficulty. He waits, therefore, till Saul has had some years of success and power, and his character has developed itself, and is taking its permanent form; and then again gives him a trial in order to test his fitness to be a theocratic king. The interest, then, of this chapter lies in the unfolding of Saul's character, and so it follows immediately upon ch. xiv., which was occupied with the same subject, without any note of chronology, because the historical narrative is subservient to the personal. Hence, too, Samuel's solemn address, reminding Saul that he was Jehovah's anointed one, and therefore had special duties towards him; that he had also been anointed by Samuel's instrumentality, and after earnest instruction as to his duties; and, finally, that Israel was Jehovah's people, and their king, therefore, bound to obey Jehovah's commands.

Ver. 2.—**Amalek.** The Amalekites were a fierce race of nomads who inhabited the desert to the south of Judæa towards Egypt. They were, and still continue to be in their descendants, the Bedouins, an untamable race of savages, whose delight is in robbery and plunder. Between them and Israel there was bitter hostility occasioned by their having attacked the people immediately after the Exodus (Exod. xvii. 8—16), and the command there given to exterminate them is repeated now, probably in consequence of their raids having become more numerous and sanguinary under their present king, as we gather from ver. 33. The reference to a war with tlie Amalektes in ch. xiv. 48 no doubt refers to this expedition, as we have there a mere summary of Saul's military enterprises. **I remember.** Literally, "I have visited;" but the sense of *remembering* seems confirmed by such passages as Gen. xxi. 1; l. 24; Isa. xxiii. 17; xxvi. 16. The Septuagint, however, and Aquila give a very good sense: "I have considered," "thought over." **How he laid wait for him in the way.** There is no idea in the Hebrew of ambuscade or treachery. It is simply, "How he set himself in the way against him," *i. e.* opposed, withstood him, tried to bar his progress.

Ver. 3.—**Utterly destroy.** Hebrew, "put under the ban." The word *herem*, ban, properly signifies a thing set apart, especially one devoted to God; and whatever was so devoted could not be redeemed, but must be slain. When a country was put under the ban, all living things, men and cattle, were to be killed; no spoil might be taken, but it was to be burnt, and things indestructible by fire, as silver and gold, were to be brought into the treasury. Everything, in short, belonging to such a nation was looked upon as accursed (see Num. xxi. 2, 3).

Ver. 4.—**Telaim.** Kimchi identifies this

with Telem (Josh. xv. 24), a place on the southern border of Judah near the country of the Amalekites. But as *telaim* means "lambs," more probably *beth*, "house," is to be understood; and so it was no town, but the "place of lambs," *i. e.* some open spot where at the proper season the lambs were collected from the pastures in the wilderness. **Ten thousand men of Judah.** A very small number compared with the hosts of Israel, especially as Judah was most exposed to the Amalekite, raids (but see on ch. xi. 8. A large army was necessary, because the Bedouin race, though offering little direct resistance, would be very difficult to overtake.

Ver. 5.—**A city of Amalek.** More probably *Ir-Amalek*, the name of their one town. **Laid wait.** Many commentators follow the Syriac in rendering this verb *contended, strove;* others, like the A. V., with the Septuagint and Vulgate, regard it as a contracted form of a verb signifying *to lay an ambuscade.* It is not, however, a **valley,** but a "torrent-bed," which was more fit for an ambush than for a strife or dispute. Rashi explains the verb as signifying "contended with himself," and quotes from the Talmud an opinion that when Saul reached the torrent he called to mind the command in Deut. xxi. 4, to slay a heifer at a torrent in expiation of a murder, and had misgivings whether a slaughter so indiscriminate as that on which he was engaged could be justified. The law of the Herem was soon softened down, but we find David in several of his wars guilty of fearful cruelty. The translation of the A. V. is the more probable.

Ver. 6.—**Saul said unto the Kenites.** Not while he was lying in ambush in the torrent-bed, but after smiting Ir-Amalek. The Kenites were always friendly to the Israelites, but seem, like the Amalekites, to have been a Bedouin nation, ever wandering about without a settled home. In Abraham's time they were a powerful people (Gen. xv. 19), but, for some reason or other, broke up into small tribes, some, as those here spoken of, choosing the wilderness of Judah for their home (Judges i. 16), others living far to the north in Naphtali (*ibid.* iv. 11, 17), others among the rocks of Arabia Petræa. Of these last we know but little, but the rest continued to be on friendly terms with David (1 Sam. xxx. 29).

Ver. 7.—**From Havilah until thou comest to Shur.** Hebrew, "from Havilah as thou goest towards Shur." It seems impossible that this Havilah can be the north-western portion of Yemen, called Chawlan, and identified with the Havilah of Gen. x. 7, 29, as this would make Saul smite them from south-east to north-west. **Shur,** which means *wall,* **is,** as Wellhausen (Text Sam. 97) observes, originally the name of the wall which ran from Pelusium past Migdol to Hero, and which gave to Egypt, as Ebers thinks, its name Mizraim, the *enclosed* or *fortified.* Shur is again mentioned in ch. xxvii. 8 as indicating the direction towards Egypt of the region occupied by the Amalekites. Havilah, which means *circle,* must have been some spot on the route to the isthmus of Suez, lying on the edge of the wilderness to the south of Judah, where Saul commenced his foray. Beginning thus upon the borders of Judæa, Saul continued his devastations up to the limits of Egypt.

Ver. 8.—**He took Agag.** This was the official name of the Amalekite kings (see Num. xxiv. 7), as Pharaoh was that of the kings of Egypt. For its meaning we must wait till we know more about the language of this race. Agag, however, from ver. 32, seems to have been able to speak Hebrew. **He utterly destroyed**—*i. e.* put under the ban—**all the people.** They appear, however, again in ch. xxvii. 8, and with so vast a wilderness in which to take refuge, it would be impossible really to exterminate a people used to lead a wandering life. Moreover, as soon as Israel began to lay hands on the spoil the pursuit would flag, as the cattle would be killed by over-driving.

Ver. 9.—**The fatlings.** So the Syriac and Chaldee render the word, but the Hebrew literally means "the second best." Kimchi and Tanchum give perhaps a preferable rendering, "the second-born," such animals being considered superior to the first-born, as the dams had by that time arrived at their full strength.

REJECTION OF SAUL AND HIS DYNASTY (vers. 10—23). Ver. 11.—**It repenteth me.** By the law of man's free will his concurrence is necessary in carrying out the Divine purpose, and consequently every man called to the execution of any such purpose undergoes a probation. God's purpose will be finally carried out, but each special instrument, if it prove unworthy, will be laid aside. This change of administration is always described in Scriptural language as God's repentance, possibly because the phrase contains also the idea of the Divine grief over the rebellious sinner. But though Saul and his dynasty were thus put aside, and no longer represented Jehovah, still Saul remained the actual king, because God works slowly by the natural sequence of cause and effect. Saul's ill-governed temper, and his hatred and malice towards David, were the means of bringing about his ruin. **It grieved Samuel.** Hebrew, "it burned to Samuel," *i. e.* he was angry and displeased. The same phrase occurs in Jonah iv. 1, where it is rendered "he was very angry." But with whom was Samuel vexed? Generally at the whole course

of events, but especially with Saul. In choosing him he had hoped that, in addition to high military qualities, he would possess a religious and obedient heart. He had now obtained for him a second trial, and if, warned by his earlier failure, he had proved trustworthy all might have been well. Saul had too many noble gifts for Samuel to feel indifferent at the perversion of so great an intellect and so heroic a heart. But he was of a despotic temperament, and would bend to no will but his own; and so he had saved the best of the plunder to enrich the people, and Agag possibly as a proof of his personal triumph. **And he cried unto Jehovah all night.** *I. e.* he offered an earnest prayer for forgiveness for Saul, and for a change in his heart. As Abravanel says, Samuel no doubt loved Saul for his beauty and heroism, and therefore prayed for him; but no change came in answer to his prayer, and as forgiveness is conditional upon man's repentance, Saul was not forgiven. It is remarkable how often Samuel is represented as "crying" unto God (see ch. vii. 8, 9; xii. 18).

Ver. 12.—**Samuel rose early.** If Samuel was at home at Ramah, he would have a journey of several days before reaching Carmel, the city mentioned in Josh. xv. 55, on the road from Arad, on the borders of the wilderness of Judah, about ten miles south-east of Hebron. The words **in the morning** should be joined with **rose early.** Before setting out, however, Samuel learned that Saul had already marched northward towards Gilgal, having first **set him up a place** —Hebrew, "a hand," *i. e.* a monument, something to call attention to his victory. In 2 Sam. xviii. 18 Absalom's pillar is styled "Absalom's hand." A Hebrew trophy in honour of a victory possibly had a hand carved upon it. **Gilgal** was the city in the Jordan valley near Jericho, whither Samuel now followed Saul.

Ver. 13.—**Blessed be thou of Jehovah.** Saul meets Samuel with all external respect, and seems even to expect his approval, saying, **I have performed the commandment of Jehovah.** And so he had in the half-way in which men generally keep God's commandments, doing that part which is agreeable to themselves, and leaving that part undone which gives them neither pleasure nor profit. Saul probably had thought very little about the exact terms of the command **given** him, and having successfully accomplished the main point of carrying out a vast foray against the Amalekites, regarded the captive king and the plundered cattle as proofs of his victory. The trophy at Carmel is a token of his own self-satisfaction.

Ver. 14.—**What meaneth then this bleating?** &c. Literally, "What is this voice of sheep in my ears, and the voice of oxen?" While Saul's own conscience was silent they were proclaiming his disobedience.

Ver. 15.—**They have brought them.** No doubt this was verbally true, and very probably the excuse of holding a great sacrifice to Jehovah had been put prominently forward. But reasons are never wanting when men have made up their minds, and the people who so readily obeyed Saul before (ch. xiv. 24, 34, 40) would have obeyed him now, had he really wished it. For a king so wilful and imperious as Saul thus to seek for excuses, and try to throw the blame on others, marks, as has been well observed, a thorough break-down of his moral character.

Ver. 16.—**Stay.** Samuel will hear no more. Long as he had striven for him in prayer (ver. 11), he now feels that Saul has fallen too low for recovery to be possible. **This night.** It is plain from this that Samuel had not gone to meet Saul at Carmel, but on receiving information of his movements had proceeded straight to Gilgal, distant from Ramah about fifteen miles.

Ver. 17.—**When**—rather, Though—**thou wast little in thine own sight.** Before his elevation to the royal dignity Saul had deemed himself altogether unequal to so heavy a task (ch. ix. 21); now, after great military successes, he is filled with arrogance, and will rule in open defiance of the conditions upon which Jehovah had appointed him to the office.

Ver. 18.—**The sinners.** The Amalekites were a race of robbers, and the command "to devote them" was the consequence of the robbery and murder practised by them on the Israelite borders.

Vers. 20, 21.—Saul's justification of himself is remarkable, as he seems entirely unconscious of having done anything wrong. His education had no doubt been defective (ch. x. 12), and his knowledge of the law was probably very small; but he must have listened to Samuel's injunctions in a very off-hand way, and have troubled himself about very little more than that he was to make war upon the Amalekites. There may even have been the wish in his mind to let Samuel know that he was now king, and would carry on affairs after his own fashion. The very form of his answer requires notice; for the word rendered **yea** is literally *in that*, or *because*, and may be paraphrased as follows: Do you reproach me thus because I have obeyed you? See, there is Agag in proof of our victory; and if the people have spared the cattle, it was with the best of intentions. The next clause, **the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed,** reads in the A. V. like an ironical parenthesis. It is not so, but an important part of Saul's defence. These sheep and oxen were "the best of the devoted things,"

selected as the first-fruits for sacrifice. Saul may not have known that such a sacrifice was forbidden (Deut. xiii. 15—17). The words, **to sacrifice unto Jehovah thy God**, imply that Samuel ought to be pleased at the victorious army doing this public homage to the Deity whose prophet he was. It was virtually a compliment to himself, and is very much in accordance with the notions of the generality of people now, who consider that attendance at a place of worship, or sending their children to school, is a favour to the clergyman.

Vers. 22, 23.—The rebuke of Samuel contains one of those pregnant sayings which mark the high moral tone of the teaching of the prophets, and soon became a fundamental principle with them: **To obey is better than sacrifice** is a dictum reproduced by Hosea (ch. vi. 6), the most ancient of those prophets of Israel whose lessons have been preserved in writing; it is referred to in still earlier psalms (see Ps. l. 8—14; li. 16, 17); by other prophets (Isa. i. 11; Jer. vi. 20; Micah vi. 6, 8); and finally received our Lord's special approbation (Matt. ix. 13; xii. 7). It asserts in the clearest terms the superiority of moral to ritual worship, and that God can only be really served with the heart. **Witchcraft** is in the Hebrew *divination*, a sin always strongly condemned in the Old Testament. **Iniquity** literally means *nothingness*, and so is constantly used for "an idol;" and this must be its signification here, as the word coupled with it, and rendered **idolatry**, is really *teraphim*. These were the Hebrew household gods, answering to the Roman *Lares*, and were supposed to bring good luck. Their worship, we see from this place, was strictly forbidden. The verse, therefore, means, "For rebellion is the sin of divination (*i. e.* is equal to it in wickedness), and obstinacy (*i. e.* intractableness) is an idol and teraphim." Samuel thus accuses Saul of resistance to Jehovah's will, and of the determination at all hazards to be his own master. With this temper of mind he could be no fit representative of Jehovah, and therefore Samuel dethrones him. Henceforward he reigns only as a temporal, and no longer as the theocratic, king.

SAUL'S PROFESSION OF REPENTANCE AND FINAL REJECTION (vers. 24—35). Ver. 24.—The words of Samuel struck Saul with terror. The same authority which had first given him the kingdom now withdraws it from him, and pronounces his offence as equal in God's sight to crimes which Saul himself held in great abhorrence. He humbles himself, therefore, before Samuel, acknowledges his sin, and frankly confesses that the cause of it had been his unwillingness to act in a manner contrary to the wishes of the people; and we must fairly conclude that the sparing of the spoil had been the people's doing. But was it not the king's duty to make the people obedient to Jehovah's voice? As the theocratic king, he was Jehovah's minister, and in preferring popularity to duty he showed himself unworthy of his position. Nor can we suppose that his confession of sin arose from penitence. It was the result simply of vexation at having his victory crossed by reproaches and disapproval from the only power capable of holding him in check. It seems, too, as if it were Samuel whom he feared more than Jehovah; for he speaks of **thy words**, and asks Samuel to pardon his sin, and to grant him the favour of his public presence with him at the sacrifice which was about to be celebrated in honour of their triumph.

Vers. 26, 27, 28.—At first the prophet refuses the king's request. Saul had dishonoured God, and, therefore, had no claim to public homage from God's minister. He turns, therefore, to go away, and Saul in his eagerness seizes hold of Samuel's **mantle**. The A. V. is very careless about the exact rendering of words of this description, and seems guided in its choice of terms simply by the ear. Now the mantle, *addereth*, though used of the Shinar shawl stolen by Achan (Josh. vii. 21, 24), was the distinctive dress of the prophets, but naturally was never worn by Samuel himself. Special dresses come into use only gradually, and Elijah is the first person described as being thus clad. Long before his time the schools of the prophets had grown into a national institution, and a loose wrapper of coarse cloth made of camel's hair, fastened round the body at the waist by a leathern girdle, had become the usual prophetic dress, and continued so to be until the arrival of Israel's last prophet, John the Baptist (Matt. iii. 4). The garment here spoken of is the *meïl*, on which see ch. ii. 19, where it was shown to be the ordinary dress of people of various classes in easy circumstances. Now the *meïl* was not a loosely-flowing garment, but fitted rather closely to the body, and, therefore, the tearing of it implies a considerable amount of violence on Saul's part. **Skirt**, moreover, gives a wrong idea. What Saul took hold of was the *hem*, the outer border of the garment, probably at Samuel's neck or shoulder, as he turned to go away. He seized him, as we should say, by the collar, and endeavoured by main force to retain him, and in the struggle the hem rent. And Samuel, using it as an omen, said, **Jehovah hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou.** *Neighbour* is used in Hebrew in a very indefinite manner, and here means generally "some one, whoever it may be," but one who will discharge the duties of **thy**

office better than thou hast done (comp. Luke x. 36).

Ver. 29.—**The Strength**—better, as in the margin, the Victory or Triumph—**of Israel.** He who is Israel's Victory, or He in whom Israel has victory, will not repent. In ver. 11 God was said to repent, because there was what appeared to be a change in the Divine counsels. "God gave Israel a king in his anger, and took him away in his wrath" (Hosea xiii. 11). But such modes of speaking are in condescension to human weakness. Absolutely with God there is no change. He is the Eternal Present, with whom all things that were, and are, and shall be are one. But even looked at from below, as this finite creature man looks at his Maker's acts, there is no change in the Divine counsels, because, amidst all the vicissitudes of human events, God's will moves calmly forward without let or hindrance. No lower or secondary motives influence him, no rival power thwarts him. One instrument may be laid aside, and another chosen, because God ordains that the instruments by which he works shall be beings endowed with free will. Saul was the very counterpart of the Jewish people—highly endowed with noble qualities, but head-strong, self-willed, disobedient. Nevertheless, he laid the foundation for the throne of David, who in so many points was the ideal of the theocratic king; and Israel in like manner prepared the way for the coming of the true Messianic King, and gave mankind the one Catholic, *i. e.* universal, religion. "He who is Israel's Victory does not repent."

Vers. 30, 31. — **Then he said, I have sinned.** We have here no real confession of guilt. Even in ver. 24 the words were rather an expression of vexation at the strictness with which he was held to the letter of the command, than an acknowledgment that he really had done wrong. Here Saul's meaning seems to be, Well, granting that I have sinned, and that this sentence of exclusion from the kingdom is passed upon me, yet at least pay me the honour due to the rank which I still continue to hold. And to this request Samuel accedes. Saul was *de facto* king, and would continue to be so during his lifetime. The anointing, once bestowed, was a consecration for life, and so generally it was in the days of the son that the consequences of the father's sin came fully to pass (1 Kings xi. 34, 35; xiv. 13, &c.). Had Samuel refused the public honour due to Saul's rank, it would have given an occasion for intrigue and resistance to all who were disaffected with Saul's government, and been a step towards bringing back the old anarchy. **Jehovah thy God.** See on ver. 13.

Ver. 32. — **Delicately.** The Septuagint and Vulgate translate this word *trembling*, and the Syriac omits, probably from inability to give its meaning. Most commentators render *cheerfully, joyfully*, forming it from the same root as Eden, the garden of joy (comp. Ps. xxxvi. 8, where Eden is translated *pleasure*). The very word, however, occurs in Job xxxviii. 31, where the A. V. renders it *bands*, and this seems the right sense: "Agag came unto him in fetters." The idea that Agag came cheerfully is contradicted by the next clause—**Surely the bitterness of death is passed.** Though put affirmatively, there is underlying doubt. It is no expression of heroic contempt for death, nor of real confidence that, as Saul had spared him hitherto, his life was in no danger. He had been brought to the national sanctuary, and a great festival in honour of the success of the army was to be held. It was entirely in accordance with the customs of ancient times that his execution should be the central feature of the spectacle. Agag's words show that this fear was present in his mind, though they are put in such a form as to be a protest against his life being taken after so long delay. Samuel's reply treats Agag's assertion as being thus at once a question and a protest. The bitterness of death has still to be borne, and the cruelty of Agag's past life makes the shedding of his own blood just. The Syriac translates, "Surely death is bitter;" the Septuagint, "If death be so bitter," with which the Vulgate agrees. Thus they all understood that Agag came trembling for his life.

Ver. 33.—**As thy sword hath made women childless.** Agag's life had been spent in freebooting expeditions, in which he had shed blood ruthlessly, and so justice required his execution in requital of his deeds to others. **Samuel hewed Agag in pieces.** The verb occurs only here, and probably refers to some particular method of execution, like the quartering of the middle ages. Being in the Piel conjugation, it would mean not so much that Samuel put Agag to death himself as that he commanded it to be done.

Ver. 35.—**Samuel came no more to see Saul.** The friendly intercourse which had previously existed was now broken off, and though they met again (ch. xix. 24), it was neither in an amicable manner, nor was their interview of Samuel's seeking. But the words have a higher meaning than the mere seeing or meeting one with the other. They involve the cessation of that relation in which Samuel and Saul had previously stood to one another as respectively the prophet and king of the same Jehovah. Saul was no longer the representative of Jehovah, and consequently Samuel no more came to him, bearing messages and commands, and giving him counsel and guidance from God. **Nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul**

There was so much in him that was good and admirable, and he had wrought such brave services in delivering Israel from its many enemies, that Samuel loved him. Now he saw all his high qualities perverted, the man fallen, his powers of usefulness destroyed. Already, too, there was probably the beginning of that darkening of Saul's intellect which filled so many of his future years with melancholy, bursting out from time to time into fits of madness. All this would end in the expulsion of himself and his dynasty from the throne, for **Jehovah repented that he had made Saul king over Israel.** See on ver. 11

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—7.—*God's terrible acts.* The facts are—1. Saul is reminded that though a king he is but the servant of God, and bound to carry out his declared will. 2. Saul is commanded to utterly destroy Amalek in retribution for former sins. 3. In prosecuting his duty Saul discriminates in favour of the Kenites, then resident among the Amalekites, in consequence of their former kindness to Israel. It appears from xiv. 48 that, although the sin of Amalek in bygone times (Exod. xvii. 8—16) was the primary ground of the judgment about to be inflicted, the recent annoyance and injury caused to Saul's subjects was the occasion for the execution of the ancient sentence at this juncture. Those living under the mild and beneficent influences of the Christian dispensation are conscious of a shock to their sensibilities in reading the account of wholesale destruction brought by human instrumentality on an entire people; and the emotional disturbance is supplemented by intellectual perplexity on observing that the transaction was in obedience to a most explicit command of God. It is sometimes the practice, very easy for all who will not take pains to enter carefully into the subject, to get rid of the emotion and the perplexity by rejecting the inspiration of the entire record, or else by saying that Samuel and Saul sincerely but ignorantly mistook their own views of policy and dispositions of heart for the voice of God. The question at issue is a large one, but as it embraces in principle the whole of what in the Psalms are called his "terrible acts," which, whenever occurring or read, tax our feelings and perplex our intellects, we may notice a few points applicable more or less to all God's righteous judgments.

I. THE SPIRIT WITH WHICH WE SHOULD APPROACH THE CONSIDERATION OF GOD'S "TERRIBLE ACTS." It is not improbable that an unteachable, self-assertive spirit—a spirit that will not repose in a higher wisdom and goodness than its own, or that chafes under its inability to square human views of sin and its relations with God's—is the moral cause of man's quarrel with some of the records of Old Testament history. Our present contention is not with atheists, who to get rid of one difficulty create many others, but with those who believe in an almighty, all-wise, and merciful God, who is the Author of the moral and physical laws, by the action of which the world finds bliss or woe. We cannot help finding ourselves face to face with events bringing sorrow and shame, material and moral desolation to multitudes, because God so willed one creature's condition to be affected by the conduct of another. Apart from all human conduct, there are awful events in which, so to speak, the reputation of God for goodness and tenderness seems to be at stake. This circumstance should make the rejecter of Old Testament records pause ere he yields to the spirit of unbelief. There are "clouds and darkness" round about the throne; and he who would flee from mystery may well seek to flee from the universe. The judgment that condemns everything of which it does not see the reason is not qualified to exercise itself on the acts of an infinite Being. The cherubim and seraphim cover their faces, not presuming to attempt to pierce even with their clear and strong vision the ineffable glory; and so when a great burden of fear rests on our heart because of the terrible things of God, it is for us to bow in lowliness and trustfulness, saying for our comfort, because of what we know him to be, and not because we can solve the awful problems of existence, "Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name?" (Rev. xv. 3, 4; cf. Ps. xxxvi. 6).

II. FACTS AND PRINCIPLES THAT SHOULD WEIGH WITH US IN OUR THOUGHTS UPON GOD'S "TERRIBLE ACTS." It is not possible to find a perfect solution of all the acts

ascribed to God, or even those known, without question, to result from his appointments. But some light shines around the "clouds and darkness," and here and there a rift in the awful covering appears. 1. *There is an awful as well as a mild aspect of the Divine nature.* Christianity is no doubt mildness, tenderness, peace, love—all that is precious to the sorrowing, perplexed spirit. The tendency of some, however, is to overlook the significant fact that all this becomes real to us in virtue of the awful sufferings and death of the Son of God. The fact, and the evident necessity of the fact, for otherwise it would not occur, of his unutterable woes is perhaps the most stupendous of all terrible acts known by man. There was the love that gave him for man; yes, and the awful righteousness which had so originally constituted the moral relations of men to a holy God that love could only effect its work through a catastrophe, on which angels must have gazed with perplexity, and possibly pain, greater than any we know when contemplating a ruined Amalek or a world swept by deluge. It is an imperfect Christianity which eliminates the majesty of righteousness in Law. He who said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," is the same who one day will say, "Depart." "These shall go away into everlasting punishment." The "wrath of the Lamb" is as real as his love. 2. *The events which confound our thought are not confined to the Scripture record.* Who shall estimate the pains of death experienced during the succession of catastrophes incident to the history of our globe? It is probable that the number of Amalekites who fell under the judgment of God was less than the sum of young and old who in one day experience the "pains of death" by the ordination of God. The destruction caused by the deluge, the fire on Sodom, the waters on the Egyptians, is not greater in the number of lives cut off than what befell the thousands cut off by events not mentioned in the Bible. What though the events—the sweeping calamities of famine, plague, earthquake, and flood, and the daily sufferings and death of thousands of young and old—be the outcome of law? God is the Author of that law, and, therefore, the events are in a significant sense his, as truly as were the ruin of Sodom and the doom of the Amalekites. No doubt the sum of enjoyment in the lives of creatures cut off by catastrophes was far in excess of the sum of misery experienced in the cutting of them off, and so a philosopher can still rest in the benevolence of God. Sudden destruction is not identical with a whole existence given up only to anguish. 3. *So far as we can see, the great woes that come by ordinary law and by special command are alike subordinate to an ulterior issue.* Although we speak of some events occurring by the action of natural law,—*e.g.* earthquakes, floods, famines, and plagues,—yet those in which the specific command appears are also according to law. The difference lies in the fact of the Divine origin of the arrangement which issues in destruction being brought out and emphasised. The laws that work ruin in fire and tempest and flood are subordinate to the higher laws involved in the perfect economy of the world. Laws involving incidental disasters subserve the conservation of the whole system of which they are a part. The laws which bring destruction to men who have sinned, and because they have sinned, are subordinate to the moral laws that govern man's relation to God. They are so inter-related, in these instances, as to be parts of one great system, and to subserve the final supremacy of the law of righteousness on which the health and well-being of the world depend. It is a Divine ordination, and is incorporated with the physical and mental constitution of man, that the sin of the fathers shall be visited, not to the exclusion from woe of the parent, but intensifying it, on the third and fourth generation. We see this law at work every day. Awful as it is, we can even now see its value as subservient to the righteousness which alone makes men blessed; for it is a most potent check to vice. Irrespective of their own immoral condition, the cutting off of the Amalekites for the sin of their ancestors is analogous to the shortened lives, the wretched health, the filthy poverty, and other miseries which are the inevitable lot of the offspring of the desperately vicious; and this for ulterior issues. 4. *Nations have no posthumous existence.* For individuals judgment is often reserved till another life. Nations, if visited with judgment at all, must suffer here. In the instruction of the individual, the fact of the coming punishment of the individual sinner bears an important part as a deterrent. In the instruction of nations as such, the signal and conspicuous punish-

ment of a people also plays an important part. This use of national judgments is constantly recognised in the language of Scripture. "The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations" (Isa. lii. 10). "Put them in fear, O Lord, that the nations may know themselves to be but men" (Ps. ix. 20). At the same time the judgments which on earth come on nations *as such* do not necessarily foreclose hope to the young and innocent among them of a personal salvation from the woe due to the personally guilty in another life. 5. *God is the only true Judge of the actual demerits of a guilty nation.* We cannot rightly estimate the intrinsic evil even of our own personal sins. "The Judge of all the earth" must decide what is appropriate punishment for national crime; for he only knows the degree of enmity in the minds of Sodomites and Amalekites. None but he can see the intricate bearings of their sin and of their continued existence as a people. He also knows best what blessed deterrent influence will arise to mankind from the conspicuous character of the judgment executed. 6. *The means by which judgment is executed appear to be determined by conditions known to God.* Judgment works inwardly through the conscience and the mental faculties in general. They bear the curse of the sin committed. It also works externally by the pressure against the sinner of the order of nature, which is in league with righteousness, and ultimately makes "the way of transgressors hard." Nations have not a very lively conscience. The force of Divine judgments usually comes from without. The instrumentality used is evidently connected with the actual presence of forces which, acting in a natural way under the preordained direction of the Omniscient, become "his arm." Doubtless there were physical conditions of earth and atmosphere which rendered destruction by a deluge both natural and yet conspicuously of God. The Sodomites were destroyed not by water, nor slow plague, nor famine, but by the natural combustible materials close at hand. The Amalekites were not left to die out by internal anarchy, or famine, or pestilence, but were given up to the action of that international hostility which was as real an element of destruction close at hand as was the volcanic force at Sodom. He who in his vast prevision, seeing the co-existence of the vices of antediluvians with certain fluvial conditions of a portion of the earth, and the co-existence of the sin of Sodom with certain volcanic conditions, used them for this purpose, may have also given full freedom to the play of national sentiment in the minds of Israel co-existing at that juncture with the fit time for the execution of a purpose to obliterate a guilty nation. Had pestilence or earthquake carried them off, it would have been God's act as truly as when the soldiers of Saul were the executioners of a decree. The employment of an executioner gives no right, but the reverse, to others to go and do the same. 7. *The form of punishment on communities under the Old Testament dispensation is evidently suggestive of the danger of antagonism to Christ.* The sin of Amalek was that of deliberate attempt to destroy the people of God (Exod. xvii. 8—16; Deut. xxv. 17—19). That means to prevent the realisation of salvation in the "seed of Abraham." If Amalek knew, as is certainly possible, the lofty claims of Israel, the crime was most fearful. That in the mind of God and of Israel such was the nature of the sin is seen in the discrimination made in favour of the Kenites because they showed kindness to Israel (ver. 6). It is at all events clear that God would have men learn that it was the sin of obstructing his purposes of mercy for mankind that was so obnoxious in his sight. The terrible *national* destruction which this sin brought on is a clear intimation of the "destruction from the presence of the Lord" which must come on the *individuals* who set themselves in antagonism to Christ and his purposes of mercy to the world. A more terrible sin than that cannot be conceived; a more terrible act of judgment cannot be imagined than that which will come when Christ shall say, "Depart from me, ye cursed" (Matt. xxv. 41). "It is a fearful thing," even under the gospel dispensation, "to fall into the hands of the living God" after a life of deliberate antagonism to the very Saviour he has sent to redeem us. Although, therefore, there may be much in the recorded "terrible acts" of God which weighs on our spirit and demands of us reverence and humility, still we are not without some gleams of light to sustain our faith both in the sacred records and the righteousness which never fails.

General lessons:—1. We see how judgment does surely come, though for genera-

tions it seems to linger. 2. It becomes us to inquire whether we by any conduct of ours are impeding the march of God's people. 3. We see how God remembers, and causes his servants to remember, acts of kindness rendered to the weary on their way to the promised rest. 4. It is a painful duty to have to be executors of God's judgments; yet when men in national and domestic affairs are really called to it, let them subordinate personal sentiment to solemn duty. 5. In all our painful thoughts over the woes that come on the universe, involving the young and old, let us seek grace to "be still," and to wait for the passing away of the night and the coming of the light that shall turn weeping into joy; for it will come.

Vers. 8—11.—*The limits of patience.* The facts are—1. Saul, in disobedience to the command of God, spares Agag and the best of the spoil. 2. God declares to Samuel that he can endure with Saul as king no longer. 3. Samuel, in his grief, cries unto God all night. It is never said that God changes his purpose absolutely. Where promises are given conditional on conduct they are revoked when conduct fails. We cannot ascribe human feelings to God; yet it is only by the analogy of human feelings that we can know anything of the mind of God. The setting aside from kingly office of Saul was an act of the Divine mind conformable with the original purpose of making him king, since the condition of permanence had not been fulfilled. Saul had been borne with so long; now he is to be borne with no longer. Patience yields to judgment.

I. THERE IS A LIMIT TO DIVINE PATIENCE. Patience bears relation to wrong-doing, or the sufferance of ill. In God it relates to the restraint he puts on himself in the presence of that which merits his displeasure. That there is such a limit to Divine patience is clear. 1. *The language of Scripture indicates it.* The heart of God is represented as being under pressure of a moral force which can scarcely be resisted. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?" (Hosea xi. 8). The retrospect of the past brings into view the overpowering considerations which withheld good and allowed calamity to come. "He should have fed them with the finest of the wheat" (Ps. lxxxi. 16). "O that my people had hearkened unto me!" (*ibid.* ver. 13). The persistence of men in sin, despite all counsel and mercy, raises the question of the length of time during which the hand of justice can be stayed. "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation?" (Num. xiv. 27). A reference to love, tenderness, and care is set in sad contrast with the doom which the ingratitude so long endured is about to bring (Matt. xxiii. 37, 38). 2. *Recorded facts illustrate it.* The vices of the antediluvians were long endured, and it was after the Spirit had striven long with men, and they had refused the warnings of Noah, that patience yielded to the execution of judgment (1 Pet. iii. 20). The repeated warnings given to Pharaoh reveal a patience which terminated in the overthrow in the Red Sea. Patience was "grieved" with the perverse generation in the wilderness, but grief gave place to a "wrath" which barred their entrance into rest (Heb. iii. 9—12). God endured long with some of the seven Churches in Asia, but at last judgment came, and the candlesticks were removed from their place. 3. The *close of the Christian dispensation in a day of judgment* is the most awful illustration of the limit to God's patience. The plain teaching of that great event is that here men have time to repent and obtain through Christ all that will qualify for a perfect life—that for the term of our earthly life God bears with our sins and provocations, and proves by thousands of favours that he "is slow to anger;" but that the end of all this must come, and judgment on the whole life ensue. His long-suffering is great. But "it is appointed to men once to die, and after this the judgment" (Heb. ix. 27).

II. THE GROUND OF THE LIMIT OF GOD'S PATIENCE. The yielding of patience to judgment in the case of Saul was on the occasion of his clear and deliberate breach of the command (vers. 1—3, 8, 9), and this too after other opportunities of obedience had been abused. But the question arises how it is that a certain degree or persistence in wrong is the occasion of the cessation of patience. There is a vague impression in some minds that because God is perfectly tender and loving his patience need and ought never to fail. This kind of thinking springs from very defective views of the character of God and of his relation to a moral order. It may not be possible for us to give a perfect *rationale* of Divine procedure; but there is per-

haps light enough to indicate the wisdom and goodness of even a limit to God's patience. 1. The *privileges of responsible beings imply a probation for their use.* The primary notion of a responsible being is one blessed with privilege, and able to use or abuse it at will. But men are constituted so as to derive much wisdom from experience, and hence failure in the use of privilege, in a few instances, may possibly create an experience that will constrain to a more careful observance of duty when newly imposed. Life is full of helps to obedience as well as of hindrances. But as time is required for the development of responsibility, so it is obvious that the possession of privilege involves a limit to the period for use or abuse. Government without a reckoning would be no government. Everlasting patience is inconsistent with responsibility attendant on privilege. 2. In a *moral order, where beings are closely inter-related, breach of duty affects others.* Saul's conduct could not end in himself. He, as fount of authority and influence, would damage his people by every act of disobedience to the Divine command. The repeated sins of men are so many attacks on the common welfare of the universe. God "desireth not the death of a sinner," but that he should "turn and live;" but he is the Guardian of right, of good, of peace, and of all that enters into the true welfare of the entire universe, and hence there is a love most deep and a wisdom unsearchable in not allowing the wilful sinner any longer to be exempt from the restraints which judgment imposes. 3. *Repeated acts of disobedience reveal to God a state of mind which will not benefit by further favours.* Every act of sin brings man lower in the moral scale. But while mercy and gentleness afford the sinner every possible chance to recover what is lost, it is possible for the habit of sin to gain such power over the entire man that to the eye of the Eternal his last chance of improving additional opportunities is clean gone. Samuel's distress at the abandonment of Saul (ver. 11) was natural, and if his cry all night was intercession, it was only what might be expected of a good man who knows only in part. The intercession of Moses (Num. xiv. 15—23) was for pardon, and was partially successful. Samuel's would appear to have been for pardon in the form of Saul's continuance in the kingly office with the usual Divine sanctions. It is, however, obvious that the judgment of God was based on his perfect knowledge that the heart of Saul was too far gone to be trusted any further. It is an awful fact that a man may, by transgression, work himself into such a condition that all is lost on him, and will be lost. God, knowing this, may cease to be long-suffering, and reject him as "nigh unto cursing" (Heb. vi. 6—8). 4. *The holiness of God requires vindication.* Every pang which followed Saul's earlier sins and every rebuke from Samuel was some vindication of the holiness of God. The private and subjective recognition by the sinner of an insulted holiness is not all that the government of God requires. He is a jealous God; he will be honoured in the eyes of all people. Continued long-suffering followed by judgment renders holiness more conspicuous than when judgment forestalls long-suffering.

General lessons:—1. We should never forget that every day affords us new opportunities of keeping God's commands. 2. It will repay the effort if we endeavour to form an estimate of the privileges conferred on us in the past, and the extent to which we have drawn on the patience of God. 3. If we are deliberately disobedient in any office of trust, we may some day look for a grave judgment. 4. We are not always competent to see the wisdom of God's severity, and may possibly pray for what is not to be granted.

Vers. 12—23.—*The sin of rebellion.* The facts are—1. Saul, having raised a monument in honour of his victory, meets Samuel with a pious salutation, as though all were well. 2. On being reminded of the presence of spoil, Saul explains by saying that it was spared for the worship of God in sacrifice. 3. Samuel, referring to the instructions received from God, presses home upon him the fact of his guilt in disobeying the Lord. 4. Saul, in response, maintains that substantially he has obeyed the voice of the Lord, but that the people spared the spoil for a religious purpose. 5. Samuel, therefore, urges the great truth that rigid obedience to God is the primary and essential duty, without which all else is sinful, and that rebellion is a sin as heinous as those which men admit to be most vile. 6. Samuel declares to Saul his

rejection of God. The important interview between the disobedient king and the prophet of God brings out several great truths.

I. MAN'S PREFERENCE OF HIS OWN WILL TO THE CLEARLY-DECLARED WILL OF GOD IS POSITIVE REBELLION AGAINST THE SUPREME AUTHORITY. Saul's sin was known to himself as a preference of his own course in dealing with the Amalekites. He thought it best to modify the command in its detailed execution. No doubt there were reasons which seemed to render such a course useful. It is clear that he did not realise all that it involved, though that was his own fault. To him as a king, whose word was supposed to be law to his subjects, there is something very appropriate in the prophet assuring him that this preference of his own will, however plausible the reasons for it, was not a simple weakness or fault, but nothing less than *rebellion*—a term of fearful significance under a properly-constituted government. The preference was virtually a setting up a counter-authority, impeaching the wisdom of God. Saul is not the only one to whom God has plainly declared his will. More or less he has spoken to all men (Rom. i. 20). To those blessed with the revealed will as contained in the Scriptures he has given commandments as precise and emphatic as that to Saul to destroy the Amalekites. Every believer in Christianity knows as well as he knows anything that God *commands* him to repent of sin (Acts xvii. 30); to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation from the curse of sin (John xx. 31; Acts xvi. 30, 31; 1 John v. 10—13); to exterminate all evil—all Amalekites—from the soul (Rom. viii. 13; 1 Thess. iv. 3; 1 Pet. i. 16); and to submit heart, will, and intellect to the authority of Christ (Matt. xi. 29; John v. 23; Acts x. 36; Phil. ii. 10, 11). Now is it not a fact that men often prefer not to do this? They do not dispute in formal terms the authority of God, any more than did Saul; yet for reasons known to themselves they prefer *not* to repent of sin, *not* to commit themselves to Christ, *not* to cast out sinful desires, *not* to bow in all things to the yoke of the Saviour. It is possible that reasons may be forthcoming to, at least, show that there is no violent antagonism. But when carefully looked at it is nothing but the positive setting up of man's will as a better, more-to-be-desired will than God's; it is positive rebellion of a subject against a king—a setting at nought of the supreme authority of the universe.

II. MAN'S ESTIMATE OF THE SIN OF REBELLION IS IN STRIKING CONTRAST WITH GOD'S. Whether Saul was self-persuaded that he had not committed any sin (ver. 13) is, as we shall yet see, doubtful. The probability is that he was conscious of uneasiness, but had no true conception of the enormity of his sin. His feeling was that he had no wish to disown the authority of God, that it was a mere matter of detail, that his general conduct was exemplary, and that he followed the inner light which seemed just then to indicate another way of ultimately and substantially carrying out the command. So do men tone down their sins and regard them as venial. The prophet's words reveal God's estimate of the sin of disobedience. It is *the cardinal sin* (vers. 22, 23). It cuts at the root of all authority. It is the assertion of a power and a wisdom over against the power and wisdom of the Eternal. It makes man a worshipper of himself rather than of God. It ignores the solemn truth that we "cannot serve two masters." It does dishonour to him whose commandments are holy, just, and good. It sows in the moral sphere seeds of evil, which, taking root, must widen the aberration of man from God. It claims for the desires and dim light of a sinful creature a higher value in the determination of actions than is to be attached to the purposes of the All-Perfect. To render its heinous character more clear, the prophet asserts that it *renders useless and even wicked the most solemn acts of worship* (ver. 22; cf. Isa. i. 11—15). No profession of religion; no self-denial in surrender of choice property; no conformity with venerable customs, or obedience in other particulars, will for a moment be accepted in lieu of full and implicit obedience to the clear commands which God lays on man both in relation to himself and mankind. God will have no reserve of our will. Again, to make it more impressive, the prophet assures Saul that this rebellion is in its evil nature *equal to the sins which men are led* by education and custom *to regard as the most abominable and indefensible.* "As the sin of witchcraft, ... as iniquity and idolatry." There are men still who shrink in horror at heathenism and vile arts. Are they prepared to believe that *not* to obey the clear command to repent, to

believe on Christ, to become pure, and to submit in all things to the yoke of Christ, is as dreadful in the sight of God as being an idolater or a vile deceiver? It is this Divine estimate of sin which alone explains the "many stripes" with which they will be punished who, knowing the Lord's will with respect to these matters, nevertheless prefer their own. It will be more tolerable in the day of judgment for Sodom than for some of our day (Matt. xi. 20—24).

III. MAN'S CONDITION AND CONDUCT AFTER DELIBERATE REBELLION IS A REVELATION OF ITS EVIL NATURE. All sin degrades and debases; it prevents clear vision of one's own condition and a true estimate of conduct. Sin is always self-apologetic. It enslaves its victims. The opinion of a morally fallen being on matters of high spiritual import must always be discounted. Men in internal opposition to God are not safe guides in dealing with the loftiest problems of human existence. This general effect of sin is more manifest when a man has, after enjoying great advantages, deliberately preferred his own will to the clear will of God. He then enters into darkness most dense, and the fountain of moral thought and feeling becomes more corrupt. We see this in Saul's subsequent conduct and perverse reasoning with Samuel (vers. 20, 21). Even when conscience began to be aroused by the impressive language of the prophet, he found a subtle evasion in that, as a king, he had done his part in placing Agag at the disposal of Samuel, but that the people were to blame in the matter of the spoil. Thus it is ever. Sin does not end in itself. It by its evil power induces self-complacency, creates ingenious excuses, prompts to observance of outward religious acts, throws blame on circumstances over which there is no control, and even emboldens the soul to argue with the messengers of God.

IV. ONE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCE OF REBELLION IS TO DISQUALIFY FOR SERVICE IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD. Apart from the personal effects of Saul's sin, the relative effect was to unfit him for performing the part to which he had been called in the service of God. He was rejected from being king (ver. 23). God's sanction and blessing were henceforth to be withheld. He was to be king in name only. The life once promising good to Israel was to be unblest and fruitful in sorrows. This result follows from every preference of our own will. We cease to hold the position and exercise the influence of God-made kings (Rev. i. 4, 5) in so far as we fail in perfect execution of the will of the King of kings. It is possible for a man to proceed from step to step in deliberate rebellion till, both on account of his inward moral decay and his pernicious influence, God sets him aside altogether. A pastor, a parent, a professed Christian may thus be practically disowned by Providence. However he may continue to labour in some lower departments, the higher spiritual service of God will cease to be his.

General lessons:—1. It is very dangerous to begin to compare our wishes and plans with the clear will of God; every thought should at once be brought into subjection. 2. Sudden and unusual outbursts of pious zeal may be a sign of an uneasy conscience; steady growth is the proof of reality. 3. The folly of excuses for sin is seen by all except the sinner himself. 4. Sin, when we are exalted to privileges, is doubly base (ver. 17). 5. We must never subordinate what we may call *general* obedience for actual literal obedience to God's will (ver. 20). 6. Participation of others in our sin is no palliation of ours (ver. 21). 7. Property obtained by unholy means is not acceptable to God when laid on his altar for professedly religious purposes (ver. 22). 8. Obedience in matters outside acts of worship is a condition of acceptable worship, but not the ground of our salvation. 9. Deceitfulness, depravity, and idolatry are the true and ruinous characteristics of every act of doing our own pleasure when professedly engaged in doing only the will of God (ver. 23).

Vers. 24—31.—*Conviction of sin not repentance.* The facts are—1. Saul, alleging fear of the people, admits his sin, and seeks Samuel's presence while he worships the Lord. 2. On Samuel refusing and turning away, Saul seizes and rends his garment, which circumstance is used as a sign that so the Lord had rent the kingdom from Saul and given it to another. 3. On being assured that God's purpose was irrevocable, Saul entreats, for the sake of his credit among the people, that Samuel

would join him in an act of worship, to which Samuel complies. The decisive language of the prophet, given in a tone which admitted of no mistake, aroused the slumbering conscience of Saul, and brought about his remarkable pleading for pity and help. We have here the case of a man guilty of a great sin, concerned for its forgiveness, but sternly assured that he shall not have it. The apparent severity of the prophet is not based on any arbitrary decree of God, nor on an unchangeableness in the "Strength of Israel" irrespective of human character and conduct, but upon God's knowledge of Saul's actual condition. The repentance which Saul thinks to be adequate, and which many men would recognise, is known by the Searcher of hearts not to be true repentance, but only a bare conviction of sin, attended with a consequent dread of the outward temporal consequences attached to it, as just indicated by Samuel. *Bare conviction of sin is not true repentance.* Consider—

I. ITS REAL NATURE. Conviction of sin is a matter only of an aroused conscience, brought about by the evidence of facts being set before the understanding and the presence of penalties consequent on the evidence. There was no resisting Samuel's argument. The common understanding saw that a human will in opposition to a Divine was necessarily sin, and the uneasiness of conscience thus naturally aroused was aggravated by the emphatic announcement of a great penalty—loss of the kingdom. The mental operation was that of a pure logical progression from admitted premises to an irresistible conclusion. Conscience does not disturb a man in working out a syllogism in formal logic or a demonstration in mathematics; but it does when the question reasoned on is the man's own conduct. This is the general nature of the conviction of sin which many experience. Here, observe, is an absence of all that fine spiritual discernment which sees in sin essential unholiness, and that corresponding feeling which loathes it because of what it is in the sight of God. There is no change in the spirit towards sin itself, no detestation of the self-preference which rose against the supreme will.

II. ITS MANIFESTATIONS. The manifestation of Saul's conviction of sin is a remarkable illustration of the enormous difference between bare conviction and true repentance. The force of evidence and pressure of penalty extorted the admission, "I have sinned:" yet, owing to the lack of the spirit of repentance, the mere generality of that admission was revealed by the immediate palliation, "I feared the people." Pardon, consisting in the removal of penalty, was the only pardon cared for, and even this was sought by a superstitious trust in the prayers of another. A zealous and prompt observance of some outward act of worship was thought to be a sure means of recovering lost favour. The slightest movement of Samuel indicative of the non-reversal of the penalty only excited a spasmodic dread, without the slightest trace of any changed sentiment towards sin itself. And when no hope of avoiding the penalty remains, the only thought is to break his fall before his elders, and so save some civil advantage. This analysis, expressed in terms suitable to our times, will be found to hold good of multitudes whose conviction of sin is unattended with the spirit of a true repentance. How different the conviction that accompanies true repentance! Then, "I have sinned" has a deep, unutterable meaning. Forgiveness is then not the mere release of life from suffering and loss, but a restoration of the soul to the joy of personal reconciliation with a holy Father. No thought of excuse is ever entertained, but "against thee, and thee only, have I sinned and done this evil," is the sincere confession of a broken and contrite heart. The soul is so filled with self-loathing, and so agonised in being far from God, that it thinks not of punishment and position among men, and can only go direct to God and plead, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." Contrast Simon Magus (Acts viii. 24) and Felix (Acts xxiv. 25; Ps. li.; Luke xv.).

III. ITS CONSEQUENCES. Saul, though convinced of sin, was practically an unchanged man. He was, after his pleading with Samuel, and after Samuel's kindly act of consoling his poor blind heart by joining in worship, as fond of his own self-will as before. No spiritual change being wrought, no remission of penalty was ever possible. On his knowledge of what was Saul's radical evil—a heart out of all sympathy with God's holiness—and of its continuance, did God resolve to provide for Israel another king. The Strength of Israel is not dependent on existing arrangements or human beings for the maintenance of his authority and accomplish-

ment of his purposes. Saul as a king was ruined. His defective conviction was of no avail. It should be urged on all that a mere admission of sin and effort to be free from its punishment are of no avail. Loss of all that is deemed precious *must* ensue. Only repentance of the heart will serve. This is sure to lead away from all false means of deliverance to him who is exalted to give remission of sins.

General lessons:—1. A spirit of blended firmness and kindness should influence us in the discharge of unwelcome duties. 2. We should be careful not to encourage men in their self-delusions. 3. Respect for an office and consideration for social relations should enter into our treatment of offenders.

Vers. 32—35.—*Painful duties.* The facts are—1. Samuel summons Agag into his presence and hews him in pieces. 2. Samuel departs from Saul, and though mourning for him, no longer holds any official connection with him. The effect of Saul's disobedience on the people would have been disastrous were the original command to be in any way evaded; and, therefore, though it was no part of the prophet's ordinary functions to act as executioner, Samuel so far deviated from his usual course, and put his feelings under restraint, as to slay the captive king. There could be no mistake of the imperativeness of the Divine command when the people saw Samuel perform on the body of the king an act symbolical of the utter destruction of the enemies of God. The act itself, as also the occasion of it, must have given pain to the prophet's mind. The subsequent suspension of relations with Saul was the natural result and formal expression of God's rejection of him. Any other line of conduct would be open to serious misinterpretation. Samuel naturally was grieved in thus setting his ban on one for whom he had taken such pains, and in whose successful career he himself was deeply interested. But duty is above personal feeling.

I. HUMAN IMPERFECTION GIVES OCCASION FOR THE DISCHARGE OF PAINFUL DUTIES. Samuel is not the only one who has had to discharge solemn duties with a sorrowful heart. 1. *There are instances recorded in Scripture.* (1) *Of men.* It was not without pain that Moses broke away from the associations of the home of Pharaoh's daughter, where he had from childhood been treated with consideration and kindness. Nathan could not but put constraint on his feelings when he exposed the sin of one for whom he had cherished the profoundest respect (2 Sam. xii. 7—14). See the case of the apostles (Acts v. 1—10; ix. 23—29; Rom. ix. 1—3; Phil. iii. 5—8). (2) *Of Christ.* It was as much beside his usual course as for Samuel to slay Agag when the gentle Saviour made a scourge and drove the money-changers from the temple (John ii. 15). There was evident sorrow of heart running through the terrible denunciations and forebodings which duty required him to utter over Capernaum, Jerusalem, and the scribes and Pharisees. His leaving Nazareth and never returning, after the cruel rejection of his word, must have been, considering his associations with the place, a duty as painful almost as the revelation to his disciples that one of their number would betray him (Luke iv. 28—30; xxii. 21—23). And may we not say that it will not be without a tone of sadness, more marked than any that entered into Samuel's demand for Agag, that Christ, the great Judge, will on the day of judgment say to those who once heard his call of mercy and scorned it, "Depart from me." 2. *There are instances recurring in modern life.* On some is imposed the sorrowful duty of rebuking friends for disgraceful deeds, or of administering chastisements which cause more pain to the chastiser than to the chastised, or of enforcing with bleeding heart the rigorous rules of Church discipline upon persons once honoured and beloved. Samuel is but one of a host who have to assert Divine authority, moral order, and the interests of the community at the cost of much personal suffering.

II. SUCH DISCHARGE OF PAINFUL DUTIES IS AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE SUPREMACY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. The emotional element is strong in life. Personal considerations have, wisely and usefully, great weight in regulating actions. But it was profound regard for right that enabled Samuel to rule every feeling of his nature and subordinate it to the ends of justice, and therefore of benevolence. The same is seen in every kindred instance. It is indicative of a healthful moral condition where regard for right is dominant. Love, tenderness, pity are useful, powerful elements in a moral character; but they cease to be strictly moral when they operate as mere

feelings apart from the guidance and control of righteousness. This looking high above personal relations to the requirements of a universal equity is the sublimest form of conduct.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—9. (GIBEAH.)—*A probationary commission.* 1. *The fidelity of Saul* to the principle of his appointment, viz. obedience to the will of Jehovah, was once and again put to the test. He had been tried by inaction, delay, and distress, which became the occasion of his being tempted to distrust, and the use of his power for his own safety, in opposition to the word of God (ch. xiii. 11). He had been tried by enterprise, encouragement, and the expectation of brilliant success, which became the occasion of his being tempted to presumption in entering rashly upon his own ways, and adopting "foolish and hurtful devices" for conquest and glory, independently of the counsel of God (ch. xiv. 19, 24). He must now be tried by victory, power, and prosperity. Having chastised his enemies on every side (ch. xiv. 47), his assured success becomes the final test of his character and fitness to rule over Israel. 2. *The temptations of Saul* may be compared with those of others, and especially with the three temptations of Christ (Matt. iv. 1—10; Luke iv. 1—12), which are "an epitome of all the temptations, moral and spiritual, which the devil has contrived for man from the day of his first sin unto this very hour." The antecedents in both cases, the circumstances under which the temptations occurred, the principles to which they appealed, the inducements which they presented, the means afforded for their resistance, and their result, are all suggestive. Where the first king of Israel failed the last King of Israel prevailed, and whilst Saul was rejected, Jesus was perfected, and "crowned with glory and honour" (Luke xxii. 28, 29; Heb. ii. 10, 18). 3. *The commission of Saul* to execute judgment upon the Amalekites was brought to him by Samuel, whose authority as the prophet of the Lord he never called in question, however much he may have acted contrary to his directions. After Saul exhibited a determination to have his own way, Samuel seems to have exerted little influence over him. At the battle of Michmash the high priest Ahiah was his only spiritual counsellor. It became more and more evident that he wished to establish a "kingdom of this world," like the surrounding heathen kingdoms, in opposition to the design of God concerning Israel, which the prophet represented and sought to carry into effect; and it was inevitable that, with such contrary aims, a conflict should arise between them. "The great prophet's voice brings him a new commission from his God, and preludes it by a note of very special warning: 'The Lord sent me,' &c. This tone of adjuration surely tells all. It speaks the prophet's judgment of his character, of prayers and intercessions, of days of watching and nights of grief for one he loved so well, as he saw growing on that darkening countenance the deepening lines of wilfulness. The prophet sees that it will be a crisis in that life-history with which by God's own hand his own had been so strangely entwined." The commission was—

I. DIVINELY APPOINTED (ver. 1). 1. When a communication enjoining the performance of any action comes *unquestionably* from God, it should be unhesitatingly obeyed. His authority is supreme, his power is infinite, and his commands are right and good. It does not follow that everything he directs men to do in one age is obligatory on all others in every age. But some things he has undoubtedly enjoined upon us all. 2. When such a communication is made with *peculiar directness* and solemnity, it should be obeyed with peculiar attention and circumspection, for important issues are involved in its faithful or faithless observance. "If thou hast failed in other things, take heed that thou fail not in this." 3. When *special privilege* and honour have been bestowed upon men by God they are placed under special obligations of obedience to him. "Though thou wast little in thine own sight," &c. (ver. 17).

II. JUSTLY DESERVED by those against whom it was directed (ver. 2)—"the sinners the Amalekites" (ver. 18). 1. Some sins are marked by an unusual degree of criminality and *guilt*. Like the people of Israel, the Amalekites were descendants of Abraham (Amalek being the grandson of Esau—Gen. xxxvi. 12, 16); but they

attacked them at Rephidim on their way through the desert, and strove to annihilate them (Exod. xvii. 8—16); they lay in wait for them secretly and subtly, and smote the hindermost, the feeble, the faint and weary, and "feared not God" (Deut. xxv. 17—19). Their conduct was ungenerous, unprovoked, cruel, and utterly godless. 2. Special sins are *perpetuated* in families and nations and increase in intensity. The Amalekites were hereditary, open, and deadly foes of Israel (Num. xiv. 45; Judges iii. 13; vi. 3). They lived by plunder, and were guilty of unsparing bloodshed (ver. 33). Some fresh act of cruelty may have shown that they were "ripe for the judgment of extermination." 3. Sinners long spared and persisting in flagrant transgression bring upon themselves sudden, signal, and overwhelming *destruction*. If judgment is pervaded and limited by mercy, mercy has also limits beyond which it does not pass, and they who despise it must perish. Men may forget what God has spoken (Exod. xvii. 14); but he remembers it, and fulfils his word at the proper time. "Injuries done to the people of God will sooner or later be reckoned for." Impenitent sinners "treasure up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath" (Rom. ii. 5). It accumulates like a gathering thunder-cloud or an Alpine avalanche (Luke xi. 50, 51), and it frequently comes upon them by ways and means such as they themselves have chosen. The Amalekites put others to the sword and spared not; they must themselves be put to the sword and not be spared. The moral improvement of inveterate sinners by their continuance on earth is sometimes hopeless, and their removal by Divine judgment is necessary for the moral improvement and general welfare of other people with whom they are connected, and teaches valuable lessons to succeeding ages.

III. FULLY EXPRESSED (vers. 3, 18). The will of God is made known in different forms and with various degrees of clearness, and some men, whilst acknowledging their obligation to obey it, have sought to justify themselves in the neglect of particular duties on the ground of their not having been fully directed. But this could not be the case with Saul, whose commission was—1. *Imperative;* so that there could be no excuse for evasion. "Go and smite Amalek." 2. *Plain;* so that its meaning could not be mistaken, except by the most inattentive and negligent of men. "Utterly destroy (devote to destruction). Fight against them until they be consumed." 3. *Minute;* so that no room was left for the exercise of discretion as to the manner or extent of its fulfilment. It required simple, literal obedience, such as is now required in many things. "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it."

IV. ZEALOUSLY COMMENCED (vers. 4, 5, 7). The "journey on which he was sent" (ver. 18) was entered upon by Saul with something of the same energy and zeal which he had formerly displayed against the Ammonites, but the deterioration which had since taken place in his character by the possession of power soon appeared. 1. The work to which men are called in the way of duty sometimes bears a close affinity to their *natural temperament* and disposition. 2. Men may *appear* to others, and even to themselves, to be very *zealous for the Lord* whilst they are only doing what is naturally agreeable to themselves. "Come with me," said Jehu, "and see my zeal for the Lord" (2 Kings x. 16, 31). "But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel." Saul of Tarsus, like Saul of Gibeah, appeared to be fighting for God when he was really fighting against him. 3. *The real nature of their zeal* is manifested when the requirements of God come into collision with their convenience, pleasure, ambition, or self-interest. Then the hidden spring is laid bare.

V. UNFAITHFULLY EXECUTED (vers. 8, 9). "Spared Agag, and the best of the sheep," &c., "and would not destroy them." "He hath turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments" (ver. 11). 1. There may be *the performance of many things* along with the neglect or refusal to perform others of equal or of greater importance. Saul was "a type of those who are willing to do something as against the world and on behalf of Christ, but by no means willing to do all that they ought to do." Herod "did many things, and heard John gladly" (Mark vi. 20), but he would not give up his ruling passion. 2. Disobedience in one thing often manifests *the spirit of disobedience* in all things. It shows that the heart and will are not surrendered to the Lord, and without such a surrender all else is worthless. In Saul's sparing Agag and the best of the sheep, &c, we have "a melancholy

example of sparing sins and evils that should be slain, and sheltering and harbouring them under false pretences by unworthy pleas and excuses." 3. *The love of self* is the supreme motive of those who refuse to obey God. Saul was actuated by covetousness (ver. 19), worldly-mindedness (Matt. iv. 9; 1 John ii. 15, 16), and vainglorious pride, which are only different forms of the love of self. "Behold, he set him up a monument, and is gone about (as in a triumphal procession), and passed on, and gone down to Gilgal" (ver. 12), intending probably to make a display of the royal captive for his own glory; perhaps to make him a tributary prince and a source of profit. "Pride arising from the consciousness of his own strength led him astray to break the command of God. His sin was open rebellion against the sovereignty of the God of Israel; for he no longer desired to be the medium of the sovereignty of Jehovah, or the executor of the commands of the God-king, but simply wanted to reign according to his own arbitrary will" (Keil).—D.

Vers. 5, 6. (THE WILDERNESS OF JUDAH.)—*Come out from among them.* The Kenites were descendants of Abraham (Gen. xxv. 2; Num. x. 29; Judges i. 16) like the Amalekites, but they were unlike the latter in character and conduct. Many of them were incorporated with Israel; others, whilst standing in friendly relationship to them, lived in close contact with "the sinners the Amalekites." They may be regarded as representing those who are "not far from the kingdom of God," but imperil their salvation by evil companionship. In this message (sent by Saul, perhaps, according to the direction of Samuel) we notice—

I. THE PERIL OF UNGODLY ASSOCIATION. It is not every association with irreligious persons indeed that is to be deprecated (1 Cor. v. 10), but only such as is unnecessary, voluntary, very intimate, and formed with a view to personal convenience, profit, or pleasure rather than to their improvement (Gen. xiii. 12). This—1. Destroys the good which is possessed. 2. Conforms to the evil which prevails (Ps. i. 1; Rev. xviii. 4). 3. Involves in the doom which is predicted—certain, terrible, and imminent. The *ban* has been pronounced (1 Cor. xvi. 22; 2 Thess. i. 9), and it will ere long be executed. "A companion of fools shall be destroyed" (Prov. xiii. 20).

II. THE OPPORTUNITY OF EFFECTUAL ESCAPE, which—1. Is afforded by the mercy of God, of which the message spoken by man is the expression. 2. Shows the value which he sets upon even the least measure of kindness and piety. "Ye showed kindness," &c. (ver. 6). Moral goodness, like moral evil (ver. 2), tends to perpetuate itself. God honours it by the blessing which he causes to follow in its track. He desires its preservation and perfection, and hence he says, "Destroy it not" (Isa. lxv. 8). 3. Offers a certain, great, and immediate benefit. "Come out from among them and be separate, saith the Lord, and I will receive you" (2 Cor. vi. 14—18).

III. THE NECESSITY OF IMMEDIATE SEPARATION. 1. This requires decision, self-denial, sacrifice, and effort. 2. Nothing else can avail (Ephes. v. 11). 3. And every moment's delay increases danger. "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain" (Gen. xix. 17). "Be wise to-day, 'tis madness to defer."—D.

Vers. 10, 11. (RAMAH.)—*Samuel's intercession for Saul.* The recorded instances of Samuel's praying are of an intercessory character (ch. vii. 9; viii. 6, 21; xii. 18, 23). The last of them is his intercession for Saul. He appears to have been told by God in a dream of the result of the probationary commission which had been given to the king. Agitated and distressed, and not yet clearly perceiving it to be the fixed purpose of God (ver. 29) that Saul should no longer reign over Israel as his recognised servant and vicegerent, Samuel gave himself unto prayer, if thereby he might avert the calamity. Respecting his intercession, consider—

I. ON WHOSE BEHALF IT WAS MADE. Chiefly, doubtless, on behalf of Saul, though not without regard to the nation, on which his rejection seemed likely to produce a disastrous effect. Intercession should be made for *individuals* as well as communities. "Satan hath desired to have you," said he who is the perfect example of intercessory prayer, "but I have prayed for *thee*" (Luke xxii. 32). There were

many things in Saul calculated to call it forth. 1. *His good qualities*, exalted position, and intimate relationship to the prophet. 2. *His grievous sin* (vers. 11, 19, 23), exceeding his previous transgressions. 3. *His great danger*—falling from his high dignity, failing to accomplish the purpose of his appointment, losing the favour and help of Jehovah, and sinking into confirmed rebellion and complete ruin. "It repenteth me that I have made Saul king; *for* he is turned back from following me" (vers. 11, 35). When a change takes place in the conduct of man toward God, as from obedience to disobedience, it necessitates a *change* of God's dealings toward him (otherwise he would not be unchangeably holy), and this "change of his dispensation" or economy (Theodoret) is called his repentance. It is not, however, the same in all respects as repentance in men. No change in him can arise, as in them, from unforeseen events or more perfect knowledge, seeing that "his understanding is infinite;" yet, on the other hand, as in their repentance there is sorrow, so also in his—sorrow over those who turn from him, oppose his gracious purposes, and bring misery upon themselves (Gen. vi. 6; Judges x. 16); and of this Divine sorrow the tears and agonies of Christ are the most affecting revelation.

II. IN WHAT SPIRIT IT WAS MADE. 1. *Holy anger* against sin, and against the sinner in so far as he has yielded himself to its power, arising from sympathy with God and zeal for his honour (Ps. cxix. 126, 136, 158). 2. *Deep sorrow* over the sinner, in his essential personality, his loss and ruin; not unmingled with disappointment at the failure of the hopes entertained concerning him. Sorrow over sinners is a proof of love to them. 3. *Intense desire* for the sinner's repentance, forgiveness, and salvation. "And he cried unto the Lord all night" with a loud and piercing cry, and in prolonged entreaty. The old home at Ramah, which had been sanctified by parental prayers and his own incessant supplications, never witnessed greater fervour. Wonderful was the spirit of intercession which he possessed. Well might the Psalmist, in calling upon men to worship the Lord, single him out as pre-eminent among them that "call upon his name" (Ps. xcix. 6). But still more wonderful was the spirit which was displayed by the great Intercessor, who often spent the night in prayer, and whose whole life was a continued act of intercession, closing with the cry, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" Would that more of the same spirit were possessed by all his disciples!

> "We are told
> How much the prayers of righteous men avail;
> And yet 'tis strange how very few believe
> These blessed words, or act as were they true."

III. TO WHAT EXTENT IT AVAILED. 1. *Not to the full extent he desired.* Saul did not repent, neither was he exempted from the sentence of rejection. The relation of the sovereignty of God to the will of men is inexplicable. How far the Almighty may, by special and extraordinary grace, subdue its opposition we cannot tell. But he has conditioned the general exercise of his power by the gift of freedom and responsibility. He does not destroy or recall the gift; and the power of human resistance to the Divine will is a fearful endowment. There are stages of human guilt which would be followed by the wrath of God "though Moses and Samuel stood before him" (Jer. xv. 1). "There is a sin unto death; I do not say that he shall pray for it" (1 John v. 16). "The sin, namely, of a wilful, obstinate, Heaven-daring opposition to the ways of God and the demands of righteousness, and which, under a dispensation of grace, can usually belong only to such as have grieved the Spirit of God till he has finally left them—a sin, therefore, which lies beyond the province of forgiveness" (Fairbairn, 'Typology,' ii. 341). 2. *Yet, doubtless, to obtain many benefits* for the transgressor, in affording him space for repentance and motives to it. Who shall say how many blessings came upon Saul in answer to Samuel's intercession for him? 3. *And to calm the soul* of him who prays, to make known the will of God to him more clearly, to bring him into more perfect acquiescence with it, and to strengthen him for the duty that lies before him. "And he arose early to meet Saul in the morning" (ver. 12).

1. How great is the privilege and honour of intercessory prayer. 2. Since we know not who are beyond the reach of Divine grace, we should never cease to intercede

for any. 3. If intercession does not avail to obtain all that it seeks, it does not fail to obtain invaluable blessings.—D.

Vers. 12—21. (GILGAL.)—*Excuses for disobedience.* 1. Samuel met Saul at *Gilgal*. It was a sacred spot, and a well-known scene of important events in former time and in more recent years. There the kingdom had been established (ch. xi. 15), and Saul "had solemnly pledged him and the people to unconditional obedience." There also he had been previously rebuked and warned (ch. xiii. 13). And thither he repaired ostensibly to offer the sacrifices of thanksgiving for victory, really to make a boastful display and confirm his worldly power. How strangely and intimately are particular places associated with the moral life of individuals and nations! 2. The interview (like the former) appears to have been held in *private*. The sentence of rejection was heard by Saul alone, and long kept by him as a dreadful secret. Yet it was probably surmised by many from his breach with Samuel, and was gradually revealed by the course of events. The sacred history was written from a theocratic point of view, and indicates the principles of which those events were the outcome. 3. The *appearance* of Samuel was an arraignment of the disobedient king before the tribunal of Divine justice. Blinded in part and self-deceived, he made an ostentatious profession of regard for the prophet (ver. 13), and with the assumption of perfect innocence and praiseworthy obedience uttered "the Pharisee's boast"—"I have performed the commandment of Jehovah." His subsequent confession proved the insincerity of his declaration. His disobedience was crowned with *falsehood* and *hypocrisy*. When formally called to account (ver. 14), he forthwith began to justify himself and make excuses for his conduct, such as transgressors are commonly accustomed to make. They were—

I. EXCEEDINGLY VARIED. He—1. Attributes to *other persons* what cannot be denied to have occurred, and seeks to transfer to them the blame which is due to himself. "*They* have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen" (ver. 15). So spoke Adam and Eve at the commencement of human transgression and human excuses (Gen. iii. 13). On a former occasion, when desirous of having his own way, he had not been so considerate of their wishes or so compliant (ch. xiv. 24, 39, 45). "If this excuse were false, where was the integrity and honour of the monarch? If it were true, where was his devotion and obedience? And whether true or false, how utterly unworthy did it prove him of continuing the servant and viceroy of the King of Israel" (Le Bas). 2. Protests *good intentions*, and even religious and commendable motives. "The people spared the best to sacrifice unto the Lord *thy* God;" whereby he seeks to gain the approval of the prophet, but betrays his own inward alienation from the Lord, for he cannot truly say "my God" (Matt. xxiii. 14); and whilst he has regard to the outward ceremonies of the law, he knows not (or wilfully disregards it) that by the law the sacrifices of "devoted" things were altogether prohibited (Deut. xiii. 15; Num. xxxi. 48). 3. *Professes his faithful obedience.* "And the rest we have utterly destroyed." Again and again he declares his innocence (vers. 20, 21), and insinuates, that instead of being reproved by the prophet, he ought to be commended by him for his zeal. 4. *Asserts complete readiness to meet* whatever charge may be preferred against him. "Say on" (ver. 16). "See how sin is multiplied by sin. The transgressor of God's command stands forth as the accuser of the people, the speaker of gross falsehood. The spirit of disobedience evoked as with the rod of an enchanter those other agents of iniquity from their lurking-place; and lo! they sprang forth to do his bidding. Verily their name was legion, for they were many" (Anderson, 'Cloud of Witnesses,' ii. 350).

II. FAITHFULLY EXPOSED. Samuel's fidelity, moral courage, and dignity, mingled with something of bitter disappointment and sorrowful resentment, are specially noteworthy. He—1. *Points to incontestable fact.* "What is this bleating of sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of oxen which I hear?" (ver. 14). It flatly contradicts thy statement, reveals thy sin, and exposes thy excuses. Between it and thy duty there is a contradiction which no explanation can remove. Sin cannot be wholly concealed. "God knows how to bring it to light, however great the care with which it may be cloaked." He was convicted of it by the voices of the animals which

had spared. And "it is no new thing for the plausible pretensions and protestations of hypocrites to be contradicted and disproved by the most plain and undeniable evidences." 2. *Checks the multiplication of vain excuses.* "Stay" (ver. 16); proceed no further in thy endeavour to justify thyself. "And I will tell thee," &c. When the voice of truth, of conscience, and of God speaks, it must perforce silence all other voices. 3. *Recalls the requirements* of the Divine commission (ver. 18), which had been kept out of sight and evaded in the attempts made in self-defence. "Go and *utterly destroy* the sinners the Amalekites" (see ver. 3). 4. *Reveals the motives* of outward conduct (ver. 19), viz. self-will, pride (ch. ix. 21), avarice, rapacity, "love of the world" (Col. iii. 5; 2 Tim. iv. 10), rebellious opposition to the will of Jehovah, and daring ambition to reign independently of him. In all this Samuel sought to rouse the slumbering conscience of the king, and lead him to see his sin and repent. If even yet he had fallen upon his face and given glory to God, there might have been hope. But the reiteration of his previous assertions, his repudiation of what was laid to his charge, and his blindly pointing to his main offence ("and have brought Agag the king of Amalek") as an evidence of his fidelity and zeal, showed that he was insensible to reproof. What should have humbled him served only to harden him in rebellion and obstinacy. And nothing was left but his rejection. His excuses were—

III. UTTERLY FUTILE, sinful, and injurious. They—1. Failed of their intended effect. 2. Increased his delusion, and prevented the light of truth from shining into his mind. 3. Deepened his guilt in the sight of Heaven. 4. Brought upon him heavier condemnation. "As he returned with his victorious troops the prophet met him. That sorrow-stricken countenance, round which hung the long Nazarite locks, now whitened by the snows of ninety years, pale and worn with the long night's unbroken but ungranted intercession, might have told all. Now the thunder-cloud, which began to gather fourteen years before, breaks and peals over the sinner's head. 'Stay,' is the sad and terrible voice as it breaks through the cobweb limits of self-deception and excuse, 'and I will tell thee what the Lord said to me this night,' &c. . . . . 'The people took of the spoil,' &c.—the very utterance of dark superstition and mean equivocation. Then the lightning came. The prophet's voice, gathering itself up into one of those magnificent utterances which, belonging to another and a later dispensation, antedate the coming revelation, and are evidently launched forth from the open ark of the testimony of the Highest, said, 'Hath the Lord,'" &c. ('Heroes of Heb. Hist.').—D.

Vers. 22, 23. (GILGAL.)—*The sentence of rejection.*

"Hath Jehovah (as much) delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,
As in obeying the voice of Jehovah?
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
And to give heed than the fat of rams.
For (like) the sin of divination is rebellion,
And (like) an idol and teraphim is obstinacy.
Because thou hast rejected the word of Jehovah,
He hath rejected thee from being king."

The crisis has now fully arrived. The aged prophet confronts the self-deceived king, whom he looks upon as no longer reigning as servant of Jehovah, in consequence of his endeavour to rule according to his own will and pleasure, though in connection with the outward forms of the religion of Israel. He has striven in vain to turn him from his way, and can henceforth only regard him as a rebel against the supreme Ruler. Inasmuch as Saul, in seeking to justify himself, showed that he estimated moral obedience lightly in comparison with ritual worship, Samuel first of all asserts the incomparable superiority of the former to the latter. He then declares that disobedience is equivalent to heathenism and idolatry, against which Saul, in offering sacrifices to Jehovah and other ways, exhibited such zeal. And, finally, he pronounces, as a judge upon a criminal, the sentence of his rejection. "There is a poetical rhythm in the original which gives it the tone of a Divine oracle uttered by the Spirit of God, imparting to it an awful solemnity, and making it sink deep into the memory of the hearers in all generations" (Wordsworth). Notice—

I. THE PARAMOUNT WORTH OF OBEDIENCE, considered in relation to offerings and sacrifices and other external forms of worship (ver. 22). 1. It is often *less regarded* by men than such forms. They mistake the proper meaning and purpose of them, entertain false and superstitious notions concerning them, and find it easier and more according to their sinful dispositions to serve God (since they must serve him somehow) by them than in self-denial and submission to his will. It is indeed by no means an uncommon thing for those who are consciously leading a sinful life to be diligent and zealous in outward religious worship, and make use of the fruit of their disobedience "to sacrifice unto the Lord," imagining that it will be pleasing to him, and make compensation for their defects in other things. 2. It is *absolutely necessary* in order that they may be acceptable to God. The spirit of obedience and love is the soul of external services of every kind, and without it they are worthless. "To love him with all the heart is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mark xii. 33). The one ought never to be disjoined from the other, but it is often done; and they are set in *contrast* to each other. "If we were to say charity is better than church-going, we should be understood to mean that it is better than such church-going as is severed from charity. For if they were united they would not be contrasted. The soul is of more value than the body. But it is not contrasted unless they come into competition with one another, and their interests (although they cannot in truth be so) seem to be separated" (Pusey, 'Minor Prophets,' Hosea vi. 6). "The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination" (Prov. xxi. 27). 3. It is *incomparably superior* to them, considered as needful and appointed modes of serving God (apart from the "wicked mind" with which they are sometimes observed). Because—(1) The one is *universal;* the other is *partial*, and really included in it. (2) The one is *moral*, the other *ceremonial*. It is a "weightier matter of the law." (3) The one is of a *man himself*, the willing sacrifice of his own will; the other of only a *portion* of his powers or possessions. And "how much better is a man than a sheep!" (4) The one is *essential*, being founded upon the natural relation of man to God; the other is *circumstantial*, arising from man's earthly and sinful condition. "Angels obey, but do not sacrifice." (5) The one is the *reality*, the other the *symbol*. (6) The one is the *end*, the other the *means*. Sacrifice is the way of the sinner back to obedience, and the means of his preservation therein. Even the one perfect sacrifice of Christ would not have been needed if man had been obedient. Its design is not merely to afford a sufficient reason for the remission of punishment in a system of moral government, but also to restore to obedience (Titus ii. 14). (7) The one is *temporary*, the other is *eternal*. The sacrifices of the former dispensation have now been abolished; and how much of the present form of Divine service will vanish away when we behold the face of God! But love and obedience will "never fail." Since obedience is thus the one thing, the essential, more important than anything else, it should hold the supreme place in our hearts and lives.

II. THE IDOLATROUS CHARACTER OF DISOBEDIENCE (ver. 22). In proportion to the excellence of obedience is the wickedness of disobedience. 1. It is a common thing for men to *make light* of it, especially in actions to which they are disposed, or which they have committed, being blinded by their evil desires and passions. 2. In the sight of God every act of disobedience is *exceedingly hateful*. "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil" (Hab. i. 13) without punishing it. 3. In the light of truth it is seen to be *the same in principle* as those transgressions on which the severest condemnation is pronounced, and which are acknowledged to be deserving of the strongest reprobation. It is probable that Saul had already taken measures to put down the "sin of divination" (ch. xxviii. 9), and prided himself upon his zeal against idolatry; but he was acting in the spirit of that which he condemned, and was an idolater at heart. For he was turning away from God, resisting and rejecting him, and making an idol of self, which is done by all who (in selfish and superstitious fear or desire) seek divination (witchcraft) and trust in an idol ("which is nothing in the world") and teraphim (household gods—ch. xix. 13). "The declinations from religion, besides the privative, which is atheism, and the branches thereof, are three—heresies, idolatry, and witchcraft. Heresies when we serve the true God with a false worship; idolatry when we worship false gods, supposing them to be

true; and witchcraft when we adore false gods, knowing them to be wicked and false—the height of idolatry. And yet we see, though these be true degrees, Samuel teacheth us that they are all of a nature, when there is once a receding from the word of God" (Bacon, 'Advancement of Learning'). "All conscious disobedience is actual idolatry, because it makes self-will, the human I, into a god" (Keil). "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John v. 21).

III. THE JUST CONDEMNATION OF THE DISOBEDIENT (ch. xxviii. 18). 1. The punishment of the disobedient is the *appropriate fruit* of his disobedience. "Because thou hast rejected me," &c. Saul wished to reign without God, and have his own way; what he sought as a blessing he obtains as a curse. Sinners say, "Depart from us," &c. (Job xxi. 14); and the most terrible sentence that can be pronounced upon them is, "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Ps. vi. 8; Matt. vii. 23). "God rejects no one unless he is before rejected by him." 2. It involves *grievous loss and misery*—the loss of power, honour, blessedness; the experience of weakness, reproach, unhappiness, which cannot be wholly avoided, even though mercy be afterwards found. 3. Judgment is mingled with *mercy*. Although Saul was discrowned as theocratic king, he did not cease to live or to reign as "legal king." He was not personally and entirely abandoned. God sought his salvation to the last. "His rejection involved only this—(1) That God would henceforth leave him, and withdraw from him the (special) gifts of his Spirit, his counsel through the Urim and Thummim and by his servant Samuel; and (2) that in a short time the real deposition would be followed by tangible consequences—the kingly ruins would be destroyed, and the kingdom would not pass to his descendants" (Hengstenberg, 'Kingdom of God,' ii. 89).—D.

Vers. 24—31. (GILGAL.)—*Insincere confession of sin.* "I have sinned" (vers. 24, 30). On hearing the sentence of his rejection, Saul at length confesses his sin. The words of Samuel have some effect upon him, but not the full effect they should have had. For his confession does not proceed from a truly penitent heart (see ch. vii. 6), and it is not followed either by the reversal of his sentence or the forgiveness of his sin. It was like that of Pharaoh (Exod. ix. 27), of Balaam (Num. xxii. 34), and of Judas (Matt. xxvii. 4)—springing from "the sorrow of the world, which worketh death" (2 Cor. vii. 10). Notice—

I. ITS CHARACTERISTICS. It was made—1. *Under the pressure of circumstances*, rather than as the free expression of conviction. Confession comes too late when it is extorted by the demonstration of sin which can no longer be denied. Some men, like Saul, conceal their sin so long as they can, and confess it only when they are compelled. 2. *From the fear of consequences* (vers. 23, 26), and not from a sense of the essential evil of sin. This is the most common characteristic of insincerity. As Saul confessed his sin from the fear of losing his kingdom, so do multitudes from fear of death, and live to prove their insincerity by their return to disobedience. "There are two views of sin: in one it is looked upon as a wrong; in the other as producing loss—loss, for example, of character. In such cases, if character could be preserved before the world, grief would not come; but the paroxysms of misery fall upon our proud spirit when our guilt is made public. The most distinct instance we have of this is in the life of Saul. In the midst of his apparent grief, the thing still uppermost was that he had forfeited his kingly character; almost the only longing was that Samuel should honour him before the people. And hence it comes to pass that often remorse and anguish only begin with exposure" (Robertson). 3. *To the servant of God*, and to gain his approval, and not to God, and to obtain his favour. "Thy words" (ver. 24). "Now therefore" (as if on the ground of his confession he could justly claim pardon), "I pray thee, pardon my sin" (ver. 25). Many confess their sin to men without confessing it to God, and attach to their confession a worth that does not belong to it. 4. *With an extenuation of guilt*, rather than with a full acknowledgment of its enormity. "I feared the people, and obeyed their voice" (vers. 24, 15). He returns to his first excuse, which he puts in a different form. If what he said was true, what he had done was wrong (Exod. xxiii. 2). There is a higher law than the clamour of a multitude. True penitents do not seek to palliate their sin, but make mention of its greatness as a plea for Divine mercy (Ps. xxv. 11).

5. *With an entreaty for public honour*, rather than in deep humiliation before God and man. "Honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of the people, and before Israel" (ver. 30). "If Saul had been really penitent, he would have prayed to be humbled rather than to be honoured" (Gregory). 6. *With repeated promises of rendering worship* before the Lord, rather than a serious purpose to obey his voice (vers. 25, 30). He does not seem even yet to have laid to heart the truth which had been declared by the prophet; and he probably looked upon public worship by sacrifice as something peculiarly praiseworthy, and sought, by urging Samuel to remain and offer it, to promote his own honour in the sight of the people, and not as the expression of penitence and the means of forgiveness "The most prominent feature in the character of Saul was his insincerity." And yet, in his repeated promises to worship the Lord, and his urgent entreaties of Samuel, there was doubtless an element of good that might not be despised (1 Kings xxi. 29).

"The blackest night that veils the sky,
Of beauty hath a share;
The darkest heart hath signs to tell
That God still lingers there."

II. ITS CONSEQUENCES. In the language and conduct of Samuel there was—1. *A reiteration of the sentence* of rejection. Thrice it was declared that Jehovah had determined that Saul should no longer reign under his sanction and by his aid (vers. 26, 28). Although he may not have known all that the sentence involved, he felt that its import was alarming. An insincere confession of sin darkens the gathering cloud instead of dispersing it. 2. *A confirmation of it by an impressive sign*, the occasion of which is afforded by the sinner himself (ver. 27). Thereby it comes home to him with greater force. 3. *An intimation of the transfer to a better man* of the dignity which has been forfeited by sin. This was the second time that an announcement of a truly theocratic king was given (ch. xii. 14); and whilst it showed that the Divine purpose could not be defeated, however it might be striven against, it must have been peculiarly painful to Saul. The dreadful secret was a constant burden to him, and when he recognised the man in whom the prediction was about to be fulfilled, it excited his envy and hatred toward him. When any one is not right with God, every favour shown to another fills him with grief and wrath (Gen. iv. 5). 4. *A declaration of the unchangeable purpose of God.* "The Strength" (Perpetuity, Confidence, Refuge, Victory) "of Israel will not lie nor repent," &c. (ver. 29). Saul evidently thought of him as capable of acting in an arbitrary, capricious, and inconstant manner, like himself; but, inasmuch as he formed his purposes with perfect knowledge, and acted on immutable principles, and there was no real change in the heart of the transgressor, there could be no reversal of his sentence. "He cannot deny himself" (2 Tim. ii. 12). If in some things his purposes toward men appear to change because men alter their relative position toward him (as the sun appears to change by the rotation of the earth, causing day and night), in others they abide the same for ever, and he who sets himself against them must be overthrown. It is now certain that he cannot again be a theocratic king; but his renewed importunity, in which, perchance, notwithstanding its apparent selfishness, the prophet sees a gleam of hope, is followed by—5. *An indication of pity* toward the foolish and fallen king. "And Samuel returned after Saul; and Saul worshipped Jehovah" (ver. 31). May he not even yet be led to true repentance? Although the birthright is given to another, there is a blessing for him who weeps and prays (Gen. xxvii. 38—40). His request is granted. He has what he desires and is prepared to receive. He is still the king after the people's heart. He shall continue such. The sentence shall not be published, nor any special effort be put forth for his dethronement. It would result in general confusion. The just and merciful purposes of God toward the people in giving him for their king are not yet fulfilled, and they will slowly ripen to their accomplishment. 6. *An exhibition of judgment* upon an obstinate offender (ver. 32). One of the reasons, doubtless, why Samuel "turned again after Saul" was that he might execute on Agag the Divine sentence which he had faithlessly remitted. "The terrible vengeance executed on the fallen monarch by Samuel

is a measure of Saul's delinquency." It is also a solemn warning to him of the doom which sooner or later comes upon every impenitent and persistent transgressor.

Observations:—1. It is not confession of sin, but the spirit in which it is made, that renders it acceptable to God. 2. Sincerity is the foundation of a truly religious character. 3. Though mercy long lingers over the sinner, yet if it be despised doom comes at last.—D.

Ver. 29. (GILGAL.)—*The unchangeable One of Israel.*

> "And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent:
> For he is not a man, that he should repent"

The word rendered Strength in the A. V. (*netsach*, here used for the first time) has a varied signification (splendour, victory, truth, confidence, perpetuity, &c.), but is used in this place in the sense of steadfastness, constancy, and unchangeableness. Jehovah, the prophet says, is the Immutability, or unchangeable One, of Israel. He is not like man, inconstant, unreliable, changeable. He is not such an one as Saul imagined him to be; does not vacillate in his thoughts, feelings, or purposes; but acts on immutable principles, and performs the word which he has spoken; and hence the sentence of rejection cannot be reversed. *His unchangeableness* is often declared in the Scriptures. It is implied in the name of Jehovah. It was dwelt upon by Moses (Deut. xxxii. 4, 18, 31), perceived by Balaam (Num. xxiii. 19), and asserted by Hannah in her song of praise (ch. ii. 2). And although it is often disbelieved or misinterpreted, it is a source of strength and consolation to all by whom it is properly understood and realised. Observe that it—

I. ACCORDS WITH APPARENT CHANGEABLENESS in—1. *The creation of the world and the varied operations of his hand.* It is not stoical indifference (without affection) nor absolute quiescence (without activity). He is the living God, and freely exercises his boundless power in producing infinite changes. "Over all things, animate and inanimate, flows the silent and resistless tide of change." But whilst he is "in all, above all, and through all," he is separate and distinct from all; and the creation of the world and all the mutations of matter and force are only expressions of his eternal and unchangeable thought. The physical universe is the garment in which the Invisible clothes himself and manifests himself to our apprehension (Ps. cii. 25—27; civ. 2). 2. *The revelations of his character and the successive dispensations of his grace.* These are not contrary to one another. They are simply the clearer and more perfect manifestations of him who is always "the same;" adapted to the need and capacity of men. God deals with them as a parent with his children, affording them instruction as they are able to bear it. 3. *The relations in which he stands to men, and his diversified dealings with them.* They sometimes appear the opposite of each other. At one time he approves of individuals and nations, and promises them manifold blessings, whereas at another he condemns and punishes them. Hence he is said to *repent*. But the change arises from a change in men themselves. The Glory of Israel always shines with undimmed lustre; but they shut their eyes and turn their backs upon the light, so that to them it becomes darkness. And it is his unchangeable holiness that necessitates this result; for if he were "altogether such an one as themselves," they might expect (like Saul) to enjoy his favour whilst they continued in sin. "With the pure thou wilt show thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt show thyself froward" (Ps. xviii. 26).

II. DENOTES REAL UNCHANGEABLENESS in—1. *The perfections of his character.* Change is an element of imperfection, and no such element can exist in the absolutely perfect One. With him "there is no variableness, neither shadow caused by turning" (James i. 17). "In him there is no darkness at all" (1 John i. 5). And it is "impossible for God to lie" (Heb. vi. 18). 2. *The principles of his government:* wisdom, truth, equity, goodness, &c. In these things he delights, and from them he never departs. They stand like rocks amidst a sea of perpetual change. They are more immutable than the laws of nature, being the foundation on which those laws rest, and inseparable from the Divine character. "The word of our God" (in which they are expressed) "shall stand for ever" (Isa. xl. 8; li. 6). "Till heaven and

earth pass," &c. (Matt. v. 18). 3. *The purposes of his heart*, formed in perfect knowledge of all that will take place, and effected in harmony with the principles before mentioned. Some of these purposes are hidden (Deut. xxix. 29). Others are revealed, and include the general conditions of peace and happiness, and the results of their observance or neglect (promises and threatenings), also particular events, occurring either independently of the free action of men, or in connection with it, whether in the way of opposition or co-operation, as, *e. g.*, the setting up of a theocratic kingdom, the advent and death of the Messiah (Acts iv. 27, 28), and his universal reign. "The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever" (Ps. xxxiii. 10, 11; Prov. xix. 21; Isa. xlvi. 10; Jer. iv. 28). "I am Jehovah, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. iii. 6). "When we find predictions in Scripture not executed, we must consider them not as absolute, but conditional, or, as the civil law calls it, an interlocutory sentence. God declared what would follow by natural causes, or by the demerit of man, not what he would absolutely do himself. And though in many of these predictions the condition is not expressed, it is understood" (see Jer. xviii. 7, 8; Ezek. xxxiii. 13, 14; Jonah iii. 4; iv. 2).

III. INCITES TO HUMAN CONSTANCY in—1. *Faith.* He never disappoints the trust that is reposed in him. His covenant with his people is firm and sure; "for the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed," &c. (Isa. liv. 10). "All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen" (2 Cor. i. 20). What an incentive is thus afforded to each believer, and the whole Church, to "abide in him"! "Whose *faith* follow, &c. Jesus Christ (is) the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever; (therefore) be not carried about (like a ship driven by varying winds) with divers and strange doctrines; for it is a good thing that the heart be *established* with grace" (Heb. xiii. 7—9). 2. *Love.* Only the unchangeable One can be a true, satisfying, and enduring rest of the affections; for all earthly objects change and pass away, and must leave the immortal spirit desolate. His unchanging love should keep our love to him and to each other burning with a steady flame (John xiii. 1, 34; Jude 21). 3. *Righteousness.* (1) Which consists in conformity to the constant obedience of Christ to the righteous and unalterable will of the Father. (2) Which is faithfully assured of enduring blessedness (Rev. xxii. 14). "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John ii. 17). (3) But without which there will be an irrevocable loss of the most glorious crown and kingdom. The persistently rebellious dash themselves to pieces against the unchangeable holiness and justice of God.—D.

Vers. 32, 33. (GILGAL.)—*The execution of Agag.* Agag was put to death, perhaps, by the hand of Samuel; more probably by other hands under his order, for it is common to speak of official persons doing what they simply command to be done (John xix. 1). "In ancient time persons of the highest rank were employed to execute the sentence of the law (Jether, the eldest son of Gideon, Doeg, Benaiah). Sometimes the chief magistrate executed the sentence of the law with his own hands" (Paxton's 'Illustrations,' iv. 171). The act was one of great severity. It should, however, be remembered that—1. The Amalekite king had committed great atrocities (ver. 33), and was the chief representative of cruel and irreconcilable enemies of Israel. 2. Amalek lay under *a ban of extermination* which had been pronounced by Jehovah (Exod. xvii. 14; Num. xxiv. 20), and was now required to be fully carried into effect. Samuel acted in obedience to a higher will than his own; not from personal revenge, but in his public capacity, doing what Saul (from no feelings of humanity) had failed to do, and giving honour to Jehovah before his altar. "There must indeed have been inadequate ideas of the *individuality of man* and of the rights of human life before a dispensation could have been received which enforced wars of extermination—wars which would now be contrary to morality; for the reason that our ideas on the subject of human individuality and the rights of life are completely changed, and that we have been enlightened on these subjects, upon which the early ages of mankind were in the dark" (Mozley, 'Ruling Ideas in Early Ages,' p. 161). 3. The peculiar circumstances of the case necessitated some such exhibition of the authority and justice of Jehovah for the maintenance of the theocracy, and the reproof and warning of the people who had shared in the sin of

their king. "Such a sinking age could be saved from imminent dissolution only by extreme severity. He who, however kindly disposed in other respects, was most direct and inexorable in carrying out what seemed urgently needed, he alone could now become the true physician of the times, and the successful founder of a better age" (Ewald). We have here—

I. A NOTORIOUS OFFENDER MEETING HIS JUST DOOM. 1. Although sentence upon an evil work is not speedily executed, it is not reversed. The long-suffering of God waits, "as in the days of Noah" (2 Pet. iii. 20), when judgment was suspended for 120 years; but "he spared not the old world" (2 Pet. ii. 5). 2. Justice requires that incorrigible sinners should be punished with significant severity. "As" (in the same manner as) "thy sword," &c. 3. Death is naturally bitter to men, and especially to those who have heavy guilt upon their consciences. The last words of Agag were, "Surely the bitterness of death is past." 4. When sinners deem themselves most secure, then "sudden destruction cometh upon them." Having been spared so long, he imagined that the danger was over, and little thought that the venerable prophet was the messenger of wrath. "The feet of the avenging deities are shod with wool, but they strike with iron hands."

II. AN AMIABLE PROPHET CLOTHED WITH HOLY SEVERITY. 1. The more a man loves righteousness, the more intensely does he hate sin. "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil." What woes were ever so terrible as those that fell from the lips of Christ? 2. A good man may inflict punishment on the wicked without feelings of personal revenge against them. "Our Lord declared the inferiority of the legal position of the Old Testament not because the desire of retribution ought to be excluded from the religion of reconciliation, but because it ought not to predominate in it" (Tholuck). 3. When some fail to carry out the purposes of God, others are bound to make up for their defect, and sometimes to do things for which they do not seem well adapted, and which do not harmonise with their general character (1 Kings xviii. 40). "When kings abandoned their duty God often executed his law by the prophets" (Grotius). 4. That which is severity to one must often be done, provided it be not contrary to justice, for the good of all.

III. AN OBSTINATE PEOPLE TAUGHT A SALUTARY LESSON. 1. No excuse can justify disobedience to the commands of God. Doubtless the people, if called to account, would have been as ready as Saul to offer excuses for the part they took in sparing Agag and the best of the sheep, &c. 2. They who fail to obey these commands deprive themselves of invaluable blessings. The sunshine of heaven is beclouded, and the sentence of rejection on their king, although at present little known, will ere long produce disastrous effects in them. 3. God's work must be done, and if one refuses to do it, another is raised up for the purpose. As with individuals, so with nations (Num. xiv. 21; Rom. xi. 22). 4. Those who, although the professed people of God, contend against his purposes must share the fate of his open enemies. "If ye shall still do wickedly ye shall be consumed, both you and your king" (ch. xii. 25).—D.

Vers. 34, 35. (GILGAL.)—*A melancholy parting.* The interview between Samuel and Saul was now ended. "It was a fearful meeting; it was followed by a lifelong parting." The earlier course of Saul (from the time the prophet met him in the gate at Ramah) was marked by modesty, prudence, generosity, and lofty spiritual impulses, and was one of brilliant promise. His subsequent course (from his first wrong step before the war of Michmash), although distinguished by external prosperity, was marked by self-will, presumption, disobedience, and selfishness, and was one of rapid degeneracy. "How must the prophet have lamented as he saw the wreck of that early brightened life!" On his part, more especially, the separation was—

I. NEEDFUL. A good man is compelled to separate from those to whom he has given his counsel and aid—1. When from lack of sympathy and opposition of aim he can no longer effectively co-operate with them. 2. When he cannot hope to exert a beneficial influence upon them. 3. When his continuance with them affords a sanction to a course which he cannot approve. His parting is a condemnation of it, and is rendered necessary by truth and righteousness. "God's ambassador was

recalled from him; the intercourse of the God of Israel came to an end because Saul, sinking step by step away from God, had by continued disobedience and increasing impenitence given up communion with God" (Erdmann). "Had he spared this spiritual child, when to spare him would have been contrary to the fundamental law of the theocracy, the worst possible precedent would have been afforded for future ages by this first king" (Ewald).

II. RESPECTFUL. Samuel acceded to the request of Saul to honour him before the people; and although it is not stated how far he participated with him in worship, yet he evidently avoided an open and violent rupture with him, and gave him honour, as civil ruler, to the last. Respect is due "not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward," on account of—1. The authority and power that may be intrusted to them in the providence of God (Rom. xiii. 1). 2. The natural dignity of man—great in ruin, capable of restoration, and susceptible to the influence of kindness or contempt. Jesus did not resent the kiss with which Judas betrayed him, but said, "*Friend*, wherefore comest thou hither?" 3. The requirements of social order and peace. Saul was even yet the best king the people were fit to receive, and the conduct of Samuel indicated the duty of submission, which, in the spirit of their king, they were not always disposed to render (ver. 24; ch. xiv. 45).

III. SORROWFUL. "Nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul." With heavy heart and weary feet the old prophet took his way up from Gilgal to Ramah, and mourned for Saul, who, on the opposite hill of Gibeah, pursued his wilful way, bringing upon himself and Israel inevitable and overwhelming woe; alive, yet dead; so near, yet so completely lost. 1. What object is more mournful than a soul "going astray" from God? 2. What sorrow is too great at such a sight? 3. How vast is that Divine sorrow of which the human is the product and reflection! "And the Lord repented," &c. The prophetic spirit is one of wide and deep sympathy at once with God and man, and it was perfectly possessed by "the Man of sorrows." "Samuel mourned for Saul, but we do not hear that Saul mourned for himself."

IV. FINAL. He "came no more to see Saul"—gave him counsel no more as aforetime, which indeed was not desired; and he only saw him once again, when he forced himself into his presence (ch. xix. 24). When good men are compelled by the conduct of the wicked to separate from them, the parting—1. Deprives the latter of incalculable benefits, however lightly they may be estimated at the time. 2. Tends to increase the moral distance between them, and render the restoration of their intercourse more and more impossible. 3. Is certain to be hereafter bitterly but vainly regretted (ch. xxviii. 15, 18). Oh, the sad and perpetual separations that are caused by sin! The paths of Samuel and Saul (like those of Moses and Pharaoh, Paul and Demas) may be compared to the courses of two ships that meet on the ocean, and sail near each other for a season, not without danger of collision, and then part asunder, the one to reach a "desired haven," the other to make shipwreck and become a castaway.—D.

Ver. 25; xvi. 1—4. (RAMAH.)—*Recalled to the path of duty.* "Go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite." 1. The greatest and best of men experience seasons of sorrow, depression, and doubt, and sometimes fail in the fulfilment of duty. It was thus with Abraham, Moses, and Elijah, and with others in later ages. It was the same with Samuel, though to a less extent than almost any other. His grief for Saul was excessive. He surrendered himself to it without seeking the consolation and help by which it might be mitigated, and suffered it to interfere with the work which he might yet accomplish on behalf of Israel; and hence he was reproved by God. "The excellent prophet here displays something of human weakness. Samuel here looked on the vessel, made by the invisible hand of God himself, utterly broken and minished, and his emotion thereat shows his pious and holy affection; yet he is not without sin" (Calvin). 2. The failure of good men often appears in those things in which they are pre-eminently excellent. Samuel exhibited extraordinary sympathy with the purposes of God concerning his people, unquestioning obedience to every indication of his will, and strong faith, and hope, and dauntless courage in its fulfilment. Yet here we find him a prey to "the grief that saps the mind," apparently hopeless and desponding, and smitten with fear like Elijah when "he arose and went

for his life" on hearing the threat of Jezebel. "Such things would seem designed by God to stain the pride of all flesh, and to check all dependence upon the most eminent or confirmed habits of godliness" (A. Fuller). The strongest are as dependent on God as the feeblest. 3. A higher voice than that of their own troubled and fearful hearts speaks to men of sincerity, and in communing with it they are led into a clearer perception of duty and to gird themselves afresh for its performance. The "spirit of faith" regains its ascendancy over them. And in going forth to active service they find new strength and hope at every step. The night gives place to the morning dawn, and

> "They feel, although no tongue can prove,
> That every cloud that spreads above
> And veileth love, itself is love" (Tennyson, 'The Two Voices').

Consider the way of duty, trodden by the good man, as—

I. PRESCRIBED BY GOD, whose will is the rule of human life, and is—1. Indicated in many ways—the word of truth, providential circumstances, reason, and conscience, and "that awful interior light which the dying Saviour promised, and which the ascending Saviour bestowed—the Spirit of God." 2. Sometimes obscured by frustrated effort, grievous disappointment, immoderate grief, desponding and doubtful thoughts (Matt. xi. 2, 3; Acts xviii. 9; xxiii. 11). 3. Never long hidden from those who are sincerely desirous of doing it, and seek for the knowledge of it with a view to that end (vers. 2, 3; 1 Kings xix. 15).

II. BESET BY DANGER. "How can I go? If Saul hear of it, he will kill me." The question was not simply an inquiry for direction, but also an expression of fear; and it may possibly have arisen from indications of Saul's wilfulness such as afterwards appeared (ch. xix. 22). 1. Danger is sometimes formidable, even to the bravest of men. 2. It is exaggerated by despondency, doubt, and fear.

> "Thy soul is by vile fear assailed, which oft
> So overcasts a man, that he recoils
> From noblest resolution, like a beast
> At some false semblance in the twilight gloom" (Dante).

3. No danger in the way of duty is equal to that which will be certainly found in departing from it. "In the way of righteousness there is life, and in the pathway thereof there is no death."

III. PURSUED WITH FIDELITY. "And Samuel did that which the Lord spake" (ver. 4). His hesitation was only for a moment, and with further light his faith revived and was displayed in fearless devotion. Fidelity to duty—1. Demands the renunciation of self and many cherished plans and purposes. 2. Appears in trustful, practical, and unreserved obedience. Samuel went in dependence upon the promise, "I will show thee what thou shalt do," &c. 3. Sometimes necessitates a prudent reserve. There was no deception in withholding a reason for the action directed, beyond that which lay on the surface of the action itself. To reveal it would be to defeat the end designed. And fidelity is sometimes best shown by silence.

IV. TERMINATING IN SAFETY AND HOPE. 1. Threatened danger is averted. 2. Promised guidance is obtained. 3. A brighter day dawns, and

> "God's purposes will ripen fast,
> Unfolding every hour."

Samuel returns to Ramah in peace, and with renewed zeal devotes his remaining days to the work of training a body of younger prophets (ch. xix. 20), whose influence, together with a change of dynasty, will save the nation and promote the establishment of the kingdom of God. "Let us ask ourselves whether the Jewish nation would have played any part as a 'main propelling agency of modern cultivation,' if its monarchy had been allowed to take the form which Saul would have given it, if he had made religion a creature of the kingly power, and war an instrument of rapine, and not of justice, and we shall see that Samuel's view of the matter was the

true one, and in accordance with the proper vocation of a prophet" (Strachey, 'Jewish Hist. and Politics').—D.

Ver. 35. (RAMAH.)—*Samuel a man of sorrows.* "Nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul." There are many kinds of sorrow in the world. One is *natural*, such as is felt by men in temporal affliction. Another is *spiritual*, such as is felt by a penitent for his sin. A third is *sympathetic*, benevolent, Divine, such as is felt by a godly man over the ungodly. "I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved." Of this last Samuel had experience throughout his life (ch. iii. 15; iv. 11; vii. 2; viii. 3, 6), and more especially at the persistent transgression and irrevocable rejection of Saul. Observe of such sorrow, that—

I. IT IS OCCASIONED BY A DEPLORABLE SIGHT. Look at it. A soul—1. Failing to fulfil the purpose for which it was made, and "coming short of the glory of God." 2. Falling into degradation, misery, and woe. A ruined temple! A wandering star! (Jude 13). A discrowned monarch! A despairing spirit! Oh, what a contrast between what it might have been and what it is here and will be hereafter! 3. Inciting others to pursue the same path.

II. IT IS AN EVIDENCE OF EXALTED PIETY, inasmuch as it shows—1. Genuine zeal for the honour of God, whose law is "made void," whose goodness is despised, and whose claims are trampled in the dust. 2. Tender compassion toward men. "Charity to the soul is the soul of charity." 3. Intense sympathy with the noblest of men, with the Son of God, and with the eternal Father himself. "I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart," &c. (Rom. ix. 1—3). "O that thou hadst known," &c. (Luke xix. 42). "O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments!" (Isa. xlviii. 18).

III. IT IS SOMETIMES IMPROPERLY INDULGED (ch. xvi. 1), as—1. When it is mingled with feelings of personal disappointment and mortification, and of dissatisfaction with the ways of God. 2. When it is allowed to become a prolonged and all-absorbing emotion, to the exclusion of those considerations and feelings by which it ought to be modified and regulated. 3. When it produces despondency and fear (ch. xvi. 2), weakens faith, and hinders exertion.

IV. ITS IMPROPER INDULGENCE IS DIVINELY CORRECTED. By means of—1. Gentle rebuke, indicating that it is useless, unreasonable, and reprehensible. 2. Clear and deep conviction of the over-ruling purpose of God, and unreserved submission to it. "*At that time* Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father," &c. (Matt. xi. 25). 3. Renewed, benevolent, and hopeful activity.—D.

Ver. 31.—*Tried again and rejected.* God proves his servants, and does not show them the fulness of his favour and confidence till they have been tested. Abraham was tried and found faithful; so was Moses; so was David; so was Daniel. Abraham, indeed, was not without fault, nor Moses either. David once sinned grievously. But all of these were proved true at heart and trustworthy. Saul is the conspicuous instance in the Old Testament of one who, when called to a high post in Jehovah's service, and tested therein again and again, offended the Lord again and again, and was therefore rejected and disowned. 1. The question on which the king was tested was the same as before. Would he obey the voice of the Lord, and rule as his lieutenant, or would he be as the kings of the neighbouring nations and tribes, and use the power with which he was invested according to his own will and pleasure? On this critical question the prophet Samuel had exhorted both Saul and the people when the monarchy was instituted. If the king erred, he could not plead that he had not been forewarned. The accepted principle of modern constitutional government is that the ruler exists and is bound to act for the public good, and not for his own aggrandisement or pleasure. At root this is the very principle which Samuel inculcated 3000 years ago. The Old Testament required a king to reign in the fear of the Lord, and loyally execute his will. The New Testament describes the ruler as a "minister of God for good." Now the Divine will and the public weal are really the same, and the most advanced political principle of modern intelligence is no other than the old doctrine of the Bible. There is no Divine right of kings to rule as they think proper. That doctrine of base political subservience is opposed

to both the spirit and the letter of the sacred writings. The king is for God, not God for the king. The king is for the people, not the people for the king. The voice of the people may not always be the voice of God, but the good of the people is always the will of God. 2. The test to which the king was now subjected was, like the former one, specific, and publicly applied. Would he obey the Lord in the extermination of Amalek or no? And he disobeyed. If there was one of all the Amalekite race who deserved to forfeit his life, it was the king, Agag, a ruthless chief, whose sword, as Samuel expressed it, had "made women childless;" yet him Saul spared when he showed no mercy to others. It was not at all from a feeling of humanity or pity. To have scrupled about shedding the blood of a hereditary foe would not have occurred to any Oriental warrior of the period. But Saul would reserve the royal captive to grace his triumph, and be a household slave of the king of Israel. It was the pride of the chiefs and kings of that age to reduce the princes whom they had conquered to slavery in their courts. Adonibezek is said to have kept seventy such captives, whose hands and feet he had mutilated to unfit them for war, and who, as slaves, gathered from his table. Besides Agag, the best of the sheep and cattle belonging to Amalek were spared by Saul and his army. They used their success to enrich themselves, and forgot that the sentence of God against that nation was the only justification of the war. 3. The Divine censure on the disobedient king was pronounced by Samuel. The prophet was deeply grieved. He had loved the young man on whose lofty head he had poured the sacred oil, and whose failure to fulfil the early promise of his reign had already caused him, if not much surprise, distress unfeigned. And Samuel was concerned for the nation. If the new government was so soon discredited, and Saul forfeited his kingly seat, what but anarchy could come upon Israel, and with anarchy, subjection, as before, to the Philistines or some other warlike nation of the heathen? The prophet fulfilled his commission, however painful; gravely reproved the king, brushed aside his excuses and evasions, and refused, not without a touch of scorn, his offered bribe of animals for sacrifice. 4. Samuel took occasion to declare that "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." These words contain the very quintessence of the testimony of the prophets; not Samuel only, but Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and in fact all the great teachers whom Jehovah sent to his ancient people. Sacrificial oblations could never be accepted in lieu of practical obedience, and a rebellious, wilful temper was as offensive to the Lord as any kind of idolatry. Priests and Levites were appointed for religious ceremonial, but the great function of the prophets was to maintain the supremacy of what is moral over what is ceremonial, and to lift up fearless voices for mercy and truth, judgment and righteousness, integrity and probity, reverence for Jehovah, and obedience to his revealed will. Such was the testimony of the Lord Jesus himself, as the greatest of prophets. He recognised and respected the sacrifices appointed in the law, but did not in his conversations or discourses dwell on them. His aim was to cause men to hear the word of God, and do it. And such is the message or burden of all New Testament prophets, and of those who know how to guide and teach Christians. To be lax and indulgent on questions of moral conduct, while strict about services and offerings to God and the Church, is the part of a false prophet. The true prophet, while witnessing to free forgiveness in the blood of Christ, will enjoin all who seek that forgiveness to cease to do evil and learn to do well, will faithfully declare to them that they cannot be kept in the love of God if they are not obedient to his word. 5. The behaviour of Saul under reproof betrayed a shifty, superficial character. He showed no real sense of sin, or desire of Divine forgiveness. David, during his reign, committed a more heinous offence against domestic and social morality than anything that Saul as yet had done; but he was pardoned and restored because when charged with the sin—"Thou art the man"—he confessed it, and excused not himself. And then he cried to God, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean." But Saul, when charged with disobedience, showed no shame or sorrow on its account. He at once put himself in a defensive attitude, stooped to subterfuge, laid the blame on others, had no feeling but a desire to escape consequences. He would propitiate the Lord and his prophet by sacrifices; but his former religious sensibility was now almost quite gone from him, and he was becoming, like Esau, a

"profane person," hard and godless. It is pitiful to see that the king looked no higher than to Samuel, and asked no more than that the prophet would pardon him and favour him so far as to join with him while he publicly worshipped the Lord. Evidently his object was to have his credit upheld by the venerated presence of Samuel; and, on his repeating the request, the prophet thought fit to yield to his wish, probably to avoid the weakening of the royal influence, and the premature fall of the monarchy. 6. The rejection of Saul took no sudden effect. Gravely and sadly it was pronounced by Samuel; but it brought about no immediate catastrophe. None the less was it a sure and fatal sentence. We know that Saul was not dethroned. He had a long reign, and died on the battle-field. But the process was already begun which led him to dark Gilboa, which led one better than him to Hebron and to Jerusalem; and the remainder of this book is occupied in showing how the Divine rejection of Saul took effect, and how the Lord brought forward and trained the son of Jesse for the kingdom. It is a thought full of solemnity, that a man may long keep his place and hold his own in Christian society who yet is rejected by the Lord, and is growing at heart more and more profane, till at last the evil spirit rules him instead of the good, and he dies as one troubled and God-forsaken. The process may be long, but it is none the less tragical. May God keep us from the beginnings of declension, and from all excusing of our sins, or laying of the fault upon others! Lord, take not thy Holy Spirit from us!—F.

CHOICE OF DAVID TO BE ISRAEL'S KING, AND DECLINE OF SAUL'S KINGDOM.

(CHS. XVI.—XXXI.)

EXPOSITION.

DAVID ANOINTED AS THE FUTURE KING, AND HIS FIRST INTRODUCTION TO SAUL.

(CH. XVI.)

CHAPTER XVI.

CHOICE OF DAVID AS SUCCESSOR TO SAUL (vers. 1—13). Ver. 1.—**How long wilt thou mourn?** The grief of Samuel was prolonged almost to a sinful extent, nor can we wonder at it. We who see Saul's whole career, and know how deeply he fell, are in danger of discrediting his high qualities; but those who were witnesses of his military skill and prowess, and saw him and his heroic son raising the nation from its feebleness and thraldom to might and empire, must have given him an ungrudging admiration. Both David's dirge (2 Sam. i. 19—27) and Samuel's long mourning, and the unqualified obedience which he was able so quickly to extort from a high-spirited people unused to being governed, bear decisive testimony to his powers as a ruler and commander in war. But God now warns Samuel to mourn no longer. Saul's rejection has become final, and God's prophet must sacrifice his personal feelings, and prepare to carry out the purpose indicated in ch. xiii. 14; xv. 28. We must not, however, conclude that Samuel's sorrow had only been for Saul personally; there was danger for the whole nation in his conduct. If wilfulness and passion gained in him the upper hand, the band of authority would be loosed, and the old feebleness and anarchy would return, and Israel become even more hopelessly a prey to its former troubles. Samuel, therefore, is to go to Bethlehem and anoint there a son of Jesse. As this place lay at some distance from Ramah, and out of the circuit habitually traversed by Samuel as judge, he probably had but a general knowledge of the family. Evidently he had no acquaintance with David (vers. 11, 12); but as Jesse was a man of wealth and importance, his reputation had probably reached the prophet's ears.

Ver. 2.—**And Samuel said, How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me.** Saul was actually king, and the anointing of another in his stead would be regarded as an act of open treason, and the stirring up of civil war. This was not indeed intended. The anointing of David was a prophetic indication of the man whom God, in his own way and at his own time, would place upon Saul's throne, without either scheming or action thereto on the part either of Samuel or of David. Its value would chiefly lie in the careful training he would receive from Samuel; but when David was king, it would also greatly strengthen his position; for it would be known that from his boyhood he had been marked out for his high office. Never did man mount a throne with purer hands than David; and if Saul would have permitted it

he would have been a faithful and loyal servant to the last. It was Saul really who thrust the kingdom upon David. As regards Samuel's fears, headstrong as Saul was, he owed too much to the prophet to have put him to death; but he would have visited the act upon Jesse and his family with revengeful violence, and Samuel would henceforward have lost all freedom of action, even if he were not cast into prison, or banished from the land. God therefore commands him to **take an heifer with** him, **and say, I am come to sacrifice to Jehovah.** The question has been asked, Was there in this any duplicity? In answer we may ask another question: Is it always necessary, or even right, to tell in all cases the whole truth? If so, quarrels and ill-feeling would be multiplied to such an extent that social life would be unendurable. All charitable, well-disposed persons suppress much, and keep a guard over their lips, lest they should stir up strife and hatred. Now here there was to be no treason, no inciting to civil war. David, still a child, was to be set apart for a high destiny, possibly without at the time fully knowing what the anointing meant, and certainly with the obligation to take no step whatsoever towards winning the crown that was to descend upon his head. This was his probation, and he bore the trial nobly. And what right would Samuel have had, not merely to compel David to be a traitor, but to place Jesse and his family in a position of danger and difficulty? To have anointed David publicly would have forced Jesse to an open rupture with the king, and he must have sought safety either by fighting for his life, or by breaking up his home, and fleeing into a foreign land. David in course of time had thus to seek an asylum for his parents (ch. xxii. 3, 4), but it was through no fault of his own, for he always remained true to his allegiance. Even when David was being hunted for his life, he made no appeal to Samuel's anointing, but it remained, what it was ever intended to be, a secret sign and declaration to him of God's preordained purpose, but of one as to which he was to take no step to bring about its fulfilment. It was a pledge to David, and nothing but misery would have resulted from its being prematurely made known to those who had no right to know it. God wraps up the flower, which is in due time to open and bear fruit, within many a covering; and to rend these open prematurely is to destroy the flower and the fruit that is to spring from it. And so to have anointed David openly, and to have made him understand the meaning of the act, would have been to destroy David and frustrate the Divine purpose.

Vers. 3—5.—**Call Jesse to the sacrifice.** The word used is *zebach*, and means a sacrifice followed by a feast, at which all the elders of the town, and with them Jesse and his elder sons, would be present by the prophet's invitation. It is plain that such sacrifices were not unusual, or Saul would have demanded a reason for Samuel's conduct. As the ark remained so long in obscurity at Kirjath-jearim, and the solemn services of the tabernacle were not restored until Saul at some period of his reign removed it to Nob, possibly Samuel may have instituted this practice of occasionally holding sacrifices, now at one place and now at another, to keep alive a sense of religion in the hearts of the people; and probably on such occasions he taught them the great truths of the law, thus combining in his person the offices of prophet and priest. Nevertheless, **the elders of the town trembled at his coming.** More literally, "went with trembling to meet him." Very probably such visitations often took place because some crime had been committed into which Samuel wished to inquire, or because the people had been negligent in some duty. And though conscious of no such fault, yet at the coming of one of such high rank their minds foreboded evil. He quiets, however, their fears and bids them **sanctify** themselves; *i. e.* they were to wash and purify themselves, and abstain from everything unclean, and put on their festal garments (Exod. xix. 10; and comp. 1 Sam. xxi. 5). It is added, **He sanctified Jesse and his sons,** *i. e.* he took especial care that no legal impurity on their part should stand in the way of the execution of his errand.

Vers. 6—10.—**When they were come.** *I. e.* to the house of Jesse, apparently in the interval between the sacrifice and the feast. The latter we learn in ver. 11 did not take place until after David had been sent for. But many hours would elapse between the sacrifice and the feast, as the victim had to be skinned and prepared for roasting, and finally cooked. This interval was spent in Jesse's house; and when he saw there Eliab, the first-born, and observed his tall stature and handsome face, qualities which Samuel had admired in Saul, he **said,** *i. e.* in himself, felt sure, that the goodly youth was **Jehovah's anointed** (see on ch. ii. 10, 35; x. 1, &c.), but is warned that these external advantages do not necessarily imply real worth of heart; and as **Jehovah looketh on the heart,** his judgment depends, not on appearances, but on reality. As Eliab is thus rejected, Jesse makes his other sons pass before the prophet. Next **Abinadab,** who has the same name as a son of Saul (ch. xxxi. 2); then **Shammah,** so called again in ch. xvii. 13, but Shimeah in 2 Sam. xiii. 3, and Shimma in 1 Chron. ii. 13, where, however, the Hebrew is exactly the same as in 2 Sam. xiii. 3. After these four other sons follow, of whom one apparently died young, as only

seven are recorded in 1 Chron. ii. 13—15, whereas these with David make eight. To all these seven the Divine voice within Samuel gave no response, and he said unto Jesse, **Jehovah hath not chosen these.**

Vers. 11, 12.—**Are here all thy children?** The word literally is lads, *na'arim*. The elder sons must have been nearly or quite grown up, but David was probably a mere boy, and as such had not been thought worthy of an invitation, but had been left with the servants keeping the sheep. The prophet now orders him to be summoned, and marks his value in God's sight by saying, **We will not sit down till he come hither.** The verb literally means, *we will not surround*, i. e. the table, though at this time the Jews did sit at meals, instead of reclining on couches, as in the days of Amos and our Lord. We gather, moreover, from Samuel's words that the selection of the son that was to be anointed took place while the preparations were being made for the feast. At the prophet's command David is fetched from the flock, which was probably near the house, and on his arrival the prophet sees a **ruddy** boy, *i. e.* red-haired, correctly rendered in the Vulgate *rufus*, the colour loved by all painters of manly beauty, and, from the delicacy of complexion which accompanies it, especially admired in the East, where men are generally dark-haired and sallow-faced. Moreover, he was **of a beautiful countenance.** The Hebrew says, "with beautiful eyes," and so the Syriac and Septuagint rightly. He was also **goodly to look to**, *i. e.* to look at. These last words give the general idea of the beauty of his face and person, while his bright hair and delicate complexion and the beauty of his eyes are specially noticed in the Hebrew.

Ver. 13.—**Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren.** Did he or they understand the meaning of the act? We think not. Certainly Eliab (ch. xvii. 28) had no idea of any special greatness being in store for his brother. Most probably both Jesse and his sons regarded David as simply selected to be trained in Samuel's schools; and there can be little doubt that he was so trained. Samuel gave unto David that which Saul had not received—long and careful training; and David profited by it, and at Naioth in Ramah perfected his skill, not only in reading and writing, but in poetry and music. Saul and David were both men of extraordinary natural ability; but the one is always shy, awkward, and with all the defects of an uneducated man; while David is altogether the contrary. But Samuel gave his youthful pupil something better than accomplishments—he carefully educated him in the law of God, and led his mind onward to all that was good. It was Samuel's last and crowning work. Prophecy and monarchy were both of his institution, as orderly elements of the Jewish state; he also trained the man who more nearly than any other approached unto the ideal of the theocratic king, and was to Israel the type of their coming Messiah. It was Samuel's wisdom in teaching his young men music which gave David the skill to be the sweet singer of the sanctuary; and we may feel sure also that when David arranged the service of the house of God, and gave priests and Levites their appointed duties (1 Chron. xxiii.—xxvi.), the model which he set before him was that in which he had so often taken part with Samuel at Ramah. As Eliab, Abinadab, and Shammah were but lads (ver. 11), David must have been very young, and many years have elapsed between his anointing and his summons to Saul's presence and combat with Goliath; and they were thus well spent in the prophet's company, whence at proper intervals he would return to his father's house and resume his ordinary duties. **The Spirit of Jehovah came upon David from that day forward** (comp. ch. x. 6, 9). In modern language we should say that David's character grew and developed nobly, both intellectually and morally. With far more ethical truth the Israelites saw in the high qualities which displayed themselves in David's acts and words the presence and working of a Divine Spirit. It was a "breathing of Jehovah" which moved David onward, and fostered in him all that was morally great and good, just as it was "the breath of God" which at the creation moved upon the face of the waters to call this earth into being (Gen. i. 2). **Samuel rose up and went to Ramah.** His mission was over, and he returned to his ordinary duties; but, doubtless, first he made arrangements that David should in due time follow him thither, that he might be trained for his high office under Samuel's direct influence and control.

DAVID'S INTRODUCTION TO KING SAUL (vers. 14—23). Vers. 14, 15.—From this time forward David is the central figure of the history. Saul has been rejected, and though, as being the actual king, he must still play his part, more especially as his decline goes on side by side with David's growth in every kingly quality, yet the record of it is no longer given on Saul's account. Interesting, then, as may be the information concerning the mental malady with which Saul was visited, yet the object of this section is to acquaint us with the manner in which David was first brought into connection with him. From the description given of David in ver. 18 it is evident that there has been a considerable interval of time between this and the previous section. David is no longer a child, but a "mighty valiant man." The connection is

ethical, and lies in the contrasted moral state of the two men, as shown in the two parallel statements: "the Spirit of Jehovah came upon David;" "the Spirit of Jehovah departed from Saul." There was a gradual decline and debasement of his character; and as David grew from a child into a hero in war and a scholar in peace, so Saul, from being a hero, degenerated into a moody and resentful tyrant. **An evil spirit from Jehovah troubled him.** Really, as in the margin, *terrified him;* that is, Saul became subject to fits of intense mental agony, under which his reason gave way, and temporary insanity, accompanied by outbreaks of violence, came on. It is very difficult for us with our richer language to give the exact force of the Hebrew; for the word rendered *spirit* is literally *wind, air, breath.* A student of Hebrew can trace the word *ruach* through all its modifications, from its physical signification as the material wind, to its metaphysical meaning as an influence from God; and then still onward up to the beings who minister before God, and of whom the Psalmist says, "He maketh his angels to be winds" (Ps. civ. 4); till finally we reach up unto the third person of the blessed Trinity: and then, as with this full knowledge of the Divine nature we read backward, we find the presence of the Holy Ghost indicated, where to the Israelite probably there was mention only of a material agency. Jost, in his 'History of the Jews since the time of the Maccabees,' vol. i. p. 12, says that Saul suffered under that form of madness called *hypochondria,* and that the Jews gave this the name of *bad air,* the words translated here "evil spirit;" for they held, he says, that "the devil inhabited the air." So St. Paul speaks of the "wicked spiritual beings that are in high places," *i. e.* in the loftier regions of the atmosphere (Ephes. vi. 12). A study of Saul's character makes it probable that, as is often the case with men of brilliant genius, there was always a touch of insanity in his mental constitution. His joining in the exercises of the prophets (ch. x. 10—12) was an outburst of eccentric enthusiasm; and the excitement of his behaviour in the occurrences narrated in ch. xiv. indicate a mind that might easily be thrown off its balance. And now he seems to have brooded over his deposition by Samuel, and instead of repenting to have regarded himself as an ill-used man, and given himself up to despondency, until he became a prey to melancholy, and his mind was overclouded. His servants rightly regarded this as a Divine punishment, but their words are remarkable. **Behold, an evil spirit from God** terrifieth **thee.** And so again, in ver. 16, **the evil spirit from God,** as if they were unwilling to ascribe to Jehovah, their covenant Deity, **the** sending of this evil "influence," while rightly they saw that evil as well as good must come from the Almighty, inasmuch as all things are in his hand, and whatever is must be by his permission. The writer of the book has no such scruples; he calls it "an evil spirit from Jehovah," because it was Jehovah, their own theocratic King, who had dethroned Saul, and withdrawn from him his blessing and protection.

Vers. 16—18.—**A cunning player on an harp.** Literally, one skilful in striking the chords on the harp. In Saul's case music would have a soothing influence, and turn the current of his thoughts. His officers suggest, therefore, that search should be made for an expert musician, and Saul consents; whereupon one of **the servants** recommended the son of Jesse. The word used here is not the same as that found in vers. 15, 16, 17. There we have Saul's *officers;* here it is *na'arim,* "young men." Thus it was a youth of David's own age, who had probably been with him at Naioth in Ramah, that described him to Saul. The description is full and interesting, but it has its difficulties. David is not only skilful in music, of which art he would have had ample scope to manifest his powers in the service of the sanctuary at Ramah, but he is also **a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters,** or, rather, *intelligent in speech* (see margin), as well as handsome and successful. Nevertheless, in ch. xvii. 33—36 David appears as a youth about to make his first essay in fighting: and though the two exploits mentioned there, of killing the lion and the bear, might justify his friend in calling him **a mighty valiant man,** literally, "a hero of valour," they do not justify the words **a man of war.** It is strange, moreover, that Saul should be so entirely ignorant of David's person and lineage as he is represented in the narrative in ch. xvii., if thus David was court musician, though reference is made there to this visit of David to Saul in ver. 15. Possibly, however, David and this youth may have served together in repelling some marauding expedition of the Philistines, and though David may not have actually done much,—nothing, at all events, so well worth repeating to Saul as the combats with the wild beasts,—yet he may have achieved enough to convince his friend that he had in him the qualities of **a man of war,** *i. e.* of a good soldier. For the rest, we must conclude that this first visit of David was a very short one, and that after playing before Saul and being approved of, he then returned home ready to come again whenever summoned, but that Saul's malady did not immediately return, and so a sufficient interval elapsed for Saul not to recognise him when he saw him under altered circumstances. **Saul's**

question, "Whose son is this stripling?" (ch. xvii. 56) seems to imply that he had a sort of confused idea about him, without being able exactly to recall who he was. The ultimate consequences of this introduction to Saul, as well as its immediate effect, are all narrated here after the usual manner of Old Testament history (see ch. vii. 13).

Vers. 19, 20.—**Saul sent messengers** to fetch David, the description of him as a brave soldier being even more to the king's liking (see ch. xiv. 52) than his skill in music. As a great man might not be approached without a present (ch. ix. 7; x. 4), Jesse sends one consisting of produce from his farm. It consisted of **an ass of bread**—a strange expression; but there is little doubt that a word has been omitted, and that we should read, with the Syriac, "And Jesse took an ass, and laded it with bread, and a skin of wine, and a kid." It was not **an ass laden with bread**, as in the A. V., but all three things were placed upon the animal.

Vers. 21—23.—**David came to Saul, and stood before him.** The latter phrase means, "became one of his regular attendants." This, and his being appointed one of Saul's armour-bearers, happened only after the lapse of some time. The armour-bearer, like the esquire in the middle ages, had to carry his lord's lance, and sword, and shield, and was always a tried soldier, and one whom the king trusted. It was apparently after the combat with Goliath that Saul sent to Jesse, and asked that David might be always with him; and until his jealousy burst forth David was very dear to him, and his music exercised a soothing influence upon his melancholy. At first, probably, these fits of insanity came upon Saul only at distant intervals, but afterwards more frequently, and with such loss of self-control that he more than once tried to murder David, and even Jonathan, his own son. We have, then, here a summary of the relations of Saul to David until the unfortunate day when the king heard the women ascribe to the youthful soldier the higher honour (ch. xviii. 7); and thenceforward these friendly feelings gave way to a growing dislike which deprived Saul of a faithful servant, and finally cost him his crown and life on Mount Gilboa.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—5.—*The progression of Providence.* The facts are—1. Samuel is aroused from his sorrow for Saul by a command from God to anoint a son of Jesse. 2. Being in fear, he is directed to go and offer sacrifice and await further instructions. 3. Arriving at Bethlehem, he quiets the trembling elders and makes preparation for the sacrifice. It was natural for Samuel in his retirement to cherish sorrow for Saul; and his brooding over disappointment would become more habitual as no active measures were as yet taken to provide a successor. The section before us introduces a new phase in the development of God's purposes. The part which Samuel was called on to play, and the spirit in which he set about it, bring out some truths of general import.

I. PROVIDENCE PROCEEDS IN ITS ORDERLY COURSE IRRESPECTIVE OF PERSONAL DISAPPOINTMENTS AND FAILURES. Saul was a failure; Samuel was disappointed; and to human appearance a pause of very uncertain duration must be made in the progress of events. The attitude of Samuel was one of sorrowful waiting. He could only nurse his grief. To man it was as though a break had occurred in the continuous unfolding of the Divine purposes in relation to the Messianic kingdom. But this was only in appearance. God will not have his great purpose in Christ arrested in realisation by the failure of one or the brooding grief of another. During the separation of Samuel from Saul the unseen hand had been guarding and guiding a youth at Bethlehem, and now that his age and the circumstances of the family were ripening for action, the sorrowing prophet must rouse himself to share actively in the coming order of events. In *every age God has his purposes to fulfil, and they continue to unfold* notwithstanding the unfaithfulness of some and the complaining voice of others. The changes experienced by men are only incidents of a moment; the providence of God is one and continuous. In the process of establishing the Messianic kingdom, one by one men and kingdoms rose and disappeared,—the people raged and submitted, wept and rejoiced, were now true and now false,—but all the while the one Will was working on to the setting of the true King in Zion. In the history of the Christian Church, men of the type of Saul have been discarded and others of Samuel's spirit have wept in solitude; but neither the failure nor the protracted sorrow have been allowed to arrest the silent, sure progression towards the

goal of human existence. A careful survey shows, that as the wholesome economy of the globe is preserved and its ultimate issue being attained amidst and even by the storms of life, so there is a wise and merciful Providence working on in unbroken lines towards the realisation of the promise made to Abraham: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."

II. GOD'S SERVANTS SHOULD ADAPT THEMSELVES TO THE PROGRESSION OF HIS PROVIDENCE. Men of Samuel's type must rouse themselves and join freely and confidently in the blessed progression. New conditions are daily arising. The instruments for the realising of the Divine purpose are limited only by his creative power. The earth is his, and he raises up a David when a David can best furnish the next link in the unbroken chain. Faculties and aptitudes need only circumstances to develop them into direct forces in the Messianic line. Samuel must brace himself to this aspect of things, and share in the honour and the toil of covering the failures of some by drawing out the better qualities of others. We *must guard against the tendency to settle down into a mournful, inactive mood* because, forsooth, the lines of Providence seem to us to be involved and past all disentanglement. There are men whose delight it is always to sing in the minor key. They overlook the fact that God's will is being wrought out in spite of necessarily imperfect creatures. There is a voice calling on all such to arise, to cease to feed their soul on regrets, to believe that the "covenant is ordered in all things, and is sure."

III. WE SHOULD AVOID A PREJUDGMENT OF GOD'S WAYS BASED ON PARTIAL KNOWLEDGE. The fear of Samuel finds its counterpart in the fear of many when called to undertake arduous duties. In his case it was based on partial information, and, therefore, while natural, was unreasonable. He appears to have concluded beforehand that he was to go and at once set up an actual king, and summon Israel to turn their allegiance from Saul to the new monarch. No doubt this would be exasperating to Saul, and by many might be regarded as treason. His reference to Saul's killing him would not, therefore, express mere fear of death so much as his view of consequences which it was desirable to avoid by a less obtrusive policy. Samuel had no right to prejudge the appointment of God. He was simply told to go to Bethlehem with his horn of oil, for that a king was to be forthcoming from the sons of Jesse. We *possess only partial information* concerning many of the purposes and methods of God. We are not justified in forming a judgment of all his acts by what is made known to us. The morality of all he commands is ever the same, whatever the future developments may be. Every day will bring its light. We must not put more into God's words than he intends. If he says, "Fill thine horn with oil and go to Jesse," we must not make that mean that we are to raise a standard of rebellion and place ourselves in peril. Men do put into Scripture what is not there, and then see consequences which arouse anxiety.

IV. DUTY REQUIRES THAT WE PLACE OURSELVES IN A POSITION TO OBTAIN FURTHER LIGHT. Samuel, instead of dwelling on his fear, arising from an unwise prejudgment of God's acts, was directed to go and do the one thing, and then look out for what next to do (ver. 3). He was to obey, and so be in a position to learn whether the next step was to raise publicly a standard of rebellion around a new king, or privately to anoint the coming man and let him await the removal by death of the people's leader. We have *here an important practical rule.* By doing each duty fully as it comes we qualify for more light and greater aptitude for succeeding duties. When bent on the performance of duty, which in its issues may involve consequences serious and untraceable, it is well to associate religious exercises with them. It is as true for us as for Samuel that, in our sphere, the Lord will show us what next to do. Faithfulness day by day in small things will make us keen to recognise the Divine voice with reference to greater things.

Vers. 6—13. — *Human and Divine judgments contrasted.* The facts are—1. Samuel, being impressed with the appearance of Eliab, concludes that he is the coming king. 2. An intimation is given that Eliab is not the man, and the reason assigned for the imperfect judgment of Samuel is, that man looks on the outward appearance, but God on the heart. 3. It being found that the other sons were not

chosen of God, inquiry is made concerning the absent one. 4. On the youngest being brought, Samuel at once recognises him as the chosen of God, and, in obedience to the voice of God, anoints him in the midst of the family. 5. Henceforth the Spirit of the Lord rests on David. We have here the introduction of an entirely new feature in the development of Israel's mission in the world. The former choice of a king was virtually man's. The initiation of the choice was taken in the desire to have a king to embody their idea of government (ch. viii. 5, 19, 20). In this case the people are not consulted or heeded. God selects the man according to his knowledge of what is best. The human device had failed; the Divine choice can now come in with impressiveness. Yet human instrumentality brings to pass God's purpose. Samuel, however, is influenced by the appearance of things, and has to learn that even the judgment of the wise and good is liable to err. The essential imperfection of man's judgment as compared with God's is explained by the fact that man's knowledge does not enter into the realities of things as does God's.

I. LIFE IS A SERIES OF JUDGMENTS. In every act of perception there is involved an intuitive judgment; and in every comparison of different objects, as also in every course of silent reasoning, a decision is arrived at which helps to form the stock of ideas constituting our knowledge. Thus do we acquire opinions respecting the value of men and things. In some persons there is a tendency to criticise human actions and words, and to proceed from what is clear to the senses to a deliberate judgment on the invisible; but in all there is a necessity of nature by which, apart from criticism, some estimate is formed of every one coming under our observation. This necessity of our nature is full of advantage. It is the means of enrichment to the mind; it furnishes a basis for friendship; it preserves from treachery; it facilitates the intercourse of life; and when the series of judgments is formed, under the guidance of such light as Christ gives, it constitutes an imperishable fount of enjoyment when this life is past.

II. GOD ALSO HAS HIS JUDGMENT OF THINGS. It is not correct to speak of God's knowledge in the terms applicable to man; for he does not pass from the small to the great, the obscure to the clear, the sensible to the invisible. Yet it may be said of God that there is in his mind a clear judgment respecting each, as to what it essentially is, and what its value in the great economy of the universe. To say that God knows us altogether is another way of saying that he has a judgment of our character and position. It is a solemn fact for us that the Eternal adjudges our actions and thoughts one by one as they arise (Rev. xx. 12), and the day of judgment will be a summary of the judgments passed on our actions one by one as they occur. If men only had more faith in God, and did but let a knowledge of his estimate of actions influence their lives, what wonders we should see!

III. MAN'S JUDGMENT AND GOD'S JUDGMENT ARE OFTEN VERY DIFFERENT. Possibly, while the distinction between infinite and finite exists, there can never be a perfect coincidence of the human and Divine judgment, in the strictest sense of the term. But apart from this there are several aspects of the truth affirmed and illustrated in the case of Samuel. 1. *The constitution of things.* We know and judge only of the appearance of things. The material universe, even when subjected to the scrutiny of the most correct scientific appliances, and reduced to the last analysis of elements, is only known on *the outside.* What the ultimate relation of the primary forces to the one almighty Power, and why they work in certain observed lines to which we give the name "laws," we know not. The same is true of mind. It is a vast world, on the outer fringe only of which we at present can gaze. Not so God's. As Author and Upholder of all, he has an estimate of the internal, essential constitution of things more perfect than our estimate of the outward appearance. Hence the folly of men professing to say what cannot be; or that the universe, as seen by us in operation, is to be and has been always thus. Hence the wisdom of submitting to the revealed truth of God when it touches on his relation to the order of things and the mysteries of his own ineffable Being (Matt. xxviii. 19; John vii. 28). 2. *The worth of lines of action.* Man's judgment is freely expressed in reference to certain lines of action pursued by what are called the "great." The heroes of the world have often won admiration for deeds which, had man's judgment been based on a finer perception of what constitutes greatness, would have been

buried in oblivion. Have not the most costly monuments been raised to warriors? Is not the world's idea of "glory" that of conquering by force of arms, or the enjoyment of wealth and splendour? The judgment of God is not thus. He looks on the heart of things. True greatness lies in saving, healing, curing, elevating, purifying, binding in bonds of peace and good-will. Imagine Jesus Christ raising an *Arc de Triomphe!* Imagine him conferring highest honours on men of great and bloody victories! Imagine him pointing to wealth as the goal of a youth's ambition! The noblest men are those who best reproduce the spirit and deeds of the Son of God. 3. *Human character.* Man's judgment of character is necessarily imperfect; for words are not always a revelation of the inner man, but the reverse, and the seat of motive is not pierced by the human eye. There is often a worse heart than appears on the surface of a man's conduct, and, also, a better heart than a man sometimes gets credit for. We are too apt to be influenced by prejudice, social considerations, personal interests, and to estimate the principles of others by the narrow standard of our own. Some men are suspicious, or self-righteous, or limited in their area of observation, and therefore they can never be sure of their judgment of other men. Others are easily caught by what is fair and conformable to custom, and, like Samuel, they spring to hasty conclusions. It is better often to fall into the hands of God than of man. On the other hand, *God's judgment of us is perfect.* The most secret avenue of thought and feeling is naked and open to his eye. He reads us entirely. His knowledge is not inferential from words and actions, but is that of the disposition and hidden motive (Ps. CXXXIX.). 4. *Fitness for position.* Samuel was in error in supposing that the qualities which might be inferred from his outward appearance to exist in Eliab would enable him to perform the part required of a true king in Israel. God alone knew the high spiritual work to be done by the coming king, and he alone could see the latent qualities in David by which it could be performed. At best our judgment is guess-work. We especially feel this in seeking to fill up secular offices, and more so when making appointments to spiritual duties (Acts i. 24; 1 Tim. v. 22).

General lessons:—1. There is abundant scope in life for caution, patience, charity in our estimate of others. 2. The best qualities of life are not always those which come to the surface on first acquaintance. 3. It should be an effort to be inwardly such as God will approve, and then all else will follow in due course. 4. Reticence in reference to the character of others is the sign of a proper estimate of our powers. 5. It should be a spring of comfort to the sincere that God knows them and approves when man errs in judgment.

Vers. 12, 13.—*The coming king.* The facts are—1. The personal appearance of David is pleasing. 2. Samuel is instructed to anoint him as the chosen of God. 3. Subsequent to the anointing the Spirit of God rests on David. 4. Samuel, having performed this important duty, retires to Ramah. Samuel, like many a servant of God in public affairs, carried in his heart a great secret. He sought the coming king, but not a word was said to indicate to the family of Jesse the specific object of his mission. For anything they knew, the selection of one of the family might be designed for some purpose connected with Samuel's work not yet made plain. The command to anoint was based, not on any discovery of qualities from mere outward appearance, though these were not unfavourable, but on God's knowledge of the inner life. Man's king had been chosen because of his being an average representative of the age, and an embodiment of the physical and mental qualities agreeable to the people. The coming king was chosen because God knew him to be the best representative of the spiritual vocation of Israel in the world. The coming king may be regarded as—

I. A TYPE. Events under the Old Testament dispensation were so ordered of God as to shadow forth the Christ, and both Old and New Testaments especially speak of David as the type of the true King in Zion. This is seen in several respects. 1. *In qualities.* Of course no man, no words, no institutions can adequately set forth the qualities of the "express image" of the Father's person. But, in comparison with others, David certainly shadowed forth more than any one some of the features of character so prominent in Christ. *Negatively*, there was an absence of

the qualities on which men were accustomed to depend. Great physical strength, lofty stature, overpowering physique were not his. And so in Christ there was an absence of the outward form which men of low type count powerful. He was not apparently competent to subdue the world by the only force which men take count of. But, *positively*, there was in this coming king an adumbration of the higher spiritual qualities which shone so brightly in Christ. The allusions to his personal appearance are both to indicate that he was not the embodiment of mere physical force, and that he did possess what was of more value, namely, vigour and freshness, capable of buoyant effort in any good endeavour; grace of spirit—gentle, approachable, one of whom the poor and needy need not be afraid; sincerity and ingenuousness of mind, free from double motives and self-seeking; love of what is right and good because right and good, uncorrupted by long and dubious association with the world's business; sympathy with God that finds joy in quiet fellowship with him by prayer or holy psalm; aspirations after the future elevation of mankind to a holier life; subordination of spirit to a higher will, for the working out of the covenant made with his people. He who sees not as man sees knew that these qualities were actually or germinally in the youngest son of Jesse. How fully the same were in Christ is evident from his life and words and sacrificial work. 2. *In object.* Saul's reign was a failure in so far as concerned the elevation of the nation to its proper position. The object for which the coming king was anointed was to deliver Israel from thraldom, fear, and degradation, and enable them to more worthily subserve the ulterior spiritual ends of their existence as a nation. In large measure David did this. In this he was certainly a type of him who was chosen for the deliverance of a larger community from worse evils; and that, too, with reference to a permanent order of things stretching beyond the day of judgment (John xvii.; 1 Cor. xv.). 3. *In call and preparation.* Leaving out the fact that Bethlehem was the place of birth to David and Christ, we may notice two or three correspondences. This youth was specially chosen of God irrespective of popular voice; he grew up in quietude, awaiting the opening of events before entering on his predestined work; and was anointed with the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, and so gradually became qualified for his important duties. Emphatically, Christ was "the Chosen One," "Elect," "Precious;" in youth he grew in wisdom and stature, far removed from the worries of public business, and received the anointing of the Spirit "without measure."

II. A MODEL. Confining attention to the qualities of this coming king, and the objects that in due course he set before himself, he may be regarded as the model king. It had been well for Israel had all subsequent kings shared these qualities and kept before them the same lofty spiritual ends. And although civilisation in the West differs from that of the East in David's age, yet it would be a great boon to the nations if all kings and queens would adopt and manifest the same principles, and seek to harmonise all the people's habits and aspirations with Messiah's kingdom. Likewise, as each Christian is to be a "king" unto God (Rev. i. 5), we may see in the qualities and aspirations of this model king what manner of persons we ought to be.

III. A CONTRAST. This is obvious. Saul was man's man; David was God's. Saul was man's device for saving the people (ch. viii. 5, 19, 20); David was God's provision for raising them to the Messianic standard. Man's device failed—the instrument partook too largely of the weaknesses of the people to be raised; God's provision succeeded, in so far as related to national freedom, higher spiritual elevation, and actual furtherance of Messianic purposes. The *contrast is suggestive of a wider expedient and a more blessed provision.* Mankind was in need of deliverance from the evils consequent on sin. During long ages the human expedient of "wisdom" was tried, but in vain. But "after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." The CHRIST has become the Deliverer. His gospel is the power of God unto salvation. By him the highest and most blessed issues are wrought out for mankind. The contrast may be traced, also, in respect to our personal deliverance and elevation to the loftiest position attainable by human nature. Our bare human reason, human morality, human force of will must issue in trouble. We need

the Anointed One, the God-given Saviour. He, transfusing our natural powers with his glorious energy, will make us "more than conquerors."

General lessons:—1. Great natures may be nurtured in lowly places while engaged in quiet pursuits. 2. Amidst the intricacies of life God keeps his eye on his loved ones, and calls them forth in due time. 3. Aspirations are awakened, but insight into the future is not perfected at once. David was stimulated, but knew not all at first. 4. Full confidence is felt when God reveals his call: then the "horn," not the vial (ch. x. 1), may be used. 5. To God's true servants the Holy Spirit comes as abiding Helper, to teach, sanctify, comfort, and elevate.

Vers. 14—23.—*Disquietude caused by sin.* The facts are—1. Saul, being left to himself, is troubled by an evil spirit from the Lord. 2. His servants, in their concern for his peace, suggest music as an alleviation, and obtain permission to provide it. 3. David, being famed for music, is sent for, and finds favour with Saul. 4. The music of David brings relief to Saul's troubled spirit. The narrative relates the effect of God's judicial abandonment of Saul to the impenitent spirit he had deliberately cherished (ch. xv. 23—29). The transaction between him and Samuel in reference to his sin and rejection had been private, and during the interval from the departure to Ramah (ch. xv. 34) up to the date of the reference in ch. xvi. 14, the secret knowledge of this fact had wrought its subjective effect on the mind of Saul. The secrecy of the business is a clue to much that follows. It matters not to our purpose what sense be put on "an evil spirit from the Lord;" the fact is clear that disquietude of mind follows on transgression duly brought home to conscience yet not repented of, and that this disquietude is aggravated by secrecy.

I. THE CAUSES OF MENTAL DISQUIETUDE. There are instances of mental disquietude (Ps. xlii. 5; John xii. 27; xiv. 1) differing in character and cause from that before us. In the case of Saul there was a strange blending of sullen remorse, despondency, instability, passion, fear, and desperation. He was sometimes beyond self-control, and his outbursts aroused the apprehensions of his attendants. The manifestations of a disquieted spirit will be partly determined by natural temperament, and partly by external conditions, and partly by bodily health. But of the class of which Saul's is an example, the general causes are akin to those which operated in him. 1. *A secret consciousness of sin.* That Saul had done wrong in the matter of the sacrifice (ch. xiii. 13), the rash vow (ch. xiv. 45), and the Amalekites (ch. xv. 18, 19) he knew full well; that the people knew that something was amiss with him is evident from their deliverance of Jonathan and Samuel's slaying of Agag; but that their knowledge of Saul's conduct was co-extensive with his own is not probable. The more private interviews with Samuel had brought him face to face with sin as it appeared to the Lord. His admission, "I have sinned" (ch. xv. 24), being a conviction without true repentance, remained in his memory after his final separation from Samuel. The fact that his people did not know all only served to make the sad secret of guilt more distressing. Now it is impossible for a man's spirit to be at ease when he carries with him at home and abroad a thorough conviction of being guilty before God. His sin haunts him as a ghost. It creates a desire to flee from himself. It causes him to feel that he is a disgraced, degraded being, the bearer of a dark secret, the subject of a remorse that will not die. 2. *Knowledge of loss of a goodly heritage.* Saul's mind dwelt much in the past. He remembered the comparative innocence of rural life, when seeking his father's asses; the unexpected honour shadowed forth by the prophet; the private anointing; the bestowment of special gifts that won the confidence of the sons of the prophets; the high and elevating intercourse concerning the manner of the kingdom, and the solemn proclamation of his kingship over the chosen race. Now all that was gone. It was of the past in a double sense. The splendid prospects had faded; the rejection by God had been privately announced by one whose word never failed. But the future had to be feared, and Saul, when daring to look into it, saw and felt that Providence was against him. The same elements of disappointment, bitter regret, and fearful foreboding enter into the life of others. How many a man in crowded cities is forced by conscious secret guilt to look back on a splendid heritage of good gone for ever! How many feel that, though friends and the world may flatter, God has turned away

his face, and that, being bent on their secret guilty way, the whole force of Providence is against them in the future! 3. *Fear of exposure.* Samuel took no steps to dethrone Saul or to alienate the people from him. He kept the secret of rejection, and expressed the Divine will only in ceasing to hold official intercourse with Saul, and in quietly selecting David as one favoured of God. Saul knew his coming doom in rough outline. The dread of this was foreshadowed in the prayer that Samuel would not openly dishonour him before the people (ch. xv. 30). A moody temperament, naturally subject to impulse, would easily be urged, under this dread, now to desponding and melancholy, and now to the sudden grasping at a shadow of hope; and the alternations of hope and despair could not but induce a nervous condition which, while a guilty secret was covered, might express itself in painful irritability. *The fear of exposure drives men in upon themselves*, and induces an abnormal condition of mind and nerve. Guilty men, who will not sincerely repent and seek rest in Christ, know that judgment is coming, but they take care to hide that truth from others, and often bear a terrible strain on their spirits. 4. *Secret persistence in wrong.* Saul had said, "I have sinned," but he never repented. No doubt he regretted the consequences that flowed from his preference of self to the will of God; but he still loved to have his own way. The spirit that prompted to set aside God's command for his own choice was unchanged. It in itself was a state of war; but still it was restive, unsubdued; it chafed under restraint and conviction of rejection, and sometimes would break out in fury that its preferences should thus be chastised. "As a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke." It is this element of cherished sin, this persistent continuance in the original state of mind that contracted guilt, which poisons the entire life. It sets the whole man at war with God, and renders irksome what to a penitent, lowly heart would be meekly borne. Truly when men sin, and "will have it so," they are so far left to themselves as to work out in their life all manner of miseries.

II. TEMPORARY ALLEVIATIONS OF MENTAL DISQUIETUDE. The servants of Saul were true philosophers in seeking *diversion* for their master. In cases of trouble, diversion from self and the causes of trouble always affords relief. This is recognised by guilty men, who seek diversion in business, or pleasure, or public affairs. It is a rule with some wicked men to plunge more deeply into public or private business in proportion as conscience has to be quieted. The *diversion* was of a nature to *soothe* the nervous system. Music has in it something refined and pure and remote from the turmoil and confusion of sinful life. As a curative or alleviative element in certain sicknesses its power has not been sufficiently developed. Saul felt the charm, and for a while the irritation consequent on internal conflict was toned down. The *diversion* would have *increased effect* if associated with spiritual song. There is evidence that David cultivated psalmody in his early years; and who can tell the subduing influence on the restless Saul as David poured forth to his harp strains of love and trust and hope in God! We see constantly that even the boldest of impenitent sinners are touched by sweet, simple hymns, which seem to call back a lost purity, and open up a gleam of hope for the most depraved. The songs of Zion are as the echo to many of long-lost music. Their power over men should be diligently used. But in all cases of mere diversion the *benefit* is *transitory*. The old enmity remains. The old fears come back in force. The true remedy has not been sought.

III. THE RADICAL CURE IS ONE AND CONSTANT. What would have been the course of Providence had he truly repented we know not. But looking at his sin and the rejection from the kingdom in the light of Scripture, we can see what would have been the safe and happy course. Had Saul been true to the passing impulse of tenderness, he would have ceased in his persistence in sin, and have humbled himself before God, and sought mercy in the appointed way. Retirement to private life would then have been no great burden, but rather a willing, loving homage to the holiness of God. The troubled spirit would have found rest. The cure for the internal miseries of men lies in self-renunciation and placing the soul at the mercy of the great Saviour. We must cease to seek rest and peace apart from his loving embrace.

General lessons:—1. We should faithfully search out how much of our restlessness in daily life is due to unforgiven sin. 2. In all our efforts to alleviate mental

distress we should pay due regard to moral causes. 3. The longer the delay in repenting of sin, the more difficult it becomes.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1. (BETHLEHEM.)—*David's parentage and education.* (*References:*—Family register—1 Chron. i.—iii. I. *Early life:* shepherd, harper, champion—chs. xvi., xvii. II. *Courtier and outlaw life*—chs. xviii.—xxxi.; 2 Sam. i. III. *Royal life* in Hebron and Jerusalem—2 Sam. ii.—xxiv.; 1 Kings i., ii.; 1 Chron. x.--xxix.) While Saul pursued his own way at Gibeah, and Samuel mourned for him at Ramah, there dwelt at Bethlehem (twelve miles from the latter place) *a shepherd youth* who was destined to attain peerless renown as "a man of war," a ruler over men, an inspired poet and prophet, and (because of his fulfilling the idea of a truly theocratic king more perfectly than any other) a type of One to whom is given "a name which is above every name." Once and again the prophet had declared that Saul would be replaced by a worthier successor (ch. xiii. 14; xv. 28); but who that successor should be he knew not until the inner voice said, "Arise, anoint him: for this is he" (ver. 12). DAVID (the beloved) was sixteen or eighteen years of age. His personal appearance is minutely described. In comparison with the gigantic Saul, and even his eldest brother, he was of short stature (ver. 7). He had reddish or auburn hair, and a fresh, florid complexion, which were rare among his black-locked and swarthy countrymen; a pleasing countenance, keen, bright eyes, and a graceful form. He also possessed great physical strength, courage, intelligence, sagacity, and power of expression (ver. 18); above all, a firm trust in God and ardent love toward him. Many influences combined to make him what he was, and to develop his extraordinary gifts; which, after his anointing, advanced rapidly towards perfection. "It is impossible to draw a line of distinction between his life before and after his designation by Samuel; but we may well believe that those elements of character were already forming which began to shine forth when the Spirit of Jehovah came upon him." "Royalty was inborn in him." Among the *formative influences* referred to were those of—

I. FAMILY RELATIONSHIP. 1. He belonged to one of the most *honourable families* in Judah, the foremost tribe of Israel. His ancestor, Nahshon, was prince of the tribe (Num. ii. 3; vii. 12); another, Salmon, married Rahab, "who received the spies in peace" (Matt. i. 5); another, Boaz (great-grandfather of David), married Ruth the Moabitess, "a truly consecrated flower of heathendom turning longingly to the light of Divine revelation in Israel" (Ruth iv. 17). His father, Jesse (Isa. xi. 1), who would often speak of them, had attained "a good old age" (ch. xvii. 12), was in prosperous circumstances, had eight sons, of whom David was the youngest, and two daughters-in-law (2 Sam. xvii. 25), whose children—Abishai, Joab, and Asahel (sons of Zeruiah), and Amasa (son of Abigail)—were old enough to be his companions. Peculiar physical, mental, and moral qualities often characterise certain families, are transmitted from one generation to another, and are sometimes concentrated in a single individual; and great family traditions tend to excite noble impulses and aspirations. 2. He was connected (through Tamar, Rahab, Ruth) with several *Gentile races.* This served to enlarge his sympathies, and accounts for his friendly intercourse with them (ch. xxii. 3; 1 Kings v. 1). "No prince of Israel was ever on such friendly, intimate terms with the heathen about him" ('Expositor,' ii. 9). 3. He received a *godly training.* Jesse was a man of simple piety (vers. 1, 5; ch. xx. 6); his mother (whose name has not been recorded) was a "handmaid of Jehovah" (Ps. lxxxvi. 16; cxvi. 16). "How much David owed to her we cannot doubt. The memory of it abode with him through all the trials and all the splendours of his subsequent career; and hence, whilst nowhere does he mention his father, he seems in these passages to appeal to the memory of his mother's goodness, as at once a special token of the Divine favour to himself, and an additional reason that he should prove himself the servant of God" (W. L. Alexander).

II. ORDINARY OCCUPATION. Whilst his brothers cultivated fields and vineyards on the slopes of Bethlehem, he kept his father's sheep "in the wilderness" of Judah

(ch. xvii. 28), and his lowly occupation—1. Was adapted to nurture *physical strength*, agility, and endurance; to call forth energy, self-reliance, and courage amidst numerous perils in a wild country, from beasts of prey and hill robbers (1 Chron. vii. 21); to make him expert in the use of the sling, like the neighbouring Benjamites (Judges xx. 16; 1 Sam. xvii. 50; 1 Chron. xii. 2); and to prepare him to rule over men by developing a sense of responsibility, and leading him to seek the welfare and study the increase and improvement of the flock (Ps. lxxviii. 70—72). 2. Left him much alone, and afforded him leisure for meditation and the cultivation of a *taste for music*, by playing on the hand-harp, which he could easily carry with him when he "followed the flock," and the rare gift of song, in both of which he may have greatly improved, after his anointing, by attendance at the school of the prophets at Ramah (ch. xix. 18). To his musical skill he owed his first introduction to the court of Saul, and by its means he became "the sweet singer of Israel." "With his whole heart he sang songs, and loved him that made him" (Ecclus. xlvii. 8). 3. Furnished him with the *suggestive imagery* of many of his psalms, especially Ps. xxiii.—'The Divine Shepherd.' "It is the echo of his shepherd life, and breathes the very spirit of sunny confidence and of perfect rest in God."

III. THE NATURAL CREATION. To him the visible universe was a manifestation of the glory of the invisible, immanent, ever-operating God (Ps. civ.). He regarded nature "not as an independent and self-subsisting power, but rather as the outer chamber of an unseen Presence—a garment, a veil, which the eternal One is ever ready to break through" (Shairp, 'Poetic Inter. of Nature'). Brought into direct and constant communion with it, he felt a boundless delight in contemplating

> "The silence that is in the starry sky,
> The sleep that is among the lonely hills;"

in listening to its mysterious voices, and watching its ever-varying aspects; and poured forth the thought and feeling of his heart in songs of adoration and praise; as in Ps. xix. 1—13—'The heavens by day;' Ps. viii.—'The heavens by night;' Ps. xxix.—'The thunder-storm.' "What we call the love of nature is in fact the love and admiration of the Deity (so far forth as he is perceived in external nature). The enthusiasm with which men survey the endless vicissitudes which the spectacle of the universe exhibits is nothing else than the devotional temper, moderated and repressed by the slight veil which sensible objects interpose between us and their author" (D. Stewart).

IV. HISTORIC REVELATION. He was instructed in "the law of the Lord" (Ps. xix. 7—14—'The moral law'), and in the wonderful works which he had wrought on behalf of his people in past time (Ps. cv.); whilst the scenes amidst which his life was spent formed a pictorial Bible, by which they were more deeply impressed on his memory. His acquaintance with the contents of the sacred records then existing would be greatly increased under the teaching of Samuel. "Thy creatures have been my books, but thy Scriptures much more" (Bacon).

V. PROVIDENTIAL PRESERVATION. The same special care which had been exercised by Jehovah over Israel he was taught to recognise in the lowly course of his own individual life. Once and again he was preserved in imminent danger (ch. xvii. 37), and thus his faith in the ever-watchful presence and providence of the Great Shepherd grew strong. "Every Hebrew might consider himself alone in the presence of God; the single being to whom a great revelation had been made, and over whose head an exceeding weight of glory was suspended. His personal welfare was infinitely concerned with every event that had taken place in the miraculous order of Providence. . . . . His belief in him could not exist without producing, as a necessary effect, that profound impression of passionate individual attachment which in the Hebrew authors always mingles with and vivifies their faith in the Invisible" (A. H. Hallam).

VI. RELIGIOUS INSPIRATION. Led by Divine grace from his earliest years into direct and loving communion with Jehovah, he was endowed with unusual spiritual power, which, as he faithfully surrendered himself to it, wrought in him more and more mightily, and prepared him for his high destiny. And all true spiritual life, as well as the peculiar endowments of the prophets and apostles, is a Divine inspiration

(John iii. 8; Acts ii. 17). "The morning of his day this extraordinary man spent not in colleges nor camps nor courts, but in following the sheep among the pastures of Bethlehem. There, under the breathings of spring and the blasts of winter; there, in fellowship with fields and flocks and silent stars; there, with the spirit of nature and of God fresh upon him; there, in the land of vision, miracle, and angels—there it was that his character was formed, a character which afterwards exhibited so rare a combination of simplicity and grandeur, sensibility and power" (C. Morris).

Application (to the young):—1. The morning of life is the appropriate season for education—physical, mental, moral. If neglected, the evil cannot be repaired. 2. No educational advantages can be of service without your own diligent co-operation. 3. All circumstances—adverse as well as propitious, solitude and society, work and recreation—may be helpful to your highest progress. 4. "Have faith in God," the secret of all David's greatness.—D.

Vers. 4—13. (BETHLEHEM.)—*David chosen and anointed.* "Arise, anoint him: for this is he" (ver. 12). In the exercise of his prophetic office Samuel appears to have been accustomed to visit one place or another, rebuking crime and sin. Hence his presence at Bethlehem (clad in a mantle, his white hair flowing over his shoulders, holding a horn of consecrated oil in his hand, and attended, perhaps, by a servant), driving before him a heifer for sacrifice, filled the elders with consternation. Having quieted their fears, he showed special honour to Jesse and his sons by inviting them to be his principal guests at a sacrificial feast. By the express direction of God he allowed his seven sons, who were introduced to him, to pass by without any mark of distinction; and, having delayed the feast until his youngest son came, poured upon his head the sacred oil, and "anointed him from amongst his brethren." "As far as outward appearances go he simply chooses him as his closest companion and friend in the sacrifice" (Ewald). The act may have been regarded as "somehow connected with admission to the schools of the prophets, or more probably with some work for God in the future, which at the proper time would be pointed out." Its main significance was known only to the prophet, and was not revealed by him at the time to any one else. Consider *the Divine choice of David* (representing that of others) to eminent spiritual service and honour, as—

I. DIFFERING FROM THE NATURAL JUDGMENT OF MEN (vers. 6, 7). They are accustomed—1. *To judge according to the "outward appearance,"* which alone is clearly perceived, which is often deemed of greater worth than properly belongs to it, and which is erroneously supposed to be united with corresponding inward reality. On this account Saul suited the popular desire. 2. *To prefer the eldest before the youngest;* an arrangement which is an imperfect one, and often set aside by the choice of God, who thus exhibits his superior knowledge and maintains his sovereign right. 3. *Even the oldest and wisest* of men fall into error when left to themselves. Not only did Jesse and the brethren of David look upon him as unfit for anything but the lowliest occupation (ch. xvii. 28), and unworthy to be called to the sacred feast, but Samuel himself thought at first that in Eliab the Lord's anointed was before him. The stone which the builders refuse becomes (by the operation of God, and to the surprise of men) "the head stone of the corner."

II. DETERMINED BY A RIGHT STATE OF HEART, which—1. In the sight of God is of greater *value* than anything else, and essential to the worth of everything else. 2. *Implies* such qualities as sincerity, humility, trust, fidelity, courage, purity, and unselfish, generous, entire devotion, which were eminently displayed by David. 3. *Renders capable of noble service,* prompts to it, and prepares for the highest honour. "Is thy heart right?" (2 Kings x. 15). Whatever great things may lie in the future, right-heartedness is the first condition of attaining them. "My son, give me thine heart."

III. DISTINGUISHING ITS OBJECT IN A SPECIAL MANNER (vers. 11, 12). 1. *By his separation from others,* and by directing their attention to his worth, which had been previously unrecognised. "We will not sit down till he come hither." Circumstances often constrain attention to those who have been despised. "The stone which is fit for the building will not be left in the road." 2. *By indications of* his

being providentially destined to *future eminence*. David did not himself understand the chief purpose of his anointing, but he must have inferred from it that he was not always to continue in "the sheep-folds" (Ps. lxviii. 70), and have been impelled to look forward to a higher service on behalf of Israel. Possibly it was afterwards explained to him by Samuel in more familiar intercourse. 3. *By communications of Divine grace* and strength to his inner life. "And the Spirit of Jehovah came upon David from that day forward." It is recorded of Samson that "the Spirit of Jehovah began to move him at times in the camp of Dan;" it was the same in the case of David (ch. xvii. 34), and in a much higher manner (see ch. x. 1, 10; xi. 6). "The natural basis for this symbolism of oil is its power to dispense light and life, joy and healing; by which it sets forth the Spirit's dispensation of light and life, and the gifts and powers therein contained" (Bähr).

IV. DELAYED IN THE FULFILMENT OF ITS ULTIMATE AIM. Many years must sometimes elapse before one who is chosen by God for a special work is fully called to its performance. Why such delay? For—1. *The removal of obstacles* that lie in his path. Saul must be suffered to go to the natural termination of his melancholy career. 2. *The occurrence of circumstances* that make it necessary and cause it to be generally desired. The people must learn by experience the folly of their former choice, and their need of another and different kind of ruler. 3. *His own instruction*, discipline, and preparation. The proper course for him who is impelled to higher service is patiently to bide his time in the humble and faithful discharge of the duty that lies immediately before him. "David's peculiar excellence is that of *fidelity to the trust committed to him;* a firm, uncompromising, single-hearted devotion to the cause of God, and a burning zeal for his honour. This characteristic virtue is especially illustrated in the early years of his life. Having borne his trial of obedience well, in which Saul had failed, then at length he was intrusted with a sort of discretionary power to use in his Master's service" (J. H. Newman).—D.

Ver. 7. (BETHLEHEM.)—*God's regard to the heart.* "The heart is the centre of (1) the *bodily* life; (2) the *spiritual-psychical* life—will and desire, thought and conception, the feelings and the affections; and (3) the *moral* life, so that all moral conditions—from the highest mystical love of God to the self-deifying pride and the darkening and hardening—are concentrated in the heart as the innermost life-circle of humanity" (Delitzsch, 'Bib. Psychology,' p. 295). The declaration that "Jehovah looketh on the heart" is profitable for—

I. THE CORRECTION OF ERRORS into which we too commonly fall in relation to others. 1. The adoption of *an imperfect standard* of human worth:—"the outward appearance," personal strength and beauty; wealth and social position; cleverness, education, and refinement of manners; external morality, ceremonial observances, and religious zeal. These things are not to be despised, but they may exist whilst the chief thing is wanting—a right state of heart. "One thing thou lackest." 2. The assumption that we are *competent judges* of the character and worth of others. But we cannot look into their hearts; and what we see is an imperfect index to them, and liable to mislead us. 3. The formation of *false judgments* concerning them. How common this is our Lord's words indicate (Matt. vii. 1).

II. THE INCULCATION OF TRUTHS which are often forgotten in relation to ourselves. 1. That we are *liable to be deceived* concerning the real state of our hearts, and to think of ourselves "more highly than we ought to think" (Rom. xii. 3). 2. That the heart of each of us *lies open to the inspection of God:* certainly, directly, completely, and constantly. He beholds its deepest motive, its supreme affection and ruling purpose. However we may deceive ourselves or others, we cannot deceive him (1 Chron. xxviii. 9; Ps. xliv. 21; Prov. xv. 11; Jer. xvii. 9, 10; Luke xvi. 15; Rev. ii. 23). 3. That *only a right state of heart* can meet with his approval. It is the effect of his grace, and he cannot but take pleasure in his own work; but "the heart of the wicked is little worth" (Prov. x. 20).

III. THE ENFORCEMENT OF DUTIES which ought to be diligently fulfilled in relation both to ourselves and others. 1. To seek supremely that *our own hearts* be set right and kept right—by self-examination, self-restraint, and fervent prayer to him "who searcheth the reins and the hearts" (Ps. li. 10; cxxxix. 23, 24; Jer. xxxi. 33).

2. To *endure patiently* the wrong judgments that others may form and utter concerning us. If we sometimes judge wrongly of them, need we wonder that they should judge wrongly of us? "Unto God would I commit my cause" (Job v. 8). 3. To *judge charitably* of their motives, character, and worth. A judgment must sometimes be formed (Matt. vii. 15—20); but "let all your things be done with charity" (1 Cor. xvi. 14).—D.

Vers. 14—16. (GIBEAH.)—*Mental and moral effects of transgression.* The soul is an arena where light and darkness, good and evil, heaven and hell, strive for mastery. But it is not an unconscious scene or passive prize of the conflict. It is endowed with the power of freely choosing right or wrong, and, with every exercise of this power, comes more or less under the dominion of the one or the other. Saul was highly exalted, but by his wilful disobedience sank to the lowest point of degradation. His sin was followed by lamentable effects in his mental and moral nature, and (since soul and body are intimately connected, and mutually affect each other) doubtless also in his physical constitution. His *malady* has been said to be "the first example of what has been called in after times religious madness" (Stanley). His condition was, in many respects, peculiar; but it vividly illustrates the mental and moral effects which always, in greater or less degree, flow from persistent transgression, viz.:—

I. THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE DIVINE SPIRIT. "And the Spirit of Jehovah departed from Saul" (ver. 14; ch. x. 10). 1. His *presence* in men is the source of their highest excellence. What a change it wrought in Saul, turning him into "another man." It imparts enlightenment, strength, courage, order, harmony, and peace; restrains and protects; and, in the full measure of its influence, quickens, sanctifies, and saves (Isa. xi. 2; Gal. v. 22; Ephes. v. 9). 2. His *continuance* in them depends on the observance of appropriate conditions. He is often compared with the *wind*, *water*, and *fire*, the most powerful forces of the natural world; and as there are conditions according to which they operate, so there are conditions according to which he puts forth his might. These are, humble and earnest attention to the word of the Lord, sincere endeavour to be true, just, and good, and believing and persevering prayer. 3. His *departure* is rendered necessary by the neglect of those conditions. "They rebelled and vexed his Holy Spirit," &c. (Isa. lxiii. 10; Acts vii. 51; Ephes. iv. 10; 1 Thess. v. 19). And with his departure the effects of his gracious influence also depart. Hence David prayed so fervently, "Take not thy Holy Spirit from me."

II. SUBJECTION TO AN EVIL INFLUENCE. "And an evil spirit *from* Jehovah troubled him." The expression is only used once before (Judges ix. 23),—"God sent an evil spirit between the men of Abimelech and the men of Shechem" (producing discord, treachery, and strife),—and denotes a breath, influence, agency, or messenger (1 Kings xxii. 22) which—1. Prevails only *after the withdrawal of the Divine Spirit.* When the soul ceases to be governed by God, it lies open to the power of evil, and comes under its dominion. 2. Is sent in just *retribution* for sin. "No man living needs a heavier chastisement from the Almighty than the letting his own passions loose upon him" (Delany). But the expression means more than this. "It is a spiritual agency of God, which brings to bear upon Saul the dark and fiery powers of Divine wrath which he has aroused by sin" (Delitzsch). Even that which is in itself good becomes evil to those who cherish an evil disposition. As the same rays of the sun which melt the ice harden the clay, so the same gospel which is "a savour of life unto life" in some is "a savour of death unto death" in others (2 Cor. ii. 16). And it is God who appoints and effectuates the forces of retribution. "The punitive justice of God is a great fact. It is stamped on all the darker phenomena of human life—disease, insanity, and death. It is in the nature of sin to entail suffering, and work itself, as an element of punishment, into all the complicated web of human existence" (Tulloch). 3. Implies the domination of the *kingdom of darkness.* Josephus, speaking according to the common belief of a later age, attributes the malady of Saul to demoniacal agency. "It was probably a kind of possession, at least at times, and in its highest stage. As a punishment for having given himself willingly into the power of the kingdom of darkness, he was also abandoned

physically to this power" (Henstenberg). How fearful is that realm of rebellion, evil, and disorder to which men become allied and subject by their sin!

III. THE EXPERIENCE OF UNCONTROLLABLE FEAR; "troubled him" — terrified, choked him. 1. In connection with *the working of peculiar and painful thoughts:* brooding over the secret of rejection, which might not be revealed to any one; the sense of disturbed relationship with God, and of his displeasure, the removal of which there was no disposition to seek by humble penitence and prayer. 2. In *the darkening aspect* of present circumstances and future prospects; suspicion and "royal jealousy, before which vanish at last all consistent action, all wise and moderate rule" (Ewald). 3. In *occasional melancholy*, despondency, and distress, irrational imaginations and terrors (Job vi. 4), and fits of violent and ungovernable passion (ch. xviii. 10, 11). "There are few more difficult questions in the case of minds utterly distempered and disordered as his was than to determine where sin or moral disease has ended, and madness or mental disease has begun" (Trench). Sin not only disturbs the moral balance of the soul, but also disorders the whole nature of man. It is itself a kind of madness, from which the sinner needs to "come to himself" (Luke xv. 17). "Madness is in their hearts," &c. (Eccles. ix. 3; 2 Pet. ii. 6).

IV. THE TENDENCY TO RAPID DETERIORATION. 1. In the case of the malady occasioned by sin there is *no self-healing power* in man, as in many bodily diseases, but it tends to become worse and worse. 2. Its *fatal course* may often be distinctly marked. "These attacks of madness gave place to hatred, which developed itself in full consciousness to a most deliberately-planned hostility" (Keil). His courage gave place to weakness and cowardice; general fear and suspicion fixed on a particular object in envy and hatred, displayed at first privately, afterwards publicly, and becoming an all-absorbing passion. "The evil spirit that came upon him from or by permission of the Lord was the evil spirit of melancholy, jealousy, suspicion, hatred, envy, malice, and cruelty, that governed him all the after part of his life; to which he gave himself up, and sacrificed every consideration of honour, duty, and interest whatsoever" (Chandler). 3. It is, nevertheless, *amenable to the remedial influences* which God, in his infinite mercy, has provided.

> "All cures were tried: philosophy talked long
> Of lofty reason's self-controlling power;
> He frowned, but spake not. Friendship's silver tongue
> Poured mild persuasions on his calmer hour:
> He wept; alas! it was a bootless shower
> As ever slaked the desert. Priests would call
> On Heaven for aid; but then his brow would lower
> With treble gloom. Peace! Heaven is good to all;
> To all, he sighed, but one,—God hears no prayer for Saul.
> At length one spake of *Music*" (Hankinson).

—D.

Vers. 19, 20. (BETHLEHEM.)—*Setting out in life.* David, setting out from his father's house at Bethlehem to go to the court of Saul at Gibeah (a distance of about ten miles), presents a picture of many a youth leaving home for more public life—to enter a profession, learn a business, or occupy a responsible position. Notice—

I. THE PECULIAR CHARACTER of the step. 1. Some such step is *necessary*. A young man cannot always continue under the paternal roof. He must go forth into the world, be thrown on his own resources, and make his own way. 2. Its nature and direction are commonly determined by his ability and tastes, and the use he makes of early advantages (ver. 18). 3. It is also greatly influenced by the wishes of others. David was sent for by Saul, and sent to him by his father. 4. It is ordered by Divine providence. This was plainly the case with David. And we are as truly the children of providence as he was. God has a purpose concerning each of us.

> "There's a Divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them as we will."

5. It opens a wider field for the exercise of natural or acquired abilities, and the attainment of desired objects. 6. It determines in most instances, the subsequent course of life. It is like the commencement of a river; or like the rolling of a stone down the mountain-side, the course of which is determined by the direction and impulse which it first receives.

II. THE PROPER SPIRIT in which it should be taken. 1. Due consideration; not thoughtlessly or rashly. 2. Lowly and loyal obedience to rightful claims. 3. Cheerful anticipation of new scenes, duties, and enjoyments. 4. Not unmingled with misgiving and self-distrust at the prospect of new difficulties and trials, and watchfulness against new and strong temptations. 5. Simple trust in God and fervent prayer for his guidance. 6. Firm determination to be true to oneself faithful to God, and useful to men.

> "Now needs thy best of man;
> For not on downy plumes, nor under shade
> Of canopy reposing, fame is won;
> Without which whosoe'er consumes his days
> Leaveth such vestige of himself on earth
> As smoke in air, or foam upon the wave" (Dante, 'Inferno,' xxiv.).

Consider—1. That life itself is a setting out in a course which will never terminate. 2. That the manner in which this step is taken will decide your future destiny.—D.

Ver. 23. (GIBEAH.)—*The soothing influence of music.* All men, with rare exceptions, are susceptible to the influence of music; some men peculiarly so. It was thus with Saul (ch. x. 10; xix. 23); and on this account, perhaps, his servants suggested the sending for a skilful musician to soothe his melancholy. The visit of David had the desired effect, and he "went and returned" (was going and returning) "to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem" (ch. xvii. 15, 55—58; xvi. 21, 22—a general, and to some extent prospective, summary of his early relations with Saul). Consider the soothing influence of music as—

I. PROVIDED BY DIVINE PROVIDENCE. It is one of the manifold indications of the goodness of God in the adaptation of man to his surroundings so as to derive enjoyment from them. The world is full of music. In trouble and agitation especially it soothes and cheers. "It brings a tone out of the higher worlds into the spirit of the hearer" (Köster). Its direct influence is exerted upon the nervous system, which is intimately connected with all mental activity. As the condition of the brain and nerves is affected by it, so also it affects the state of the mind.

> "There is in souls a sympathy with sounds;
> Some chord in unison with what we hear
> Is touched within us, and the heart replies" (Cowper).

"Pythagoras quieted the perturbations of the mind with a harp" (Seneca, 'On Anger'). Elisha, when chafed and disturbed in spirit, called for a minstrel, and was prepared by the soothing strains of his harp for prophetic inspiration (2 Kings iii. 5). Divine providence ordered the visit of David to Saul, over whom mercy still lingered. He was not only freed from the immediate pressure of fear and despondency, but also restored to a mental condition which was favourable to repentance and return to God. Music is a means of grace, and when rightly used conveys much spiritual benefit to men. It is "one of the fairest and most glorious gifts of God, to which Satan is a bitter enemy; for it removes from the heart the weight of sorrow and the fascination of evil thoughts" (Luther). "It is a language by itself, just as perfect in its way as speech, as words; just as Divine, just as blessed. All melody and all harmony, all music upon earth, is beautiful in as far as it is a pattern and type of the everlasting music which is in heaven" (C. Kingsley).

II. PRODUCTIVE OF EXTRAORDINARY EFFECTS. "Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him." "The music was more than a mere palliative. It brought back for the time the sense of a true order, a secret, inward harmony, an assurance that it is near every man, and that he may enter into it" (Maurice).

> "He is Saul, ye remember in glory,—ere error had bent
> The broad brow from the daily communion; and still, though much spent
> Be the life and the bearing that front you, the same, God did choose,
> To receive what a man may waste, desecrate, never quite lose" (Browning, 'Saul').

Many other instances of a similar nature, both in ancient and modern times, have been recorded. One of the most noteworthy is that of Philip V. of Spain, who was restored from profoundest melancholy by the magical voice of Farinelli (see Bochart; Burton, 'Anat. of Mel.;' Kitto, 'D. B. Illus.;' Jacox, 'Script. Texts Illus.;' Bate, 'Cyc. of Illus.'). "Psalmody is the calm of the soul, the repose of the spirit, the arbiter of peace. It silences the wave and conciliates the whirlwind of our passions. It is an engenderer of friendship, a healer of dissension, a reconciler of enemies. It repels the demons, lures the ministry of angels, shields us from nightly terrors, and refreshes us in daily toil" (Basil).

III. PERFECTED BY SPECIAL ENDOWMENTS possessed by the musician. David's harp was the accompaniment of his voice as he sang "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (see Josephus), expressive of the sympathy, confidence, hope, and joy of his soul; "the prelude to the harpings and songs which flowed from the harp of the future royal singer." His musical and poetic gifts were great, and they were consecrated (as all such gifts should be) to the glory of God and the good of men. "Did the music banish the demon? Not so. But the high frame of mind into which the king was brought by it sufficed to limit at least the sphere of the operation of the evil spirit within him; while the full, clear, conscious life of faith on the part of Saul would have altogether destroyed the power of the wicked one. Besides, the silent intercessions of David sent up to heaven on the wings of the music of his harp must have contributed not a little to the results with which his melodies were crowned" (Krummacher). "The Lord was with him" (ver. 18).

IV. PARTIAL AND TEMPORARY IN ITS WHOLESOME POWER. Saul was not completely cured of his malady. A breathing-space was afforded him for seeking God, and if he had faithfully availed himself of it he might have been permanently preserved from its return. But he failed to do so. On the indulgence of envy, "the evil spirit from God came upon him" again (ch. xviii. 10; xix. 10) with greater power than before (Matt. xii. 45), and that which formerly calmed and gladdened him now excited him to demoniacal frenzy and murderous passion. "It is said that the evil spirit departed, but not that the good spirit returned. Saul's trouble was alleviated, but not removed. The disease was still there. The results of David's harp were negative and superficial. So is it with the sinner still. There are many outward applications which act like spiritual chloroform upon the soul. They soothe and calm and please, but that is all; they do not go below the surface, nor touch the deep-seated malady within. Our age is full of such appliances, literary and religious, all got up for the purpose of soothing the troubled spirits of men. Excitement, gaiety, balls, theatres, operas, concerts, ecclesiastical music, dresses, performances, what are all these but man's appliances for casting out the evil spirit and healing the soul's hurt without having recourse to God's remedy" (Bonar, 'Thoughts and Themes').

Learn—1. That the excellent gift of music should excite our admiration of the Giver, "the First Composer," and our devout thankfulness to him. 2. That it ought not to be perverted from its proper intention, and employed, as it too frequently is, in the service of sin (Isa. v. 12; Amos vi. 5). 3. That the soothing and elevating effect of a "concord of sweet sounds" must not be mistaken for the peace and joy of true religion. 4. That nothing but the gospel of Christ and the power of his Spirit can effect the moral and spiritual renewal of man, and restore him to "his right mind" (Mark v. 15).—D.

Vers. 12, 13.—*The chosen one.* The Lord is never without resource. If Saul fail, the God of Israel has another and a better man in training for the post which Saul discredited. This new personage now appears on the page of history, and he will occupy many pages. It is David, the hero, the musician, the poet, the warrior, the ruler, a many-sided man, a star of the first magnitude. 1. *Not chosen according to the thoughts of men.* Samuel, who at first hesitated to go to Bethlehem on so

dangerous an errand as the Lord prescribed to him, when he did go was inclined to be over-hasty. Assuming that a new king who should supplant Saul ought to be not inferior to him in stature and strength, the prophet at once fixed on Eliab, the eldest son in Jesse's family, as the one who should be the Lord's anointed. Here was a man able to cope with, or worthy to succeed, the almost gigantic son of Kish. But the Lord corrected his servant's mistake. The time was past for choosing a leader on the score of "outward appearance." The Lord sought for the regal position a man whose heart would be true and obedient. Now Eliab's heart, as the next chapter shows, was small, though his body was large; his temper was vain and overbearing. So he had to pass; and all his brothers who were present at the feast had to pass. Not one of them had such a heart as the Lord required; and it is a significant fact that we never read of any of these men in after years as playing any honourable or memorable part in the history of their country, unless the Septuagint reading of 1 Chron. xxvii. 18 be right, and the Eliab here mentioned held the office of a tribal chief under his royal brother. 2. *Chosen according to the thoughts of God.* When the young shepherd, being sent for by his father, entered the chamber with his bright hair and fair countenance, fresh from the fields, the Lord bade Samuel anoint him. "This is he." The selection of the youngest son is in keeping with what we find in many Bible stories. Divine choice traversed the line of natural precedence. The Lord had respect to Abel, not to Cain; to Jacob rather than to Esau; to Joseph above his elder brethren. Ephraim was blessed above Manasseh, Moses was set over Aaron; Gideon was the youngest in his father's house. In this there is something so pleasing to the imagination that it has passed into the tales and legends of many nations. Of three brothers, or seven brothers, it is always the youngest who surpasses every one, accomplishes the difficult task, and rises to be a king. David's superiority to his brothers was intrinsic, and the result not of luck, but of grace. The Lord had drawn his heart to himself in the days of youth. Accordingly, where such men as Saul and Eliab were weak David was strong. He revered and loved the Lord, and could therefore be depended on to do God's will. "To whom also," says Stephen, "he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, who shall fulfil all my will." The last clause in this extract shows what is intended by the one which goes before. David was a man after the Lord's heart in loyally doing his will. He was not without fault; he certainly displeased God more than once; but he thoroughly apprehended what Saul never could understand—that a king of Israel must not be an autocrat, but should without question or murmur carry out the paramount will of God. In this respect David never failed. He had many trials and temptations, afflictions that might have made him discontented, and successes that might have made him proud; but he continued steadfast in his purpose of heart to be the Lord's, to consult the Lord about everything, and carry out his revealed will. 3. *Prepared in retirement for future eminence.* There is a sort of augury of his career in his father's words, "Behold, he keepeth the sheep." Saul first came before us going hither and thither in search of asses that were astray, and not finding them. So, as a king, he went up and down, restless and disappointed. But David kept the flock intrusted to him, and, as a king, he shepherded the flock of God. "So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands." (1) As a shepherd David formed habits of vigilance. He had to think for the flock, lead the sheep to pasture, see that they were regularly watered, watch that none strayed or were lost, and look well after the ewes and the tender lambs. All this served to make him in public life wary, prudent, thoughtful for others, a chieftain who deserved the confidence of his followers. Saul had little or none of this. He went to and fro, and fought bravely, but evinced none of that unselfish consideration for his people which marks a kingly shepherd. David showed it all through his career. He watched over his subjects, thought for them, instructed and led them. Near the end of his reign he committed an error which brought disaster on Israel; and it is touching to see how the true shepherd's heart was grieved that the flock should suffer through his fault. He cried to the Lord, "Lo, I have sinned, and have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done?" (2) As a shepherd David proved and improved his courage. Shepherds in Palestine, in those days, were

obliged to protect their flocks from prowling beasts of prey. How many encounters of this kind David may have had we do not know; but we learn from himself that, while yet a stripling, he had fought and slain both a lion and a bear rather than give up one lamb or kid of the flock. His was the best sort of courage—natural intrepidity of a true and brave spirit, sustained and elevated by unquestioning trust in God. While encountering the wild beasts in defence of his flock David was being fitted, though he knew it not, to face an armed giant in behalf of Israel, and in many battles afterwards to beat down the enemies of his country. The springs of his courage were in God. "Jehovah is my light and my salvation: whom shall I fear? Jehovah is the strength of my life: of whom shall I be afraid?" (3) As a shepherd David had leisure for music and poetry. As he kept the sheep he learned to play on his harp with a skill which was the occasion of his first rise from obscurity; and he composed and sang sweet lyrics, pious and patriotic. Whether he looked up to the sky, or looked round on the hills and valleys, or recalled to mind famous passages of his nation's history, everything gave him a song to Jehovah. Every poet writes juvenile pieces, which, though defective, show the bent of his genius; and in after years, if he has not rashly published them, he is able to recast them into new and more perfect forms as his mind grows and his skill improves. So, doubtless, the son of Jesse, in the pastoral solitude at Bethlehem, began to compose lyrics which in more mature life, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he threw into the forms of those Psalms which carry down his fame to the end of time. What a contrast to the unhappy son of Kish! Saul had the impulse of music and song upon him more than once; but he had to be acted on by others, and his own spirit had no inward harmony. As the years advanced his life became more and more unmelodious and out of tune; whereas David's early addiction to devout song and minstrelsy prepared him to be something better than a gruff warrior in his manhood. Born with genius and sensibility, he grew up a man of some accomplishment, and when called to the throne, elevated the mental and spiritual tone of the nation, and was, through a long reign, himself a very fountain of musical culture and sweet poetic thought. 4. *Anointed without and within.* Samuel anointed the youth outwardly, pouring oil over his head; Jehovah anointed him inwardly, for "the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward." The old prophet is a figure of John the Baptist, another Nazarene, and one who came to prepare the way of the King. David suggests Another, a descendant of his own, born in the same Bethlehem, and, like himself, lightly esteemed. As Samuel poured oil on the head of David, so John poured water on the head of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Then Samuel retired from view. So John too retired, and made way for him whom he had baptized. "He must increase, but I must decrease." The parallel goes still further. David had been a child of grace, but on that day the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he got what Samuel could not impart—a Divine qualification for the work and dignity to which he was destined. Jesus had been holy, harmless, and undefiled from his mother's womb; but on the day of his baptism the Spirit, as a dove, descended and rested upon him, and he got what John could not impart—the Divine qualification of his humanity for the work and dignity to which he was destined as the Christ, the Lord's Anointed. "Now know I that the Lord saveth his anointed." Therefore He will save us who follow the King. Only let the name of the King be our watchword, his righteousness our righteousness, his strength our strength, his mind our mind, his anointing our anointing. So shall we see him and be with him in his kingdom and glory.—F.

Ver. 23.—*The king and the minstrel.* I. THE COMPLICATION OF MENTAL AND MORAL DISORDER. Saul was the victim of cerebral disease, but not an innocent victim. His unhingement of mind was due in large measure to causes for which he was morally responsible. The expression, "an evil spirit from the Lord was upon him," is just an Old Testament way of saying that the state into which he fell, as a result mainly of his own misconduct, bore the character of a Divine retribution. From the beginning there seems to have been a morbid tendency in the mind of Saul. He was at once very impulsive and very obstinate; and as his troubles and anxieties increased, the original weakness or unhealthiness of his brain became more and more apparent.

He had an evil conscience because of his disobedience to Divine commands, and though faithfully reproved by the prophet Samuel, he does not appear to have ever sought pardon or healing. Thus the purpose of God to give the kingdom to another and a better man weighed on him as a dreadful secret, and his native melancholy deepened. The thing preyed on his mind till he became wretchedly suspicious and jealous, and at times gave way to homicidal mania. For considerable periods, as during the active struggle with the Philistines, this evil spirit left the king; but he fell back into his passionate gloom. As we trace his course, the better lines of his character fade away, and the worse become deeper and more obvious.

II. THE REMEDY APPLIED—ITS SUCCESS AND ITS FAILURE. In so far as there was mental disease, the case called for medical treatment; in so far as it was complicated with and grounded on moral disorder, it needed a moral corrective. But even if there had been any scientific treatment of insanity known at the period, it would have been difficult to apply it to King Saul, and it occurred to his attendants to try the soothing charm of music. This might be the opiate to assuage the anguish of the spirit—

> "The soft insinuating balsam, that
> Can through the body reach the sickly soul."

So David was brought to the court to allay, if he could not cure, the malady of the king by his skilful minstrelsy. It was a wise experiment. From the readiness of Saul to catch the fervour and join in the strains of the sons of the prophets, and from the fact that in his frenzy he "prophesied in the midst of the house," we infer that his temperament was peculiarly open to musical impression, and are not surprised that the sounds of David's lyre and voice, especially when chanting some Divine and lofty theme, affected and in some degree controlled the unhappy king. As he listened his spirit became more tranquil, and wicked thoughts and jealousies lifted from off him, as clouds lift from a mountain for a while, even though they gather again. The refining and calming effect of music and song no wise man will disparage. It is not religion, but it may legitimately and powerfully conduce to moral and religious feeling. Elisha called for a minstrel, that his mind might be attuned and prepared to receive the prophetic impulse. Martin Luther found the inspiration of courage in the same manner. "Next to theology," he said, "I give the first place and the greatest honour to music." Milton, too, delighted in such musical service

> "As may with sweetness, through mine ear,
> Dissolve me into ecstasies,
> And bring all heaven before mine eyes."

David sang before the clouded face of Saul, and "played with his hand." So let sweet and sacred minstrelsy confront the sin and sorrow of the world. It is better than the fabled power of Orpheus, who, when he touched his lyre, moved the very trees and rocks, and gathered the beasts of the forest to listen to his notes. Another myth regarding Orpheus has indeed a noble meaning beneath the surface of the story. When the Argonauts passed the island of the sirens, Orpheus, on board their ship, loudly chanted the praises of gods and heroes, so as to drown the voices from the shore, and so he and his comrades passed the fatal spot in safety. The moral is obvious. The sirens represent pleasures of sense, which begin with blandishment, but end in cruel destruction; and a powerful resistance to sensual temptation is to be found in preoccupation of mind and heart with holy and heroic song. Yet the moral power thus exerted has its limit, and we see this clearly in the case of Saul. The king was acutely sensitive to the influence of David's minstrelsy, but he was only charmed, not cured; and even while the youth played before him he attempted his life in a paroxysm of jealousy. So is many a man thrilled with delight by sacred music wedded to holy words in an oratorio or in Church service who is not delivered thereby from some evil spirit or base passion that has mastered him. Alas, how many men of musical taste and sensibility, some of them of poetic capacity also, have been quite unable to shake off the yoke of that most conspicuous evil spirit of

our time and nation, the love of strong drink! This infatuation may be quieted or checked for a time, but it is not expelled by music ever so good and true. The harp, even David's harp, cannot subdue the power of sin. This requires the power of David's God. There is need of a prayer of David, such as Saul seems never to have offered up: "Create in me a clean heart; Lord, renew a right spirit within me." There is need to apply to the Son of David, who cast out unclean spirits by his word, and brought men to their right mind, and now in the power of the Holy Spirit not only controls, but corrects and cures all the evils which prey on the mind or defile the heart of man. The blackness of envy, the foulness of hatred, the demons of deceit, avarice, intemperance, and cruelty are expelled by nothing less than the grace of Christ.

"And his that gentle voice we hear,
Soft as the breath of even,
That checks each fault, that calms each fear,
And speaks of heaven." —F.

ADVANCE OF DAVID IN REPUTATION BY THE SLAUGHTER OF GOLIATH (CH. XVII.).

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XVII.

GOLIATH'S DEFIANCE OF ISRAEL (vers. 1—11). Ver. 1.—**The Philistines gathered together their armies.** As the object of the historian is not to give us an account of the Philistine wars, but only to record the manner of David's ripening for the kingly office, nothing is said as to the space of time which had elapsed between Saul's victory at Michmash and the present invasion. We are, however, briefly told that "there was sore war against the Philistines all the days of Saul" (ch. xiv. 52), and apparently this inroad took place very many years after Saul's establishment upon the throne. The Philistine camp was at **Ephes-dammim**, called Pas-dammim in 1 Chron. xi. 13. The best explanation of the word gives as its meaning *the boundary of blood*, so called from the continual fighting which took place there upon the borders. **Shochoh**, spelt more correctly *Socoh* in Josh. xv. 35, was one of fourteen villages enumerated there as lying in the Shephelah, described by Conder ('Tent Work,' ii. 156) as a region of "low hills of limestone, forming a distinct district between the plain and the watershed mountains." In this district Socoh lay north-east of Eleutheropolis (Beth-jibrin), midway between it and Beth-shemesh, from each of which places it was distant about eight or nine miles. It is now called *Shuweikeh*. For **Azekah** see Josh. x. 10.

Vers. 2, 3.—**The valley of Elah.** *I. e.* of the terebinth tree. **A valley between them.** Conder ('Tent Work,' ii. 160) describes the spot from personal observation thus: "Saul, coming down by the highway from the land of Benjamin, encamped by the valley on one of the low hills; and between the two hosts was the *gai* or ravine." In the A. V. no exactness of rendering is ever attempted, and both the *emek*, the broad strath or valley of Elah, with gently sloping sides, and the *gai*, the narrow, precipitous ravine, are equally rendered *valley*. Really the *gai* is most remarkable, and fully explains how the two hosts could remain in face of one another so long without fighting; for Conder proceeds, "Two points require to be made clear as to the episode of David's battle with Goliath: one was the meaning of the expression *gai* or ravine; the other was the source whence David took the 'smooth stones.' A visit to the spot explains both. In the middle of the broad, open valley we found a deep trench with vertical sides, impassable except at certain places—a valley in a valley, and a natural barrier between the two hosts. The sides and bed of this trench are strewn with rounded and waterworn pebbles, which would have been well fitted for David's sling. Here, then, we may picture to ourselves the two hosts, covering the low, rocky hills opposite to each other, and half hidden among the lentisk bushes. Between them was the rich expanse of ripening barley, and the red banks of the torrent, with its white, shingly bed. Behind all were the distant blue hill-walls of Judah, whence Saul had just come down. The mail-clad champion advanced from the west through the low corn, with his mighty lance perhaps tufted with feathers, his brazen helmet shining in the sun. From the east a ruddy boy in his white shirt and sandals, armed with a goat's-hair sling, came down to the brook, and, according to the poetic fancy of the Rabbis, the pebbles were given voices, and cried, 'By us shalt thou overcome the giant.' The champion fell from an unseen cause, and the wild

Philistines fled to the mouth of the valley, where Gath stood towering on its white chalk cliff, a frontier fortress, the key to the high road leading to the corn-lands of Judah and to the vineyards of Hebron."

Vers. 4—7.—**A champion.** Literally, "a man of the two middles," *i. e.* one who enters the space between the two armies in order to decide the contest by a single combat. **Of Gath.** In Josh. xi. 21 this town is mentioned, together with Gaza and Ashdod, as still having among its inhabitants men of the race of Anak. **Whose height was six cubits and a span.** In our measure his height was eight feet five and one-third inches; for the cubit is sixteen inches, and the span (really the hand-breadth) is five and one-third inches. A span, *sit*, is eight inches, but the word used here is *zereth*. See on these measures, Conder, 'Handbook,' p. 79. This height, though very great, has been attained to in modern times. **Armed with a coat of mail.** Literally, "clothed in a shirt of scales," *i. e.* a corselet made of metal scales sewn on cloth so as to overlap one another. It was flexible, and protected the back and sides as well as the front. **Five thousand shekels of brass.** Really copper, as brass was then unknown. Conder gives the shekel as equal to two-thirds of an ounce. This would make the corselet weigh at least two hundred-weight, an enormous load to carry even for a short time. Goliath's other equipments correspond in heaviness, and largely exceed the weight of medieval suits of armour. **Greaves of brass upon his legs.** The thighs were protected by the corselet, so that only the legs required defensive armour. This would account for the weight of the corselet, as it was much longer than the cuirass, as worn by the Greeks and Romans. **A target.** Really, "a javelin." It was carried at the back, ready to be taken in the hand and thrown at the enemy when required. The versions have a different reading—*magan*, shield, for *chidon*, javelin. The shield was carried before him by an armour-bearer. **The staff.** The written text has a word which usually signifies *shaft, arrow*, for which the Kri substitutes *wood*, the noun actually found in 2 Sam. xxi. 19; 1 Chron. xx. 5; but most probably the word used here is an archaic name for the handle or staff of a spear. **Six hundred shekels.** The weight of the iron head of the spear would be about twenty-five pounds. However tall and strong Goliath may have been, yet with all this vast weight of metal his movements must have been slow and unready. He was got up, in fact, more to tell upon the imagination than for real fighting, and though, like a castle, he might have been invincible if attacked with sword and spear, he was much too encumbered with defensive armour to be capable of assuming the offensive against a light-armed enemy. To David belongs the credit of seeing that the Philistine champion was a huge imposition.

Vers. 8—11.—**He stood and cried unto the armies.** Literally, "the ranks," the word being the noun formed from the verb translated *set in array*, just below. The same word is used throughout (see vers. 10, 20, 21, 22, 26, 45). **Am not I a Philistine?** Hebrew, "the Philistine," the champion on their side. **I defy the armies.** Hebrew, "I have cast scorn or insult upon the ranks of Israel this day." The sense is not so much that he defied them as that they were dishonoured by not accepting his challenge. **They were dismayed.** That is, terrified, and made uncertain what to do (comp. Jer. l. 36). We have seen from Mr. Conder's account that each army held an impregnable position on the two sides of the ravine, which neither could cross without the certainty of being defeated in the attempt by the other side. Under such circumstances there seemed no way of deciding the contest except by a single combat. But though Saul and his warriors were too terrified at Goliath's appearance to venture to meet him, still they held their ground for forty days, inasmuch as it was evidently impossible for him to cross the ravine clad in such cumbrous armour, nor did the Philistines venture to make the attempt, as the Israelites would have taken them at a manifest disadvantage.

DAVID'S VISIT TO THE CAMP (vers. 12—31). The Vatican codex of the Septuagint omits the whole of this section, and it was inserted in the Alexandrian copy by Origen. It is found, however, in the other versions; and possibly this treatment of David's history as of a person unknown, just after the account given of him in ch. xvi., did not seem so strange to readers in old time as it does to us, with whom reading is so much more easy an accomplishment. It is, nevertheless, one of the many indications that the Books of Samuel, though compiled from contemporaneous documents, were not arranged in their present form till long afterwards. It was only gradually that Samuel's schools dispersed throughout the country men trained in reading and writing, and trained up scholars capable of keeping the annals of each king's reign. The Books of Kings were, as we know, compiled from these annals; but probably at each prophetic school there would be stored up copies of Psalms written for their religious services, ballads such as those in the Book of Jashar, and in the Book

of the Wars of Jehovah, narratives of stirring events like this before us, and histories both of their own chiefs, such as was Samuel, and afterwards Elijah and Elisha, and also of the kings. There is nothing remarkable, therefore, at finding information repeated; and having had in the previous narrative an account of a passing introduction of David to Saul as a musician, which led to little at the time, though subsequently David stood high in Saul's favour because of his skill upon the harp, we here have David's introduction to Saul as a warrior.

Vers. 12—14.—**Jesse . . . went among men for an old man in the days of Saul.** This translation is taken from the Vulgate; but the Hebrew is, "And the man in the days of Saul was old, gone among men." Some explain this as meaning "placed," *i. e.* "reckoned among men of rank;" but probably an aleph has dropped out in the word rendered *men*, and we should read "gone," *i. e.* "advanced in years." *Old* is used in a very indefinite way in the Books of Samuel; but as Jesse had eight sons, of whom the youngest was now grown up, he must have been nearly sixty. **Went and followed.** Hebrew, "And there went the three elder sons of Jesse went after Saul to the war." Some grammarians consider that this repetition of the verb is intended to give it the force of a pluperfect,—they had gone,—but it is more probably an error, and one of the two verbs should be omitted.

Ver. 15.—**David went and returned from Saul.** This is a very important statement, as it shows that the writer, in spite of what is said in vers. 55—58, knew that David had visited Saul at his court, and become personally known to him. Apparently it had been but a short visit, possibly because after the fit of melancholy had passed away there was no return of it for the present; and if David had been back at Bethlehem for two or three years, a young man changes so much in appearance at David's time of life that it is no wonder that neither Saul nor Abner recognised him in his shepherd's dress. For some reason, then, or other David had not remained with Saul at Gibeah, but had resumed his pastoral life at Bethlehem, and the statements made in ch. xvi. 21—23 belong to the time immediately after the combat with Goliath, and not before.

Vers. 16—19.—**The Philistine . . . . presented himself.** *I. e.* took his stand (see on ch. x. 23; xii. 7, 16). This verse takes up the narrative, disturbed by the inserted explanation about David's family relations. The extraordinary formation of the ground, as described in ver. 3, shows how it was possible for this challenge to go on for forty days without either army advancing or retiring. During this long time it seems to have been the business of the friends at home to supply the combatants with food, and so Jesse sends David with **an ephah**, about three pecks, **of parched corn**—as the word is spelt in the Hebrew it means "parched pease." **Also ten loaves**, and, for the captain of their thousand, **ten cheeses**—rather, "ten slices of fresh curd." David was also **to take their pledge.** Apparently neither Eliab nor his brethren could write, and therefore they would send back to their father some token previously agreed upon to show that they were in good health, and had received the supplies sent them. **Now Saul, &c.** This is a part of Jesse's speech, telling David where he would find his brethren. For *were*, the right translation is, "They are in the terebinth valley, fighting with the Philistines."

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—11.—*Aggression not defence.* The facts are—1. The armies of Israel and Philistia are drawn up in array, with a valley between them. 2. A gigantic champion, heavily armed and proud of his strength, challenges any one of Saul's army to a personal encounter, and with lofty words defies the armies of Israel. 3. Saul and his men are in great fear. The episode given by the sacred writer is one of those occurrences likely to arise under the conditions of ancient warfare. It must be viewed by us as one of the events which Providence overruled for the gradual introduction of David to the notice of Israel. But in this section we may confine attention to truths not immediately affecting him.

I. We have here AN EXHIBITION OF THE WAR-SPIRIT. This giant was under the influence of a mere love of fighting. It was not a question of rightness or wrongness, but of slaying or being slain. The modicum of patriotism was overlaid by the lust of contention. This *passion dwells* more or less *in all men.* Its mildest form is a contentious spirit—a quarrelsome temper, a desire to try our strength against others. It has found wide and pernicious scope in the history of nations. There is a tendency to foster this unhallowed spirit even in civilised, so-called Christian

countries. The profession of soldier, the pomp of military parade, the zest with which battles are described, the haze of glory thrown around the unutterable horrors of war, and rivalry among men for distinction in action—all show that the war-spirit is fostered. Is it not true that a mere desire to find actual occupation in fighting determines the first choice of multitudes in entering on warlike enterprises? The *evils of this spirit* are patent. *In itself* it is a *debasement of our nature.* The God of peace and love is our Father, and we are to be his children in the spirit that governs us. The execution of law and right is a totally different thing. *The woes* it has *brought on the world,* in deaths, widows, orphans, poverty, desolations, debts, suspicions, and engendered vices, can never be told. It is the duty of every Christian to strive to crush it out, by careful training of the young, by discouragement of popular passions, by enforcement of the teaching and Spirit of Christ, and by earnest prayer that the Church may be firm in protest against it.

II. We have also AN EXHIBITION OF PRIDE IN HUMAN STRENGTH. This giant thought himself mighty, and he boasted in his strength. Boastfulness in any form is disgraceful. Man is not in a position to magnify himself on any possession, for it is as a shadow, and may quickly vanish. Pride in mere physical strength is the lowest form of boasting, save that in actual vice. A quick, bright, intelligent mind is of more account than height of stature and strength of limb. Yet self-satisfaction in intellectual qualities and powers is evidence of a moral weakness which renders man inferior in the higher realms of life. We have need to learn that man at his best estate is vanity; that it is not by might nor by power that the highest achievements are wrought in the spiritual sphere.

III. We have also A REVERSION OF THE NATURAL ORDER OF THINGS. The natural order is that which follows from the normal constitution and relations of things. By appointment Israel were the possessors of the land. The promise had read thus: Be true and obedient, and ye shall possess the land in peace, and be exalted above all nations (Deut. xxviii. 1—13). Had the conditions been faithfully observed, God long ere the days of David would have subdued their enemies (Ps. lxxxi. 13—16). Or, had new enemies trespassed on their borders, Israel would have assailed in confidence, and not be assailed in great fear. Aggression on the foes of God and man is the work of God's people; there is a reversion of the natural order when they are barely able to hold their own, and tremble at the aggressive onslaughts of the foe. The *attitude and work of the Church in relation to the manifold forms of evil* in the world is not inaptly indicated in Israel's original relation to the abominable nations that once held and begirt the promised land—namely, *aggression till the earth is subdued to Christ.* If there are defiant systems assailing the Church of God and making inroads upon her, it is because she has been unfaithful in her aggressive work. If we do not make aggression on the domain of sin, the forces of evil will gain power and make positive aggression on the domain of religion. Vices of all kinds, and infidelity in brazen forms, flourish and become more than defensive in action when Christians lose faith in their mission and sink to the level of other men. Not even the vilest of men nor the hardiest unbeliever will venture to assail a pure and very devoted spiritual life.

General lessons:—1. The Christian Church should consider how much of the prevalence of the war-spirit is due to her imperfect treatment of the natural tendency to it. 2. Those who despise the low type of life which glories in mere brute force should remember that, from the higher spiritual sphere, glorying in any mere human possession may be regarded in the same light. 3. The earnest cultivation of spiritual life will be proved by the aggression which, as individuals, we make on our besetting sins, and, as communities, on the sins of the world.

Vers. 12—19.—*Co-operation in spiritual warfare.* The facts are—1. Three of Jesse's sons are with the army opposing the Philistines. 2. David, being relieved from attendance on Saul, keeps the flock at Bethlehem. 3. Jesse sends David to the camp with provisions, and instructs him to look after the welfare of his brethren. It is possible that Jesse may have surmised that some considerable developments would soon arise out of Samuel's recent visit to Bethlehem and the wonderful interest taken in young David. At all events, it was providential that he sent him

from caring for sheep to care for his brethren on the battle-field. Leaving out of view the moral condition of Israel and its consequences, as dwelt on in the last section, we may regard the army of Saul as being engaged in the service of the living God (vers. 26, 36), virtually against the foes of the kingdom of the Messiah. David's visit to the army with provisions and messages relating to the welfare of his soldier-brothers, therefore, brings out the relation that should subsist between those engaged in open conflict in the service of God and such as are not called to serve in that form.

I. THE EXIGENCIES OF THE CHURCH REQUIRE SOME TO BE SPECIALLY ENGAGED IN OPEN CONFLICT WITH SIN. The circumstances of Israel necessitated just then that some of God's people should devote themselves to the campaign as soldiers. Combination under the guidance of skill would effect what isolated private effort could not touch. In the Christian economy every true follower of Christ is a soldier, following the lead of the Captain of our salvation. Nevertheless, the circumstances in which Christians find themselves demand that some should be more emphatically fighting men, to undertake, in combination with others, arduous work which can never be done by Christians in a private and isolated capacity. Hence we have men, separated from various occupations, consecrating all their time and energies not merely in defence of the gospel, but in making war upon the manifold evils which obstruct the triumph of Christ. These sustain a relation to others, whose time is otherwise employed on purely personal pursuits, similar to that of the army at Elah to the Jesses and Davids engaged in domestic and rural occupations.

II. The CONFLICT THUS OPENLY MAINTAINED INVOLVES THE INTERESTS AND CLAIMS THE SUPPORT OF ALL. Obviously every one in Israel was concerned in the issue of the conflict with the Philistines. All that free people hold precious was at stake. If it was in the power of *non*-combatants to render aid, clearly it ought to be forthcoming. In a higher and wider sense is it true that the business of Christ's soldiers at home and abroad is the business of the entire body of believers, irrespective of age, position, or ability. The Church is one body, and the sufferings or pleasures of one member are of moment to all the members. The feeling which suggests that certain efforts to save men are no concern but to those engaged in them is unintelligent and unchristian. The call to hold forth the word of truth is to the one body of the faithful. Our sympathy with Christ's mission is real only as we identify our hopes, and aspirations, and endeavours with those of all who have the "same mind." Consequently, every consideration of humanity, of brotherly regard, of love for Christ, and joy in his advancing conquests, should stimulate aid to those on the high places of the field.

III. THERE ARE AVAILABLE MEANS BY WHICH EVERY ONE MAY RENDER SUBSTANTIAL AID IN THIS WARFARE. Jesse's forethought and David's readiness contributed to the strength and encouragement of the absent warriors. Likewise every one in Israel could aid in the conflict by contributions of food and clothing, and by cherished sympathy and prayer. In modern nations every member of the community renders assistance in war, by payment of taxes, combination of counsel, deep and variously-expressed sympathy, and that quota from each one which makes up the sum of support to be found in public opinion. The means by which the scattered members of Christ's Church can fulfil their duty to their brethren devoted entirely to the campaign against sin are varied and effective. 1. *By loyally bearing the common cause on the heart.* This may become a habit if we will but make an intelligent study of what is due from us. Its value to the distant and near soldiers of the cross is clear to the spiritual eye. Moral natures are knit together by subtle bonds. 2. *By special acts and seasons of prayer.* Emphasis given to our general sympathy by special pleading with God on behalf of his faithful servants is the all-powerful means of taking our share in the one great conflict. Even the greatest of apostles felt that he would do his work better if friends would but respond to his appeal, "Brethren, pray for us." This is an aid which may be rendered by young and old, hale and weak, the rich and poor. Only eternity will reveal how much, among the many concurring causes that issue at last in the full triumph of Christ, is due to the prayers even of the helpless invalids, and poor, unheard-of saints that dwell in cottage homes. 3. *Moral and material support.* We may seize opportunities for

assuring our brethren, whose hearts are often faint and weary, that we do carry their cares and sorrows, and do regard their work as ours. We rob devoted men of strength when we are chary of letting them know our deep interest in them. The *material support* is also within the reach of most. To devote a portion of our means to Christ's cause is a great privilege. Had the Church devoted half on Christian enterprise that has been devoted to questionable self-indulgences, the joys of men and angels would ere this have been doubled.

General lessons:—1. We should encourage by example and personal influence in young people an intelligent interest in all Christian work because it is *Christian*. 2. Where true love exists, ingenuity will devise means of cheering those engaged in arduous service. 3. The spiritual unity of the Church may thus be largely realised, notwithstanding diversity of organisations.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—11. (THE VALLEY OF ELAH.)—*Israel smitten with fear.* "They were dismayed, and greatly afraid" (ver. 11). 1. The renewed attempt of the Philistines to subjugate Israel shows, in comparison with their former invasion, a decrease of power. They did not penetrate into the heart of the land (ch. xiii. 5), but advanced only a short distance from their own border, and "pitched between Shochoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim," a dozen miles south-west of Bethlehem. They had been driven back and held in check. 2. It could hardly have been possible, but for the rashness of Saul in "the war of Michmash," by which the opportunity of inflicting a fatal blow was lost. Hearing, perhaps, of his condition, and perceiving signs of the laxity of his rule, they sought to repair their defeat. 3. It found the people of Israel, notwithstanding their previous success, ill-prepared to repel the aggression. Although they went to meet the enemy, and encamped opposite to them, they did nothing more. In the spirit of a better time they would have immediately fallen upon them in reliance upon "the Lord of hosts" (Deut. xxxii. 30); but now they were *paralysed with fear*, especially at the appearance of the gigantic champion who came out against them. The Philistines desired to make the issue depend on a single combat between this man and any Israelitish warrior who might be appointed to meet him; and he "drew near morning and evening, and presented himself forty days" (ver. 16). A similar fear has sometimes pervaded the Christian community in the presence of the enemy.

I. IT IS INSPIRED BY FORMIDABLE OPPONENTS. 1. *Their number is great.* They consist not merely of one or two, but of a host of giants. (1) *Within:* carnal affections, corrupt tendencies, proud thoughts, evil imaginations, and wrathful passions. (2) *Without:* ignorance, error, unbelief, superstition, intemperance, licentiousness, worldliness, and "all ungodliness." (3) In the *background* of all "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Ephes. ii. 2). 2. *Their appearance is imposing.* They seem to be possessed of extraordinary might, and arrayed in terrible armour, and are of great renown. "Am I not that Philistine" (ver. 8), who has exhibited such prowess and slain so many foes? "He arose, and came, and drew nigh, like a stalking mountain, overlaid with brass and iron" (M. Henry). 3. *Their attitude is proud,* boastful, defiant, contemptuous, and increasingly confident of victory as day after day the challenge is renewed, and no one dares to answer it. "The first challenge to a duel that we ever find came out of the mouth of an uncircumcised Philistine" (Hall). How often has the contemplation of such adversaries filled even good men with dismay! While we measure our natural strength against the forces of evil our case is hopeless. "Who is sufficient for these things?"

II. IT RESULTS FROM PREVIOUS UNFAITHFULNESS. 1. *Distrust of God* and alienation from him. Faith prevents fear. It looks to God, judges of the power of the enemy in the light of his omnipotence, unites to him, and inspires with unbounded courage (ch. xiv. 6; ver. 47); but unbelief is blind and weak and fearful (Matt. viii. 26). And dismay in great emergencies reveals the absence or feebleness of faith in the preceding and ordinary course of life. 2. *Outward acts of disobedience* to the Divine will — diminishing moral power, and producing inward distraction and

dread. 3. *Sympathy with a faithless leader*, and participation in the "spirit of fear" (2 Tim. i. 7) which he possesses. Saul had forsaken the Lord. He had not the presence of Samuel with him; nor, apparently, that of the high priest; nor did he seek the Divine counsel as aforetime. He ruled independently of Jehovah; and the people loved too much "to have it so," sharing in his faithlessness and fear. A faithless and fearful leader cannot have faithful and fearless followers.

III. IT INCURS DESERVED REPROACH (vers. 8, 26)—uttered by the enemy, and echoed in the conscience of the people, on account of—1. The *cowardice* of their conduct. 2. The *inconsistency* of their position, as professed servants of the living God: unfaithful to their calling, trembling before the votaries of "gods that were no gods" (ver. 44), and bringing dishonour upon the name of Jehovah. "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you" (Rom. ii. 24; Prov. xxv. 26). 3. The likelihood of their *defeat*, of which it is a virtual acknowledgment, and to which it must infallibly conduct, unless a better spirit be infused into them. "How is it that ye have not faith?" (Mark iv. 40).

Learn that—1. The spirit of fear can be expelled only by the spirit of faith. 2. Fearfulness in conflict, difficulty, and danger indicates a lack of faith, and should constrain to renewed trust in God. 3. In their greatest extremity God does not abandon his people to despair, but provides for them "a way of escape."—D.

Vers. 17, 18. (BETHLEHEM.)—*Parental solicitude.* Family life occupies a prominent place in the Books of Samuel, and the affectionate concern of parents for their children is often mentioned (see ch. ii. 24; x. 2). Jesse, who, in consequence of his advanced age (ver. 12), was himself unable to go against the Philistines, had his three elder sons in the army of Israel; and after they had been absent for some weeks, sent their youngest brother with provisions for their need, to make inquiries about their welfare, and "take their token," by which he might be assured thereof. Such solicitude as he displayed is—

I. NATURAL. 1. Arising out of the instinctive affection which is felt by parents. 2. Continuing throughout the whole of life. 3. Commended by the heavenly Father, who puts it into the heart; and often illustrated, directed, and regulated by the teachings of his word (Gen. xviii. 19; xxii. 2; 2 Sam. xviii. 33; Ephes. vi. 4; 1 Tim. v. 8).

II. CONSIDERATE. 1. Of the distance of children from home, and of their deprivation of parental oversight, counsel, and restraint. 2. Of their need: temporal, spiritual, and eternal. 3. Of their peril: from their own tendencies, their intimate associations, and their open enemies.

III. PRACTICAL. Expressed—1. In sending them presents of that which is best adapted to their wants. 2. By the hand of a brother (Gen. xxxvii. 14; xliii. 11). 3. With the request of a token of affectionate regard for the gratification of a heart that desires and seeks their happiness.

IV. ILLUSTRATIVE of "the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man" (Titus ii. 4). The relation of an earthly father to his children is a shadow of that of the heavenly Father to men; it was doubtless appointed from the first to be such, and the loving care which arises out of it is, in comparison with that of the "Father of spirits," only as a ray of light compared with the sun. This also is—1. Natural and spontaneous, for "God is love." 2. Considerate (Ps. ciii. 13, 14). "In thee the fatherless findeth mercy" (Hosea xiv. 3). 3. Practical. "I have loved you, saith the Lord," &c. (Mal. i. 2; Matt. vii. 11; John iii. 16).

Exhortation:—1. To parents. Let your kindness to your children be such as accords with that of your heavenly Father to you, and as affords a true image of it. 2. To children. Show kindness to your parents in return for their kindness to you (ch. xxii. 3), as your heavenly Father requires. 3. To all. "If I be a father, where is mine honour?" (Mal. i. 6).—D.

EXPOSITION.

Vers. 20—22.—**He came to the trench.** More probably the barricade, or outer circle of defence for their camp, made of their wagons (see on ch. x. 22). Strictly the word means a *wagon-track*, but the primary meaning of the verb is *to be round*. This was the shape of camps in old time, and they were protected against surprise by having the wagons and baggage placed round them. The word occurs again in ch. xxvi. 5, 7. The latter part of the verse is literally, "And he came to the circle of the wagons, and to the host that was going forth to the array; and they shouted for the battle." If the article be omitted before "going forth," for which there is some authority, the rendering of the A. V. would be right. **David left his carriage.** *I. e.* that which he was carrying. The word is rendered *stuff* in ch. x. 22; xxv. 13; xxx. 24. Literally the word means *utensils*, and so whatever he had with him for any purpose (comp. Acts xxi. 15). **Ran into the army.** Literally, "to the array," "to the ranks," the place where the troops were drawn up (see ver. 10).

Vers. 23, 24.—**The champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name.** The Hebrew is, "The champion (see on ver. 4), Goliath the Philistine his name, of Gath," probably the very words of the original record. **Out of the armies,** or *ranks*. This is a very probable correction of the Kri, made by restoring a letter which has apparently dropped out. The word in the written text might mean "the open space between the two armies;" but it occurs nowhere else, and this space was chiefly occupied by the ravine. **The men of Israel . . . . fled from him.** *I. e.* they drew back in haste from the edge of the ravine, which Goliath could no more have crossed, encased in armour weighing two and a half hundred-weight, than a knight could have done in the middle ages. In ver. 40 we read that it was out of this ravine that David selected his pebbles, and, being encumbered with no armour, it was easy for him to climb up the other side and attack his heavily-armed opponent.

Vers. 25—27.—**To defy Israel.** Rather, "to cast scorn on," "to dishonour Israel" (see on ver. 10). **The king will enrich him with great riches, ... and make his father's house free in Israel.** Many years must have elapsed before Saul could thus have developed the powers of the crown, and the last words show that contributions were levied from all the households in Israel for the support of the king and his retinue. There had manifestly been a great advance since the day when Jesse sent the king a few loaves of bread, a skin of wine, and a kid (ch. xvi. 20). Still we cannot imagine that Saul had introduced taxes, nor was the political organisation of the State ripe enough for so advanced a state of things. The words more probably refer to freedom from personal service in the army and elsewhere; though it is quite possible that on special occasions contributions may have been levied, and presents, no doubt, were constantly being made to the king, though on no regular system. **Taketh away the reproach.** The noun formed from the verb rendered *defy* in ver. 10, where see note. **Uncircumcised.** See on ch. xiv. 6. David, like Jonathan, sees a ground of confidence in the uncovenanted relation of the Philistine towards God. **The living God.** A second ground of confidence. The god of the Philistines was a lifeless idol; Jehovah a Being who proved his existence by his acts. **So shall it be done.** As the people all answer David's inquiries in the same way, Saul had evidently made a proclamation to this effect, which we may suppose he fulfilled, though not in the frankest manner (ch. xviii. 17, 27).

Vers. 28, 29.—**Eliab's anger was kindled against David.** As David, with growing indignation at an uncovenanted heathen thus dishonouring the subjects of the living God, puts eager questions to all around, his elder brother angrily reproaches him with words full of contempt. Between the eldest and youngest of eight sons was a vast interval, and Eliab regards David's talk as mere **pride,** or, rather, "presumption," "impertinence;" and also as **naughtiness,** or badness, **of heart,** probably because he imagined that David's object was to provoke some one else to fight, that he might **see the battle.** David's answer is gentle and forbearing, but the last words are difficult. **Is there not a cause?** Have not those whom we are ready to condemn a reason and justification for their conduct? Such a question put to ourselves might stop much slander and fault-finding. But the Hebrew literally has, *Is it not a word?* And the ancient versions and the best modern commentators understand by this, "It was but a mere word;" "I was only talking about this challenge, and was doing no wrong."

Vers. 30, 31.—**Manner.** Literally, *word*, the noun translated *cause* in ver. 29, and meaning in both verses "conversation." It occurs here thrice, the Hebrew being, "And he spake according to this word: and the people returned him a word according to the former word." And as David thus persisted in his indignant remonstrances at the ranks of the living God being thus dishonoured by no man accepting the challenge, **they rehearsed them before Saul,** who thereupon sent for

him. And thus David a second time, and under very different circumstances, found himself again standing in the king's presence.

DAVID UNDERTAKES THE COMBAT WITH GOLIATH, AND PREPARES FOR THE ENCOUNTER (vers. 32—40). Vers. 32, 33.—On being brought before the king, David says, **Let no man's heart fail because of him,** *i. e.* "on account of this Philistine." Literally it is "upon him," and some therefore translate "within him." The Septuagint for man reads "my lord"—"Let not my lord's heart fail within him." Probably "within him" is the best rendering of the phrase. **Thou art but a youth.** *I. e.* "a lad" (see on ch. i. 24; ii. 18). It is the word applied to David's brethren in ch. xvi. 11, and his friend must have been very enthusiastic when, in ch. xvi. 18, he described him as a "hero of valour and a man of war."

Vers. 34—36.—David does not appeal to any feat of arms. He may have served with credit in repelling some Philistine foray, but these combats with wild beasts, fought without the presence of spectators, and with no urgent necessity (as most shepherds would have been too glad to compound with such enemies by letting them take a lamb without molestation), still more clearly proved David's fearless nature. Lions and bears were both common in ancient times in Palestine, when the country was more densely covered with wood; and bears are numerous in the mountainous districts now. Lions seem to have been less feared than bears (Amos v. 19); but Canon Tristram thinks there were two species of the lion in Palestine—one short-maned, which was not very formidable, the other long-maned, which was more fierce and dangerous ('Nat. Hist. of Bible,' p. 117). The Hebrew literally is, "There came the lion and even the bear," the articles implying that they were the well-known foes of the shepherd. The written text has *zeh*, "this," for *seh*, "a lamb," probably a mere variety of spelling. There can be little doubt that David refers to two different occasions, especially as bears and lions never hunt in company. **By his beard.** Neither the bear nor the lion has a beard, and the word really means "the chin," "the place where the beard grows." The Chaldee translates *the lower jaw*, and the Septuagint *the throat*. It is plain from this description that David slew the beast with his staff. **He arose against me.** This shows that the combat thus particularly described was with the bear, which does thus rise on its hind legs to grapple with its foe, while the lion crouches and then springs. Pliny also says that the weakest part of a bear is its head, and that it can be killed by a smart blow there. The manner in which David killed the lion is not described. **Defied.** See on ver. 10.

Ver. 37.—**Saul said unto David, Go.** The king's consent was necessary before David could act as the champion of the Israelites. It was a courageous act in Saul to give his permission, considering the conditions of the combat (see ver. 9), but the two arguments here given persuaded him: the first, David's strong confidence in Jehovah, insuring his courage; and, secondly, the coolness and bravery he had shown in these dangerous encounters with savage animals.

Vers. 38—40.—**Saul armed David with his armour.** Rather, "Saul clad David in his war-dress." The word does not mean *arms*, either offensive or defensive; for in ch. iv. 12, where it is rendered "clothes," we read of its being rent. It occurs again in ch. xviii. 4, and is there rendered "garments." Strictly it was the soldier's coat, worn under his armour, and girt close to the body by the sword-belt. It does not follow that David was as tall as Saul because he thus put on his military coat; for it would be adjusted to the body by the belt, and its length was not a matter of much consequence. When, then, it is said that **David girded his sword upon his armour,** it means upon this coat, though the corselet of mail would also be worn over it. **He assayed to go.** *I. e.* he made an attempt at going, took a short walk thus arrayed, making trial all the while of his equipments; and he found them so cumbrous that he felt that he would have no chance against the Philistine except as a light-armed soldier. The agility of his movements would then make him a match for one so heavily overweighted as Goliath. Wearing, therefore, only his shepherd's dress, armed only with a sling, David descended into the ravine which separated the two armies, chose there five pebbles, and, clambering up the other side, advanced towards the Philistine. For **brook** the Hebrew has "torrent bed." Conder speaks of a torrent flowing through the ravine (see on ver. 2).

COMBAT OF DAVID AND GOLIATH (vers. 41—54). Vers. 41—44.—When David had crossed the ravine, Goliath and his armour-bearer advanced towards him; and when he saw that the Israelite champion was but a lad (see ver. 33), with red hair, which added to his youthful appearance, and handsome, but with nothing more than a staff in his hand, he regarded this light equipment as an insult, and asks, **Am I a dog,**—an animal held in great aversion in the East,—**that thou comest to me with staves?** The plural is used as a contemptuous generalisation, but the Septuagint is offended at it, and with amusing matter-of-fact exactness translates "With a staff and stones." **And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.** The Hebrew is singular, "by his god," *i. e.* the deity whom he had selected to be his especial patron.

Vers. 45—47.—**And with a shield.** Really, "a javelin" (see on ver. 6). David of course mentions only his arms of offence. As Goliath had reviled David by his god, so David now expresses his trust in the God of Israel, even **Jehovah of hosts**, whom the Philistine was dishonouring. **This day.** *I. e.* immediately (see ch. xiv. 33). **Carcases** is singular in the Hebrew, but is rightly translated plural, as it is used collectively. **That all the earth may know,** &c. As we saw on ver. 37, it was David's strong faith in Jehovah, and his conviction that God was fighting for him in proof of his covenant relation to Israel, that not only nerved him to the battle, but made Saul see in him one fit to be Israel's representative in so hazardous a duel.

Vers. 48, 49.—**When the Philistine arose.** Apparently he was seated, as was the rule with armies in ancient times when not engaged in conflict (comp. ver. 52). When, then, he saw David emerge from the ravine, he rose, and, carrying his vast load of armour, moved slowly towards his enemy, trying to frighten him by his curses. David, meanwhile, in his light equipment, **ran towards the army,** Hebrew, "the rank," *i. e.* the Philistine line, in front of which Goliath had been sitting. As the giant's helmet had no visor, that protection not having as yet been invented, and his shield was still carried by his armour-bearer, his face was exposed to David's missiles. And in those days, before firearms were invented, men by constant practice "could sling stones at a hair-breadth, and not miss" (Judges xx. 16). And even if David were not quite as skilful as those Benjamites, yet, as the giant could move only very slowly, the chances were that he would hit him with one or more of his five pebbles. As it was, he struck him at his first attempt upon the forehead with such force that Goliath was stunned, and fell down upon his face to the ground.

Vers. 50, 51.—**So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone.** It is evident that the narrator regarded David's victory as extraordinary; and no doubt it required not only great courage, but also perfect skill, as only the lower portion of the forehead would be exposed, and on no other part of the giant's body would a blow have been of any avail. The narrator also calls attention to the fact that David relied upon his sling alone, for **there was no sword in the hand of David.** Slings probably were regarded as useful only to harass an enemy, while swords, which they had only lately been able to procure (ch. xiii. 22), were regarded as the real weapons of offence. David, therefore, completes his victory by killing Goliath with his own sword as he lay stunned upon the ground. As Ahimelech considered it fit for David's own use (ch. xxi. 9), it was probably not so monstrous in size as Goliath's other weapons. **Champion** is not the word so rendered in vers. 4, 23, but that used in ch. xvi. 18 for "a *hero* of valour."

Vers. 52, 53.—**To the valley.** Hebrew, *gai.* As we have seen, there was a *gai* or ravine between the two armies, but in the Hebrew there is no article, and the Israelites must also cross this before any fighting began. The panic which struck the Philistines when they saw their champion fall enabled the Israelites to do so, but the pursuit only then commenced. The Septuagint reads Gath, a very probable emendation, for, as we saw in the passage quoted from Conder on ver. 2, Gath was situated at the mouth of the terebinth valley. The Syriac and Vulgate retain *valley*, but the former understands it of the mouth of the valley of Elah. **Shaaraim** was a town assigned to Judah (Josh. xv. 36) in the Shephelah (see on ver. 1), but was now held by the Philistines. **They spoiled their tents.** More correctly, "their camp."

Ver. 54.—**David . . . brought it to Jerusalem.** This is an anticipation of later history. The Jebusites at this time held Jerusalem; but when David had taken it from them, he removed the head of Goliath thither, and the narrator, following the usual custom of Hebrew historians, mentions the ultimate fate of this trophy here (see on ch. xvi. 21). **He put his armour in his tent.** *I. e.* he carried it to his home (see on ch. ii. 35; iv. 10; xiii. 2, &c.), where it became his private property. The mistranslation of *camp* by *tents* in ver. 53 might lead an English reader to suppose that it meant a tent in the camp of Israel; but most probably the men all slept under their wagons. Abravanel supposes that by David's tent was meant the tabernacle of Jehovah, but this would surely have been stated more fully. Either, however, now, or at some later period, David must have presented the sword as an offering to the tabernacle, as it was laid up at Nob, whence he took it with him in his flight (see ch. xxi. 9).

SAUL'S INQUIRY CONCERNING DAVID'S PARENTAGE (vers. 55—58). Vers. 55—58.—**Abner, whose son is this youth?** Hebrew, "lad," *na'ar.* We have seen that the narrative in ch. xvi. 21—23 carries the history of David's relations with Saul down to a much later period, and that in ver. 15 of this chapter David is represented as not dwelling continuously at Saul's court, but as having returned to Bethlehem and resumed his pastoral occupations there, whence he would be summoned back in case of the recurrence of Saul's malady. It is plain from what is stated here that David had not thus far spent time enough at Gibeah to be personally well known either to Saul or his officers (see note on ver. 15). **Stripling.** Not *na'ar*, but *'alem*, the masculine of the word *'almah*, used in Isa.

vii. 14. It means a young man fully grown, and arrived at the age to marry, and so is more definite than *na'ar*, which Saul uses in ver. 58. **As David returned**, &c. Abner, as captain of the host, would naturally watch the combat, and as soon as it was possible would bring the young warrior into the king's presence. But what is recorded here could have taken place only after the pursuit of the Philistines was over, and really these five verses should be united with ch. xvii., as their object is to introduce the account of the love of Jonathan for David. Starting then with the inquiry made by the king of Abner, asking for fuller information as to the young man's parentage, the historian then tells how after the chase he was brought before Saul, and then, in ch. xviii. 1, that the result of their conversation was the warm love that henceforward knit together these two kindred souls.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 20—30.—*A religious man's view of things.* The facts are—1. David arrives at the camp just as preparations are being made for battle. 2. While with his brethren he hears the defiance of Goliath, and observes the dismay of Israel. 3. Being informed of the inducement offered by Saul for any one to slay Goliath, he makes particular inquiries as to the facts, and suggests the vanity of the defiance. 4. His inquiries arouse the jealousy of Eliab, who imputes to him unhallowed motives. 5. Nevertheless, David persists in his attention to the matter. The pusillanimity of the entire army seems to have been accepted by Saul as quite reasonable in presence of such a foe. David's converse with the men revealed a remarkable unanimity of sentiment among them. Estimated by the ordinary maxims of war during times when brute force in individual conflict decided the day, there was, indeed, small chance for a dwarf against a giant. The embarrassment was great, natural, and irremovable. But from the moment of David's arrival this condition of things appeared to him unreasonable. Coming fresh from the fold, unfamiliar with the ordinary rules of armed warfare, and interpreting facts by principles acquired elsewhere than in the camp and among pusillanimous men, he marvelled at the dismay of Israel, and dared to be singular in his opinion that the giant was not to be dreaded. Events from a religious point of view assume a different aspect. Notice—

I. AN EMINENTLY RELIGIOUS MAN'S IMPRESSIONS OF FORMIDABLE DIFFICULTIES. David was at this time, in comparison with others, eminently religious. The facts of life impress us according to sentiments and views already entertained. When, therefore, this devout, God-fearing youth looked on the conflict, he saw it with eyes full of religious light. He felt that the entire army was wrong in feeling and opinion. The *principle holds good in other applications.* The eminently religious get an impression of the world peculiar to their refined spiritual condition. The most conspicuous instance of this is in the case of the holy Saviour. Coming from the pure, loving sphere of heaven, more sweet and restful than David's rural pastures, how different would the earth, with its conflicts, cares, and woes, appear to him as compared with their impression on men! Holy men see the world with new eyes when they descend from some mount of transfiguration. No wonder if some highly-purified and trustful souls, looking on the fear and inactivity of professed followers of Christ, are disgusted and ashamed at the lack of hope and confidence. If we have the "mind of Christ," fresh, pure, deep in conviction of God's all-wise and mighty will, toned with pity, and elevated by undying hope, we shall often get impressions of our surroundings which may make us singular, but which, nevertheless, will be just.

II. AN EMINENTLY RELIGIOUS MAN WILL NOT HESITATE TO INDICATE AND JUSTIFY HIS IMPRESSIONS. The clear, truthful eyes of the shepherd youth saw the world through a Divine medium, and, with all the sincerity of goodness and force of deep conviction, he was not afraid to let it be known that he differed from others. "*Who* is this Philistine?" *He* defy the "armies of the *living God!*" The fire burned; he could not but speak. To him it was a most abhorrent thought that any one could dare to assert his strength against God. It is obvious that David reduced the whole situation to a question of first principles. He remembered *who* the Philistine was in the sight of God, and *what* the meaning of Israel's existence in the

great purpose of redemption. The fear of Israel he referred to loss of faith in the people's mission to the world, and in God as the perfecter of that mission. *Illustrations of the same course are elsewhere found.* True religious enlightenment must express itself in some form. The holy cannot look on life and be silent. Our Saviour's words and deeds were largely the expression of the effect of man's condition upon his nature. It is especially important to remember this reference to first principles in their application to—1. The *sorrows and woes of mankind* through sin. We cannot solve the mystery of evil, but can fall back on the primary truth that God is good and wise, and therefore his government in the end will be justified. 2. The *prevalent habits of the world.* We must not fail to trace them to radical alienation from God, and apply the only radical cure, renewal of nature by the Spirit of God. 3. The *obstacles in the way of Christ's triumph.* They are real as facts, but we must justify our faith in their removal by indicating their essentially transitory character in contrast with the "everlasting strength" of our God.

III. A RELIGIOUS MAN IN GIVING EFFECT TO HIS IMPRESSIONS MAY BE MISREPRESENTED. David's pure mind was charged with vanity and idle curiosity (ver. 28). The accusation was the more painful in coming from a brother. Jealousy creates a jaundiced medium through which the holiest and most beautiful things appear hideous. A greater than David was also reviled, and his most holy and blessed words and deeds associated with the most wicked of origins (Mark iii. 22; John x. 20). Pliny and Tacitus, judicious men of the world, could not appreciate the opinions and motives of the early Christians. Even now strong faith in God, and belief that all obstacles to the progress of Christianity will give way because essentially human, is regarded as fanaticism. Even among some *professed* believers in Christ those are held to be too sanguine who feel sure that the most formidable of modern giants is as nothing before the mighty power which somehow will sweep it away. Be it so; time will show.

General lessons:—1. Clearness of vision on religious matters, and indirectly on all, is a result of superior devoutness of spirit. 2. We never need fear being singular when sustained by a clear conscience and the approval of God. 3. The earnest convictions and simple faith of one man may, in the providence of God, work a revolution in popular thought. 4. We give value to our religious convictions when they are indicated with candour and are sustained by simplicity and purity of life 5. A love of detraction and petty fault-finding, while it does not really injure the devoted who are its object, debases those who indulge in them.

Vers. 31—37.—*Reasonable confidence in God.* The facts are—1. David's words being reported to Saul, he sends for him. 2. David volunteers to go forth and fight the Philistine. 3. In justification of his confidence, he refers to God's deliverance of him from the lion and bear. 4. Saul bids him go, and desires for him the Lord's presence. It was doubtless a relief to Saul to be informed that at least there was one in Israel who dared to accept the Philistine's challenge. His surprise was equal to his relief, and may have lessened his hope, when he saw the stripling. The quiet confidence of David was natural and reasonable to himself, but evidently required some justification before Saul. The story of the lion and bear was adduced, with beautiful simplicity of spirit, to indicate to Saul that the confidence cherished was amply warranted by past experience. To David's mind the logic was unanswerable. It is by tracing the mental process by which David rested in his firm conviction that we shall see the true ground of our confidence in God, when called by his providence to enter upon undertakings of a serious nature.

I. A PRIMARY TRUTH. The power of God is adequate to any human need. This general truth was the basis of David's reasoning. It was involved in his very conception of Jehovah, and found beautiful utterance in his language of later years. The power of the Eternal was not a mere philosophic idea requisite to complete the *notion* of God, but a living energy permeating all things. The ascription of natural changes and events immediately to God (Ps. xviii.) is only the expression of a faith which sees the Divine energy in and through all things. The people at Elah, on seeing Goliath, thought of his strength. The reverse effect produced in the mind of David by Goliath's boast was the thought of the eternal power. The *influence of*

general truths on our life is great—greater than some suppose. They lie deep down in the mind, and yet are ever at command to regulate thought and feeling, and to suggest lines of conduct. Hence those in whom they are most fresh and clear are persons of wider range of view, sounder judgment, and deeper convictions. It is *important to have the mind well fortified with those general truths that relate to God;* and, in view of the difficulties and dangers of life, it is well to keep clear the truth that in Jehovah is "everlasting strength."

II. AN EXPERIENCE. David referred to the experience he had had of the power of God in delivering him from the lion and bear while in the discharge of his life's calling. The Almighty hand had befriended him at a time when he put forth his own energies to subdue his dangerous enemies. Without having recourse to miracle in these cases, it is enough to notice that David recognises Divine aid in the putting forth of effort, and the primary truth had been translated into the experience of life, and so become strikingly verified. A fact is an unanswerable argument. The logic strengthens. Most of us can *fall back on deliverances from lions and adders* (Ps. xci. 13). The mental record of the past furnishes a premiss on which to build an argument of hope for the future (2 Tim. iv. 17, 18).

III. A REVEALED FACT. David could not cherish the confidence he did without welding with his primary truth and personal experience the fact that the Almighty was always the same, and that, therefore, continuity in aid might be looked for. The unchangeableness of God was an assured fact, not from philosophic speculation on the necessary nature of the Supreme, but because made clear to the mind by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. i. 21). "From everlasting to everlasting thou art God," keeping covenant for ever (Ps. lxxxix. 34). Therefore the argument from past experience of his power was, so far, available for conflict with a gigantic foe. The *force of this revealed fact concerning the Divine Being is great.* It gives our mind a resting-place amidst the incessant flux of things. It opens up to view a rock on which we can stand calm and secure in face of all changes of earth. The frailty of our life seems a blessing in association with so precious a reality. As the uniformity in the laws of nature furnish a basis of wise calculation and confidence in action, so the unchanging power of God in relation to human need is a ground of hope and confidence in pursuit of legitimate objects.

IV. A PRESENT EMERGENCY. David found himself in presence of an emergency more trying than when lion and bear were confronted, for the interests were wide. He was too sensible a youth to imagine that the eternal power would be manifested because men desired it, whatever the occasion. But if aid was given formerly in real need, and now a need more pressing was felt, the argument of faith was conclusive. Moreover, the earlier occasions were private and personal; this was public, affecting the interests of Israel; and were not these the interests of him for whose advent Israel lived? The ruddy youth perhaps saw a connection between the overthrow of Goliath and the great kingdom of which he sang in Ps. lxxii. We have here a *safe criterion of the reasonableness of confidence in God's aid.* When an emergency arises which deeply affects the honour and safety of Christ's Church, and the diffusion of the blessings of his reign, we are warranted to cherish fullest confidence that God will help us in our endeavour, by such means as we possess, to meet the peril. Let Churches and individuals act by this rule, and they will never be disappointed. It is involved in the promise, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

V. A PROVIDENCE. The previously-noticed elements in the ground of David's confidence were more influential from the fact that he did not force himself into the position, but was there by providential leading, in which he was quite passive. A man may at the last moment shrink from a dangerous work if conscious that he, by contrivance, sought it out; but when we are literally urged by circumstances into difficulties and dangers, and have a good cause in hand, then we may take the providence as an encouragement to go through. Providence led the apostles into conflict with rulers, and, hence, they dared to be confident.

VI. A PLEA. David could fortify his expectation of help by the plea that his heart was honest in intent. He sought not to fight the giant for love of fighting, for securing renown, for any private end, but for love to his people Israel and the honour

of Israel's God. Purity of motive in ordinary life is no substitute for faith in Christ for acceptance with God; but it is a condition on which God grants his aid to us in our exertions. If we face gigantic evils, in themselves too great for our wisdom and strength, from an intense desire to conquer them for Christ, cherishing no vain personal ambition, then the highest confidence is justified. A power equal to our need, unchanged by time, realised in past experience, required for an emergency in which the honour of Christ is at stake, sought by one providentially led to face the difficulty, and desired not for vain reasons, but purely for the glory of God—such a process of thought places confidence in God's help on a most reasonable basis.

General lessons:—1. We should consider whether Providence has really given us arduous work to do for Christ. 2. Our wisdom is to go forth, not under the influence of the opinions of unspiritual men, but under the full force of our own religious convictions. 3. We must not expect to know in what way the power of God will work with us; the fact that it will is enough. 4. Success or failure in perilous enterprises for Christ depends much on the purity of motive, and this should receive prayerful attention.

Vers. 38—40.—*Naturalness*. The facts are—1. Saul clothes David with his armour. 2. David, distrusting its value, puts it aside. 3. He goes forth to the conflict armed only with a sling and a stone. There is a curious blending of cowardice, prudence, and folly in Saul's conduct. Not daring to fight the foe, he hesitates not to accept a youth; and while providing ordinary armour for his defence, he fails to see that an armed youth would really be at a disadvantage with an armed giant. Apart from higher considerations, David's good sense shows him that free nimbleness would be of more value than limbs stiffened under a coat of mail. The gentle negation, "I have not proved them," covered a positive faith in other armour often proved. He would be David in the conflict, and no one else. The issue was staked on his perfect naturalness. He knew "in whom he believed," and was true to his own individuality. The teaching is wide and important in relation to—

I. EDUCATION. To be natural is one of the ends of education, and there is a naturalness in the means and process by which alone that and all the ends of education will be secured. While psychologically the sum of faculties is the same in all, the relative power of them may vary. Constitutional tendencies and tastes also greatly differ. The inherent capacity of certain faculties seems likewise to be affected by inheritance. Discrimination is therefore requisite in education, otherwise we may place a Saul's armour on a David, and encumber his mental movements. No doubt a weak faculty is benefited by being stimulated to work, and a deficient taste may be improved by exercise; but the apportionment of work to faculties and tastes should be regulated, not by some general average of minds, but by what will make the most of the idiosyncrasies of the individual. That educational training and equipment is natural which leaves the mind most free and effective. What is gained on one side by painful drudgery may be lost on another by embitterment and crippled talents. Especially in *religious education is this important*. Let us not clothe the mental nature of children with the forms suited to men. Probably much of the distaste for religious instruction springs from the perfect unsuitability of the form to the receptivity of the mind.

II. OCCUPATION. Success in any calling depends largely on the naturalness of it to the abilities, tastes, and aspirations of the employed. The Goliath of poverty and disappointment too frequently overpowers really good and able men, because their occupation, though good and useful in itself, is unnatural to them. In the pressure of life it is hard, no doubt, to find the proper place for each one; but more forethought on the part of parents and guardians would obviate some of the evils. The over-crowding and eager race of men, trampling one another down in poverty, raises the thought whether these troubles are not the voice of Providence calling on men to spread abroad and cultivate the rich distant lands waiting for occupants. *Naturalness of occupation and of manner* is also desirable in *works of charity and religion*. Let not men be armed with powers and prerogatives out of accord with their mental and moral stature. Let not the youth of the Church, in their enthusiasm for Christ, be fettered by impositions that will nullify their zeal Nor let the immature assume

functions for which ripe experience alone can qualify. The wise Church is that which takes cognisance of all its members, and finds out and encourages some sphere of Christian activity natural to the attainments and social position of each individual. Ministries may differ in style and be most natural—*e. g.* Paul and John.

III. SPIRITUAL CONFLICT. In one respect David's was a spiritual conflict. He discerned the great religious issues at stake, and the fitness of the means by which the battle was to be fought. For sweeping off from the earth a great foe of God's purpose in Israel, and, therefore, in Christ, he had not proved the armour of Saul, the unspiritual king; but he had proved other means of warfare suited to his individuality as a youth full of faith in God and enthusiasm for the golden age of the world. The man after God's own heart will not fight in the attire of the man who had lost faith in God. He must have freedom for such powers as are natural to himself, and that would give scope for his trust in God. 1. Is there not here a *foreshadowing of a greater than David?* Christ, in seeking to rid the earth of the giant foe of God's righteous government, *sin*, knows that men have been accustomed to contend with the evil by various appliances—philosophy, art, social and political organisation, repressive ordinances, commercial intercourse, and other agencies created for the preservation of society. There were men who hoped that he would adopt some of the ordinary appliances (John vi. 15). But Christ worked out his mission on the line of his own individuality. Recognising organisations, and social laws, and ordinary knowledge as useful, he nevertheless struck at the root, not at the ramifications, of sin. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." "Make the tree good and his fruit good." And this he effects by the power of his holy life, of his self-sacrifice, and pure truth, brought to bear on the deepest springs of thought and volition by the mighty working of the Holy Spirit (Matt. xi. 29; John iii. 7; x. 16—18; xiii. 15; xvii. 17; 2 Cor. v. 21; Phil. ii. 5; 1 Pet. ii. 21—25; iii. 18). 2. *We may also see here a parallel to our personal conflicts with evil.* There are "carnal" weapons sometimes used for subjugation of evil, but the spiritual man knows of an "armour of God" (Ephes. vii. 11—17), often proved and never known to fail. Both in our own hearts and in the world sin will be most surely overcome if we distrust mere accommodations to its nature and conformities to its methods, and use with all our free energy the spiritual power which comes of God. Christian naturalness lies in using Christian means—faith, prayer, truth, love, hope, and patience.

Vers. 41—51.—*The governing principle of life.* The facts are—1. The Philistine, on observing the youth and simple weapons of David, disdains and curses him, and boasts of soon giving his flesh to bird and beast. 2. David, in reply, declares that he comes in the name of God, and expresses his assurance that, in the speedy death of his foe, all men would learn that the battle is the Lord's. 3. Goliath falls by means of the sling and stone. 4. Seizing his sword, David cuts off his head, whereon the Philistines flee. We may regard Goliath and David as representatives of two very distinct orders of character—the one serving as a foil to the other. The low human purpose, the boastful trust in human strength, and the vanity of gaining personal renown, on the one side, set off in bold relief the execution of a Divine purpose, the quiet trust in Divine strength, and the supreme desire to see God glorified, on the other side. "I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied"—here is the great principle that governed David's conduct. "*In the name of the Lord*" did the stripling raise his voice, select his stones, and use his sling. Nor was this a mere accident in his life. A crisis may bring out into clear and bold expression the principle which governs a good man's life, but it does not create it. "In the name of the Lord" was his motto when feeding the sheep, slaying the lion and bear, and composing the Psalms. Consider—

I. The NATURE AND RANGE OF THE GOVERNING PRINCIPLE OF A GOOD MAN'S LIFE. There are various mental acts entering into and lying at the spring of conduct—some more original than others. Life cannot be fully understood without an analysis of them and a recognition of their mutual relation. At one time a passion may be regarded as the governing principle—*e. g.* "The love of Christ constraineth us;" at another, supreme regard for right—*e. g.* "Do justly;" at another, obedience to a superior will

—*e. g.* "Not my will, but thine be done." But these and others of kindred nature are in Scripture summarised in the beautiful formula, "In the name of the Lord." David's conduct brings this principle into triple form. 1. *The purpose of life is the purpose of God.* That which God, by the revelations of his mercy and the ordinations of providence, is working out—the cutting off of evil and the establishment of righteousness—is the adopted and cherished purpose of life. In every calling, pursuit, enterprise, alliance, pleasure, secular or spiritual conflict, the true man goes forth "in the name of the Lord" to destroy the foe of God and man. He is conscious of a definite unity of purpose, and wills that it be identical with the one purpose of God. 2. *The power trusted to is the power of God.* The Lord in whose name David went forth "saveth not with sword and spear." The stripling did not expect Goliath to fall down dead while he lay at rest in his tent, but he went forth using those means natural to him as a youth, and this too because of the unseen hand which taught "his fingers to fight." God's strength is not a vast reserve locked up for use on some far distant day, when some new system of worlds has to be created, any more than that it has been all poured forth into laws and forces now acting. The Eternal Spirit is eternally strong, and as a Spirit is in such contact with us that, by placing ourselves in a certain attitude of loving trust, we receive from him according to our need. 3. *The glory sought is that of the Lord.* The motive of David was not to become notorious among men, not to promote some private advantage, but that "all the earth might know that there is a God in Israel." Here the stripling warrior was governed by the same reference to God as was recognised by the Apostle Paul when he said, "Do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. x. 31). This abnegation of self, this joy in the honour of the holy name, this ambition to see men bowing in reverence to the Lord of all, enters into the private and public, the secular and spiritual, works of the renewed man. See the beautiful and impressive language of saints of different ages (2 Sam. xxii. 33, 35; 2 Chron. xxxii. 7, 8; Ps. xx. 5; lxiii. 4; cxv. 1; 2 Cor. x. 4; Heb. xi. 32—34).

II. The TRUE GOVERNING PRINCIPLE OF LIFE IS NOT UNDERSTOOD BY THOSE WHO ARE NOT UNDER ITS INFLUENCE. Goliath, judging others by the principles that governed his own conduct, disdained David: his abusive language shows that he had no conception of the nature of the inspiration that made the stripling so cool and brave. Some men live in a world not penetrated even by the vision of others. Spheres of life come into collision, but do not intersect. The scorn and contempt of the ungodly is a common fact (Ps. cxxiii. 4; 1 Cor. i. 18; iv. 13). Christ and his apostles were treated with contempt, and their design of subduing the world was, and still is, by some referred to madness. Ridicule of prayer, of missions to savage men, of expectation of Christ's gospel being accepted by all, still abounds. Are not the people "few," the means contemptible—out of harmony with the age, and opposed to the principles of physical science? It is the old story of a boastful Goliath. It is the same revelation of profound ignorance. Verily, if there were no more in Christian men than in their foes, the conflict would soon be settled (2 Cor. iv. 4).

III. The TRIUMPH OF THE OUTWORKING OF THE TRUE GOVERNING PRINCIPLE OF LIFE IS ASSURED. David was sure that on that very day his foe would fall, and so illustrate the supremacy of the good man's principle. Events confirmed the truth. The issue of the great conflict between Christ's Church and opposing forces of evil is thus foreshadowed. We may go forth with the same assurance that at the end of the world's great day of battle we shall be in a position to say, "Now thanks be unto God, who always causeth us to triumph in Christ" (2 Cor. ii. 14; 1 Cor. xv. 57, 58). The same result may be looked for in respect of our own personal conflicts with sin; for though we may be weak, and pained by the scorning of the proud, yet, using our sling and stone in the strength of God, it will be found at last that we are "more than conquerors." And this, which applies to life as a whole, is of equal force in respect to any form of vice or moral evil we contend with day by day (Ps. xliv. 6, 7; Micah vii. 8).

General lessons:—1. The continued boasting of the enemies of Christianity is an illustration of its spiritual nature and the truth of its predictions (2 Pet. iii. 3). 2. The great need for Christians is to rise to the height of their powers and privileges

as soldiers of Christ (1 Cor. xvi. 13). 3. Every triumph achieved for Christ over sins, or individuals, or obstacles is a pledge of coming victories.

Vers. 52—58.—*Unknown and yet well known.* The facts are—1. Stimulated by the exploit of David, the people complete their victory over the Philistines. 2. David leaves his weapons in his tent and carries Goliath's head to Jerusalem. 3. During the conflict Saul inquires who David was, but obtains no information, till, on presentation, David declares himself to be the son of Jesse. The summary of events here given brings out incidentally a fair illustration of general truths.

I. MULTITUDES ARE INSPIRED TO VIGOROUS ACTION BY THE INFLUENCE OF INDIVIDUAL HEROISM. The force of David's character passed beyond the death of Goliath: it infused fear into the Philistines and aroused the spirit of his countrymen. In this stimulating power we have one of the prime qualities of true leadership. The value of our actions lies much in this moral force. One of the difficulties of conflict in a good cause is to arouse enthusiasm, nourish courage, and incline men to exchange their lethargy for action. In the cause of Christ we have need to pray that he would raise up men fitted, by their heroic spirit, to arouse the slumbering energies of his people.

II. FORMER FRIENDS REAPPEAR UNDER A NEW GUISE. The stripling who befriended Saul in his military difficulties was the same as comforted him in his private sorrows. The deft fingers that once drew sweet music from the harp now used the stone that brought Saul's enemy to the earth. This was the second of the many acts of kindness rendered by the future to the present king, though Saul recognised not his *quondam* comforter under the new guise of chivalry. It is a happy circumstance when a man can enrich others by the exercise of diverse and unlooked-for gifts, even when not recognised. By such merciful providences does God sometimes mitigate the misfortunes even of the undeserving.

III. THERE IS SOMETIMES IGNORANCE IN HIGH PLACES OF PERSONS AND QUALITIES WORTH KNOWING. For some time David had, next to Samuel, been the most beautiful character in Israel. This is a just inference from his choice and anointing by Samuel, the sweet charm of his music and song, his noble endurance of Eliab's base imputation (vers. 28, 29), the simple story of the lion and bear, the tone of his address to Goliath, and the entire spirit displayed through the day. If moral and high spiritual qualities are of greatest permanent value to a nation, then David was, next to Samuel, Israel's greatest benefactor. And yet Saul and his officers knew him not. Concerned with the arm of flesh and the framework of national life, great authorities are often unaware of the presence of persons most important on account of their elevation of character. This will ever be true until the time comes when moral and spiritual considerations have their proper place in the councils of kings and princes. But though "unknown" in earthly courts, the holy and Christly have their record in the court of heaven, and are held in everlasting remembrance by him who delighteth in his saints and guards them as the apple of his eye.

General lessons:—1. We should pray God that the spirit of his chosen servants may become more prevalent in the Church. 2. If our goodness is real, it will find out new forms of manifestation, and not refrain because men see not the personality that blesses. 3. It may be useful to foster courage and hope for future conflicts in life by a frequent reminder of past victories, for the giant's head in Jerusalem was not without moral intent. 4. It will be an encouragement to constancy in goodness to remember that while "unknown" we are "well known" (2 Cor. v. 9).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 19—31. (THE VALLEY OF ELAH.)—*Self-conquest.* "What have I now done? Is there not a cause?" (ver. 29. Was it not a word? or, Was it anything more than a word?). In the conflict of life the first victory which every one should seek to achieve is the victory over himself. Unless he gain this, he is not likely to gain others, or, if he gain them, to improve them aright; but if, on the other hand, he gain it, he is thereby prepared to gain others, and to follow them

up with the greatest advantage. Such a victory was David's. 1. He arrived at the wagon-rampart when the host was about to make an advance; leaving there the things he carried, he ran into the ranks to seek his brethren; and, while talking with them, there stalked forth, as on previous days, the Philistine champion, at the sight of whom "all the men of Israel fled, and were sore afraid" (ver. 24). The shepherd youth alone was fearless. There was in him more faith than in the whole army. And in conversing with the men around him he intimated the possible overthrow of this boastful giant, and the "taking away of the reproach from Israel," and expressed his amazement at the audacity of the man in "defying the ranks of the living God" (whose presence and power all appear to have forgotten). 2. On hearing his words, and probably surmising that he entertained the thought of encountering the champion, Eliab was filled with envy and anger, and reproached him as being out of his proper place, as only fit to have the charge of a few sheep, and even neglectful of them, and as proud, discontented with his calling, bad-hearted, and delighting in the sight of strife and bloodshed, which, he said, he *knew*, however others might be deceived. Ah, how little did he really know of his brother's heart! But angry men are more desirous of inflicting pain than of uttering the truth. 3. This language would have excited the fierce wrath of most persons. But David maintained his self-control, and gave the soft answer which "turneth away wrath." He thus obtained a victory which was hardly less noble than that which he shortly afterwards obtained over Goliath. Consider his self-conquest (with respect to the passion of anger) as—

I. ACHIEVED UNDER SEVERE PROVOCATION. 1. *The contemptuous reproach of a brother.* From him at least better things might have been expected. But natural affection often vanishes before envy and anger (Gen. iv. 8), and is transformed into intense hatred. "There is no enemy so ready or so spiteful as the domestical" (Hall). 2. *An ungrateful return for kindness.* David had come with valuable presents and kindly inquiries, and this was his reward. 3. *An unjust impugning of motives.* "Eliab sought for the splinter in his brother's eye, and was not aware of the beam that was in his own; the very things with which he charged his brother were most apparent in his own scornful reproach" (Keil). 4. *An open attack upon reputation.* His words were intended to damage David in the eyes of others, as unworthy of their confidence and regard. All these things were calculated to exasperate. "Thus David was envied of his own brethren, herein being a type of Christ, who was rejected of the Jews, being as it were the eldest brethren, and was received of the Gentiles" (Willet). The followers of Christ are often exposed to similar provocation. "And the strength of a good soldier of Jesus Christ appears in nothing more than in steadfastly maintaining the holy calm, meekness, sweetness, and benevolence of his mind amidst all the storms, injuries, strange behaviour, and surprising acts and events of this evil and unreasonable world" (J. Edwards).

II. EXHIBITING AN ADMIRABLE SPIRIT. 1. *Extraordinary meekness and forbearance in enduring reproach.* "He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding," &c. (Prov. xiv. 29; xv. 18; xxv. 28). 2. *Firm and instant repression of angry passion.* For it could hardly be but that a flash of indignation should glance into his breast; but "anger resteth in the bosom of fools" (Eccles. vii. 9). 3. *Wise and gentle reserve in the language employed.* It is as useless to reason with the wind as with an angry man. "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth," &c. (Ps. cxli. 3). 4. *Continued and steadfast adherence to a noble purpose.* David went on talking "after the same manner" (ver. 30). We ought not to suffer ourselves to be turned from the path of duty by the reproach which we may meet therein, but we should rather pursue it more diligently than ever, and prove by our conduct the sincerity and rectitude of our spirit. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city" (Prov. xvi. 32). "It is better to conquer the deceitful lusts of the heart than to conquer Jerusalem" (St. Bernard).

> "The bravest trophy ever man obtained
> Is that which o'er himself, himself hath gained."

"When thou art offended by others, do not let thy mind dwell upon them, or on such thoughts as these:—that they ought not so to have treated thee; who they

are: or whom they think themselves to be, and the like; for all this is fuel, and a kindling of anger, wrath, and hatred. But in such cases turn instantly to the strength and commands of God, that thou mayest know what thou oughtest to do, and that thine error be not greater than theirs. So shalt thou return into the way of peace" (Scupoli). And of this spirit Christ is the supreme pattern (1 Pet. ii. 21—23).

III. FOLLOWED BY A BENEFICIAL EFFECT. 1. *A sense of peace and Divine approbation.* "Angels came and ministered unto him" (Matt. iv. 11). It is always thus with those who conquer temptation. 2. *The purifying and strengthening of faith* by means of the trial to which it is subjected (1 Pet. i. 7; James i. 2). 3. *The commendation of character* in the sight of others, who commonly judge of the truth of an accusation by the manner in which it is met, and naturally confide in a man of calmness, firmness, and lofty purpose. "They rehearsed them" (his words) "before Saul: and he sent for him" (ver. 31). 4. *The preparation of the spirit for subsequent conflict.* "Could the second victory have been achieved if he had failed in the first conflict? His combat with Goliath demanded an undimmed eye, a steady arm, and a calm heart, and if he had given way to stormy passion for only a brief season there would have been a lingering feverishness and nervousness, utterly unfitting him for the dread struggle on which the fate of two armies and two nations was depending" (C. Vince).—D.

Vers. 32—37. (THE VALLEY OF ELAH.)—*Faith's argument from experience.* "He will deliver me out of the hand of the Philistine" (ver. 37). Many things tend to hinder the exercise and work of faith. Some of them arise from the heart itself. Others arise from the speech and conduct of other people. Such was the scornful reproach cast upon David by his eldest brother, and such the cold distrust with which he was at first regarded by Saul. But as he had doubtless overcome his own tendency to unbelief by recalling what God had done, so now by the same means he overcame the unbelief of the king, and excited his confidence and hope. "Let no man's heart fail," &c. (ver. 32). "Thou art not able," &c. (ver. 33). But "there was that in the language of this youth which recalled the strength of Israel, which seemed like the dawn of another morning, like the voice from another world" (Edersheim). "And Saul said unto David, Go, and Jehovah be with thee" (ver. 37); thus displaying one of the best features of character he possessed after his rejection. We have here—

I. AN EXPERIENCE of great deliverances. 1. Consisting of *accomplished facts.* "Thy servant kept his father's sheep," &c. (vers. 34, 35). They were not imaginary, but real events. 2. Occurring in *personal history*, and therefore the more certain and deeply impressed on the mind. How full is every individual life of instructive providential occurrences, if we will but observe them. 3. Wrought by *a Divine hand.* "The Lord that delivered me," &c. (ver. 37). Where unbelief perceives nothing but chance and good fortune a devout spirit sees "him who is invisible;" and the extraordinary success which the former attributes to man the latter ascribes to God. 4. Treasured up in a *grateful memory.* "Therefore will I remember thee," &c. (Ps. xlii. 6; lxxvii. 10, 11). "Experience is the collection of many particulars registered in the memory."

II. AN ARGUMENT for strong confidence. The argument—1. Rests upon the *unchangeableness of God*, and the uniform method of his dealings. "The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent" (ch. xvi. 29). Hence every instance of his help is an instruction and a promise, inasmuch as it shows the manner in which he affords his aid, and gives assurance of it under like conditions. "Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice" (Ps. lxiii. 7; xxvii. 9). "This was a favourite argument with David. He was fond of inferring future interpositions from past. And the argument is good, if used cautiously and with just discrimination. It is always good if justly applied. The difficulty is in such application. The unchangeable God will always do the same things in the same circumstances. If we can be certain that cases are alike we may expect a repetition of his conduct" (A. J. Morris). 2. Recognises *similarity between the circumstances* in which Divine help has been received and those in which it is expected · viz., (1)

in the path of duty; (2) in conflict with an imposing, powerful, and cruel adversary; (3) in a state of perilous need; (4) in the exercise of simple trust; (5) in the use of appropriate means; (6) and in seeking the honour of God. When there is so close a resemblance the argument is readily applied, and its conclusion irresistible. 3. Regards the help formerly received as a *pledge of personal favour*, and an encouragement to expect not only continued, but still greater, benefits from him whose power and love are measureless. "I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion; and the Lord shall deliver me from *every* evil work," &c. (2 Tim. iv. 17, 18; 2 Cor. i. 10).

> "Man's plea to man is that he never more
> Will beg, and that he never begged before:
> Man's plea to God is that he did obtain
> A former suit, and therefore sues again.
> How good a God we serve, that, when we sue,
> Makes his old gifts the examples of his new" (Quarles).

4. Is *confirmed in practice* as often as it is faithfully tested, and increases in force, depth, and breadth with every fresh experience of Divine help. "Oh, were we but acquainted with this kind of reasoning with God, how undaunted we should be in all troubles! We should be as secure in time to come as for the time past; for all is one with God. We do exceedingly wrong our own souls and weaken our faith by not minding God's favours. How strong in faith might old men be that have had many experiences of God's love if they would take this course! Every former mercy should strengthen our faith for a new, as conquerors whom every former victory encourageth to a new conquest" (Sibbes, 'Works,' i. 320).—D.

Vers. 38—54. (EPHES-DAMMIM.) — *David's conflict with Goliath.* "So David prevailed" (ver. 50). 1. David was *specially prepared* for the conflict by the whole of his previous life, and especially by his successful attack upon the lion and the bear, and his victory over himself. 2. He was *providentially led* into the conflict. "Jesse little thought of sending his son to the army just in the critical juncture; but the wise God orders the time and all the circumstances of actions and affairs so as to serve his designs of securing the interest of Israel and advance the man after his own heart" (M. Henry). 3. He was *inwardly impelled* to the conflict by the Spirit of the Lord that had come upon him (ch. xvi. 13), and had formerly inspired Saul with fiery zeal against the Ammonites (ch. xi. 6). If he had gone into it in any other manner he would doubtless have failed. 4. He rendered *invaluable service* to Israel by the conflict, not only thereby repelling the invasion of the Philistines, but also teaching them the spirit they should cherish, and the kind of king they needed. "It is not too much to assert that this event was a turning-point in the history of the theocracy, and marked David as the true king of Israel, ready to take up the Philistine challenge of God and his people, and kindling in Israel a new spirit, and in the might of the living God bringing the contest to victory" (Edersheim). 5. He became an *appropriate type of Christ* by the conflict. "It is a rehearsal of Christ's temptation and victory a thousand years afterwards" (Wordsworth's 'Com.'). 6. He was also an *eminent pattern for Christians* in the conflict; exhibiting the spirit which they should possess in their warfare with "the world, the flesh, and the devil." "David's contest with Goliath will only be apprehended in its true light if the latter be regarded as a representative of the world, and David the representative of the Church" (Hengstenberg). Notice—

I. THE WEAPONS which he chose (vers. 38—40). 1. *He neglected not the use of weapons altogether.* To have done so would have been rash and presumptuous; for it is God's method to grant success to those who employ the legitimate aids which he has provided for the purpose. Although David did not trust in weapons of war, he did not throw them away, but used them wisely. We must do the same in the spiritual conflict. 2. He *rejected the armour*, defensive and offensive, which seemed to others indispensable. "I cannot go in these; for I have not proved them. And David put them off him" (ver. 39). Some weapons may appear to others, and even to ourselves, at first, to be the best, and yet not be really such. Some weapons may

be suitable to others, but not to us. We must learn by experience. We must be simple, genuine, and true to ourselves. And above all, we must look for Divine guidance in the matter. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal," &c. (2 Cor. x. 4). 3. *He selected the weapons which were most effective.* "And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones," &c. (ver. 40)—selected them carefully, knowing well which were the best for his purpose; and he was not satisfied with one or two merely, but provided a reserve. His weapons were insignificant only in the view of the inconsiderate. They were the most suitable that can be conceived, and gave greatest promise of success; and his genius was shown in their selection. *Intelligence was opposed to brute force.* "It was just because the sling and the stone were not the weapons of Goliath that they were best fitted to David's purpose. They could be used at a distance from the enemy; they made his superior resources of no avail; they virtually reduced him to the dimensions and condition of an ordinary man; they did more, they rendered his extraordinary size a disadvantage; the larger he was, the better for the mark. David, moreover, had been accustomed in his shepherd life to the sling; it had been the amusement of his solitary hours, and had served for his own protection and that of his flock; so that he brought to his encounter with Goliath an accuracy of aim and a strength and steadiness of arm that rendered him a most formidable opponent" (A. J. Morris). The lesson here taught is not that anything will do to fight with, but that there must be in spiritual, as well as in secular, conflicts a proper adaptation of means to ends.

II. THE SPIRIT which he displayed (vers. 41—48). 1. *Humility.* His heart was not haughty and proud (Ps. cxxxi. 1), as Eliab said it was, but humble and lowly. He was conscious of unworthiness before God, of utter weakness and insufficiency in himself, and ready to do and bear whatever might be the will of the Lord concerning him. Humility (from *humus*, the ground) lies in the dust, and is the root out of which true excellence grows. It is the first, the second, and the third thing in religion (Augustine). "Before honour is humility" (Prov. xv. 32). "He giveth grace to the humble." "Be clothed with humility." 2. *Faith.* "I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts" (ver. 45; see ch. i. 3). He looked beyond man to God, and relied upon his help. "He did not compare himself with Goliath, but he compared Goliath with Jehovah," who was the Leader and "God of the ranks of Israel." He believed, and therefore he spoke, and fought, and prevailed (2 Cor. iv. 13). "Although unarmed in the estimation of men, he was armed with the Godhead" (St. Ambrose). 3. *Zeal.* He was little concerned about his own honour and renown, but he was "very jealous for the Lord God of hosts" (1 Kings xix. 14). He heard the gods of the heathen extolled (ver. 43), and the name of Jehovah blasphemed, and he was desirous above all things that he should be glorified. "All the earth shall know," &c. (ver. 46). "All this assembly shall know," &c. (ver. 47). When we fight for God we may confidently expect that he will fight for us. "The battle is the Lord's." 4. *Courage*, which stood in contrast to the fear with which Israel was smitten, and was the fruit of his humility, faith, and zeal. It was shown in his calm and dauntless attitude in going forth against his opponent, in the presence of the two armies, in breathless suspense; in his bold and confident answer to the contemptuous challenge of the foe; and in his eagerness and energy in the actual conflict. "David hasted, and ran," &c. (vers. 48, 49, 51). "So David prevailed."

III. THE VICTORY which he achieved. Not only was the boastful Philistine overthrown, speedily, signally, and completely, but also—1. The enemy fled in terror (ver. 51), and their power was broken (ver. 52). 2. Israel was imbued with a new and better spirit (vers. 52, 53). 3. He himself was honoured—by God in giving him the victory and opening before him a wider sphere of activity, by the king (vers. 55—58; ch. xviii. 2), and by all the people. Even the Philistines long afterwards held his name in dread (ch. xxi. 11). "This first heroic deed of David was of the greatest importance to him and all Israel, for it was his first step on the way to the throne to which Jehovah had resolved to raise him" (Keil). "Raised by the nation, he raised and glorified it in return; and, standing at the crowning point of the history of the nation, he concentrates in himself all its brilliance, and becomes the one man of greatest renown in the whole course of its existence" (Ewald).—D.

Ver. 47.—*The battle is the Lord's.* Many of the battles which are waged on earth are not the Lord's. They are unnecessary and unrighteous. The end they seek and the means they adopt to attain it are evil. Other conflicts are only the Lord's in an inferior sense. Although not unnecessary, nor in themselves unrighteous, they are waged with secular aims and carnal weapons. But there is one which is the Lord's in the highest sense. It is a holy war; a conflict of the kingdom of light with the kingdom of darkness. Observe that—1. *The obligation is imposed by the Lord.* "Fight the good fight of faith." 2. *The adversaries are the adversaries of the Lord.* "Principalities and powers," &c. 3. *The soldiers are the people of the Lord.* Those in whose hearts the principles of the kingdom of God are implanted—"righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." 4. *The Commander is the Anointed of the Lord.* "The Captain of our salvation." "The Leader and Commander of the people." 5. *The weapons are provided by the Lord.* "Put on the whole armour of God"—"the armour of light." 6. *The success is due to the Lord.* He gives the strength which is needed, "teacheth our hands to war, and our fingers to fight," and "he will give you into our hands." 7. *The end is the glory of the Lord.* When it is over God will be "all in all." "Who is on the Lord's side?"—D.

Vers. 29, 37—39, 45—47.—*Three victories in one day.* Here the history assumes the charm of romance, and David stands forth a hero above all Greek and Roman fame. By the grace of God he won three victories in quick succession. 1. *Over the spirit of anger.* When David, shocked to see all Israel defied and daunted by one Philistine, showed his feeling to the men that stood by him, his eldest brother, Eliab, sneered at him openly, and taunted him with being fit only to keep sheep, or to look at battles which others fought. Probably this ungracious brother had not forgiven David for being preferred before him in the day when Samuel visited the house of Jesse; probably too he was conscious that it was the duty of some such tall soldier as himself to encounter the Philistine champion, and he was ashamed and irritated because he was afraid to fight. So he vented his ill-humour in a most galling and insulting reproach, hurled at his stripling brother. His words might have provoked a sharp retort. But David was in a mood of feeling too exalted to descend to wrangling. He was forming a purpose, at once patriotic and pious, which he saw that Eliab was unfit to appreciate, and therefore made a calm and mild reply: "What have I now done? It was only a word;" *q. d.* "I may surely ask a question.' Thus the hero ruled his own spirit; was master of himself before he mastered others; had that disinclination and disdain for paltry quarrels which belongs to men who cherish high and arduous aims; and David's first triumph was the triumph of meekness. 2. *Over the precautions of unbelief.* When the youth was led to the king, and in his presence offered to fight with the Philistine, he was told that he was not old or strong enough for the encounter. When a tried soldier of lofty stature like Saul himself shrank from the combat, how could this stripling attempt it? It was certain death. David was not shaken from his purpose. He showed the king that his trust was in God, and that the remembrance of past encounters with wild beasts when the Lord delivered him made him confident of victory over the giant. Then Saul said, "Go, and the Lord be with thee." Perhaps he said it from a mere habit of using such phrases, perhaps with a melancholy feeling that from himself the Lord had departed. But he had so much consideration for the brave youth before him as to put his own armour on him, and gird him with his own sword. It may seem strange that he did not assign to him a suit of armour more suited to his size; but there was little armour of any kind among the Israelites, and none so good as that of the king. It was well meant, but it was a sign of unbelief. Saul could not trust in God to defend this young champion, but would cover him with a brazen helmet and a coat of mail. David, however, happily for himself, put off the armour. It only encumbered his body, taking away his native nimbleness of movement, and it tended to weaken in his mind that total faith in God and sense of dependence on him which was more to him in such a field than even the armour of a king. Thrice was he armed who had his quarrel just, and the living God for his refuge and strength. 3. *Over the proud*

blasphemer. Goliath was a terrible opponent in a time when gunpowder as yet was not, and prowess in the field depended on size, strength, and armour. No one dared to accept his challenge; and as he stalked along the valley he scoffed at the men of Israel with impunity. It was a prodigy of courage on the part of a youth like David—however strong and active, not above the customary height of men—to assail that moving tower of brass. But it was no blind fanaticism, such as despises caution and skill, and disowns the use of fit means, as though implying a want of faith. David's faith made him use his utmost care and dexterity, trusting in God to give him a sure aim and a quick victory. It is quite a mistake to dwell on the simplicity of David in going forth to the combat with a weapon so unlikely, so inadequate, as a sling. On the contrary, he would have shown not simplicity only, but folly, if he had trusted to sword and spear. If he were to strike the giant at all, it must be from a distance, and not with weapons held in the hand; for Goliath's long arm and long spear would never have let him near enough to inflict a blow. So David shrewdly took the sling, with which he was familiar, and picked from the bed of the brook a few pebbles which would pass through the air like bullets. The sling was in fact the rifle of the period, and men who practised the art could make their bull's-eyes with this weapon as well as our modern rifle-shooters, though not at so great distances. The giant, seeing the shepherd's staff in David's hand, and probably not perceiving the thong of the sling, demanded whether he was regarded as a dog, that might be beaten with a stick. Then he loudly defied the rash boy who ventured to meet him in combat, and cursed him by his own heathen god. Back across the valley went the noble answer of Jehovah's servant. "I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied." Then came the terrible moment, and both armies "held their breath for a time." David made the attack. Nimbly he ran forward to be within shot. Goliath had opened the visor of his helmet to look at the foe whom he despised, and to shout defiance. Thus was his forehead exposed. David's quick eye saw the advantage; he slipped a pebble into the sling, and let it fly. A sharp whistle in the air, and the stone sunk into the giant's haughty brow. "He fell on his face to the earth." How the men of Israel shouted as they heard the clang of his heavy armour on the ground, and saw their young champion cut off the boaster's head with his own sword! Then it was the turn of the Philistines to fear and to flee; and the Israelites pursued them, and "spoiled their tents." So one man gained three battles in a day, and thousands reaped the advantage of his victories. Is not this what we have under the gospel? One who was born in Bethlehem, but in whom his own brethren did not believe, is our Deliverer and the Captain of our salvation. Jesus overcame provocation by his meekness and lowliness of heart. He overcame all temptation to unbelief and self-will by his perfect trust in God his Father. He also overcame that strong adversary who had long defied and daunted the people of God, and had lifted up the name of false gods on the earth, blaspheming him who is true. This enemy seemed to stride to and fro in the earth, and boast himself against the Lord with impunity. But the Son of David has bruised the enemy's head, laid low his pride, and now thousands and tens of thousands enter into his victory and shout his praise. To David belonged the honours of the day. Jonathan loved him. All Israel extolled him. So let us love and praise him who has won for us a greater victory and a richer spoil. We thank victorious generals, we decorate valiant soldiers, we raise statues and trophies to national champions. But, in truth, the country which they have saved is their real monument, the nation which they rescue from oppression or danger is the true and lasting pillar of their fame. So is it in regard to the Captain of our salvation. Words and offerings for his cause are insufficient for his praise. The Church of the redeemed is his monument. All whom he has saved out of the enemy's hand are to the praise of his glory. "Hosanna to the Son of David; hosanna in the highest!"—F.

EXPOSITION.

PERSONAL RELATIONS OF SAUL AND DAVID (CHS. XVIII.—XXVII.).

FRIENDSHIP OF DAVID AND JONATHAN (CHS. XVIII.—XX.).

CHAPTER XVIII.

JONATHAN LOVES DAVID (vers. 1—5). Ver. 1.—**When he had made an end of speaking.** This conversation took place as soon as the pursuit of the Philistines and the collecting of the spoil were over. There would then be a muster of the Israelites, and Abner would naturally present the youthful champion to the king, who is represented as having virtually forgotten him, and as anxious to learn his history; nor had his stay been long enough for Abner to remember him. As this conversation is narrated as an introduction to the account of Jonathan's friendship for David, the last four verses of ch. xvii. ought to be prefixed to ch. xviii. A new beginning commences with them, in which we are told of the commencement of this friendship, of the growth of Saul's hatred, and of the trials which befell David, proceeding on the king's part from bad to worse, till at last he was driven away and compelled to lead the life of an outlaw. But by his envy, cruelty, and bad government Saul was alienating the minds of the people from him, and preparing the way for his own downfall and David's ultimate triumph. The episode of Jonathan's love is as beautiful as Saul's conduct is dark, and completes our admiration for this generous and noble hero. **The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David.** These kindred spirits had so much in common that, as David with modest manliness answered the king's questions, an intense feeling of admiration grew up in the young warrior's heart, and a friendship was the result which ranks among the purest and noblest examples of true manly affection. The word rendered *knit* literally means *knotted*, tied together firmly by indissoluble bonds.

Vers. 2—4.—**Saul took him that day.** Bent solely on war, Saul gladly took so promising a young soldier as David to be one of his body-guard (ch. xiv. 52), and henceforward he was constantly with him. Thus in two ways, first as a musician, and now as a soldier, David was forced into those intimate relations with Saul, which ended so tragically. For a while, however, those happier results ensued summed up in ch. xvi. 21. **Jonathan and David made a covenant.** We are not to suppose that this happened immediately. David continued on friendly terms with Saul for a considerable period, during which he went on many expeditions, and grew in military renown (see ver. 5). And thus the love which began with admiration of David's prowess grew deeper and more confirmed by constant intercourse, till this solemn bond of mutual friendship was entered into by the two youthful heroes, by which they bound themselves under all circumstances to be true and faithful to one another. How nobly Jonathan kept the bond the history proceeds immediately to tell us; nor was David subsequently unmindful of it (2 Sam. ix. 1, 7). **Jonathan stripped himself of the robe,** &c. In confirmation of the bond Jonathan gave David first his *robe*, the *meïl*, which, as we have seen on ch. ii. 19, was the ordinary dress of the wealthier classes; and next **his garments,** his military dress (see on ch. xvii. 38, 39), worn over the *meïl*, and which here seems to include his accoutrements,—the bow, sword, and girdle,—though elsewhere distinguished from them (2 Sam. xx. 8). In thus clothing David in his own princely equipments Jonathan was showing his friend the greatest personal honour (Esther vi. 8), and such a gift is still highly esteemed in the East.

Ver. 5.—**David went out.** *I. e.* went on military expeditions (comp. ver. 30). As the verb has thus a technical signification, it makes a complete sense, and the verse should be translated, "And David went forth (*i. e.* on warlike enterprises); whithersoever Saul sent him he prospered, and Saul set him over the men of war." These expeditions were not upon a very large scale; for it is not until ver. 13 that we read of David being made "captain over a thousand." Still, even while only a centurion in rank, yet, as being in constant attendance upon the king, he would often temporarily have the command of larger bodies of men, or would go on campaigns as one of the king's officers. As it is mentioned that his promotion caused no envy because of his great merits, it follows that it was rapid enough to have given occasion to ill-will under ordinary circumstances. **Behaved himself wisely.** This is the primary meaning of the verb; but as success is the result of wise conduct, it constantly signifies *to prosper*. This verse is a summary of events which may have occupied a very considerable space of time. It was only gradually that David's fame became so great as to rouse all the worst feelings in Saul's mind.

SAUL'S HATRED OF DAVID (vers. 6—16). Ver. 6.—**When David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine.** Or more probably, as in the margin, "of the Philis-

times." The allusion is not to the combat with Goliath, but to one of the expeditions referred to in ver. 5, in which David had gained some decisive victory. The women would not have described the slaughter of one champion as the slaying of ten thousand, nor would there have been any contrast between this act and the military enterprises of Saul. Probably he too would have looked with indifference upon this Oriental exaggeration of the daring bravery of a boy; but what galled him was David's continual success in repeated campaigns. **The Philistine** means the whole people of that name; and as the war between them and Saul lasted all the days of Saul's life, and was his main kingly work, he saw with envy the rapid growth of David's reputation; and when, after some noble achievement, the women gave David an ovation, and declared in their songs that he had achieved a success ten times as great as Saul, an outburst of ill-feeling was the result. Saul suddenly became aware that the young captain on whose shoulders he had devolved the chief labours of the war had supplanted him in the popular estimation, and hatred took the place of the good feeling which he had previously entertained towards him. **The women came out of all cities of Israel . . . to meet king Saul.** It is evident that this refers to some grand occasion, and probably to the conclusion of a peace between the two nations. The battle in the valley of Elah was probably followed by several years of warfare, during which David developed those great military qualities which made him subsequently the founder of the wide empire over which Solomon reigned. It was unendurable for Saul, himself a great soldier, to find, when the war at last was over, that the people recognised in his lieutenant higher military qualities than they had discovered in himself. **With tabrets.** See on ch. x. 5. **With joy.** As this is placed between the names of two instruments of music, it must mean some kind of joyous shouting or singing to the sound of their tabrets. **With instruments of music.** Hebrew, with triangles, a very ancient but effective instrument for an outdoor procession accompanied with dancing.

Ver. 7. — **The women answered.** *I. e.* they sang alternately. It was this alternate singing which led to the psalms being composed in parallel sentences, and not in metre; and we from the temple service have inherited our method of chanting antiphonally. **As they played.** The word is ambiguous, and to an English reader would suggest the idea of the women playing upon the musical instruments. It usually refers to merriment, and so in Zech. viii. 5 it is used of the children *playing* in the streets, but especially it refers to dancing. Thus in 2 Sam. ii. 14 it is used of a war-dance ending in a real conflict; and again (2 Sam. vi. 5, 21; 1 Chron. xiii. 8; xv. 29) of David dancing to instruments of music before the ark. Michal probably would not have despised David for playing an instrument of music during a religious ceremony; it was the posturing of the dance which seemed to her beneath the dignity of a king. So these women danced in alternate choruses to the beating of their tambourines and triangles. In Judges xvi. 25, where, however, it is in a different conjugation, the verb is translated "to make sport." Really Samson was compelled to dance Israel's national war-dance before the Philistines.

Vers. 8, 9.—**What can he have more? &c.** Literally, "And there is beside for him only the kingdom." Though many years had passed since Samuel pronounced Saul's deposition, and the choice of another in his place (ch. xv. 28), yet it was not a thing that a king could ever forget. No doubt he had often looked out for signs of the person destined to be his successor; and now, when he had stood powerless before the enemy, a shepherd boy had stepped forth and given him the victory. And this stripling, taken to be his companion in arms, had shown so great qualities that the people reckoned him at ten times Saul's worth. Had Saul been the high-minded man he was when appointed to the kingdom (ch. xi. 13), he would have thrust such thoughts from him. But his mind had become cankered with discontent and brooding thoughts, and so **he eyed David from that day and forward.** In many nations the eye of an envious man is supposed to have great power of injury. Here it means that Saul cast furtive glances at David full of malice and ill-will.

Vers. 10, 11.—**It came to pass on the morrow.** The day had been a time of public triumph, and yet one of the chief actors goes home to a sleepless couch, because he thinks that another has received higher honour than himself. His melancholy deepens till a fit of insanity comes on. **For the evil spirit from God came upon Saul.** Literally, "an evil spirit (breath) of God descended mightily upon Saul" (see ch. xvi. 15). Just as all mighty enthusiasms for good come from God, so do strong influences for evil, but in a different way. In all noble acts men are fellow-workers with God; when evil carries them away it is of God, because he it is who has made and still maintains the laws of our moral nature; but it is by the working of general laws, and not by any special gift or grace bestowed by him. Saul had brooded over his disappointment, and cherished feelings of discontent at his own lot and of envy at the good of others to such an extent that his mind gave way before the diseased workings

of his imagination. And so he lost all control over himself, and **prophesied**. The conjugation employed here (Hithpahel) is never used of real, true prophecy (which is always the Niphal), but of a bastard imitation of it. Really Saul was in a state of frenzy, unable to master himself, speaking words of which he knew not the meaning, and acting like a man possessed. In all this there was something akin to the powerful emotions which agitated the true prophet, only it was not a holy influence, but one springing from violent passions and a disturbed state of the mind. In order to soothe him **David played with his hand, as at other times**, but without the desired effect. On the contrary, Saul brandished the javelin, which he carried as a sort of sceptre in his hand, with such violence that David twice had to escape from this threat of injury by flight. It is not certain that Saul actually threw the javelin. Had he done so it would be difficult to account for David escaping from it twice. After such an act of violence he would scarcely have trusted himself a second time in Saul's presence. Instead of **Saul cast the javelin**, the Septuagint in the Alexandrian codex and the Chaldee render *lifted*, i. e. retaining the same consonants, they put vowels which refer the verb to another root. But even with the present vowels it may mean "made as though he would cast," or aimed "the javelin." On a later occasion Saul actually threw the javelin, and struck the wall where David had been sitting (ch. xix. 10).

Vers. 12—16.—**Saul was afraid of David.** A new feeling. To his jealousy succeeded a sense of powerlessness, as knowing that a higher power was with David, while he had lost the Divine protection. This miserable feeling grew upon the unhappy king, till before the battle of Gilboa we find him with all his old heroic spirit gone, a miserable wreck, seeking for comfort at the hands of a woman of the most worthless kind (ch. xxviii. 5, 7, 20). In this despondent state of mind he dismisses David from attendance upon him, but in an honourable manner, giving him the command of a thousand men, at the head of whom **he went out and came in before the people**, *i. e.* in a public capacity, as an officer of state. As Saul seems entirely to have neglected the internal administration of the kingdom, this would refer to military expeditions (see on ver. 5); and in these **David behaved himself wisely.** Rather, "prospered" (see on ver. 5). His great success only increased Saul's fears; but both **Israel and Judah loved David**, now that in this higher command they had full opportunities for judging of his high qualities. Thus again his removal from his place in Saul's body-guard only served to make him better known. The separate mention of Israel and Judah is an indication of the Books of Samuel having been written at a post-Solomonic date, though the distinction was a very old one (see on ch. xi. 8).

SAUL, UNDER PRETENCE OF A MARRIAGE WITH HIS DAUGHTER, PLOTS DAVID'S DEATH (vers. 17—30). Vers. 17, 18.—**Behold my elder daughter Merab.** Saul had promised that he would give his daughter in marriage to whosoever should slay the giant (ch. xvii. 25); and not only was there in this the honour of a close alliance with the royal house, but, as it was usual to give large presents to the father in return for the daughter's hand, the gift had also a substantial value. After long delay Saul now refers to this promise, not so much with the intention of fulfilling it, as of leading David on to enterprises which might cost him his life. The marriage may have been deferred at first on account of David's youth; the subject is now revived, but with evil intentions. **My elder daughter** is literally "my daughter, the great one," while Michal is "the little one," a way of speaking used only where there are but two daughters. **Be thou valiant**, &c. This exhortation would be natural under the circumstances; but Saul hoped that David, in order to secure so great a prize, would be encouraged to undertake rash adventures. **For Saul said.** *I. e.* in himself; his purpose was to urge David to perpetual fighting, that so in some rash undertaking he might be slain. Thus Saul's malice grows, and though not prepared as yet to put David to death himself, he would have felt relief if he had died by the fortune of war. David answers modestly and discreetly that he is not worthy of so great an honour. We are not to suppose that he discerned Saul's treachery, which only came to light afterwards. **What is my life,**—*i. e.* my condition, —**or my father's family?** The *or* is not in the Hebrew, and the meaning is, What is my condition, even my father's family? &c. David's condition or rank in life was settled by the rank which his father held.

Ver. 19.—**Merab . . . was given unto Adriel.** A large dower was doubtless offered to Saul in return for his daughter, and, as he had never wished David to have her, he proved untrue to his word. For the unhappy death of the sons of Merab and Adriel see 2 Sam. xxi. 8

Vers. 20, 21.—**Michal . . . loved David.** Probably there was some short lapse of time between Merab's marriage and the growth of this affection, the news of which pleased Saul. He was not an ungenerous man, and possibly may have felt ashamed at having acted so meanly by David after having exposed him to danger. And yet evil thoughts again are uppermost, and his purposes are selfish; for either way Saul will be the

gainer. David will probably be slain, he thinks, in trying to get the dowry asked of him; and if not, at all events he will himself be cleared of the stain of public dishonesty now resting upon him. Therefore **Saul said to David**. Not in person, which accounts for David giving no answer, but through his servants, as is recounted more fully afterwards.

Vers. 22, 23.—**Commune**, &c. This is a more full and exact account of what was said summarily in ver. 21. We cannot suppose that Saul first spoke to David himself, and then told his servants to coax him, as this would also require us to suppose that when offered her by Saul, David refused Michal in marriage. But we may well believe that he was displeased at having been deceived, and that the renewed proposal of marriage with one of the king's daughters had to be made carefully, as he might naturally think that there was danger of his being cajoled a second time. David replies, in fact, very discreetly, saying that to be the king's son-in-law was indeed a great honour, but that he was too poor to provide a sufficient dowry. Strictly the promises given in ch. xvii. 25 bound Saul to give her without dowry; but it appears quite plainly from David's words that he had lost Merab because not able to purchase her as Adriel had done. For the custom of giving large sums to the bride's father see Gen. xxxiv. 12; Exod. xxii. 16, 17.

Vers. 24, 25.—David's answer exactly fell in with Saul's purposes, and he forthwith asked as a dowry proof of David having slain a hundred Philistines. As this slaughter would have to be effected not in regular warfare, but in a sort of private raid, there would be every likelihood of David being overpowered by a rapid gathering of the Philistines and slain in attempting it. It marks the unscrupulous character of ancient warfare that the lives of enemies should thus be taken, without any public provocation, for private purposes (comp. Judges xiv. 19).

Vers. 26, 27.—**It pleased David well to be the king's son-in-law.** Besides the great honour, David, not suspecting any malicious purpose on Saul's part, may have hoped that this relationship would put an end to the miserable state of things which existed between him and Saul. He harboured no treasonable purposes, and would have gladly served Saul faithfully if he had been permitted. The nature also of the dowry fell in with his adventurous and war-loving disposition. **The days were not expired. Wherefore**, &c. A difficulty arises here from the wrong division of the verses, and from our translators having rendered the clauses as if they were independent of each other. The Hebrew is, "And the days were not full, and David arose," &c. The dowry was to be given within a fixed time, and before it had expired David, who had been forming his plans, set out with his men and made an incursion into the Philistine territory, whence he brought back to the king twice as many foreskins as had been stipulated; and thereupon Michal became David's wife.

Vers. 28, 29.—The failure of his evil purpose, and the knowledge that Michal loved her husband, and would protect him against his intrigues, and that the marriage had brought rank and influence to David, made Saul hate him all the more bitterly, because he could not now openly put to death one so closely connected with him.

Ver. 30.—**The princes of the Philistines went forth.** See on ver. 5. This new war was the result of David's raid, but it only led to an increase of his fame and popularity. For **he behaved himself more wisely.** *I. e.* was more successful and skilful than any of Saul's other officers.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—4.—*Religious friendship.* The facts are—1. Jonathan, on becoming acquainted with David, forms a strong attachment for him. 2. Saul, to show his gratitude for David's aid, constrains him into his service. 3. Jonathan and David enter into a solemn covenant of friendship. It is obvious that David desired to retire to the quietude of rural life, thus displaying simplicity of purpose and freedom from the ambition charged on him by Eliab (ver. 28), as also superiority to the temptation of success. Saul's will that he should "go no more home to his father's house" was fraught with a long train of consequences which told on the development of the higher qualities of the coming king. The first of these was the formation of that beautiful friendship with Jonathan, which shines as a welcome light amidst the gloom of the last years of Saul's reign. There are in this section two matters deserving special attention.

I. AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE HARMONIES OF PROVIDENCE. On *à priori* grounds we may conclude that always, in all things, however apparently clashing, there is an interior harmony in the ordinations and unfoldings of Providence. In many

instances we seem to hear discord; faith only enables us to refer the discord to our defective organs of knowledge. But here, as in some other instances, we can trace the exquisite harmony between David's detention by Saul, involving his friendship with Jonathan, and David's subsequent entrance on the duties and dignities foreshadowed by the anointing by Samuel. Unquestionably, as seen in the history and in the Psalms composed during the period, David's trials and the public position arising out of this forced detention by Saul were, in their effects on his character and abilities, wonderfully harmonious with his pre-ordained kingship. Moreover, this providential opportunity for forming personal friendship beautifully harmonises with both the cutting off of Saul's line (ch. xv. 27—29) from the succession and the acquisition by David of the title, in virtue of his religious and general qualities. Such friendship, formed on the purest religious basis, and before developments with respect to the succession were made, would save both David and Jonathan from the possibility of regarding each other as rivals, and would also be a blessed counterpoise to David's unmerited sorrows during Saul's violent persecutions. Jonathan never lived to see the throne taken by another; but his life was not embittered by the griefs of jealousy, because of the deep love he had for his friend. David, while in the decree of God destined to be king, loved Jonathan too well to think of setting him aside. Beautiful providence that could insure a succession out of the line, and yet sweeten and ennoble the lives of those whose interests were involved in it! It would be easy for Jonathan to resign to David, should they both survive Saul's decease; for did he not love him with a love passing that of women? (2 Sam. i. 26). And it would be far from David's desire to set him aside, seeing the loving esteem in which he was held. Yea, was there not an instinctive homage paid to David's character, as though the pure soul saw in him the coming king, when Jonathan stript himself of his princely attire and placed it on David? Harmonies of Providence are constant, if only we had the eye to discern them. Paul's early training worked into his life's mission, though at first tending another way. The flight of Mary and Joseph into Egypt no doubt checked a premature notoriety of the child Jesus.

II. AN ILLUSTRATION OF A TRUE RELIGIOUS FRIENDSHIP. Friendship in some degree is a necessity of man's life. A perfectly solitary being, whose feelings cling to no one, and around whom no one clings, is truly lost. Ordinary friendships are based on the existence of natural affinities and contrarieties. That similarity of mind is the basis of friendship is only true in a limited sense, for one is drawn to another not only by the affinity of common tastes and qualities, but because of a recognition and admiration of qualities that are lacking in self. We seek to supplement the deficiencies of our own life by taking into ourselves, as far as possible, the excellences of another life, and friendship is the means to this end. This is not indeed a full *rationale* of friendship, nor must it be inferred that cool calculation of personal profit enters into it. The love, the sympathy, the tender, undefinable interest and absolute trust cannot be disentangled from the perception of qualities supplementary to one's own. The friendship of David and Jonathan embraced all that enters into ordinary friendship,—appreciation, love, confidence, tenderness, fidelity, unsuspicious intercourse,—with an additional religious element. This religious friendship may be considered as to—1. *Its nature.* In David and Jonathan we recognise, besides the usual essentials of friendship, the responsive action of a common faith in God and delight in his service. Each saw in the other, as by a higher spiritual insight, a spiritual kinship. *The circumstances of the age intensified this mutual attraction.* As holy, consecrated young men, they cherished a secret sorrow over the unhappy spiritual condition of their countrymen; and their joy in the recent victories was joy in God and the holy cause for which Israel was chosen out from among the nations. Among *Christians the same religious feeling operates* in the formation and maintenance of friendships. It is true that all are one in Christ, and each sees in every other a member of the household of faith: religiously there is a common interest in all (1 Cor. xii. 26, 27). So far, therefore, there is a friendship subsisting between each member of Christ's body and every other, as distinguished from his interest in men of the world. But affection needs for its own life concentration; and while, therefore, we are in general friendship with all Christ's people, and are conscious of a blessed and indestructible bond, the necessities of our life lead to the

formation of personal friendships in which all ordinary feelings are intensified and beautified by the infusion of a spiritual element. Some *modification of the view* just given is requisite in considering the *friendship of Christ* for John and the family at Bethany. But although the perfect Saviour saw not in others qualities deficient in himself, he did see in the ardent John and the tender sympathy and fine appreciation of the family at Bethany that which he was so eagerly in quest of in this rough, unspiritual world. His weary heart delighted to rest in such pure love and sympathy, and he returned the affection a hundredfold. 2. *Its maintenance.* The noblest form of friendship needs culture if it is to be permanent. How David and Jonathan nourished theirs is a matter of history, and should be noted. Few things are more sad to reflect on than a broken friendship—it means the embitterment and sad solitariness of two human beings. No detailed rules can be set for nourishing that which in its very nature overleaps all formalities and rigid lines. Ordinarily we may strengthen our friendships by cherishing a conviction of their *sacredness*—not to be rudely handled and lightly thought of; by making it a point to secure sufficient intercourse or interchange of feeling (Prov. xviii. 24); by a studied respect for the minor differences which advancing age and changed circumstances may develop; by prayer for the blessing of God on each other; and, if possible, by sharing in some common work for Christ. Why should not friendships continue through life?

General lessons:—1. Knowing the force of impulse and the growth of interest when once aroused, we should be careful in placing youth in such circumstances as may lead to the formation of true and lasting friendships. 2. It should be a question for each how it is that Christian feeling does not enter so fully as it ought into the friendships of some professedly religious people. 3. It would be an instructive study for young and old to trace out in history some of the achievements in religious work and fidelity promoted by the maintenance of strong personal friendships.

Vers. 5—11.—*Some dangers of persistent sin.* The facts are—1. David, behaving wisely in his public position, wins favour with the people, and in the welcome to him on his return from the battle the women ascribe to him, in their song, higher praise than to Saul. 2. The fact excites Saul's envy henceforth. 3. In a fit of envious rage Saul seeks to smite David. The victory over Goliath brought Saul and David into a proximity highly favourable to the development of their respective characters. Their mutual influence acted powerfully on the main springs of life; and as these were so utterly different in moral quality, so the sequel reveals very diverse conduct, We have in this section an instance of—

I. MISINTERPRETED PROSPERITY. The decisive words of Samuel (ch. xv. 26) and his entire separation from Saul (ch. xv. 34, 35), as also the threatening attitude of the Philistines, were certainly enough to depress the spirit of the king; and his melancholy was but the outward sign to men of his painful secret. But the appearance of David, and the consequent defeat of the enemy, was an unlooked-for gleam of light, and at once raised hopes which of late had been lost. He even set David over his men of war. The old prosperity was returning; the kingdom was saved; Saul was not dishonoured in battle. After all, with such helpers as David, might not the dreaded doom be avoided? Thus do we see a man, conscious of moral degeneracy, and sensible of being rejected, putting an interpretation on events according to his wishes, and not from a perception of their real bearing. The heart, when destitute of the spirit of true repentance, obstinately clings to unwarranted hope, and, by its own perverse ingenuity, obliterates or weakens the force of hard facts and moral laws (ch. xv. 26—29). In the eye of God the recent victory was the public presentation of the "neighbour," as a preliminary to his supplanting Saul; in the eye of Saul it was the postponement, if not the rendering void, of the dreaded doom. *The tendency thus to misinterpret facts is common to sinful men.* An impenitent heart is unwilling to believe in the vindication of justice. Not being in moral sympathy with the purposes of God, it will not, if possible, see those purposes in process of realisation. The very riches of goodness are perverted into an occasion for persistence in sin (Rom. ii. 4), and the temporal prosperity of life, despite the voice of conscience and the clear word of God, is supposed to be a sign that the issue will not be so fearful as was anticipated (Ps. x. 6, 11; Heb. ii. 3).

II. THE SOUNDNESS AND THE DEFECTS OF POPULAR INSTINCTS. The mass of the people were quick in recognising the fact that David was the hero of the day, and only expressed the real truth in ascribing to him his "ten thousands," and to Saul his 'thousands." Their instincts led them to honour above the king the man who was proved to be better than the king. But while correct in their appreciation of fact, they had no adequate, if any, perception of the moral bearings of it. Samuel, probably Jesse, and a few other devout men, would trace in David's exaltation of the "name of the Lord" (ch. xvii. 45—47) a spiritual power and a spiritual man destined to work wonders for Israel. It is a good philosophy that *trusts the popular mind in reference to the recognition of the broad facts of life.* It is this faith which lies at the foundation of constitutional governments and the judicial administration of our own country. The common sense of mankind is a safe guide in ordinary matters of fact. But by reason of the low condition of man's spiritual life, and his inveterate proneness to look at the "things that are seen," the mass of men do not recognise quickly the moral and spiritual bearings of facts. There is a moral and spiritual "intention," to use a logical term, in human facts; they carry with them qualities that determine the future; they exhibit to the spiritually enlightened powers that will germinate, and that, too, not always in the form desired by the populace (Matt. xvi. 3).

III. THE LIABILITY OF MEN, WHEN WARRING AGAINST PROVIDENCE, TO FALL INTO NEW SINS. We have seen (ch. xv. 24—31) that Saul cherished impenitent feelings when told of his sin. As a consequence, he tried not to believe that the threatened disaster would come. One of the consequences of this mental condition was, that as soon as he heard the honest, popular approval of David's prowess, he, dreading lest after all the decree might be fulfilled, eyed David as a rival, and fell into the grievous sin of ceaseless and cruel envy. The grievous character of this sin is seen if we notice its manifestation, and the main features are true of all envy. 1. It *blinded him to actual facts.* It was true that David had slain "his ten thousands," as compared with Saul's "thousands;" but to the envious eye this was as though it were not. Its reality must not be tolerated. The Pharisees in like manner were wilfully blind to the fact that Christ *had* opened the eyes of the blind. 2. It *led to the imputation of base motives.* He at once charged David with readiness for treasonous designs on the kingdom. The pure man was deemed impure. This is the common practice of narrow and base men, as appeared in the instance of Joseph (Gen. xxxvii. 8, 11), and of Christ (John vii. 20). 3. It *made himself perfectly wretched.* His life lost all joy and hope, and suspicion and fear entered in. And whoever falls into this sin finds that it slayeth him (Job v. 2), and is as rottenness to the bones (Prov. xiv. 30). 4. It *impelled to deeds of blood.* The thrust of the javelin was virtual murder. The same process wrought in the heart of Cain, of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. xxvii. 18; Mark xv. 10), and is active in many who are guilty of no overt act (1 John iii. 15). The dark thoughts, the unspoken intents of envious minds; who shall declare them? How true it is that he who hardeneth his heart, not bowing in true penitence, submissive to all God's judgments, falleth into mischief (Prov. xxviii. 14) again and again, till at last he is destroyed suddenly and without remedy (Prov. xxix. 1; cf. 1 Sam. xxxi. 3, 4).

General lessons:—1. All human judgments on the course of Providence are to be discounted in so far as sin is cherished in the life. 2. The key to the future of the individual and national life is to be sought in moral conditions 3. It is important that the popular mind should be trained to estimate things in their moral relations. 4. Christians should strive to be entirely free from the spirit of envy, both in relation to worldly prosperity and to position in the Church of God (Ps. xxxvii. 1; 1 Cor. xiii. 4; 1 Pet. ii. 1). 5. In so far as we indulge in any envy we lay ourselves open to temptations to further sins.

Vers. 12—16.—*The disturbing power of goodness.* The facts are—1. Saul, seeing the signs of God's presence with David, fears him, and removes him to a distance. 2. Increasing wisdom of David adds to Saul's fear, and secures the favour of the people. 3. The departure of God from Saul explains his self-abandonment to the influence of this fear. We have here a statement of the diverse relation of God to

David and Saul,—he was with the one and was departed from the other,—and the consequences ensuing thereon in their respective lives. Each man made his own position, and was answerable for the state he was in and attained to; nevertheless, the presence and absence of God accounted for much. Thus, also, we have the diverse effect of the same wise and holy life upon different persons—the diversity arising from the moral condition of the persons acted upon.

I. The RELATION OF GOD TO MAN IS NOT IN EVERY INSTANCE THE SAME. There are certain natural relationships which God sustains to all men, in all time, irrespective of their character. His power upholds them in life; his equitable rulership is never withdrawn. All this was true in reference to David and Saul, while it was equally true that God was to the one what he was not to the other. There was the relation of moral nearness and support to David, and of moral abandonment and disapproval to Saul. The Lord "knoweth the way of the righteous" (Ps. i. 6). His delight is in his people (Ps. xxii. 8). "The proud he knoweth afar off" (Ps. cxxxviii. 6), and is "angry with the wicked every day" (Ps. vii. 11). The effects of moral nearness and support are seen in the instance of David:—piety was sustained and rendered beautiful in development; abilities, under such favouring influences, were more fully and evenly exercised; the vision being cleared, practical sagacity found wider scope; and the Divine energy acting everywhere in harmony with moral ends, opportunities would be created for usefulness, and the minds of men disposed to favour. On the other hand, moral nearness and support being wanting to Saul, the evils long cherished found more unrestrained exercise; conscience became more remorseful; natural abilities were impaired in their development, and foolish deeds became habitual.

II. The DIVERSE RELATION OF GOD TO MAN ARISES FROM MAN'S PREVIOUS CONDUCT. The recent history of David shows that from a youth he had quietly and consistently followed the measure of light vouchsafed to him; while Saul's course reveals a deliberate and persistent preference of his own will to the revealed will of God. Grace was added to valued grace. Light disregarded had become darkness. In this diverse consequence there is nothing unusual. It is the New Testament law that "to him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken away even that he hath" (Matt. xiii. 12; Hosea xi. 8; Luke xix. 42; John xii. 35—40; 1 Tim. iv. 8).

III. A RECOGNITION OF THE DIVERSE RELATION OF GOD TO MAN IS AN OCCASION OF TROUBLE TO THE DELIBERATELY WICKED. While David won the affection of the mass of the people, his name and presence were disturbing to Saul. "Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him, and was departed from Saul." The reasons for this effect on Saul are obvious. David's holy life and glorying in the name of the Lord (ch. xvii. 45—47) revealed by contrast the spiritual condition of Saul to himself; and, being destitute of the spirit of repentance, he trembled under the silent rebuke. There was also a reminder of joys and privileges once within reach, but now gone for ever; and he could not but associate the rising character of David with the predicted doom of his own monarchy. It is a well-known fact *that goodness does exercise a disturbing influence in the domain of sin.* Goodness in its own nature is a repellant power. It creates a commotion whenever it enters the realms of darkness. The powers of evil know it as their natural foe, and quail in consciousness of its predestined triumph. There appears to have been fear and excitement among the evil spirits when the holy Saviour drew near to their sphere of influence on earth (Matt. iv. 1—11; xvi. 18; Mark v. 7; Luke xxii. 53; Col. ii. 15). While the natural effect of embodied goodness on minds not bent on sin is to soothe, to cheer, and to gladden, as when Christ drew near to the poor and needy, the sick and penitent, and as we all feel when a very wise and holy man enters a home or a sick chamber, yet the effect is the reverse when sin is being deliberately practised. It is in this way that we may understand Herod's fear on mention of the name of John, Ahab's fear of Elijah, and the evident uneasiness of scribes and Pharisees at the presence of Christ.

General lessons:—1. We see the value to the ordinary affairs of life of a consciousness of the favour of God (Ps. xxx.). 2. The development of our powers is intimately connected with our faithfulness in spiritual things. 3. In proportion as we

attain to true holiness of life will the power of our presence and actions be recognised. 4. We must expect the actual antagonism of those who have rejected God in so far as we come into contact with them, but this should be regarded as proof of the truth of our religion.

Vers. 17—30.—*The plot and its lessons.* The facts are—1. Saul, in hopes of compassing the death of David, promises him his eldest daughter to wife, on condition that he is valiant against the Philistines. 2. David expresses his unworthiness of so great an honour. 3. Saul, having broken this promise by giving Merab to Adriel, offers David his daughter Michal. 4. On David intimating that, being poor, he was not able to provide a becoming dowry, Saul is content with proof of the death of a hundred enemies of Israel. 5. David presents double the number required, and takes Michal to wife. 6. In spite of his devices, Saul sees the growing prosperity of David, and becomes more than ever afraid of him. This section further unfolds, on the one side, the downward progress of the man who has wilfully sinned under circumstances favourable to obedience, and has consequently been left to the tendencies of his impenitent heart; and, on the other side, the steady advance in wisdom and aptitude for affairs of the man who gloried only in the "name of the Lord of hosts." The narrative relates events as they appeared to observers at the time, and introduces statements of the sacred historian designed to indicate how those events were regarded by God. The outward acts are connected with the hidden motive, and so made to bear their proper moral character.

I. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PLOT. Did we not know Saul's entire history, there is much in the narrative of this section which might suggest to a casual reader no thought of a plot. The addition of statements unveiling the hidden purpose of his words and deeds changes the moral bearing of the whole, and sets forth the triple characteristics of the plot. 1. *Cleverness.* It is said that insane persons often display unusual cunning and skill in compassing their ends; and also the "devices" of the wicked, both in relation to God and to man, are in Scripture proverbial (Job v. 12; Ps. x. 2; xxxiii. 10). The incipient madness and settled wickedness of Saul at this period of his life indicate the truth of these remarks; for consider the plausibility of his conduct. (1) There was a *fair appearance of truthfulness.* He had virtually promised his daughter to the man who should slay Goliath (ch. xvii. 25). To keep one's word was becoming a king and due to a youthful hero. (2) There was an *obvious display of magnanimity.* For the recent violent attempt on the life of David (ver. 11) must have produced an impression of injustice on both David and the people. What then more proper than that a fit of unreasonable anger should be followed by some expression of the wrong done, and some effort to render compensation. (3) *Religious feeling was conspicuous.* Had not David appeared on the arena to fight the battle of the Lord? (ch. xvii. 47). Was it not proper, after the signal victory in the Lord's name, that the king should recognise the conflict with the heathen oppressor in its theocratic aspect, and encourage the valiant youth still to go forth in the same holy name? (4) *Personal interest was natural.* Saul's instructions to the courtiers to endeavour to induce David to accept of Michal had an appearance of naturalness, as it was important to honour so able a man and to ally him with the interests of the monarchy, as also to remove any chagrin on account of Merab having been given, probably for state reasons, to Adriel. (5) There was a *kindly consideration for David's position.* A sense of poverty is hard to bear when it stands in the way to honour and influence. David felt that, despite his services, he was too poor to comply with custom in offering as dowry what became a suitor to a king's daughter. It was, therefore, very thoughtful on the part of Saul to ask as dowry what certainly few men could provide, but what the conqueror of Goliath would, no doubt, readily and with increasing honours secure. A kindly, considerate bearing disarms suspicion. The plot was clever, like all the plots whereby our great adversary, the devil, seeks to ensnare the innocent. A parallel might be developed without much difficulty. 2. *Vileness.* The cleverness is discovered by tracing the course apparent to men; the vileness by the light thrown upon that course by the Searcher of hearts. We are enabled to look beneath the surface, and to estimate words and deeds by their relation to motive. The vileness is seen in—(1) The *deliberate*

intent to commit murder. The whole procedure originated in a determination to insure David's death. Blood was shed in intent. The true universe is the unseen, for it is enduring. In that sphere Saul slew, before the clear, searching eye of God, the best friend he ever had next to Samuel. (2) The *covering of murderous intent, with professions of kindness and esteem.* Open hostility is bad enough in an evil cause, but to play the hypocrite for compassing a cruel purpose is the blackest of crimes (Ps. x. 7). To be clothed as an angel of light is not confined to Satan. (3) The *attempt to make Providence subservient to a secret intent.* Saul dare not lay hands on David, but he dare lay a train of circumstances by which Providence should be charged with doing what all men would deplore except himself. Man would make God the servant of his vile designs. Cowards wish Providence to do what they have not the courage to avow. 3. *Foolishness.* It is no uncommon thing for the cunning and skill of the wicked to turn out the veriest foolishness. Such is the force of right and justice, that wicked wisdom is always found in the issue to be mad folly. That it was so in this case is seen by observing—(1) God *knew all from the first.* It is a proof of the utter stupidity of the sinful heart that it acts as though God were not. This unreasonableness enters into all sin. The wicked heart retires into its own darkness, and says, "He will never see it" (Ps. x. 11). (2) The plot *secured to David the special protection promised to the innocent.* God pledges his care to the poor and needy when they walk in innocency. He "saveth the upright in heart" (Ps. vii. 10). The "needy shall not alway be forgotten" (Ps. ix. 18; xxxvii. 32, 33). Saul ought to have known that a holy man, one who had been blessed in conflict, would not be left to himself in the day of danger. (3) It *issued in David's advantage.* Saul really fell into a pit prepared for another. The man who was to be put down rose higher, while Saul himself sank in the esteem of all. The scheme brought out in clear and beautiful form David's personal integrity (vers. 18, 23). Its issue gave him greater influence with Israel (ver. 30). He became a greater terror to his enemies (ver. 27), and his marriage with Michal subsequently proved a great help in escaping the snares of Saul (ver. 21; cf. xix. 12).

II. THE GENERAL TRUTHS IT TEACHES. Among the many truths set forth in the plot of Saul and escape of David, the following may be specially noticed:—1. The *moral value of conduct is seen when the light of God shines on it.* Saul's conduct, as watched by casual observers ignorant of the secret between him and Samuel (ch. xv. 26—28, 30), would have attached to it a moral value quite inconsistent with real truth. It is the light which God enabled the historian to pour on the inner motive that reveals the whole as vile. Our estimate of conduct is necessarily approximate. A measure of doubt or suspense attends our judgments of character. There is no principle more clearly held than that the secret intent, the private, unexpressed, and often inexpressible motive, is the real determinant of moral character in actions. Yet such are the depths and intricacies of human thought and feeling, that every man is largely an unknown being to his fellows. This uncertainty creates a belief in a future manifestation of character, when every man shall receive from all exactly his due. Otherwise justice is defeated, and moral worth is cheated of its honour. Scripture assures us of the truth that the day will come when the true spring of conduct shall be manifested; the inner real man will be known. The day is coming on when men shall see themselves and others in that all-revealing light (Eccles. xii. 14; Matt. x. 26; xxv. 31, 32). Hence the good cheer of the upright in heart whose actions are misinterpreted, whose position is obscure, who suffer from the scorning of the proud, and whose outward success in life is not commensurate with the largeness and purity of their desires. Hence, also, the warning for those who cover up a defiled heart beneath an attractive exterior. 2. *Integrity is the best human defence against wicked craft.* The manifest integrity of David in all his relations to Saul and the people was better to him than all possible contrivances to cunningly checkmate the movements of his enemy. There was a moral power in his blameless, unaffected conduct which caused his secret foe to dwell in fear. Looking back on this period, he could say, "I have walked in mine integrity" (Ps. xxvi. 1); and doubtless, knowing the value of such defence in the past, he could say, in view of future dangers, "Let integrity and uprightness preserve me" (Ps. xxv. 21). It is ever so. As simple truth is mightier than all ramifications of falsehood, so an upright heart, an inno-

cent life, is, in the issue, more than a match for all cunning combinations of evil. Were men more simple in purpose, less given to mere policy, keeping their hearts free from petty jealousies and ambitions, their foot would be less often caught in a snare, and their reputation would take care of itself. 3. God *takes care of his faithful servants who have a work to do in the world.* David's innocence was an object of interest to God, and received his protection; but David was a chosen servant in course of unconscious preparation for high and important duties. He, therefore, was cared for by God in the midst of unknown dangers. Nor was there anything exceptional in this, for such is the heritage of all who fear the Lord. Bodily suffering, and even death, may come on the innocent and true, but these are not the worst of evils. There is a more fearful fall; and in this respect, such is the care of God, that though a thousand fall at the side of the faithful, the great spiritual evil does not touch him (Ps. xci. 7, 14). Every one has a charmed life in Christ's service as long as his work is not finished. No weapon formed against David could prosper before he became king. No power was allowed to take away our Saviour's life till he had finished the work the Father gave him to do. No stones and lying in wait of wicked men were of any avail against Paul before he had preached the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts ix. 15, 23, 24; 2 Cor. xi. 24—27). 4. The *ulterior object of a sinful course is never attained.* One object of Saul's cunning was to get rid of David. History tells us how this object was frustrated. The Lord was with David. Disappointment, vexation, intenser misery were the result to Saul. It is not too wide an assertion to affirm that the ulterior object is never attained in a sinful course. A careful analysis of the workings of sin in every instance will show that the end in view is to secure a pleasure deemed greater and more welcome than any supposed to result from obedience to God's will. If sin in its origin be self-assertion, as against conformity to a supreme will, the object in view is evidently to attain to a state of being superior to that involved in conformity. It seeks a rise, and, behold, it is itself a *fall.* It is always self-defeated. This can be shown to be true of all who wilfully refuse to have rest in God—they miss the bliss they sought in rebellion; of all who prefer to be saved by other means than by the one Mediator—they never attain to the pardon and purity which alone constitute salvation; of all who sacrifice Christian principle to acquire wealth or power—they get the wealth and power, but not the satisfaction of soul which their possession was believed to insure. It cannot be insisted on too strongly, that not only is sin essentially evil and degrading, however fascinating its form, but is also in its issue a bitter disappointment. "He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul" (Prov. viii. 36). The desire, the expectation, the way of the wicked "*shall perish*" (Ps. i. 6; cxii. 10; Prov. x. 28). 5. *Exalted piety and simplicity of life are consistent with pre-eminence in secular affairs.* It is often supposed that a very pious man, and one of simple purpose in life, cannot compete with men less spiritual in character. The language of Christians has sometimes given sanction to this belief. But facts and reason are against it. David, the most pious of men, attained to a capacity for affairs far in advance of others (ver. 30). Newton was not a worse mathematician and astronomer for his deep and simple piety. It is reasonable that a mind pure, devout, calm in sense of God's favour, free from the distraction induced by waywardness of will, and enjoying the promised blessing of God, should, when called by Providence to any sphere of activity, excel those of equal natural powers, but destitute of the spiritual tone. If such men do not attain to highest public stations, it may be because Providence has other work for them to do; or if only a few rise to pre-eminence, it may be because the combination of great piety and great natural aptitude for special pursuits is rare.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—30. (GIBEAH.)—*David's life at court.* On his victory over Goliath, David was conducted by Abner (ch. xiv. 50) into the presence of Saul, "with the head of the Philistine in his hand." He appears to have been unrecognised by the king, perhaps because of the alteration that had taken place in his personal appearance. Henceforth he resided at Gibeah (ver. 2), where he remained for two or three years. The court of Saul, while unlike that of Solomon, half a century

later, was not destitute of worldly show, and was marked by the obsequiousness, self-seeking, emulation, and intrigue which too often prevail in such places, especially when the monarch is capricious, proud, and without the fear of God (ch. xxii. 6, 7). David's connection with it was of great importance in relation to the position which he was destined by Divine providence to occupy; continued his education for it; and afforded (as every promotion to high place does in its measure) a wider scope for—

I. THE EXERCISE OF ABILITY. 1. Outward circumstances, though they may not create eminent ability, serve to *call it forth*. Much excellence doubtless exists, but is never displayed on account of the absence of favourable conditions. 2. Great genius is shown in one who has the *faculty of adapting himself* to varied positions in life and their varied requirements. 3. The proper use of power *strengthens it* and develops it to perfection. 4. The humble, faithful, and efficient discharge of duty in one position *prepares the way* for another and a higher. It was thus with David, who passed from the narrow circle of private life to the wider one of public life, from the sheepfold to the palace, from contending against a lion and a bear to military expeditions (vers. 5, 13, 30) against the enemies of Israel, and ultimately from loyal obedience to royal rule.

II. ACQUAINTANCE WITH MEN, and the knowledge of human nature. David was familiar with "fields, and flocks, and silent stars," but needed training in another school. 1. There are few things more *valuable* than an accurate and extensive knowledge of men: their divers temperaments, tendencies, and capacities; their peculiar excellences and defects; their varied wishes and aims; and underneath all the great principles of humanity that are the same in all. 2. Some circumstances afford *special opportunity* for the attainment of such knowledge. What a field of observation were the court and camp of Saul to one of such mental activity and profound insight as David! 3. The knowledge of men produces in the heart that is sincere, devout, and acquainted with itself a *large sympathy* with them in their sorrows, joys, imperfections, and strivings after higher things. Of this sympathy the psalms of David are a wonderful expression. 4. It is necessary to the knowledge of the most *effectual methods of dealing with them*—one of the most needful and desirable qualifications in a ruler.

III. THE TRIAL OF PRINCIPLE. David, no less than Saul, must be put to the test, and his fidelity to Jehovah tried as silver "in a furnace of earth." 1. Trial is *needful* to prove the reality of principle, and manifest its strength and brightness. 2. One trial is often *followed by another* and a greater. The royal favour into which David was suddenly raised was as suddenly succeeded by royal jealousy, hatred, and craft. Surely no man was ever more fiercely assailed by temptation. 3. When endured aright, in faith and obedience, trial, however painful, is *morally beneficial*. 4. The victory which is gained over one temptation is an *earnest* of a victory over the next. The triumph of humility in David was followed by that of simplicity, patience, and forbearance.

IV. ADVANCEMENT IN POPULAR FAVOUR (vers. 7, 16, 30), which, in the case of David, paved his way to the throne; though he neither coveted nor, during the life of Saul, put forth any effort to gain that object. 1. A course of wise and prosperous action, as it well deserves, so it *generally obtains* the approbation of the people. 2. Such a course of action ought to be aimed at, rather than the popular favour with which it is attended. 3. The favour of the people is to be valued only in *subordination* to the favour of God, and in so far as it accords with it. 4. Popular favour should be regarded not as an end in itself, but as a *means* of promoting the Divine glory and human welfare.—D.

Vers. 1—4. (GIBEAH.)—*True friendship.* (*References:*—ch. xix. 1—5; xx. 1—23; xxiii. 16—18.) 1. Friendship is a mutual affection between persons of congenial minds, arising out of their esteem for each other's excellence, and expressing itself in kindly offices. Attachment to kindred is in some respects surpassed by that which is felt towards the friend "who is even as thine own soul" (Deut. xiii. 6). In allusion to it "Abraham was called the friend of God" (2 Chron. xx. 7; Isa. xli. 8; James ii. 23)—possibly in the first instance by God himself; and "God spake to

Moses as a man to his friend" (Exod. xxxiii. 11). The Book of Proverbs abounds in statements concerning the worth and claims of friendship (Prov. xvii. 17; xviii. 24; xxvii. 6, 9, 10, 17). And Jesus said to his disciples, "I have called you friends" (John xv. 15). 2. Much that is usually called friendship is not worthy of the name. "There are three things that engender friendship—profit, pleasure, virtue. The first two do not beget true friendship, for as soon as the profit or pleasure ceaseth, friendship is gone; but virtue only maketh love and friendship to continue" (Willet). 3. The *true friendship* which subsisted between Jonathan and David "shines for all ages an eternal type." It is "the first Biblical instance of such a dear companionship as was common in Greece, and has been since in Christendom imitated, but never surpassed, in modern works of fiction" (Stanley). The most celebrated of the instances referred to were those of Orestes and Pylades, Damon and Pythias, Nisus and Euryalus. 4. The friendship of Jonathan toward David (the *formation* of which is here described) was Divinely provided as a means of guarding the life of the latter from the attacks of Saul, and of preserving his loyalty to the king and his faith in God. "Thy love to me was wonderful" (2 Sam. i. 26). On the other hand, that of David toward Jonathan exerted an elevating and sanctifying influence upon him. Of true friendship observe that—

I. IT EXISTS ONLY IN NOBLE SOULS. Both Jonathan and David were virtuous, generous, and devout. They were one in "the love of virtue and the fear of God." Persons destitute of these principles can neither esteem the excellence of others nor be esteemed for their own. "We are so formed by nature that there should be a certain social tie among all; stronger, however, as each approaches each. Now friendship is nothing else than a complete union of feeling on all subjects, Divine and human, accompanied by a kindly feeling and attachment. The entire strength of friendship consists in an entire agreement of inclinations, pursuits, and sentiments' (Cicero, 'On Friendship').

> "A generous friendship no cold medium knows,
> Burns with one love, with one resentment glows" (Homer).

"A *good* man is the best friend, and therefore soonest to be chosen, longest to be retained, and, indeed, never to be parted with, unless he ceases to be that for which he was chosen" (Jer. Taylor).

II. IT IS FOUNDED UPON MUTUAL ESTEEM. When David "had made an end of speaking unto Saul," in which he doubtless said much more than is recorded, the soul of Jonathan "was knit (linked or chained) with the soul of David," &c. (ver. 1). Nothing is said of Jonathan at the time of David's conflict with Goliath. He may have been absent; or, if present, not permitted to risk his life in the encounter. Perhaps his faith and courage were not strong enough. But "he loved that which went beyond his own spirit, yet was of the same heroic order. He saw in David a higher and greater Jonathan, the ideal of his own actual life, himself transfigured and perfected. What he had dreamt he might be he beheld in David" (B. Kent). He admired the faith, courage, modesty, and moral excellence which lay beneath the "outward appearance." "Now they are worthy of friendship in whom there exists a reason why they should be loved; a rare class, for in truth all that is excellent is rare" (Cicero).

III. IT CONSISTS OF DISINTERESTED AFFECTION. "Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (vers. 1, 3; ch. xx. 17); with the same kind and the same measure of affection. Hence the sympathy, generosity, fidelity, and constancy which he displayed. A friend is "another self." "Though judgment must collect the materials of the goodly structure of friendship, it is affection that gives the cement" (Melmoth). "It really seems to consist in loving rather than being loved. It is the wishing a person what we think good for his sake, and not for our own, and, as far as is in our power, the exerting ourselves to procure it. And a friend is he who entertains and meets a return of this feeling" (Aristotle, 'Ethics,' viii.; 'Rhetoric,' ii.). "I hope I do not break the fifth commandment if I conceive I may love my friends before the nearest of my blood, even those to whom I owe the principles of life. I have loved my friend as I do virtue, my soul, my God" (Sir T. Browne, 'Religio Medici').

IV. IT UNITES IN A STEADFAST BOND. Knit—sincerely, closely, firmly joined, grappled together "as with hooks of steel." "A friend loveth at all times," in adversity as well as in prosperity; and his friendship endures the strain caused by conflicting interests, misrepresentation, and many imperfections; it may even be said to be "one soul dwelling in two bodies." "Now the foundation of that steadfastness and constancy which we seek in friendship is *sincerity;* for nothing is steadfast which is insincere" (Cicero). "Friendship founded on worldly principles is natural, and, though composed of the best elements of nature, is not exempt from its mutability and frailty; but friendship founded on religion is spiritual, and therefore unchanging and imperishable" (R. Hall, 'Works,' v.).

V. IT IS CONFIRMED BY A SOLEMN COMPACT. "And Jonathan and David made a covenant," &c. (ver. 3; ch. xx. 16, 17). In it they gave and received assurance of affection, agreed to be faithful to each other under all circumstances, and called the Lord in whom they trusted to be witness between them; to it they were impelled by the strength of their love and "a loftier necessity of finding and loving in one another, if possible in a yet higher degree, the purely Divine power already felt within, and thus mutually living under its influence" (Ewald); and by it their friendship was rendered sacred and strong and permanently established. In times when "the love of many waxes cold and iniquity abounds," men of a common faith and love toward God do well to draw closely together and strengthen each other's hearts and hands by sacred vows.

VI. IT IS MANIFESTED IN GENEROUS GIFTS. "And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him," &c. (ver. 4). He gave him what best expressed the gift of himself, and what would continually remind David of his friend and increase his confidence and love. It was little that David could give him in return of an outward kind, but he gave him confidence for confidence, love for love, life for life. Friendship is practical, self-sacrificing, and helpful, and gives of its best. "David is seen in Jonathan's clothes that we may take notice he is Jonathan's second self. Our Lord Jesus Christ has thus showed his love to us, that he stripped himself to clothe us, humbled himself to enrich us. Nay, he did more than Jonathan—he clothed himself with our rags, whereas Jonathan did not put on David's" (M. Henry).

Exhortation:—1. Seek friendship only among the wise and good. If you would have a true friend, make a friend of him who is a friend of God. 2. Strive to be as worthy of the friendship of the good as David was of the friendship of Jonathan. 3. Be as sincere and faithful to your friend as Jonathan was to David. 4. Value the friendship of Christ beyond all other.—D.

Ver. 4.—*Divine friendship.* "He loved him as his own soul" (ver. 3). Human friendship is a shadow of Divine. The greatest and best Friend is God in Christ Jesus. Happy is every one who can say from the heart, "This is my beloved, and this is my friend" (Song of Sol. v. 16). Consider—

I. ITS CONDITIONS, on the part of man. 1. *Rationality:* capacity of thought, voluntary choice, moral esteem. "Amidst the ashes of our collapsed nature there slumber certain sparks of celestial fire" (Owen). 2. *Reconciliation;* inasmuch as man is alienated from God, and under condemnation. 3. *Renewal* in righteousness and true holiness, so that we may be "partakers of the Divine nature" (2 Pet. i. 4). "Friendship is a union of souls, and souls can be united only where there is more or less accord" (Amos iii. 3).

II. ITS CHARACTERISTICS, on the part of the Lord. All his perfections render it in every respect transcendently excellent. But notice more particularly — 1. *Its disinterestedness.* "He first loved us," with a pure, free, condescending, self-sacrificing love. "Greater love hath no man," &c. (John xv. 13). 2. *Its faithfulness.* 3. *Its constancy.* "The love of friends of this world is defective in three respects—they begin to love late, cease early, love little. But the love of God is an unequalled love. He loves us without beginning, without intermission, and without end" (Nouet).

III. ITS BENEFITS, or the blessings enjoyed by those who have fellowship with him. 1. *Counsel,* warning, rebuke. Reproofs are "the graver looks of love." 2

Defence, support, and effectual help. 3. *Sympathy*, encouragement, and everlasting consolation. "And now," said Jonathan Edwards, on his death-bed, turning from his earthly friends toward the approaching darkness, "where is Jesus of Nazareth, my true and never-failing Friend?"

IV. ITS CLAIMS, or the duties of those who enjoy such benefits and desire their continuance. 1. To cherish proper feelings toward him—confidence, affection, and delight in intercourse with him. 2. To do those things that please him. "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." 3. Not to be ashamed of him, but to confess his name before men; to love and serve his friends for his sake, and to seek in all things his honour and glory.—D.

Vers. 6—16. (GIBEAH.)—*Envy*. "And Saul eyed David from that day forward" (ver. 9). How extraordinary are the moral contrasts which are often presented in human life! The friendship of Jonathan here stands in opposition to the envy of Saul. Hardly had David experienced the one before he was exposed to the other. "His victory had a double issue, Jonathan's love and Saul's envy, which God so mixed that the one was a remedy of the other" (Hall). On the day of public rejoicing the seeds of jealousy, envy, and hatred were sown in his heart. He eyed David not with favour, as before, but with dislike on account of the honour given to him beyond himself. The general suspicion which he entertained in consequence of the intimations of Samuel concerning his successor also seems to have fastened on him as the man; and henceforth he looked upon him as a dangerous rival. "Mingling with his constitutional malady, it poisoned his whole future relations with David." Of *envy* notice that—

I. IT TAKES ROOT IN AN EVIL HEART. In the case of Saul the soil was congenial and ready prepared by—1. *Alienation* from God and conviction of his disfavour. 2. *Selfishness* and morbid concentration of thought upon himself. 3. *Self-will*, pride, and worldly ambition, still continuing and increasing. 4. *Wrathful passion*. He "was very wroth, and the saying displeased him" (ver. 8). "He who is apt to feel indignation, feels pain at those who are undeservedly successful; but the envious man, going beyond him, feels pain at every one's success" (Aristotle, 'Ethics').

II. IT GROWS IN THE SHADE OF ANOTHER'S PRE-EMINENCE in—1. *Popular estimation*. "They have ascribed unto David ten thousands," &c. (ver. 8). "What properly occasions envy is the *fruit* of the accomplishments of others; the pre-eminence which the opinion of the world bestows, or which we dread it will bestow, on their talents above ours" (Blair). 2. *Successful achievements*, from which such preference proceeds. "The bright day brings out the adder." Prosperity is generally attended by envy. 3. *Personal excellences*. David "behaved himself wisely" (ver. 5); "very wisely" (ver. 15); "more wisely than all" (ver. 30). He acted prudently, cautiously, skilfully, and therefore prosperously.

> "Base envy withers at another's joy,
> And hates the excellence it cannot reach" (Thomson).

4. *Divine approbation*, which appears in prosperous enterprises. "And Saul was afraid of David, *because* the Lord was with him," &c. (ver. 12). "And Cain was very wroth," &c. (Gen. iv. 5; 1 John iii. 2). The envy felt at the favour shown to another by God is peculiarly criminal, because of its opposition to God himself.

III. IT IS MARKED BY MANY ODIOUS FEATURES. 1. *Unreasonableness*. 2. In most cases *ingratitude*. David had conferred a great benefit on Saul and Israel by his victory over Goliath; he "went out whithersoever Saul sent him," and fought his battles; and often soothed his melancholy with the music of his harp (ver. 10). 3. *Injustice*. He did him "shame" (ch. xx. 34) by entertaining suspicions of his loyalty and treating him as a traitor. 4. *Ungodliness* and all uncharitableness. "Charity envieth not." "Envy is the worst of all passions, and feedeth upon the spirits, and they again upon the body; and so much the more because it is perpetual, and, as it is said, keepeth no holidays" (Bacon, 'Essays').

IV. IT IS PRODUCTIVE OF MUCH DEADLY FRUIT, in relation both to others (Prov. xxvii. 4) and to the envious man himself (Prov. xiv. 30); partly of *hatred* and partly

of *grief*. "As it shows itself in hatred it strikes at the person envied; but as it affects a man in the nature of grief it recoils and does execution upon the envier. It lies at the heart like a worm, always gnawing and corroding and piercing it with a secret, invisible sting and poison" (South, 'Sermons,' lviii.). In Saul it produced unrest of soul, increased subjection to the power of evil—"it came to pass *on the morrow*," &c. (ver. 10); ungovernable rage—"he poised the javelin" twice; craft and hypocrisy; fear (vers. 11, 15); continual enmity (ver. 21); deliberate avowal of murderous intentions (ch. xix. 1); open and unceasing persecution; despair and self-destruction. "When in the last judgment envy is placed at the bar of God, what an indictment will be laid against the evil spirit! The insulting anger of Eliab, the cruelty of Joseph's brethren, the murderous wrath of Cain, and the greatest share in the greatest crime in the world—the crucifying of the Lord of glory—will be charged upon him. To cast this demon out of our bosoms before that final condemnation is one purpose of Jesus, and with all our hearts we should pray for his complete and speedy victory" (C. Vince).

Conclusion:—In order to the cure or prevention of this evil passion, seek a renewed heart; dwell much on the Divine love "that spurns all envying in its bounty;" estimate aright temporal advantages; entertain lowly thoughts of self; learn to admire excellence in others, and regard it as if it were your own; check the first impulse of jealous or envious feeling; and "commit thy way unto the Lord."

> "O man! why place thy heart where there doth need
> Exclusion of participants in good?
> Heaven calls,
> And, round about you wheeling, courts your gaze
> With everlasting beauties. Yet your eye
> Turns with fond doting still upon the earth.
> Therefore he smites you who discerneth all" (Dante, 'Purg.' xiv.).—D.

Vers. 17—30. (GIBEAH.)—*Simplicity*. There is a simplicity which springs from ignorance, and is displayed in folly and presumption (Prov. xxii. 3). There is also a simplicity which is the fruit of innocence, truthfulness, and goodness, and appears in an ingenuous mind, a guileless disposition, and straightforward speech and conduct. In its best sense (*simplicitas*—without fold or twist) it is opposed to duplicity, deception, and "cunning craftiness" (Rom. xii. 8; xvi. 19; 2 Cor. i. 12; xi. 3); and it was exemplified, in an eminent degree, by David, especially in his earlier intercourse with Saul; for, through familiarity with court life, and much more in consequence of the straits to which he was reduced by the craft and persecution of the king, the simple-minded, open-hearted shepherd youth once and again turned aside from the right path (ch. xxi. 2). Consider simplicity as—

I. BESET BY THE WORKING OF CRAFT. Having given way to envy, and in a violent fit of madness threatened the life of David, Saul continued to hate and fear him (Mark xi. 18), and sought to get rid of him, though indirectly from restraint of conscience and secretly from fear of the people (Mark vi. 20; Luke xxii. 2). Sin works in the dark. Malicious craft often—1. Seeks to accomplish *ends* which it may not dare to avow. Springing from jealousy for personal position and renown, it aims at the depreciation of every one by whom they seem to be endangered; and at his removal, whether accidentally by the hands of others, or by his committing some overt act which may justify his open punishment (vers. 17, 21, 25). And toward these ends it works with ever greater directness and less concealment; for that which is hidden in the heart must sooner or later come to light. 2. Makes use of *fair professions*, and uses pretexts which are specious, false, and hypocritical. David was assured that no harm was really meant him, and made "captain over a thousand" (ver. 13); whereas he was removed from the presence of the king because he was hated and feared, and that he might be exposed to greater danger. His not receiving the fulfilment of Saul's promise (ch. xvii. 25) was probably accounted for by his lack of wealth and social status (ver. 25); but the promise was repeated insincerely. "Only be thou *valiant for me*" (expose thyself to every hazard), "and *fight the Lord's battles*" (with zeal for Jehovah, which I know thou hast), and (*sub voce*) "let not my hand be upon him," &c. (ver. 17). On the loss of Merab he was consoled

by the promise of Michal (ver. 21), but only as "a snare," and her love was made use of for the purpose. And at length (when the king had formed his plan, and felt sure of its success), he was told by his servants (as if in confidential communication), "Behold, the king hath delight in thee," &c. (ver. 22), "desireth not any dowry," &c. (ver. 25); "but Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines." 3. Adopts *means* which are unworthy, base, and godless. Scheming, plotting, murderous attempts on life under the sanctities of affection and religion; at heart, infatuated opposition to the will of God. If it were not the Divine purpose that David should be king, why fear him? if it were, of what avail would resistance be?

II. DISPLAYED IN THE MIDST OF CRAFT. The snares that were woven around David seem plain enough to us; but there is no reason to suppose that they were at first observed by him. The simple-hearted man—1. Is accustomed to *look upon others as sincere* like himself, regards their statements and assurances as truthful, and is slow to suspect their evil intentions. Even to the last David could hardly believe that Saul, of his own accord, sought his life (ch. xxvi. 19). He is "simple concerning evil." Large experience makes men cautious; but it is better to be deceived a hundred times than to lead a life of continual suspicion. 2. Entertains modest and *lowly views of himself*, takes contempt and disappointment without complaint, and accepts humbly and cheerfully whatever honour may be conferred upon him (vers. 18, 23). "Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not" (Jer. xlv. 5). "A pious man is even in prosperity humble in heart." 3. Is intent upon the honest, faithful, and efficient *discharge of the duty* that lies before him, and fears danger little because he fears God much (vers. 5, 14, 27). "David's calm indifference to outward circumstances affecting himself were very strikingly expressed in his conduct. Partly from his poetic temperament, partly from his sweet, natural unselfishness, and chiefly from his loving trust in God, he accepts whatever happens with equanimity, and makes no effort to alter it" (Maclaren). It has been remarked that "*genius* is simply the carrying into the maturity of our powers the simplicity and ardour of childhood."

III. PRESERVED FROM THE DEVICES OF CRAFT. It is the best means of preservation, inasmuch as—1. It affords the *least occasion* for an adversary to take an advantage. Although the ingenuous man may appear to lie open to attack, yet he is really most effectually guarded against it. 2. It attracts the *respect* of other men (ver. 16), gains the love of those who warn and help him (ver. 28; ch. xix. 11), and makes it difficult for his enemies to prevail over him. 3. It insures the *favour of God*. "The Lord was with him" (vers. 12, 14, 28) to guide, defend, and help him (Ps. xxxvii. 24, 33). "In thee do I trust."

IV. RESULTING IN AN END OPPOSED TO THAT OF CRAFT. 1. Instead of returning no more from the conflict, he returns in triumph, and receives an unwilling honour from the hand that was lifted up against him (vers. 27, 28; Rev. iii. 9). 2. Instead of being less an object of terror to the wicked, he is more so (ver. 29). 3. Instead of being deprived of the love of the people of God (ver. 16: "All Israel and Judah loved David"), he is more completely enthroned in their hearts (ver. 30).

Remark—1. How ineffectual are the devices of the wicked against "the upright in heart." 2. How beneficial may even their devices become when met with "simplicity and godly sincerity." 3. How inexpressibly beautiful is the character of the Son of David—"meek and lowly in heart." 4. How necessary is the "anointing of the holy One," that we may become like unto him.—D.

Vers. 1—9.—*Love and jealousy.* One great exploit performed in the sight of two armies took David at once and for ever out of obscurity. Thenceforth he was a man much observed. The quiet pastoral life at Bethlehem was ended, and could never be resumed. Sudden success brings rapid distinction, but also brings trials and risks from which the obscure are free. David leaped at a bound into honour and fame, but for that very reason he found himself at the beginning of his troubles. Well that, before those troubles began to press him, he knew the Lord as his refuge; well, too, that he won to himself in the very sphere of danger a loving and faithful friend.

I. JONATHAN'S LOVE. If there was a man in Israel who had reason to be jealous of David, it was the Prince Jonathan. He was a gallant soldier, and here was a greater hero to eclipse him. He had by personal valour gained a signal victory over the Philistines, and here was a personal courage still more brilliant, and a discomfiture of the enemy more easy and more complete. He was the heir to the throne, and if this youth should aspire to rule as well as deliver Israel, it was Jonathan whom he would supplant. Yet in this generous prince there appeared not even a shade of envy. He saw in the young shepherd a congenial spirit—a temper adventurous as his own, with a faith in God firm and ardent as his own. The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David. It was good for Jonathan to find a friend who could evoke an admiration and affection so intense. He could no longer look up to his own father with respect or confidence. In the circle or court about the king the finer qualities of Jonathan's nature found no harmony, no encouragement. But here was one who could understand him, and in whom he could see and admire what a leader in Israel ought to be. It was good for David, too, to find that he was cared for, that his pure and devout patriotism was appreciated, and that he had the fraternal sympathy of at least one in that higher grade of life on which he was now so suddenly to enter. The time was at hand when such strong and faithful love would be very precious.

II. SAUL'S JEALOUSY. At first it appeared as though David was to have nothing but honour. The king obeyed his good impulse, and gave the young hero high promotion among his officers, with the evident approval of the soldiers and all the people. But a black cloud of jealousy soon gathered. Saul could not bear to hear this new champion praised more than himself; and he began to brood over the thought that this might be the man at whom Samuel hinted, to whom the Lord would give the kingdom. "What can he have more but the kingdom? And Saul eyed David from that day forward." We soon read of the jealous king trying to take David's life. Oh, cruel envy! No worthiness, no goodness is a defence against it. The sight of good excites it to evil. It is the passion of a mean spirit; or, if it fastens on a character which has some great qualities, it tends to weaken and degrade it. Indeed, no more wretched fate can befall any man than to be filled with envy, and so to chafe and jibe at all who surpass him; to become a prey to jealousy, and mistrust or disparage all who seem to please God or man more than he. How fatal for Saul himself was this jealous passion! By the help of David the king might have recovered something of his lost health and happiness, and repaired some of the errors of his reign. But once jealousy took possession of him all this was impossible. Saul became gloomy, crafty, and cruel; and the more David did for the kingdom, bearing himself wisely in camp and court, the more was he watched with envious eyes, and pursued with sullen hatred. "Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?" This seemed an ominous beginning for David; but it served its purpose in the training through which God meant him to pass. After Saul was anointed he was put through no such ordeal. The slight opposition which was made to his sudden elevation was soon surmounted, and the son of Kish stepped up to the throne of Israel with very little difficulty. But this was really ominous. It was a sign that God was to have little service or glory from King Saul. The son of Jesse had a higher destiny, and therefore he was tried and proved. His faith was tested as by fire; his discretion was ripened by the knowledge that jealous eyes were watching him; his patience was perfected; his staying power developed through an experience hard and harassing.

III. SUGGESTIONS OF JESUS CHRIST, LOVED AND HATED. As David in his youth, and on the threshold of his public career, overcame the strong enemy of Israel in single combat, so Jesus in youth, and on the threshold of his public life, encountered the adversary of the people of God, and overcame the tempter in the wilderness. Then, as David endured much before he reached the throne, so Jesus Christ endured much before God raised him up and gave him glory. And during that time of his lowly suffering Jesus was, like his human ancestor David, solaced by love and pursued by envy. 1. *Loved.* The Son of David had the applause of the multitude, and bore himself so wisely that the keenest observers could find no fault in him. Withal he had the power of knitting souls to himself, so as to make them willing to forsake all

for his sake. Now this was always a strong characteristic of David—a charm of character and bearing which attached to him many lovers and friends. Jonathan loved him in youth as his own soul. His warriors were so devoted to him, that he had but to wish for water from the well of Bethlehem, and three heroes dashed through the ranks of the Philistines to draw water and bring it to their chief. Ittai the Gittite and others are evidences that David retained this attaching power even in old age. And did not the Son of David, with an attraction which we cannot analyse or define, draw to himself the sons of Zebedee, and the sons of Jonas, the brother and sisters at Bethany, Mary of Magdala, and many more who found in his companionship and favour all that their hearts desired? Did he not afterwards draw to himself the persecutor, Saul of Tarsus, and engage the all-enduring loyalty and love of Paul? And are there not thousands on thousands who, though they have not seen him, love him, and in whose eyes he is never more worthy of love than when contemplated as One despised and rejected of men, "a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief"? It was a solace to Jesus in his deepest suffering that they who knew him best loved him. How often he dwelt on it, on the night in which he was betrayed! "If ye love me, keep my commandments." "He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father." "The Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me." Just as it comforted David when hunted and proscribed to know that Jonathan loved him truly and well, so it comforted the Son of David, that though men might hate and kill him, there were those who loved him truly and well, and whom neither death nor life could separate from his love. 2. *Hated.* We have seen how David's courage and discretion stirred Saul's jealousy. A man so rare in his qualities, so evidently fitted for greatness, drew after him eyes of cruel envy. So it befell the Son of David. Because Jesus drew to him disciples and friends, the priests and rabbis hated him. Because he was followed by multitudes, the rulers took counsel together against him. Because he answered and acted wisely, the scribes and Pharisees were filled with malice against him. Wherever he went, jealous eyes watched him, and crafty questions laid wait for him. The Scripture was fulfilled: "They hated me without a cause." Pontius Pilate easily detected the motive (no just cause) which led the Jewish Council to arraign the Son of David at his judgment-seat. "He knew that for envy they had delivered him." So it is to-day. Jesus Christ is proclaimed as mighty to save. The world is being filled with his name, and everywhere cries ascend of "Hosanna to the Son of David." And how is it taken? Some love, but some also hate. Some feel as Jonathan did. They are quite drawn out of themselves to the Lord Jesus. He is, he must be, their Beloved and their Friend. And how significant of his greatness it is that he, now unseen, awakens in human hearts a faith as strong, an attachment as ardent, as thrilled the breasts of apostles who accompanied him and women who ministered to him in Galilee! Paul, who had not seen him in the flesh, loved him as truly and served him as enthusiastically as Peter and John, who had. Christians of the eleventh century, like Bernard of Clairvaux, or of the fifteenth, like him who wrote as Thomas à Kempis, clave to him as devoutly as the Fathers who lived within a few generations of the apostles. And comparative moderns, like Herbert, Bengel, Rutherford, Madame Guyon, Brainerd, Whitefield, the Wesleys, Toplady, Hervey, Henry Martyn, McCheyne, Adolph Monod, have held him as precious as did the most fervent spirits of earlier times. Jesus Christ has always known how to draw men to himself, and hold them by cords of spiritual attraction, so that they have loved him as their own souls. Others, however, eye him as Saul eyed David, in order to find fault with him. Oh, what a triumph it would give to a certain class of men if they could only find a blot in the Lord Jesus; if they could show him to have been no better or higher than other men! But it cannot be done. His way is perfect. His character, however closely scrutinised, reveals no flaw. It comes to this, that men hate him because he is so good. They love the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds are evil.—F.

Vers. 29, 30.—*David proved and tried.* I. EXEMPLARY CONDUCT UNDER TRIAL. One can hardly imagine a course of events more likely to turn a young man's head and make him giddy with elation than the rapid promotion of the youthful David. Brought at once from comparative obscurity into the full blaze of public admiration

as a national hero, appointed as an officer of high rank in the army, made son-in-law to the king, and at the same time trusted and honoured by the people, the son of Jesse had much to tempt him to self-complacence. It is a sign that the Lord was with him that he bore himself meekly, circumspectly, and with "sublime repression of himself." A man who is conscious of fitness for a great position can afford to wait. It must come to him, if he lives long enough; and if he is not to live, why should he fret his few years with an idle ambition? David had something better than such a consciousness; he knew himself to be anointed and ordained of God to fill an eminent place in his service. True, that nothing seems to have been said about the kingship at the private anointing in Bethlehem; and David's gift of sacred song seemed to point him out as successor of Samuel rather than of Saul. But kings, not prophets, were anointed; and the thought of being king, especially after the exploit at Elah, must have passed and repassed through the young hero's mind. Yet because he believed God he did not make haste. If the high and perilous seat of a king of Israel was destined for him, let it come; but he would not grasp it, or climb into it by dispossessing its first occupant. Not by him would Saul be dethroned, or any dishonour done to a head which had received a holy anointing. God would give what he pleased, as and when he might see fit. Enough that David should act wisely and justly in the station to which he was assigned. This was no fatalism. The history shows that David used all lawful (and some rather questionable) endeavours to preserve his own life, and that he missed no opportunity to advance his public interest. He was far from inferring that, as God had marked out for him a destiny, he must not give any heed to his way or to his safety, because God would bring his own purpose to pass. On the contrary, he knew that the fulfilment of the destiny must be through his own discretion, valour, and proved fitness for the royal dignity. Therefore, while David would not push his way ambitiously to the throne, he was careful to do nothing that would make such promotion impossible. In fact David took the course which may be recommended to every young man who desires to rise in the esteem and confidence of others. He did well whatever was given him to do. He behaved himself wisely as a minstrel, as a soldier, as a prince. The historian marks the steps of his advance—"wisely," "very wisely," "more wisely than all the servants of Saul" (vers. 14, 15, 30). If we read "prospered," "prospered exceedingly," "prospered more," the lesson remains the same. We are reminded of the youthful Joseph, always prosperous in administration, whether in Potiphar's house, in charge of the prison, or in the government of Egypt. It was because the Lord was with him (Gen. xxxix. 2, 23). Yet the promotion of Joseph was through his well-approved discretion and fidelity winning for him more and more confidence (Gen. xxxix. 39—41). So David prospered; every step of his elevation bringing out more clearly to view his fine combination of boldness and discretion, and his consequent fitness to rise yet higher, and to be the leader and ruler of all Israel. Happy the nation where such proved fitness counts for more than the highest birth or the strongest interest! If survival of the fittest be a rule in nature, selection of the fittest is the true principle for the public service. Not that every one who holds an inferior position well is fit to hold a higher and rise toward the highest. Men have their range, beyond which they are ill at ease and incapable. But this is certain, that men who are fit for a leading position will reveal their capacity while serving in a subordinate place. Only in judging of this account must be taken not of brain power and acquired knowledge merely, but of character, and that moral influence which character and conduct give. Is it not on this principle that God promotes the heirs of glory? All who have received his grace are anointed ones; but they have to serve before they rule, and to be tested in labours and patience before they can reign with Christ. Has not our Saviour taught in parables that his people must be servants till he returns, and that only good and faithful servants are to enter into the joy of their Lord? Has not St. Paul spoken of eternal life as given to those "who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, honour, and immortality"? Behold the way to "the honour that comes from God only." Behave wisely in the present sphere of duty. Do well, and do it with patience. Make not your advancement in this world, or even in the world to come, a matter of passionate anxiety. Foster and obey the sense of duty, attend consci-

entiously to the obligations of your present station, and fear not but the Lord will give you as much elevation as is good for you in this present time, and in the age to come a place and a portion with the King and with his saints.

II. THE IMPRESSION WHICH DAVID PRODUCED. 1. *On the people.* They were captivated by his gallantry and his discretion. Both in martial skill and in civil administration he surpassed all the public men of his country, and was fast becoming a popular idol. It is too true that, notwithstanding this, Saul was able to drive him into exile, and found soldiers enough to pursue him for his life. Popular favour did not protect him from such outrage. Yet two facts are worth noting. (1) That David gave clear evidence of a man who could, and therefore should, sooner or later, lead his countrymen. This early approval of himself to all observers, however obscured or disparaged during the days of his persecution, was not forgotten by the people, and helped his ultimate elevation to the throne. (2) That, though many turned against him at the bidding of Saul, David from this very time drew to himself friends that would not forsake him, for they saw in him the hope of Israel; and, following him to the caves among the rocks of Judah, and even to the land of the Philistines, were the companions, first of his tribulation, and then of his kingdom and glory. 2. *On the king.* The effect of David's well-doing on Saul was sinister and shameful. The good points which had once appeared in this unhappy man now recede from view, and the bad points of his character come out in strong relief under the baleful influence of jealousy. When he was himself the sole hero, and the eyes of all Israel turned to him, he could be gracious and even humble in his bearing. But elevation had made him proud; power had made him wilful; and a bad conscience made him hate and fear a well-doer near the throne. He felt that this youth from Bethlehem was far the better man, and he suspected that the nation thought so too. Envy completed the moral ruin of Saul. As the worm seeks out the best fruit to eat the heart of it, so envy fastens on the best and noblest persons to hate and hurt them. It goes by quick steps to injury—even to murder. "Saul spake to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David." O cursed envy! O hideous ingratitude! O foul and furious jealousy!

III. THE TREATMENT OF JESUS CHRIST FORESHADOWED. The Son of David lived unblamably, answered discreetly, behaved himself wisely. The people gathered to him in multitudes, with eyes and ears of admiration. They judged him worthy to be made their king. It is true that the fickle populace took part with their rulers against our Lord, just as the fickle subjects of Saul took part with him against the son of Jesse. But, in the one case as in the other, some hearts clave to the persecuted One. And as all the malice that pursued David failed to keep him from the kingdom to which God had destined him and for which God had fitted him, so the rejection, betrayal, and crucifixion of Jesus could not keep him from the throne far above all principality and power which was his in virtue of an eternal covenant. The rulers hated him without a cause; his very wisdom and goodness irritated them, and they took counsel together how they might slay him. For envy they delivered him up to judgment, and demanded that he should be crucified. At the period described in our text a crisis had arrived in Israel. Men were forced to choose between Saul and David, for these were contrary the one to the other, and could not live in unity. We know what side such a man as Doeg took. But David had his friends, who dared everything rather than renounce his cause. Better, in their opinion, to be exiles and pilgrims with him than to remain with the moody tyrant from whom the Lord had departed. So, in the days of his showing to Israel, many refused Jesus, but some clave to him. Better, in their opinion, to be cast out of the synagogues, to go forth without the gate, bearing his reproach, than to take part with the world that hated him, especially with that hard and gloomy Judaism from which the Lord had departed. The crisis continues. Before all men the alternative lies—for Christ, or against him. Oh, receive him whom the world has rejected; give him your hearts; identify and associate yourselves with the "once despised Jesus."—F

EXPOSITION.

SUCCESSIVE ATTEMPTS UPON DAVID'S LIFE FRUSTRATED BY THE LOVE OF JONATHAN AND MICHAL, AND FINALLY BY FLIGHT (CH. XIX.).

CHAPTER XIX.

JONATHAN'S LOVE FOR DAVID (vers. 1—7).

Ver. 1.—**Saul spake to Jonathan his son . . . that they should kill David.** The translation of the last clause is untenable; it really means "about killing David," and so both the Septuagint and the Syriac render it. The descent of men once full of noble impulses, as was the case with Saul, into open crime is gradual, and with many halts on the way. Saul first gave way to envy, and instead of struggling against his bad feelings, nourished them. Then, when scarcely accountable for his actions, he threatened David's life; and next, with growing malice, encouraged him in dangerous undertakings, in the hope that in one of them he might be slain. And now he goes one step farther. He talks to Jonathan and his officers concerning the many reasons there were for David's death; argues that without it there will be no security for himself and his dynasty; represents David probably as a traitor, with secret purposes of usurping the throne; and reveals what hitherto had been but the half-formed wishes of his heart. But even now, probably, he still spoke of David's death as a painful necessity, and had many misgivings in his own mind. But he was really encouraging himself in crime, and by cherishing thoughts of murder he was gradually descending towards the dark abyss into which he finally fell.

Vers. 2, 3.—**Until the morning.** Rather, "in the morning." Saul's purpose was taking shape, and as there are always men too ready to commit crime at the bidding of a king, there was the danger that secret murder might be the quick result of Saul's open communication of his wishes to his men of war. Jonathan, therefore, warns David of the king's malice, and urges him to hide himself until he has made a last entreaty for him. This was to take place in **the field**, the open common land. There was no idea of David overhearing the conversation, but when the king took his usual walk Jonathan was to join him, and hold a conference with him apart in the unenclosed hill pastures. After probing his father's real feelings he would continue his walk, and, without awakening any suspicions, would meet David and communicate to him the result. **What I see, that I will tell thee.** More exactly, "I will see what (he says), and will tell thee."

Vers. 4—7.—In the field Jonathan intercedes for David, assures his father of his friend's innocence, reminds him of his noble exploit, and of Saul's own joy at it, and beseeches him not to shed innocent blood. And Saul, fickle and selfish, yet not destitute of noble feelings, repents of his purpose, and with characteristic impetuosity takes an oath that David's life shall be spared. Whereupon a reconciliation takes place, and David resumes his attendance upon the king's person.

RENEWED ATTEMPT TO SLAY DAVID FRUSTRATED BY MICHAL (vers. 8—17).

Vers. 8, 9.—**The**—more correctly *an*—**evil spirit from Jehovah.** The friendly relations between Saul and David continued for some time; but when at length war broke out again, David acquitted himself with his usual ability and success, whereupon Saul's envy and jealousy returned, and fits of melancholy, deepening into insanity, once again overclouded his reason. It is no longer called "an evil spirit from God," as in ch. xviii. 10, but **from Jehovah**, as in ch. xvi. 14, suggesting that it was no longer a natural influence, but that Saul, having broken his covenant relations with Jehovah, was now punished by him. While in this moody state the same temptation to slay David with his javelin came over him, but with such violence that he was no longer able to restrain his evil intent.

Vers. 10—12.—**Saul sought to smite David.** The verb used here is not that rendered *cast* in ch. xviii. 11, where probably we had the record of a purpose threatened, but not carried out. Here Saul actually threw his javelin at David with such violence that it was fixed into the wall. But David, though playing some instrument of music at the time, was on his guard, and slipped away. **And David fled, and escaped that night.** As usual, the historian gives the ultimate results of Saul's violence first, and then returns and gives the particulars; for plainly David first went home, and it was only when he found that the house was surrounded by Saul's emissaries that he fled away to find refuge with Samuel. **Saul also sent messengers.** As is often the case, this outbreak of violence on Saul's part broke down all the former restraints of upright feeling and conscience. He had lost his self-respect, was openly a murderer as regards everything but the success of his attempt, and he determined that that should not be long wanting. He sends persons, therefore, to watch David's

house, with orders that when in the morning he came out, suspecting no danger, they should fall upon him and slay him. But Michal in some way or other became aware of her husband's danger. Possibly she had been at her father's house in the afternoon, and with quick observation had noticed that more than usual was going on, and seeing that her own house was the object of these preparations, had divined their intent; or possibly Jonathan may have given her information, and so she warned David of his danger. As the entrance was guarded, he was let down through a window, like St. Paul afterwards, and so began the weary life of wandering which lasted through so many troubled years.

Ver. 13.—**Michal took an image.** Literally, "the teraphim," a plural word, but used here as a singular. Probably, like the corresponding Latin word *penates*, it had no singular in common use. It was a wooden block with head and shoulders roughly shaped to represent a human figure. Laban's teraphim were so small that Rachel could hide them under the camel's furniture (Gen. xxxi. 34), but Michal's seems to have been large enough to pass in the bed for a man. Though the worship of them is described as iniquity (ch. xv. 23), yet the superstitious belief that they brought good luck to the house over which they presided, in return for kind treatment, seems to have been proof against the teaching of the prophets; and Hosea describes the absence of them as on the same level as the absence of the ephod (Hosea iii. 4). **A pillow of goats' hair for his bolster.** More correctly, "a goat's skin about its head." So the Syriac and Vulgate. The object of it would be to look at a distance like a man's hair. The Septuagint has a goat's liver, because this was supposed to palpitate long after the animal's death, and so would produce the appearance of a person's breathing. But this involves a different reading, for which there is no authority; nor was Michal's deception intended for close observation. She would of course not let any one disturb David, and all she wanted was just enough likeness to a man to make a person at a distance suppose that David was there. Soon or later her artifice would be found out, but her husband would have had the intervening time for effecting his escape. As the word rendered **pillow**, and which is found only here, comes from a root signifying "to knot together," "to intertwine," some commentators think that it means a network of goats' hair, perhaps to keep off flies. But this is a mere guess, and not to be set against the combined authority of the two versions. **With a cloth.** Hebrew, *beged*. This *beged* was David's every-day dress, and would greatly aid Michal in her pious artifice. It was a loose mantle, worn over the close-fitting *meïl* (see ch. ii. 19). Thus Ezra (ch. ix. 3, 5) says, "I rent my *beged* and my *meïl*," which the A. V. with characteristic inexactness translates "my garment and my mantle." In Gen. xxviii. 20, where it is rendered *raiment*, Jacob speaks of it as the most indispensable article of dress; and in Gen. xxxix. 12, where it is rendered *garment*, we find that it was a loose plaid or wrapper. In those simple days it was used for warmth by night as well as for protection by day, and it is interesting to find David in his old age still covered up for warmth in bed by his *beged* (1 Kings i. 1), where it is translated *clothes*.

Vers. 14—17.—When, after waiting till the usual hour for David's appearance, he came not, the watchers send and inform Saul, who now orders his open arrest. But Michal despatches a messenger to tell her father that he is sick. Upon this Saul orders bed and all to be brought, that he may slay him. As an Oriental bed is usually a mere strip of carpet, this would be easy enough. But when the messengers force their way through, in spite of every obstruction which Michal can devise to waste time, and come up close to the sleeping figure, "Lo, teraphim in the bed, and a goatskin at its head." They carry the news to Saul, who sends for Michal, and reproaches her for letting his enemy go. And she, afraid of bringing her father's anger upon herself, answers with a falsehood, such as we find David also too readily having resort to; for she tells Saul that his flight was David's own doing, and that she had taken part in it only to save her life. **Why should I kill thee?** She pretends that David had told her not to force him to kill her by refusing to give her aid in his escape. Saul, no doubt, saw that she had been a willing agent; but as she professed to have been driven to do what she had done by David's threats, he could say no more.

DAVID'S FLIGHT TO SAMUEL AT RAMAH (vers. 18—24). Ver. 18.—**David . . . came to Samuel.** We have seen that there is every reason to believe that David had been taught and trained by Samuel among the sons of the prophets, and now, conscious of his innocence, he flees for refuge to his old master, trusting that Saul would reverence God's prophet, and give credence to his intercession and his pledge that David was guiltless. **He and Samuel went and dwelt in Naioth.** Rather in *Nevayoth*, as in the written text. This is not the name of a place, but signifies "dwellings," "lodgings," and is always translated in the Chaldee "house of study," *i. e.* student's lodgings. Somewhere near to Ramah Samuel had erected buildings to receive his young men,

who were called "sons of the prophets," not because their fathers were prophets, but because they were under prophetic training, with prophets for their teachers, though not necessarily intended to be prophets themselves. At first Samuel, we may suppose, built one *nevath*, one simple hospice for his students, and then, as their numbers grew, another, and yet another, and so the plural, *nevayoth*, came into vogue as the name of the students' quarters.

Vers. 19, 20.—On hearing where David was, Saul sends messengers to arrest him, and we thus incidentally gain a most interesting account of the inner condition of Samuel's schools. Evidently after Saul had become king Samuel devoted his main energies to this noble effort to raise Israel from the barbarous depths into which it had sunk; and when the messengers arrive they enter some hall, where they find a regularly organised choir, consisting not of "sons of the prophets," young men still under training, but **of prophets**, men who had finished their preparatory studies, and arrived at a higher elevation. The Chaldee Paraphrast calls them *scribes;* and doubtless those educated in Samuel's schools held an analogous position to that of the scribes in later days. And **Samuel** himself was **standing—not as appointed over them**; he was the founder and originator of these schools, and all authority was derived from him. What the Hebrew says is that he was "standing as chief over them," and they, full of Divine enthusiasm, were chanting psalms to God's glory. So noble was the sight, that Saul's messengers on entering were seized with a like enthusiasm, and, laying aside their murderous purpose, joined in the hearty service of the prophetic sanctuary. Instead of **they saw** the Hebrew has "he saw," but as all the versions have the plural, it is probably a mere mistake. The Hebrew word **for company** is found only here. By transposing the letters we have the ordinary word for *congregation*, but possibly it was their own technical name for some peculiar arrangement of the choir.

Vers. 21—24.—Saul sends messengers a second and even a third time with the same result, and finally determines to go in person. Having set out, **he came to a**—more correctly *the*—**great well that is in Sechu**—more probably the cistern or tank there. From the value of water it was no doubt a well-known spot at the time, but in the present ruined state of the country all such works have perished. Sechu, according to Conder ('Handbook'), was probably on the site of the present ruin of Suweikeh, immediately south of Beeroth. Having there made inquiries whether Samuel and David were still at Ramah, courageously awaiting his coming, he proceeds on his way. But even before arriving in Samuel's presence, with that extraordinary susceptibility to external impressions which is so marked a feature in his character, he begins singing psalms, and no sooner had he entered the Nevayoth than **he stripped off his clothes**—his *beged* and *meìl*—**and lay down naked**—*i. e.* with only his tunic upon him—**all that day and all that night**. His excitement had evidently been intense, and probably to the chanting he had added violent gesticulation. But it was not this so much as the tempest of his emotions which had exhausted him, and made him thus throw himself down as one dead. And once again the people wondered at so strange an occurrence, and called back to mind the proverb, **Is Saul also among the prophets?** When first used (ch. x. 11) Saul's enthusiasm was an outburst of piety, genuine but evanescent, and which had long since passed away. What was it now? The Chaldee, as explained by Rashi, says he was mad. More probably, in the violent state of excitement under which Saul had for some time been labouring, the thought of seeing Samuel, from whom he had been so long separated, brought back to his mind the old days when the prophet had loved and counselled him, and made him king, and been his true and faithful friend. And the remembrance overpowered him. What would he not have given to have continued such as he then was! And for a time he became once again the old Saul of Ramah; but the change was transient and fitful; and after these twenty-four hours of agony Saul rose up, full perhaps of good intentions, but with a heart unchanged, and certain, therefore, very quickly to disappoint all hopes of real amendment, and to become a still more moody and relentless tyrant.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—7.—*Open enmity and open friendship.* The facts are—1. Saul reveals his purpose to kill David. 2. This being made known to Jonathan, he arranges with David to let him learn the result of an effort to turn Saul from his purpose. 3. He pleads with Saul David's good services and personal risks, God's approval, and the king's own joy therein. 4. Saul yields to persuasion, resolves not to shed "innocent blood," and recalls David into his personal service. The historian traces the progress of Saul to ruin, and of David to royal honours, and here brings out the aroused

hostility of Saul on the one side, and the open services of Jonathan's friendship on the other. Father and son are at cross purposes concerning the life of one who in the providence of God is to supplant both. Each performs his part with perfect naturalness; and in the progress of the conflict between enmity and friendship there is a revelation not only of the individual characteristics of the men, but also of principles in constant operation. We have here an instance of—

I. THE INEVITABLE GROWTH OF SECRET SIN. Except in occasional seasons of moodiness, Saul's conduct towards David had not found formal expression. His servants probably set down his violence (ch. xviii. 11) to irritability, and we have seen how cleverly Saul had striven to throw on Providence the slaying of David while he was doing him honour (ch. xviii. 17—30). The frustration of these secret schemes brought out the fact that the sin so long cherished in the heart, and for very shame concealed, had, by that very nurture, gained such power over the entire man as to force its way into open day, regardless of all considerations of prudence and self-respect. The murder in intent became murder avowed. The ruling passion of the inner life now became the acknowledged master, and a public avowal of servitude to it is therefore voluntarily made. Saul's experience is but an *instance of the experience of multitudes.* Progress in wickedness is from within outwards. Lust, when it hath conceived, brings forth sin (James i. 15). Every deliberate murder, theft, deed of adultery, fraud, and rebellion against Christ's authority was at first germinal in the heart. Each stage of internal growth lessened the power of the will over its progress, till at last it revealed its evil nature in open acts. This psychological genesis of sin is an awful fact, and may well cause those to tremble whose dalliance with secret evil becomes habitual. Truly he who committeth sin is "the servant of sin," and every consideration of duty and interest should urge us to cry daily for a "clean heart," and that sin may have "no more dominion" over us (Ps. cxxxix. 23; Rom. vi. 14).

II. THE STUPIDITY CONSEQUENT ON THE DOMINION OF SIN. Facts prove that all sin is a species of madness. Adam and Eve imagined that a thicket would hide them from God. Saul's clearness of intellect suffered by his first public disobedience; and now that the evil passion had gained ascendancy, extreme stupidity appears in his soliciting the aid, in the execution of his cruel purpose, of Jonathan, David's bosom friend (ch. xviii. 1—4; xix. 1). If he knew nothing of their friendship, which is very improbable, he ought to have known enough of so good and devout a son as to be sure that he would be no party to a base and villanous deed. If he imagined that Jonathan was likely to be actuated by jealousy of a rival, he performed the stupid act, common to base men, of thinking that reasons which have force with themselves have force with others. In proportion to the power of sin over the will is the effect of it on the intellect. Even the most clever sinners, when seeking to cover their sin from man, manifest some infatuation or folly which affords the clue to their crime. But it is especially in relation to God and the future issues of sin that this stupefying effect appears. It is only this blinded spirit that explains the ease with which men read of the coming "terrors of the Lord" (2 Cor. v. 10, 11; iv. 3, 4; Heb. ii. 3).

III. THE DOMESTIC SORROWS CREATED BY SIN. It was with a sad, heavy heart that Jonathan had witnessed the gradual decay of his father's character, but the saddest blow was when the father sought to make the son partaker in his sin. The grief of the son would be proportionate to his piety. To be tempted by a father, to have filial obedience tested in deeds of evil, to see the utter ruin of a parent's moral character, was a bitter trial; and, as a true son, Jonathan could not but bear these sorrows as a fearful secret. In how many families are there sorrows of this kind! How many a child has to watch the decay of a father's reputation, to bear inducements to sin, and to hide deeds and intentions of evil! A parent is far gone when children are prompted to wrong. A child is indeed a "child of sorrow" when compelled to carry on a pure heart the secrets of a sinful home.

IV. THE TRIUMPH OF RELIGIOUS FRIENDSHIP. It is scarcely likely that Saul would speak to Jonathan about killing David without pointing out how dangerous a rival he was to both father and son. It raised in Jonathan's mind the conflict of worldly interest and fidelity to a friend. Not a few have yielded to such temptations. But

Jonathan's pure soul was equal to the occasion. His conduct was marked by exquisite delicacy of feeling and wisdom. He would not so degrade his father as to tell David that he had been asked to slay his friend, while he assured David of his real danger. While not assuming the tone of an advocate, he skilfully handled facts so as to achieve the end in view. The point of the temptation was to sacrifice friendship to private and public interests. There are persons still subject to the same trial. May we not also see something analogous to the common temptations of Christians to renounce the "anointed One" for reasons pertaining to earthly wealth and glory? Where there is real oneness of heart with Christ, no blandishments of sin, no prospect of greater worldly distinction, avail to break the sacred bond.

V. THE FORCE OF TRUTH ON THE CONSCIENCE. Jonathan simply, in a kindly, gentle way, conversed with his father on the matter, and called his attention to a few facts, —David's risks, services, and evident approval by God, and Saul's own joy in his victories,—and then asks whether such innocent blood should be shed. The effect even on the impenitent Saul is to soften his hard heart and draw forth the declaration that he shall be spared. Happy the son who has such influence with an unhappy, wicked father! In dealing with hardened sinners *three things are necessary.* 1. *Truth to present to the conscience.* That David was innocent Saul knew; but ordinarily passion blinded him to the due recognition of it. If we can hold forth "the word of life," the actual truth concerning Christ, so that it shall shine straight in upon the conscience, men cannot but acknowledge its power, and it will exercise some restraint on their conduct. 2. *A kindly, unaffected manner.* It was the manner of Jonathan that secured an attentive hearing and disarmed Saul's suspicion. Harsh language tends to arouse antagonism. The secret of success lies in so presenting the truth that it stands forth alone, unmixed with disturbing elements from our personality. "He that winneth souls is wise" (Prov. xi. 30). 3. *Prayerfulness of spirit.* We may be sure that Jonathan as well as David prayed in spirit on this occasion. The tone of our mind is wonderfully affected by prayerfulness. We then speak for God and man with a gentle force which guilty men cannot but feel.

General lessons:—1. More attention should be called to the importance of crushing out sinful feelings on their first appearance, and means suggested for so doing. 2. Parents and persons in positions of influence should be earnestly warned of the fearful crime of seeking to induce young persons to violate their sense of right and truth. 3. The good that is in us may be much more utilised if we strive to act with the "wisdom of the serpent and the harmlessness of the dove."

Vers. 8—17.—*Revived sins and troubles.* The facts are—1. The fresh fame of David arouses the latent ill-will of Saul, who seeks in vain to smite him with a javelin. 2. David fleeing to his house, Saul sends men to lie in wait for and slay him. 3. Michal warns him of danger, and during the night aids his escape. 4. By a clever device she diverts his enemies from an immediate pursuit, and on being accused of aiding her father's enemy, she pleads self-preservation. The troubles of life are but temporarily overcome. It was destined for David to smite the national enemy, since he went forth as none other did, strong in the "name of the Lord." The fame of his exploits no sooner reached the ears of Saul than the effect of Jonathan's recent endeavour to reconcile him to David was utterly lost; and hence arose a series of new troubles for persecutor and the persecuted. We see here—

I. That A RADICAL CHANGE OF DISPOSITION IS THE ONLY GUARANTEE OF CONDUCT AND CHARACTER. The change wrought in Saul by Jonathan's recent presentation of truth was only superficial. The old sin was loved and unrepented of. The nature of the man was alienated from the life of God; and hence on the slightest approach of temptation the old spirit broke forth. It is *universally true* that no *intellectual recognition of truth,* no acquiescence of conscience in the injustice of a course, no reformation consequent on human influence over the feelings or the intelligence, *will make man, or enable him to be, what he ought to be.* The fundamental disposition must be renewed. There are instances of this in Christian history. The lion becomes a lamb. A Saul of Tarsus becomes an apostle of Christ. It is in the nature of things that so it should be. For in the ordained subordination of the powers of the mind there is a ruling disposition to which all bend: if it be pure all will move in a

holy direction; if it be impure the whole life will be stained. Out of the heart are the issues of life. It is the weakness of all systems of morality that they exalt virtue and teach the evils of vice, but furnish no adequate power to render the life virtuous in the highest sense of the term. Moralists may be immoral. The doing of truth is not involved in a knowledge of it. Here it is that the New Testament comes in to supplement man's knowledge, and to perfect codes of morality. By the gift of the Holy Spirit it builds up outward character from within, and insures that at last sin shall have no dominion over us. There is *danger of men overlooking this truth*, especially when "many run to and fro, and knowledge is increased." Civilisation, by securing a presentable exterior, diverts attention from the "hidden man of the heart." The indirect effect of Christianity is to incorporate with the ordinary character many of the virtues nourished only by itself, and hence men imagine that society would be what it is without Christianity. It is extremely important, therefore, to insist on the New Testament teaching of the need of a radical change by the power of the Holy Spirit; to seek to bring our children early under his renewing power, and to pray constantly that men may be renewed and become new creatures in Christ Jesus.

II. That THE AFFLICTIONS OFTEN BEFALLING THE SERVANTS OF GOD PUT A SEVERE STRAIN ON THEIR FAITH. If Ps. lix. was written in reference to this persecution, we can see the propriety of the assertion, "Not for my transgression, and not for any sin of mine" (Ps. lix. 3), do they "set themselves." To a young man conscious of his integrity, and not without hope of being accepted of God, it must have seemed a strange providence which allowed his life to be so troubled. Could Samuel's anointing really have a Divine significance? (ch. xvi. 13). Was it not a mistake to have left the quiet sheepfold for the scene of conflict? (ch. xvii. 20). Would it not be well even now to retire into private life? Why should an innocent, sincere soul have such constant reason to cry, "Awake to help me, and behold?" (Ps. lix. 4). The *experience is not confined to David.* One greater than David, when in pursuit of his higher work in the world, was a "Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." And likewise for many a year his Church, when pursuing her holy and beneficent course, was exposed to relentless persecution. It is still true that "many are the afflictions of the righteous," and that "through much tribulation" we enter the kingdom. But all this is *not a matter of chance*, nor an indication of imperfect wisdom and love. The world is evil, and goodness can only live in it by conflict. It is part of the great battle of the universe that sin shall be exterminated by endured sorrows. History proves that the purest lives and most beautiful virtues have flourished in times and by means of severe trial. Every sufferer knows how blessed it is to be driven nearer to God. The tribulation is only for a brief space, and works out a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Hence faith can bear the strain; the more so as God does succour and delight the soul with his comforts (Ps. lix. 17; xciv. 19).

III. That THOSE WHO DEVISE EVIL AGAINST THE SERVANTS OF GOD ARE SOMETIMES CAUGHT IN THEIR OWN DEVICES. In the exercise of his low cunning Saul gave Michal to David that she might be a snare to him (ch. xviii. 21), her character and tendencies being such as might in his judgment bring him into trouble. It now turned out that the snare for David became a snare for Saul (Ps. vii. 14, 15). Wicked men cannot always reckon safely on their instruments. Men laid snares for Christ, but were entangled in their own talk (Matt. xxii. 15—22). Pharaoh thought he would find Israel "entangled in the land" (Exod. xiv. 3), and he found himself ensnared therein to his own destruction. Snares are laid for the Church of God in modern times, and some of these will doubtless prove the reverse of the original intent. We are invited with persuasive voice to enter the pathway of severe historical criticism and of physical science, and it is hoped thereby to disenchant us of the fascination of a supernatural Christianity. Men are as confident of the result as was Saul when he gave Michal to David (ch. xviii. 21); but we have nothing to fear, for criticism and science thus far only bring out the truth that the CHRIST is unexplainable on any hypothesis but that of the supernatural; and hence, on the ordinary principles of scientific research, men are bound to accept that hypothesis, or else declare themselves unscientific. "He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet" (1 Cor. xv. 25).

IV. That ALTHOUGH IMPERFECT MORAL CONDUCT MAY SUBSERVE THE INTERESTS OF GOD'S SERVANTS, IT NEVERTHELESS IS DISHONOURING TO THEM. Michal acted a lie, and also told deliberate lies, in order to shield David and then herself. The issue was advantageous to David, as it put a wide distance between him and his pursuers. The statement of the facts in Scripture is by no means identical with approval of them. God's purposes have sometimes been furthered by the actions of imperfect men, but the actions have been their own, and never have had Divine approval. It is true still that many a defective "earthen vessel" is the instrument of good. Indeed, were God to refrain from working out his blessed purposes of mercy till we were all pure as the angels, the prospects of the world would be dark enough. The safe rule is "not to do evil that good may come." Good does come often in spite of evil, as when God's truth is diffused in spite of the mixed motives and strifes of those engaged in his service, and when comfort and joy flow to the poor from money given even for purposes far from benevolent. The command of God is "Lie not one to another" (Levit. xix. 11). It is not for us to say that dangers will be avoided by occasional lies. The principle involved in truth-speaking is of vast importance in all times and places, and is worth the sacrifice of much for its vindication. Suppose a man is slain rather than utter a lie, does not his martyrdom for truth, in the enduring moral sphere, bring greater good to moral beings and himself than could have come from trampling on a sacred principle for a present advantage? God, moreover, does not leave his servants when they do right. Had Michal stated the facts she would have saved her husband from slander, and there were ten thousand ways by which God could have frustrated the purpose of the men and shielded David. Our duty is to be true and leave consequences to God. God does not lie—we are children of God; Christ did not lie—we are followers of Christ. We may be sure that permanent good must ensue on our being conformed to Christ, the image of God. There is a gain which is loss, and a loss which is gain (Ps. xxxvii. 3—8, 27, 28; Mark viii. 36; Ephes. v. 9; vi. 14).

General lessons:—1. The influence of Christians may restrain the development of sin in some of its grosser forms, but it is an imperfect Christianity which rests in that. 2. The "wrath of man" is made to praise God, in that persecutions issue in greater spirituality of mind and fitness for permanent service (Rom. v. 3—5). 3. We need not fret and be uneasy about the snares of the wicked if only we are in God's service, as time is on our side (Ps. xxxvii.). 4. Christians should strive to put down all practical forms of falsehood prevalent in society, and train children in a severe love of truth at any cost.

Vers. 18—24.—*Saintly refuge and spiritual restraint.* The facts are—1. David takes refuge with Samuel at Naioth in Ramah. 2. The messengers sent by Saul to take David are restrained in the presence of Samuel and the prophets, and themselves begin to prophesy. 3. Other messengers come under the same influence. 4. Venturing to go himself, he, on approaching the place, also falls under the prophetic influence, and is utterly overcome by it in the presence of Samuel. Human wisdom may be almost confounded by the prominent facts of this section, but this must not be taken as proof of our infallibility, nor of the unfitness of the event with the order of Divine providence. Had it been left to man to invent and regulate the process by which the earth and life upon it arrived at the forms now familiar to us, would he have introduced some of those ancient physical conditions and changes which must have been so utterly unlike what now prevail? The convulsions, the transformations, the climatic conditions, the huge forms of life of some past ages are as much unlike the present facts as the spiritual manifestations of the prophetic schools are unlike the orderly course of Christian influence. It is only of late years that men have in some degree traced the naturalness of the physical process, and even now there is diversity of opinion on the subject. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, if, in man's comparative ignorance of the unseen spiritual sphere in which the great development of God's purpose in Christ really occurs, he should not be able to supply all the links connecting the spiritual manifestations of the era of Samuel with the rigid legal era of Moses and the more calm and orderly methods of the Christian dispensation.

"Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain;
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain."

Looking at the teaching of the section, we see—

I. AN IMPORTANT SPIRITUAL POWER BEING NOURISHED AMIDST THE TURMOIL OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS. While battles were being fought, and the kingdom was troubled with the unsatisfactory condition of the court, Samuel was quietly gathering around himself a band of men who, devoting attention to the records of Israel's history, the exercise of psalmody and music, and the spiritual interests of men, were becoming a power to influence the national life in days to come. The extent and strength of that influence cannot be minutely traced, because of its spiritual nature; but the higher tone of national life during the reigns of David and Solomon was doubtless largely due to it. *Centres of spiritual influence are formed* when the great political world is intent on its wars and intrigues. Notably, Christianity arose and found its first nourishment amidst the quiet valleys and hills of Palestine while Roman imperialism was intent on conquests and ignorant almost of its existence. The band of men and women who met for prayer in an upper room (Acts i. 13, 14) cultivated there the power which afterwards penetrated into all parts of the Roman empire. The quiet retreats and colleges of the middle ages in some respects were the seats of an influence which the world could ill spare. During the close of the last century small bodies of Christians nourished here and there the missionary spirit which has since affected the destinies of millions in the East and South. Amidst all the conflicts of politics and controversies of science and worry of commerce there are quiet fellowships of Christians devoted to the nourishment of a life destined to conserve and elevate the national life. The *Christian Church has need to form and sustain "schools of the prophets"* to meet the demands of the age. Samuel's course and the injunctions of Paul to Timothy (1 Tim. iii. 1—7; v. 21, 22; 2 Tim. ii. 4; cf. Ephes. iv. 11—15) suggest that it is the duty of the Church as a whole, and not to be left as a private enterprise to a few zealous individuals, to provide for the training of men for spiritual service. Had more care been devoted to this in years past it had been well for the world.

II. THE SORROWFUL SOUL SEEKS REFUGE FROM THE CARES AND TROUBLES OF LIFE IN FELLOWSHIP WITH THE DEVOUT. It was a spiritual instinct that drew David to Samuel. The penalties of public life had already fallen heavily upon him. He had found, even in the beginning of his career of service to mankind, that "offences must needs come." The whole tone of life around the throne was out of accord with his most cherished aspirations. He was conscious of being misunderstood and misrepresented. The earlier days of quiet service and holy communion with God were now but sweet memories, bringing the bitter realities of daily life into stronger relief. With bounding heart and rapid flight, therefore, did he seek consolation, counsel, and rest with the honoured man who once anointed him to some unexplained service. Many have been, and still are, *in full sympathy with the troubled David.* The devout heart is brave, and dares not shun to fight the holy battles of the Lord in daily life. Religion is to flourish in face of evil and care, and not away in solitude. The business of life must not be left to the greedy and the vile. The great prayer was not that the disciples should be taken from the world, but that they should be kept from its evil (John xvii. 15; cf. 1 Cor. v. 10). Yet human nature cries out under the strain; the spiritual mind is disgusted with the sins it witnesses; the sense of belonging to a higher citizenship rises in force; sympathy with kindred spirits is longed for; the support of stronger natures is a pressing need; and opportunities for prayer and for contemplation on the loftier aims of life are earnestly desired. Under this common inspiration, Jacob and Moses and Elijah sought each his "Bethel," and found strength for the coming trials and relief from present cares. It was in the same participation in human infirmities and sorrows that Christ loved to retire from the alien world to seek solace with his Father and with his people (Matt. xiv. 23; xvii. 1; Mark vi. 31; John xi. 3, 32—36; xii. 1, 2; Heb. v. 7). For the same reason we love to retire from the turmoil of life to the fellowship of a

pious home, a meeting for prayer and counsel, and the service of the sanctuary. It is helpful to court occasional retirement. The "communion of saints" should be more than an article in our creed.

III. A DIVINE RESTRAINT IS PUT ON THE ENEMIES OF GOD'S SERVANTS. Saul's wicked desperation was great when he sent to Naioth to take David, and at its highest pitch when, after three despatches of men, he ventured to go to the abode of Samuel on a cruel errand. Hitherto Saul appeared to be fighting solely against David; but now that the mysterious spirit of prophecy came upon his messengers and rendered them harmless, it ought to have been obvious to him that in persecuting David he was at war with God. The knowledge of this mysterious restraint on them could not but add to his mental confusion, though it was not sufficient to the subjugation of his wild passion. Yet Saul was not bereft of reason; and could he have travelled to Ramah on such an errand without passing in review events prior and subsequent to his last intercourse with Samuel? (ch. xv. 26—35). Must he not have gone back in thought to the fearful day when the prophet declared the doom of his reign; the earlier days when as king he received the cheers of the people and the instructions of the prophet (ch. x. 24, 25); and the still earlier time when, fresh from his anointing, on meeting a band of prophets, the spirit of prophecy came on him and turned him into another man? (ch. x. 5—9). And now, after long separation, he was drawing near to that revered man of God and the company of the prophets, not the former Saul, full of hope and courage, but a man sinking deeper and deeper in sin, and with only the courage bred of remorse. If he was to be restrained and rendered harmless, what more natural method—more in harmony with the characteristics of the age and locality, and the psychological facts—than that for a season the old prophetic excitement should come upon him? It is no solitary fact that the mental and moral atmosphere of a place exercises power over men. The *main truth, however, is that God restrains.* Divine restraint enters into all things. The *nature* of things is but their limit assigned by God. The original relation of forces in the physical world is so settled by God that their interaction shall be bounded by definite results. To every effect wrought out in the development of the material universe it has been virtually said, "Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther." Scripture makes known the restraint which God puts on hearts and on moral beings. Lions dare not touch a Daniel. Evil spirits beg permission of Christ before they can go forth. Men sent to seize the Saviour were unable to fulfil their mission (John vii. 46), and soldiers were powerless in his presence (John xviii. 3—6). The history of the Church and of individual Christian life brings out instances of the restraining power which silently lays hold of man and renders his enmity innocuous. "It shall not come nigh thee" (Ps. xci. 7) has often been verified. In all these instances we have but glimpses of that unseen Power by which in due time all principalities and powers, and whatever opposeth itself to God and his Church, shall be either turned unto him or deprived of their power of injury (Isa. xi. 9; xxxv. 9, 10; 1 Cor. xv. 24—26; Phil. ii. 9—11; Col. i. 19, 20; Rev. xxi. 22—27).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—7. (GIBEAH.)—*The proof of true friendship.* Adversity is the touchstone of friendship, as of many other things; and its experience, sooner or later, is certain. Notwithstanding the secret jealousy and plotting of Saul, the prosperity of David continued to increase; and at length, unable to endure the sight of it, he "spoke to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, about killing David." Persons in high places are generally attended by some men who, like Doeg (ch. xxi. 7; xxii. 22) and Cush (Ps. vii., inscription), are ready to carry out their evil wishes. The danger of David was now imminent. And with the revelation of it to him by Jonathan his troubles began. Whilst adversity shows the insincerity and worthlessness of false friends, it also shows the sincerity and worth of true. "In adverse hours the friendship of the good shines most." The proof of true friendship appears in—

I. THE STEADFASTNESS OF ITS ATTACHMENT. "Jonathan delighted much in David." Notwithstanding—1. *Misrepresentation* on the part of enemies. There can be no doubt that Saul spoke of David as treacherously aiming at the throne. The mouths

of others were full of detraction and calumny, by which they sought to destroy him as with sharp swords (Ps. lix. 7). 2. *Urgent claims* on the part of friends and kindred. A father's wishes are sometimes opposed to a friend's welfare. 3. *Self-interest.* If David were spared Jonathan's accession to the throne would be jeopardised (ch. xxi. 13). But true friendship stands the test. It "thinketh no evil" of a friend, will do him no wrong, nor admit the least feeling of jealousy or envy. The wintry storm only serves to strengthen its attachment. "Yet these two charges of inconstancy and of weakness condemn most men: either in their prosperity they despise a friend, or in his troubles they desert him" (Cicero).

II. THE FAITHFULNESS OF ITS COMMUNICATIONS. "And Jonathan told David," &c. (vers. 2, 3). 1. It reveals the *whole truth* and conceals nothing. "If you think any one your friend in whom you do not put the same confidence as in yourself you know not the real power of friendship" (Seneca). 2. It gives the *best counsel* in its power. 3. It *promises aid* as it may be needed.

III. THE SELF-DEVOTION OF ITS ENDEAVOURS. "And Jonathan spake good of David," &c. (vers. 4, 5). 1. It undergoes *personal risk* in undertaking the cause of a friend. 2. It makes *earnest entreaty* on behalf of the absent one; asserting his innocence, enumerating his services, setting forth his claims upon gratitude and esteem, and remonstrating against his being injured "without cause" (ver. 5; John xv. 25). 3. It shows a *prudent and respectful regard* for those whom it wishes to influence. In Jonathan prudence and principle were combined. "Prudence did not go so far as to make him silent about the sin which Saul was purposing to commit; principle was not so asserted as to arouse his father's indignation" (W. M. Taylor).

IV. THE VALUE OF ITS ACHIEVEMENTS. "And Saul hearkened," &c. (vers. 6, 7). "How forcible are right words!" Even the heart of Saul is moved, and his better feelings gain the ascendancy. How often by a generous and prudent attempt at peace-making is—1. A threatening *evil* averted. 2. A *reconciliation* of the alienated effected. 3. *Intercourse* between friends renewed, "as in times past." "Blessed are the peacemakers," &c. (Matt. v. 9). "There are four, young man" (says an Eastern sage), "who, seeming to be friends, are enemies in disguise—the rapacious friend, the man of much profession, the flatterer, and the dissolute companion. These four, young man, are true friends—the *watchful* friend, the friend who is *the same in prosperity and adversity*, the friend who gives *good advice*, and the *sympathising* friend" ('Contem. Rev.,' xxvii. 421).—D.

Vers. 8—18. (GIBEAH.)—*David's escape from court.* "And David fled, and escaped that night" (ver. 10). "There was war again" (ch. xvii.; xviii. 5, 30), victory by David again, an evil spirit upon Saul again (ch. xvi. 23; xviii. 10); and, as David once more sat in the palace, "playing with his hand," the king not merely brandished his spear as before, but hurled it at him. It was his last attempt of the kind. After what had taken place he might not be trusted again; and David fled, first to his own house, and during the night from the city. It is one of the *memorable nights* of the Bible. 1. That night was the commencement of his *open persecution by Saul*, and of the long and varied troubles he experienced as an outlaw. He had been at court some three or four years, and now at three-and-twenty went forth to his seven years' wanderings (2 Sam. v. 5: "He lived seventy years"—Josephus). 2. That night was, as is commonly thought, the occasion of the composition of *the first of David's psalms.* PSALM LIX., 'the refuge of the persecuted,' "is perhaps the oldest of the Davidic psalms that have come down to us" (Delitzsch). It is not necessary to suppose that it was actually written on the night of his escape. The thoughts and feelings then entertained may have been penned subsequently; perhaps while he continued at Ramah with Samuel and "the prophets" (vers. 18, 20). Other psalms have been referred by some to the same occasion—viz., Ps. vi., vii., xi. "His harp was his companion in his flight, and even in the midst of peril the poet's nature appears which regards all life as materials for song, and the devout spirit appears which regards all trials as occasions of praise" (Maclaren). How wide and deep was the stream of sacred song of which this was the commencement! 3. That night afforded one of the most remarkable instances of the protecting and guiding *providence of God* by which the life of David was manifestly ordered. Notice—

I. HIS DANGER, and the anxiety and distress by which it was naturally attended (vers. 11, 14, 17, compared with Ps. lix.). Adversity—1. Often follows closely upon *prosperity*. In the morning David occupied a position of high honour as the king's son-in-law, the successful general, the popular hero; at night he was hiding in secret and fleeing for his life. Vicissitude is the law of life; and none, however exalted, may boast of their security or continuance (Job xxix. 18). 2. Appears sometimes to fall most heavily upon *the godly man*. "Not for my transgression nor for my sin" (Ps. lix. 3). Why should it be permitted? To test, manifest, strengthen, and perfect his character. David had been tried by prosperity, he must also be tried by adversity. 3. Is due, in great measure, to the opposition and persecution of *the ungodly*. What a picture is here presented of the enemies of David, "when Saul sent messengers, and they watched the house to kill him"! (Ps. lix. 3, 6, 14). And what a revelation does it make of the wickedness of the human heart, which was consummated in the crucifying of the Lord of glory! "As then he that was born after the flesh," &c. (Gal. iv. 29). The conflict is renewed in every age and in every individual life. "All that will live godly," &c. (2 Tim. iii. 12). 4. Leads the good man to *more entire trust* in God and more earnest prayer. This is one of its chief purposes.

> "Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God! . . .
> *O Jehovah, God of hosts*, God of Israel! . . . .
> O my Strength, on thee will I wait,
> For God is my Fortress."

5. Is never so bitter to him as trouble to the wicked, for he has *peace within* and undying hope. How different was it with David in this respect from what it was with Saul! 6. However long the good man may suffer from the persecution of the wicked, his deliverance is *certain;* for "God is Ruler in Jacob," &c. (Ps. lix. 13). "By him actions are weighed."

II. HIS DELIVERANCE (vers. 11, 12, 17, 18). The interposition of Providence, to which it was due—1. Is not made without the watchful and diligent use of appropriate *means*. David did not presumptuously wait in the palace or his own house, but availed himself of the opportunity of escaping. "When they persecute you," &c. (Matt. x. 23). 2. Is shown in *turning to good* what was meant for evil. The snare that was woven for his soul (ch. xvii. 21; ver. 11; Ps. lix. 3) aided his escape. 3. Often fills the wicked with *disappointment* and confusion when most confident of success (ver. 17). 4. Provides a *home* for the good man when driven out of their society. "Came to Samuel and told him all," &c. That night he was received by his revered friend, to whose instructions he had doubtless often listened; and with whom else could he have found such sympathy and shelter? 5. Causes him to *render praise* to God.

> "But, as for me, I will sing of thy strength,
> Yea, I will shout aloud of thy mercy in the morning;
> For thou hast been a Fortress to me,
> And a Refuge in the day when I was in distress:
> O my Strength, unto thee will I harp,
> For God is my Fortress, my merciful God."

6. Conduces to the *benefit* of many. These Psalms of David—the result (under "an unction from the Holy One") of his distresses and deliverances—are among our greatest spiritual treasures. "They are for all time. They never can be outgrown. No dispensation while the world lasts and continues what it is can ever raise us above the reach or the need of them. They describe every spiritual vicissitude, they speak to all classes of minds, they command every natural emotion. They are penitential, jubilant, adorative, deprecatory;—they are tender, mournful, joyous, majestic;—soft as the descent of dew; low as the whisper of love; loud as the voice of thunder; terrible as the almightiness of God!" (Binney, 'Service of Song in the House of the Lord').—D.

Vers. 11—17. (GIBEAH.)—*Michal.* The women mentioned in the Books of Samuel are, for the most part, distinguished for their eminent piety. But what shall be said

of Michal, the wife of David? She was a daughter of Saul, inherited much of his temperament and disposition, and (unlike Jonathan) was without the religious principle by which they might have been controlled and sanctified. She was—1. *Impressionable and impulsive.* Fascinated by his personal appearance and popularity, the young princess "loved David," and made no secret of her affection; but she does not appear to have perceived anything of his highest qualities. The relation of husband and wife, no less than that of friends, is firmest when sanctified by common faith and love toward God. 2. *Capable of a noble action.* Under the influence of strong feeling she warned David of his danger and aided his escape, at the risk of her own life. 3. *Designing and deceptive.* Her quick-wittedness devised the means of escape, deceived the messengers of Saul to gain time, and invented a ready story to disarm her father's wrath. Her fear of her father was greater than her love for truth; and her love for her husband greater than her hatred of sin. "She could tell lies for David, but she had not the courage and the faith to go with him into suffering, or to tell the truth for him" (W. M. Taylor). 4. *Superstitious.* Teraphim (ch. xv. 23). See Bible Dictionaries. It is not said that David knew of her possession of these idolatrous objects. 5. *Changeable and wayward.* During the wanderings of David she was given in marriage to Phalti, apparently without reluctance (ch. xxv. 44); and (as appears when restored to David) "she had evidently gained his affections; he most likely had won hers" (2 Sam. iii. 16). 6. *Proud, jealous, and scornful.* Proud of her birth and rank, jealous of her rivals, Abigail and Ahinoam (2 Sam. vi. 16, 20—23; Blunt, 'Script. Coincidences,' p. 126), and scornful toward her husband. "She despised him in her heart."

> "Preceding the blest vessel, onward came,
> With light dance leaping, girt in humble guise,
> Israel's sweet harper; in that hap he seemed
> Less and yet more kingly. Opposite
> At a great palace, from the lattice forth
> Looked Michal, like a lady full of scorn
> And sorrow" (Dante, 'Purg.' x.).

7. *Unspiritual, and destitute of sympathy* with the feelings of boundless gratitude, joy, and adoration expressed before the Lord.—D.

Ver. 20. (RAMAH.)—*Samuel the president.* Of Samuel one more glimpse is afforded before his life closes. After his separation from Saul he appears to have devoted himself to the training of a body of younger men to carry on his prophetic work. The flight of David to him shows that an intimate relationship had previously subsisted between them. He went to him for counsel and sanctuary, and the intercourse of the young hero with the old prophet is full of suggestion. Samuel might have advised him to make armed resistance against the godless tyranny of Saul; in which, with his great popularity, he might have succeeded, but only at the cost of a long and ruinous civil war. As at the rejection of Saul he avoided violent measures in support of the theocracy, so now he counselled the same course, and took David with him from his own house to Naioth (dwellings), or the common residence of "the company of the prophets" (ch. x. 10), in the neighbourhood of Ramah. It was the chief home of order, light, and religion; the centre of spiritual influence. "He found there only temporary safety, indeed, from Saul's persecution, but abiding consolation and strength in the inspired prophetic word, in the blessings of the fraternal community, and in the consoling and elevating power of the holy poetic art, whereby he doubtless stood in peculiarly intimate connection with the community" (Erdmann). "God intended to make David not a warrior and a king only, but a prophet too. As the field fitted him for the first and the court for the second, so Naioth shall fit him for the third" (Hall). How long he continued is not stated; but, on hearing of his refuge, Saul sent three times to take him by force, and ultimately went himself for the purpose. The messengers found an assembly (*lahak*, used here only, probably by a transposition of letters, i. q. *kahal*—Gesenius) of prophets engaged in religious exercises under the presidency of Samuel. It is not necessary to suppose that the service, which may have had a special character, was

conducted in a large hall, though there may have been such; it was probably in the open air, and capable of being seen and heard from a distance (ver. 22). With respect more particularly to Samuel, notice—

I. HIS HONOURED POSITION—"standing as appointed over them," or as leader; not probably appointed by any official act of theirs, but generally recognised and honoured, and directing their holy exercises. The honour in which he was held was due to—1. The pre-eminent *authority* he possessed as a prophet of the Lord (ch. iii. 19). 2. The high *character* he had so long sustained in that office, and the course of labour he had pursued. 3. The *special work* he had accomplished in gathering around him such young men as seemed to be qualified by their gifts and piety to act as prophets in Israel, and forming them into a school or college of prophets. He was the venerable founder of their order, and reaped the reward of his labours in their reverence and affection, and still more in their devotion to Jehovah and their zeal for his honour.

II. HIS PROPHETIC ASSOCIATES. They were "prophets," not "sons" or disciples "of the prophets" (2 Kings ii. 3), who seem to have occupied in later times a more dependent and inferior position. They were a union or free association of men "endowed with the Spirit of God for the purpose of carrying on their work, the feeble powers of junior members being directed and strengthened by those of a higher class" (Kitto, 'Cyc. of Bib. Lit.'). Among them probably were Gad (ch. xxii. 5; 2 Sam. xxiv. 11), Nathan (2 Sam. vii. 2; xii. 1), and Heman, the grandson of Samuel (1 Chron. vi. 33; xxv. 5; "the king's seer," &c.). 1. They had been under his *instruction* in the knowledge of God and his law, and, as subservient to this, in reading and writing, poetry, music, and singing. "Education is not a panacea for all human ills, but it is an indispensable condition both of individual and of national progress" ('Expositor,' iii. 344). 2. They were in sympathy with his *purposes* concerning the true welfare of the people of Israel, and strove to carry them into effect. They formed "a compact phalanx to stand against the corruption which had penetrated so deeply into the nation, and to bring back the rebellious to the law and the testimony" (Keil). 3. They were endowed, like Samuel himself, with a peculiar measure of the *Divine Spirit* for the accomplishment of their work. By his influence they were drawn together, variously gifted, and sometimes impelled to ecstatic utterances.

III. HIS DEVOUT OCCUPATION. He presided over the prophets, and took part with them in "prophesying," or uttering with a loud voice the praises of God. His last recorded act was one of worship, and under his influence David's intense love for public worship was probably acquired. The service was—1. Accompanied with *music* (as in ch. x. 10). "A principal part of their occupation consisted—under the guidance of some prophet of superior authority, and more peculiarly under the Divine influence, as moderator and preceptor—in celebrating the praises of Almighty God, in hymns and poetry, with choral chaunts, accompanied by stringed instruments and pipes" (Lowth). 2. *Edifying.* Whilst their utterance expressed their inward feeling, it was also the means of teaching and exhorting one another, and of "awakening holy susceptibilities and emotions in the soul, and of lifting up the spirit to God, and so preparing it for the reception of Divine revelations." 3. *United*, which tends by the power of sympathy to intensify feeling, strengthen faith, enlarge desire, and perfect those dispositions in connection with which worship is acceptable to God.

IV. HIS POWERFUL INFLUENCE. "The Spirit of God came upon the messengers," &c. The immediate effect was to transform these men, to protect David from their power, and to afford a sign of the opposition of God to the designs of Saul. More generally, the influence of Samuel was put forth in and through the "company of prophets" for—1. The maintenance of the principle of the *theocracy*, which was imperilled by the conduct of Saul. The prophets were its true representatives and upholders in every subsequent age. 2. The elevation of the *people* in wisdom and righteousness. Their work was to teach, reprove, and exhort those with whom they came into contact; and "through such a diffusion of prophetic training the higher truths of prophecy must have been most rapidly diffused among the people, and a new and higher life formed in the nation" (Ewald). 3. The *preparation* of men for

a better time—the advent of Christ, the outpouring of the Spirit, and the proclamation of the gospel. The prophets, not the priests, were the true forerunners of the gospel ministry.—D.

Vers. 22—24. (RAMAH.)—*The meeting of three remarkable men.* This appears to have been the only occasion on which Samuel, Saul, and David were present at the same time and place. The meeting was a notable one, and may be compared with others (Exod. x. 16; 1 Kings xviii. 16; Acts xxv. 24). Besides the three men just mentioned, there was also present One infinitely greater, and, although invisible, his power was displayed in a marvellous manner. Considered in relation to the *Divine power*, the narrative sets before us—

I. AN AGED PROPHET IMBUED WITH FEARLESS DIGNITY. His danger was great. What Saul might do may be judged from the fear which Samuel expressed on a former occasion (ch. xvi. 2), and from what he actually did not long afterwards (ch. xxii. 18, 19). But the prophet went on with his holy service calm and undismayed. He was inwardly sustained by Divine power, as others have since been in danger and suffering (Acts xvi. 25). Such fearlessness is possessed by God's servants in connection with—1. A firm persuasion that they are in *the path of duty.* They have within "a peace above all earthly dignities, a still and quiet conscience." If conscience "does make cowards of us all," it also makes us heroes. And

> "He that hath light within his own clear breast
> May sit in the centre and enjoy bright day;
> But he that hides a dark soul and foul thoughts
> Benighted walks under the midday sun" (Milton, 'Comus').

2. A vivid realisation of the *presence and might of the Lord.* Faith "sees him who is invisible" and "the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire" (2 Kings vi. 17). 3. A strong assurance of *deliverance* from their adversaries.

II. A PERSECUTING MONARCH TURNED INTO A HARMLESS ENTHUSIAST. The Divine power was exerted first upon Saul's messengers and then upon himself. In a somewhat similar manner, if not to the same extent, it is often exerted upon evil and persecuting men—1. In connection with the utterances of *the praises of God* by his servants (2 Chron. xx. 22; Ps. cxlix. 6). Instances are not unknown in which "one that believeth not" has come into their assembly, and, hearing their praises, has fallen down on his face and worshipped God (1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25). This was not the first time that Saul was so affected, and the recollection of his earlier experience had probably some influence upon him. But *then* it was a sign that the power of God was for him, *now* that it was against him. 2. In order to *restrain* the wicked from carrying out their evil designs. He who holds the hearts of men in his hand thereby says, "Do my prophets no harm" (1 Chron. xvi. 22). 3. In order to *restore* them to the right way. It was to Saul more than a warning that he was fighting against God. "He was seized by this mighty influence of the Spirit of God in a more powerful manner than his servants were, both because he had most obstinately resisted the leadings of Divine grace, and also in order that, if it were possible, *his hard heart might be broken* and subdued by the power of grace. If, however, he should nevertheless continue obstinately in his rebellion against God, he would then fall under the judgment of hardening, which would be speedily followed by his destruction" (Keil).

III. AN INNOCENT FUGITIVE RESCUED FROM IMPENDING DESTRUCTION. David was saved from the hand of Saul, and even (as it would appear) formally reconciled to him (ch. xx. 18, 27). The putting forth of the power of God was to him—1. An indication of the varied and abundant *resources of God* to protect in the greatest peril. 2. An assurance of *Divine approbation* in the way of trust and obedience. 3. An encouragement to *patient endurance.* He might be tempted to reach the goal for which, as he was now probably fully aware, he was destined (ch. xx. 15; xxiii. 17) by violent measures; but ever as he thought on this scene, together with the counsel and the whole course of the venerable prophet, he would feel that "the way of order is the best."

"The way of order, though it lead through windings,
Is the best. Right forward goes the lightning
And the cannon-ball; quick, by the nearest path,
They come, opening with murderous crash their way
To blast and ruin! My son, the quiet road
Which men frequent, where peace and blessings travel,
Follows the river's course, the valley's bendings;
Modestly skirts the corn-field and the vineyard,
Revering property's appointed bounds,
And leading safe, though slower, to the mark" (Schiller, 'Wallenstein').
D.

Vers. 18—24.—*Religious consolation and religious excitement.* The consolation was tasted by David; the excitement was shown by Saul.

I. CONSOLATION. We are not surprised to learn that David, when driven from his house by the deadly malice of the king, betook himself to the prophet Samuel at his residence in Ramah. In reporting the treatment he had received to the venerable prophet, he reported it to God, whose authority was represented by Samuel. The path of his life seemed to be blocked by the undeserved ill-will of Saul. Was there any further instruction for him from the Lord? There is no evidence that Samuel had held any communication with David from the time of his visit to Bethlehem to anoint the young shepherd; but it may be assumed that he had kept a watchful eye on his career, and prayed much for a youth with so great a destiny. Some painter ought to show us their meeting: the aged prophet, his countenance traced with sorrow for his own unworthy sons, and not less for the untoward career of Saul, receiving with outstretched arms and ready sympathy the fugitive David, in the very perfection of his gallant youth, yet coming with weary steps and dejected visage. The old man took the young chief to shelter with him in Naioth, where was a settlement of prophets—a group of dwellings where servants of God lived in retreat and cultivated sacred song and fraternal fellowship. David was not to tarry long in such a refuge, but it was good for him to visit it. It solaced and strengthened his spirit in God. Undisturbed by the jealousies of the court and the dangerous frenzy of the king, surrounded by an atmosphere of devotion, mingling not merely with aged seers like Samuel, but also with young men of his own age whose time was spent in sacred study and brightened with music and song, David must have been in his best element. He was a good soldier, and happy at the head of his troops, charging the Philistines. But he was still more a thinker, a poet, a minstrel, a prophet, a man of fervent spirit toward God, and so must have been happier in the goodly fellowship of the prophets at Naioth than in the rush of battle and the pride of victory. There is no record of the words of consolation and counsel which Samuel spoke to him; but doubtless we have traces and echoes of them in those psalms in which David has discussed the afflictions of the servants of Jehovah, and sung of their ultimate deliverance and reward. Ps. lix. is traditionally ascribed to the period when the armed men sent by Saul surrounded David's house to put him to death. As it is highly artificial in structure, it can hardly have been composed on the spur of the moment. Very probably it was written at Naioth while the impression of the danger was fresh, and was sung among the prophets there. In the case of David we read of no agitation or excitement. It would be little surprising if he, fleeing for his life, had been overcome by emotion when he found himself in safeguard. But all we read of his bearing is rational and calm.

II. EXCITEMENT. It was in the servants of Saul, and subsequently in Saul himself, that a religious excitement appeared. Three successive bands were despatched by the king to seize his son-in-law, but with a strange result. As each band saw the venerated Samuel stand forth at the head of the prophets, they feared to do violence to one under such august protection. Nay, more; the spiritual enthusiasm of the prophets communicated itself to them and overmastered them, so that they forgot their errand and joined in the burst of holy song. King Saul himself, provoked by the failure of his emissaries, went to Naioth, and he was more completely overpowered than they. We have seen already that his temperament was exceedingly amenable to the impressions of music and song. We remember how he had flung

himself among the prophets in the very outset of his history; and although sadly deteriorated in character, he still retained his early sensibilities. Indeed, through the very disorder of his faculties he had become more susceptible than ever of religious excitement; so when he reached Naioth he was quite beyond himself. The spiritual electricity of the place was too much for him, and he fell into a very paroxysm of enthusiasm. At first when, on the way to Naioth, he lifted his voice in some sacred chant, it was well, and the historian does not hesitate to say that "the Spirit of God was upon him." But at Naioth he behaved like a fanatical devotee of some heathen god, or a wild dervish of the East. He threw off his royal tunic, and after long and exhausting exercise of body and spirit lay in nothing but his under-dress, prone and probably motionless, on the ground for "all that day and all that night." But though "among the prophets," he was not of them. It was a mere fit of fervour soon to pass away. The heart of Saul was by this time hopelessly "jangled and out of tune." The subject of temporary religious excitement needs to be carefully thought out and discreetly handled. But it can never be fully explained—at all events not till more is known of the action of the nervous system, and till more light falls on the mysterious question of contagious emotion and imitative cerebral stimulation. One or two things, however, are plain enough, and deserve to be noted; *e. g.*— 1. *There is a religious excitation which carries with it no moral influence whatever.* It is not feigned or insincere. He who is the subject of it is really lifted up or carried along as with a rush of earnest feeling. He cries for mercy; he prays with strong supplication; or he sings of pardon and of unutterable joys. His emotions are all aglow, and his brain is stirred to unusual activity. This occurs the more easily if one who is constitutionally accessible to such gusts of feeling falls among others who are much in earnest. He finds himself where prayers burst forth from importunate souls, and hymns are sung with a swing of enthusiasm. At once he feels as those around him do. Yet there is no change of his moral nature; he is merely a person of susceptible or imitative constitution, who has caught the contagion of religion from others, yet has not come, and may never come, to repentance. It is not for a moment to be denied that in many cases a real moral and spiritual change is produced in the midst of much excitement; but the excitement is only an accompaniment of the change—perhaps necessary for some minds, but always fraught with some degree of danger. The only thing of lasting value is the exercise of conscience, and the turning of the affections and will to God in Christ. 2. *The degree in which new religious emotion overpowers the body is generally proportioned to the previous ignorance of the mind, or its estrangement from God.* David at Naioth fell into no frenzy, lay in no swoon, because he was a man of God, and devout feeling flowed through him unimpeded, found in him a congenial heart. But Saul had been in an evil mood; envy and murder were in his breast. So, when a pure and sacred impulse came upon him, it met resistance; and there were bodily manifestations which, far from being marks of grace, were signs of a moral state at variance with the Spirit of God. This case should teach caution in ascribing any religious value to prostrations, trances, and long fasts. These things most frequently occur in cases of a morbid hysterical temperament, or in very ignorant persons who are disturbed and terrified, or in instances where religious feeling, suddenly flowing in on unprepared minds, encounters obstinate obstruction. When the mind is thoughtful and refined, or when the heart is gentle and open to any good influx, religious fervour seldom causes any disorder in the nervous system or the physical constitution. We may be reminded here that David could show no small excitement, for he danced before the ark in the sight of all Israel (2 Sam. vi. 14). True; but in all the enthusiasm of that great occasion King David was sober-minded and self-possessed. He had good reasons for leading the sacred processional dance, as may afterwards be shown; but, far from giving way to excitement, or losing his senses like Saul, he went calmly through the duties of an eventful and fatiguing day. He offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. Then he blessed the people, causing provisions to be distributed among them. And after all this "David returned to bless his house." Such is the enthusiasm we desire To be full of joy before the Lord, but at the same time to be of a healthy mind, ready for public or private duty hour by hour. But we see no good in nervous excitement or hysterical ecstasy. When we consider that the Bible is a collection of

Eastern books, and that the East has always been the home of strange religious extravagances, we recognise in the well-balanced sobriety of mind which pervades the Bible a new proof of its Divine inspiration. It takes notice of the varied phenomenal effects of strong religious feeling on the human frame; it tells of long prostrations, excited movements, and prophetic trances; but it always attaches moral significance and value not to such abnormal conditions, but to the effects which appear and remain in character and life. The greatest of all, the Man Christ Jesus, the Lord whom we are to love and follow, is shown to us full of a sublime enthusiasm, but full at the same time of meekness and of wisdom. The Scriptures teach us to be calm and fervent, fervent and calm. If rushes of devout emotion come upon us, be it so. If men who have no faith call us fanatical and mad, be it so. Such men said of our Master, "He rageth, and hath a demon;" and of Paul, "Thou art beside thyself." But let the evidence of our Christian faith and principle be found not in any moods of excitement, but in the moral excellence we exhibit, the fruit of the Spirit we bring forth. So shall we find consolation and strength when others only expose their weakness; and every pause at Naioth, or the place of prayer and holy fellowship, will brace our spirits for the trials that must yet befall us before we are perfected.—F

EXPOSITION.

JONATHAN ENDEAVOURS TO RECONCILE SAUL TO DAVID (CH. XX.).

CHAPTER XX.

JONATHAN'S COVENANT WITH DAVID RENEWED (vers. 1—23). Ver. 1.—**David fled from Naioth.** While Saul was under the influence of the prophetic enthusiasm David escaped; but it is evident that this visit to Samuel, and the extraordinary occurrences which attended it, were not without a good influence for the time upon Saul's mind. Some sort of reconciliation must have been patched up, probably by the mediation of Samuel; for David assumed that at the new moon he would be expected to dine at the king's table (ver. 5), and that Saul would look for him as a matter of course (ver. 6). We find, moreover, that his place was made ready, not only on the new moon (ver. 25), but also on the following day (ver. 26). But whatever professions Saul may have made to Samuel, it is evident that no promise had been made personally to David, and taught by past experience that the intention of slaying him had grown more and more fixed in the king's mind, he feels that his position is full of danger, and takes counsel with Jonathan, with the view of learning whether he might venture once again to take his place as a member of Saul's family.

Ver. 2.—**God forbid.** An exclamation of horror; literally, "Far be it" (see on ch. ix. 45). In spite of the many proofs of Saul's bitter hatred, Jonathan cannot believe that after all that had taken place at Ramah his father would still persist in his murderous purpose. He further assures David that Saul would do nothing without telling him; literally, without uncovering his ear, without telling it him privately (see on ch. ix. 15). The phrase is used again in ver. 12. For **will do nothing** the written text reads "has done for himself," which the Kri properly corrects. The rashness of Saul's temper, and his frank talk about killing David recorded in ch. xix. 1, confirm Jonathan's statement about the openness of his father's ways, and he therefore assures David that he may take his place in safety.

Vers. 3, 4.—**Thy father certainly knoweth,** &c. Though Saul did not know the entireness of Jonathan's love for David, yet he was aware of the friendship that existed between them, and consequently might keep his purpose a secret from Jonathan, especially if he considered that his frankness in speaking openly to his son and servants on a previous occasion had led to David's escape. David, therefore, urges upon his friend a different course, to which he assents. But how are we to explain the entirely different views taken of Saul's conduct by the two. When David tells his fears Jonathan utters an exclamation of horror, and says, "Thou shalt not die." Yet he knew that his father had talked to him and his officers about putting David to death; that he had tried to kill him with his own hand, and on his escape had set people to watch his house with orders to slay him; and on David's flight to the prophet had thrice sent emissaries to bring him away by force. The explanation probably lies in Saul's insanity. When he threw his javelin at David and during the subsequent proceedings he was out of his mind. The violent fit at Naioth had for the time cleared his reason, and he had come back sane. Jonathan regarded all that had taken place as the effect of a mind diseased, and concluded,

therefore, that David might now return to his home and wife, and resume his duties and take his place at the royal table. Should the old craze come back about David being his rival and destined successor, Saul would be sure to talk about it, and then Jonathan would give him timely warning. But David was convinced that it was no craze, but that Saul, sane or insane, had determined upon his death.

Vers. 5—7.—**To-morrow is the new moon.** The first day of the new moon was a joyful festival, its appearance being greeted with the sounding of trumpets, and celebrated by a burnt offering and a sin offering. It was, moreover, kept by Saul as a family festival, at which David, as his son-in-law, was expected to be present. As, moreover, David was to hide **unto the third day at even**, counting from the time when he was arranging his plans with Jonathan, it is plain that it was the rule to prolong the feasting unto the second day. When then Jonathan, convinced by David's pleading, had consented to aid him in his own way, they arrange that he shall absent himself from this festival, and remain during it hidden out of sight. In case Saul missed him and asked the reason of his absence, Jonathan was to offer as an excuse for him that he had earnestly requested leave to pay a hurried visit to Bethlehem, in order to be present at an annual festival: and if Saul took the excuse in good part it would be a sign that he had no malicious purposes towards David, whereas if he fell into a rage it would be a proof of a settled evil design. **A yearly sacrifice for all the family.** For all the *mishpachah*, i. e. not for all Jesse's household, but for all that subdivision of the tribe of Judah to which Jesse belonged; for a tribe was divided into families, and these again into fathers' houses (Josh. vii. 16, 17). The occasion would thus be a grand one. In ch. xvi. 2 we have an instance of a special sacrifice at Bethlehem, but this feast of the *mishpachah* was held every year; and evidently before the temple was built at Jerusalem these local sacrifices were the rule. We may well believe that there was such a festival, and that the fictitious part of Jonathan's story was that David had been summoned to it.

Ver. 8.—**Thou hast brought thy servant into a covenant of Jehovah with thee.** As the friendship between Jonathan and David had been cemented by the invocation of the name of Jehovah, it was one firm and assured, and David might look not merely for one act of kindness, but for constant truth and help. It was, moreover, Jonathan's own doing; and yet, **if there be in me**, David says, **iniquity**, *i. e.* treason against Saul, if I have not been a faithful and true servant to him, but, on the contrary, have plotted evil against him, or now entertain any evil designs, then let the covenant be abrogated. David refuses to shelter himself under it if he has incurred guilt, and only asks that Jonathan, by the authority which he exercised as the king's son, should himself put him to death, and not deliver him up to Saul.

Ver. 9.—**Far be it**, the word rendered *God forbid* in ver. 2. It indignantly rejects the idea of David having committed any crime. The rest of the verse is an incomplete sentence: "If I knew certainly that evil were determined by my father to come upon thee, and did not tell thee——" These broken sentences have great force in the original, as signs of intense feeling (comp. Luke xix. 42). We must complete the sentence mentally in some such way as the Syriac: "then Jehovah do so to me, and more also."

Ver. 10.—**Who shall tell me? or what if,** &c. The *if* is an insertion of the A. V. Really David's question is very involved and ungrammatical, as was natural in his excited state. It may be translated, "Who will tell me (or, how shall I know) what rough answer thy father will give thee?" But some Jewish authorities render, "Who will tell me if so be that thy father give thee a rough answer?"

Vers. 11—13.—**Let us go out into the field.** David's question had shown Jonathan that there were grave difficulties in their way, and so he proposes that they should walk into the country, to be able to talk with one another more freely, and concert measures for the future. And there Jonathan binds himself with a solemn oath, if Saul's intentions be good, to send a trusty messenger to inform David, but if there be danger, then to come and tell David himself. **O Lord God.** With a few MSS. we must supply the usual formula of an oath: "As Jehovah the God of Israel liveth." **About to-morrow any time, or the third day.** This cumbrous translation arose out of the mistaken idea that the word rendered **to-morrow** could only be used in that limited sense. Strictly it signifies the *morning*, and is applicable to any morrow. Jonathan fixes one time, and one only, and the passage should be rendered, "By this time on the third morrow." The meeting was to be on the morrow after the second day of the festival, and so on the third morrow after the conversation. The whole may be translated, "As Jehovah the God of Israel liveth, when by this time on the third morrow I have searched my father, and, behold, there be good for David, if then I send not to thee, and uncover thy ear, Jehovah do so and much more to Jonathan." The alternative case is then put and if the news be evil, Jonathan undertakes himself to be the messenger, and David is to

provide for his safety by flight. The concluding prayer that Jehovah might be with David as he had been with Saul contains the same presentiment of David attaining to great power and dignity which is more directly expressed in the following verses.

Vers. 14, 15.—The construction of this passage is very difficult if we retain the three negatives of the Masoretic text; but most commentators, following the reading of the Syriac as regards at least one of them, consider that the Masorites have been mistaken in the vowels which they have attached to the consonants (see on ch. i. 7). Read with other vowels, two of these negatives become interjections of desire—*O that;* and the whole may be translated, "And O that, while I still live, yea, O that thou wouldst show me the kindness of Jehovah,—*i. e.* great unfailing kindness, such as was that of Jehovah to Israel,—that I die not, nor shalt thou cut off thy kindness from my house for ever." It was the sanguinary custom in the East on a change of dynasty to put all the seed royal to death (1 Kings xv. 29; xvi. 11, &c., and comp. 2 Sam. xix. 28). As then Jonathan foresaw that it was Jehovah's will to transfer the kingdom to David, he binds him by the memory of his own true love to him to show mercy to his race.

Ver. 16.—This verse also is very difficult, but it is probably to be taken as an insertion of the narrator: "So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David"—that is, so as to bind his descendants—"saying, Let Jehovah require it at the hand of David's enemies." These last words probably are a euphemism, and mean David himself. So Rashi explains the words. The courtesy of an Oriental forbade his saying, May Jehovah punish David for it, but he prays that God would requite it on some one. But if the Divine anger visits even David's enemies for it, how much more the guilty perjurer himself.

Ver. 17.—**Jonathan caused David to swear again.** So strong was his conviction in David's future kingdom, and his wish that there should be an unbroken bond of love between the two families, that he makes David solemnly repeat his promise. The Septuagint and Vulgate, by altering the vowels, read, "And Jonathan sware again to David." At first sight this interpretation seems most in accordance with the reason given for the renewal of the oath, namely, Jonathan's own love; but the Masoretic text agrees better with what has gone before, and with his wish that their covenant under no change of circumstances should be broken.

Vers. 18, 19.—Jonathan now arranges his plan for communicating the result to David. For **when thou hast stayed three days,** at which all the versions stumble, a slight alteration gives the right sense: "And on the third day." David on the third day was to **go down quickly**—Hebrew, "greatly," *i. e.* he was to go a long way down into the valley. The rendering *quickly* is taken from the Vulgate, but makes no sense. It did not matter whether David went fast or slow, as he was to hide there for some time, but it was important that David should be far away, so that no prying eye might chance to catch sight of him. **When the business was in hand.** Literally, "the day of the business," probably that narrated in ch. xix. 2—7. The Septuagint, Vulgate, and Chaldee all understand "a working day," in opposition to a feast day; but "where thou didst hide thyself on a week day" gives no intelligible meaning. **By the stone Ezel.** As the name Ezel is formed from a verb signifying *to go,* some understand by it a *road-stone,* a stone to mark the way.

Vers. 20—23.—The two friends now agree upon the sign. Jonathan was to shoot three arrows at this stone, Ezel, as his mark, and was then to send his servant to gather them up. When he had gone some distance Jonathan was to shout to him, loud enough for David to hear. If Jonathan said that the arrows were on that side the mark, *i. e.* between it and Jonathan, David was to come forth boldly, as all was well. But if Jonathan said that the arrows were further on, then David must understand that he was to seek safety in flight. For **there is peace to thee, and no hurt,** the Hebrew has "there is peace to thee, and it is nothing," a simpler and more idiomatic rendering. **As touching the matter,** &c. Rather, "As for the word that we have spoken, I and thou, behold, Jehovah is between me and thee for ever." The *word* was the bond and covenant by which they had pledged their truth to one another. Though separated, their love was to continue, and Jehovah was to be their eternal centre of union, and the witness to their covenant.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—10.—*Endangered life and reputation.* The facts are—1. David, believing in Saul's purpose to kill him, flees to Jonathan, and inquires into the cause of this persecution. 2. Jonathan quiets him by the assurance that Saul would not hide any purpose from him. 3. On David referring to Saul's know-

ledge of their friendship and its effect on his methods, Jonathan expresses readiness to do whatever David may suggest. 4. Thereupon David suggests a means by which Saul's disposition towards him can be ascertained. 5. He further pleads, on the ground of their strong friendship, that Jonathan should slay or aid to deliver him. It is not improbable that the coming of the prophetic spirit on Saul was, among other reasons, designed to help him once more to a due consideration of his course. But by this time David appears to have awakened to the conviction that the recent attempts on his life were not to be ascribed to fitful outbursts of madness, but to a fixed purpose, for reasons he could not surmise. As then he had sought refuge with Samuel from the hand of passionate violence, so now he naturally turns to his beloved friend Jonathan to ascertain from one presumably in his father's secrets the causes of this persistent attempt on his life, and to demand of him the offices of true friendship. A triple consciousness pervades this appeal of David: namely, of integrity, of danger, of duty of self-preservation.

I. A MAN CONSCIOUS OF INTEGRITY OF LIFE. It would appear that David was quite unaware of the secret of Saul's conduct. It is probable that he knew nothing of that fearful doom pronounced by Samuel (ch. xv. 26—29) which had operated so disastrously on the guilty mind of Saul. With the innocence of an unworldly man, he could not imagine that a monarch reigning over the people of God could ever devise destruction against a subject unless he believed that subject to have committed some crime worthy of death. Possibly the king might be under an unfounded impression; and as Jonathan was heir to the throne and in his father's confidence, he would surely inform his friend. At all events, so far as he knew his own heart, he was conscious only of integrity. "What have I done? What is mine iniquity?" In dealing with the important matter involved in these questions, let us observe that —1. *Integrity is to be sought in every man.* David was correct in the assumption underlying his inquiry—that every one ought to be characterised by integrity of life, and that on its existence alone can we justly claim exemption from scorn, suffering, abandonment, and a right to respect, enjoyment of life, and personal protection. There is in every man a voice unceasingly demanding of him uprightness, moral soundness. The eye with which we look on one another is guided by this conviction. And it is in the universal recognition of the truth that integrity is to be sought in every one that we find a basis of appeal in the name of righteousness, and a rational place for the doctrines of atonement and regeneration. 2. *Integrity is to be regarded in a twofold aspect.* It will be observed that David simply raises the question as to what he had done in relation to Saul or his kingdom. He distinguished between integrity in his relations to man and integrity in his relations to God. All moral relations to man involve moral relations to God, but the reverse is not true. Man's relations to God are wider than those to his fellow-men. Religious morality is not identical with secular morality. The spiritual embraces obligations transcending the humanly moral. Integrity in relation to man lies in the faithful discharge of all obligations due to man, under the influence of pure motives in detail, and a supreme sense of justice in general. But integrity in relation to God means perfect rightness of spirit, manifesting itself in perfect love of God, perfect obedience to God, perfect purity of thought—in fact, conformity in every secret and open movement of will with the holy will of God. This soundness, this health, is certain to insure integrity in relation to man, but the reverse is not true. This distinction is of great importance to the understanding of Scripture and the regulation of life (cf. 2 Chron. vi. 36—39; Job xv. 14; Ps. xv.; Isa. xxxiii. 15, 16; Rom. iii. 23—28; James v. 16; 1 John i. 8). 3. *Integrity in its human relation is, in ordinary life, maintained without self-assertion.* During the months of David's service, from the day he entered into conflict with Goliath till his flight to Naioth, he had been a true, sincere man, doing his duty. But all this time he was not conscious of anything remarkable. The beauty of integrity of life lies in the naturalness which suggests no reflection upon itself. True virtue excludes self-admiration, and, when in exercise, self-consciousness. Our Saviour never refers to his goodness as a praise to himself. The sun needs only to shine, the truth only to be (Matt. vi. 1—4; Luke xviii. 12). 4. *Integrity may be asserted when challenged by detractors, or when wrong is done to one's interests.* David's uprightness of life would have gone on without self-introspection and self-

assertion were it not that he was subject to a treatment not explicable on ordinary principles. It was time for him to affirm his innocence, and bring his natural integrity into distinct consciousness. He often does this in the Psalms, not to claim righteousness in relation to God, but to rebut accusations in reference to his conduct amongst men. It was the same sense of injustice which led Job to assert his innocence of many of the charges of his friends. "I will maintain mine own ways before him" (Job xv. 13—16). The Apostle Paul also vindicated his own life against the insinuations of false brethren (2 Cor. x. 8—11; xi. 6—10, 21—30). Our Saviour also, when persecuted by malicious men, could ask, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" (John viii. 46). Only a stern sense of duty—a protest against wrong—will break a righteous man's silence in relation to himself. 5. *Integrity before man must never be a substitute for integrity before God.* David's object was simply vindication from supposed charges of wrong deliberately done to Saul. He had a deep consciousness at the same time that in the sight of God, as a spiritual being, he was unworthy and in need of *mercy*. Only such a man, sensible of sinfulness before God, would dwell so much on mercy (Ps. lii. 8; lxii. 12; lxxxvi. 5), and at the same time on "integrity" and "uprightness" (Ps. vii. 8; xxv. 21; xxvi. 1; xli. 42). Men take a very superficial view of things when they imagine that goodness which passes among men, and is a fulfilment of our earthly obligations, "extendeth" unto God (Ps. xvi. 2, 3). This was one of the deadly errors of the Pharisees, and it was exposed by the whole tenor of our Saviour's teaching (Luke xviii. 9—14; John iii. 1—11). As we have not integrity before God, we must be born again, repent, seek forgiveness and acceptance, not because of what we are and have done, but because of Christ having loved us and *given himself for us* (Acts iv. 12; Rom. iii. 24—28; iv. 5, 6; v. 1, 2; Phil. iii. 8, 9).

II. A MAN SENSIBLE OF GREAT PERIL. Two perils beset David. He feared death at the hand of Saul, and, most of all, loss of reputation. He rightly judged that it the king of Israel sought his life and chased him with that end in view, the impression would be conveyed to many that he had been guilty of some act of wrong well known to Saul, though unknown to the people. An upright man, although able to commit himself to God, dreads to be thought a wrong-doer, and to die as though he were such. Hence his pleading with Jonathan, his pain at the suspicion of want of integrity, his desire to learn whether the king's mind was more placable. *These two perils beset us all.* In one sense we are safe from death till our appointed time has come, for God's care fails not; yet in relation to the forces at work around us we know not what a day or an hour may bring forth. Life is begirt with powers of destruction. There is but a "step" between us and death. "In the midst of life we are in death." The *proper effect of this sense of peril is wholesome.* It leads to such an estimate of life as renders it wiser, more sober, earnest, and devout (Ps. xxxix. 4—7; xc. 12; Eccles. ix. 10; xi. 9; xii. 13; 1 Cor. vii. 29—31). But to a sincerely good man *danger to reputation is more serious.* Many would rather die than either actually lose character or be deemed to have lost it. They can sympathise with David's wish that Jonathan would slay him if really moral cause existed. Our Saviour's pain was great because of the effort to ruin his character. But though all are exposed to these two perils in common with David, there is *one other peril of life* which often is an occasion of loss of reputation. We are *exposed to the wiles of the devil.* As Saul sought the life of David, so Satan goeth about seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. v. 8). Every day the adversary destroys by "his strong ones." The language of the Psalmist (Ps. x. 8—10) will apply with wonderful precision to the destroyer of souls, the "murderer from the beginning" (John viii. 44). The *proper effect of this sense of peril* is to *induce watchfulness,* avoidance of the haunts of iniquity, prayer for strength, and such consecration to work as shall leave no time or thought for dalliance with the tempter (Matt. vii. 13; xxvi. 41; Ephes. vi. 11, 12, 18).

III. A MAN INTENT ON SELF-PRESERVATION. While in conflict with Goliath, amidst the regular duties of his public course, David seems to have been under no concern for his life or reputation. He did his duty and trusted in God. But when he suspected attempts in the dark on his life and character, he felt bound to devise means of securing himself, and rightly manifested much anxiety in relation thereto. It is possible that character may be so defamed during life that only death will prove

its vindication, as in case of our Saviour; nevertheless, no means should be left unused to assert our innocence and if possible prove it. The *subtle powers which threaten our life may be often avoided* by observance of laws of health and abstention from unnecessary risks. Many men commit slow suicide by wilful neglect of fresh air, good and moderate food, and by excessive toil for gain. The *preservation of character* may often be secured by abstaining from the "appearance of evil," though we shall never rid ourselves of uncharitable defamers.

General lessons:—1. We should strive to be free from the narrow suspicions and uncharitable thoughts which tend to injure excellent reputations (1 Cor. xiii. 4—7). 2. If we cannot vindicate our reputation before men, let us have comfort in God's knowledge of us (Ps. xxxvii. 5, 6; cxxxix. 1—4). 3. Like Jonathan, we should manifest great sympathy with those whose honourable character is defamed or in peril. 4. Our supreme concern should be to live in spirit so as to find acceptance with the holy, all-seeing God.

Vers. 11—23.—*The spring of self-sacrifice.* The facts are—1. Jonathan and David retire from observation to confer further. 2. Jonathan undertakes to do all that David requires, and solemnly pledges himself to let him know the mind of Saul. 3. He pleads with David, in prospect of his elevation to power, that he and his house may receive mercy. 4. In his eagerness he seeks a renewal of David's promise. 5. They then arrange that, after consulting with Saul, an arrow before or beyond a certain mark shall reveal safety or danger. This beautiful narrative brings out the love and confidence of these young men in such a way that one is constrained to ask whether there is not here, not only an exquisite instance of what all our religious friendship should be in spirit and expression, but an historical foreshadowing of the relation of the loving, confiding soul to the true Anointed of the Lord. We know that in the New Testament the promised land is a shadow of the "better country," the "rock" in the wilderness a figure of Christ (1 Cor. x. 4), Zion and Jerusalem a type of the city of God, and David, the king after God's own heart, a pattern of another David, the only begotten of the Father, the eternal King in Zion (Isa. ix. 7; Acts ii. 25—36). Also in the Psalms (Ps. xlv.) and in Isaiah there are references to the deep interest of the Church in Christ and of Christ in the Church. It is not, then, unwarrantable to regard the devotion of Jonathan to the coming king, and because he was beloved as the coming king, as, at all events, suggestive of an analogous devotion of the true believer to Christ. The most striking feature of the narrative before us is the utter self-sacrifice of Jonathan and the deep love from which it sprang. We may notice the main features of the story, and in doing so point out their truth in Christian life.

I. There IS A FULL ACQUIESCENCE IN DAVID'S DESIRES SO FAR AS THEY ARE EXPLICITLY KNOWN. Some might regard the retirement of the two into the seclusion of "the field" as suggestive of the private and sacred communion of a believer and Christ; but, without dwelling on that, it may be noticed that as soon as privacy was secured Jonathan at once, with solemn and pathetic earnestness, pledges himself to all that David had so far required. How true this is of a believer in Christ! When the "Anointed of the Lord" makes known his request, whether it be to bear witness for him, to remember his death, or to feed and clothe the little ones, the true heart responds with all zeal and delight. It is a mark of a true Christian, that of delighting to do his will. His yoke is easy and his burden light. It was a very delicate and difficult business to find out Saul's mind, and involved no little risk to Jonathan; and it is possible that much in which we have to acquiesce involves a strain and tension of feeling, a firmness and endurance, a risk of worldly loss, and a certainty of personal inconvenience; but nevertheless all is welcome, because it is for him who has won our love and is worthy of the best service we can ever render.

II. There IS A DISTINCT RECOGNITION OF HIS ENDURING SUPREMACY, AND A CORRESPONDING SENSE OF PERSONAL UNWORTHINESS OF SUCH DISTINGUISHED FRIENDSHIP. It is hard to say in words how refined spiritual minds obtain all their knowledge. They seem to possess an insight, a supersensual instinct, which takes them straight through the present external conditions to the abiding reality. At all events, Jonathan was convinced that his beloved friend was destined to be king in Israel, and he

speaks as one not worthy of such honour; and yet, with all this reverence and awe of the coming majesty and power, there was the tender love "passing that of women." Faith saw through the loneliness and oppressed state of David, and recognised the king in Zion. *This was the real feeling of the apostles*, in their better moods, during the Saviour's humiliation. They knew that, though men were divided in judgment, he was "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. xvi. 13—16). The deep love of John when reclining on his bosom, and the sense of unworthiness of Peter when he cried, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke v. 8), were only instances of the feeling which usually pervaded their minds. And it is *this recognition and the feeling accompanying it which enters into every believer's life*. He is *the* King, the Hope of the afflicted nations, the "Restorer of paths to dwell in" (Isa. lviii. 12). As Jonathan with passionate love and strong confidence gazed on the beautiful face of David, so do we look with intense interest on Christ and feel sure, in spite of the slow ages and the present antagonisms, that he "must reign," that on his own head an imperishable crown shall flourish (Ps. lxxii.). And while admiration, joy, and satisfaction attend this prevision of the coming glory, the heart is filled with wonder and gratitude in being permitted to call that Chosen One a Friend.

III. There IS A FREE SURRENDER OF ALL THAT IS DEAREST TO THE REALISATION OF HIS SUPREMACY. Nothing, humanly speaking, was more precious to Jonathan than his right to the succession, and the prospects of power and distinction involved therein. Nothing in history is more beautiful than the spontaneity and heartiness with which he laid aside all this, and found joy and satisfaction in the coming supremacy of David (vers. 14—17). What noble self-sacrifice for high spiritual purposes! This was more than "houses and lands," more than "father and mother" (Matt. xix. 29). Only the true spiritual vision of the kingdom of God will account for such deviation from the selfish ways of the world. "The Lord" was in the mind of Jonathan, and "the Name" (ch. xvii. 45) which David had exalted was the "Name" to be still more honoured in his coming reign. And in this is the essence of our Christian life. Surrender of all for Christ: sacrifice of every power, prospect, hope, and wish to the holy purposes for which the "Anointed One" lives. In this there is no exaction and no constraint. Christ does not demand something for his mere personal gratification, and we do not yield to a loss because a more powerful One claims what we have. Jonathan and David were as one (ver. 17). They had but one interest, and lived for one object. Loss and gain were inadequate terms. The surrender to one was as a surrender to self. Loss was gain, and gain was loss. So is it in the mystical union of our lives with Christ. Though we give up all, and perform what men call self-sacrifice, we yet give up nothing. For us "to live is Christ." Blessed oneness! Always giving, always receiving; ever denying self, ever enriching self! The glory of the King is our glory; the sorrows of our heart are his sorrows; deeds to his are deeds to him (Matt. xxv. 34—40; John xvii. 24; Heb. iv. 15).

IV. LOVE, CONSTANT AND MASTERFUL, IS THE SPRING OF ALL THIS SELF-SACRIFICE. Jonathan's love was the master passion—"passing that of women"—pure, steady, unaffected by public opinion and private influence (vers. 30, 31), illumined and regulated by spiritual insight, prompt in expression, giving joy and satisfaction to every deed and word that might bring future honour to David or present comfort in trouble. This undying love, this regnant force, so pure, so sweet, so strong, so gentle, ennobled its possessor, and was regarded by its object as the most beautiful and precious thing on earth. Events show that it was reciprocal (ver. 41; 2 Sam. i. 25, 26). It is this strong master passion that lies at the spring of all our true Christian service. "We love him because he first loved us." "The love of Christ constraineth us." We do his will, lay our talents, possessions, prospects, all we inherit or can acquire, at his feet because we love to do so, and would not do otherwise if we could. No box of ointment is too costly for those dear feet that have trodden the sorrowful paths of life for us! No crown too glorious for that brow that once was pierced and pained for us! No joy too excessive in final enthronement over all principality and power of him who once did battle for us, and destroyed the gigantic foe of God's people! To measure out our service, to reckon how little we can spare or do, to shut him out

from any section of our life—this were debasement and shame indeed. Love—"passing that of women"—seeks satisfaction in living for Christ and glorying only in him.

General lessons:—1. We should inquire whether any of Christ's requirements have as yet been disregarded. 2. It is a matter of doubt whether the professing Christian Church fully enters into the joy of Christ's coming glory, and is sufficiently identified in hope and feeling with it. 3. Each one may ask, Have I surrendered all that is precious to Christ? Is there any reserve? 4. The due culture of love for Christ as the supreme affection of life demands thought and care. 5. The cure of many of the sorrows and ills of Christians and Churches lies in the quickening of this personal interest in Christ.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—10. (GIBEAH.)—*The intercourse of friends.* The regard which true friends have for each other prompts to much communion. In it they find an exalted pleasure, and a sure resource of help and comfort in adversity. Hence David, in his continued distrust and fear of Saul, hastened to his friend Jonathan. Concerning their intercourse, notice—1. *Its entire freedom.* They tell each other, without reserve, all that is in their hearts. Such freedom can be wisely indulged only in the presence of a friend. "A *principal* fruit of friendship is the ease and discharge of the fulness and swellings of the heart which passions of all kinds do cause and induce. No receipt openeth the heart but a true friend, to whom you may impart griefs, joys, fears, hopes, suspicions, counsel, and whatsoever lieth upon the heart to oppress it, in a kind of civil shrift or confession. It redoubleth joys, and cutteth griefs in halves" (Bacon, 'Essays'). 2. *Its gentle expostulations* and reproofs. When David said, "Thy father seeketh my life" (an expression often used in the Psalms), Jonathan reproved his distrust—"It is not so;" and only after a solemn oath could be induced to share it (ver. 9). Rebuke is a duty and evidence of true friendship; and "where a man's ears are shut against the truth so that he cannot hear it from a friend, the welfare of such a one is to be despaired of." "As many as I love I rebuke." 3. *Its kindly assurances.* "Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will do it for thee." Such assurances he gave generously, sincerely, solemnly, and repeatedly, and they imparted encouragement and increased confidence. How "exceeding great and precious" are the promises which the heavenly Friend has given for this purpose to his friends! 4. *Its anxious consultations* and intelligent counsels. "The *second* fruit of friendship is healthful and sovereign for the understanding, as the first is for the affections; for friendship maketh indeed a fair day in the affections from storm and tempests, but it maketh daylight in the understanding out of darkness and confusion of thoughts; neither is this to be understood *only* of faithful counsel. The last fruit is aid, and bearing a part in all actions and occasions" (Bacon). 5. *Its earnest requests* of aid (ver. 8). Although it is the part of friendship to grant help to a friend rather than to beg it of him, yet it shows itself by reliance upon him in great emergencies, and confidently claims the fulfilment of former assurances; nor will it look for aid to a true friend in vain. 6. *Its manifest imperfection.* For, like all things earthly, human friendship is imperfect. Its communion is liable to interruption (vers. 10, 41). It often entertains thoughts, devises plans, and makes requests which are mistaken and injurious. The statement of David (though founded upon a measure of truth) was a mere pretext, and through failing faith in God he fell into "foolish and hurtful devices." It also omits reproof when it should be given, complies with doubtful requests, and promises what it is not able to perform. But all the defects which are found in the highest human friendship are absent from, and all the excellences which it possesses, and infinitely more, are present in, the friendship of Christ.—D.

Ver. 3. (GIBEAH.)—*Only a step.* Our path in life lies along the brink of a river or the edge of a cliff; and we may by a step—a single step—at any moment meet our fate. The asseveration of David may be regarded as the expression of a strong conviction ("As Jehovah liveth," &c.) of—

I. THE SOLEMNITY OF DEATH. The event is a serious one. To leave familiar

scenes and beloved friends, to "be missed" from our accustomed place is a saddening thought. But what gives solemnity to death as well as life is its moral aspect, its spiritual and Divine relations. 1. *It terminates our earthly probation*—severs our immediate connection with the privileges, means, and opportunities by which character is proved and the soul prepared for another state. When this step is taken, all these things belong to the past. 2. *It ushers us into the Divine presence;* no longer partially concealed by the veil of material things, but fully revealed in light, which reveals the moral attitude of every human spirit and judges it "in righteousness." "After death" (and following close upon it) "the judgment" (Heb. ix. 28). "We must all be manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ," &c. (2 Cor. v. 10). 3. *It fixes our future destiny*, in weal or woe. "What is a man profited," &c.

II. THE UNCERTAINTY OF LIFE. The step *must* be taken, but *when* we know not. That we may be duly impressed by a truth which all admit, but few adequately realise, consider—1. *The frailty of the body*, and the innumerable dangers to which it is exposed. "Between us and hell or heaven there is nothing but life, the most fragile thing in existence" (Pascal). 2. *The facts of daily observation.* What occurs to others so often, so suddenly and unexpectedly, may occur to ourselves. We have no guarantee that it will not. "Man's uncertain life is like a raindrop on the bough, amid ten thousand of its sparkling kindred, and at any moment it may fall." 3. *The declarations of the Divine word.* "Man knoweth not his time," &c. (Eccles. ix. 12). "Ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life?" &c. (James iv. 14). Why should we be left in such uncertainty? (1) To teach us the sovereignty of God and our dependence upon him. (2) To accord with our present probationary position, which necessitates the proper adjustment of motives to our freedom and responsibility. (3) To enable us properly to perform the ordinary duties of life, in connection with which we are appointed to serve God here and prepare for his service hereafter. (4) To check presumption in devoting undue attention to the affairs of this life and neglecting those of the life to come. (5) To lead us not to put the event out of our minds altogether, but rather to constant preparation for it and for the life that lies beyond. "The last day is kept secret that every day may be watched" (Augustine). "Take ye heed, watch and pray: *for* ye know not when the time is" (Mark xiii. 33). "Be ye therefore ready also," &c. (Luke xii. 40).

III. THE NECESSITY OF WATCHFUL PREPARATION. Seeing that at any instant the step may be taken, it plainly behoves us to be *always ready.* 1. By seeking and maintaining *a right state of heart* (John iii. 2, 14). 2. By diligent, faithful, and persevering *performance of duty.* 3. By constant and prayerful *committal of our souls into the hands of God.* So, whenever the step is taken, it will be "only a step" out of the shadows and sorrows of earth into the glory and joy of heaven.—D.

Vers. 11—23. (THE OPEN COUNTRY, NEAR GIBEAH.)—*A covenant of friendship.* "And Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David" (ver. 16). The friendship of Jonathan and David was expressed and confirmed by a sacred covenant (ch. xviii. 3). The covenant now made differed from the former. 1. It was made at a time of trial. Their friendship was put to a severe test; for it had become clear to the mind of Jonathan that David was destined to be king (ver. 13), as he afterwards stated more fully (ch. xxiii. 17). "Jonathan caused David to swear again" (ver. 17), not because he distrusted him, but "because he loved him: for he loved him as he loved his own soul;" and in times of special danger such repeated and solemn assurances may be needful and beneficial. 2. It included the obligation to show kindness to the house of Jonathan as well as himself. Consider it as—

I. CONFIRMED BY AN APPEAL TO GOD. It was customary in making a covenant (contract or agreement) to take an oath in which God was appealed to as a witness and an avenger of its violation (Gen. xxvi. 28; xxxi. 45—53). Even when no such appeal is expressly made it should be remembered—1. That he observes the promises and engagements which men make to one another, and keeps a faithful record thereof (Mal. iii. 16). 2. That he loves to see truth and faithfulness in their speech and conduct (Deut. vii. 9; xxxii. 4). 3. That he manifests his displeasure toward those who neglect or violate their engagements (Ezek. xvii. 9). 4.

That he shows favour and affords help to those who strive to keep them faithfully. "Who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord" (Ps. xxiv. 4; xv. 4; Ephes. iv. 25).

II. DEEPENING THE SENSE OF OBLIGATION. In some cases a covenant creates a new obligation; in others (like that of friendship) it intensifies the force and feeling of it—1. By the solemn manner in which it is made. 2. By the greater definiteness in which the obligation is expressed. 3. By the permanent record which is formed of it in the memory, often associated with particular places and objects (Josh. xxiv. 27). 4. And this is important as an incentive to faithfulness in temptation arising from self-interest and strong passion to set it aside. As often as Jonathan and David remembered their sacred covenant they would be impelled to ever higher love and faithfulness.

III. CONTRIBUTING TO THE BENEFIT OF BOTH. "By Jehovah," &c. (ver. 12). "And O that thou wouldst while I live show me kindness," &c. (ver. 14). Each received as well as gave assurances of kindness, which served—1. To afford a claim that might be confidently urged in difficulty and danger (ver. 8). 2. To enrich the soul with a permanent feeling of pure and elevating joy. "Very pleasant hast thou been to me" (2 Sam. i. 26). 3. To preserve it from despondency in hours of darkness and trouble. 4. To increase its aspiration and endeavour after all that is excellent. The continued loyalty of David to Saul and his acts of kindness to him were doubtless greatly incited by the love of Jonathan; and the latter was not less morally strengthened and blessed by the love of David. "There is no influence on a feeling mind stronger than the sense of being loved; nothing more elevating, more securing to the inner life."

IV. INVOLVING THE WELFARE OF OTHERS. "And that thou wouldst not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever," &c. (vers. 15, 23). "His request that his house may be excepted from this judgment, as executor of which he regards David, is founded on and justified by his position outside the circle of 'enemies' (since he recognises God's will concerning David, and bends to it as David's friend), so that, though a member of Saul's house, he does not belong to it as concerns the judgment of extermination" (Erdmann). 1. A parent naturally desires and ought to seek the welfare of his family. 2. He may by his faithful conduct do much to promote it. 3. For the sake of one many are frequently and justly spared and blessed. "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness *for Jonathan's sake*" (2 Sam. ix. 1). 4. The memory of the good is a perpetual incitement to goodness.

Learn—1. The wonderful condescension of God in making with men a friendly covenant (arrangement, constitution, dispensation), according to which he graciously assures them of unspeakable privileges and blessings (Gen. ix. 14; Jer. xxxi. 33; Gal. iii. 15—18). 2. The sure ground which is thereby afforded for confidence and "strong consolation." 3. The necessity of observing the appointed conditions thereof. 4. To look to God for all good through "Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant" (Heb. xii. 24), and "for Christ's sake" (Ephes. iv. 32).—D.

Ver. 3.—*Mortal peril.* Brave men have their times of depression, and believing men have their fits of discouragement. Of David's courage there could be no question. He had faced death without flinching, both in defence of his flock from beasts of prey, and for the deliverance of Israel from the boastful Philistine. Yet he now recoiled, saying, "There is but a step between me and death." He felt as on the edge of a precipice. One push, and he was gone. We need not wonder at this; for it is one thing to meet an enemy in the open field, another thing to feel that one's steps are dogged by treacherous malice, and not know but one may be attacked in his sleep, or struck from behind, or entrapped by some cruel stratagem. Of David's faith in God there could be just as little question as of his bravery. All the successes he had gained had been triumphs of faith. But temperament goes for something too, and the son of Jesse had the sensitive nature which goes with poetic genius. He was capable of great exultation, but just as capable of sudden discouragement; and when he gave way to a foreboding, melancholy mood, his faith looked like unbelief. The young and healthy cannot, should not, wish to die. We can feel for

Henry Kirke White, though his tone was too gloomy, when he wrote, deprecating his early fate—

> "It is hard
> To feel the hand of Death arrest one's steps
> Throw a chill blight o'er all one's budding hopes,
> And hurl one's soul untimely to the shades."

Poets, both heathen and Christian, have often deplored the disease and violence which cast young lives headlong from the precipice. And we regard the youthful David's recoil from the cruel death which Saul designed for him as quite natural, and in no sense discreditable to his manhood. But there is more than this in his melancholy.

I. THE OLD TESTAMENT WAY OF REGARDING DEATH. In the days before Christ dimness overhung the doctrine of a future existence. "Life and incorruption" had not been brought to light. It was therefore reckoned a blessing to live long in Palestine. It was a sore calamity to die in one's youth. The soldiers of Israel would encounter death in the excitement of battle; and such prophets as Elijah and Jonah could even wish for death in a hurt and discouraged mood of mind; but, as a rule, even the most devout Hebrews regarded death with sadness and reluctance. No wonder that David, brought up in the ideas of his own age, not of ours, should shrink from the cutting short of his days by violence, just when he had won distinction, and begun to be of service to his nation. The horror of it hung above him for many a day; for even after many wonderful escapes we hear him say, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul." This sadness or reluctance in view of death never left an Old Testament worthy like David except in the hour of battle, or under some such strong emotion as once made him cry, "Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" At the end of his career he made express mention in his song of thanksgiving of his deliverance from the "sorrows" and the "snares of death" (2 Sam. xxii.). And when we see him in old age, anxiously nursed that his days might be prolonged, we catch no sign of a spirit longing to be free and assured of being with the Lord, such as one expects to find in the latter days of almost any eminent Christian. "Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die, and he charged Solomon his son, saying, I go the way of all the earth." Compare the language in Ps. xiii. 3; xxx. 9; lxxxviii. 11; and that of Hezekiah in Isa. xxxviii. Contrast with this the contempt of death which was admired and often exhibited by the heathen. But the Hebrew feeling on the subject was really the more exalted, as having a perception of the connection of death with sin, and a value for communion with the living God in the land which was his, and therefore theirs, of which the heathen mind knew nothing.

II. BRIGHTER VIEW OF DEATH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT. 1. Contrast with the case of David in youth that of Stephen at Jerusalem, evidently young, or in the prime of life. His powers were at the full, and a distinguished career of usefulness among the Hellenist Jews opened before him. Those who entered into controversy with him "were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake." Suddenly the enraged Jews seized him, and dragged him before the Sanhedrim on the capital charge of blasphemy. Well did Stephen know that there was but a step between him and death; but no melancholy fell upon his spirit. "All that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." 2. Contrast with the case of David in old age that of "such an one as Paul the aged," and his feeling when he was "ready to be offered," and the time of his departure was at hand. He too was a man of sensitive temperament, and suffered keenly at times from dejection. He too was careful not to throw his life away. But when there seemed but a step between him and death, what an access of light, what an advance of consolation and hope, had the servant of God in the New Testament over the servant of God in the Old! David said, "I go the way of all the earth." But Paul, "We are confident, and willing rather to be absent from the body and present with the Lord." O happy ending of this troubled life! O welcome escape from fleshly impediment, weariness, temptation, insufficiency, and sorrow!

III. CHRIST'S CONTEMPLATION OF HIS OWN DECEASE. He who is the Son of David,

and the Lord of Stephen and of Paul, saw in the very prime of youthful manhood that there was but a step between him and death, and that too a death of harsh violence such as his ancestor had feared. There was, however, this difference between "the Man Christ Jesus" and all other men—that he knew when, where, and how he should die. It was to be at Jerusalem, and at the time of the feast. He foretold the very day on which he should "be perfected," and indicated that it would be by crucifixion in saying that the Son of man would be "lifted up from the earth." From such knowledge it is well that we are exempt. To know the place, time, and manner of our death would tempt, perhaps, at first to carelessness; and then, as the date came near, would put a strain on our spirits very hard to be borne. Such a strain was upon Christ, and, as the bitter death approached, his spirit was "exceeding sorrowful." As David had his friend Jonathan to show him sympathy and endeavour to drive from his mind the presentiment of death, so Jesus Christ had his disciples, who, as lovers and friends, besought him not to think of dying; but he could not take comfort from them. The cup which his Father had given him to drink, should he not drink it? To him death was gain. He finished all his work and travail, then left the world and went to the Father. "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit." We have much to learn from David, more from Stephen and Paul, most of all from our Lord Jesus. What if there be but a step between us and death? It is a step which cannot be taken but as, and when, and where our Lord appoints. "Lord Jesus, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" "Absent from the body, present with the Lord."—F.

EXPOSITION.

OPEN HATRED OF SAUL AGAINST DAVID (vers. 24—34). Vers. 24—26.—**The king sat him down to eat meat.** Hebrew, "the king sat down at the bread to eat." On sitting at table see ch. xvi. 11. **And Jonathan arose.** When the king had taken his usual place, that of honour, next the wall, and therefore farthest from the door, Jonathan arose and took his place on one side of the king, while Abner sat on the other. David's place below them was left empty. The omission of the statement that Jonathan *sat down* makes the passage obscure, and the versions bungle in rendering it, but there can be little doubt that these words ought to be supplied. **He is not clean.** Saul supposed that some ceremonial defilement (see Levit. xv. 2—16) had befallen David, and as the new moon was a religious festival, this would necessarily prevent his attendance.

Vers. 27—29.—**On the morrow, which was the second day of the month.** Hebrew, "on the morrow of the new moon, the second day." David's absence on the second day made Saul aware that it was no accident, and he demands of Jonathan the reason; whereupon he gives the excuse previously arranged, adding that it was David's brother who had required his attendance. The Septuagint has *brothers*, being offended at the singular, because Jesse was still alive. But as the festival was not confined to Jesse's household, his brother might very properly be the convener, without usurping his father's place. **Let me get away.** Literally, "let me escape," "let me get off," a light, half jocose way of speaking adopted by Jonathan as if the matter were a mere trifle.

Vers. 30, 31.—**Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman.** Literally, "thou son of one perverse in rebellion." In the East it is the greatest possible insult to a man to call his mother names; but the word rendered *perverse*, instead of being a feminine adjective, is probably an abstract noun, and "son of perversity of rebellion" would mean one who was thoroughly perverse in his resistance to his father's will. **Unto the confusion of thy mother's nakedness.** *I. e.* thy mother will feel ashamed and disgraced at having borne such a son. **He shall surely die.** Hebrew, "he is a son of death," *son* being constantly used in Hebrew to express qualities, or, as here, the fate to which a man is destined.

Vers. 32—34.—When Jonathan pleaded mildly for his friend, Saul did not **cast**, but "brandished" (see on ch. xviii. 11) his **javelin at him**, threatening **to smite him.** This fierce behaviour of his father filled Jonathan also with anger, and he arose, refused to partake of the meal, and went away in wrath. His indignation was roused not merely at his father having thus brandished his javelin in his face, for he was sitting close to Saul, but because he had cast shameful aspersions upon David in saying that he was a rebel, and deserved death.

JONATHAN'S LAST MEETING WITH DAVID (vers. 35—42). Vers. 35—38.—The next morning **Jonathan went out into the field,**

not **at the time**, but "to the place" **appointed**, taking with him **a little lad**, as less likely to suspect a reason. Having shot at the mark, he sends him to pick up the arrows, and as he runs to do so he shoots one beyond him, and, calling aloud, gives David the sign that there was no hope. To keep the boy's attention engaged he gives him hurried commands — **Make speed, haste, stay not.** Instead of **the arrows** the written text has "Jonathan's lad gathered up the arrow," *i. e.* that one especially which Jonathan had shot beyond him, and to which his rapid commands referred.

Vers. 40—42.—**His artillery.** *I. e.* his weapons. To get rid of the boy Jonathan sends him home with his bow and arrows, and then **David arose out of a place toward the south**, or "from the south side" of the stone Ezel, and while not forgetting in his repeated obeisance the honour due to Jonathan's dignity, yet friendship prevailed, and they kissed one another and wept sore, **until David exceeded**, *i. e.* broke down, and was completely mastered by his grief. And so they parted, David to begin a life of danger and wandering, while Jonathan returned to the city to be a dutiful son to Saul. Phillipson remarks, "The scenes in this chapter are some of the most affecting presented to us in history, whether in old or modern times, and we may well wonder at the delicacy of feeling and the gentleness of the sentiments which these two men in those old rough times entertained for one another. No ancient writer has set before us so noble an example of a heart-felt, unselfish, and thoroughly human state of feeling, and none has described friendship with such entire truth in all its relations, and with such complete and profound knowledge of the human heart."

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 24—34.—*Wasted influences, muffled thoughts, and conflicting interests.* The facts are—1. While David lies hidden, Saul notices his absence from the feast on the first day, and refers it to some ceremonial defilement. 2. On the second day he calls Jonathan's attention to the fact, and inquires the cause. 3. On his explaining the reason, Saul, in a fit of anger, accuses him of friendship with David, and points out the injury which he thinks will arise therefrom. 4. On Jonathan reasoning against the command to fetch David that he may be slain, Saul, in his rage, casts a javelin at him. 5. Jonathan, indignant at the injustice and cruelty of his father, leaves the court and spends the day in fasting and sorrow. The chief interest of this section turns on the conduct of Jonathan and Saul in the absence of David. The event proved the sagacity of David in keeping at a safe distance from his declared enemy. The facts of this narrative may be best dealt with as furnishing suggestions of realities common even in modern life.

I. THE COMMINGLED CHARACTERS OF LIFE. Here was a festive board, a court banquet, and a blending in it of characters most dissimilar. First there was Saul, sullen, morose, charged to the full with envy and malice, ready for deeds of blood, and fearful of a doom of which he dared not speak. Then there was Jonathan, pure, bright, the very soul of chivalry and honour, carrying on his heart a tender secret, and bound by holy bonds to the interests of a coming king. By him was Abner in a seat of honour, just coming into distinction, a warrior destined to play an important part in the future affairs of Israel. Others, not named, were there—men of influence, varying in temper and diversely influenced by the strange events of the age. And, in spirit, holding his right to a vacant place, David, who in sympathy sustained the heart of his beloved friend in face of a perilous undertaking. A motley assembly in a moral point of view! Representative of many a banquet and social gathering! Society is strangely formed. The necessities of life, sustained by custom, bring into contact elements most dissimilar, each being toned down by the presence of the other, and the powers that lie in the heart being systematically repressed out of deference to the proprieties of life. The contending forces of sin and holiness, modified by diversities in education and association, issue in shades of character in endless variety. Take any assembly, around the festive board or in a wider circle; what passions, hopes, fears, terrors, joys, aspirations, motives, designs lie concealed in each breast! Each one there is a distinct world; carries in himself a special destiny; is a sepulchre of buried joys, or a garden of germinating seeds. How little we know of those sitting by our side! What tragedies are to be wrought out by some we meet! (Matt. x. 26; 1 Cor. ii. 11).

II. WASTED INFLUENCES. Saul's spirit and conduct at this time were evidence that all the efforts to bring him to a right state of mind were in vain. During his career Providence had wrought through trouble and joy, prophet and people, threatening and encouragement, and lately through the wise and gentle persuasions of his eldest son and the awe-inspiring presence of the prophetic company (ch. xix. 21—24). But it all proved to be as the "morning cloud and early dew." Indeed. the coarse language and foul abuse and increased violence on this occasion remind us of the unclean spirit returning with other spirits to make the last state worse than the first (Matt. xii. 45). This necessarily raises the thought of the *extent and lessons of the wasted influences of life.* That vast and varied influences are brought to bear on human beings, which, so far as we can trace in this life, do not issue in their legitimate results is obvious. "Seed on stony ground" is a fact in the moral as in the physical world. "How often would I have gathered thee!" is repeated by hundreds of parents and teachers after the example of the sorrowing Lord. The bitter tears of broken-hearted parents and the lamentations of our true Jeremiahs over degenerate nationalities raise the question of Why such wasted energy for good? It does not, indeed, follow that all is lost which seems to be lost on the immediate object. The waste of life which Butler refers to in his 'Analogy' is, we know, not really such in the economy of the universe. And so even the fruitless expenditure of moral influence on our reckless souls is wrought up into useful expenditure, for moral instruction and maintenance of justice, in the whole circle of moral existence. Our Saviour's appeals issued in rejection by the Pharisees, but the two together will form an element in the discipline and instruction of untold ages which will be highly useful. It suggests thought as to the mystery of the human will, and the relation of present to future existence. It suggests inquiries for all Christian workers—whether their methods are wisest, are sustained in a right spirit, and are sufficiently varied in kind. It brings grave questions to the conscience of those who enjoy privileges—as to what account they will render, and whether they shall ever be more than awful monuments in the universe for the warning of other beings.

III. MUFFLED THOUGHTS. "Saul *spake* not anything that day: for *he thought*" (ver. 26). As the monarch sat at the head of his table the guests saw his stately form and heard his voice when he conversed on the ordinary topics of the day; but also "*he thought*"—thoughts of David, his past honours, his possible future, his absence to-day, and his appearance on the morrow, and then his speedy death, passed swifter than lightning through the dark mind, indicating their existence in the low, muffled tones which only the ear of God could discern. Thought is constantly tending to expression in words, and there are gradations in its movement. From simple definiteness of existence up to loud exclamations, Saul's thoughts, like muffled bells, were ringing within in subdued tones, their language being distinct to himself and to God. It is often forgotten that thought is language in the world of mind; and it is a solemn fact that our real life lies in the thoughts we allow to pass through our mind. Many are under the delusion that what is said audibly and done visibly constitutes the material of which character is built and on which judgment will one day be pronounced. We are spiritual, invisible beings. And while thus our thoughts are the real forms of our life, it is worthy of remark that not one thousandth part of what we think ever finds expression in distinct, audible tones. The vast preponderance of our thoughts beat in muffled tones because we dare not or cannot utter them. What God must hear beating in the hearts of men daily! It was muffled thought which Christ detected saying, "This man blasphemeth" (Matt. ix. 3; Luke vi. 7, 8), and which said, "There is no God." The same is true of the "groaning of the prisoner" which cometh up before God, and the dumb prayers of the children of God all over the earth. "Keep thy heart with all diligence."

IV. CONFLICTING INTERESTS. Jonathan appears to have been an authority with his father in all matters pertaining to the court and government (vers. 2, 27). The muffled thoughts which all along had muttered vengeance against David now found audible and violent expression in the abuse poured on Jonathan and the villanous attempt on his life. He set before Jonathan as conflicting interests, between which he was to make a choice, his friendship for David and his succession to the kingdom.

If Jonathan kept the one he must lose the other. Saul assumed that policy and prudence would dictate the choice of the succession, for, with the swift logic of the cruel, he wound up his argument by, "Therefore now send and fetch him unto me, for he shall surely die" (ver. 31). It is easy to show that Saul's logic, like that of all the wicked, was faulty; for if David was really the "neighbour" to whom God had decreed to give the kingdom (ch. xv. 28), no breaking of friendship would prevent his having it; and if David was a friend of Jonathan he would never rob him of his right should the friendship be maintained. Jonathan's love and spiritual insight enabled him to see through the fallacy and to make his choice. There are *alternatives open to most men in the course of years* which bring material and spiritual considerations into sharp contrast. Here it was selfish grasping at power *versus* joy in God's purposes for Israel and mankind. Moses had to say whether the probability of becoming prime-minister of Egypt was more attractive than identifying himself with the despised slaves in prosecution of a spiritual enterprise. The same contrast arose, though the choice was different, when the young rich man was required to evince his supreme love for God and all that that implies by giving up the wealth on which his heart was set (Matt. xix. 20—22). The possession of wealth and acquisition of honour in public life are not inconsistent with true piety, but it makes all the difference when parents say to young men, "Give up your religion if you are to make your way in the world;" "Surrender the Greater than David, and grasp the honours of this life." Every one is called on to decide between Christ and the supremacy of material, earthly interests. In which lies wisdom is evident (Matt. x. 37; xix. 27—29).

V. VIRTUE VICTORIOUS. Jonathan was proof against parental influence, material considerations delusively presented, and even threatening of death. He pleaded for right and innocence. He mourned the debasement of a father. He was indignant at the base insinuations against the noblest and purest of men. He dared to let the court know his preference for the spiritual over the material (ver. 34). This is heroism requiring far more courage than to go amidst the cheers of men and the pageantry of war to the cannon's mouth. Here is the power of faith, the sufficiency of God's grace, the victory that overcometh the world (Heb. xi. 32—38). The world is short-sighted. Jonathan now wears a crown which will never fade (2 Tim. ii. 12; iv. 7, 8; Rev. iii. 21).

General lessons:—1. Seeing that such varied characters are around us, let us be in every place as the "salt of the earth" and "light of the world." 2. It is our duty to exercise the holiest influence and to work unweariedly, whatever be the issue (Eccles. xi. 6). 3. We should cultivate such an inner life that if all our thoughts found audible expression we need not be ashamed (Ps. li. 6, 10). 4. Every one is tempted to reject Christ, and so every one has to determine his own destiny. 5. Fidelity in seasons of great trial depends much on previously-cultivated friendship with Christ.

Vers. 35—42.—*Warning in danger.* The facts are—1. In accordance with arrangement, Jonathan, on the next day, goes out into the field, and, on shooting the arrow beyond the lad with him, he cries out the signal of danger. 2. David recognises the sign, and the lad is sent away to the city. 3. Thereupon David and Jonathan embrace each other, and take a sorrowful farewell—Jonathan giving him his benediction, and reminding him for his comfort of the sacred covenant between them both. A crisis had come in the life of David which demanded prompt action. He had passed from a quiet pastoral occupation to the full glory of a victor's triumph, and from thence through the chequered scenes of public service in the army and the court. Meanwhile the hidden purposes of God were fast developing; and now the "anointed" has to take a painful step in order to insure the preservation of life essential to the realisation of the end for which Samuel had chosen him in the name of God. The manner in which Jonathan performed his part is a beautiful instance of wise and faithful friendship under most perilous circumstances. We see here—

I. HOW WE MAY COME INTO CIRCUMSTANCES OF GREAT DANGER WHICH AT ONE TIME WOULD NOT BE ANTICIPATED. The life of the anointed of the Lord was in real peril by reason of the fixed purpose of an enraged and envious king. No one would have supposed such a condition of things when the ruddy youth went forth to meet the

giant, and subsequently received favours at the hand of Saul. But the possibilities of human experience transcend all our effort to foresee. What the web of life will embrace as the weaving goes on who can tell? It is true one stage prepares the way for another according to fixed laws, but we know not what new external condition a day or an hour may bring forth to modify an existing stage. Who less than Divine could have supposed that Adam, pure and blessed, would soon be exposed to so deadly a peril in Eden? or that he who received the homage of wise men and was the subject of angelic praise would be sought by a murderous Herod? The *great lines of human experience are still the same.* In business affairs the once prosperous come sometimes into risks of property, reputation, and all that is dear. By associations not looked for, characters once without suspicion are in danger of a fatal compromise. The tender, happy youth of a pious home, encircled by all that love can provide, is found far from home on the verge of a moral precipice. No position of privilege or service sets us above the possibility of grave dangers. Even David, the chosen servant, was nigh unto death, and the holy apostle was anxious lest, having preached to others, he himself should at last be a "castaway" (1 Cor. ix. 27).

II. PROVIDENCE ALWAYS PROVIDES KINDLY WARNINGS OF DANGER AND INCENTIVES TO ESCAPE. In the service of God David came into this great peril, but by the offices of friendship God mercifully provided for his need. The signal was given, and he recognised its meaning. It said to him, "Flee; escape." Perhaps it may be safely said that there is no circumstance of moral—and often of material—danger into which we may be brought in the unfolding of events but that God makes known our position and opens a way of escape. Even in ordinary affairs the voice of a sober judgment, if not of some personal friend, may warn the merchant of his risks, and suggest a speedy retreat from entanglements. Often a man, gradually forming undesirable associations, is warned by relatives and those who love him best of the peril of his reputation. The *quondam* youth of purity hears a voice as from a mother's heart saying, as he in later years stands on the brink of ruin, "Flee!" Providence has many a Jonathan to shoot the arrow and cry "Beyond."

III. It is REASONABLE THAT IN ALL TIMES OF DANGER WE SHOULD PROMPTLY ACT ON THE WARNING AT ANY COST. In David's case we see the reasonableness of his noting the sign, acting on its significance, even though in so doing it cost him the bitter pang of parting from the dearest friend of his life, and becoming a beggar and a fugitive. Only thus could he ultimately fulfil the end of his existence. It was reasonable, for Jonathan knew the danger to be real, and would not deceive. So in any case of our peril, whether of health, business, reputation, Christian profession, or future salvation, it is important at once to heed the voice of warning; for Providence never lies. It is a *fact that many are ruined in spite of warning.* The reason is, they either will not cultivate the habit of discerning the "signs of the times" in moral and spiritual matters (Matt. xvi. 3); or, discerning them, they fall under the delusion that somehow they shall escape, even though they remain as they are; or else they refuse to believe the signs. Many reject the testimony of the faithful Jonathan. They prefer their own speculations to the declared testimony of Christ (Rev. i. 18). Verily unbelief is folly, and those who pride themselves on reason are most unreasonable. It *often costs much to act promptly on the voice of warning.* We may not have to endure a separation from a holy friend as did David; but a temporary loss may be sustained of serious character. The ruin threatening from a man's entangled business affairs may be escaped by a prompt surrender of luxurious habits and home comforts. To save reputation friends may have to be abandoned. A soul can only be saved from death sometimes by a resolute plucking out of a right eye (Matt. v. 29). Lot lost all in Sodom but saved himself.

General lessons:—1. Knowing the perilous possibilities of life, let us go forward cautiously, yet quietly trusting in God. 2. Whenever it is in our power, let us prove ourselves friends by warning others of their material or spiritual dangers. 3. We should give careful heed to the first promptings of conscience, remembering that in moral questions the first motions of conscience are safest for action. 4. We may make a useful study of the partings of life—of, *e. g.*, Lot and Abraham, Moses and Pharaoh, Paul and the Ephesians, Christ and his disciples.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 24—34. (GIBEAH.)—*Anger.* "Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan" (ver. 30). "And Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger" (ver. 34). Anger is not necessarily sinful. "It is in itself, and in its original, no more than indignation against injury and wickedness" (Butler, on 'Resentment'). But it is too frequently sinful because of the manner in which it is indulged. How different was the anger of Saul now from what it was on a former occasion (ch. xi. 6). Consider that—

I. IT MAY BE UNINTENTIONALLY EXCITED (vers. 24—29). The reason which Jonathan gave why "David's place was empty" was doubtless a mere pretext (ver. 12), harmless as he thought, and not designed to provoke wrath; but Saul saw through it at once, and his "anger was kindled against Jonathan" on account of it and his taking part with one whom he regarded as his enemy. Care should be exercised, even when no harm is meant, to furnish no occasion for offence, especially in intercourse with those who are of an irritable and passionate temper, and to avoid "all appearance (every kind) of evil." Deception practised for a good end is not good, and sometimes produces much mischief.

II. IT IS OFTEN UNRIGHTEOUSLY INDULGED (vers. 30—33), as—1. *When it springs from selfishness* and pride, and is associated with malice and revenge. Saul's anger against Jonathan was the offspring of the envy toward "the son of Jesse" which slumbered in his breast, if indeed he had not now formed the deliberate purpose of putting him to death at the first opportunity. It is not said that "the evil spirit from Jehovah came upon him" again. Hatred of David had become the pervading spirit of his life, and it gave a colouring to everything. "Anger is an agitation of the mind that proceeds to the resolution of a revenge, the mind assenting to it" (Seneca, on 'Anger'). 2. *When it is felt without just or adequate cause.* The questions of Jonathan (ver. 32) did not, any more than the reason he had previously given, justify his father's wrath, and his jealousy of David was groundless and wicked. "Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause," &c. (Matt. v. 22). 3. *When it becomes excessive,* and ceases to be under the control of right reason. "Be master of thine anger." 4. *When it issues in bitter words, and violent and unjust acts.* "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer," &c. (1 John iii. 15). He has within him the principle of murder, the germ from which the outward act naturally grows. "Cease from anger and forsake wrath" (Ps. xxxvii. 8). "Where envy and strife are there is confusion and every evil work" (James iii. 16). "Sinful anger destroys our own peace of mind, hurts the unity of spirit among brethren, blocks up the way to the Divine throne, exposes us to danger, makes work for bitter repentance, fires the minds of others, makes us unlike the meek and lowly Jesus, causes us to resemble madmen and devils, and is cruel and murderous" (Fawcett, 'Essay on Anger').

III. IT CAN BE UNBLAMABLY ENTERTAINED (ver. 34). It may in certain circumstances be a Christian virtue. But in order to this—1. *It must be directed, out of love to righteousness, against the wrong* which is done or intended rather than against the wrong-doer, and be associated with sorrow for him and good-will toward him. "Resentment is not inconsistent with good-will. These contrary passions, though they may lessen, do not necessarily destroy each other. We may therefore love our enemy and yet have resentment against him for his injurious behaviour toward us" (Butler, on 'Forgiveness of Injuries'). "And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being *grieved* for the hardness of their hearts," &c. (Mark iii. 5). 2. *It must be felt from love to others* rather than ourselves, especially to those who love God, and from zeal for his honour. "He was grieved for David, because his father had done him shame." 3. *It must be kept under proper control.* Jonathan did not retaliate. He "arose from the table," and went out; to fast, not to raise a rebellion against his father, as Absalom did at a subsequent period. 4. *It must not be suffered to continue too long.* "Wise anger is like fire from flint; there is a great ado to bring it out; and when it does come, it is out again immediately" (M. Henry). "Be ye angry and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath, neither give place to the devil."

IV. IT MUST BE UNCEASINGLY GUARDED AGAINST and duly suppressed by the use of proper means, such as consideration of the effects of sinful anger on others and on ourselves, of the allowance which ought to be made for others, of our own faults, and of the patience and gentleness of Christ; the realisation of the presence and love of God; the cultivation of the opposite principles of humility, charity, and meekness; and continual prayer for the Holy Spirit.—D.

Vers. 35—40. (THE STONE EZEL.)—*An obedient lad.* (A word to the young.) Prince Jonathan went out into the country, by the stone Ezel, to practise archery on his famous bow (2 Sam. i. 18, 22), and took with him a lad, "a little lad" (ver. 35), to carry his arrows and gather them up after they had been shot at the mark. This lad—1. *Had learnt a great lesson,* the first and most important lesson of life—obedience. He was a young soldier, and had learnt a soldier's chief duty. "Children, *obey* your parents" (Ephes. vi. 1). "Servants, *obey* your masters" (Col. iii. 22). "*Obey*" your teachers (Heb. xiii. 17). "*Obey* magistrates" (Titus iii. 1). 2. *Had learnt his lesson well.* He did what he was told to do willingly, cheerfully, quickly ("make speed, haste, stay not"), fully, "without asking any questions." 3. *Was very useful to his master.* Though but a little lad, he could be of service to a prince and great hero. 4. *Did a greater service than he was aware of.* He was seen by David from his hiding-place in the rock, and was useful to him as well as to Jonathan. "And the lad knew not anything" (ver. 39). In doing our duty One sees us whom we see not, and regards it as done to him. 5. *Did not go unrewarded.* He pleased his master, and would be more highly valued for this service and promoted to a higher position, for which it helped to prepare him. 6. *Set a pattern* of the kind of service we should render to God. "We ought to obey God" (Acts v. 29) above all. "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth."—D.

Ver. 41. (THE STONE EZEL.)—*The parting of friends.* Friends sometimes part because they cease to esteem each other. They also sometimes part not in feeling, but only in space; not willingly, but under the constraint of a higher necessity; and their separation is one of the most painful trials of life. Such was the parting of Jonathan and David. "This is the culminating point in the mutual relations of the two friends who furnish the eternal type of the perfection of noble friendship; and, moreover, in these last hours before their separation, all the threads of their destinies, henceforth so widely different, are secretly woven together. It is also at this point, consequently, that the clearest anticipation of the whole subsequent history already shines through. As Jonathan here foresees, David afterwards obtains the kingdom; and, in accordance with his oath to his friend, he afterwards, when a powerful king, always spares the descendants of Jonathan, in grateful remembrance of his dearly-loved friend, and never loses an opportunity of showing them kindness" (Ewald). In their parting we observe—

I. COURTESY. David "fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times." He did so not merely in external and courtier-like obeisance to the prince, but also in heartfelt esteem and homage to the friend, who had shown his fidelity in a great crisis, virtually renounced the prospect of a kingdom for his sake and in obedience to what he saw to be the Divine purpose, and was worthy of the highest honour. True courtesy—1. *Has its seat in the heart,* and expresses itself in appropriate speech and conduct in intercourse with others, according to the custom of the time and place and the relative position they occupy. The outward bearing, of itself, is morally worthless. It may be superficial and hypocritical. Yet "courtesy of feeling is very much acquired and promoted by cultivating courtesy of manner. Gentleness of manner has some influence on gentleness of life." 2. Is the *opposite* of selfishness and pride (the chief causes of its absence); unsociableness, austerity, and moroseness; coldness, reserve, and neglect; contemptuous demeanour, rudeness, and undue familiarity. And it by no means implies obsequiousness or want of self-respect. 3. *Consists* of humility, benevolent regard for others, kindly consideration for their feelings even in little things, gentleness, and frankness. 4. Is *attended* with many advantages; commended by the examples recorded in the word of God, and enjoined by its

precepts (Gen. xxiii. 12; Luke vii. 44; Acts xxviii. 7; Philemon). "Whatsoever things are lovely," &c. (Phil. iv. 8). "Be courteous" (1 Pet. iii. 8).

II. TENDERNESS. "And they kissed one another, and wept with one another, until David exceeded" (LXX., "wept one with another with great lamentation"). The tenderness of their affection and grief was "wonderful." Something of the same tenderness—1. Is commonly possessed by men of a *brave and noble type* of character. "There is in David (as there is said to be in all great geniuses) a feminine as well as a masculine vein; a passionate tenderness, a keen sensibility, a vast capacity of sympathy, sadness, and suffering which makes him truly a type of the Man of sorrows" (Kingsley). 2. Is revealed in them by *special circumstances*, and is in such circumstances worthy of them. 3. Is shown in *sympathy with the trouble of others*, rather than in grief occasioned by the deprivation of their friendship and aid. The loss which David and Jonathan were each about to suffer by the separation was great; but they were chiefly affected by the thought of the trouble which awaited each other: the one to become an outlaw and to be pursued with relentless malice; the other to bear the frowns of his royal father, and witness his ruinous career, without any consolation but that derived from the prospect of a better time under the rule of his chosen friend. 4. Appears in the *restraint* which is put upon the indulgence of personal feeling, from concern for others' welfare. The interview might not be prolonged. There was danger in delay. And Jonathan hastened the departure of his friend, saying, "Go in peace." Equal tenderness appears in none save those whose hearts are softened and pervaded by Divine grace (Acts xx. 37, 38; xxi. 13), or in "the Friend of sinners."

III. PIETY. "Go in peace, forasmuch," &c. Their souls were "knit" to God before they were knit to each other; the one was the cause of the other; their covenant was made "in the name of Jehovah," and he would still be with them when they parted. The piety which is possessed in common alleviates and sanctifies the grief occasioned by the separation of friends. It appears in—1. The *fellowship* which is held with the eternal Friend and abides amidst all earthly changes. 2. *Submission* to his sovereign will, which appoints the lot of each and all (Acts xxi. 13). 3. *Faith* in his overruling power and goodness, according to which "all things work together for good"—the welfare of his people, the establishment of his kingdom. 4. The wish and *prayer* for his continued presence and blessing. In him parted friends may still meet, continue of "one heart and one soul," and obtain by their prayers invaluable benefits for one another.

IV. HOPEFULNESS. They did not part without the hope of meeting again in this life (which was fulfilled—ch. xxiii. 16), and doubtless also in the eternal home to which God gathers his people. "Let it be considered what a melancholy thing any friendship would be that should be destined to expire with all its pleasures and advantages at death. That is the worthy and happy friendship, and that alone, where the parties are zealously preparing and have a good hope to meet in a nobler scene" (J. Foster). The friendship which is formed and cherished in God is not dissolved by death, but is renewed in "a life beyond life," and perpetuated for ever.

"As for my friends, they are not lost;
The several vessels of thy fleet,
Though parted now, by tempest tossed,
Shall safely in the haven meet."

D.

EXPOSITION.

DAVID'S FLIGHT TO NOB, AND SUBSEQUENTLY TO THE PHILISTINES (CH. XXI.).

CHAPTER XXI.

DAVID'S FLIGHT TO NOB (vers. 1—9). Ver. 1.—**Then came David to Nob.** Nob means a *knoll* or *hill*, and apparently was situated a little to the north of Jerusalem on the road leading to Gath. The ark had evidently been removed thither by Saul early in his reign, after it had remained for twenty years in the house of Abinadab; and as eighty-five priests wearing an ephod were murdered there by Doeg at Saul's command (ch. xxii. 18, 19), it is plain that the worship of Jehovah had been restored by him

with something of its old splendour. And this agrees with Saul's character. At the commencement of his reign we find Ahiah with him as high priest, and even when he fell his excuse was the necessity for performing the public rites of religion (ch. xv. 15). But with him the king's will was first, the will of Jehovah second; and while he restores God's public worship as part of the glory of his reign, he ruthlessly puts the priests with their wives and families to death when he supposes that they have given aid to his enemy. **Ahimelech was afraid at the meeting of David.** More literally, "went trembling to meet David." Ahiah, described as high priest in ch. xiv. 3, was either dead or, more probably, was a younger brother, who, while Ahimelech remained with the ark, acted as high priest at the camp for Saul, especially in consulting God for him by means of the ephod with the breastplate. **Why art thou alone?** Nevertheless, in Mark ii. 26 our Lord speaks of those "who were with David," and the "young men" are mentioned in vers. 4, 5. While David went alone to consult Ahimelech, that his visit might be kept quite secret, he had taken a few of his servants with him, and had left them somewhere in the neighbourhood, or even, more probably, had instructed some one to meet him with such men as he could collect. The arrival of the king's son-in-law without an escort would naturally strike the high priest as strange, and therefore as alarming.

Ver. 2.—**The king hath commanded me a business.** This pretence of a private commission from the king was a mere invention, but his "appointing his servants to meet him at such and such a place" was probably the exact truth. After parting with Jonathan, David probably did not venture to show himself at home, but, while Saul still supposed him to be at Bethlehem, gave orders to some trusty officer to gather together a few of his most faithful men, and await him with them at some fit place. Meanwhile alone he sets out on his flight, and, having as yet no settled plan, goes to Nob, because it was out of the way of the road to Bethlehem, whither Saul would send to arrest him. Naturally such a visit would seem strange to Ahimelech; but David needed food and arms, and probably counsel; and but for the chance of the presence of Doeg, no harm might have ensued. As it was, this visit of David completed the ruin of Eli's house.

Vers. 3, 4.—**What is under thine hand?** This does not mean that Ahimelech was himself carrying the shewbread out of the tabernacle, but simply, "What hast thou?" The sense of the whole verse is, "Now, therefore, what hast thou at hand? Give me five loaves, or whatever there may be." Ahimelech answers, "There is no common bread at hand." I have no ordinary food; there is only **hallowed bread**, that is, the shewbread, which, after remaining in Jehovah's presence from sabbath to sabbath, was then to be eaten by the priests in the holy place (Levit. xxiv. 8, 9). As Ahimelech could not venture to refuse David's request, he asks if his attendants are at least ceremonially clean, as in that case the urgency of the king's business might excuse the breach of the letter of the commandment. Our Lord in Matt. xii. 3 cites this as a case in which the inward spirit of the law was kept, and the violation of its literal precept thereby justified.

Vers. 5, 6.—**About these three days since I came out.** This exactly agrees with the time during which David had lain concealed (ch. xx. 24, 27, 35), and explains the hunger under which he was suffering, as he had no doubt taken with him only food sufficient for his immediate wants. He wishes, however, the high priest to believe that he had been engaged with his men during this time on public business, whereas they had been at home, and some of them possibly were unclean. The whole chapter sets David before us in a very humiliating light. Just as some books of Homer are styled "the prowess" of some hero, so this chapter might be called David's degradation. The determined hatred of Saul seems to have thrown him off his balance, and it was not till he got among the hills of Judah, wherein was the cave of Adullam, that he recovered his serenity. **The vessels of the young men.** Their scrips, in which they would carry the bread, and their baggage generally. **The bread is in a manner common, &c.** The word *bread* is supplied by the translators, to give some sense to this most difficult passage. Literally translated, the two last clauses are, "And the way is profane, although it be sanctified to-day in the vessel." Among the numerous interpretations of these words the following seems the best: "And though our journey be not connected with a religious object, yet it (the bread) will be kept holy in the vessel (in which it will be carried)." There is no difficulty in supplying *bread* in the last clause, as the shewbread was the subject of the conversation, and a nominative is constantly supplied by the mind from the principal matter that is occupying the thoughts of the speakers. David's argument, therefore, is that both his attendants and their wallets were free from legal defilement, and that though their expedition was on some secular business, yet that at all events the bread would be secure from pollution. **The shewbread that was taken from before Jehovah.** The Talmud ('Menach.,' 92, 2) points out that this bread was not newly taken out of the sanctuary, but, as the last clause shows, had been re-

moved on some previous day. As after a week's exposure it was stale and dry, the priests, we are told, ate but little of it, and the rest was left (see Talmud, 'Tract. Yom.,' 39, 1). It also points out that, had such violations of the Levitical law been common, so much importance would not have been attached to this incident.

Ver. 7.—David's visit to Nob had probably been dictated simply by a desire to get food while a few attendants were being collected for him, and under ordinary circumstances would have remained unknown to Saul. Unfortunately there chanced to be a person present there who informed the king of it, and brought a second terrible catastrophe upon the house of Eli (see on ch. ii. 33); by working too upon his jealousy he caused Saul to commit a crime which sets him before us as a hateful and remorseless tyrant. This man was **Doeg, an Edomite**, who had, it seems, long been in Saul's service, as he was his chief herdsman. According to the Septuagint he had charge of the king's mules, but the other versions agree with the Hebrew. As herds would form the main part of Saul's wealth, his chief herdsman would be a person of importance. He was **detained before Jehovah**. *I. e.* shut up in close seclusion within the precincts of the tabernacle, either for some vow, or for purification, or perhaps as suspected of leprosy (Levit. xiii. 4), or, as some think, as a proselyte. Ephrem Syrus thinks he had committed some trespass, and was detained till he had offered the appointed sacrifice. David at once felt that Doeg's presence boded much ill (ch. xxii. 22), and it probably was the cause of his taking the rash resolution to flee for refuge to Gath.

Vers. 8, 9.—**Is there not here under thine hand spear or sword?** The sight of Doeg made David feel how helpless he was in case of attack, and he excuses his request for weapons by saying that he had left home unarmed because of the urgency of the king's business. The whole matter must have seemed very suspicious to Ahimelech, but he was powerless, and answers that the only weapon in the sanctuary was David's own votive offering, the sword of Goliath, carefully deposited in a place of honour behind the ephod with the Urim and Thummim, and **wrapped in a cloth** for its protection. As the word is used in Isa. ix. 5 of military attire, it may mean Goliath's war-mantle, but more probably it was a covering to preserve it from rust and damp. In ch. xvii. 54 it is said that Goliath's armour became David's private property, and nothing could be more natural than that he should thus lay up the sword in the tabernacle, as a thank offering to God. He now takes it with pleasure, saying, **There is none like that**; for it was a memorial of his greatest achievement, and might be the presage of good fortune again.

DAVID SEEKS REFUGE WITH THE KING OF GATH (vers. 10—15). Ver. 10.—**David arose and fled that day.** The presence of Doeg at Nob was a most untoward circumstance; and though David could never have anticipated that Saul would visit upon the priests the unwitting assistance they had given him with such barbarous ferocity, yet he must have felt sure that an active pursuit would be at once instituted against himself. He therefore took a most unwise and precipitate step, but one which clearly shows the greatness of the danger to which he was exposed. For he flees to Achish, king of Gath, the first town upon the Philistine border, at the mouth of the valley of Elah (see on ch. xvii. 3). Achish is called Abimelech in the title of Ps. xxxiv., written by David in grateful commemoration of his escape, that being the official title of the kings of Gath handed down through many successive centuries (see Gen. xxvi. 1). It has been objected that nothing could be more improbable than that David, the conqueror of Goliath, should seek refuge with a Philistine lord, and that this is nothing more than a popular tale, which has grown out of the real fact recorded in ch. xxvii. But when men are in desperate straits they take wild resolutions, and this meeting with Doeg, just after he had broken down with grief (ch. xx. 41), evidently put David to his wits' end. As, moreover, Saul was degenerating into a cruel tyrant, desertions may have become not uncommon, and though only three or four years can have elapsed since the battle of Elah, as David was only about twenty-four years of age at Saul's death, yet the change from a boyish stripling to a bearded man was enough to make it possible that David might not be recognised. As for Goliath's sword, we have seen that it was not remarkable for its size, and was probably of the ordinary pattern imported from Greece. Even if recognised, Achish might welcome him as a deserter from Saul, the great enemy of the Philistines; for as a deserter never received pardon or mercy, he must now use his prowess to the very utmost against Saul. Finally, the historical truth of the narrative is vouched for by Ps. xxxiv. and the details are all different from those in ch. xxvii. David there is a powerful chieftain with a large following of trained soldiers, and feels so secure that he takes his wives with him; he asks for some place in which to reside, and occupies himself in continual forays. Here he is in the utmost distress, has no trained band of soldiers, and goes well-nigh mad with mental anguish. And this is in exact keeping with that extreme

excitement to which David was a prey in his last interview with Jonathan (ch. xx. 41); and only in his first grief at Saul's cruel bitterness would his mind have been so affected, and his conduct so rash.

Ver. 11.—**David the king of the land.** The servants of Achish use the title of *king* in a very general way. Thus Achish, though really a *seren* (see on ch. v. 11), is called king of Gath; and they meant nothing more as regards David than that he was Israel's great man, though in accepting Goliath's challenge he had undertaken what in old time was regarded as the king's especial duty. **Did they not sing one to another of him in dances?** The Hebrew method of singing was by choruses, who sang and danced in turns to the music of their tambours (see on ch. xviii. 7). David evidently had hoped not to be recognised, but to be admitted to serve as a soldier, or in some other capacity, without many questions being asked. As we find an Edomite in Saul's service, Cushites, Maachathites, and other foreigners in the employment of David, there was probably much of this desertion of one service for another, especially as kings in those days had absolute authority and their displeasure was death.

Ver. 13.—**He changed his behaviour.** The same word is used in the title of Ps. xxxiv. Literally it means "his taste," and, like the Latin word *sapientia*, is derived from the action of the palate, and so from the faculty of discriminating flavours it came to signify the power of discrimination generally. Thus "to change his taste" means to act as if he had lost the power of distinguishing between objects. **Feigned himself mad.** Literally, "he roamed hither and thither" restlessly and in terror. **In their hands.** *I. e.* before them, in their presence. **Scrabbled on the doors of the gate.** The Vulgate and Septuagint read *drummed* upon them. Literally the verb means "to make the mark of a Tau," the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and which anciently was in the form of a cross. The gate, on the leaves of which David scrawled, was probably that of the court or waiting-room, in which the servants of Achish passed their time when in attendance upon him. Possibly David had witnessed these symptoms of madness in Saul's case during his fits of insanity. The idea of some of the older commentators, that David really for a time went out of his mind, is opposed to the general sense of the narrative.

Vers. 14, 15.—**The man is mad.** Achish supposes that David's madness was real, and "drove him away" (Ps. xxxiv., title). Here we have only his contemptuous words, declaring that he had madmen enough of his own, and needed no more. As madmen were looked upon in old time as possessed by the Deity, and therefore as persons who must not be interfered with, they probably presumed upon the liberty granted them, and gave much annoyance. **In my presence.** Rather, "against me." Achish feared personal injury. **Shall this fellow come into my house?** A strong negative taking the form of a question. It means, David shall not enter into my service (comp. Ps. xxxiv., title). The whole psalm bears witness to the deep perturbation of David's spirit, and helps to explain his strange conduct.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—7.—*Weakness in embarrassment.* The facts are—1. Arriving at Nob, David quiets the suspicions of Ahimelech by stating that he was on the king's secret business. 2. On this ground he asks for and obtains hallowed bread to appease his hunger, and the sword of Goliath. 3. Doeg the Edomite, being detained there that day, is observant of David's proceedings. Hitherto David had held position as an officer in Saul's household or in the army, and therefore, despite Saul's private jealousy, had a right to the respect and protection of every man. Henceforth loyalty to Saul meant death to David. Therefore the paternal home at Bethlehem was out of the question, and there were reasons for not compromising Samuel with any appearance of open revolt. To a devout mind it was natural under these circumstances to flee to the sanctuary, and there seek solace and aid. The narrative relates how good and evil were blended in the conduct of the man of God at this critical juncture, and it suggests for consideration several important truths.

I. THE HIGHER LAWS OF LIFE. David desired the shewbread to appease his hunger, and the priest in charge at first objected to the request on the plea that it was contrary to the ceremonial law to give it to him. The fact that David, a devout and reasonable man, ventured to ask for it, combined with his argument on the priest's own ceremonial principles (ver. 5), shows that he perceived the existence of a law which rose above the ceremonial. Some would perhaps regard David's action as typical of the prerogatives of the real King and Priest of Zion, and even interpret his statement about the "king's business" as a spiritual enigma, pointing to the

"Father's business" which Christ was commissioned to accomplish (Luke ii. 49; John xvii. 4—9). But, at all events, it is certain that our Saviour regarded David's request and the response of the priest as indicative of the subordination of a lower to a higher law (Mark ii. 24—28). To save and sustain the life of a man, though a fugitive, was more important than the observance of a ritual. This *subordination of law runs through all things*, till we come up to the highest—that of supreme love of God. Health, and even life, may have to be set aside for the assertion of a moral principle. Hence the paradox (Matt. x. 39). Class distinctions, official relations, domestic claims, and private rights may be, in seasons of extreme national peril, entirely ignored for the maintenance of public safety. On this principle it is that attention to the affairs of this life, though right and good, is to yield to the higher obligation of regard to eternal things; and deference to self—one of the most important of laws—must give way when Christ claims submission to his yoke, the submission of love. Thus it could be shown how entirely in harmony with the scientific principle of interaction and subordination of laws is the cardinal teaching of the gospel.

II. WEAKNESS IN EMBARRASSMENT. The embarrassment of David was great, and not unlike what many fall into when called to high service for God. He was evidently under the impression that he was being led by God to some service for Israel not yet explicitly revealed (cf. ch. xvi. 13; xvii. 26, 45; xix. 18—24; xx. 13—15). At the same time he had neither the will nor the thought to rise in revolt, nor would Samuel or Jesse encourage it; yet, without home, friend, or covering, whither could he flee, and what do? To aid him would be deemed by the enraged king as treason. Under these circumstances, as a devout man, he naturally fled from his hiding-place to the sanctuary at Nob. But the considerations which hindered him from compromising Samuel, Jesse, and Jonathan also operated with him to save Ahimelech from the cruel suspicion of Saul. Hence, for covering the priest as well as for saving life, he fabricated the falsehood. 1. *God's service and approval afford us no exemption from embarrassment.* No man was ever more truly called to service and more distinctly approved than was David, and it is difficult to find in history a case of more undeserved and painful embarrassment. The Psalms, especially vii., x., xiii., xxxv., lii., liv., reveal how keenly he felt his position. Those who think that the service of God is free from cares and trials know little of history and life. The Apostle Paul had his full share, though chief of apostles (2 Cor. xi. 23—28). The purifying fires easily enkindle in this world. There are materials for them in domestic affairs, in business, in the developments of private experience. 2. The *causes of weakness in embarrassment are often traceable.* If we fall, as did David, it is because of either—(1) *Partial consideration of the facts of our position.* We may dwell too much on the difficulties, too little on the Unseen Hand. Peter looked at the waves, and not at Christ, and then began to sink. "Man does not live by bread alone" (Deut. viii. 3). (2) *Physical exhaustion conduces to this partial consideration*, and also *renders the action of the mind less steady.* David was suffering mentally by the recent suspense, parting from his friend, and long abstinence from food. The inception of many a sin takes place when the flesh is literally weak. Our Saviour recognises this (Matt. xxvi. 40, 42). 3. *Education may have impaired our moral perception* in reference to some actions. Custom does in one age tolerate what in another is abominated. Good men have bought and sold slaves. In David's time the tongue that lied for bread may have committed only a venial offence. 4. There *may be too much inventiveness in seeking an outlet from embarrassment.* It is possible to think and scheme too much, not leaving to God that which in our desperate need always belongs to him. In this state of mind evil suggestions are sure to arise, and they lay hold of the spirit just in proportion as, in extreme self-reliance, we lose trust in God. Our Saviour seems to have this in view in Matt. vi. 25—34. 5. It is *possible that amidst the pressure of life we do not keep near enough to God.* Possibly David had been too hurried and worried by the purely human aspect of affairs to have strengthened his faith by fellowship with God. The soul, as in the case of Peter, is weak if it fasts too long, as is the body when bread fails.

III. THE PRESENCE OF AN UNFRIENDLY EYE. Doeg the Edomite was present, and David's conduct was noted. Little sympathy had this proselyte with the lofty aspira-

tions of the "anointed;" great his pleasure in revealing to Saul anything gratifying to his wicked malice. The lesson is obvious. The servants of God live in the midst of a "perverse generation," and any inconsistencies in their conduct are sure to be used against them. Some men take unusual delight in detecting the frailties of professing Christians, as though these were an excuse for their own habits. Deeds which attract no attention in other men become conspicuous in Christians, because of the utter contrast with their holy profession (1 Tim. vi. 1; Titus ii. 4—8).

IV. A PARALLEL AND A CONTRAST. There is a singular *parallel* in many of the circumstances of David's life at this period and those of our Saviour's. David, the anointed, was destined to work out a great issue for Israel, but for years carried the secret in his own breast, and was now despised, persecuted, unsustained openly by any in authority, without food, shelter, and visible means of defence, and, moreover, exposed to strong temptations arising out of his sorrows. And so the "Anointed of the Lord," later on, kept for a long while the purpose of his life in his own heart, and only by degrees unfolded it to men. He also was despised and rejected of men; unrecognised by the authorities; cruelly persecuted, being charged with motives and intentions most base; not knowing "where to lay his head;" without means of defence against physical injury; and not unacquainted with hunger and weariness. No wonder if the Psalms which assert the "righteousness" of David (Acts ii. 29—31; 2 Pet. i. 21) shadow forth the "righteousness" of the "Holy One" (Acts ii. 27) and his more glorious triumph. But the *contrast* is manifest. David in poverty and distress trusts in God, but not perfectly. He proves his frailty in common with all others. He knows the shame and bitterness of sin. Not so the Christ. He would have no recourse to expedients for obtaining bread or relief from apprehension (Matt. iv. 2—4; xxvi. 38, 39, 50). "Of the people there was none with him." "He trod the winepress alone." But in all things he was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." In the deepest sense, therefore, do we see the appropriateness of the reference of the Psalms to him in all ascriptions of right and dominion by virtue of purity and righteousness (Ps. xxiv. 3—10). Not in David, but in Christ is the solution of the grandest language of the Psalms. How impossible of solution are the problems when men eliminate the inspiration of the Holy Ghost from the Old Testament!

General lessons:—1. We should be careful to avoid such a rigid adherence to useful and approved ordinances and arrangements as might deprive the poor and needy of spiritual nourishment. This danger attends some Church regulations. 2. It should be laid down as a rigid rule that no embarrassment, no perils from men, should ever justify even the thought of deception or wrong. Such a principle engrained into the soul will be a "breastplate of righteousness." 3. The prime consideration in times of peril is to commit our way to God, and be willing if need be to suffer and die. 4. We are justly indebted even to the failures of good men; for, out of the bitter review of their sins, they have borne testimony to the value of righteousness and the blessedness of trusting in God. Hence many of the Psalms. 5. We should guard against partiality in judging of the weakness of good men; for an occasional falsehood may be shocking to a man who thinks little of his own habit of backbiting or self-righteous censoriousness. 6. It requires many righteous deeds to remove the bad impression created on unfriendly observers by one indiscretion.

Vers. 10—15.—*Uncertain light.* The facts are—1. In continued fear of Saul, David flees to the king of Gath. 2. Being recognised as the conqueror of Goliath, he fears the consequences. 3. To escape vengeance he feigns madness. 4. Achish the king thereupon refuses to have him in his service. There is no evidence that David received any Divine direction through the high priest, but the reverse (ch. xxii. 15). He appears to have been left to the exercise of his own judgment as to a future place of refuge. To be alone, unable to remain in one's own land, a hunted fugitive, on religious principle averse to resistance by sword or concerted revolt (ch. xxiv. 6), with no guide but such as the judgment unhinged by conflicting thoughts could afford—this was certainly being "desolate" and "afflicted." The result was a determination to seek shelter among the enemies of his God and country, a step

most perilous, and of very doubtful character, and which involved farther recourse to a most humiliating expedient.

I. THERE ARE TIMES WHEN GOD'S SERVANTS ARE APPARENTLY LEFT TO THEIR OWN USE OF PREVIOUS TEACHING, which they find difficult to apply to new and dangerous circumstances. David was placed in great peril, with no other guidance than what his own spirit might gather from a consideration of his calling by Samuel, and the general signs of God's past favour. There is, as a rule, a difficulty to the inexperienced in applying general principles to novel conditions; and under the physical and mental exhaustion of this crisis David found it hard to extract from the past sufficient light to guide his present steps. He walked in comparative darkness. "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps" (Ps. lxxxviii. 6). The *supposition that it is reserved only to the deliberately wicked to walk in darkness is not correct.* The present life of the righteous in a sinful world is one of discipline, in which they both reap some of the fruits of former imperfections and become trained to higher service. Our Christian course is a campaign in which dark nights of watching and groping and trembling are to be expected as well as bright days of onslaught and victory. The degree of clearness in which the pillar of fire and cloud may stand before us may be affected by our disordered vision—the result of imperfect health, or distraction, or sheer exhaustion. The disciples of Christ, during those dark and dreadful hours of his passion and death, were left to the guidance and cheer of such of the truths as he had taught them in the days of prosperity as their judgment might deem appropriate to their present need. To the young man from home, tossed and torn by the adversities of life, unable to find means of sustenance, and destitute of friends, there is left the lessons of his childhood and such truth as may have been gathered from a brief experience of life. In his agitation he sees no clear light. A "horror of great darkness" comes over the soul, and the servant of God asks why his God is so "far from helping" him (Ps. xxii. 1).

II. THE SERVANTS OF GOD, ACTING ON THEIR OWN JUDGMENT AT SUCH TIMES, MAY COMMIT THEMSELVES TO INCREASING DANGERS AND HUMILIATING DEVICES. Exercising his judgment both on his present circumstances and his past experience of God's dealings with him, David thought he saw amidst the gloom a hand pointing to Gath as a place of refuge. No voice from heaven said, "Go not thither," and no light led elsewhere. Men would say he did the best under the circumstances, and in all sincerity of purpose. Nevertheless, the step was a false one, apart from his motive, both in itself and in its results. For it was shocking for a pious Hebrew—the assertor of the "name of the Lord" (ch. xvii. 45), and the victor of Elah—to enter the abode and seek the service of the "uncircumcised Philistine," and the event proved that safety was not secured, but was so imperilled as to suggest the adoption of a most humiliating expedient. Oh, the bitter anguish of those who, having lived in the light of God's countenance, find themselves sinking deeper and deeper into helplessness and sorrow! *Thus may it be with us all in our "dark and cloudy day."* Every new step we take only makes our path more painful, and taxes more severely our ingenuity. Peter's "following afar off" led him amidst scoffing men and women, and their words (ch. xxi. 11; cf. Matt. xxvi. 58, 69—75) made a demand on his ingenuity more serious in its success than David's feigned madness. And this has been the experience of multitudes. There are *two great dangers of the "hour of darkness"* which David's experience indicates. 1. *The danger of causing scandal among the enemies of religion.* If the servants of Achish suspected David of the low cunning (ver. 11) which seeks to slay by stealth, then his brave, chivalrous character as a defender of the honour of Jehovah's name (ch. xvii. 45) is gone; and if they regard him as a fugitive fleeing from his king and country, then he reveals to the "uncircumcised" the woes and troubles of the people of God. It is a sacred duty in all our times of adversity to avoid whatever would cause irreligious men to think that we can do their base deeds, and not to expose to the eye of the unsympathetic the internal sorrows of the Church of God. 2. *The danger of appearing to be what we are not.* It may have been a harmless and successful device to simulate madness; but self-respect was gone, and a "more excellent way" of escape might have been sought of God. This is the great peril of us all both in prosperity and adversity. The guise under which the simulation appears is varied

An appearance of wealth covers real poverty; a geniality of manner is adopted when real aversion lies in the heart; a pretence of ill-health secures escape from obligations; ambiguous words and evasions are employed to suggest our ignorance of matters when we know them well. To be real, to be known to be just what we are, is the only safe and wise course for a true Christian.

III. THE MORAL VALUE OF THESE SEASONS OF DARKNESS CANNOT BE APPRECIATED AT THE TIME. David was doubtless confounded at the providence that should have him "anointed" to a special service and yet allow him to be hunted as an outcast. He saw not the good of being bereft of friend and counsellor. But God deals with his servants in view of their actual need and the future service they are to render. Unchecked prosperity might have been the greatest curse to such a young man. We do not know what subtle dangers were lurking in his heart, and how necessary it was to cause him to feel his utter helplessness when left to himself. Facts prove that out of this bitter experience he rose a more devout, and humble, and trustful man, and was thereby enabled to be a better king, and to enrich the world for ever with psalms expressive of the deepest experience of the human soul. *Time is essential to the interpretation of the ways of God.* The cruel wrongs of Joseph and the anguish of Jacob proved among the good things of life. The forty years' trial in the desert was a blessing to Israel. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous;" but history proves how blessed it is. The absolute trust expressed in the Psalms could only have been stated by one who had been very poor, desolate, and afflicted. Even the life of the Apostle Peter was the better for the bitterness and shame of his deed. Many on earth can say that they are grateful for their adversities, for through them they have got nearer to God, have found Christ's love more precious, and have set their affections more intently on things unseen and eternal. Who can adequately praise the unsearchable wisdom and love that can thus turn our darkness into light, and convert our sorrows into joys, and even build up holy characters out of the ruins of our own actions and follies? (Rom. xi. 36—39).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—8. (NOB.)—*Deceit.* 1. As in the outward life, so in the inward experience of men great exaltation is often followed by great depression. Whilst David was with Samuel and the prophets his faith in God appears to have been strong, and it was justified by the extraordinary manner in which he was preserved. But soon afterwards (some events which are not recorded having taken place in the interval) he was in mortal fear for his life, and resorted to an unworthy pretext in order to obtain an assurance of safety, and now took another false step. "There seems ground for suspecting that from the time of his parting with Jonathan—if not, indeed, from the time of his leaving Naioth—David had *lost some of his trust in God*" (Kitto). 2. The intention to deceive constitutes the essence of lying. Truth is the representation of things as they are, and it may be departed from in many ways without such an intention. But veracity is always obligatory. Even if intentional deception be ever justifiable, as some have supposed, it clearly was not in the case of David. The sacred historian records the fact without approval, and without comment, except as the mention of its disastrous consequences may be so regarded (ch. xxii. 2). "Whoso thinketh that there is any kind of lie which is not sin deceiveth himself" (Augustine). 3. The amount of guilt involved in lying depends upon its circumstances, nature, and motives. The forms which it assumes are endlessly varied (direct, equivocation, suppression of truth, for advantage, pious frauds, malicious, &c.); but that which is marked by hatred and malice is the most reprehensible. This element was absent from the deception practised by David. The age in which he lived, too, was one in which a "lie of necessity" was deemed comparatively venial; and it was borne with, though not approved, by the "God of truth" until men should be trained to a higher moral state. Concerning *deceit* observe that—

I. IT IS USUALLY URGED BY SPECIAL INDUCEMENTS; such as—1. *The pressure of circumstances.* When David presented himself alone before the high priest at the commencement of the sabbath (the evening of Friday) he was pressed by hunger

and fear, and thereby tempted to invent a falsehood. If he had steadfastly set his face against the temptation his need would probably have been met in some other way. There is, strictly speaking, no such thing as a lie of necessity. A man may die of necessity, but not lie. 2. *The promise of advantage.* He thought that no harm could possibly come of his deceit. But how little do men know, when they enter upon a false way, to what end it may lead! 3. *The possession of a natural tendency* or susceptibility to such a temptation. There was in him (notwithstanding he abhorred lying from his heart) "a natural disposition which rendered him peculiarly open to this temptation: a quick, impulsive genius fertile in conceiving, and a versatile cleverness skilful in colouring things different from the actual fact. And does it not read a most striking lesson to those who are in any way similarly constituted?" (J. Wright, 'David, King of Israel').

"Ever to the truth
Which but the semblance of a falsehood wears
A man, if possible, should bar his lip,
Since, although blameless, he incurs reproach" (Dante).

II. IT IS ALWAYS DESERVING OF STRONG REPROBATION, inasmuch as—1. It is a violation of the *bond by which society is held together.* Without confidence in each other's truthfulness men could not live together in social union. It is a sin against the justice and the love which we owe to our neighbour. What the apostle says with reference to the Christian community applies to all: "Wherefore putting away lying," &c.: "for we are members one of another" (Ephes. iv. 25). 2. It is contrary to the dictates of an *enlightened conscience.* 3. It is prohibited and condemned by the *word of truth.* "Ye shall not lie one to another" (Levit. xix. 11). "Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile" (Ps. xxiv. 13; cxix. 29; Prov. xii. 22; Col. iii. 9; Rev. xxi. 8). "Lying is a base, unworthy vice; a vice that one of the ancients portrays in the most odious colours, when he says that 'it is to manifest a contempt of God, and withal a fear of man.' It is not possible more excellently to represent the horror, baseness, and irregularity of it; for what can a man imagine more hateful and contemptible than to be a coward toward men and valiant against his Maker?" (Montaigne).

III. IT IS OFTEN DETECTED BY UNEXPECTED MEANS (ver. 8). Little did David think of seeing Doeg the Edomite detained (literally, shut up) in the tabernacle, to witness his deception with quick eyes and ears, and ready to reveal it with a tongue "like a sharp razor, working deceitfully" (Ps. lii. 2). But—1. However cautious men may be in practising deceit, they can *never calculate upon all the means* by which it may be discovered. "A bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter" (Eccles. x. 20). 2. Even its *temporary success* often leads to inquiry and discovery (ch. xxii. 6). 3. God, before whom "all things are naked and open," causes *the whole course of things* to work together for its exposure (2 Sam. xii. 12), in order to teach men to avoid "the way of lying," and "speak the truth in their heart." It was through the operation of his providence that Doeg was there that day. Human history and individual life afford innumerable instances of the exposure of deceit in unexpected ways (Eccles. xii. 14).

"Lie not; but let thy heart be true to God,
Thy tongue to it, thy actions to them both.
Dare to be true! Nothing can need a lie;
The fault that needs it most grows two thereby" (Herbert).

IV. IT INVARIABLY PRODUCES PERNICIOUS CONSEQUENCES. 1. In those who deceive—by their moral deterioration, encouragement in deception when they are successful, and filling them sooner or later with bitter regret (ch. xxii. 22). 2. In those who are deceived, to an extent which cannot be anticipated. 3. In other men, by lessening their confidence in one another, and giving "occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme" (2 Sam. xii. 14).

Learn—1. That we may not "do evil that good may come." 2. To judge charitably of others, inasmuch as we know not the strength of their temptations.

3. To watch against the least approach to deception in ourselves. 4. To seek preservation from it by firmly trusting in God.—D.

Ver. 2. (NOB.)—*The sins of good men.* Some of the most eminent servants of God mentioned in the Bible fell into grievous sins. This has often been to some a ground of objection to the Bible, and to others a subject of perplexity. But there is little reason for either. Consider it in relation to—

I. THE TRUTH OF SCRIPTURE. If men had been described therein as wholly free from sin there would have been much more reason for doubt or perplexity concerning its truth than now exists; for its representation of them—1. Proves the *impartiality* of the writers, who record the failings of good men as well as their excellencies, concealing nothing. It shows that the sacred writers were influenced by the highest principles, and even guided by a higher wisdom than their own. 2. Accords with the *results of observation* and experience, which teach that men are sinful, that those who are unquestionably good men are liable to fall, and that the most eminently pious are not perfect. Much of the Bible is chiefly a faithful picture of human nature, which (both without and under the power of Divine grace) is essentially the same in all ages. 3. Confirms the *doctrines* it contains: such as that man is fallen, sinful, and helpless; that his elevation, righteousness, and strength are of God; that he can attain these blessings only through faith and prayer and conflict; that he can continue to possess them only by the same means; and that when he ceases to rely on Divine strength he utterly fails.

II. THE CHARACTER OF GOD. They were accepted and blessed by him notwithstanding their sins. Is he, therefore, unholy, unjust, or partial? Let it be remembered—1. That their sins were not sanctioned by him. 2. That they were forbidden by him. 3. That they were punished by him. 4. That they were forgiven only when repented of. 5. That they were in some cases mercifully borne with for a time because of the good which he saw in his servants, and in order to the ultimate removal of the evil. 6. That if such endurance of some things in them appears strange to us, under the higher light and grace vouchsafed, there are probably some things in ourselves, the evil of which we scarcely perceive, but which will appear hereafter in a different light to others. 7. That the principle on which God deals with the individual and the race is that of a gradual education, the aim of which is that we should be "holy as he is holy."

III. THE WORTH OF SUCH MEN. If they had continued in conscious and persistent transgression they could not have been held in honour or regarded as really good (1 John iii. 6); but though their sins may not be excused, their names are worthy of being had in everlasting remembrance, because of—1. The surpassing virtues which distinguished their character. 2. The main current of their life—so contrary to isolated instances of transgression. 3. Their deep sorrow for sin, their lofty aspirations after holiness, and their sure progress toward perfection.

IV. THE EFFECT ON OTHERS. This has doubtless been injurious in some directions. But, on the other hand, it has been, as it must be when the subject is rightly viewed, beneficial in—1. Making others more watchful against falling. If such eminent servants of God fell, much more may we. "Let him that thinketh he standeth," &c. 2. Preventing despair when they have fallen. If those who fell could be restored, so can we. 3. Teaching them to look to Jesus Christ as the one perfect example, the only propitiation for our sins, the all-sufficient source of "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." "Nothing can be an excuse or apology for sin; yet by God's mercy it may be turned to account, and made to produce the opposite to itself. To some men's errors the world has been indebted for their richest lessons and ripest fruit. . . . To the lamentable lapse, the penitence and the punishment of David, we owe some of the most subduing, the most spiritually instructive and consolatory of his psalms—psalms that have taught despair to trust, and have turned the heart of flint into a fountain of tears" (Binney).—D.

Vers. 3—6. (NOB.)—*The letter and the spirit.* "So the priest gave him hallowed bread" (ver. 6). More than half a century had elapsed since the destruction of Shiloh. The remaining members of the family of Eli had greatly increased, so that

eighty-five priests now dwelt at Nob, where the tabernacle (and possibly the ark—ch. vii. 1) had been placed. But the condition of the priesthood was very different from what it once was. The spiritual power of the nation lay in the "company of the prophets;" and Saul, rejected of God and ruling according to his own will, "assumed the power of giving the high priest orders at all times through his messengers (ch. xxi. 2); so far had the theocracy sunk from that state in which the people used to stand before the tabernacle to receive the sole behests of Jehovah their King, through the prophet and priest" (Smith, 'O. T. History'). Nevertheless Ahimelech (Ahiah, ch. xiv. 36) appears to have been a man of high character (ch. xxii. 14, 15); and when David, in his necessity, requested "five loaves," he gave them to him from the shewbread which had just been removed from the holy place. He may have been influenced by sympathy with David's character and position (of which he could not fail to know something), as well as by compassion for his need and by loyalty to the king, or by the advice of Abiathar (his son and successor, afterwards friend and companion of David—ch. xxii. 20—23; 1 Kings ii. 26; and removed from the priesthood by Solomon, giving place to Zadok, of the elder branch of the Aaronic family). The shewbread (literally, "bread of the presence") "set forth Israel's permanent consecration in obedience and in producing the fruit of good works" (see Fairbairn, 'Typology,' ii. 324), and was permitted to be eaten only by the priests (Levit. xxiv. 9); but he departed, with some reserve (ver. 4), from the strict *letter* in observance of the *spirit* of the law. And our Lord "selected this act of Ahimelech as the one incident in David's life on which to bestow his especial commendation, because it contained—however tremulously and guardedly expressed—the great evangelical truth that the ceremonial law, however rigid, must give way before the claims of suffering humanity" (Stanley). Observe that—

I. THE LETTER IS DISTINCT FROM THE SPIRIT. To the former belong particular customs, maxims, rules, rites, and ceremonies; to the latter, general principles, and essential moral and spiritual obligations. As a simple illustration—Christ said to his disciples, "Ye also ought to wash one another's feet" (here is the rule); "Love one another" (here is the principle). 1. The letter *rests upon the spirit* as its foundation. The whole Mosaic law, *as law* (moral, ceremonial, political), was a "letter" based upon great principles, springing directly out of the relation of God to men—granite foundations on which more recent strata rest, and which often crop through them into distinct view (Levit. xviii. 18; Deut. vi. 5). "There is a 'letter' and 'spirit' in everything. Every statement, every law, every institution is the form of an essence, the body of a soul, the instrument of a power. These two things are quite distinct—they may be quite different" (A. J. Morris, 'Christ the Spirit of Christianity'). 2. The letter is a *means* to an end, the spirit is the end itself. The shewbread was set apart for a particular purpose, and permitted to be eaten only by the priests, in order to represent and promote the consecration, good works, and true welfare of the whole people. So "the sabbath was made for man" (Mark ii. 27). 3. The letter is *restricted* in its application to certain persons, places, and times; the spirit is universal and abiding. 4. The letter (as such) is in its requirement *outward*, formal, mechanical, and in its effect conservative, constraining, and preparatory; the spirit necessarily demands thoughtfulness, affection, moral choice, and is productive of liberty, energy, perfection. "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life" (John vi. 63).

II. THE LETTER MAY BE CONTRARY TO THE SPIRIT. It is not essentially so; it is not always so when men imagine it to be, as, *e. g.*, when it is a restraint only upon their selfish convenience and sinful propensities. The fact that it is such a restraint shows that they still need the discipline of the law and the letter. If they were truly spiritual and free it would not be felt. But generally—1. When it is applied to *cases not contemplated by it*,—to inappropriate times and circumstances,—and when it hinders rather than promotes its chief end. 2. More particularly when it prevents the meeting of the real and *urgent necessities* of men, and the accomplishment of their true welfare—the satisfaction of hunger, the removal of sickness, the preservation of life, the salvation of the soul (Matt. xii. 1, 12). On this principle David "entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread," &c. 3. When it is opposed to the proper exercise of *benevolence*. On this principle Ahimelech gave him the bread,

and our Lord acted (Luke vi. 10). "I desired mercy, and not sacrifice" (Hosea vi. 6). 4. When it hinders the *highest service of God.* In all such instances the strict observance of the letter "works mischief and misery, and not only kills, but kills the spirit itself from which it came" (2 Cor. iii. 6).

III. THE LETTER MUST BE SUBORDINATED TO THE SPIRIT. It should not be despised or arbitrarily set aside; but the lower obligation (in so far as the "letter" is obligatory) ought to be secondary and subservient, and give place to the higher. And we learn that—1. In the order of God's dealings with men it was necessary that the *dispensation of the letter* should be superseded by that of the spirit. This incident affords a glimpse of their predominant elements. "The law was like a book of first lessons—lessons for children. Christianity is like a book for men." 2. In the *Christian dispensation* what is ceremonial, regulative, temporary (however important) must be deemed of less consequence than what is moral, essential, enduring; and devotion to the former should be surpassed by devotion to the latter. Unduly to exalt external rites or special forms of worship is to return to the bondage of the letter; whilst zealously to contend about them without brotherly love and charity is to lose the substance for the sake of shadows. "Redeemed and sanctified man stands no longer under the disciplinary form of the law, but stands above and controls the form of the requirement" (Erdmann). He is a king and priest. "Pure religion" (literally, outward ceremonial service), &c. (James i. 27). It is charity and purity. 3. In the *individual life*—renewed and sanctified—the chief endeavour should ever be to "live in the spirit," and exhibit "charity out of a pure heart" (1 Tim. i. 5).

> "I'm apt to think the man
> That could surround the sum of things, and spy
> The heart of God and secrets of his empire,
> Would speak but *love;* with him the bright result
> Would change the hue of intermediate scenes
> And make one thing of all theology."

4. In everything *Christ must be regarded as supreme*, the perfect embodiment and only source of the spirit, Redeemer, Lord, "all and in all" (Col. iii. 11; 2 Cor. iii. 17, 18).—D.

Vers. 8—10. (NOB.)—*The sword of Goliath.* "There is none like that; give it me" (ver. 9). When David slew Goliath "he put his armour in his tent" ("the ancient word for *dwelling*"). But he appears to have afterwards deposited his sword in the tabernacle at Nob as a sacred relic, dedicatory offering, memorial, and sign; and on seeking for means of defence during his flight "from the face of Saul" (ver. 10) it was still there, carefully "wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod," and was handed over to him by the priest. It was of special significance for him, and (as other memorials often do to others) it must have spoken to him with an almost oracular voice in the way of—

I. REMEMBRANCE of the help of God; afforded—1. In the gaining of a notable victory over the enemies of the Lord and his people. 2. At a time of imminent peril and utmost extremity. 3. Through faith "in the name of the Lord of hosts." David's deliverance, as he then acknowledged, was accomplished not by the sling and stone, nor yet by the sword, but by the Lord on whom he relied; and he much needed to be reminded of it now.

II. ENCOURAGEMENT to trust in God. 1. In his service, in conflict with his enemies and obedience to his directions, the Lord is with his servants. They are not "alone" (ver. 1), but he is on their side (Ps. cxviii. 6). 2. In the greatest extremity, when ordinary means seem unavailing, he is able to deliver them by those which are extraordinary. 3. The confidence which they place in him he never disappoints. "Fear not." "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes."

III. WARNING against confidence in man. Overwhelmed with fear, he was about to take the daring step of leaving his people and seeking shelter with the Philistines, and eagerly grasped the weapon as an omen of the success of his scheme. But if he had reflected it would surely have taught him that—1. There is no safety for a servant of God in dependence upon or in alliance with his enemies. None might

be like "the sword of Goliath" when used in "the Lord's battles," but in no other. 2. His own wisdom and strength avail nothing "without the Lord." And he was now evidently venturing on an erroneous and presumptuous course, in which he had no assurance of Divine guidance and help. 3. The weapon which has been powerful by faith is powerless without it, and may even be turned against him who employs it. Ancient memorials, institutions, methods are valueless apart from the spirit which they represent. It is probable that David was discovered in the native place of Goliath by the sword he bore; and the next thing we hear is that he and the renowned weapon he so highly prized were in the hands of the Philistines.—D.

Vers. 10—15. (GATH.)—*The fear of man.* "And David laid up these words in his heart, and was sore afraid" (ver. 12). The fear of man is not always sinful. As in certain cases, and within certain limits, the approbation of others is a natural and proper object of desire, so the disapprobation of others is a like object of dread; and it often restrains from temptation and impels to virtuous conduct. But it is sinful when it exists where it ought not, or in an undue measure; when it hinders us from doing right lest we should incur their displeasure, or incites us to do wrong in order to avoid it. Such fear has often possessed the servants of God (Gen. xii. 12; Exod. xxx. 11, 22; 1 Sam. xvi. 2; Matt. xxvi. 72). It was felt by David when he fled from Saul; and still more when recognised by the servants of Achish, king of Gath, and brought before him. To avoid what appeared to him inevitable death he feigned madness, and his dissimulation (though no more reprehensible than the stratagems which many others have devised in great straits) was unworthy of his high character. Notice—

I. ITS PRINCIPAL CAUSES. 1. *Distrust of Divine protection,* which he had already exhibited. If he had not, to some extent, "cast away his confidence," he would hardly have come to Gath at all; for God could assuredly protect him in his own land. And now, deprived of "the shield of faith," he became victim to a fear as great as the courage he had formerly displayed. 2. *The failure of worldly policy,* which, through lack of faith, he had adopted. Like Peter, he went whither he was not called to go; and when his folly and presumption were suddenly revealed he was overwhelmed with dismay. His failure was, in its ultimate result, good; for, although he had no intention of turning his sword against his people, it prevented further entanglements arising out of his relation with his enemies, humbled him, and constrained him to cry to God for deliverance. It is better for a good man to be driven forth from the wicked in contempt than to be retained amongst them in honour. 3. *The presence of personal danger;* doubtless great, but exaggerated, as it always is, by fear. "He that seeketh his life shall lose it." How common is the fear of man, arising from similar causes, in social, political, and religious life!

II. ITS INJURIOUS INFLUENCE (ver. 13). The intercourse of David with Saul may possibly have suggested the device; which, moreover, was not an inappropriate expression of his inward agitation and misery. Fear—1. *Fills the mind with distracting anxiety and distress.* He whose faith fails is no longer himself. He is driven hither and thither, like a ship upon the open sea (Luke xii. 29). 2. *Incites to the adoption of deceitful expedients.* "The fear of man bringeth a snare" (Prov. xxix. 25). 3. *Exposes to ignominious contempt* (ver. 15). "Signally did David show on this occasion that he possessed two of the powers most essential to genius—powers without which he could never have become the great poet he was—the power of *observation* and the power of *imitation.* He must previously have noticed with artistic accuracy all the disgusting details of madness; and now he is able to reproduce them with a startling fidelity. And in the possession of these powers we may, I think, find not an excuse for, but certainly an explanation of, that tendency to deceit, which otherwise it would be hard to account for in so holy a person. When a man finds it an easy and pleasurable exercise of ability to throw himself into existences alien to his own, he is tempted to a course of unreality and consequent untruthfulness which can hardly be conceived by a more self-bound nature. But if genius has its greater temptations, it also has greater strength to resist them. And the more godlike a genius is, the more unworthy and humiliating are its lapses. What more debasing sight can be imagined than that which David presented

in the king's palace at Gath! Fingers which have struck the celestial lyre now scribble on the doors of the gate. From lips which have poured forth divinest song now drops the slaver of madness. The soul which has delighted in communion with God now emulates the riot of a fiend. And all this not brought on by the stroke of Heaven, which awes us while it saddens, but devised by a faithless craft" (J. Wright).

III. ITS EFFECTUAL REMOVAL by—1. *The overruling goodness of God,* which often delivers his servants from the snares they have made for themselves, and sometimes mercifully controls their devices to that end; and (as we learn from the psalms which refer to the event) in connection with—2. *Earnest prayer for his help,* and—3. *Restored confidence in his presence and favour.* Faith is the antidote of fear.

"The following is an approximation to the chronological order of the eight psalms which are assigned by their inscriptions to the time of David's persecution by Saul: vii. (Cush), lix., lvi., xxxiv., lii., lvii., cxlii., liv." (Delitzsch). See also the inscriptions of Ps. lxiii. and xviii. Ps. LVI., 'The prayer of a fugitive' (see inscription):—

> "Be gracious unto me, O God. . . .
> In the day that I fear, in thee do I put my trust,
> In God do I praise his word.
> In God have I put my trust; I do not fear.
> What can flesh do unto me?" (vers. 1, 4, 9, 12).

Ps. XXXIV., 'Thanksgiving for deliverance' (see inscription):—

> "I will bless Jehovah at all times. . . .
> I sought Jehovah, and he answered me,
> And out of all my fears did he deliver me.
> This afflicted one cried, and Jehovah heard,
> And saved him out of all his troubles" (vers. 1, 3, 7, 12—16).

"When David sang these two songs God's grace had already dried his tears. Their fundamental tone is thanksgiving for favour and deliverance. But he who has an eye, therefore, will observe that they are still wet with tears, and cannot fail to see in the singer's outpourings of heart the sorrowfulest recollections of former sins and errors" (Krummacher).—D.

Ver. 6.—*The letter of the law violated.* How did David, being neither priest nor Levite, venture to eat the presence-bread from the sanctuary? How did Ahimelech venture to give it to him?

I. THERE WAS THE PLEA OF NECESSITY. An ox or an ass which had fallen into a pit might be lifted out on the sabbath, notwithstanding the commandment to do no manner of work on the seventh day. The need of the poor animal, and the mercy due to it in its mishap, were justification enough for a breach of the letter of the law. When the disciples of Christ, walking with him along the edge of a cornfield, pulled some ears to relieve their hunger, they were blameless, for what they did was expressly permitted by the Mosaic law (Deut. xxiii. 25). But they did it on the sabbath, and this the Pharisees challenged as unlawful. The Lord Jesus, however, held it quite lawful. It was necessary that his followers should relieve their hunger and recruit their strength, and the greater object must be put above the less. "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." Our Lord brought out this truth into stronger relief than any other Jewish teacher had done; but it was not new doctrine. We see that while the Mosaic ritual was in the full force of its obligation the priest at Nob felt warranted to suspend one of its most minute regulations in order to relieve pressing human want. Perhaps the tendency in modern Churches is to take too much liberty with rules and ordinances of religion under pleas of necessity which are little more than pleas of convenience or self-will. But there is a golden mean between rigidity and laxity; and it must be left to the judgment and conscience of those who fear the Lord to determine for their own guidance what does or does not constitute a sufficient ground for setting aside regulations or restrictions which are ordinarily entitled to respect. Yet it is only the letter of the law, or the *minutiæ* of religious observance, that may be thus dealt with. There are supreme obligations which not even a question of life and death may overrule. Nehemiah

would not flee into the temple to save his life when his duty was to build up Jerusalem. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would not worship the golden image at Babylon to save their bodies from the furnace; nor would Daniel desist from prayer to Jehovah to escape the lions' den. Paul insisted on his right of protection as a Roman citizen, but he would not for a moment compromise or conceal the gospel to evade persecution. No bonds or afflictions moved him; neither did he count his life dear to himself, so that he might finish his course with joy. It is true that not all the followers of Christ have had such fortitude. In days of persecution some faltered and apostatised, excusing themselves under a plea of necessity. They could not suffer; they dared not to die. But the noble army of martyrs consists of those who felt it the supreme necessity to be true to conscience, to the truth of the gospel, and the Christ of God. Not everything, then, must yield to necessity. David thought his hunger a sufficient warrant for taking from the priest's hand the sacred bread; but when Goliath blasphemed the God of Israel and defied his army, David had shown that his own life was not so dear to him as the glory of God and the honour and safety of his people.

II. THERE WAS A PROFOUND INSIGHT INTO THE TRUE MEANING OF PRIESTHOOD IN ISRAEL. No doubt the priests formed a hereditary order, wearing a distinctive dress, and having special provision made by statute for their position and maintenance. But they were never intended to be a caste of holy intercessors standing between God and an unholy nation. Neither they nor the Levites, their assistants, were isolated from the common life of their countrymen, as by separate charter of privilege or vows of celibacy. They were just the concentrated expression of the truth that all Israel was called to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." The rule was that the priests only should eat the bread which was withdrawn weekly from the table in the sanctuary; but it was no breach of the essence and spirit of the law if other Israelites, faithful to God, should on an emergency eat of this bread. David was as truly a servant of Jehovah as Ahimelech. Though all the Lord's people never were prophets, they always were, and now are, priests. Knowing this, David took and ate: not at all in a wilful mood, like Esau in his ravenous hunger eating Jacob's pottage, but with reverential feeling and a good conscience, under sanction of the fact that he was one of a priestly nation, and with confidence that God would not condemn him for exceeding in such a strait the letter of the law, so long as he honoured and obeyed its spirit. The leaders and rulers of the Church, according to the New Testament, are not *sacerdots* invested with a mystic sanctity and intrusted with a religious monopoly. They are simply the intensified expression of the holy calling of all the members of Christ, all the children of God. All these have a right to worship in the holiest; and as all of them may offer spiritual sacrifices, so all may "eat of the holy things." Order, indeed, is needful in the Church, and no man may assume a leading place or charge therein until duly called and appointed to the same. If David had for a light cause, or frequently, taken the presence-bread, it would have been a sign of irreverence or arrogance. And in like manner if a Christian not intrusted with office in any constituted Church pushes forward when there is no emergency, and assumes to lead the Divine service, or to appoint or conduct the observance of the Lord's Supper, he steps out of his place, and may be designated "unruly." But there are places and occasions which do not admit of the usual regulations being observed; and in such cases a private or unofficial Christian may take upon himself any religious function rather than that any soul should suffer damage, and this under the general principle that all Christians form a "royal priesthood." The teaching of this passage is against religious pedantry and ecclesiastical *hauteur*. Count form subordinate to life. Value order, and reverence ordinances that are really of God. Play no "fantastic tricks" with sacred things "before high heaven;" but do not reduce religion to a question of meats and drinks, and do not count any one a serious offender who in a strait has violated prescription or usage. One who breaks the letter of the law may keep the law itself better than another who knows nothing but the letter. We are called to liberty; not licence, indeed, but order and liberty. If we are true to God and to our consciences we need not dread that, for a formality or an informality, Christ will cast us off. The Son of man is Lord of the sabbath and of the table, "Minister of the sanctuary and

the true tabernacle," Lord of all the ordinances that are binding on his followers. And there is a freedom—not from order, but in God's order—with which the Son of man, being Son of God, has made his people free.—F.

Vers. 8—15.—*The hero unheroic.* I. A WEAPON WAS GIVEN TO DAVID AT NOB THAT SHOULD HAVE STIRRED ALL THE HEROIC ELEMENT IN HIM AND RESTORED HIS FALTERING FAITH. Had he forgotten that the sword of Goliath was in custody of the priests? Or did he remember it, and was it for a sight and a grasp of this mighty weapon that he longed? Who can tell? The priest reminded him of the day when, with that very sword, he beheaded the prostrate giant in the valley of Elah. The words must have sent a thrill through David's heart, and touched some chord of shame. Why was he now so much afraid? Why could he not trust the Lord who had saved him in that dreadful combat to protect him now? He was all eagerness to have the sword in his hand again—"There is none like it; give it me." It may have been too ponderous for a man of ordinary size and strength to wield with any freedom, but its associations and memories made it more to David than many weapons of war. He ought to have been of good cheer when in one day he got both bread and sword out of the sanctuary. Is not this suggestive of a way of help and encouragement for all who know the Lord? In new emergencies let them recall past deliverances. As Matthew Henry says, "experiences are great encouragements." The God who helped us in some past time of need is able to help us again. The grace which gained one victory is strong enough to gain another. But—

II. RECOLLECTION WITHOUT ACTIVE FAITH AVAILS LITTLE. The courage which must have leaped up in David's breast at the sight and touch of Goliath's sword soon ebbed away. His mood of despondency returned as he neared the frontier, and he relapsed into shifts unworthy both of his past and of his future. It must be owned that his position was very critical. To cross the western frontier was to expose himself to suspicion and obloquy in Israel, and to run great risk of his life among the Philistines. He was between two fires: enraged Saul behind him, and before him the king of Gath, who might very probably avenge upon him the humiliation and death of the great champion of Gath, Goliath. When the latter of these risks actually threatened him, David, always quick to scent danger, perceived his extreme predicament; and, equally quick in suggestion and resource, fell on an ingenious plan to save his life. It was not dignified—it was not worthy of a devout and upright man; but it was clever and successful. David had often seen Saul in his frenzy, and knew how to counterfeit the symptoms. So he feigned insanity, and was allowed to leave the Philistine town unmolested, and to escape to his native land. (Illustrate from the stories of Ulysses and of Lucius Junius Brutus.) What may pass without censure in heathen Greeks and Romans may not so pass in a Hebrew like David, who knew the true God; and though we should not judge severely the action of a man under imminent mortal peril, we are disappointed to see the son of Jesse betake himself to stratagem and deceit. We are vexed to find the hero unheroic, the saint unsaintly. But—

III. ALL THE WHILE THERE WAS A DEEP VEIN OF DEVOUT FEELING IN DAVID'S MIND. Two of his psalms are said to refer to this time of trouble at Gath. The first of these is the thirty-fourth. It makes no definite allusion to the events related here, but we see no reason to disregard the old tradition embodied in its title, which refers its origin to the time of David's narrow escape from the Philistines. Not that he composed it on the spur of the moment, for the elaborate acrostic structure of the ode forbids that supposition. But the sweet singer, recalling his escape, recalled the devout feeling which it awakened. He did not introduce into his song any of the actual incidents at Gath, for he must have felt that, so far as his own behaviour was concerned, the incidents were not worthy of celebration; but he recorded his experience of Divine succour for the consolation of others in their extremity, ending with "Jehovah redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate." The other psalm to which we allude is the fifty-sixth. This, too, is ascribed to "David when the Philistines laid hold on him in Gath." It vividly describes his condition and his alarm, and tells where his hope of deliverance really lay. God knew his wanderings and regarded his tears; and thoughts of God were

in David's heart even when he was playing the part of a maniac to delude the Philistines. "In God I put my trust: I am not afraid: what can man do unto me?" We do not palliate anything in David's conduct at Nob or at Gath that was unbecoming a servant of God. We must go to the great Son of David to learn a faultless morality, so that no guile may proceed out of our mouths, and we may use no pretexts to gain our objects, but count the keeping of a good conscience superior to all considerations of comfort and even of life, and have no fear of them who can kill the body, "but are not able to kill the soul." But the Psalms come in well to prevent our doing David any injustice. All through this painful passage of his life—in his flight, his grief, his mortal peril—his heart was crying out for God. So he was saved out of the hands of enemies. Goliath could not hurt him, nor Saul, nor Achish either. Not that God sanctioned any shift or subterfuge; but God heard him, and saved him out of all his distresses.—F.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXII.

COMMENCEMENT OF DAVID'S LIFE AS AN OUTLAW. Ver. 1.—**The cave Adullam.** According to Josephus this was situated near a city of the same name ('Ant.,' vi. 12, 3), which formed one of a group of fifteen in the Shephelah (see on ch. xvii. 1), and its site has now been recovered by Mr. Conder (see 'Tent Work,' ii. 156—160). "The great valley," he says, "of Elah, which forms the highway from Philistia to Hebron, runs down northwards past Keilah and Hareth, dividing the low hills of the Shephelah from the rocky mountains of Judah. Eight miles from the valley head stands Shochoh, . . . and two and a half miles south of this is a very large and ancient terebinth." This stands on "the west side of the vale, just where a small tributary ravine joins the main valley; and on the south of this ravine is a high rounded hill, almost isolated by valleys, and covered with ruins, a natural fortress," the site of the city Adullam. David's cave, he considers, would not be one of the larger caverns, as these are seldom used for habitations; but "the sides of the tributary valley are lined with rows of caves, and these we found inhabited, and full of flocks and herds; but still more interesting was the discovery of a separate cave on the hill itself, a low, smoke-blackened burrow, which was the home of a single family. We could not but suppose, as we entered this gloomy abode, that our feet were standing in the very footprints of the shepherd king, who here, encamped between the Philistines and the Jews, covered the line of advance on the cornfields of Keilah, and was but three miles distant from the thickets of Hareth." After describing the fine view from this hill, which is about 500 feet high, he adds, "There is ample room to have accommodated David's 400 men in the caves, and they are, as we have seen, still inhabited." Thus then David's cave was one of many in the Terebinth valley and the ravine opening into it, and was not far from Gath, though over the border. Here **his brethren and all his father's house** joined him through fear of Saul. Among these would be Joab, Abishai, and Asahel, his cousins; and we learn how great was the love and enthusiasm which David was able to inspire among them from the feat of the three heroes, of whom Abishai was one, who, while he was in the cave of Adullam, and a garrison of the Philistines at Bethlehem, broke through them to bring David water from the well there (2 Sam. xxiii. 13—17). As Bethlehem was thus held by the Philistines, there was double reason for the flight of Jesse's family; and it is a proof how thoroughly Saul's government had broken down that, while Samuel could maintain a son at Beersheba as judge (ch. viii. 2), Saul was unable to defend places so much more distant from the Philistine border.

Ver. 2.—**Every one that was in distress, . . . in debt,** or **discontented** (Hebrew, bitter of soul), **gathered themselves unto him.** Had Saul's government been just and upright David would have had no followers, but he never rose above the level of a soldier, had developed all that arbitrariness which military command fosters in self-willed minds, and seems entirely unaware of its being his duty to attend to the righteous administration of the law. The Israelites had in him the very king they had desired, but they found that a brave general might at home be a ruthless tyrant. Debt was one of the worst evils of ancient times. The rate of usury was so exorbitant that a loan was sure to end in utter ruin, and not only the debtor, but his children might be made slaves to repay the debt (2 Kings iv. 1). It was one of the first duties of an upright governor to enforce the Mosaic law against usury (Levit. xxv. 36); but all such cares Saul despised, and there were probably many in the land impoverished by Saul's own exactions and

favouritism (ver. 7), and made bitter of soul by his cruelty and injustice. All such were glad to join in what seemed to them the banner of revolt. Afterwards at Ziklag David was joined by nobler followers (see on ch. xxvii. 6). With David we may compare Jephthah's case in the old days of anarchy (Judges xi. 3—6), and note that bad government leads to lawlessness just as surely as no government.

Vers. 3, 4.—**David went thence to Mizpeh of Moab.** The position of this place is unknown, but as the word means a *watch-tower*, it was no doubt some beacon-hill in the highlands of Moab on the east of the Dead Sea, and probably in the mountains of Abarim or Pisgah. Here David placed his father and mother under the care of the king of Moab. They had fled from Bethlehem under the combined fear of Saul and the Philistines, but were too old to bear the fatigues of David's life. He therefore asks for a refuge for them with the king of Moab, probably on the ground that Jesse's grandmother, Ruth, was a Moabitess. But as Saul had waged war on Moab (ch. xiv. 47), the king was probably glad to help one who would keep Saul employed at home. The language of David is remarkable, and is literally, "Let, I pray, my father and my mother come forth with you" (pl.); but no better interpretation has been suggested than that in the A. V.: "Let them come forth, *i. e.* from the hold in Mizpeh, to be or dwell with you." **While David was in the hold.** Not merely that in the land of Moab, but up to the time when David was settled in Hebron. During all this period David was wandering from one natural fortress to another. **Till I know what God will do for** (or to) **me.** These words show that David had recovered his composure, and was willing calmly to leave everything to the wise disposal of God.

Ver. 5.—**The prophet Gad.** This sudden appearance of the prophet suggests Stähelin's question, How came he among such people? But, in the first place, David's followers were not all of the sort described in ver. 2; and, next, this must be regarded as a declaration of the prophetic order in his favour. As we have a summary of David's proceedings in ver. 4, extending over some time, during which the massacre of the priests at Nob took place, we may well suppose that Saul had alienated from him the minds of all religious people, and that Gad, probably by Samuel's command, came to be David's counsellor. The advice he gives is most important —**Abide not in the hold.** *I. e.* do not remain in the land of Moab. Had David done so he probably would never have become king. By remaining in Judah, and protecting the people from the Philistines, which Saul could no longer do, David grew in reputation and power, and from the list of those who joined him at Ziklag (1 Chron. xii. 1—22) it is evident not only that such was the case, but that there was a strong enthusiasm for him throughout not merely Judah, but all Israel. In the happier times which followed Gad became David's seer (2 Sam. xxiv. 11), was God's messenger to punish David for numbering the people (*ibid.* ver. 13), and finally wrote a history of his life (1 Chron. xxix. 29). As he thus survived David, he must have been a young man when he joined him, and possibly had been a companion of David in the prophetic schools at Naioth in Ramah. **The forest of Hareth.** Or, rather, Hereth. "This lay on the edge of the mountain-chain (of Hebron), where Kharas now stands, surrounded by the thickets which properly represent the Hebrew *yar*, a word wrongly supposed to mean a woodland of timber trees" (Conder, 'Tent Work,' ii. 88). *Yar* is translated **forest** here. Hereth was about three miles from Adullam (see on ver. 1).

MASSACRE OF THE PRIESTS AT NOB (vers. 6—19). Ver. 6.—**When Saul heard that David was discovered.** Hebrew, "was known." The meaning is easy enough, though rendered obscure by the involved translation of the A. V., and is as follows: When Saul heard that there was information concerning David and his men, he held a solemn council, in which we see how simple was the dignity of his court, but how great the ferocity to which he was now a prey. There is no parenthesis, but the account of Saul taking his seat, surrounded by his officers, follows directly upon the narration of the fact that news of David had reached him, and should be translated thus: "And Saul takes his seat in Gibeah under the tamarisk tree on the height, holding his javelin (as a sceptre) in his hand, and all his officers stand in order by him." For Saul's fondness for trees see ch. xiv. 2; but at a time when there were no large buildings a branching tree formed a fit place for a numerous meeting. **A tree.** Really a tamarisk tree, which "sometimes reaches such a size as to afford dense shade. . . . It is a very graceful tree, with long feathery branches and tufts, closely clad with the minutest of leaves, and surmounted in spring with spikes of beautiful pink blossom" (Tristram, 'Nat. Hist. of Bible,' p. 357). It grows abundantly on the seashore of England, but requires a warmer climate to develope into a tree. In Spain beautiful specimens may be seen, as for instance at Pampeluna. **In Ramah.** Conder (Handbook) thinks that Gibeah was the name of a district, which included Ramah; others take the word in its original signification, and render "on the height." **Standing.** The word means that they took each their proper posts around him (see on ch. x. 23; xii.

7, 16; xvii. 16). Saul was holding a formal court, to decide what steps should be taken now that David had openly revolted from him.

Vers. 7, 8.—**Ye Benjamites.** Saul had evidently failed in blending the twelve tribes into one nation. He had begun well, and his great feat of delivering Jabesh Gilead by summoning the militia of all Israel together must have given them something of a corporate feeling, and taught them their power when united. Yet now we find him isolated, and this address to his officers seems to show that he had aggrandised his own tribe at the expense of the rest. Moreover, he appeals to the worst passions of these men, and asks whether they can expect David to continue this favouritism, which had given them riches and all posts of power. And then he turns upon them, and fiercely accuses them of banding together in a conspiracy against him, to conceal from him the private understanding which existed between his own son and his enemy. **Hath made a league.** Hebrew, "hath cut." This use of the formal phrase for making a covenant seems to show that Saul was at length aware of the solemn bond of friendship entered into by Jonathan with David. **To lie in wait.** To Saul's mind, diseased with that suspicion which is the scourge of tyrants, David is secretly plotting his murder. **As at this day.** *I. e.* as to-day is manifest (see ver. 13).

Vers. 9, 10.—**Doeg the Edomite, which was set over the servants of Saul.** This translation is entirely wrong, nor would Saul's Benjamites have endured to have an Edomite set over them. The verb is that used in ver. 6, and refers simply to Doeg's place in the circle of attendants standing round Saul. The words mean, "Doeg the Edomite, who stood there with the servants of Saul." As chief herdsman he was present as a person of some importance, but far below "the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds." **I saw the son of Jesse,** &c. As Saul was in a dangerous state of excitement, bordering on insanity, Doeg's statement was probably made with the evil intent of turning the king's suspicions from the courtiers to the priests. His assertion that the high priest **enquired of Jehovah for** David was possibly true (see on ver. 15).

Vers. 11—13.—**All his father's house.** Doeg's suggestion that the priests were David's allies at once arouses all Saul's worst passions. As if he had determined from the first upon the massacre of the whole body, he sends not merely for Ahimelech, but for every priest at Nob. Shortly afterwards they arrived, for Nob was close to Gibeah, and Saul himself arraigns them before the court for treason, and recapitulates the three points mentioned by Doeg as conclusive proofs of their guilt.

Vers. 14—16.—Ahimelech's answers are those of an innocent man who had supposed that what he did was a matter of course. But his enumeration of David's privileges of rank and station probably only embittered the king. In his eyes David was of all Saul's officers the most **faithful,** both trusty and trusted (see on ch. ii. 35). He was, moreover, the **king's son-in-law;** but the next words, he **goeth at thy bidding,** more probably mean, "has admission to thy audience," *i. e.* is thy privy councillor, with the right of entering unbidden the royal presence (comp. 2 Sam. xxiii. 23, margin; 1 Chron. xi. 25). **Did I then begin to enquire of God for him?** Though the meaning of these words is disputed, yet there seems no sufficient reason for taking them in any other than their natural sense. It was probably usual to consult God by the Urim and Thummim on all matters of importance, and David, as a high officer of Saul's court, must often have done so before starting on such expeditions as are referred to in ch. xviii. 13. But the Bible is singularly reticent in such matters, and it is only incidentally that we learn how fully the Mosaic law entered into the daily life of the people. But for this frightful crime we should not even have known that Saul had brought the ark into his own neighbourhood, and restored the services of the sanctuary. But just as he took care to have Ahiah in attendance upon him in war, so we cannot doubt but that his main object in placing the priests at Nob was to have the benefit of the Divine counsel in his wars. It would be quite unreasonable to suppose that such consultations required the king's personal attendance. **Thy servant knew nothing of all this, less or more.** Whatever Ahimelech had done had been in perfect good faith, and though David's conduct must have seemed to him suspicious, yet there was nothing that would have justified him in acting differently. Nevertheless, in spite of his transparent innocence, Saul orders the slaughter not only of God's high priest, but of the whole body of the priesthood whom he had placed at Nob, and now had summoned for this ferocious purpose into his presence.

Vers. 17—19.—**Footmen.** Hebrew, "runners." They were the men who ran by the side of the king's horse or chariot as his escort (see on ch. viii. 11). In constant training, they were capable of maintaining a great speed for a very long time. Here they were present at the king's council as his bodyguard, but when commanded to commit this horrid deed not one of them stirred from his place. Saul might have seen by this that he was alienating the hearts of all right-minded men from him; but, unabashed, he next orders Doeg to slay the priests, and he, aided pro-

bably by his servants, slew in that day four-score and five persons that did wear a linen ephod. The fact that they were thus clad in their official dress added not to the wickedness, but to the impiety of this revolting act. And, not satisfied with thus wreaking his rage on innocent men, he next destroyed the city of the priests, barbarously massacring their whole families, both men and women, children and sucklings, and even their oxen, asses, and sheep, as if Nob was a city placed under the ban. It is a deed in strange contrast with the pretended mercy that spared Agag and the best of the Amalekite spoil on the pretext of religion. Only once before had so terrible a calamity befallen the descendants of Aaron, and that was when the Philistines destroyed Shiloh. But they were enemies, and provoked by the people bringing the ark to the battle, and even then women and children escaped. It was left to the anointed king, who had himself settled the priests at Nob and restored Jehovah's worship there, to perpetrate an act unparalleled in Jewish history for its barbarity. Nor was it an act of barbarity only, but also of insane and wanton stupidity. The heart of every thoughtful person must now have turned away in horror from the king whom they had desired; and no wonder that when, two or three years aftewards, war came Saul found himself a king without an army, and fell into that deep, despondent melancholy which drove him, in need of some human sympathy, to seek it from a reputed witch.

ESCAPE OF ABIATHAR TO DAVID (vers. 20—23). Vers. 20—23.—**Abiathar escaped.** Probably he was left in charge of the sanctuary when Ahimelech and the rest were summoned into the king's presence, and on news being brought of Saul's violence, at once made his escape. Naturally, as representing a family who, though originally Saul's friends, had suffered so much for David, he was kindly received, and a friendship commenced which lasted all David's life; but, taking at last Adonijah's side, he was deprived by Solomon of the high priesthood, and sent into honourable banishment at Anathoth (1 Kings ii. 26). On hearing of the terrible tragedy from which Abiathar had escaped, David, with characteristic tenderness of conscience, accuses himself of being the cause of all this bloodshed. Perhaps he felt that when he saw Doeg at Nob he ought at once to have gone away, without implicating Ahimelech in his cause; but he could never have imagined that Saul would have treated innocent men so barbarously, and may have supposed that their sacred character as well as their guiltlessness would have secured them from more than temporary displeasure. David now warmly promises Abiathar safety and friendship, and possibly the inversion of the natural order, **he that seeketh my life seeketh thy life** (where the *my* and *thy* are transposed by the Septuagint in one of its usual improvements of the Hebrew text), is meant to express this entire oneness and close union henceforward of the two friends. As to the question when and where Abiathar joined David, see on ch. xxiii. 6.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—5.—*Difficult circumstances.* The facts are—1. David, escaping from Gath, takes refuge in the cave of Adullam. 2. Here he is joined by his kindred and a miscellaneous band of men, over whom he exercises authority as captain. 3. Anxious for the comfort of his father and mother, he desires and obtains of the king of Moab permission for them to dwell at Mizpeh. 4. On being advised by the prophet Gad, he returns to Judah. This section covers the conduct of David up to the point when the "walking in darkness" terminated in a merciful Divine intervention. Four leading characters are here set before us: David, his adherents, his parents, and the seer; and the teaching of the passage may be arranged by making each of these in succession the prominent figure.

I. PRUDENCE IN DIFFICULTY. The line of action taken by David after his escape from the dangers of Gath is a remarkable instance of prudence, when regard is had to the utterly hopeless condition to which he was apparently reduced, and that no light was afforded him from any prophetic source. Lonely and hunted, he sought an impregnable cave for shelter, abstaining from any publicity to attract men into revolt against Saul. Being, apart from his choice, surrounded by men who for various private reasons were in sympathy with him, he simply organised them for defence in case of need. Knowing the peril of parents advancing in years, he sought out a place of safety where they would be free from possibility of annoyance. To secure this, and also to betake himself as far as possible from collision with Saul, he availed himself of the advantage of a kinship through Ruth, and yet, after having made the best disposition of affairs his judgment could suggest, he at once yielded to the

superior wisdom of the prophet of God. In all this we get traces of the qualities which subsequently made David a wise king. Herein are *lines of conduct worthy of our imitation* amidst the perplexities which sometimes fall to our lot in private, domestic, and public life. Amidst the fears and gloom of our position let us cherish that faith in God's purpose concerning us which, in spite of fears and sorrows, underlies all David's procedure (Ps. vii., xxiv.), and then exercise our best judgment on the avoidance of evil, the discharge of daily duty, and the measures most conducive to the end in view. To avoid all occasions of annoyance, to avail ourselves of such aid as Providence may bring to us, to lay hold of and control any unsatisfactory surroundings so as to divest them of possible mischief and convert them into useful agents, to see to it that others shall not if possible come to grief by being associated with our movements, to go on steadily awaiting God's time for action, and to welcome any clear intimations of his will, however contrary to our own arrangements—this will prove our wisdom.

II. UNSATISFACTORY ADHERENTS. The men who flocked to David were of miscellaneous characters, and were swayed by diverse motives; not such perhaps as David would have chosen. The manifestly unjust treatment of the young deliverer of Israel, and the increasingly irritable and impulsive temper of the king, accompanied with misgovernment in matters of detail, could not but make brave and chivalrous men "discontented;" and it was no wonder if at such a time many were brought to poverty. It is certain, however, that many of them did not enter into the lofty spiritual aims of David, and, in so far as their principles were not identical with his, they were a questionable support. *Yet the fact is instructive.* Persons of high character and lofty aims exercise an attractive influence over many who cannot enter fully into their conceptions. The assertors of great principles do sometimes find adherents very inferior to themselves. The adherents of a just cause are not always to be credited with an intelligent appreciation of its nature. It is therefore wrong to judge leaders of important movements by the crude notions and imperfect character of their followers. In the case of our Saviour it was the force of his personal character that drew disciples of diverse tastes and degrees of intelligence around him. But just as David disciplined and educated his followers till they became valiant, loyal men in the kingdom (1 Chron. xi.), so Christ in due time endowed his disciples with power to enter into the spirit of his mission. Neither in the Church nor in social and political affairs can we dispense with men who, though drawn to leaders, are not yet in perfect harmony of intelligence and character.

III. FILIAL PIETY. Amidst the gravest anxieties of his life David manifested concern for the welfare of his parents. Indeed all his private and public movements for a time seem to have been subordinated to securing their freedom from danger and distress. If ever a man could plead inability he could just then. This tenderness of character is very prominent in his entire life. Filial piety is strongly enjoined in the Bible. The "commandment with promise" relates to duty to parents. Our Saviour's example is conspicuous (Luke ii. 50—52; John xix. 26, 27). It is impossible to lay claim to religion without this love, care, tender interest, self-denial, and reverence for parents (Ephes. vi. 1—3). There are manifold ways in which it may be displayed: by sympathy in sorrow and sickness, by reverence and affection in health, by deference to their wishes whenever consistent with holiness and right, by forecasting their needs and providing for them, by insuring support and comfort in old age, and by the cherished love which ever causes them to thank God for the gift of children.

IV. OPPORTUNE COUNSEL. During the long season of darkness David had groped his way from place to place, exercising his judgment, and doubtless lifting up his heart for more light. He stumbled at Nob; he fell into a net at Gath; he showed prudence at Adullam; and now in the land of Moab, where perhaps he mourned in being so far from the sanctuary of God, he is remembered on high, and the prophet Gad brings to him the first Divine and official communication he, as far as we can learn, ever received. This circumstance was full of meaning. The prophetic order was recognising him. The dayspring had come. Henceforth he was to be instructed more openly in the way in which he should go (vers. 20—23; ch. xxiii. 2). *There is, also, a limit to our seasons of darkness.* We have not a prophet Gad; but when

patience has had her "perfect work," and discipline has brought us nearer to God, a "more sure word of prophecy," which "shineth as a light in a dark place," will make clear to us the perfect will of God. Like as Christ found an end to the "hour of darkness," so all who share in his sorrows will find darkness made light before them. The resurrection morn was an end to the gloom and uncertainty of the apostles. Many an anxious soul, troubled with dark doubts and on the borders of despair, has found at last a light which has turned doubt into confidence and made the path of submission to Christ the path of joy. "I will not leave you comfortless, but will come unto you."

General lessons:—1. We should not despise or discourage persons seeking to be identified with a good cause on account of their inferiority to those who lead. 2. There may be many waiting for action if men of energy and attractiveness would afford them facility. 3. The experience of the Church in all ages justifies faith in the guidance of God when we have work to do for him.

Vers. 6—16.—*Resistance to God's purposes.* The facts are—1. Saul, hearing at Gibeah of David's movements, makes an appeal to his Benjamite attendants. 2. He insinuates the existence of secret designs against himself, connivance at David's supposed purpose, and lack of pity for his condition. 3. Thereupon Doeg the Edomite relates what he saw at Nob, and makes the statement that the high priest inquired of the Lord for David. 4. Saul sends for Ahimelech and charges him with conspiracy. 5. Notwithstanding the high priest's denial of the charge, and his conviction of David's innocence, Saul condemns him and his house to death. The conduct of Saul is increasingly devoid of reason, and this gradual failure of intelligence has its root in moral decay. The key to his infatuation is to be found in the obstinate impenitence of his heart in relation to the sins of his probationary career, and the consequent fight of his entire nature against the settled purposes of God (ch. xi. 24, 25; xii. 24, 25; xiii. 11—14; xv. 26—29). The events recorded in the section before us reveal a more fatal advance in this course of mental and moral degeneration.

I. RESISTANCE TO GOD'S PURPOSES FORCES ON INCREASED DANGERS. Had Saul with penitent spirit bowed to the will of God, as expressed in ch. xv. 26—29, and at once retired into private life, the rest of his days might have been at least devout and quiet. But, persisting in rebellion, he soon saw in the innocent son of Jesse a personal enemy. And the resistance to God's purposes which induced personal envy and ill-will prompted also to open deeds of violence, and these deeds, designed by the perverted judgment to negative the Divine decree (ch. xv. 26—29), had the triple effect of cementing the bond between David and Jonathan, of developing the sympathy of the prophets and of all just men with the persecuted one, and of making David the leader of a band of 400 men. Thus the very devices of a guilty, hardened heart to prevent the fulfilment of the purposes of God were conducive to a reverse issue. Saul's dangers multiplied just as he sought their removal. The *only safe course* for guilty men, guilty Churches and nations, *is to bow at once before God*, and place themselves unreservedly at his mercy. The laws of providence are in incessant movement toward the realisation of God's purpose against sin. Every effort to set them aside, or to avoid their inevitable issue, only tends to multiply the agencies by which they at last shall be vindicated. The man who, having committed secret sin, seeks, in the exercise of an impenitent spirit, to cover it up, or brave it out, creates by every thought of his mind a new cord by which he is bound fast to his fate. Nations that seek to ward off the judgments due to past sins by guilty acts for strengthening their position in the world, rather than by sincere repentance and newness of life, are only heaping up wrath for the day of wrath. Penitence, submission, righteousness, these are the "way everlasting." Practical godliness is the soundest philosophy for individuals and communities.

II. IT INDUCES A STATE OF MIND WHICH CREATES GREAT FEARS OUT OF SLIGHT CIRCUMSTANCES. Three circumstances were the occasion of much fear to Saul—the existence of David, his friendship with Jonathan, and his holding a cave with 400 men. External events are to us what the medium through which we view them makes them appear to be, and this medium is often the creation of our moral nature. With all his daring resistance to the purposes of God, Saul could not lose the

consciousness that he was a guilty man, that the judgment pronounced was just, and that, in spite of all wishes, hopes, and efforts to the contrary, the dreaded doom would come. In such a state of mind he saw messengers of justice and supplanters of his position where others saw only blessings to Israel. A prudent act for purposes of self-defence against cruel persecution became to him a formidable attack on his throne. The secrets of a holy friendship were the plottings of unfaithful men, and the want of sympathy on the part of upright men with his malicious designs against an honourable man and public benefactor, he construed into conspiracy against himself. This *tendency of the mind to clothe all things with its own moral colouring is universal.* As the holy and the wise see occasions for joy and confidence in everything except the sins of men and their natural effects, so the guilty and foolish see occasions for trouble and fear in what to others is the expression of goodness and of righteousness. It is a slight circumstance for a policeman to walk the street, but there are men who quail at the sight. The bare mention of a name or incidental reference to a transaction will cause agitation in the minds of evil-doers. The appearance among men of the holy Saviour caused trembling in the heart of the guilty Herod (Matt. ii. 3; xiv. 1—3). A man like Saul carries within him all the elements of a hell. Small things become instruments of self-inflicted torture. In such a moral mood a man becomes an Ishmaelite indeed by reason of the quickness of his fears and the strength of his suspicions. If, beyond this life, this state of mind is intensified in the wicked by the complete dominion of sin and absence of present mitigations, it is not difficult to conceive the imperfection of language to indicate the future of the lost.

III. IT PROMPTS TO NEW EXPEDIENTS FOR RELIEF FROM SELF-CREATED DIFFICULTIES. The circumstances which caused fear to Saul were the product of his transgression; for had he not disobeyed there would have been no need for a David to be brought out from the sheepfold as a conqueror of Goliath and chosen supplanter of his line, and hence no suspicious friendship and no cave of Adullam; but now that the fears bred of these circumstances were heavily upon him, the old resistance to God manifests itself in fresh contrivances to extricate himself from trouble. He addresses the leading men of Benjamin, seeking for loyal support. He works on the feeling of clanship. He appeals to their lust for promotion and wealth. He claims their pity in his sorrows, and suggests that they, as loyal men, should avoid the suspicion of conniving at a conspiracy between his son and the son of Jesse. There is here a strange blending of hardihood and cowardice, defiance of God's will and sense of weakness, distrust of his friends and hope of assistance from them—a fair index of the mental confusion out of which spring all devices for warding off the certain doom which the guilty conscience sees to be approaching. *Generally very much energy and skill are spent by men in seeking to avert the necessary consequences of their past lives.* No mental operation is more universal than that which associates evil consequences, remote or near, with wrong-doing. But a guilty man's repugnance to suffering, combined with a determined spirit of rebellion against the moral order, induces an incessant strain of energy and skill to evade the inevitable. It is possible for men to look on Saul's appeals to Benjamites, and his stratagems for nullifying the words of Samuel (ch. xv. 28, 29), as vain and foolish as would be an attempt to prevent the action of the law of gravity, while in their own sphere they may be pursuing a similar course. All who live in hopes of a future blessedness while not laying a foundation for it in purity of nature and personal fellowship with Christ are practically like Saul; for no law is more unchangeable than that the pure in heart alone can see God. History relates how men of abandoned lives have, in later years, under a dread of future consequences, become precise in formal acts of worship, and bountiful in use of wealth, without the slightest perception of the need of a radical love of holiness, hoping by such external means to break open the door that bars the entrance into the kingdom of God of whatever defileth. A salvation from uneasiness and pain men are eager for, not a salvation which consists in holiness of nature and joy in God.

IV. IT IS SURE TO FIND SOME ABETTORS OF ITS STRIFE WITH GOD. It is probable that the more sober of the Benjamites had begun to distrust their king, and although they may not have known all his dread secret (ch. xv. 28, 29), they could not but

see that he had lost the moral support of Samuel, and was bent on a reckless course in hunting the life of David. But one man was ready to strengthen his hate and urge him on in the fatal conflict. Doeg the Edomite, a man of low spiritual tastes, an alien to Israel, maliciously added fuel to the raging evils of the unhappy king. There are several suggestive items in this brief account of the dark deed of Doeg. 1. He was *not a true Israelite.* By education, habit, and taste he could not have sympathy with the lofty, Messianic aims of a David or a Samuel. He is the type of a formal professor, who bears the name, but has none of the spirit, of the true religion. 2. He had *material interests at stake* in the continued reign of Saul (ch. xxi. 7; xxii. 9). The psalm supposed to refer to him represents him as bent on the acquisition of wealth (Ps. lii.). He is the ideal of a man whose main thought is business, and who therefore forms a judgment of religious, social, and political claims according to their presumed bearing on worldly advancement. 3. He was *cruelly cool in his plans and conduct.* The simulated tone of ingenuousness in his reference to what he had seen at Nob, his abstention from personal invective, and the matter-of-fact way in which he welded his lie about the priest inquiring of the Lord for David with the other part of the story, reveal a cruelly cool scheme for destroying one whose pure life and lofty aspirations must have mirrored too painfully his own vileness. The readiness with which he could subsequently shed the blood of God's priests fully bears out all the severe language of Ps. lii. He reminds us of the many vile men who, under cloak of attachment to a religion too pure for them, pursue this cruel course, seeking to heap up treasure by any means, and ready by word or deed to blight fair reputations and pander to the passions of the powerful. It only requires a little knowledge of the facts of David's life to enable every just and pure mind to sympathise with his strong denunciation of such men (Ps. xxxv. 4—9; lii. 2—5; lvii. 4; lviii. 4—11). There are affinities of evil. Sauls yearn for Doegs, and Doegs are ever ready to blend interest with the Sauls. Satan is not the only one lying in wait to destroy the poor and needy. Hand joins hand in wickedness, and base heart encourages base heart in the mad endeavour to destroy a greater than David.

V. IT WILL PROCEED TILL IT SETS AT NOUGHT THE MOST SACRED THINGS. Bad men are often checked in their antagonism to God's purposes by the wholesome influence on their remaining religious instincts of spiritual institutions and characters. The priesthood was revered by Saul at one time. The spiritual power had been prominent in his installation to the kingdom. All the influence of early Hebrew training conspired to make him look up with reverence to the high priest as in some sense the representative of all that is holy and Divine. Common prudence, religious prepossessions, every sentiment of tenderness and awe ought to have discounted the assertion of Doeg in the presence of the high priest's emphatic denial of having inquired of the Lord for David. It was therefore an evidence of the utter suppression of all that hitherto had acted as a beneficial restraint when, in the desperate violence of his strife with God, Saul dared to sentence the innocent high priest to death. He now sank to a deeper deep. The spiritual powers became the object of his deadly hate. The warfare must now be urged against the most sacred things of God. *Facilis descensus Averni. Spiritual deterioration is nearly complete when men set themselves in antagonism to the institutions of religion.* It argues a terrible power of evil when a soul can accept the suggestions of bad characters and cast aside all the reverence fostered by years of education and discipline. Yet there is a reason in the madness; for, no doubt, as the spiritual in Israel was at this time the most formidable, though not conspicuously active, force against Saul's permanence in the kingdom, so it is the spiritual, as embodied in a pure Christianity, which bars the way most surely to the permanent prosperity of the man who persistently lives in impenitence, and, therefore, from his mistaken point of view, it is essential if possible to doom it to destruction. It is the old tragedy again when men, for love of their own sinful will, trample underfoot the Son of God, and count the "blood of the covenant an unholy thing" (Heb. x. 29). The bold defiance of religion is too often simply an effort to cast away the cords of a holy restraint (Ps. ii. 3).

General lessons:—1. It is well to consider the force of habit in its bearing on unwillingness to submit to God's judgments. 2. Whenever slight circumstances

create great fears it should be regarded as instant proof of the existence of a perilous spiritual condition, and a demand for great searching of heart. 3. Remembering how much all our judgments are coloured by our imperfect moral state, we should pray much that God would open our eyes to see things in his light and lead us in the "way everlasting." 4. History and personal experience should teach us that the shortest and indeed only way to extricate ourselves from difficulties induced by our sins is to shun every evil way and submit ourselves entirely to God. 5. Reputations are to be held sacred, and all gain at the cost of others' ruin brings a curse with it. 6. One of the best safeguards against the dangerous allurements of wealth and the love of worldly power is a lofty spiritual aspiration—sympathy with the Lord's Anointed. 7. It is in vain to spend arguments on men who in self-abandonment to their sinful will seek to destroy the institutions of religion; for it is not a question of reason, but of perverted, degraded nature. 8. We should avoid the slightest approach to evil, seeing that when indulged in the impetus downwards is so fearful.

Vers. 17—23.—*The tragedy at Nob.* The facts are—1. Saul commands his guards to slay the priests of Nob, but they refuse. 2. Thereupon he commands Doeg to effect their death, who slays eighty-five priests, and procures the destruction of the entire city. 3. Abiathar, escaping to David, makes known to him what has happened. 4. David perceives that his presence at Nob was the occasion of this sad calamity, and admits that he feared the course Doeg would take. 5. He encourages Abiathar to remain with him, and assures him of safety. This section sets forth Saul's conduct in the darkest characters, and brings out a turn in the course of events of great consequence to David, while at the same time illustrating several important truths.

I. SINFUL MEN ARE SOMETIMES THE INSTRUMENTS OF FULFILLING DIVINE PREDICTIONS OF JUDGMENT. It had been declared as a judgment on the house of Eli that terrible things should befall his descendants (ch. ii. 31—36; iii. 11—14). In the fearful destruction at Nob this prediction was partly fulfilled. The sins of Saul brought on retribution for the sins of Eli and his sons. In this we have an instance of frequent occurrence in human history, both of nations and individuals. The savage ambition of Rome realised the truth of our Saviour's words concerning the judgment due to impenitent Jerusalem (Matt. xxiii. 34—38; Luke xxi. 20—24). The untruthful conduct of Jacob was most severely chastised by the lying tongues of his sons who conspired against his favourite Joseph; just as now the judgment due to a parent for irreligious example in the home is often realised in the open vices of his children, which perhaps ruin his health and fortune. In all these cases we have to distinguish between the just purpose of God to visit sin by future retribution, and the free action of the men who are the means of bringing it to pass. Had pestilence, or plagues, or earthquakes been more in the line of natural order just then, these would have conserved the Divine purpose. But man's sinful action, free, responsible, was the agency used, thus illustrating the statement which sometimes perplexes superficial students of the Bible—"the wicked, which is thy sword" (Ps. xvii. 13). The metaphysical question, involved in this conjunction of a righteous retribution with the free agency of man in the perpetration of crimes for which alone they are responsible, may be beyond present solution, but the fact is plain. Philosophical difficulties are inherent in common facts, and are not peculiar to theological truth.

II. IN ORDINARY MEN RELIGIOUS INSTINCTS ARE STRONGER THAN POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS. We need not be surprised that Saul's Hebrew guards declined to obey his command to slay the "priests of the Lord." No doubt strong reasons were present to prove their loyalty to their king. Not only is loyalty a first principle of action with good subjects, but the fact that he was of their own tribe, and had been their choice out of all Israel (ch. x. 19—24), must have made them anxious to sustain his authority against all comers. Even the very weaknesses of a monarch will induce some men to put down with strong hand all charged with conspiracy against him, whether or not the charge be fully established. Yet these men had been wont to recognise a higher authority than Saul's. They belonged to a race whose vocation in the world was of God. All the sanctities of religious worship and ritual, all the rich instruction of their marvellous history, strengthened and purified

the instinct that leads man to fear God. To them the high priest and his subordinates were representatives of a sacred order, the exponents of a spiritual power, and it would therefore be violence to all that was sacred, inexpressible, and most influential in their nature were they, out of loyalty to the king or from tribal considerations, to touch the "priests of the Lord." The *religious instincts of men are a great power*. They not only prompt to actions more or less good according to the degree of enlightenment, but we cannot calculate the vast benefits resulting to mankind by their restraining power. The fact is worthy of much study, and the wide world furnishes ample illustrations of its importance. On the nation, the family, and the individual it acts as a conservator of good and a represser of much that would destroy. It is often the only barrier against the tide of passion and ignorance. The wise know how to appeal to it and turn it to their own uses. It is this in men, among other things, which renders null and void all efforts to exterminate Christianity. Men may call reverence for sacred persons and offices superstition, and in extravagant forms the term is fitly applied, yet it is the indication of a governing influence in human affairs superior to all the advances of civilisation. Man must be remade if his life is permanently to be regulated by any principles or opinions at variance with the natural religiousness of his spirit.

III. ACTIONS INNOCENT IN INTENTION MAY BE FRAUGHT WITH SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES TO OTHERS. It can scarcely be charged on David that he was guilty of sin in visiting the tabernacle at Nob, seeking there food and shelter, though it may have been an indiscretion. The false representation by reason of which Ahimelech was induced to give him bread and a sword was the real wrong. On a wider survey of facts, and with a juster estimate of the risks of compromising the officials of the sanctuary, he would probably have sought food in some other quarter, or have cried out to God for special deliverance. As it was, his device of being on Saul's business was evidently intended to save the high priest from the political sin of aiding one outlawed by the king. But his good motives were entirely useless because the overt act was witnessed by an enemy, who, David felt sure, would put on it a construction inconsistent with his own wishes and the knowledge of the high priest. His conduct, therefore, pure in intentions and fenced with precaution, did compromise a band of innocent men, and was, owing to the wickedness of the parties he had to contend with, and not to the natural justice of the case, the occasion of the fearful slaughter of the priests and entire population of the city. The guilt of the slaughter rested on Saul; the occasion for the exercise of the murderous malice was unwittingly created by David. With a sorrowful heart he admits the great woe to have had its origin incidentally in his own action. It is a truism that *every action carries with it consequences into the future*, in which we ourselves and others are concerned. One of the effects of our action is to prompt the action of other men, or to modify the course which otherwise they would have taken. And as the interests of many may depend not on what we do directly, but on the conduct of others whom we directly affect, it is obvious that it is often possible for us to perform deeds or pursue courses which shall give occasion for other men to perpetrate great wrongs on those we would gladly shield. In that case we are not responsible for their crimes or follies, but we are responsible for any indiscretions which may have given plausible ground for their procedure, or have rendered it possible. But it is only *where indiscretions are possible that blame really rests*. The wise men from the East, inquiring with all simplicity of purpose for the new-born king, were the occasion of the slaughter of the children of Bethlehem; but though they no doubt were pained, if ever they knew the fact, they were not guilty of any wrong. We cannot always refuse to act because evil men exist. Indiscretion is chargeable where a knowledge of facts and of the probable uses men will make of our deeds is presumably possible. The practical bearing of the risks attendant on our actions is to induce extreme caution, to awaken watchfulness, lest by our well-intentioned deeds we should compromise others, or give an appearance of reason for wicked men to manifest their wickedness. In the memory of many a man there are records of deeds unwise and out of season, which have left a fatal mark on the world in spite of subsequent efforts of wisdom and goodness. Like David men can say, "I have occasioned" all this.

IV. THE DESIGNS OF THE WICKED DEFEAT THEMSELVES. The conflict waged by Saul was, as we have seen, really against the decree of God, but its ostensible object was a plot on the part of David against the throne. Whatever fears Saul may have had concerning Samuel's sympathy with David, there was no public ground for them in any positive action taken by the prophet in concert with David. What he dreaded most of all was the open espousal of David's cause by the spiritual power; for the priesthood had immense influence with the people. It was to crush out by one terrible blow any supposed concert that he caused the slaughter at Nob; and it is instructive to observe how this very attempt to deprive David of the official support of the spiritual power really put it on his side. The deeds of bad men are never complete enough for insuring a final triumph; some oversight, some weakness, some so-called accident gives occasion for the ultimate frustration of their purpose. By some chance, as men say, Abiathar escaped and went over to David. Saul fell into the pit he had prepared for David (Ps. lii. 6). There is now a *Christian spiritual power*, and the truth thus exemplified is especially seen in the great conflict of men against it. The same interests in higher form are still in conflict with opposing forces. Every effort to subvert or crush out the kingdom of God, though it should be a great "slaughter" either of bodies or of characters, develops more life, leads to closer union, throws the Church more on the power and guidance of God, and so prepares the way for a new movement of a higher spiritual character before which the powers of evil must yield. Give time, and the spiritual will triumph.

General lessons:—1. In matters of doubt, where evil consequences may possibly ensue from our conduct it is best to abstain from action; for it is a good rule to bar the way to evil by every possible contrivance. 2. Where the reputation of others is affected by our conduct we should either seek their consent or avoid a possible compromise of their character. 3. Any false step in life is greatly embittered in review if it has been attended with untruthfulness. 4. We may confidently appeal to the religious feelings of men in our defence of Christian truth even when by bare argument we cannot touch them. 5. In the frequent historical illustrations of the impossibility of men crushing out the spiritual power, whether in Jewish or Christian form, we see a prophecy of the time when Christ shall have "put down all rule and all authority and power" (1 Cor. xv. 24).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1, 2. (THE CAVE OF ADULLAM.)—*David's refuge and following.* David's escape from Gath to the cave of Adullam marks a fresh starting-point in his career. Henceforth he led the life of an independent outlaw at the head of a band of armed men. He was openly and continually persecuted by Saul, under the illusion that he was aiming at the crown, although he neither rebelled nor encouraged rebellion against his authority. He was thereby kept prominently before the minds of the people, and must have fixed the attention of the most observant and devout upon him, as, in contrast to Saul (whose government became more and more arbitrary, inefficient, and ungodly), the man who alone was worthy to be "captain over the Lord's inheritance;" and the experience through which he passed served to prepare him for his destination. "This very period of his deepest sufferings becomes the decisive turning-point of his whole history, at which it enters upon a true upward course, thence to rise ever higher and higher; while his real destiny, viz., to rule, is now for the first time not only foreshadowed, but already begun, though only on the smallest scale; and the clearest proof that this actually is his destiny is found in the fact that he begins to work it out without consciously exerting himself to do so" (Ewald). He may be considered as representing, in some respects, *the good man under persecution,* and as—

I. PROTECTED FROM THE VIOLENCE OF PERSECUTORS, with which the servants of God have been threatened in every age. 1. Underneath the personal and ostensible grounds of such violence lie *the opposition of "the kingdom of darkness"* to the kingdom of God, and the enmity of the evil heart against righteousness and goodness. David was "the representative of the theocratic principle for which he

suffers and endures; Saul of the anti-theocratic principle." Like Moses, David bore "the reproach of Christ," who was in him and suffered with him (Acts ix. 4; Col. i. 24; Heb. xi. 26, 32—38). 2. It is *limited* in its power, and is always ultimately defeated. "Be not afraid of them that kill the body," &c. (Luke xii. 4). 3. God himself is *the Refuge of the persecuted*, and provides varied, wonderful, and effectual means for their deliverance. "Thou art my refuge" (Ps. cxlii. 5). "Thou hast delivered my soul from death," &c. (Ps. lvi. 13). The operation of Divine providence was displayed in a remarkable manner in the preservation of David throughout the whole course of his persecution by Saul.

II. SYMPATHISING WITH THE MISERY OF THE OPPRESSED. "His brethren and all his father's house," endangered by Saul's jealousy as well as by the Philistine garrison at Bethlehem (2 Sam. xxiii. 13, 14), "and every one that was in distress" (outwardly impoverished and harassed), "and in debt" (to avaricious usurers, and not necessarily through any fault of his own), "and discontented" (inwardly embittered and dissatisfied with the existing state of things), owing to bad government. "Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad" (Eccles. vii. 7), and incites and justifies the adoption of a course which, under other circumstances, would be highly culpable. They did not gather to David in vain. 1. Sympathy with suffering is usually *felt in an eminent degree* by those who have themselves suffered (Heb. ii. 18). 2. It is always shown, when it is genuine, in *practical effort* for its alleviation (2 Cor. i. 4). 3. It generally produces in those toward whom it is shown a peculiarly strong and enduring *attachment*. "Pain is the deepest thing we have in our nature, and union through pain has always seemed more real and more holy than any other" (A. H. Hallam). "I do not know where a better home could have been provided for David than among those men in distress, in debt, in discontent. If it behoved a ruler to know the heart of his subjects, their sorrows, their wrongs, their crimes,—to know them and to sympathise with them,—this was surely as precious a part of his schooling as the solitude of his boyhood, or as any intercourse he had with men who had never faced the misery of the world, and never had any motive to quarrel with its laws. Through oppression, confusion, lawlessness he was learning the eternal, essential righteousness of God" (Maurice).

III. ASSUMING THE LEADERSHIP OF THE FAITHFUL. "He became captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men"—afterwards six hundred (ch. xxiii. 13); including his nephews, Abishai (ch. xxvi. 6), Joab, Asahel, and Amasa, Ahimelech the Hittite, the "three mighty men" who "broke through the host of the Philistines and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem" (2 Sam. xxiii. 16), many of those whose names are recorded in the list of David's heroes (1 Chron. xi. 10—47), Gadites "whose faces were like the faces of lions, and were as swift as the roes upon the mountains," Benjamites and men of Judah, under Amasai, on whom "the Spirit came, and he said, Thine are we," &c.; "for thy God helpeth thee" (1 Chron. xii. 8—18). Some of them possessed, perhaps, little religious principle, and were ready for any adventurous enterprise; but most of them were young, free, noble spirits, resenting the tyranny of Saul, and sympathising with all that was best in the nation—"the unconscious materials out of which a new world was to be formed." David's leadership was — 1. Exercised by virtue of his peculiar position, eminent godliness, and *surpassing ability*. 2. Accepted by them *voluntarily*, and followed with fidelity and enthusiasm. 3. Contributed to their discipline, *improvement* (Ps. xxxiv. 11), and future service against the common enemy, as well as his own moral force and power of organisation and rule. "The effect of such a life on his spiritual nature was to deepen his unconditional dependence on God; by the alternations of heat and cold, fear and hope, danger and safety, to temper his soul and make it flexible, tough, and bright as steel It evolved the qualities of a leader of men, teaching him command and forbearance, promptitude and patience, valour and gentleness. It won for him a name as a founder of a nation, and it gathered around him a force of men devoted to him by an enthusiastic attachment, bred by long years of common dangers and the hearty friendships of many a march by day and nightly encampment round the glimmering watchfires beneath the lucid stars" (Maclaren).

IV. DEVOTED TO THE SERVICE OF GOD. The effect of persecution on a good man

is to cause him to draw nigh to God in—1. Renewed *confidence* and hope. 2. Intense *desire for the manifestation of his glory* in "bringing the wickedness of the wicked to an end and establishing the just" (Ps. vii. 9). He wishes above all things and strives for the setting up of the kingdom of God upon earth. 3. Earnest *prayers* and thanksgivings, such as are expressed in the "cave songs" of David. PS. CXLII., 'A cry of the persecuted to God' (see inscription):—

"With my voice to Jehovah do I cry,
With my voice to Jehovah do I make supplication.
Deliver me from my persecutors,
For they are stronger than I."

PS. LVII., 'Trusting in the protection of God' (see inscription):—

"Be gracious unto me, O God, be gracious unto me,
For in thee hath my soul found refuge;
And in the shadow of thy wings will I find refuge
Until the destruction passeth by.
Be thou exalted above the heavens, O God,
Thy glory above all the earth."

"When his companions in arms were carousing or asleep, he sat by his lamp in some still retreat, or 'considered the heavens' as they spread above him, or meditated on the law, or engaged in prayer, or held intimate communion with God, and composed and wrote (though he thought not so) what shall sound in the Church and echo through the world to all time" (Binney).—D.

Vers. 3, 4. (MOAB.)—*Filial kindness.* To honour parents is the earliest obligation of life, the foundation of human duties and a stepping-stone to Divine. It applies to children not only when they dwell at home and depend on their parents, but also when they leave home and become independent of them. The manner in which it should be shown in the latter case differs in some respects from that in the former; but such kindness as David exhibited towards his aged father and mother ought never to be neglected. It was—

I. NEEDFUL. In early life we need the care of parents, in old age that of children. 1. Bodily *weakness* and failing health often render parents dependent for physical comforts and even necessaries (Gen. xlvii. 12). 2. Increasing *loneliness* makes them desirous of the cheering presence and intercourse of their children; and much pain is naturally given by lack of respect, affection, confidence, and gentle ministrations. 3. Special *emergencies*, like those here alluded to, sometimes demand unusual efforts for their safety and happiness. Their condition appeals to the tenderest and best feelings of the heart, though, alas, it sometimes appeals in vain.

II. OBLIGATORY. 1. Arising out of *natural relationship*, the duties of which on the part of children, however imperfectly they may have been fulfilled on the part of parents, cannot be cancelled. 2. Required by the claims of *gratitude* for innumerable benefits received. 3. Enjoined by the *Divine word* in many precepts to which great promises are annexed. "The fifth commandment is the centre of all the others; for upwards it is the point of departure for Divine, and downwards for human duties" (Ephes. vi. 1). "Despise not thy mother when she is old" (Prov. xxiii. 22). "God commanded, saying, Honour thy father," &c. (Matt. xv. 4—9). "Let them learn first to show (filial) reverence to their own household, and to requite their parents," &c. (1 Tim. v. 4). 4. Commended by the *example* of the good. "Because ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father," &c. (Jer. xxxv. 18, 19). Jesus Christ himself (John xix. 26).

III. EXEMPLARY in the way in which it was displayed. 1. *Thoughtful*, affectionate, and tender. 2. *Self-denying* and self-sacrificing, with much effort and risk, and as was best suited to the circumstances of the case. 3. *Religious:* "Till I know what God will do to me;" where there is a recognition of his will as supreme, faith in his wise and gracious disposal (Ps. xxvii. 10), and hope of his enabling him to see again his parents, from whom he parted with regret, and provide for their permanent welfare.

Exhortation:—1. To children. Be kind to your parents, though you no longer need their care, if you would not have your children be unkind to you. 2. To parents. Seek to gain the respect and affection of your children, and teach them to honour God, if you would have them to honour you. 3. To all. Be not like those of whom the heavenly Father said of old, "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me" (Isa. i. 2).—D.

Ver. 4. (MOAB.)—*Awaiting the future.* "Till I know what God will do to me." There are times when our thoughts naturally turn toward the future: the commencement of a fresh enterprise or a new season, suspense in sickness, the approach of critical events, especially when they lie beyond our control or even our probable conjecture. At such times this is the appropriate language of a good man. He awaits it in—

I. UNCERTAINTY about the events of the future—new positions, opportunities, advantages, trials, duties. "We know not with what we must serve the Lord until we come thither" (Exod. x. 26). "Ye have not passed this way heretofore" (Josh. iii. 4), and cannot tell what may befall you therein. "Shadows, clouds, and darkness rest upon it." But the good man is not distracted by curiosity or anxiety, inasmuch as—1. Neither is of any avail. 2. The Father has reserved the times and the seasons "in his own power" (Acts i. 7). 3. And he has done so wisely and *for our good.* "The veil that hides the future is woven by the hand of mercy."

II. CONFIDENCE in the care of God. "My times are in thy hand" (Ps. xxxi. 15). "I will cry unto God that performeth all things for me" (Ps. lvii. 2). Such confidence respects—1. His perfect knowledge, almighty power, and *supreme control* of all things, including the thoughts and purposes of men (ch. xix. 23). 2. His *individual observation.* 3. His *beneficent operation.* "Being well assured of the justice of his cause as contrasted with the insane persecutions of Saul, David confidently hoped that God would bring his flight to an end" (Keil).

"O Lord, how happy should we be,
If we could cast our care on thee,
If we from self could rest,
And feel at heart that One above,
In perfect wisdom, perfect love,
Is working for the best" (Keble).

III. READINESS for whatever may take place. 1. By *watchful attention* to every indication of the will of God, looking out for it as a watchman for the dawn of the morning. "I will stand upon my watch," &c. (Hab. ii. 1). 2. By cherishing a spirit of *humble submissiveness* to what he may think fit to do and fixed determination to do what he may require. 3. By faithful fulfilment of the plain and *immediate duty* of the present time. "Let my father and mother come forth" (from the hold in Mizpeh) "and be with you, till," &c. Its performance is the best preparation for the events and duties of the future.—D.

Ver. 5. (MIZPEH OF MOAB.)—*A summons to duty.* The prophet Gad was probably sent at the instance of Samuel to David, who was now "in the hold" in Moab, and with whom he may have become acquainted at Ramah. His message was important in relation to the future course of David (ver. 3). "According to the counsels of God he was not to seek for refuge outside the land; not only that he might not be estranged from his fatherland and the people of Israel, which would have been opposed to his calling to be king of Israel, but also that he might learn to trust entirely in the Lord as his only refuge and fortress" (Keil). There was also a special reason why he should be recalled in the incursions of the Philistines, which Saul failed to repel (ch. xxiii. 1). And the message furnished a test of his obedience to the will of God as declared by the prophets. "Immediately he conferred not with flesh and blood," but did as he was directed, and thereby afforded an instructive example to others. Consider the *message* as—

I. COMMUNICATED BY THE PROPHETIC WORD. This word is, for us, contained in "the Scriptures of truth." 1. It speaks with *authority.* 2. It speaks *plainly*, "in

divers manners," according to our need, and "for our good always." 3. It speaks in the reading of the Scriptures, in the voice of preachers and teachers, parents and friends, in the recollections of the memory, and often comes to the heart and conscience with peculiar force. "Believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper" (2 Chron. xx. 20).

II. CALLING TO UNEXPECTED DUTY; unexpected, inasmuch as, not unfrequently—1. It is such as we should not naturally have supposed. 2. It differs from the course which we have chosen for ourselves. "Abide not in the hold." 3. It requires us to meet unusual *difficulties and dangers*. "Depart, and get thee into the land of Judah" (into the very presence of a deadly foe). "Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?" (John xi. 8—10; Luke ix. 51).

"Do thy duty; that is best;
Leave unto thy Lord the rest."

III. COMPLIED WITH IN A RIGHT MANNER. "And David departed," &c. 1. Without question, like a good soldier at the word of command. 2. Without hesitation or delay. 3. Without fear. How different was it with Saul! (ch. xiii. 11; xv. 11). "Whosoever will save his life," &c. (Matt. xvi. 25).

IV. CONDUCTING TO SAFETY, USEFULNESS, AND HONOUR. 1. Safety; for he was "kept by the power of God." 2. Usefulness; for he "saved the inhabitants of Keilah" (ch. xxiii. 5). 3. Honour; for he was more fully recognised as the true defender of Israel against their enemies, and his heroic band was largely increased (ch. xxiii. 13).

"Stern Lawgiver! yet thou dost wear
The Godhead's most benignant grace;
Nor know we anything so fair
As is the smile upon thy face:
Flowers laugh before thee on their beds,
And fragrance in thy footing treads;
Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong;
And the most ancient heavens through thee are fresh and strong.
Give unto me, made lowly wise,
The spirit of self-sacrifice;
The confidence of reason give,
And in the light of truth thy bondman let me live."
(Wordsworth, 'Ode to Duty.')—D.

Vers. 6—19. (GIBEAH.)—*The tyranny of Saul.* With his spear-sceptre in his hand, Saul, now considerably past the meridian of life, sat in the midst of his council of officers and magnates, under the tamarisk tree on the height, in Gibeah. The description of what took place in this assembly—"a kind of parliament in the open air"—casts a lurid light upon his character and rule. In it we see—1. The fulfilment of the *prediction* of Samuel concerning the course which would be pursued by a king such as the people desired (ch. viii. 11—18). 2. The moral *deterioration* of Saul since the day when they shouted "God save the king" in Mizpeh (ch. x. 24), and "made him king before the Lord in Gilgal" (ch. xi. 15); and even since his rejection (ch. xv. 26). 3. The working out of the law of *retribution* in their chastisement through the king chosen by themselves and reflecting their own sin. The early brilliance of his reign had been long overcast, and the thunder-storm was approaching. Saul had ceased to be a servant of Jehovah. His government was the reverse of what it ought to have been. Although it had respect to the outward forms of religion, and displayed much zeal against irreligious practices, yet it did not really recognise the invisible King of Israel, obey his will, or observe "the manner of the kingdom" which had been ordained of old (Deut. xvii. 14—20), and formally recorded as a permanent law and testimony (ch. x. 25). It was essentially anti-theocratic. The true theocracy was represented by Samuel and the prophets at Ramah, and David and his band at Adullam; and through them (in the wonderful working of Divine providence) the nation would be raised to power and glory, and the purposes of God concerning it accomplished. His character and rule were marked by—

I. MORBID SELFISHNESS. By constantly directing his thoughts toward himself, instead of toward God and his people, Saul had come to think of nothing else but his own safety, power, and honour. Selfishness appears in—1. *Pride* and vainglory. Of this he had previously exhibited unmistakable signs (ch. xv. 12). Yet it was expressly required that his heart shou'd not be "lifted up above his brethren" (Deut xvii. 20). 2. The use of power for *personal ends.* In contrast to charity, it seeketh its own. The king exists for the good of the people, not the people for the glory of the king. "Behold, I am against thee, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers, which hath said, My river is my own, and I have made it for myself" (Ezek. xxix. 3). 3. The *neglect* of the performance of duty to others. Unlike Samuel, when he was judge, Saul had evidently, in his concern for himself, omitted to maintain law and order (ver. 2), and even to resist the encroachments of the Philistines, against whom he had formerly rendered signal service.

II. AVOWED MISGOVERNMENT (vers. 7—9). 1. *Partisanship.* He placed men of his own tribe in the chief offices of state, and this would not be conducive to the unity of the nation. "Hear now, ye Benjamites." 2. *Mercenariness.* He sought to attach them to his interest by the lowest motives. "He boasts that he has given fields and vineyards to all his Benjamite servants and accomplices; and what he gave to them he must have taken away from others" (Hengstenberg). His reign was oppressive, as it had been predicted. 3. *Suspicion* of disloyalty, and reproach for want of gratitude and sympathy. "All of you have conspired against me," &c. A man is apt to suspect in others the evil which exists in his own heart. 4. *Falsehood.* Having heard that a number of men had gathered around David, he said, "My son hath stirred up my servant against me," &c. "There is herein a twofold false accusation: as to David, that he was lying in wait to take his throne and his life; and as to Jonathan, that he was the cause of this insurrectionary and insidious conduct of David."

III. FLAGRANT INJUSTICE (vers. 9—16). The people desired a king that he might judge them (ch. viii. 20). But Saul abused his judicial office by—1. Receiving and relying upon *insufficient testimony.* The law required the evidence of at least two witnesses; but he was satisfied with the information of one of his creatures—Doeg the Edomite. 2. A prejudiced *prejudgment* of the guilt of the accused. He sent for Ahimelech "and all his father's house," having already resolved, apparently, upon their destruction. 3. Utter disregard of the plainest *proofs of innocence.* The priest gave his evidence in a dignified, simple, and straightforward manner. In what he had done he was fully justified. And he had not done all that was attributed to him. "The force of the word *begin* lies in this, that it would have been his first act of allegiance to David and defection from Saul. This he strenuously repudiates" (Speaker's 'Com.') He was ignorant of any treason in others, guiltless of it himself, and had done no wrong. 4. A rash, precipitate, revengeful, and disproportionate *sentence.* "Thou shalt surely die, Ahimelech, thou, and all thy father's house" (ver. 16).

IV. PERSISTENT WILFULNESS (ver. 17). "Never was the command of a prince more barbarously given, never was the command of a prince more honourably disobeyed" (M. Henry). "We ought to obey God rather than man." The besetting sin of Saul received another check; and another merciful warning was given him, which should have made him pause and desist from his evil purpose. But, blinded by passion, and probably thinking (being turned aside by a deceived heart) that his course was justifiable, he heeded it not, outraged the public conscience, as expressed in the refusal of his own body-guard, and gave the order for immediate execution to one of his vilest servants and accomplices. Wicked men generally find appropriate instruments for the accomplishment of their wickedness.

V. ATROCIOUS CRUELTY (vers. 18, 19). Impelled by the same self-will as formerly led him to spare Agag, he not only destroyed eighty-five "priests of the Lord," but also gave to the sword "the city of priests, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep;" nor was he, as in his attack upon the prophets, restrained by the hand of God. 1. In fulfilling their own purposes evil men often unconsciously execute the *predicted and righteous judgments of Heaven* (ch. ii.

31—36; iii. 11—14). 2. Those judgments, though startling in their immediate occasion, are *connected with their main cause.* If the house of Eli had not been reduced to a dependent and despised condition by notorious transgression, Saul would hardly have dared to commit this act. 3. The evil which men do *lives after them* in its effects, and one generation suffers for the preceding (Exod. xx. 5). 4. Although men in doing wrong may execute the will of God, they are *responsible* for their own acts, and must sooner or later suffer the penalty due to them. Saul's reckless cruelty alienated the best of his subjects and hastened his doom. This was not the only instance in which it was displayed (see 2 Sam. xxi. 1—6).

VI. IMPIOUS REBELLION. In destroying the servants of God for imaginary rebellion against himself Saul was guilty of real rebellion against the Divine King of Israel. More fully than ever he renewed a conflict which could end only in his defeat. "Woe to him that striveth with his Maker."

Reflections:—1. How vast is the mischief which self-will works in the world! 2. How base do men sometimes become under its dominion! 3. How fearfully is the possession of power frequently misused! 4. "How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"—D.

Vers. 18, 19. (GIBEAH.)—*Doeg the Edomite.* Wicked men, especially when they occupy positions of authority and possess wealth and influence, attract to themselves others of like character, and become more wicked by association with them. Of the latter Doeg the Edomite was one. He belonged to a people between whom and Israel the bitterest enmity existed. But he had apparently become a proselyte, and, being a man of some ability, was made overseer of the herdsmen of Saul and one of his council. His real character seems to have been perceived by David before he fled from court (ver. 22); and it is very probable that he gave secret information to the king of what took place at the tabernacle at Nob previous to bearing open testimony in the council. He was—

I. A HEARTLESS WORSHIPPER; "detained before Jehovah" (ch. xxi. 7). Whatever may have been the reason of his detention, there can be no doubt that he was present in the sacred place either unwillingly and by constraint, or offering a formal and hypocritical worship. "He concealed his heathen heart under Israelitish forms." He was more observant of the conduct of others in the house of God than careful to correct his own. He cherished "a wicked mind," and perhaps revolved therein how he could turn what he saw to his own advantage, or employ it for the gratification of his hatred and enmity. All who join in the outward forms of worship do not "lift up holy hands without wrath and disputation."

II. A MALICIOUS INFORMER (vers. 9, 10). His immediate purpose in giving information may have been to avert the reproaches of the king from his courtiers; but he must have known what its effect would be with respect to the high priest, and doubtless deliberately aimed at producing it. He also appears to have gone beyond the truth; perchance supposing that when he saw the priest take "the sword of Goliath" from behind the ephod, he used the latter for the purpose of "inquiring of the Lord." "Thou lovest evil more than good; and lying rather than to speak righteousness. Thou lovest all devouring words, O thou deceitful tongue" (Ps. lii. 3, 4).

III. A RUTHLESS EXECUTIONER (vers. 18, 19). What others, whose consciences were not hardened, refused to do he willingly and readily accomplished, and probably found therein a gratification of the enmity of his race against Israel. The command of the king could not relieve him of his responsibility for his deed of blood. "Louis XIV., who had sanctioned the Dragonades, died declaring to the cardinals Rohan and Bissy, and to his confessor, that, being himself altogether ignorant of ecclesiastical questions, he had acted under their guidance and as their agent in all that he had done against the Jansenists or the Protestant heretics, and on those his spiritual advisers he devolved the responsibility to the supreme Judge" (Stephen, 'Lect. on the Hist. of France').

IV. A RETRIBUTORY INSTRUMENT (see last homily). When the great wickedness of men like Doeg is considered, it is not surprising that David (living under the former dispensation) should predict and desire their due punishment as public

enemies; "not in a spirit of revenge, but rather in a spirit of zeal for the glory of God, desire for the vindication of right, and regard for the peace and purity of society" ('Expositor,' iv. 56), as he does in Ps. LII., "The punishment of an evil tongue" (see inscription):—

"Why boastest thou thyself in wickedness, O mighty man?
The mercy of God endureth continually.
Destruction doth thy tongue devise,
Like a sharp razor, working guile.
Thus then God will smite thee down for ever.
He will seize thee and pluck thee out of thy tent,
And root thee out of the land of the living."

Other psalms have been supposed by some to refer to Doeg and the massacre of the priests, viz., xvii., xxxv., lxiv., cix., cxl.—D.

Vers. 20—22. (THE FOREST OF HARETH.)—*Conscience.* Conscience is the consciousness a man has of himself in relation to the standard of right which he recognises. It is at once a judgment of his conformity or otherwise to that standard, and a corresponding feeling of approbation or disapprobation. It is the crowning faculty of the soul. "The whole world is under a solemn economy of government and judgment. A mighty spirit of judgment is in sovereign exercise over all; discerning, estimating, approving or condemning. And it is the office of conscience to recognise this authority and to represent it in the soul. It communicates with something mysteriously great without the soul, and above it, and everywhere. It is the sense (more explicit or obscure) of standing in judgment before the Almighty" (J. Foster). Its operation appears in what is here said of David as—1. *Uttering a warning against sin.* "I knew it that day," &c. Conscience is not only reflective, but prospective in its operations. The sight of Doeg led him to see and feel that the course which he was about to take in deceiving Ahimelech was wrong, and would be productive of evil consequences. But under the pressure of urgent need he neglected the premonition. 2. *Inflicting remorse on account of sin.* "I am guilty as to every soul (life) of the house of thy father." The information he received called his conscience into the highest activity. He judged himself strictly. He felt his sin deeply. And most gladly would he recall the evil he had done if he could. But that was impossible. "The lie had gone forth from him; and having done so, it was no longer under his control, but would go on producing its diabolical fruits" (W. M. Taylor). 3. *Constraining to the confession of sin.* He did not (as Saul had done) seek to conceal or palliate his transgression, but freely and fully acknowledged it, renounced it, and sought its forgiveness (Ps. xxxii. 5). 4. *Inciting to reparation for sin.* "Abide thou with me," &c. It was little that he could do for this purpose, but what was in his power he did. It is evident that, notwithstanding he had yielded to temptation, he possessed a *tender conscience* (Acts xxiv. 16). "And wouldst thou be faithful to that work which God hath appointed thee to do in this world for his name? Then make much of a trembling heart and conscience; for although the *word* be the line and rule whereby we must govern and order all our actions, yet a breaking heart and tender conscience is of absolute necessity for so doing. A hard heart can do nothing with the word of Jesus Christ. Keep then thy conscience awake with wrath and grace, with heaven and hell. But let grace and heaven bear sway" (Bunyan).

"O clear conscience and upright!
How doth a little failing wound thee sore." D.

Ver. 23. (HARETH.)—*The defender of the persecuted.* As David afforded protection to Abiathar, so Christ affords protection to those who betake themselves to him. This is not a mere resemblance, but is directly involved in that (his royal office) wherein David was a type or Divine foreshadowing of "the King of kings." They—

I. ENDURE PERSECUTION FOR HIS SAKE. "He that seeketh my life seeketh thy life." They do so—1. Because of their *union* with him, and partaking of his life and righteousness, to which "this present evil world" is opposed. 2. Because of

their *love* to him, which will not suffer them to leave him, or be unfaithful to him for the sake of gaining the favour of the world. 3. Because it has been thus *ordained*. "Unto you it is given," &c. (Phil. i. 29). "With persecutions" (Mark x. 30), which are an occasion of spiritual blessing (Matt. v. 10).

II. MUST ABIDE IN HIS FELLOWSHIP. "Abide thou with me." 1. By unwavering *reliance* upon him (John xv. 4—7; 1 John ii. 28). 2. By intimate *intercourse* with him. 3. By constant *obedience* to him.

III. FIND SAFETY UNDER HIS PROTECTION. "Fear not; with me thou art in safeguard." "David spoke thus in the firm belief that the Lord would deliver him from his foe and give him the kingdom" (Keil). Christ has "all power in heaven and in earth," and he will assuredly be "a hiding-place from the wind and a covert from the tempest." 1. Because of *his love* to them. 2. Because of his regard for *his kingdom*, to which they belong, and which they represent. 3. Because of his express and *faithful promise*. "Fear not." If the worst that can befall them should happen, even then

> "Thou, Saviour, art their charmèd Bower,
> Their magic Ring, their Rock, their Tower." D.

Vers. 1, 2.—*The cave of Adullam.* David knew well that he could nevermore live in safety at the court of Saul. He would not raise a hand against his king and father-in-law, but he would not place himself again within his reach. Better a free life even in deserts and caves of the earth than a life in constant peril in ceiled houses. Behold him then in the cave of Adullam.

I. THE CAPTAIN OF THE REFUGEES. No question arises here respecting the right of revolt against a perverse, tyrannical king. We entirely believe in such a right, because the king exists for the good of the people, not the people for the service of the king. We have no misgiving as to the right of the British nation to rid itself of King James II., or that of the people in the kingdom of the Two Sicilies to drive away King Francis II. But the case of Saul's royalty over Israel was unique. The people had chosen him by acclamation, and there was no proof as yet that the mass of the people wished to dethrone him. Even if they had so wished, David was not the man to lead their revolt; for it was one of the tests of his fitness for the succession that he should not snatch at the honour to which he was destined, but wait the evolution of the Divine purpose, recognising God only as the true and absolute King of Israel. Therefore, what he did at this period was simply for preservation of himself and his relatives. The times were "out of joint," and he had no protection of law or civil order against the mad suspicions of the king. So he took refuge in a cavern, waiting for God and hoping in his word. The hero raised no standard of revolt, and drew no followers by prospect of plunder or revenge. Yet he did draw hundreds of the men of Israel to his place of refuge. These must not be likened to the riotous and desperate followers of Catiline, or even to the "empty persons" who attached themselves to Jephthah. Doubtless there may have been among the young men some who were more adventurous than devout, and cared for their leader's sword and spear more than for his psalms; but they were in general young men of patriotic temper who had suffered damage through the misrule of the time, and found the public disorder and tyranny intolerable. They turned their wistful eyes towards one who had borne himself wisely in the station he had occupied, and from whom they hoped for a just and prudent administration of public affairs. There are parallels to this position in the history of other nations; but most worthy of our thought is the parallel of the great Son of David, our Lord Jesus Christ. When he was a young man in Galilee the people were distressed under their rulers. The civil government was oppressive; the religious *surveillance* by the chief priests and elders was worse. Heavy burdens were imposed without pity, and grievous abuses of power and office were committed. The eyes of many had failed them, looking long for a deliverer who should be the Consolation of Israel. Then appeared Jesus of Nazareth, raising no standard of revolt, indeed refusing to be made a king by the voice of the multitude, while himself under the evident displeasure of the authorities, and exposed to frequent risks of arrest and death. But to him followers repaired, and they were welcome. Jesus called to him the labour-

ing and heavy-laden. He had powerful attraction for all who were distressed. And from the day when he took up a position apart from the rulers of the Jews, though he headed no movement of resistance, it became more and more obvious that those rulers had lost the favour of Jehovah, and had nothing before them but thickening disaster and a final collapse of their power like that of Saul on Mount Gilboa. The only hope of Israel thenceforth was with and in the despised and rejected One who had been born in David's city and of David's line. So it is still. It is Jesus Christ, as rejected of men, humbled, crucified, who appeals to human hearts. Who will go out to him, "without the camp, bearing his reproach"? Who will repair to him at the cave of Adullam? Not the proud, nor the thoughtless, nor the self-satisfied; but the distressed, the ruined, and the bereaved will go; and over such he is willing to be Captain. Let them come to him, and his life is thenceforward bound up with theirs, and theirs with his. With him they are "in safeguard" till the end of the tribulation; and when the King appears in his great power these will appear with him in glory; the trials of Adullam more than recompensed by the joys of New Jerusalem.

II. THE POSITION OF SEPARATION. When is it justified? David and his followers went apart from the common life of their countrymen, and renounced all idea of rendering service or occupying any post of honour under Saul. Jesus Christ and his disciples broke with the course of the Jewish and Galilean world in which they lived, and took up a position quite aloof from the priests, elders, and scribes. What is the duty of modern Christians towards the society around them? Are they to come out and be separate? Some persons have almost a craze for separation, and support it on this story of Adullam. They hold it to be the duty of Christians to stand aloof from all the existing order of things, and all the plans and occupations of society; to accept no office in the State, and be subject to the powers that be only in the sense in which David continued subject to Saul; and to come out from all organised historical Churches, on the ground that they contain worldly elements and principles, and are therefore impure and ready to perish. All this seems to us extravagant in theory and uncharitable in spirit. Separation from evil does not mean alienation from every place and every institution in which a fault can be found. For good men to hold aloof from public affairs is simply to play into the hands of evil-doers; and to separate from every Church that has a faulty element in it is to disintegrate Christian society, and miserably embitter it in the process. But we must hold the balance true. It may be one's duty to separate himself from institutions of both Church and State under which he was born. As to civil institutions, this is plain enough. As to ecclesiastical relations, there are critical times when, as it was right for Israelites to separate from Saul and go over to David, so it has been and is right for Christians to withdraw from positions which they could not correct or amend, and go over to some simpler and purer expression of their faith and hope. On this ground we justify without hesitation the erection of reformed Churches in the sixteenth century apart from the unreformed. The Papal system had a long trial, and was found wanting. Such men as Wickliffe, Savonarola, and Huss tried to correct its errors and rouse a new spirit within its pale, just as David played on his harp to cure the mania of King Saul. It was labour lost. That which was evil grew worse. The tyranny which hung over Western Christendom became intolerable. Then they did wisely and well who threw off the yoke and began afresh with the word of God for their directory, and the Son of God, who became Son of David, for their Captain. On the same ground we justify those who now-a-days break away from the same Papal infallible, and therefore incurable, system to join or to organise a reformed Church. And we add that those who do so in a Roman Catholic country, like Spain or Italy, to worship with some small evangelical congregation in a hall, mocked and despised, show a courage not at all inferior to that of the four hundred who defied the power of Saul, and flocked around David in the cave of Adullam. Those men did not lift their swords against Saul. David did not desire them to do so. He saw something still to honour in that king, and knew that the throne would be vacated without any assistance from him. So, in that system of infatuation and spiritual tyranny which centres at Rome, there is something of that common Christianity which we must reverence, and against which we may not fight.

While we expose its errors, let us always acknowledge whatever of the truth of God it contains, and be patient. Ultimately that system must perish. As the Philistines, and not the followers of David, made an end of Saul, so the democratic infidelity, not the reformed Church, is likely to make an end of the Papacy, and all the religious delusion and oppression of the Latin Church. Happy they who are in a fellowship which gives them direct access to the Lord Jesus, and has in him the living centre and the joy of all. O Saviour, draw us to thyself, and be thou a Captain over us!—F.

Vers. 18—23.—*Massacre and safeguard.* The tragic interest of this passage groups itself about four men: (1) the furious king; (2) the cruel officer; (3) the innocent priest; (4) the self-reproaching hero.

I. SAUL AND HIS MAD TYRANNY. How much allowance may be made for actual insanity in the king God only knows. But it must not be forgotten that the disorder of his mind was largely due to his own indulgence of fierce and arrogant passions, and his wilful refusal to obey the commands of the Lord and the guidance of his prophet. He had now become quite furious in his jealousy of David and in his suspicion of all around him as plotting his downfall. Unable to capture David, he turned fiercely on those whom he supposed to be aiding and abetting him in rebellion; and the homicidal mania which he had already betrayed in hurling his javelin at David, and even at Jonathan, now broke out against the innocent priests. When one begins to indulge a bad passion, how little he can tell the length to which it may carry him! We remember how Saul at the outset of his reign would not have a man in Israel put to death on his account. But now he had no pity on the innocent. Nothing can be more shocking than the hardness of heart which disregarded the noble defence of the priests against unjust accusation, and condemned them and their families to immediate death. By this Saul forfeits all claim to our sympathy. He is a bloodstained tyrant. Nero on his accession to the imperial dignity at Rome showed a similar reluctance to sign a legal sentence of death on a criminal, and yet broke forth into horrid cruelty at the age of seventeen. Saul was not so precocious in cruelty, and seems to have been free from other vices that made Nero infamous. But it should be considered, on the other hand, that Saul had knowledge of Jehovah, while Nero knew only the gods of Rome; and that though Nero had a great teacher in Seneca, Saul had a still greater in Samuel. There is no palliation of his conduct admissible unless on the plea of disease of the brain—an excuse which may also be advanced in behalf of such wretches as Antiochus Epiphanes and the Emperor Caligula. The lesson of admonition is that wickedness has horrible abysses unseen at first. Stop short at the beginnings of evil. Check your peril, calm your anger, correct your suspicions, hold back your hasty javelin; for if you lose self-control and a good conscience there is hardly any depth of injustice and infatuation to which you may not fall.

II. DOEG AND HIS RUTHLESS SWORD. Cruel masters make cruel servants. Tyrants never lack convenient instruments. Caligula, Nero, and Domitian had favourites and freed-men ready to stimulate their jealous passions and carry out their merciless commands. At Saul's elbow stood such a wretch, Doeg the Edomite. The repeated mention of this officer's extraction seems to imply that he was actuated by the hereditary jealousy of Israel which filled the descendants of Esau, and took a malicious pleasure in widening the gulf between Saul and David and slaying the priests of Israel's God. With his own hand he cut them down, when the Israelite officers shrank from the bloody deed; and no doubt it was he who executed the inhuman sentence against the women and children at Nob, and smote the very "oxen, asses, and sheep with the edge of the sword." Doeg has had many followers in those who have with fiendish relish tortured and slain the servants of our Lord and of his Christ. And indeed all who, without raising the hand of violence, take part with malicious purpose against servants of God, who misrepresent them and stab their reputations, are of one spirit with this Edomite whose memory is cursed.

III. AHIMELECH IN HIS INTEGRITY. How fine the contrast between the calm bearing of the chief priest on the one hand, and the unreasoning fury of Saul and truculent temper of Doeg on the other! How straightforward was the vindication of Ahimelech! If Saul had not been blind with passion he must have seen its

transparent truth and noble candour. When it became known through the land that Ahimelech and the priests had been killed by the king's order on a mere suspicion of disaffection which was false, a thrill of horror must have run through many bosoms, and those who feared the Lord must have had sore misgiving that he had forsaken his people and his land. Under such mishaps in later times similar fears have been awakened. Indeed men have been tempted to question whether there be any God of righteousness and truth actually governing the world; for the virtuous suffer, the innocent are crushed, might overrules right, victory seems to be to the proud and not the lowly. It is useless to deny that there are strange defeats of goodness and truth, and that blows fall on heads that seem least to deserve them. All that we can do is to cleave to our belief, firm on its own grounds, that God is, and to say that the calamities complained of have his permission for some good ends in his far-reaching purpose. At all events we can go no further into the mystery on a survey of this present life. But there is another, and in it lies the abundant recompense for present wrongs. It seems strange that a life so precious as that of Paul should have been assailed, bruised, and finally taken by violence for no crime, but for the name of Jesus. But Paul himself has given us some clue to the compensation: "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Ahimelech and the priests, we may be sure, though they suffered not directly for Christ, but on account of his human ancestor, lost nothing, but gained much, by forfeiting their lives in innocence.

IV. DAVID AND HIS SELF-REPROACH. News of this massacre must have shocked all thoughtful men in Israel, and deepened the distrust with which Saul was now regarded. David, when he heard of it, felt, besides horror and indignation, a bitter pang of self-reproach. It was he who had played on the simplicity of the priests at Nob, and so had given occasion to Doeg to accuse them. Would that he had gone without bread, whatever the consequence to himself, rather than have exposed so many innocent persons to such a cruel fate! And now the horrid deed was done, and quite past remedy. What a lesson against crafty strokes and plausible pretexts! One may gain his point at the time by such devices, but after consequences little expected may fall on some innocent head; and surely there is no sting so sharp in the conscience of an honourable man as the feeling that, for his own safety or interest, he has misled his own friends, and unwittingly brought disaster on them. We can believe that David, on hearing what Abiathar told him, was bowed down with shame such as he never yet had needed to feel. In this respect he failed to typify Christ. Our Lord had no *self-reproach* to bear. He never had recourse to subterfuge, and no guile was found in his mouth. Those who have suffered for his sake have not been led into the risk of death unwittingly. It was of some comfort to David that he could give protection to Abiathar. "He that seeketh my life seeketh thy life." We have a common enemy. Thy life is in peril on my account; therefore stay with me; "thou shalt be in safeguard." Here we do seem to hear the voice of Christ in a figure. "If the world hate you, ye know," &c. (John xv. 18—20). Our Lord gives his people safeguard with himself. "Abide in me." "Continue in my love." Such words are dear to mourners. As David gave to Abiathar immediate and sympathetic attention, so the Son of David hearkens at once to those who repair to him with the tale of their mishap and grief. He will take them all under the guarantee of his faithful safeguard. Whatever solace it is possible to have in this world they have who abide with him And no one can pluck them out of I is hand.—F.

EXPOSITION.

ADVENTURES OF DAVID AT KEILAH AND IN THE WILDERNESS OF ZIPH (CH. XXIII.).

CHAPTER XXIII.

DAVID RESCUES KEILAH, BUT HAS TO ESCAPE FROM THE TREACHERY OF ITS INHABITANTS (vers. 1—13). Ver. 1.—**They told David,** &c. The return of David into his own land was quickly followed by exploits which not only increased his power, but turned the eyes of all the people towards him as their protector. His first success was the deliverance of the city of **Keilah** from a body of Philistines who were plun-

dering it of the produce of its harvest. This place lay a few miles south of the stronghold of Adullam, and itself occupied a defensible position, being perched on a steep hill overlooking the valley of Elah, not far from the thickets of Hareth (Conder, 'Tent Work,' ii. 88). Being thus at no great distance from the Philistine border, a band of men started thence on a foray for the purpose of robbing the **threshing-floors.** As no rain falls in Palestine in the harvest season (ch. xii. 17), the corn is threshed out in the open air by a heavy wooden sledge made of two boards, and curved up in front, with pieces of basalt inserted for teeth, drawn over it by horses, or it is trampled out by cattle. Conder ('Tent Work,' ii. 259) describes the threshing-floor as "a broad flat space on open ground, generally high. Sometimes the floor is on a flat rocky hill-top, and occasionally it is in an open valley, down which there is a current of air; but it is always situated where most wind can be found, because at the threshing season high winds never occur, and the grain is safely stored before the autumn storms commence." As the grain after winnowing is made into heaps until it can be carried home, there is always a period when the threshing-floors have to be watched to guard them from depredation, and this was the time chosen by the Philistines for a foray in force.

Vers. 2—5.—**David enquired of Jehovah.** This seems to show that Abiathar was already with David, as the prophet Gad had no ephod, and at this time, and for a considerable period subsequently, the usual way of consulting God was by the Urim and Thummim (see ver. 6). Though the answer was a command to go, yet David's men hesitated; not that they had any doubt of the immediate result, but, regarding Saul as their most dangerous enemy, they were unwilling to embroil themselves also with the Philistines. **They argue, We be afraid here in Judah:** why then should we close the Philistine territory against us by attacking their **armies?** Hebrew, "ranks," men disciplined and drawn up in array (see ch. xvii. 22). In order to remove these prudential doubts, David again consults God, and being a second time encouraged to undertake the rescue of Keilah, proceeds thither with his men. This attack, being unexpected, was entirely successful. The Philistines were driven back with great slaughter, and David **brought away their cattle.** The word signifies "small cattle," such as sheep and goats. Besides robbing the threshing-floors, the Philistines apparently had been driving off the flocks from the neighbouring pastures. Both Hareth, where David and his men had lain hid in the thickets (ch. xxii. 5), and Keilah were in the tribe of Judah, in the southern portion of the Shephelah (Josh. xv. 44).

Ver. 6.—**When Abiathar . . . fled to David to Keilah, he came down with an ephod in his hand.** Literally, "an ephod came down in his hand," and so, word for word, the Syriac. The object of this verse is to explain how it was that David (in vers. 2 and 4) was able to inquire of Jehovah. The words **to Keilah**—Hebrew, Ke lah-wards—do not mean that it was at Keilah that Abiathar joined David, but that he came in time to go thither with him. In ch. xxii. 20 it seems as if Abiathar must have joined David even at an earlier date, for he is represented as fleeing to him immediately after the massacre of the priests at Nob. Now, granting that David's stay at Gath with Achish was very brief, he must have remained at Adullam a considerable time, inasmuch as men joined him there in large numbers (ch. xxii. 2), which seems to show that his hiding-place had become generally known. It was probably this concourse of men to him that was "discovered," *i. e.* made known, to Saul, and, as being an act of formal revolt, so raised his ire. As being supposed to be in league with David, Saul put the priests to death, and Abiathar fled; but probably the news of this terrible act had already reached David, and, in anxiety about his father and mother, he had gone to find refuge for them in Moab. Thither Gad follows him, bringing prophetic approval of his conduct, but ordering him to return into the territory of his own tribe. If then David was on his way to Moab when Abiathar reached Adullam, he may have remained in hiding there till David's return to the thickets of Hareth. But, possibly, even before Abiathar joined him the news may have arrived of the Philistine foray, and David's mind was set Keilah-wards. But there were those who doubted of the prudence of this proceeding, and Abiathar's arrival with the ephod enabled him to consult Jehovah's will. By his presence also David had now the approval of the priesthood.

Vers. 7, 8.—It was well-nigh a hopeless matter to hunt David as long as he remained on the borders of the desert of Judah, but once shut up in a town his capture was inevitable. When Saul, therefore, heard that David was at Keilah, he said, **God hath delivered him into my hand.** The Syriac, Chaldee, and Vulgate translate in the same way, probably as the nearest equivalent to the Hebrew, while the Septuagint has a different reading—*sold.* The Hebrew phrase is a very strong one; literally, "God hath ignored him," hath treated him as a stranger, and so let him fall "into my hand." Possibly Saul's metaphor was taken

from the popular language, and no attempt should be made to get rid of unusual expressions, as if they were false readings. **By entering into a town that hath gates and bars.** Either the people of a walled town would give up David rather than expose themselves to the horrors of a siege (2 Sam. xx. 21, 22), or, if they stood by him, its capture would be a mere matter of time. David, it seems, would have run the risk, but happily was prevented.

Vers. 9—13.—**Saul secretly practised mischief.** This phrase is correctly translated "devised evil" in Prov. iii. 29; xiv. 22. There is no idea of secrecy in the Hebrew verb, which literally means "to work in metals," "to forge." Saul's purpose was open enough, and when David heard of it he tells Abiathar to bring the ephod, and then offers earnest prayer to God for counsel and advice. In his prayer his two questions are put inversely to the logical order, but in accordance with their relative importance in David's mind, and no ground exists for altering the text. But when the ephod was brought forward the questions were of course put in their logical sequence. To the first question, "Will Saul come down to besiege Keilah?" the answer was, "He will." To the second, "Will the citizens of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul?" the answer also was, "They will." Whereupon he and his followers, now increased to 600 men, withdrew, **and went whithersoever they could go.** Literally. "they went about whither they went about," *i. e.* without any fixed plan, as chance or their necessities dictated. As David was once again at large, Saul had no longer any reason for besieging Keilah, especially as its citizens had preferred his side, as that of the more powerful, to gratitude for the safety of their lives and property.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—5.—*Deference to the Divine will.* The facts are—1. David, being informed of the inroads of the Philistines against Keilah, seeks counsel of God. 2. Being directed to go against them, he finds his men in doubt of the safety of the enterprise. 3. Hence, to satisfy them he makes further inquiry of the Lord, and is again directed to go, with promise of victory. Acting on these instructions, he saves Keilah. The moral degeneracy of Saul seems to have been accompanied with some degree of inefficiency of government, by reason of which portions of the country were still exposed to incursions of the Philistines. The subsequent conduct of Keilah, bad enough as it was in itself (ver. 12), would lead us to infer that the people who sought David's interposition were patriotic men not resident in the city. Possibly David's reputation for energy and courage had been sustained of late by the manner in which he had developed his few resources in defence against the wiles and force of his personal foe, and hence it would be natural for oppressed neighbours to seek his aid on an emergency. The narrative relates how he met the demand on his intervention, and with what result. It brings out a fine truth bearing on both public and private life.

I. THE HABIT OF DEFERENCE TO THE DIVINE WILL IS A NECESSARY AND VALUABLE ELEMENT IN LIFE. It is remarkable how, without choice of his own, David had been forced into a position of isolation and danger. There perhaps never was a life, except that of our Saviour, in which habitual submission to a supreme will was more conspicuous. The critical position in which he found himself when urged to make war on Philistine plunderers brought out into more public view a condition of mind habitual in private life. His unwillingness to take the step without being sure of the will of God was a revelation to those who sought his services of what was constant in his experience. The question was not, Can I gain wider reputation, or win Israel to my standard? Is it the will of God, was the first and last thought. *David's conception of life was that which becomes every Christian.* Whether our lot be kingly or lowly, our calling public or private, it should be a primary thought with us that God has a will of his own as to what manner of persons we ought to be, and what line of conduct we should adopt in the most common affairs of our life; for every action, and word, and spirit possesses in God's sight a moral character derived from the motive in which it originates and the final result to which it is made subservient. Our great business is to form an estimate, by a study of God's character and providence and of our own position and capabilities, of what he would regard as a pure and righteous course, and then strive, as demands are made on us, to translate that

into our actual deeds and temper. There is abundant scope for this habitual deference to God's will in the demands which come upon us from all quarters. By reason of the strong interaction of various tendencies within us, and the opposing claims of what seem to be benevolence and prudence, we may, like David, find ourselves in an ambiguous position, and it is at such junctures especially that the habitual deference will manifest its valuable presence. The difference between a really good man and one of formal godliness comes out in this, that the one always feels as though another and higher will was present and supreme over his own, while the other only thinks of that superior will on special occasions when painful events fill him with fear. This habitual deference is partly owing to the fact that a correct view is taken of life. David understood his vocation in the world. He had a part to perform in the great Messianic purpose. Although his vision of the future unfoldings of that purpose, varying in distinctness at different periods (Ps. ii.; cf. Ps. lxxii.), was not of details, yet he had faith enough in its reality and grandeur to induce the conviction that every step of his daily course was in some way associated with its realisation. And in like manner the humblest Christian is permitted to believe that he has a similar vocation in the world, as a member of Christ's mystical body. Hence we, as members of Christ's body, have no *raison d'être* apart from habitual deference to the will of Christ. And as, by the varied experience of life, this deference deepens, so its effect on our general character is more conspicuous. It induces a sobriety of judgment, for haste and rashness are due to self-will; it creates a refined susceptibility of spirit by which moral perfections are quickened and the existence of evil is discerned from afar; and it gives zest and carefulness in use of means to ascertain, in cases of difficulty, what is the perfect will of God.

II. THE MANIFEST APPROVAL OF GOD IN ANY CASE OF DIFFICULTY OR PERIL IS AN ALL-SUFFICIENT ENCOURAGEMENT TO A SINCERE MAN. David's position was still one of embarrassment and danger. He was potentially king, but could not avow it. He was loyal to Saul, though strongly tempted by his persecutions to rise in open rebellion. He was assured by the anointing and by Samuel's sanction and encouragement that a great future was awaiting him, and yet, like many since his time, he had to bear all the pains and sorrows of the outcast. The agony of feeling expressed in the Psalms can be understood only as we remember his call to a holy work and the consciousness of innocence. The recent experience at Nob caused him to feel how incidentally others might be compromised in his procedure, even when undertaking useful service. But all fear, all sorrow, every feeling of uneasiness as to consequences, disappeared when God recognised him by an answer to the official inquiry of Gad or Abiathar. The fact of the inquiry on his behalf is very important (Num. xxvii. 18—21; Judges xx. 26—28). That one or both of these after the slaughter of Nob sought counsel for David was a declaration in most emphatic form that he was the coming king. God thus by his servants openly sanctioned him, and hence his soul was encouraged to brave any danger, to bear any consequences, so long as God approved (Ps. lvi. 11). It is the assured approval of God, obtained in diverse ways according to the nature of the case, that emboldens Christians in courses of extreme difficulty and peril. The apostles feared not Jewish or Roman power when they had, after the ascension of Christ, received the inward and outward testimony of the Holy Spirit of the Divine character of the cause they professed. The same spirit is created in others when called to go forth to heathen lands, or to wage war with fearful evils at home. Let the youth, the sire, the statesman, the parent, the merchant, and the pastor only hear the word "go," at once the soul may take courage and assert its strength.

III. THE MEANS BY WHICH GOD AFFORDS GUIDANCE TO HIS PEOPLE VARY IN DIFFERENT AGES. David now is guided in his public capacity as the coming king by prophet or by priest using the ephod. As a private man he depended for the ordinary course of life on the more private and unexpressed guidance which God insures to all his faithful children. The means by which his public course was directed were unlike the more ancient and the more modern. From the beginning of human history we have to distinguish between the communications which God may have given to men for their personal comfort and use and that which was designed to reveal the fact of his purposes of mercy to the world and gradually unfold their scope, although in some

instances, as in the case of Abraham (Gen. xv. 1), the personal and general might coincide. The guidance granted to the patriarchs for the unfolding of the redemptive purposes was chiefly in form of visible or audible manifestations, a method well suited to a primitive life without religious literature, precedents, fixed regulations, and official teachers, and needing greatly, in the midst of visible surroundings and material tendencies, to be impressed with the reality of the unseen power. To Israel in the desert the guidance and spiritual impressment was given by the visible pillar of cloud and of fire, and by the stupendous signs on Mount Sinai which accompanied the communications to Moses for their benefit. The Urim and Thummim of the high priest were chiefly employed during the years subsequent to Moses, thus largely dispensing with the irregular visible display. In the prophets Samuel, Gad, and others after them a more spiritual method came into use, God making known his will to the people by some spiritual manifestation to or elevation of the prophet's spirit. In Christian times the personal prophetic medium reached its culmination in Christ and his apostles, who, out of the fulness of the Spirit that dwelt in them, gave forth such teaching and guidance in action as the Church required. Thus in divers manners God has spoken for the guidance of the Church. We have to consult the "living oracles" (2 Tim. iii. 16) for our guidance as a Church of Christ in reference to the general principles and the manifold details involved in establishing "the kingdom" (Isa. viii. 20; John v. 20; Acts xvii. 11). As individual Christians, besides acting in unison as a Church for the common objects of the kingdom of Christ, we may seek guidance daily by private use of the same means as those enjoyed privately by David.

IV. THE HIGHEST QUALITIES OF THE RELIGIOUS CHARACTER may be associated with THE MORE ORDINARY AND PRACTICAL, and when so associated THEY GIVE VALUE AND COMPLETENESS to them. It is a too frequent belief in the world that a man absorbed in the pursuit of the highest religious vocation and distinguished by the loftiest spiritual aspirations, such as are revealed in the Psalms and in David's life, becomes thereby one-sided in development, and fails by neglect in the detailed and minor moralities of life. A saint is synonymous with a moody, unpractical man, too much occupied with spiritual realities to be careful of little things. David's conduct in the affairs of Keilah is a refutation of this false conception. The narrative brings out his full-orbed religion, and in this he may be considered as a fit representative of the well-developed Christian. 1. The *line of conduct pursued with reference to Keilah*, taken in historic connection with his call to service, *brings out a remarkable combination of high and ordinary qualities*. With his consciousness of high mission was joined a patient endurance of bitter trials as a consequence of the very position to which Providence was calling him. Not a word of complaint and distrust escapes his lips during this weary hiding from his foe, although in his agony he was constrained to cry, "How long, O Lord!" Then there was that beautiful self-reserve, lest by any impetuous act he should seem to forestall the ways of God and force on the final issue—as seen in his unwillingness to annoy or embarrass Saul and press him to a conflict by an attack, without royal commission, on the Philistines. This following and not going before appears also in his using the official means of guidance only when Providence had placed them clearly in his way, and not by privately enticing Gad and Abiathar to join his company. But while intent on these high spiritual objects, there was a generous disinterestedness in relieving the troubles of others, even at a time when his own sorrows were multiplied, for he spared not himself when Keilah was oppressed. Nor did he feel for them alone, since the second inquiry of the Lord (ver. 4) was evidently dictated by a tender consideration for men whose faith was unequal to his own. And, finally, all this also associated with a wonderful tenderness for his personal enemy, based on a recognition of his kingly office, and more so on pity for a character once hopeful, but now fast on the way to ruin. Never, perhaps, were the precepts of the New Testament with respect to personal enemies (Matt. v. 38—44) more truly exemplified in combination with so utter a detestation of the sins that tended to frustrate the spiritual ends for which Israel existed in the world. 2. Taking, then, the conduct of David and the special qualities indicated therein as a basis, we may *summarise the qualities* which seem to *enter into a well-developed religious character.*

(1) *Recognition* of a *high vocation in life,* associated with God's merciful purposes toward mankind. No man is great whose energies do not in their results aim at something beyond himself; nor is that a high style of character which is governed by aspirations terminating with the material and temporal wants of mankind. As David was conscious of a vocation in life which linked his whole existence with the advancement of the highest spiritual interests of the world, and with the highest material as naturally included in the spiritual, so every truly religious man believes and rejoices to know that his business in life lies outside his fleeting earthly occupation and possessions, and in fact coincides with that for which Christ came into the world. What tone and power the Church would have in the world if all her members duly realised for what end Christians exist! A lofty ideal always gives power and elevation to actual life; and no higher ideal can be set before us than that which is the normal vocation of every one of Christ's disciples. (2) *Submission to God's ways and times.* The realisation of the ideal before David was by a process which seemed to run counter to the dictates of human wisdom. The great scope of a religious ideal, while it expands the intellect and fills the imagination with the glowing colours of future good, also makes a present demand on the more sober and less brilliant qualities of the soul. The course of nature and the progress of spiritual forces are determined by primary principles of government and a combination of incidental and final issues which in their entirety are comprehensible alone to God, as, indeed, they received their co-ordination from him. A mind that forms a just estimate of itself, and regards the outworking of the powers of the kingdom of God as the visible index of an infinite secret, will bow in loving submission to all the methods and seasons appointed by God in bringing on the setting of his King on the holy hill of Zion. (3) *Confidence in God* in spite of adverse events. The key to David's life when fleeing from cave to cave, and through all the lowly submission to years of waiting, was, as so often expressed in the Psalms, *trust in the Lord.* The trusting power of our nature is large, but unfortunately has been injured in its development by the suspicions created in our intercourse with untruthful, selfish men. There is a danger of importing this impaired confidence from the secular to the spiritual sphere, and practically treating God as though he were one of us (Jer. xv. 18). There is a spiritual heroism in believing in God against hope (Rom. iv. 17—21; Heb. xi.). The religious trust is not founded on knowledge of things, either as to their intrinsic nature or their correlation, but on the fact that God is over all and is *true* to his word. What some would call unreasoning fanaticism is the soul's rational, loving homage to the wisdom that never errs, the goodness that ever blesses, and the power that works all things to its own ends. History justifies the faith of God's people. "They are *dead* which sought the young child's life" (Matt. ii. 20). "He shall live," and "upon himself shall his crown flourish," was predicted of the most despised and reviled (Ps. lxxii. 15; cxxxii. 18; Isa. liii. 3); and, in a modified sense, it will hold true of all who endure and are faithful to the end (Rev. iii. 21). (4) *Kindliness towards the weak and the oppressed.* The kindly feeling which prompted an effort to save Keilah, although not personally interested, and which sought support for the weak faith of doubting men by a second inquiry of the Lord (vers. 2—4), is but an illustration of the humane spirit of true religion when properly developed. The virtues of submission and confidence, which find exercise toward God as their object, are supplemented by those which bear on the sorrows of men. The loftiest spiritual aspirations—of the severest purity, of the widest range of vision, and of intensest gaze on the realisation of a spiritual salvation for man—were combined in Christ with the tenderest and the most considerate regard for the weaknesses and woes of men, and did, directly or indirectly, during a brief sojourn on earth, more than anything else to alleviate temporal sufferings and finally break the bonds of social and political oppression (Luke iv. 18). 3. *The attainment of this well-developed personal religion is within reach of all.* The character of David was not supernatural, but the outgrowth of a mental and moral constitution, under the carefully-cherished influences of such religious privileges as fell to his lot. The position of each one of us is in the main that of David: we have our natural temperament, which may determine the prominence of this over that virtue; we, as Christians, have received our solemn call by One greater than

Samuel; we, in our private or public sphere, have, as the business of our life, the maintenance of a theocracy more blessed and wide in its influence than that for which David lived; the Divine truth for our instruction and admonition embraces more than he was wont to meditate on by day and night; and it is our privilege to wait on the Lord daily for both strength and wisdom. A nature less capacious than that of David's, and called to a department of service for God less conspicuous to the public eye, may, by corresponding diligence in self-culture, attain to a symmetry of Christian excellence akin to that of David, and embracing all the qualities we have just sketched. Every man is a well-developed Christian when such a nature as he happens to possess is brought, in all its tendencies and developments, entirely under the sway of the Christian spirit. A knowledge of our constitutional tendencies should be accompanied by special guarding of those forms of temperament which imperil symmetry of character. Occasional reviews of our vows and of the goodness and mercy of our God will prompt to a renewed and fuller consecration, which will not fail to develop patience in worse trials possibly than those of David, and confidence in God despite the most adverse of circumstances.

Ver. 6—12.—*Misinterpretation and miscalculation.* The facts are—1. The moral position of David at Keilah is strengthened by the presence of Abiathar with the ephod. 2. Saul, believing David to be shut up in the city, prepares a force to lay siege to Keilah. 3. David, aware of this, has recourse to the ephod, and asks through Abiathar whether Saul was really coming, and whether, in case he came, the men of Keilah would give him up to Saul. 4. He receives an affirmative reply to each inquiry. We have here two men moving in opposite lines and under totally diverse principles, yet each making reference to God in relation to his own conduct—a fair illustration of the intelligent and the ignorant use made of religious language and sentiments in human affairs. And while David in the deep earnestness of his soul seeks through the appointed means to know the will of God, and Saul in his infatuation concludes God to be on his side, the Eternal reveals his knowledge of the secret tendencies of men and his tender regard for the upright in heart. The actual conduct of Saul and the hypothetical conduct of the men of Keilah suggest the misinterpretation of conduct and the miscalculation consequent thereon. No doubt the action of an energetic man at the head of a band of followers might cause uneasiness to a monarch whose hold on the people was not very strong, and consequently the movement of David, viewed at a distance and considered irrespective of his known character, might suggest the thought of an attempt to ingratiate himself with the nation, and gain a position from which a blow might, with greater chance of success, be struck at the throne. Saul's interpretation of the attack on the Philistines, and consequent entry into Keilah, was either that David was carrying on a freebooting expedition from mere love of plunder and exploit, or that, under cover of aiding the oppressed, he was entering upon active hostilities against himself. He could not conceive of such an act as compatible with friendliness to himself, and called forth by pure regard for the honour and freedom of Israel, patriotic hostility to the national foe, generous sympathy for the weak, and readiness to benefit sufferers, even though in so doing a man should pursue a course open to the possibility of being misunderstood. The Saul of this date was not the Saul who once (ch. xi. 1—8), with large-hearted patriotism and generous impulse, rescued the men of Jabesh from the power of Nahash the Ammonite. Hence his misinterpretation of David's conduct. But thought and action are closely allied, and a false view of things is the basis of a miscalculation of the results of action when we proceed to carry out a purpose. So reversely did Saul now read all the lessons of the past few years in the life of David and himself as to comfort himself with the belief that God, in the order of his providence, was now shutting up David in a city in order that Saul might take and slay him. This phenomenon of a morally diseased nature is worthy the study of Christian men, and may well make the resolutely impenitent to stand aghast at their possible madness. *Quem Deus vult perdere.* Miserably did Saul miscalculate the course of events. God does not act for men because their wishes are made a substitute for knowledge. Generalising the truth involved in the case of Saul and David, we may notice—

I. That MISINTERPRETATION AND MISCALCULATION ARE COMMON IN THE AFFAIRS OF MEN. It is a truism that men make mistakes; but making mistakes is not always identical with misinterpretation of human conduct, and the false reckoning proceeding therefrom. There is a too prevalent opinion among certain classes of men that they do understand their fellows, and, by the exercise of keen observation, can avoid the error of referring actions to wrong motives. On the other hand, there are ingenuous minds that imagine that no one will ever think of referring their conduct to an origin other than that which is so clear and pure to their own conscience. Such persons need to be instructed. The question may be raised whether, even in the most holy and blessed society of intelligent beings, there is ever a sufficient capacity in one mind to unravel and ascertain perfectly the secret springs of action in others. We each, some time or other, have to bear the frown and condemnation of our fellow-creatures, because what we do is not associated, in their judgment, with the motives which are clear in our consciousness; and in so far as they have to calculate on the issue of the conduct misjudged, error is inevitable. The Bible affords notable instances of misinterpretation and miscalculation. We have seen how Hannah's heart was misread by Eli (ch. i. 14). The Apostle Paul was supposed by false brethren to display zeal for Christ for reasons utterly alien to his nature. The rejection of Christ by the Pharisees was the practical form of their interpretation of his words and deeds. Some of the bitterest trials of private life consist in generous, true hearts having to bear the consciousness that suspicion and distrust are meted out to them when, were all known, love and confidence would abound. In like manner *the false reckonings of men are manifold.* Every one calculates amiss when he has laid a false foundation in a partial or wrong reading of character. True prophecy, in relation to what will come of the conduct of those we criticise, can only proceed from a just estimate of their moral position. Saul was a false prophet when he predicted that God would now deliver David into his hand. No laws exist for bringing events to pass so that they shall harmonise with our estimate of men. "God hath forsaken him," may be said of a David; but the false judgment of his desert will not destroy the loving-kindness which endureth for ever. On the basis of their interpretation of Christ's character and conduct men esteemed him "smitten of God and afflicted," and calculated that the silent tomb would put an end to his influence in the world. Those who contend with a holy, Christ-loving people, whose spiritual principles are not appreciated, forget that they are embarked in a war against the mightiest forces that operate in the universe.

II. That MOST OF THE MISINTERPRETATIONS AND MISCALCULATIONS OF LIFE ARE TO BE REFERRED TO A DOUBLE ORIGIN. The source of these evils is partly intellectual and partly moral. Saul understood not David and miscalculated the issue of his entering Keilah because of his defective knowledge of human nature and of the order of Providence. In his case, however, apart from radical narrowness of mental range, his mind was injured, with respect to the normal exercise of his intellect, by the moral disturbance consequent on his dreadful alienation from God. He furnishes a typical instance of what may be regarded as the power of the moral state over the intellectual faculties—fearfully suggestive of what demented, shrivelled beings men may become should they in another life still be under the domination of a masterful aversion to God. The liability of every man to fall into the evils of misinterpretation should induce attention to the twofold cause in ourselves. The *intellectual cause* is often seen in a radically defective knowledge of human nature and its possibilities; in a structure in the mind of rigid lines of conduct, based on a narrow experience; and in a partial acquaintance with the actual facts connected with the case on which judgment is exercised and reckonings are made. The *moral cause* is often more subtle in operation, and therefore more difficult of detection; but frequently it appears in the morally wrong act of applying our limited power to questions not fairly within their reach, in the obstinate tendency to make the possibly imperfect governing principles of our own life the infallible tests by which all conduct is estimated, in the embittered spirit with which we contemplate the course of events, and in the active presence of envy, jealousy, suspicion, and selfishness. As a rule, moral causes have more influence in determining our judgments of conduct and character, and in calculating the issues of action, than intellectual. It is easy to

believe what we wish, and to see evil where we cherish ill-will. A very pure, loving soul will avoid errors where others of superior intellect will fail; for purity and love will hold the will back from judgment on uncertain *data*, and will also, by a sort of moral-intuition, recognise goodness where less spiritual natures would not discriminate.

III. That THE EVILS INCIDENT TO MISINTERPRETATIONS AND MISCALCULATIONS ARE OF BOTH SHORT AND LONG DURATION. The evils are twofold—those affecting the injured and those attaching to the wrong-doer. David and Saul suffered by Saul's errors. It is true some of the evils affect both for the same time, such as the mutual distrusts, the alienations, the loss of co-operation which inevitably attend the misreading of character and conduct; and it is impossible to estimate the grievous loss to the world arising from this source. But in instances such as that of David and our Saviour, and of all truly good, the injury on their side is soon removed; for Providence so orders events that what was hidden becomes revealed, and their righteousness shines forth as the light, and their judgment as the noon-day (Ps. xxxvii. 28—40). The day of judgment will, to many, be a day for lifting up their head with joy. On the other hand, in so far as we are governed by the tendencies which induce wrong judgments, so far and so long our whole nature is impaired and debased. Indeed, the sum total of our mental and moral wealth is lessened for ever by the indulgence in wrong habits of this class; for we can never become the intellectually and morally perfect beings we should be had no energy, no faculty been perverted and abused. No amount of growth and development, after years of defective mental action, can overtake the position due to a healthful advance from the first. But especially will the evils be of long duration in the case of those who, by persistent, persecuting, false judgments, seek to harass and wound the children of God. The shame and the remorse of having bruised a tender heart or misjudged a holy character cannot easily die out. Saul's anguish of spirit consequent on his sin against David survived David's injury.

General lessons:—1. If we would escape undesirable judgments we should avoid, as much as possible, ambiguous actions and the appearance of evil. 2. Nevertheless, in the cause of humanity we ought to be ready to act, even though men, not knowing our feelings, may misinterpret us. 3. We should hold our judgment in strong reserve when but partial knowledge is within reach, even though plausible reasons appear to urge a criticism. 4. Proper weight should always be allowed for the modifying influences of education, habit, and range of experience. 5. We may take consolation in the knowledge that God weighs conduct in reference to its intention, and that he rules events so as to vindicate the just. 6. If ever we have wronged another by harsh and wicked judgment, we are bound to make some amend by word or deed.

Undeveloped tendencies. The second topic suggested by this section is evidently that involved in the predicted conduct of the men of Keilah under the circumstances specified in the inquiry of David. The service rendered by David to Keilah was such as gave him a just claim to their gratitude. No doubt zeal was abundant in expressing their obligation to him, and judging from appearances one might suppose that the men would be quite prepared to befriend him in case of need. In the early overflowings of gratitude for favours received men are wont to be strong and lavish in the expression of personal attachment and readiness to return kindness for kindness; and most certainly the men of Keilah, had they then been questioned as to the possibility of their ever casting aside one who had so generously befriended them in a time of sore distress, would each have felt inclined to say, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?" But there was more in their complex human nature than they themselves imagined, and the sentiments ruling their will just then and creating agreeable words and kind intentions might, under new conditions, subside and give scope for the play of a different set of tendencies, kept by the present auspicious events in abeyance. David appears to have surmised the existence within their hearts of weaknesses which would not bear the strain of the tests that must be created by his sojourn in their city, and hence, not to be misled in so important a matter, he calls for the priest and makes special inquiry as to whether, in case Saul should come against the city, these men, now so grateful and devoted, would deliver him up. The answer which David received from the Searcher of hearts

was to the effect that, should they be brought to the test, they would develop tendencies which gave no sign of present existence, and which if charged on them would probably be emphatically repudiated. Thus do we see how there may dwell in men, unconsciously to themselves, latent tendencies which, though repressed and rendered by present surroundings inoperative, are so real and patent as, under conditions yet to be created, to become the determinant powers in regulating conduct.

I. THE EXISTENCE OF UNDEVELOPED TENDENCIES IS A GENERAL FACT IN HUMAN LIFE. It is a truth that as we find ourselves in daily life we each possess a complex nature in which an inextricable interweaving of thought and feeling is the prominent feature. Every idea and feeling that has become an item stored in memory becomes a power in the subsequent course of our inner experience, even though not distinctly traceable. There are certain fundamental dispositions by which the great lines of action are decided, and minor feelings or sentiments which are tributary to them as servants and prompters. But experience proves that all contained within our nature cannot operate at once, and which of the inner forms of activity may be brought into exercise at any given moment depends on the influences brought to bear and the laws of association thereby set in operation. The tendency to shrink from pain and conflict found no occasion to indicate its presence when the entry of a victorious David into Keilah aroused sentiments of joy and gratitude. It is possible for a tendency to be apparently annihilated by the constant demand on a feeling or sentiment antagonistic with its nature. Hence men may often carry within them possibilities of action while ignorant of their reality, and they may, therefore, be induced to make professions and undertake obligations without reckoning on what may be aroused within when circumstances require the fulfilment of the obligations. Theories of conduct are held which may be belied by the hidden man of the heart when his unhappy hour for development comes. Are we not all now and then startled by the uprising from the unfathomed deeps of our nature of a hideous form which lets us see just enough of its unholy self to create distrust and fear that other powers of evil are there waiting to appear in actual life? The precautions employed in educating youth and the care bestowed on enforcing public sentiment proceed on the belief that the germs of ruin in young and old only await nourishment in order to gain a destructive ascendancy. Nor is the fact confined to what is evil. There are latent tendencies to good—to truthfulness, gentleness, generosity, chivalrous consideration, kindliness, and kindred virtues—which by reason of circumstances do not always find expression. There is a tender place in the hardest heart, though not often touched. Have we not seen a word, an allusion, draw out feelings not supposed to have existence? And in many a Christian there is much more germinal goodness than is developed in outer life. Christ shocked the complacent Pharisees by assuring them of the latent wickedness of their hearts (Matt. xxiii. 25—28; Mark vii. 21—23), and the Apostle Paul urged Timothy to "stir up the gift" bestowed on him (2 Tim. i. 6).

II. THE RECOGNITION OF THE EXISTENCE OF LATENT TENDENCIES IS OF PRACTICAL IMPORTANCE IN ALL DEPARTMENTS OF LIFE. Our course through life is not regulated simply by what is known. A recognition of the unknown or at least undeveloped forces of our own nature ought to exercise considerable influence in the conduct we daily pursue. 1. *In our association with men.* David clearly recognised the fact of certain undeveloped tendencies in the men of Keilah, and he discreetly dealt with that unknown factor by endeavouring to find out whether it would come into ascendancy. It should be a maxim with us that there is far more in the men we have to do with than appears in overt act and uttered sentiment, and this, without degenerating into a painful suspicion and cruel distrust, will enable us often to escape being placed within their power; and also, if our intention is to draw out their better qualities, will stimulate to that end. 2. *In our professed allegiance to Christ.* It should be our rule to watch and govern ourselves in his name on the supposition that there lie within us on the one hand secret tendencies which, under favourable conditions of temptation, may, at least, embitter our life by a fearful struggle for the mastery, and possibly, in consequence of lack of resolution and forethought, for the time mar our character; and on the other hand tendencies germinal repressed, and scarcely conscious, which, if we bring to bear on our heart the warm light of his truth,

will expand and assume in our outward life permanent forms of usefulness and beauty. 3. *In our work for Christ.* Both the kind and character of Christian work are influenced by our recognition of the less manifest tendencies of human nature. It is noticeable how constantly Christ spake to the hidden thoughts and feelings of men rather than to the questions they raised and the attitude they professed to assume. A preacher may often effect most by directing his effort toward some unuttered and even deliberately-suppressed sentiment of his hearers. In so far as our persistence in Christian work is concerned we have to consider not merely the value of the impulses and principles that make us earnest during the day of prosperity, but what weaknesses are inherent in us that may develop themselves in unwelcome proportions when trials and adversities threaten. The men of Keilah could sympathise with and swear by the "anointed" when no thought of Nob was present. We may count on this undeveloped factor as one of our best allies in Christian work. Beneath all the vices and superstitions of heathenism and all the shams and scepticism of modern civilisation there lies the hidden, slumbering sense of God and immortality.

III. IT IS GOD'S PERFECT KNOWLEDGE OF ALL THE UNDEVELOPED TENDENCIES OF LIFE THAT RENDERS HIS GOVERNMENT SO STRONG AND HIS PROVISION FOR MAN'S REDEMPTION SO WISE. This is included in the broad truth that there is nothing hidden from his sight. According to Ps. cxxxix. every incipient force—chemical and mechanical, moral and spiritual—in every point of space, through all the ages, has been and still is as clear to the eye of the Eternal, and as traceable in all its endless and intricate developments, as is the mighty sun that sheds its light on our earth. It is this knowledge of the undeveloped which lies at the foundation of prophecy, and renders it possible that, notwithstanding the developments resulting from adverse human wills, the great end for which Christ lived and died shall at last be attained. The warnings and admonitions, "here a little and there a little," for the guidance of our conduct; the form and variety of the promises; the ordinances of religion; the special features of the redemptive work effected by Christ—all these are adapted to the possibilities, and not merely to the present actualities, of human life. "He knoweth our frame." Hence the reasonableness of submitting our reason to his revelations.

IV. IT IS OUR WISDOM, IN ALL TIMES OF DOUBT, TO HAVE RECOURSE TO THE MEANS OF ASCERTAINING GOD'S KNOWLEDGE OF THINGS. No doubt David speculated on the probable course of the men of Keilah should they ever be brought to decide between grateful attachment to him and the frown of Saul, and his general acquaintance with human nature may have inclined him to believe in their treachery when under the influence of fear. But as it was a question of his personal safety, and involved in that a question also of ultimately realising the great purposes of a Messianic kingdom, he wisely sought a solution of all doubts by a recourse to the available means of putting himself in possession of God's knowledge with reference to this particular matter. The knowledge which God has of the secret powers of the universe does in effect become ours when in any instance he condescends to make us acquainted with the result in which they will issue. A really wise man in seasons of uncertainty, when important interests are at stake, whether temporal or spiritual, will not rest with speculations on what may be; but will, like David, inquire of the Lord, so as to regulate his present action according to God's knowledge of what is inevitable. The means of ascertaining God's knowledge may vary with the case in hand; it may be by laying the candid mind open to direct Divine illumination, or by devoting special attention to the monitions of Providence, or by consulting the "lively oracles" which are to us the voice of God on great moral and religious matters. In one respect we are all in a position analogous to that of David; for there are intricate and hidden powers at work within and without which, when fully developed by the new circumstances that may arise, may have the effect of delivering us bound to a condemnation far more terrible than any Saul could pass on a captive David. Now it is a serious question to each whether this one enemy will ever gain power over us, and by what means its dominion can be escaped. In a case of such importance we cannot afford to trust to speculation and humanly-grounded hope. We are permitted to inquire of God, who in his word and in the redemption provided in Christ has put us in possession of his knowledge of the undeveloped tendencies of sin

in human nature, by assuring us that under certain conditions—our following our own independent course—we shall come into condemnation on the day of judgment, and that under other conditions—our self-surrender to Christ for pardon and renewal—we shall be not only free from that woe, but shall rise to sit on thrones of honour and power (2 Tim. ii. 10—12).

Practical lessons:—1. Inasmuch as the great issues of life are determined by the mastery of one set of principles over another, it is very important to seek the expulsion or entire suppression of latent evil tendencies by the careful nurture of tendencies of opposite character, for the strength of principles is in proportion to their exercise. 2. In so far as tendencies to evil lie within us, we should avoid unnecessary exposure to influences that may draw them into activity; and, reversely, we should seek those conditions of life that will aid the development of the good. 3. Caution should be exercised lest we be misled in our estimate of what we can do in resisting evil inclinations by basing our calculation on circumstances hitherto helpful; for the men of Keilah, in the flush of David's achievement, and not yet threatened by Saul, were like Peter, who could fearlessly avow fidelity to Christ while he was present to inspire and cheer. 4. The fact that in the emergencies of their life God gave specific replies to the inquiry of his chosen servants, because they were instruments of working out the great Messianic purpose, is encouragement to believe that he will give heed to every one whose life is devoted to the same issue, and who is equally sincere in prayer.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—6. (HARETH, KEILAH.)—*Public spirit.* "So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah" (ver. 5). Another step in advance was now made by David. Whilst Saul (in addition to alienating the prophets, and well-nigh exterminating the priests) failed to afford adequate protection to his subjects, David was called to defend them against the incursions of the Philistines. This was doubtless the chief purpose for which he was recalled from Moab to Judah. And he fulfilled it, in obedience to the direction of God, which he sought and received through Abiathar, who had come down to him "with an ephod in his hand." "For his conscience and his assurance of faith, as well as for the certainty and success of the whole undertaking, he needed the Divine authorisation; if he had not the sanction of the theocratic king, he must have that of God himself, since the question was of a matter important for the people of God and for the affairs of God's kingdom in Israel—war against Israel's hereditary foe" (Erdmann). His *public spirit* was—

I. INDICATIVE OF A NOBLE DISPOSITION. Some men are unduly concerned about their own convenience, safety, interest, and refuse to look beyond them. Others render public services from selfish motives. But the truly public-spirited man, like David, possesses—1. *An intense desire for the welfare of the people,* to whom by Divine providence he is united by special ties, not contrary to, but closer and more immediately affecting him than those which unite him to all mankind. 2. *Genuine sympathy with the distresses of the weak,* the injured, and the imperilled (ver. 1). Their condition fills his heart with generous impulses, and makes him forget his own troubles. 3. *Supreme concern for "God's kingdom and righteousness,"* which inspires him with zeal against evil-doers, and (along with his unselfish regard for his people) makes him willing to undergo labour, conflict, sacrifice, suffering, and death. "Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people," &c. (2 Sam. x. 12).

II. DIRECTED BY THE DIVINE WORD (vers. 2, 4) in—1. *General principles,* such as are contained in the commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Levit. xix. 18), and others of a similar nature (Gal. vi. 10; Phil. ii. 4). In order that our love to the whole human race (included in the commandment in its widest sense) may be real and effectual, it must begin by the exercise of love toward those who are nearest to us and have the first claim upon us (Ps. cxxii. 6—9; cxxxvii. 5, 6; Luke xiii. 34; xxiv. 47; Rom. ix. 3). 2. *Particular precepts* pertaining to the varied relationships, capabilities, and needs of men, as rulers, subjects, &c. 3. Joined with *numerous promises* and encouragements to the performance of duty. If public spirit in the form of *patriotism* is not expressly enjoined in the New Testa-

ment it is not without reason. "It was worthy of the wisdom of our great Legislator to decline the express inculcation of a principle so liable to degenerate into excess, and to content himself with prescribing the virtues which are sure to develop it, as far as is consistent with the dictates of universal benevolence" (R. Hall).

III. OPPOSED BY PRUDENTIAL FEARS. "David's men said unto him, Behold, we are afraid here in Judah," &c. (ver. 3). They were not of the same mind as himself, had not a proper sense of their obligation, were unduly concerned about their own safety, and full of doubt and fear. But he was not disheartened nor deterred. And on a further revelation of the Divine will they were (as others often are)—1. Persuaded that their opposition was wrong. 2. Convinced that their fears were groundless. 3. Induced to accompany their leader in a brave and generous enterprise (ver. 5). One man imbued with strong faith and public spirit thus overcomes the opposition of many, and converts them into zealous helpers.

IV. PRODUCTIVE OF IMPORTANT CONSEQUENCES. The hand of God was with them, and—1. Injustice was punished, the public enemy defeated, and the prey taken from the mighty. 2. Those who were in the utmost peril were saved. 3. All the people were taught where to look for their deliverer. In seeking the good of others David found his own honour, and received a Divine testimony to his royal destination.—D.

Vers. 1—12. (HARETH, KEILAH.)—*Answers to prayer.* Inquiry of the Lord by Urim and Thummim really meant prayer in which Divine direction was sought in a particular manner (see ch. xiv. 19, 36). It was made by David soon after the arrival of Abiathar, on three several occasions (vers. 2, 4, 10),—on the last of them by two separate questions,—and in each case a definite answer was received. "God shows great care for David, instructing him now by prophets (ch. xxii. 5), and now by Urim and Thummim" (Grotius). "That which in the olden Jewish times was the prerogative of a few becomes in Christian days the privilege of the many. Christ makes all his faithful followers 'kings and priests unto God.' And much of the sacred symbolism that gathered around the ancient priesthood now gathers in another form around the believer in Christ. Mere symbols have given place to true spiritual power. The Spirit of God which once underlay the symbols, and spake through them to the devout mind, now communicates directly with the heart, and needs no material intervention" ('Bible Educ.,' iv. 38). Those who seek guidance of God in a right spirit never fail to obtain it, especially in—

I. PERPLEXITY concerning the knowledge of duty. Asking, "Shall I go?" (ver. 2) they receive, perchance, the definite answer, "Go;" not, indeed, by an audible voice, but by means of—1. The elevating, calming, and enlightening of their minds through communion with God, and more particularly by *the purifying of their moral nature* from carnal and selfish affections by his indwelling Spirit, which enables them to see "what the will of the Lord is." "Our notions resemble the index and hand of the dial; our feelings are the hidden springs which impel the machine; with this difference, that notions and feelings react on each other reciprocally" (Coleridge). "The understanding resembles not a dry light, but admits a tincture of the will and the passions, which generate their own system of truth accordingly" (Bacon). And when the heart (which is the soul's eye) is pure we see God (Prov. xxviii. 5; Matt. v. 8; John vii. 17). 2. A *clear understanding* of the meaning of the *written word*, and of its application to the circumstances in which they are placed. As by that word thoughts, impressions, and purposes are tried, in order that it may be proved whether they are of God, so by the same word they are formed and directed (Isa. viii. 20; John xvi. 13). 3. A *correct judgment* of what is right and most expedient, accompanied by an inward assurance of the Divine approbation. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God," &c. (James i. 5; Ps. xxv. 9).

II. DIFFICULTY arising from hindrances to the performance of duty. "David inquired of the Lord yet again" (ver. 4). The obstacles placed in the way of duty, especially by friends, ought to lead to renewed consideration and prayer, and these are often followed by—1. Strong *confirmation* of the conviction previously entertained. "Arise, go down to Keilah." 2. Increased *confidence* of success. "I will give the Philistines into thine hand." 3. Entire *removal* of the difficulty. "David and his men went." It appears to have been chiefly for their satisfaction that the second

inquiry was made. Whilst we should endeavour to persuade men to adopt a right course, we ought above all things to look to God to dispose them to walk therein.

III. DANGER, which sometimes occurs on the fulfilment of duty (vers. 7—12). "In the deed of deliverance itself lies the seed of new suffering." Saul misinterprets events (ver. 7), like other men blinded by sin and "using the name of God when God is farthest off from them," confidently calculates on seizing David, levies war, and openly devotes himself to the execution of his wicked purpose. But David is warned; he has also, probably, reason to suspect the fidelity of the citizens of Keilah, and again inquires of the Lord. He does so with much fervour, calling him the "Lord God of Israel," and humbly acknowledging himself to be his servant; and the answers he obtains afford him—1. *Foresight* of the perilous events of the future. "He will come down." 2. *Insight* into the hidden purposes of men. "They will deliver thee up." We may often ascertain more of the secret thoughts of men by communion with God than by consultation with men themselves. 3. *Guidance* for the frustration of ungrateful and evil intentions, and escape from every danger. "David and his men, &c." (ver. 13). How perfect is the knowledge which God possesses of all things! How sure is the guidance which he affords to those who seek him! How safe are they who make him their Rock and their Fortress! In the midst of all his troubles David can sing of "his marvellous loving-kindness in a fenced city;" as he does in Ps. xxxi.: "In thee, O Jehovah, have I found refuge."

"See Judah's promised king bereft of all;
Driven out an exile from the face of Saul.
To distant caves the lonely wanderer flies,
To seek that peace a tyrant's frown denies.
His soul exults; hope animates his lays;
The sense of mercy kindles into praise;
And wilds familiar with the lion's roar
Ring with ecstatic sounds unheard before" (Cowper). D.

EXPOSITION.

SAUL'S PURSUIT OF DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS OF ZIPH (vers. 14—28). Vers. 14, 15.—**Strong holds.** Natural fortresses in the woods and mountains are meant, and places difficult of access. **The wilderness of Ziph.** This lay to the south of Hebron, upon the edge of the great desert of Judah (Josh. xv. 55). **Saul sought him every day.** The pursuit was maintained constantly, with men always spying David's movements, and ready to report to Saul any opportunity of seizing him; but apparently there was no body of men at present perpetually in quest of him. **In a wood.** Many rightly regard this as a proper name. *Horesh*, and as the same place as the **mountain** mentioned in ver. 14; for, as Conder remarks ('Tent Work,' ii. 89), "a moment's reflection will convince any traveller that, as the dry, porous formation of the plateau must be unchanged since David's time, no wood of trees can then have flourished over this unwatered and sun-scorched region."

Vers. 16—18.—**Jonathan . . . went to David into the wood.** To Horesh, as in ver. 15. This visit suggests two things: the first, that, after the scene in ch. xxii. 8, Saul was estranged from his son, and treated him harshly, regarding him as a fellow-conspirator with David; the second, that there was a growing conviction, not only in Jonathan's mind, but generally, that Jehovah had transferred the kingdom from Saul to David, and that consequently David's final success was inevitable. He **strengthened his** (David's) **hand in God.** Such a visit, and the expression of Jonathan's strong conviction that Jehovah was with David, must necessarily have had a powerful moral effect upon his mind. Under such trying circumstances David must often have been tempted to despair; but the assurance of Jonathan's unbroken love for him, and the knowledge that he and many more regarded him as chosen by God to be Israel's king, would revive his courage and make him content to bear the hardships of his present lot. **I shall be next unto thee.** Had he not been killed in Mount Gilboa, it seems that, unlike Ishbosheth, Jonathan would have resigned all claim to the crown. But the feeling must often have distressed David, that the kingdom could become his only by dispossessing his true and unselfish friend. Nor would such a regret be altogether removed by Jonathan's ready acquiescence in it as God's will, though, as next to him, and beloved as he deserved, his position as the king's friend would have been a not unenviable one. Still, to be second where by right of inheritance he should have been

first would have been a very trying lot, and it was better for Jonathan that he should die a soldier's death, even granting that he would have felt a lively joy in David's success and the glory of his empire. But their love was to be exposed to no vicissitudes, and the two friends parted never to meet again — David remaining at Horesh, while Jonathan returned to his home at Gibeah.

Vers. 19, 20. — **The Ziphites.** Rather, "some Ziphites," or "people of Ziph," as there is no article. They tell Saul that David was hiding in the fastnesses of the wild region in their neighbourhood, and especially in **the hill of Hachilah**, a ridge that ran along eastward of Maon. Conder recognises it in the long ridge called El Kôlah, running out of the Ziph plateau towards the Dead Sea desert. It lay **on the south of Jeshimon**, or rather "on the right hand of the desert." Jeshimon is not a proper name, but means any desert (Ps. cvii. 4; Isa. xliii. 19), though it is used specially of the desert of Sinai in Deut. xxxii. 10, and of that of Judah here and in Num. xxi. 20; xxiii. 28. Conder ('Handbook,' p. 213) calls it "the dreary desert which extends between the Dead Sea and the Hebron mountains. It is called Jeshimon, or 'Solitude,' in the Old Testament, and 'wilderness of Judea' in the New (Matt. iii. 1). It is a plateau of white chalk, 2000 feet lower than the watershed, and terminated on the east by cliffs which rise vertically from the Dead Sea shore to a height of about 2000 feet. The scenery is barren and wild beyond all description. The chalky ridges are scored by innumerable torrents, and their narrow crests are separated by broad flat valleys. Peaks and knolls of fantastic forms rise suddenly from the swelling downs, and magnificent precipices of ruddy limestone stand up like fortress-walls above the sea. Not a tree nor a spring is visible in the waste, and only the desert partridge and the ibex are found ranging the solitude. It was in this pathless desert that David found refuge from Saul's persecution, and the same has been a place of retreat from the days of Christ to the present time." The Ziphites assure Saul that from their knowledge of this region they shall be able, if he come in force, so to guide him as that David must fall into his hands.

Vers. 21—23. — **Ye have compassion on me.** There is something pitiable in Saul's answer. He had brooded over his rejection from being king, and the many indications that David was to be his successor, till he had become the prey of abject melancholy. He evidently regarded himself as a wronged and injured man, while David to his diseased imagination was ever conspiring against him and plotting his murder. With much prolixity he encourages them still to keep a close watch upon all David's movements, so as to know **his place where his haunt is.** Literally, "his place where his foot will be," the place whither he goes for rest and refuge. The reason he gives for this long and close observation of David's doings is that it is told him **that he dealeth very subtilly.** That is, according to Saul's information, he behaved with the utmost prudence, ever keeping a careful look-out against surprise, and using much skill to conceal his movements and to provide for his escape from danger. Finally, they are to return **with the certainty**—with trustworthy and accurate information, and then Saul will gather his forces and **search** David **out throughout all the thousands of Judah.** These are the larger divisions of the territory of the tribe (Num. i. 16; x. 4), throughout which Saul will hunt for him till he has got him into his power.

Ver. 24.—While the Ziphites were conferring with Saul and gathering information David had moved about six miles to the south of Ziph, and was **in the wilderness of Maon.** This town is still called Main, and occupies a conical hill, whence Robinson ('Bibl. Res.,' ii. 433) counted no less than nine cities belonging to the hill country of Judah. Conder ('Tent Work,' ii. 90) calls it a great lump of rock. **In the plain on the south of Jeshimon.** Literally, "in the 'Arabah to the right of the desert." The 'Arabah was the name of the low-lying desert tract extending along the valley of the Jordan from the lake of Gennesareth to the Dead Sea. Maon lay upon the edge of this depression, in the southern portion of the Jeshimon or Solitude.

Vers. 25, 26.—**He came down into a rock.** Hebrew, *sela'*, a cliff or precipice. In the next verse it is described as a mountain, on one side of which was David and his men, in full view of Saul and his army on the other. But as Saul's forces were much more numerous, they were preparing to separate, and so enclose David, while he **made haste.** The word expresses anxiety and fear, and may be translated, "And David sought anxiously to go from before the face of Saul." Conder's description of the spot ('Tent Work,' ii. 91) sets the whole scene most vividly before us. It is as follows:— "Between the ridge of El Kôlah (the ancient hill of Hachilah) and the neighbourhood of Maon there is a great gorge called 'the Valley of Rocks,' a narrow but deep chasm, impassable except by a detour of many miles, so that Saul might have stood within sight of David, yet quite unable to overtake his enemy; and to this "cliff of division" the name Malâky now applies, a word closely approaching the Hebrew *Mahlekoth*. The neighbourhood is seamed with many torrent

bels, but there is no other place near Maon where cliffs such as are to be inferred from the word *sela'* can be found. It seems to me pretty safe, therefore, to look on this gorge as the scene of the wonderful escape of David, due to a sudden Philistine invasion, which terminated the history of his hair-breadth escapes in the south country." This cliff in ver. 28 is called Sela-Hammahlekoth, "the cliff of divisions," or "of separations," *ham* representing the Hebrew article. Many other derivations have been suggested, but the above, which alone agrees with the ordinary meaning of the Hebrew verb, is proved to be right by Mr. Conder's researches. They enable us also to correct some small errors. Thus David did not come down **into a rock**, but "to the cliff," the *sela* or precipitous gorge described above. Nor did he "descend the rock" (Erdmann) "in order to conceal himself in the low land, or in the caves at its base," but he went to it as being an impassable barrier between him and his pursuers. But "he hasted anxiously to get away" (ver. 26), because Saul would divide his army into two parts, and so David would only have the advantage of the few miles of detour which Saul must make. But for the news of the Philistine invasion his final escape would have been almost hopeless. The ordinary notion that David and his men were concealed from the sight of Saul by an intervening mountain is disproved, not only by no such mountain existing, but also by the clause, "Saul and his men were surrounding David and his men" (ver. 28). They had them in sight, and were forming in two divisions, so as to pass the gorge at the two ends and close upon the flanks of David's small band of followers.

Verse 29 belongs to the next chapter.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 13—18.—*Deepening sorrows and new encouragement.* The facts are—1. David, deeming it unsafe to remain in Keilah, goes forth with his men in uncertainty as to their destination. 2. Saul, forbearing to march against Keilah, seeks in vain to capture David in the wilderness of Ziph. 3. While David, fully aware of Saul's evil intent, remains in the wilderness, he is comforted by a visit from Jonathan, who expresses his confidence in David's future supremacy and renews with him a covenant of friendship. It is one of the most beautiful features in David's life that he never hesitated to follow the indications of the will of God, however humiliating to himself, and apparently adverse to the attainment of the objects dearest to his heart. This obedience is the natural outcome of the full trust in the Lord so amply expressed in the Psalms. To exchange the comforts of an anticipated sojourn in Keilah for a rough and unsettled life in the mountainous district of Ziph was a new trial to the faith already highly strained. But the obedience was speedily followed by the occurrence of an event full of interest and encouragement, and the narrative of this section thus furnishes us with one of the most suggestive instances on record of the providential alleviation of sorrows incident to the path of duty. The connected truths here conveyed may be set forth as follows:—

I. DEEPENING SORROWS MAY FOLLOW ON MANIFEST TOKENS OF GOD'S FAVOUR AND TENDER CARE. No one could doubt but that the response given to David's inquiry at Keilah was clear evidence to himself and others that he was the chosen servant of God, and the character of the reply to his prayer was proof that the tender care of Jehovah was keeping him from the rage and cruelty of Saul. We can thus understand the strong expressions of confidence in God and gratitude for his mercy to be found in the psalms of this period; and yet the anguish of spirit and heaviness of heart which also are manifest in portions of those psalms are to be accounted for only by the fact that the loving-kindness thus shown was accompanied by the permission of continued and almost unendurable sorrows. No sooner had David been delivered from the hand of Saul at Keilah than he found himself, if possible, worse off than before entering Keilah, an outcast and fugitive, hiding daily for his life amidst the wilds of the rugged wilderness of Ziph. It is a riddle which the unspiritual mind can never solve, but which becomes increasingly simple and beautiful to those who enter into the spirit of our Saviour's mission on earth—that the sorrows of life often deepen when God is putting honour on his servants by preparing them for a more pure and blissful fellowship with himself, and for a higher grade of spiritual service. Our Saviour was the "beloved Son," the object of the Father's complacent love, and his work for the benefit of mankind was one of suffering,

shame, and death. In his case we see how the higher the service, the wider its range, and the more pure and blissful its issue, the deeper were its sorrows. To him there was no contrariety between the bitterness of the cup provided and the love unspeakable and unmeasured. Not every one is fitted to enter fully into the higher form of service. Many sons of Zebedee long for the honour apart from the cost. The loftier views of the Apostle Paul enabled him to regard the manifold sorrows of his life as an honourable and to-be-coveted participation of the sufferings of Christ. The power of spiritual service lies not in knowledge, not in culture of mere intellect, but in more perfect purity of spirit and a high development of the spiritual powers of faith, love, and free, cheerful absorption of will in the will of God; and such is human nature at its best, that only tribulation, it may be increasing tribulation, can so check our unspiritual tendencies as to enable us to serve God on the highest plane. A rough and rugged wilderness may fall to our lot not only while God loves and cares for us, but possibly as a further means of developing in us those high spiritual qualities which in days to come will fit us to minister psalms of comfort and cheer to the saints of God, and occupy positions of influence in the invisible Church corresponding in the spiritual sphere to that held by David in Israel when he swayed a royal sceptre over the land.

II. PROVIDENCE BRINGS SPECIAL SOLACE IN SEASONS OF INCREASING SORROWS. What though David exchange the prospective comfort of a stay in Keilah for a fugitive life in the wilderness, what though his heart for the moment find it "too hard" to solve the strange problem of his chequered course; just then that same Providence which directed his steps from Keilah was mercifully operating in the heart of the noblest man at the court of Saul to bring him sweetest consolation. There are many lines of influence at work under the unifying hand of God for the defence and guidance of his people; and though in his first feeling of disappointment on leaving Keilah David could only see one line, the subsequent appearance of Jonathan where he least expected him made it clear that others were in existence and found their centre in God. God never really impoverishes those who trust and serve him. Our course when faithful is one of progressive enrichment, and will be till we enter on the perfected inheritance above. It is contrary to the laws of a spiritual life for a true servant of God to be worse off to-day than yesterday. The ordinary springs of comfort open to David—meditation on God's past faithfulness, the conviction that he was working out a high and Divine purpose, and the pouring out of his heart in prayer—were now supplemented by the presence and love of his dearest earthly friend. And so God never takes away what seems to be a good, and never lays any new burden on us but that he gives us a corresponding blessing. Abraham sorrowed for kindred in a distant home, but had God for his portion and exceeding great reward. Our health fails, our material possessions vanish, or our loved ones die, and we turn our hearts more truly and passionately toward him who never fails, who is an everlasting portion, and who "gathers into one" the living and dead. Oh, blessed discipline! How tenderly the great Father cares for his sorrowing ones! With what precision does he follow them "whithersoever" in the order of duty they go, to raise up streams in the desert and cause them to feel, as the Apostle Paul in his sorrows felt, that God is able to supply all their need and never does forsake his saints.

III. In the unfolding of the GENERAL PURPOSES OF GOD'S KINGDOM there is a SUBORDINATION OF SERVICE in which, however, the HIGHER IS DEPENDENT FOR COMPLETEST EFFECTIVENESS ON THE LOWER. In Israel at that time God's merciful purposes toward mankind were being wrought out through the agency of servants occupying in the execution of the Divine will positions of relative subordination. Samuel, David, Jonathan were each working out the same results. But the part which Jonathan played in the sum of events comprised in the period covered by the history was inferior to that of David. As a spiritual man he had his work to do, and it was as important in its place as was that of Samuel and of David; yet we can see how wisely he formed an estimate of his position and service for the one great end, when he regarded David as superior in calling and in the honours and responsibilities he would have to bear. Jonathan by visiting David and ministering to his comfort recognised this unity and diversity of service. And it is instructive to notice how

in the spiritual service which unites us those who are supposed to hold inferior positions, and certainly do not carry so heavy responsibilities, are able to render most important aid to others above them in these respects. David was relatively the greater man, and yet David needed the spiritual encouragement and support which Jonathan was able to afford; and Jonathan, by strengthening "his hand in God," was for the time so far the benefactor and the superior. The *unity and subordination of spiritual service* is a truth applicable to the world as a whole, and to the part taken by any of us at particular stages of its history. There is to be at last "a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing" (Ephes. v. 27), and things are to be gathered together in one in Christ (*ibid.* i. 10). This unity of result is to be the product of all the manifold influences and agencies which God is pleased to employ through the whole course of time,—from the first to the last man,—as truly as the complete temple is the product not of the more prominent toilers, but of the totality of workers, from the highest to the lowest, first to last. As every separate ray of light and drop of dew is necessary, and therefore of value, in the totality of vegetation we witness—as the vegetation would be less perfect were any one of these to be absent from the process, so there is need, in converting the Divine idea of salvation into the grand reality indicated in the New Testament, for every small as well as great spiritual influence, and the most perfect fruition of the great thus becomes dependent on the action of other influence inferior to itself. Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, and Paul were respectively great in faithfulness, wisdom, devotion, fervour, and zeal, yet the educating influence of their lives is in the same line, and is ultimately strengthened by association with the holy patience of a despised Lazarus and the large liberality of a poor widow. Men *do not see the interlacings of spiritual agencies.* The influence exerted by Jonathan's counsel and friendship on the man chosen to do so wonderful a work for all time raises the thought whether in the main the great results achieved by some whose names are prominent may not be closely allied to the influences exerted by others unknown to fame. There are doubtless great revelations yet to be made in reference to the interdependence of the forces of the spiritual world. We do not as yet see the full bearings of the prayers of the lowly on the raising up of distinguished workers and their enrichment with spiritual power. The devoted missionary, the successful pastor, the great teacher and leader of men, may therefore owe much of their peculiar spiritual usefulness to the untraceable influence of prayers offered by the obscure. This principle helps to explain the great stress laid in the Bible on the prayers of ordinary Christians, and thus enables us to see how after all a poor afflicted child of God may be an unconscious strengthener of persons unknown by name.

IV. A TRUE SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION RECOGNISES THIS UNITY AND SUBORDINATION, AND SEEKS TO GIVE EFFECT TO IT. The actions and words of Jonathan sprang from his distinct recognition of the fact that David, though greater than himself, was inspired by the same aim, and longed for the realisation of Israel's glory. He could not bless Israel by a virtuous reign; it was denied him to be in Zion a king typical of the Messiah; but he could strengthen the heart of him who was destined to that honour; and with unparalleled magnanimity and self-denial, with utter absorption in Israel's good, and cheerful submission to the manifest will of God, he contributed his part toward the final issue. It is a question whether amidst our modern religious parties we sufficiently realise the unity and subordination of our work for Christ. The narrowness of our *isms* is not healthful in itself, and it tends to rob the great body of workers of much of the sympathy and large-hearted prayer that would unconsciously to themselves make them strong in God. What elevation of thought and grandeur of life should we more uniformly attain to could we, like Jonathan, put into practice the feeling that our prayers and sympathies, in going forth for all who labour for Christ, and especially for those who are called to bear the strain of high and perilous service, are our contribution to the one great enterprise which from first to last has filled the heart of Christ and is absorbing the best energies of his Church!

V. THE BEST FORM OF SERVICE WE sometimes can RENDER TO GOD IS TO INSPIRE WITH COURAGE the hearts of those who DO A WORK TO WHICH WE ARE NOT CALLED. Jonathan was not called to be a king, but he served God by inspiring the heart of

David with courage amidst his sorrows and cares. The narrative implies that the friends conversed freely on the situation and prospects of David. Doubtless Jonathan, besides assuring David of his own belief in God's purposes and his personal allegiance, would also press upon him the fact of Israel's need, the past care of God, the anointing by Samuel and its significance, the historic trials of patriarchs, the high purposes of sorrow and patience, the honour of being chosen to serve and to wait, and the grand issue when, in some as yet unknown manner, the best Messianic hopes of the nation would be realised. He knew that David's need was quiet trust in God, and with the tenderness and love of a true friend he diverted his thoughts away from Saul and the sorrows of a fugitive life to the everlasting Refuge. "Strengthened his hand in God." Noble man! noble service! There are in the lives of many of God's servants seasons when their wisdom, strength, courage, and patience are taxed almost beyond endurance. "Heart and flesh fail." What they need is faith in God. To move on in the dark, to toil when success seems hopeless, to hold on though dangers thicken, to hope when events are adverse—this was the case of David, and often that of missionaries, pastors, parents, and others called to high and arduous service. How such men long for the inspiring word, the significant sign of sympathy, the reminder of the truth well known! The history of the Church is full of such instances. "Who is sufficient for these things?" "Could ye not watch with me one hour?" Angels came and cheered the heart which men left to bear the unutterable burden. Following the example of Jonathan and of the angels, we each may do something to inspire with new faith and hope those who feel the pressure of care and toil for Christ; we may do it by our words of cheer, by our assured sympathy, by our fervent prayer, and by hearty, free co-operation in the enterprise which absorbs their energy.

Practical lessons:—1. We should seek the evidence of our being blessed with the favour of God in the unquestionable spiritual blessings he has conferred on us in the past, in the fact of our being led by him and not by our own choice, and in the answer of a good conscience to his claim on our obedience and love, and not in the presence or absence of easy circumstances. God's chosen ones have often known the pains of wilderness life. 2. We may be sure that before troubles become so manifold as to destroy the end for which God has called us into his service some appropriate aid will come, not to relieve us of all care, but to fortify us for duty; for he will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able to bear. 3. It should inspire every Christian worker amidst his toils that he is daily borne on the heart of many who, though unseen and unknown by name, are friends in Christ. 4. Honour is due to every one who by prayer or kindly word contributes to the sum of Christian effort. 5. True religious sympathy will lead us to rejoice in the superior service to which others are called, and will devise new means of aiding their progress. 6. There are seasons in the religious life when calm trust in God, in the absence of favouring circumstances, is almost our sole duty; and when we are strengthened in this respect we shall be able to possess our souls in patience till the desire of our heart is attained (Luke xxi. 14—19).

Vers. 19—29.—*The unobserved side of life.* The facts are—1. The Ziphites send to Saul, offering their services to secure David if only he will come to their country in pursuit of him. 2. Saul, indulging in pious language, thanks the Ziphites for their sympathy, and promises to comply with their request when properly informed of David's movements. 3. Going in pursuit of David in the wilderness of Maon, Saul encompasses him with his men. 4. At this critical juncture Saul is called away to repel an invasion of the Philistines, whereupon David seeks refuge in Engedi. This brief narrative is full of suggestion of profitable topics, such as the intense zeal of men in sinful courses, its reasons and its issue; the pernicious influence of local jealousy in determining the bearing of men towards others; the blindness and folly of combinations of men against the quietly-developing purposes of God; the power of the love of gain, leading, as it does, men to adopt a course of evil from which others shrink; the causes of the indifference or aversion of sections of the community to the governing and advancing sentiment of a nation, as seen in the attitude of the Ziphites contrasted with the general feeling in relation to Saul and

David: the moral causes of disregard for the signs of the times; the tendency to cover up deeds of wrong under the plea of patriotism and loyalty; the degree to which religious forms of speech and professions of sanctity may survive the utter decay of vital godliness; and the moral uses of protracted trouble to the children of God. But leaving these, we may generalise the most prominent teaching in the following way:—

I. THERE IS AN IMPORTANT UNOBSERVED SIDE OF LIFE WHICH MUST BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN FORMING A PROPER ESTIMATE OF CONDUCT. In this section we have a record of facts as they appeared to an observer. The acts of the Ziphites are recorded, and not the reasons from which they proceeded. Our knowledge of men compels us to believe that there were intellectual and moral causes of the active zeal against David which they alone of all Israel manifested; but, so far as the narrative itself informs us, their conduct may have been inspired by loyalty to a recognised king. Thus, also, Saul's conduct as here described is only that which appears to the casual observer. There is nothing wrong in a monarch endeavouring to capture a subject who holds a strong position by the aid of armed men; nor is there anything but an appearance of piety in imploring the Divine blessing on men who express in tangible form their sympathy with his troubles. Again, the conduct of David as here recorded embraces only that side of life on which men can gaze, for he here appears as one acting as though his entire safety depended alone on his exertions, and not on any other power. The inner, religious side of his life is not noticed. And, finally, the acts of the Philistines are narrated as they would appear to a historian—simply as the movements of men bent on some of the ends common to the warlike and restless, no reference being made to the over-ruling power which silently worked on the inner side of life, causing their action to synchronise with the perilous position of David. What is thus true of the Ziphites, Saul, David, and the Philistines, as their acts are set forth in the history, is also true of all men whose deeds are recorded in history, and of every individual in the prosecution of his daily course. The main purpose of history is to state fact in such a connection as to show the dependence of one on the other. There is always presupposed a vast area of life, which furnishes the immediate moral causes of what appears in the field of human observation. In so far as historians profess to trace actions back to their governing principles, and thus reveal the other and inner side of life, they become philosophers, and must not expect the same deference for their conclusions as for their statements of fact. The Ziphites would have Saul think that their zeal was the offspring of a cherished patriotism and loyalty, whereas there is reason for believing that other causes were chiefly in operation. It is the characteristic of sacred history that sometimes it gives an authoritative record of the inner life, assigning the true causes of the actions described. The practical use of the fact that there is an unobserved side of life is—1. To *induce more care with respect to our unobserved life.* When we believe that there is more real life lived within than without, that the causes and germs of things are all nurtured beyond human observation, that the moral value of what is observed is determined by the quality of what is unobserved, and that though, like the Ziphites, we may seem to do only what may possibly proceed from worthy motives, God looks at the actual spring of conduct—then shall we be more earnest in seeking a pure heart, an unobserved life which shall be acceptable to God. 2. To *regulate our judgment of human actions.* The knowledge that there is an unobserved side of conduct cannot but induce caution in our estimate of character. The apparent loyalty of a Ziphite and the pious language of a Saul may be the expression of a good or of an evil condition of the unobserved life. Our own deceitful hearts tell us how possible it is to appropriate virtues to ourselves before others when in our deepest consciousness we know that no just claim can be made to them. On the other hand, as it would be unjust to infer that because in this historical section there is simply a record of David's exertions to escape Saul, therefore he was destitute of the pious trust which seeks refuge in God (Ps. liv.), so, in viewing the outward life of men, we must not conclude that that is all; for in the unobserved life, spent concurrently with the observed, there may be a devout, holy trust in God which, beyond all human view, sustains and strengthens the entire man. There is a vast demand on our pity and sympathy in the life which underlies many

a calm and brave endurance of toil and care; and beneath many a fair exterior there is a secret second life deserving scorn and indignation.

II. ANTAGONISM TO RELIGION IS USUALLY TRACEABLE TO MORAL CAUSES. Although the record does not state the reasons for the conduct of the Ziphites, we, taking it in connection with the entire history of the period, may approximately arrive at their real nature. Remembering that these men belonged to a nation whose very existence was due to the predominance in public affairs of religious considerations, that government with them was a question of allegiance to God as well as to man, that the national life of their own period had been one in which religious principles had become increasingly prominent in public affairs, that they were well aware of Saul's recognition as king on the understanding that he acted in subordination to the higher principles of which Samuel was the assertor, that it was within their knowledge that Samuel and the high priest Abiathar had disowned Saul and favoured David, and that David's prowess had been distinctly approved of God and beneficial to the nation, while his holy, beautiful life was in striking contrast with the life which had secured the slaughter of the priests at Nob, alienated the head men of his own tribe, and become an occasion of sorrow to the land — it follows from all this that these men could not have set themselves against the most renowned and honoured man of their own tribe unless they were under the influence of motives sufficiently strong to overbear the evidence, on the one side, of David's integrity and recognition by God, and, on the other, of Saul's debasement and rejection. That they did not reason and act in harmony with facts admitted arose from two circumstances. 1. That David was now, and for some time had been, an outlaw, isolated and sorrowful, a fact seemingly inconsistent with the previous honours conferred upon him by God, and with the continued sanction of Samuel and Abiathar. 2. That lack of sympathy with the holy aspirations of David and jealousy against one of their own tribe induced them to take his present unfortunate position as disproof of any value to be attached to the earlier evidences of his being a chosen servant of God. We have in this case an *illustration of the antagonism of men towards Christ* while he was on earth, and *towards Christianity in the present age.* In the case of our Saviour there was the most clear and convincing evidence that he was the Anointed, resembling that of David's call. Only resort to the absurd supposition that he was influenced by Beelzebub could afford an appearance of logical consistency in disputing his Messiahship. But a further point of resemblance arises; for the Pharisees construed the lowly life, the unostentatious bearing, the manifest sorrows, in fact, the strange delay in rising to complete dominion, as inconsistent with their idea of what became an Anointed of the Lord. Moreover, as with the Ziphites, so with the Pharisees; there was a moral offence because of Christ's insistence on internal holiness, and they were averse to the kind of government over men which he alone cared to establish. But as aversion to holiness and jealousy of distinction are strong principles of action, the Pharisees, like the Ziphites, could not await the development of events; they must needs take active measures to capture and destroy One who had proved by his deeds of power the greatest benefactor of the age. In the case of *modern antagonism to Christianity* we find the *same causes at work* under analogous conditions. Given the existence of a Supreme Being, interested in the spiritual condition of his creatures and free to act for their welfare, and given, also, as can be well established to every mind free from preconceived ideas on the impossibility of the supernatural, the veracity of the evangelical records, we have then a body of evidence concerning the supernatural origin and character of Christianity as clear as, and much fuller than, the evidence to the Hebrews of David's selection through Samuel and distinct approval by God; and this becomes overwhelming when taken in conjunction with that wondrous life which no other hypothesis can possibly explain. Yet men seek to set aside this evidence because, forsooth, it does not fall in with their conception of what a revelation from God to man should be; much after the model of the Ziphites, who could not believe a wandering, sorrowful outlaw to be the coming king, notwithstanding that some earlier events seemed to point in that direction. No doubt in many theoretical objectors to Christianity there is a positive aversion more or less pronounced to the inward holiness and entire submission of heart and intellect and will which

Christ makes the invariable condition of being his subjects, and this perverts the judgment.

III. STRONG FAITH IN GOD IS THE PROPER COMPLEMENT OF THE MOST EARNEST EXERTION, AND IS A POWER IN BRINGING ABOUT THE DESIRED RESULT. Confining our attention to this narrative, we should conclude that David not only strove with all his energy to avoid a conflict with Saul, but that he was conscious that success rested entirely on his exertions. But there was an unobserved side of David's conduct of which the narrative says not a word. The fifty-fourth Psalm reveals that other side, and we there learn that though he strove to escape as though everything depended on his skill and discretion, yet he trusted in God as though hope were alone to be found in him. This double life is well known to every child of God. Whatever metaphysical questions may be started concerning it, as a fact it is unquestionable. Faith is a power acting in the unseen, spiritual sphere concurrently with our exertions in the visible, material sphere. Both are real powers in God's government of man. We are apt to under-estimate faith because we do not see its incidence; or we are disposed to doubt its utility because we cannot trace the intricate operations by which events are brought to pass. It is some aid to our faith to remember that the Divine energy is immanent in every mind and in every ultimate force, and can carry out millions of lines of action concurrently for definite ends as readily as we by concentration can carry out one to a single end. God does rule among the armies of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. His control of men's movements is evidently not a mere general survey of hard, rigid lines of force originally set in motion, but the free exercise of his personal energy on the deepest springs of human action, so as to insure a concurrence of events at such times and places as may subserve some advantage to those whose lives are moving in harmony with his holy purposes. God becomes a reality to us in so far as we believe this and act on the belief. Our Christian enterprises, private conflicts with sin and sorrow, and daily occupations should be pursued with all zeal, and yet with all faith in the need and certainty of God's help. If we wish men to be moved, money to be raised for Christ's service, hindrances to religion to be overcome, and events to be brought about for which we have not the adequate means, there is no presumption, but rather there is profound wisdom and piety, in asking God to exercise his boundless power for the glory of his name. "When the Son of man cometh" to visit his Churches, as when once he walked among the seven golden candlesticks (Rev. i. 13—17), "*shall he find faith on the earth*"? (Luke xviii. 8).

General considerations:—1. It is worthy of consideration how far the outward life observed by men is a genuine expression of the inner, and to what extent our secrets are holy and lawful. 2. A study of the intellectual and moral causes of unbelief, as manifested by various grades of intellect and during many centuries, would furnish instruction and warning to the tempted. 3. It is to be feared that the extreme development of man's activity in all departments of life and the insistence on personal effort have withdrawn the attention of Christians too much from the great part which faith in God is ordained to play in the government of the world and salvation of men.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 13, 14.—*David's wanderings in the wilderness.* "And Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand" (ver. 14). From the time of his leaving Gath till his return (ch. xxvii. 2) David dwelt in the following places successively—1. The cave of Adullam. 2. Mizpeh of Moab. 3. The forest of Hareth. 4. Keilah. 5. The wilderness of Ziph (Hachilah, Horesh). 6. The wilderness of Maon. 7. En-gedi. 8. "The hold" (ch. xxiv. 22). 9. The wilderness of Paran (ch. xxv. 2). 10. The wilderness of Ziph again. The period over which his wanderings in these places extended is not stated, but it was probably upwards of five years; "and the time that David dwelt in the country of the Philistines was a year and four months" (ch. xxvii. 7). Like the journeyings of the people of Israel (the events of which "were written for our admonition"), they resemble, in some respects, the course of all God's servants through the present world to "the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." "Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou

my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?" (Ps. lvi. 8). Regarded generally they were a scene of—1. *Bitter hostility.* "Saul sought him every day." And so long as the servants of the great King are "in the world" they are objects of the hatred and opposition of "the prince of this world" and "the children of disobedience" (Ephes. ii. 2; Gal. i. 4), because "they are not of the world." The hostility which is directed against them is unreasonable and unrighteous, but real and deep; sometimes fierce and violent, and never ceases. 2. *Outward distress* David was hunted like "a partridge on the mountains" (ch. xxvi. 20), "wandered in deserts and mountains and caves of the earth," sometimes (like the Son of man) "had not where to lay his head," suffered hunger and thirst and continual hardship, was separated from "lover and friend," and lived in the midst of extreme peril. Others are more highly favoured, but none can escape the ordinary sorrows of life; some are "greatly afflicted," and not a few suffer reproach and persecution for Christ's sake. "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts xiv. 22). 3. *Inward conflict,* temptation, care, depression, grief, and fear, such as are described in the psalms which refer to David's wanderings, and are full of imagery derived therefrom. "His sanctified genius did not give forth its perfect fragrance till it was bruised in God's chastening hand. It was the storm of affliction that awoke the full harmonies of David's harp" (Binnie). And these are echoed in the experience of the servants of God in every age. 4. *Divine protection* and instruction, by means of providential occurrences, the prophetic word, and the inward teaching of the Holy Spirit. "God delivered him not into his hand." "Out of these great experiences in David's sorrowful life of the grace and power, wisdom and justice, mercy and goodness of God, was developed in him, and through him in his people, that intelligence of faith and theological knowledge which we see in the Psalms and the prophetical writings" (Erdmann). And still higher privileges than of old are now conferred on the people of God. 5. *Sacred devotion.* His harp was his constant companion in his wanderings, and mingling with its tones in every place, his voice rose up to God in prayer and praise, making every place a temple.

> "Serene he sits and sweeps the golden lyre,
> And blends the prophet's with the poet's fire.
> See with what art he strikes the vocal strings,
> The God, his theme, inspiring what he sings" (Lowth).

"Whether it be the Divine excellences, or the deep-toned voice of penitence, or the longing of the soul after God, the rejoicing in the light of his countenance, or thanksgiving for his mercies, in short, every emotion of the renewed heart finds adequate expression in the Book of Psalms" (J. Duncan). It is "the poetry of friendship between God and man" (Herder). 6. *Active service.* For during his wanderings he was called to render special service (ver. 2), and in the latter part of them continually afforded protection to his people (ch. xxv. 16). "None of us liveth to himself." We are the Lord's servants, and must serve him in faithful and diligent labour on behalf of others. 7. *Necessary preparation* for future service, honour, and joy.

> "Oh spread thy covering wings around,
> Till all our wanderings cease,
> And at our Father's loved abode
> Our souls arrive in peace." D.

Vers. 15—18. (HORESH, in the wilderness of Ziph.)—*The benefit of true friendship.* "And Jonathan . . . strengthened his hand in God" (ver. 16). The friendship of Jonathan for David here stands in contrast not only to the hatred of Saul, but also to the ingratitude of the citizens of Keilah, and the treachery of the Ziphites (ver. 19). The benefit of it, which had been long enjoyed by David, was even more fully than ever experienced by him now, when he left Keilah with his 600 men, wandered hither and thither, and "abode in a mountain (Hachilah) in the wilderness of Ziph." He was exposed to the persecution of Saul, who sought to destroy him by every means in his power (ver. 14), driven from one stronghold to another, able to procure only a precarious subsistence, anxious, fearful, and sometimes ready to sink in doubt and despondency. "Just at this moment Jonathan, as though led by

God, made his way to him in the thickets of the forest (literally, Horesh), and consoled him as if with words and promises from God himself" (Ewald). He did not accompany the force in pursuit of David (ver. 15), but came from Gibeah. His peculiar and trying position made it impossible for him to do more for his friend than hold this secret interview with him, without altogether breaking with his royal father, and openly incurring the charge of disobedience and rebellion. Never was friendship more faithfully shown; never did it render more valuable service. Well might the blind man, when asked what he thought the *sun* was like, reply, "Like friendship." Its benefit, as received by David, was—

I. OPPORTUNE. "A friend loveth at all times;" but his kindly offices are peculiarly grateful and beneficial in a *time of need;* as, *e. g.*, in—1. Physical distress, affliction, homelessness, privation, peril of liberty or life. 2. Mental anxiety, loneliness, discouragement, depression, when the

> "Light is low,
> When the blood creeps, and the nerves prick
> And tingle; and the heart is sick,
> And all the wheels of Being slow."

3. Spiritual trial, temptation, failing faith hope and patience; in view of the prosperity of the wicked, the patience of Heaven, the delay of promised good. At such a time how unspeakably precious is a true friend! His countenance is like sunshine breaking through thick clouds. "Friendship is the only point in human affairs concerning the benefit of which all with one voice agree. There is nothing so suited to our nature, so well adapted to prosperity or adversity. I am not aware whether, with the exception of wisdom, anything better has been bestowed on man by the immortal gods. And they seem to take away the sun from the world who withdraw friendship from life" (Cicero). "Refuge failed," &c. (Ps. cxlii. 4; Matt. xxvi. 40, 56).

II. ADAPTED to the most pressing need. "And strengthened his hand in God, *i. e.* strengthened his heart not by supplies, or by money, or any subsidy of that kind, but by consolation drawn from his innocence and the promises of God" (Keil). "Exhorted him to put confidence in God" (Dathe). He strengthened him by—1. *His genial presence,* especially since his visit was expressive of his fidelity, confidence, and sympathy, and made with much effort, self-denial, and risk. "They that fear thee will be glad when they see me" (Ps. cxix. 74; Prov. xxvii. 17). "Whom when Paul saw," &c. (Acts xxviii. 15; 2 Cor. vii. 7). "When I ask myself whence it is that I feel this joy, this ease, this serenity when I see him—it is because it is he, it is because it is I, I answer; and that is all that I can say" (Montaigne). 2. *His encouraging words.* "Fear not" ("the keynote of Jonathan's address"), &c., in which he assured him of—(1) Preservation from threatening danger, doubtless pointing him to the Divine protection. (2) Exaltation to the highest dignity: "Thou wilt be king over Israel;" pointing him to the Divine purpose, which had been plainly declared, and could not fail to be fulfilled. He had already intimated (ch. xx. 15), and now explicitly asserted, his faith in that purpose. What ground was there for David's fear? (3) His anticipation of continued and intimate association with him when he should sit on the throne, all claim to which he willingly renounced for his sake, and in obedience to the will of God. (4) The conviction of Saul himself that he would prevail. If Saul believed it, why should David doubt? What more he said is not recorded. But this was admirably adapted to strengthen his heart and hand. "It is difficult to form an adequate conception of the courage, the spiritual faith, and the moral grandeur of this act. Never did man more completely clear himself from all complicity in guilt than Jonathan from that of his father. And yet not an undutiful word escaped the lips of this brave man" (Edersheim). 3. *His renewed covenant with him* (ch. xviii. 3; xx. 16, 17, 42), in which, whilst he pledged his own faithful love and service, he drew forth the expression of his faith in his future destiny as well as of his fidelity to himself and his house; and both appealed to God as witness. The intercourse of friends is peculiarly beneficial when it is sanctified by their common recognition of the presence of God, and their common devotion to his will. "Next to the immediate guidance of God by his Spirit, the

counsel and encouragement of virtuous and enlightened friends afford the most powerful aid in the encounter of temptation and in the career of duty." It was the last time David and Jonathan met.

"O heart of fire! misjudged by wilful man,
Thou flower of Jesse's race!
What woe was thine, when thou and Jonathan
Last greeted face to face!
He doomed to die, thou on us to impress
The portent of a bloodstained holiness" ('Lyra Apostolica').

III. ENDURING. The influence of their meeting continued long afterwards, and produced abundant fruit (ch. xxiv. 7; xxvi. 9). "The pleasures resulting from the mutual attachment of kindred spirits are by no means confined to the moments of personal intercourse; they diffuse their odours, though more faintly, through the seasons of absence, refreshing and exhilarating the mind by the remembrance of the past and the anticipation of the future. It is a treasure possessed when it is not employed; a reserve of strength, ready to be called into action when most needed; a fountain of sweets, to which we may continually repair, whose waters are inexhaustible" (R. Hall). "If the converse of one friend, at one interview, gives comfort and strengthens our hearts, what may not be expected from the continual supports, daily visits, and powerful love of the Saviour of sinners, the covenanted Friend of believers!" (Scott).—D.

Vers. 19—23. (THE HILL OF HACHILAH.)—*Treachery.* One of the most painful of the afflictions of David (suspicion, hatred, calumny, ingratitude, &c.) was treachery, such as he experienced at the hands of some of the people of Ziph. They were men of his own tribe, had witnessed his deliverance of Keilah from the common enemy, were acquainted with his character and relations with Saul, and might have been expected to sympathise with him when he sought refuge in their territory. But "those who should have rallied around him were his enemies and betrayers." They had "a panoramic view of the country from Tell-Zif, and could see from thence David's men moving about in the desert;" went and informed the king that he was hiding himself "in strongholds in the wood (Horesh), in the hill of Hachilah (south of Tell-Zif, which is four miles south-east of Hebron), on the right hand of the desert;" urged him to come down and accomplish his desire, and promised to deliver David into his hand. This new affliction came upon him almost immediately after he had been encouraged by the visit of Jonathan, and in it we see—

I. AN EXHIBITION OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY. There can be no doubt, after what had taken place, about the motives by which they were actuated. Underneath their apparent "compassion" for Saul (ver. 21) lay hatred of David, aversion to his principles, and the "evil heart of unbelief, departing from the living God," which exists in all ages, and manifests itself in an endless variety of ways (Ps. xiv.; Rom. iii. 10; Heb. iii. 12). It appears in—1. *Unfeeling faithlessness;* indifference to the claims of close relationship, superior worth, and valuable service; deficiency of compassion for the needy and unjustly persecuted; voluntary misuse of advantages, and abuse of trust. 2. *Subtle selfishness,* making some temporal good its chief aim; for its sake doing injury to others, eagerly seeking the favour of the wealthy and powerful, and disguising itself under professions of loyalty and public service; running "greedily after the error of Balaam for reward" (Jude 11; Matt. xxvi. 14, 15). 3. *Ungodly zeal.* "Any one at that time in Israel who feared God more than man could not lend himself to be made a tool of Saul's blind fury. God had already manifestly enough acknowledged David" (Delitzsch). Saul knew that it was the purpose of God that David should be king (ver. 17), notwithstanding his pious language (ver. 21), and the men of Ziph participated with him in his endeavour to defeat that purpose. Their character is described in PS. LIV., 'The Divine Helper against ungodly adversaries' (see inscription):—

"O God, by thy name save me,
And in thy might judge my cause.

For strangers have risen up against me,
And violent men have sought after my life;
They have not set God before them."

They were *strangers* "not by birth or nation, but as to religion, virtue, compassion, and humanity" (Chandler); and in calling them such "there is a bitter emphasis as well as a gleam of insight into the spiritual character of the true Israel" (Rom. ii. 28, 29; ix. 6).

II. AN EXPERIENCE OF SEVERE TRIAL often endured by good men, who "for righteousness' sake" are betrayed by false friends, and even those "of their own household" (Matt. x. 36), in whom they have put confidence. The trial—1. *Causes intense suffering;* grieves more than the loss of earthly possessions, and inflicts a deeper wound than a sword (Ps. lv. 12). 2. *Becomes an occasion of strong temptation;* to indulge a spirit of revenge, to doubt the sincerity of others, to refrain from endeavour for the general good as undeserved and vain (Ps. cxvi. 11). But when regarded aright—3. *Constrains to fervent prayer* and renewed confidence in the eternal and faithful Friend.

"O God, hear my prayer;
Give ear to the words of my mouth.
Behold, God is my Helper,
The Lord is the Upholder of my soul" (Ps. liv. 2, 4).

III. A FORESHADOWING OF MESSIAH'S SUFFERINGS, for the afflictions of David on the way to the throne of Israel were ordained to be a type of "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." "He came unto his own, and his own received him not," was persecuted by the rulers of the nation, and, after escaping many treacherous designs of his enemies, was betrayed by Judas (the only Judæan among the twelve) "into the hands of sinners." And his betrayal was necessary to—1. *The completeness of his experience* as the chief of sufferers. 2. *The setting forth of his example* of spotless holiness and quenchless love. 3. *The perfection of his sympathy* as the Succourer of the tempted. "It became him," &c. (Heb. ii. 10, 18). "The end of Christ's incarnation was that he might draw up into his own experience all the woes and temptations of humanity, to draw around him all the swathings of our imperfect nature, and make our wants his own, till not a cry could go up from it which had not first come into his own consciousness" (Sears).—D.

Vers. 24—28. (THE WILDERNESS OF MAON.)—*A marvellous escape.* "Therefore they called that place Sela-hammahlekoth"—the cliff of separations (ver. 28). It seemed as if at length Saul was about to accomplish his purpose. Led by the treacherous Ziphites, he went down to the hill of Hachilah, from which David had withdrawn to "the wilderness of Maon, in the plain on the south of the desert." In his further pursuit (ver. 25) there was but a short distance between them—Saul standing on a ridge of Hachilah, David on a rock or precipice in Maon; but a deep chasm separated them from each other. And when "Saul and his men were encircling David and his men to seize them, and David was sore troubled to escape" (ver. 26), "there came a messenger unto Saul, saying, Haste thee, and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land." Thus his purpose was suddenly and effectually defeated. The escape of David suggests, concerning *the dealings of God with his servants,* that—

I. HE SOMETIMES SUFFERS THEM TO BE REDUCED TO SEVERE STRAITS. Danger is imminent, the enemy exults, their own wisdom and strength are unavailing, and they are full of anxiety and dread. They have no resource but to betake themselves to "the Rock of Israel;" if he should fail them they are lost; and it is to constrain them to seek refuge in him that they are beaten off from every other (see ch. vii. 12).

II. HE NEVER SUFFERS THEM TO CONTINUE THEREIN WITHOUT HELP. Although the space that separates them from destruction be narrow, it is impassable; for the invisible hand of God is there, and the enemy cannot go a step further than he permits. "He shall cover thee with his feathers," &c. (Ps. xci. 4). Sometimes nothing more can be done than to "stand still and see the salvation of the Lord;" if an effort to escape must be made, it is still he who saves, and to him we must ever look in faith

and prayer. "What doth not prayer overcome and conquer? What doth not resistance drive back when accompanied by distrust of self and trust in God? And in what battle can he be conquered who stands in the presence of God with an earnest resolve to please him?" (Scupoli). "When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back," &c. (Ps. lvi. 9).

III. HE OFTEN DELIVERS THEM AT THE MOMENT OF THEIR GREATEST PERIL. He does so both in temporal calamity and in spiritual trouble, labour and conflict. At the point of despair deliverance comes (Micah vii. 8). And thereby his interposition is rendered more apparent, the designs of the enemy are more signally frustrated, and the gratitude of his servants is more fully excited. "David was delivered at the last hour, it is true; but this never strikes too late for the Lord to furnish in it a proof to those that trust in him that his word is yea and amen when it says, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee'" (Krummacher).

IV. HE MAKES USE OF VARIOUS AND UNEXPECTED MEANS FOR THEIR DELIVERANCE (ver. 27). Who could have predicted the arrival of such a message? The incursion of the Philistines was the natural result of the course pursued by Saul in levying war (ver. 8), going out to seek the life of David (ver. 15), and leaving the country unprotected; but the message came at the opportune moment by the overruling providence of God. His resources are boundless; he employs his enemies for the preservation of his friends, diverts their attention to other objects, and impels them to spend their strength in conflict with each other. "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations" (2 Pet. ii. 9).

V. HIS INTERPOSITION ON THEIR BEHALF SHOULD BE GRATEFULLY RECORDED; as it was in the name which was given to the spot, and still more fully in the psalm ending

> "With willing mind will I sacrifice unto thee;
> I will give thanks to thy name, O Jehovah, for it is good.
> For out of all distress hath he delivered me,
> And upon mine enemies hath mine eye seen its desire" (Ps. liv. 8, 9). D.

Vers. 16—18.—*Sweet counsel in time of need.* I. THE DISCOURAGEMENT OF DAVID. The citizens of Keilah, after he had with his good sword delivered them from the Philistine marauders, were so ungrateful, perhaps so much afraid of sharing the fate of the city of Nob at the hand of Saul, that they were ready to betray the son of Jesse and surrender him to the king. From this danger he no sooner escaped than the people of Ziph—though he did not compromise them by entering their town, but encamped in a wood—were not only willing, but eager, to reveal his hiding-place. And the pursuit was hot. "Saul sought him every day." To add to the danger, David had with him 600 armed men—too many to be easily concealed, but too few to encounter the force which Saul led against him, and which was numbered by thousands. It was therefore a critical time for David; and his poetic, sensitive nature felt the ingratitude and injustice more keenly than he dreaded the actual peril, so that he began to be quite chagrined and disheartened. The Apostle Paul had a similar tendency to depression. He felt ingratitude and calumny most acutely, and was more cast down by these than by any of the physical sufferings and mortal risks that befell him. But Paul was like David too in his quick susceptibility to words of kindness, and in drawing strength from fellowship with congenial minds.

II. THE FRIEND IN TIME OF NEED. St. Paul tells, "When we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears. Nevertheless God, who comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus." In like manner did God comfort David amidst fightings and fears by the coming of Jonathan. This noble-minded prince cheered the fugitive in the forest of Ziph—1. *By showing to him a generous human affection.* This was love indeed, which clave to David in exile as closely as ever it had done when he was in the sunshine of public favour, and which was willing to run great risks for the delight of clasping hand in hand and talking face to face. Here was genuine friendship, which is perhaps more rare than love. Cynics point out that the celebrated friendships, as of David and Jonathan in the Bible, and Damon and Pythias the Pythagoreans in Greek story, belong to "the heroic and

simple period of the world;" and they allege that these cannot be reproduced in the sophisticated society of modern times. There is something in this, though it is not absolutely true. The tone of "In Memoriam" may be too intense for most of us, but it is not incomprehensible. That is a rare and lofty friendship which prefers another in honour above ourselves. From the early days of David's promotion Jonathan augured his advancement to the throne, and took generous delight in the prospect. He still retained and openly expressed the same feeling. David would be king, and he, his friend and brother, would share his joy and stand at his right hand. It was not to be so. But we see David, when established on the throne, looking, if we may so speak, for Jonathan. "And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" (2 Sam. ix. 1). 2. *By lifting his thoughts to God.* It was not possible or proper for Jonathan to levy troops and lead them to the help of his friend against the king his father. But he did what he could, and did the best thing possible in such a case, when he animated the faith and hope of David in the promise and providence of God. He referred to the Divine purpose as no secret, but revealed, and known to Saul himself, though he struggled against it. The counsel of the Lord must stand. How could David doubt it? But David did sometimes doubt and fear, and he is not alone in the weakness. Sarah had the promise of God that her son should be Abraham's heir and successor, and yet she was uneasy lest he should be dispossessed or hurt by the son of Hagar. Jacob at Bethel got a promise that he and his posterity would possess the land on which he lay, yet when he returned to it he was quite alarmed lest Esau should destroy his family and himself. And so also many persons who have eternal life in the gospel and in the sure provision of grace by Christ Jesus grow faint and raise foreboding questions: What if God forget me? What if I perish after all? The best thing that a friend can do for such a doubter is to show him that God cannot lie and cannot be defeated. For his name's sake he will do as he has said. So one may strengthen the weak hands of another in God.

III. THOUGHTS SUGGESTED BY THE MEETING IN THE WOOD. 1. *The value of an early friendship in the fear of God.* It is in youth that the strongest friendships are formed, and permit interchanges of criticism and correction that are not so palatable when years have increased our reserve, and perhaps our obstinacy. This is especially true of the moral and religious aspect and use of friendship. Old men, even when they are on terms of cordial personal regard, do not easily exchange spiritual confidences. But young friends can do so; and never do they put the bond between them to better use than when they warn each other of moral risks and snares, and encourage one another to trust in God. 2. *The great part which secondary personages in history may play.* David takes a primary or front place in sacred story; but he was much indebted to the kindly help of others who take a less conspicuous rank—*e. g.*, Jonathan encouraging him in the wood, and Abigail turning him back from hasty bloodshedding. Again we pass on in thought to the Apostle Paul, who fills a very high place in the Christian annals, but was much helped by men and women in quite a secondary position. Himself tells us so, joyfully acknowledging his obligation to such as Aquila and Priscilla, Mary, Urbane, Timothy, Epaphroditus, John Mark, Luke, and Aristarchus. These Christians did direct work for the Lord; but perhaps did their best piece of service when they helped Paul, and encouraged his hand in God. So is it at all times with the greatest men in both Church and State. They owe much to others who are far less known than themselves, if known at all. A sympathetic wife, a faithful friend, a humble helper, quite incapable of taking the conspicuous position or doing the public work, supplies a strengthening, restoring element in hours of discouragement or weariness, and so does much to preserve a notable career from failure. In fact every great man draws up into his thought and work the cogitations of many minds, the desire of many hearts, the faith or fortitude of many spirits; and the efforts and sympathies of many combine in the results which are associated with his name. 3. *The uncertainty that friends who part will meet again on earth.* "They two made a covenant before the Lord," and parted, little knowing that each was taking the last look of his friend. Their thoughts were of days to come, when they should not need to meet by stealth. They would be always together by and by—take counsel together fight side by side

against the enemies of Israel, do exploits for their nation, and re-establish the worship of Jehovah and the honour of his sanctuary. The elevation of one would be the elevation of both; and the spirit of jealousy which now darkened the court and the kingdom would give place to generous confidence and love. So they proposed; but God disposed otherwise. Jonathan never saw David again. Death broke their "fair companionship," and the elevation of David was bedewed with tender sorrow for his friend, "the comrade of his choice, the human-hearted man he loved." There is one Friend, only one, from whom we cannot be severed. Oh, what a Friend we have in Jesus! especially helpful to us in cloudy days and seasons of distress. He comes to us when we are in the wood, perplexed, embarrassed, cast down. Let us tell all our straits and misgivings to him. This Friend will never die. And not even our death can break the friendship or separate us from the love of Christ.—F.

EXPOSITION.

DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS OF ENGEDI (CH. XXIII. 29—XXIV.).

CHAPTER XXIV.

DAVID SPARES SAUL'S LIFE IN A CAVE (vers. 1—7). Ver. 1.—**The wilderness of En-gedi.** Finding no safety on the western side of the desert of Judah, where the Ziphites were ever watching his movements, David now boldly crossed this arid waste, and sought shelter in the remarkable oasis of En-gedi, on the shore of the Dead Sea. The word may signify either the Fountain of Luck or the Kid's Spring, the latter being the meaning of the name Ain-Jadi, which it still bears. In 2 Chron. xx. 2 it is identified with Hazazon-Tamar, the Palm-Wood, an ancient seat of the Amorites, and evidently famous from of old for its fertility (Gen. xiv. 7). Conder ('Tent Work,' ii. 126) describes the country over which David would have to travel as almost impassable, so that in four and a half hours of hard riding he and his party advanced only six miles, so deep were the valleys which they were obliged to cross. From a lofty peak on their way the view was most extraordinary. On every side were other ridges, equally white, steep, and narrow; their sides seamed by innumerable torrent-beds, their summits sharp and rugged in outline. Not a tree was visible, and the whole region was like the dry basin of a former sea, scoured by the rains, and washed down in places to the hard foundation of metamorphic limestone which underlies the whole district. But the desert once crossed, "there is no scene," he says, "more vividly impressed on my memory than that of this magnificently rocky and savage pass, and the view from the spring below." He had encamped on a plateau upon the top of the cliffs, which rise to a height of 2000 feet above the Dead Sea; and 1340 feet below him the warm spring of En-gedi, 83° F., rises from under a great boulder, and dashing down the rest of the descent, flows across the plain at the foot of the cliffs, which is about half a mile square. All around are the ruins of ancient gardens and thickets, among which he saw the beautiful black grackles with gold-tipped wings, bulbuls, and thrushes. Solomon seems to have delighted in the spot, and to have covered the hills with vines; for he compares his beloved to a "cluster of camphire in the vineyards of En-gedi" (Cant. i. 14). Neither palm nor vine is to be found there now, but there is still a rich vegetation, and groves of trees. According to Thomson ('The Land and the Book,' p. 602) the sides of the ravines leading to En-gedi are full of natural and artificial caves and sepulchres.

Ver. 2.—**Chosen.** See on this word ch. ix. 2. **The rocks of the wild goats.** Apparently this was the proper name of some cliffs near En-gedi, so called from their being frequented by the ibex, or Syrian chamois, an animal which, according to Thomson (p. 603) is still found there. It shows Saul's pertinacious hatred of David, that no sooner was the war with the Philistines over, than he pursues him with 3000 picked warriors into these lonely fastnesses. Comp. Ps. lvii. 4, written, according to the title, upon the occasion recorded in this chapter.

Ver. 3.—**He came to the sheepcotes.** Rather, "to sheepcotes," there being no article in the Hebrew. Such sheepcotes were common in Palestine; for Thomson (p. 603) says, "I have seen hundreds of these sheepcotes around the mouth of caverns, and indeed there is scarcely a cave in the land, whose location will admit of being thus occupied (*i. e.* by the flocks), but has such a "cote" in front of it, generally made by piling up loose stones into a circular wall, which is covered with thorns, as a further protection against robbers and wild beasts. During cold storms, and in the night, the flocks retreat into the cave, but at other times they remain in this enclosed cote. . . . These caverns are as dark as mid

night, and the keenest eye cannot see five paces *inward;* but one who has been long within, and is looking *outward* toward the entrance, can observe with perfect distinctness all that takes place in that direction. David, therefore, could watch Saul as he came in, and notice the exact place where he "covered his feet," while Saul could see nothing but impenetrable darkness." **To cover his feet.** The Syriac understands this of sleeping; more correctly the Vulgate and Chaldee take it as in Judges iii. 24, margin.

Vers. 4, 5.—**Behold the day of which Jehovah said unto thee,** &c. David's men regard this deliverance of Saul into their hand as providential, and the fulfilment of the promises made in David's favour, with which, no doubt, they were well acquainted. But with a noble self-control he refuses to take the matter into his own hand, and leaves unto God in trusting faith the execution of his purposes. To prove, nevertheless, to Saul his innocence, to soften his bitterness, and refute the suspicion that he was lying in wait to murder him, he cuts off the corner—Hebrew, wing—of his *meil* (see ch. ii. 19). Even for this his **heart smote him.** So tender was his conscience that he condemned himself for even deviating so slightly from the respect due to the anointed king.

Vers. 6, 7.—**Seeing he is the anointed of Jehovah.** David bases his allegiance to Saul on religious grounds. He was Jehovah's Messiah, and as such his person was sacred. To this principle David steadfastly adhered (see ch. xxvi. 9; 2 Sam. i. 16). **The Lord forbid.** Hebrew, "Far be it from me from Jehovah," *i. e.* for Jehovah's sake. **So David stayed his servants.** The verb is a strong one, and means *to crush down.* It shows that David had to use all his authority to keep his men, vexed by Saul's pursuit, from killing him.

TEMPORARY RECONCILIATION OF SAUL AND DAVID (vers. 8—22). Ver. 8.—Saul apparently had withdrawn from his men, and David seizes the opportunity of proving to him his innocence, and quieting the king's fears. He goes out, therefore, and calls after him, saying, **My lord the king,** addressing him thus as his *master,* to whom his obedience was due. He also pays him the utmost reverence, bowing his face to the earth and making obeisance. By this lowly bearing David showed that, so far from being a rebel, he still acknowledged Saul's lawful authority, and was true to his allegiance.

Vers. 9, 10.—In his address David complained of Saul's listening to **men's words,** which slanderously represented him as lying in wait to kill the king (comp. ch. xxii. 8). In answer to their calumnies he now pleads Saul's own experience of his deeds. **Some bade me kill thee.** Hebrew, "he bade to kill thee." The literal rendering is, "Jehovah delivered thee to-day into my hand, and bade kill thee." The A. V. supplies *some,* or, more exactly, "*one* said." This is supported by the Syriac and Chaldee, but the literal rendering is probably the right one. Had David killed Saul, it would have seemed as if it were ordered by Providence so to be, and as if by putting Saul into his power God had intended his death. But what seem to us to be the leadings of Providence are not to be blindly followed. Possibly David's first thought was that God intended Saul to die, and so the Vulgate, "I thought to kill thee." But immediately a truer feeling came over his mind, and he recognised that opportunities, such as that just given him, may be temptations to be overcome. The highest principles of religion and morality do not bend to external circumstances, but override them.

Vers. 11—13.—**My father.** David thus salutes Saul not because he was actually his father-in-law, but as a title indicative of the respect due from an inferior to his superior (2 Kings v. 13). So David calls himself Nabal's son (ch. xxv. 8). In the rest of the verse he contrasts his refusal to slay Saul, when it might have seemed as if it were Providence that had put him into his power, with Saul's determined pursuit of him. **Thou huntest my soul to take it.** Thou perpetually usest every artifice and stratagem against me for the confessed purpose of killing me, and pursuest me as eagerly as the hunter pursues his game. Hence David commits his cause to Jehovah, in the sure confidence that he will avenge him, and with the firm determination never himself to raise his hand against one who, though his enemy, was also the king. In proof of the impossibility of his ever seeking the king's hurt, he quotes an ancient proverb, "From the wicked goeth out wickedness." Had David harboured evil intentions he would have executed them when so fair an opportunity offered, but as he has no such purposes "his hand will never be" upon Saul.

Vers. 14, 15.—Finally, David makes a pathetic appeal to Saul, contrasting him in his grandeur as **the king of Israel** with the fugitive whom he so relentlessly persecuted. In calling himself a **dead dog** he implies that he was at once despicable and powerless. Even more insignificant is **a flea,** Hebrew, "one flea," "a single flea." The point is lost by omitting the numeral. David means that it is unworthy of a king to go forth with 3000 men to hunt a single flea. As the king's conduct is thus both unjust and foolish, David therefore appeals to Jehovah to be judge and **plead his cause,** *i. e.* be his advocate, and state the proofs of his innocence. For **de-**

liver me out of thy hand, the Hebrew is, "will judge me out of thy hand," *i. e.* will judge me, and by doing so justly will deliver me from thy power.

Ver. 16.—This address of David produced a lively effect upon Saul. Philippson says of it, "The speech of David has so much natural eloquence, such warmth and persuasiveness, that it can be read by no one who has any feeling for the simple beauties of the Bible without emotion. The whole situation, moreover, has much of sublimity about it. We see David, standing on the summit of some rock in the wilderness, raising on high the trophy of his magnanimity, while addressing the melancholy Saul, whom he loved as a father, obeyed as king, and honoured as the Lord's anointed, but who nevertheless hated him without reason, and followed him with unremitting energy to put him to death; using his opportunity of touching the heart of his enemy with words hurried, but expressive of his innermost feelings, and showing himself full of humility, oppressed by unutterable sorrows, bowed down by the feeling of his powerlessness, yet inspirited by the consciousness of a noble deed." So affected is Saul by David's words that he breaks into tears, affectionately addresses David as his son, and acknowledges his innocence and the uprightness of his cause.

Ver. 19.—**Will he let him go well away?** Hebrew, "will he let him go on a good way?" *i. e.* will he let him go on his way in peace, unhurt? As David, nevertheless, had let his enemy go unharmed, Saul, touched momentarily by his generosity, prays that Jehovah will reward him for what he had done.

Vers. 20—22.—**I know well that thou shalt surely be king.** Jonathan had expressed a similar conviction (ch. xxiii. 17), and probably there was a growing popular belief that David was the person in whom Samuel's prophetic words (ch. xv. 28) were to be fulfilled. Something may even have been known of the selection of David and his anointing at Bethlehem; not perhaps by the king, but in an indistinct way by the people As for Saul himself, he must long have felt that God's blessing had departed from him, and, brooding perpetually over Samuel's words, it required but little discernment on his part to make him see that the kingdom which he had forfeited was to be bestowed upon one so worthy of it, and so manifestly protected and blessed by God. He therefore makes David swear that he will not **cut off his seed after him** (see on ch. xx. 15); and so they part. Saul returns to Gibeah, while **David and his men gat them up unto the hold.** The word *gat up, mounted*, suggests that *the hold*, or fastness, was their previous haunt at Hachilah. They would go down to En-gedi, and the difficulty of obtaining food there for 600 men would be insurmountable, except for a very short period. On the other side of the desert they were in a pastoral country, and the large flock-masters there probably from time to time sent them supplies. The position of David was thus improved for the present by Saul's reconciliation with him.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—7.—*Instruction in caves.* The facts are—1. Saul, having repelled the incursion of the Philistines, returns to pursue David in the wilderness of Engedi. 2. Saul, entering privately into a cave while David and his men lie concealed there, comes unwittingly within the power of David. 3. David's men, referring to a Divine prediction, urge him to slay Saul. 4. Apparently to indicate how entirely Saul was within his power, David stealthily cuts off the skirt of his coat. 5. Reproaching himself for the levity thus displayed in treating the Lord's anointed, he at once justifies his refusal to touch Saul's life, and also restrains his men. It is observable how the sacred narrative of this period is entirely occupied with the conflict between Saul and David; not a word being said of the social and spiritual state of the nation, its commerce and agriculture, its hopes and fears, or even of the nature and degree of influence being exerted by Samuel and the prophetic schools. The specialty of sacred history lies in the concentration of all thought in the development of the chain of events by which the original promise to Adam and Abraham is traceable to fulfilment in Christ. This principle will account for countless omissions of fact which might reasonably be expected in a nation's annals, and for the prominence given to persons and circumstances otherwise of no public significance. It is because men do not consider the spiritual principle on which the Old Testament is evidently constructed that they mistake much of its meaning, fail to see its exquisite teaching, and regard as heterogeneous what is pervaded by a marvellous unity. The incidents of this stage in the history not only reveal the gradual process by

which Providence was working out great issues for Israel and all mankind, but also suggest several topics of far wider range than the individual life of David. *Caves*, from Machpelah, the centre of solemn and tender interests (Gen. xxiii. 1—9; xxv. 9; xxxv. 29; l. 13), on to the hiding-place of a weary-hearted prophet (1 Kings xix. 9), to Plato's imaginary scene for illustrating the limitations of human knowledge and the hiding-places of persecuted saints (Heb. xii. 38), have figured in human affairs, and the cave of Engedi certainly merits attention. It reminds us of—

I. THE DOMINANCE OF AN EVIL PASSION. In reply to the inquiry, How is it that the king of Israel is here away from his ordinary seat of government, and exposed to peril of life? the answer must be, Because the passion of cruel envy has gained dominion over his entire nature. Any considerations of policy or prudence wherewith he may have sought to justify his conduct in pursuing David were mere fictions created by a perverted will under the control of a masterful envy of one better than himself. The history traces the growth of this feeling. The dire evil, like a repressed torrent, seemed to gain force by the check given by Samuel and the prophets (ch. xix. 18—24), until at last it gained such ascendancy over Saul's life that the entire energy of his mind and the ordinary administration of his kingdom were made subordinate to its expression. He was the slave of an evil once consisting in a sudden feeling of ill-will, which, had it been dealt with as every unhallowed feeling should the moment it appears, might have been crushed in the germ. *The case of Saul is not unlike that of many men*, although the governing feeling may be different. Men are more entirely dominated by some powerful disposition than they, in their neglect of introspection and consequent lack of self-knowledge, imagine. The reality is seen in the instance of persons given up to intemperance, dissoluteness of life, and cruelty; and ordinary observers may be able to trace the process from slight indulgence in the sin to its complete mastery over the life. Others, who look at life more closely and estimate its value by the Scriptural standard, can also see the same enslavement, brought on by degrees, in the instance of persons who pursue wealth, worldly fame, or personal enjoyment as the chief end of life. The Pharisees thought it shocking to have killed the prophets, and were not disposed to admit their own enslavement to evil feelings deadly in character. The positive antagonism of men to Christ means the gradual growth in them of aversion to his holy restraints until they become its slaves. There is a proud but delusive sense of independence attaching to this enslavement to evil. "We were never in bondage to any man" (John viii. 33). It is a device of the devil to make his captives content with their chains or to blind them to their reality. "Are we blind also?" (John ix. 40). And as in the case of Saul the domination of the evil only drew him on and on to deeper trouble, till at last all was lost, so, unless our ruling evils are destroyed by prompt submission of will to Christ's yoke, and consequent subjection of the life to his purifying grace, sin will "bring forth death."

II. THE INFLUENCE OF HUMAN FEELING IN THE INTERPRETATION WHICH MEN PUT UPON REVELATION AND PROVIDENCE. Different opinions may be entertained as to the sense attached to the words of David's men (ver. 4), and accordingly the practical lessons deducible will vary with the choice we make. (1) On the supposition that they were here quoting a specific communication conveyed to David through Samuel or Gad, and probably divulged in course of conversation with them, we have raised the question of the fact of revelations having been made in past ages to holy men which, serving for their personal guidance and comfort, have not been incorporated in the ordinary records, which conserve only what has been deemed necessary to the connected history of redemption and the general instruction of mankind. If this be so, it is obvious obscurities might cease to be obscurities to us did we but know what those immediately concerned in the events recorded may have been familiar with. (2) On the supposition that the language of these men was the interpretation which they put upon the predictions contained in ch. xv. 28; xvi. 1, 12, and on the avowed beliefs of Jonathan (ch. xx. 15; xxiii. 17), which by this time may have become current, we have raised the question of the influence of a cherished state of feeling—its extent and legitimacy—on the interpretation which men put upon the teachings of Scripture in reference to doctrine, history, and worship. (3) On the supposition that their words were simply intended to be the sense they put

upon the indications of Providence as then working out in favour of David's cause, we have the question of the proneness of men to view passing events in the light of their own tendencies, and, therefore, to make Providence mean what it was never designed to suggest. Apart from controversy on the fore-mentioned points, it is possible to generalise the teaching of the passage by saying that there is a prevailing tendency in men to prejudice the interpretation both of Divine words and providential events by undue regard to their own wishes. It is clear that these men wanted David to slay Saul. Being less spiritual and generous than he, not having risen to his lofty conception of the kingdom of God, and restive under the restraints which kept them from positions of power under the coming king, they easily believed it was God's will that David should force on the issue by the death of his enemy. Passing event or spoken word in the past would have no other meaning for them. 1. *This fact should be remembered* in relation to controversies and *diversities of opinion on matters of sacred history, doctrine, and worship.* The existence of such diversities is no evidence against a revealed religion, as some suppose, but just the reverse; for in the nature of the case men view the truth through the medium created by their own cherished moral condition. The final supremacy of truth is not to be attained in violation of laws which govern the operations of the human mind, but by means of them. That men so diverse in opinion and in worship should nevertheless have so much in common that is fundamental, and should be under the mighty influence of it, is a sign that the truth is one and of God, while the error is of man and is manifold. No student of human nature can be surprised that men should seek to eliminate the supernatural from Scripture history; for only let a desire be cherished to see a revelation harmonise with what a man thinks would be a proper way of giving it to the world,—namely, by just such an absence of supernatural manifestations as characterises an era when no new revelation is longer needed,—and it will be as easy for him to see only naturalism in Scripture events as for David's men to see in words and events an authorisation to slay Saul. It is a suggestive circumstance that men of diverse temperaments and emotional or æsthetic tendencies gravitate towards certain ecclesiastical organisations; nor can we overlook the fact that it is rare for men to pass over from a system in which their tastes have been formed to another, the advocates of which claim to represent the truth. 2. *The fact should variously affect our conduct in relation to our fellowmen and to the truth.* It should induce a *distrust of our own judgment* in so far as, on severe self-examination, it is *seen to be associated with our wishes.* Every one is bound to "search the Scriptures," to "see whether these things are so," and to "hold fast what is true." No surrender of this great duty and privilege to an order of men can be pleaded on the ground that possibly feeling may distort the vision of truth in the private individual; for men acting for others are men still, and cannot escape the conditions of human nature, while the aid of the Holy Spirit is as available for one sincere heart as for another. Our duty is to bring the most vigorous powers we can command to bear on our understanding of the will of God, and in so far as we do so in dependence on the Holy Spirit we may calmly rest in our conclusions, with the proviso that they, however good, are not coextensive with truth, and that we have purged our hearts of all human preference and prejudice. *It should induce charity towards others.* The exercise of charity in matters of opinion is not identical with a surrender of our own judgment to a superior, nor a denial of the importance of fundamental truth and the possibility of its attainment, nor a blindness to the serious consequences resulting from error, but an exercise of kindly consideration for those who differ from us, proceeding from the consciousness that our own views may be in some degree affected by our subjective moral condition, and that our superiority to others depends on the belief we have in the comparative freedom of our judgment from personal bias. It is a characteristic of the interaction of feeling with thought that in so far as feeling has become habitual we are, by a well-known psychological law, less conscious of its presence as an element in the formation of judgment; and consequently we may, as may others, be very sincere though in error. This by no means justifies error, or renders men safe from its consequences; but it does demand mutual consideration, and imposes on every man the solemn responsibility of so guarding the beginnings of his life that no unholy feeling or form

of self-will shall gain ascendancy in his nature. They are wise who in a kind and tender spirit seek to bring men to a higher form of spiritual life. It is in love—the pure love of God—that truth is to be seen. It should induce us *to seek for ourselves and others* more of the *purifying grace of the Holy Spirit*. Possibly while on earth men will not entirely rise above the disturbing or perverting influence of tastes and sentiments inwrought with their early education, and unconsciously fostered as years advance; for by the mental law of association we are, while in the body, in some measure subject to bondage. Yet the truth is clear that in so far as we do become pure in heart and like as a little child—with a nature open to receive what God may teach, and not furnished with wishes by which truth is to be judged—we shall rise to a correct view of God's word and providence. Pure souls are quick in spiritual perception and responsive to all that is Divine, and, on the other hand, sensitive to the faint appearance of evil. The more fully the Church becomes sanctified, the more unity will be created in a discernment of all that constitutes fundamental truth. The eras in which men have paraded opinions alien to the faith once delivered to the saints, priding themselves on their skill and ability, have not been distinguished by extreme dependence on the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit; nor perhaps has the Church ever, since apostolic days, sufficiently associated growth in spiritual knowledge with his blessed indwelling.

III. THE MEANS OF SUCCESS AS VIEWED BY MEN OF DIVERSE CHARACTER. All the men in the cave were one with David in the cause on which he was embarked. But followers do not always enter into the lofty aspirations of their leaders, or share equally with them the responsibility of the position assumed, while they often outstrip them in apparent zeal for the completion of their work. Hitherto the chief obstacle in the way of success was Saul, and now that Providence had manifestly put him within the power of David, what more conclusive evidence to ardent followers of the true road to success could be forthcoming? Let David smite his persecuting foe, and the cause is won! Such was the road to success suggested by policy, self-interest, usages of Eastern warfare, and restless impatience of the ways of God. Against this David protests. It is his duty to abide God's time for entrance on his royal dignities. Even the slight liberty which David, on the impulse of the moment, took with the king in spoiling his garment became on reflection an occasion of self-reproach. Respect for office is a power in social life, being one form of reverence for law and order, and contributing to the easy maintenance of lawful authority; and therefore the levity of finding amusement for himself and others at a king's expense was inconsistent with the true Hebrew culture which indicates its regard for the finer sentiments of life by such prohibitions as, "Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk;" "Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people." It should be remembered generally that there is a *seeming way to rapid success* which is *not the true way*, and, *vice versâ*, *a tedious, painful way which is the right*. David's superior discernment was fortunate for him, though doubtless his adherents were annoyed at his apparent timidity and, as they supposed, fastidiousness. Lot ungenerously made choice of the richest district in haste to be rich, but his uncle eventually was most successful (Gen. xiii. 8—11; xiv. 11, 12). On the other hand, Moses refused the temptation to become possessed of the honours and riches of Egypt, and finally was raised to the highest position a servant of God could occupy (Heb. xi. 24—26). Our Saviour might have gained a vast following and been regarded by the authorities of Jerusalem as their Messiah had he only accommodated his standard a little to their wishes; but now he is Lord of millions. The apostles constantly resisted inducements to achieve an immediate success by lowering their standard of preaching to the tastes of men, and so lost some (Gal. iii. 1—4) disciples; but the result has been most blessed. In Church organisation, modes of worship, and methods of labour it is possible to devise means by which at first a large accession shall be made to the ranks of nominal Christians, yet at the same time wrong may be done to the claims of order, purity, reverence, and truth, which wrong will be avenged in years to come by corruption of manners, low spiritual tastes, and possibly apostasy from the truth. In matters of business men often see an easy way by which wealth may be speedily won, and, in preference to the slow and steady process of honest toil, it may be chosen to the ruin of the soul. Simple, earnest waiting on

Providence, doing daily work as it comes, not seeking to force matters by any act that conscience would condemn, is the course suggested by the conduct of David and all who fear God.

Vers. 8—15.—*Discrimination in relation to men, truth, and vocation.* The facts are—1. David follows Saul out of the cave and pays him homage. 2. He remonstrates against Saul heeding the lies of slanderers, and declares to him how he had just spared his life. 3. Exhibiting the skirt of the robe in evidence of his words, and appealing to God, he protests his innocence of purpose. 4. He, while admitting his own insignificance, commends his cause to the justice of God, and prays for deliverance. If we take into account what human nature is under provocation, and the rough and painful life of David at this period, we shall not fail to admire the generous, highly spiritual tone of his conduct on this occasion. It is a remarkable instance of real conformity of spirit with Christian requirements among those in ancient times not blessed with our advantages. It is also a remarkable testimony to the value of these virtues that men, without dissent, admire the beautiful spirit of David, even though in many instances they have not the will to act likewise in analogous situations. But the general teaching of the section may be arranged in the following order:—

I. DISCRIMINATION OF CHARACTER IS A PRODUCT OF TRUE GOODNESS, and is ESSENTIAL TO SUCCESS IN DEALING WITH MEN amidst the difficulties of life. David was a man of valour, of deep piety, and of keen discernment. His intense love of righteousness was not attended by a hasty and harsh condemnation of Saul's conduct, evil as it was. While keenly alive to the wrong Saul was doing him, and recognising that One above visits every evil-doer, he nevertheless in his first words to Saul recognises the fact, which doubtless through Jonathan and others he had ascertained, that there were greater sinners in this sad business than Saul. "Wherefore hearest thou men's words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt?" He knew how the unhappy king had departed from God, and subsequently had become melancholy, and at times almost insane, and he understood how the original wicked envy was associated with this sad fall from God's favour; and hence, apart from the reverence cherished for the office of king, he could not but commiserate his persecutor. Saul, in the judgment of David, was now but a mere tool in the hands of cunning, unscrupulous men at court, who basely roused the enmity of the unfortunate monarch by inventing lies concerning the intentions of David. *Discrimination of character may find abundant scope* in every man's life. How much it is lacking is obvious when we reflect on the wholesale condemnation often passed on individuals and communities. Accidental association in public life is frequently the sole basis of a common judgment. Much of the faulty training of families and imperfect education in schools is to be ascribed to this source, while errors in this particular are the cause of manifold mistakes and disastrous failures in private life. It is due to others, as also safe for ourselves, that we act on our Saviour's exhortation, "Judge righteous judgment." David was just to Saul in regarding him as the weak instrument of stronger wills; as was our Saviour just to a misled people when he charged the scribes and Pharisees with hindering them from obeying the gospel (Matt. xxiii. 13). A certain development and balance of the intellectual faculties are requisite to discriminate character. It is to be feared that very little attention is paid to this kind of culture in many homes and schools, and consequently there are thousands in a far worse position for the great conflict of life than they need be. But where ordinary capacities for discernment exist, true piety will insure their right and just exercise; for religion raises the whole moral tone of a man, and gives a superior moral element to our judgments on the motives and conduct of men. The gift of "discerning spirits" is of much value still in the Church of God and in daily affairs.

II. OUR JUDGMENT ON THE LANGUAGE OF THE BIBLE SHOULD BE REGULATED BY REGARD TO THE SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE ON WHICH IT IS BASED. David discriminates between the weak and sinful Saul and the cunning, determined men who used him as a tool for their wicked schemes. The language employed by him here in reference to Saul is mild and tender—recognising wrong, but expressive of the

conviction that his actions were now not responsible in the same degree as when he disobeyed the command of God through Samuel. In the Psalms we have other language—strong, severe, withering—intended for "men set on fire, sons of men whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their *tongue* a sharp sword" (Ps. lvii. 4). "Deceit," "fraud," "lying lips," "poison of adders," tongues "set on fire," that "wrest words" and "love all devouring words," are the terms used to indicate the motives and purposes of the men prompting the action of Saul. Now as we find the explanation of the mild language in the intimate knowledge which he had of the weakness of his enemy, and the use which stronger wills were making of him, so, by the same rule of interpretation, ought we to allow an appropriateness of other and more severe language to men so utterly vile as these were known to be, and to whom he alludes in ver. 9 and ch. xxvi. 19. Too often Christian men, and especially unbelievers, read the strong language of the Psalms as though it were expressive of sentiments ordinarily entertained towards any who might differ from David; and it is viewed as in contrast with his address to Saul and the precepts of Christ. The unreasonableness of this judgment is evident when we only consider what David knew these men to be, and to be aiming at. They were deliberate, calculating liars, knowing by his deeds, by Samuel's approval, and by his pure and useful life, that he was a chosen man of God, and yet endeavouring by false representations to blast his reputation, to incite a moody king to slay him on account of his vileness of intention, and, in fact, to frustrate the purpose which God had announced through Samuel, and of which Jonathan, Gad, Abiathar, and others were aware. A baser, more cruel and cowardly conspiracy against character, life, and *national welfare* can hardly be imagined. The knowledge of these specific facts renders David's wrath and indignation most holy, and, in view of what would be the calamity to Israel should they succeed in annulling the purpose of God as declared to Samuel and made known to David and others, the Church can say Amen to the Psalms. This *principle of interpretation is wider than the case before us.* None of us dare use towards others the severe language of Christ's denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees, because we have not the minute knowledge of motive and internal, irreclaimable deceitfulness which was clear to his eye; but his view of what is hidden from us rendered his words just and good. Also, the language used with reference to the necessity of atonement, the manner in which it is made, and the conditions on which it becomes available for those made acquainted with it, should be considered reverently, as being founded on an intimate knowledge on the part of God of very many facts pertaining to moral existence, the inter-relation of all moral beings, and the administration of a government stretching through all time and place, which necessarily at present escape our observation. The same principle may apply to much of the language in reference to the future condition of the wicked. Even the right interpretation of historical matter in many dubious cases may depend on facts which to the writers were well known, but to us are unknown. It would be useful to direct attention to the conditions of a right understanding of the Bible, embracing in the purview moral health, attained by the quickening of the Holy Spirit, caution, reverence, regard to its spiritual aims, its fragmentary character, its progressive teaching—especially sympathy with its purpose.

III. A MAN'S VOCATION IN LIFE EXERCISES A POWERFUL INFLUENCE IN DETERMINING HIS MORAL QUALITIES. The moral qualities of consideration, forbearance, magnanimity, and candour so prominent in David during this interview with Saul met with little sympathy among his followers at the time, though subsequently they would see the wisdom of his conduct. Like others, they judged of what should be done by what from their lower moral position they were inclined to do. The superior conduct of David was not due simply to tenderness of natural disposition, nor to the presence of piety considered *per se*, but largely to the educating influence on his generally pious character of his *calling in life.* He perfectly understood that, as servant of God, he was called to be future ruler of Israel, and meanwhile so to live and act that no deed of his should touch his personal reputation in Israel or create the impression on the mind of Saul that he sought his removal from the throne to gratify private ambition. Virtually he was already a royal personage. His actions and words were therefore public property. The building up of national character and development

of national resources were matters of deepest concern. The consciousness of this drew him nearer to God, attached responsibility to his deeds, imparted dignity and grace to his bearing, put a restraint on the flow of private feelings, and, though uncrowned, made him royal in his magnanimity. David as a coming king was morally a more developed man than would have been David as a simple citizen. *A consideration of the influence of calling on character would afford much instruction* in relation to social habits, mental and moral development, Christian excellence and degeneracies national and provincial characteristics and tendencies, domestic comfort and discomfort, personal antagonisms and aversions, and the need for a large charity in estimating conduct different from our own, as also for profound thought in reference to the best means of remedying some evils incident to a highly-developed civilisation, in which the comforts and luxuries of one class are procured by avocations of another class that tell perniciously on their mental and moral development. Christians are especially exhorted to walk worthy of their high calling; and, apart from direct influence of the Holy Spirit in the formation of character, it would be helpful to all to study the natural influence over the entire man of a calling to be "kings and priests unto God." "What manner of persons ought ye to be?" "As he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation" (1 Pet. i. 15).

IV. THE COMMITTAL OF OUR INTERESTS TO GOD IS THE PROPER SEQUEL TO A CONSCIENTIOUS DISCHARGE OF DUTY. David had done all an honest man could do to clear himself of guilt and to pacify Saul, and with strong faith in an over-ruling Providence he leaves his cause with God. Personal retaliation for injuries done is no part of our duty. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." Whether we succeed in a difficult work is not our business. To have done right is the chief concern. Our Saviour has set us an example of fulfilling all righteousness and then committing himself and his cause to the "righteous Father." There is that in the conscience of men which bows before such appeals to the "Judge of all the earth." The name of God is a power over men because they are moral beings. It is a refuge for the oppressed and a terror to the wicked.

General lessons:—1. The real guilt of men is to be estimated both by the intrinsic evil of their intentions and the influence they seek to exercise over others. 2. Men who desire to find the Bible faulty in its language can have their desire easily gratified by reasoning as though they knew all concerning its production and contents; while a different disposition will lead to suspension of judgment or minute search for hidden facts. 3. The moral influence of a calling on character should guide us in our arrangements for our sons and daughters. 4. Deeds are the tests and signs of principles; for as wickedness is the natural outcome of the wicked man, good actions, as in the generous sparing of Saul's life, are the product of a righteous soul (ver. 13).

Vers. 16—22.—*Tenderness transitory and truth suppressed.* The facts are—1. Saul, subdued by the magnanimity of David, weeps and admits his own wrong in contrast with David's kindness. 2. Acknowledging his belief that David is to be king, he pleads with him to be merciful to his seed. 3. David, granting the request, returns to his stronghold, and Saul to his home. Good actions soon begin to authenticate their Divine mission in the world. The noble self-vindication from the calumnies of slanderers and the rare display of generosity to a persistent foe told at once even on the obdurate nature of Saul, and in the effect produced we have an instance of two facts often observable among men and of some significance in their experience.

I. THE TRANSITORY TENDERNESS OF SINFUL MEN. Saul's heart was softened, and he wept. Words of tenderness and of frank confession of guilt came forth with all sincerity. The terrible encrustation formed by years of transgression and disobedience seemed to be broken, and the true man reasserted itself from within. The power of kindness received a conspicuous illustration. Wickedness could no longer confront goodness. And yet, as we know from the subsequent care of David to escape from Saul, the tenderness was only as "the morning cloud and early dew." 1. *There are seasons of tenderness even in the lives of the most impenitent of men.* This might be inferred from our necessary knowledge of the conflicting principles at work in all moral beings, and from our observation that it requires enormous effort to kill outright

all the better qualities of our humanity; but the fact comes before us in history, biographical confessions, and in the intercourse of daily life. Who has not seen a hardened sinner subdued by a reminder of a mother's prayers, or the mention in gentle tones of the Saviour's name, or the kindly gaze of a Christian eye? In the vilest abodes of sin, and among the proudest sceptics, there are those who sometimes weep in secret or relent in their rebellion against God. 2. *The causes of this tenderness are often ascertainable.* In the case of Saul we see a combination of causes. The display of magnanimity was impressive because of its very rarity; it came home to his sense of right; it was in vivid contrast with his own conduct; it was in its logic so conclusive as to the goodness of the man he was persecuting; it brought out the fact that all along he had known David to be good, but had forced the fact out of thought; it was a revelation of his bondage to vile men, to whose character he could not be quite blind; and it could not but call up to memory days once bright and happy, when he was a young man unburdened by present guilt and care. Varied are the causes which enable the remnant of good in men to assert itself for awhile; some lie deep in the hidden processes of thought, where the association of ideas is made subservient to the force of Scriptural truth learnt in early years and to the unconscious influence of the Spirit of God; while others arise in the events of daily life, such as sickness, casual words of kindness, presence of a beautifully holy life that suggests a contrast, mention of the words of Jesus, or the open grave. 3. *The import of these seasons of tenderness deserves consideration.* Is there not some hope for such men in spite of their past and present surroundings? Is there not a basis on which Christians may work in wisdom? Have we not here the secret on the human side of the mighty power of the truth of God? Is it not important to make such men believe that there is some germ worth caring for in their otherwise sad and wretched life? Does not the transitoriness of the tenderness often arise from the absence of some wise friend to encompass the self-condemned heart with love? Ought not Christians to go among men with the conviction that they are all reclaimable, and that it is largely a question of gaining access to the tender place in their nature and caring for them as a wise physician would for a patient desperately ill? There are many ways in which the Church may apply the thoughts thus awakened in our endeavours to win to Christ even the most abandoned. Immense power is gained over men when they know us to be cognizant of any transitory feeling of tenderness; and half the battle is won when they begin to look on us as friends to be trusted.

II. THE FORCED SUPPRESSION OF TRUTH. Saul was evidently sincere in saying, "Now, behold, I know that thou shalt surely be king;" but the confession was also a revelation of the fact that all through these persecutions he had more than surmised that David was the coming king. Had he been anxious to know the actual truth before as surely as he professed now to have attained it, the course was clear enough. But these words confirm the teaching of the entire history—that he was aware not only of his own rejection, but that this slayer of the lion and bear, and conqueror of Goliath, and *protégé* of Samuel, and friend of Jonathan, was the chosen servant of God. The course adopted by Saul can only be explained on the supposition that he suppressed the truth. It is in the nature of truth to assert its power over the life by convincing the understanding and constraining the will, and only the rebellious spirit that refused to submit to the sad punishment announced by Samuel, sustained by cherished envy of David, and wrought upon by cunning slanderers, could have rendered the facts clear to Saul so nugatory in their influence over his life. Well would it have been if this were a solitary instance of suppression of truth! Every man persisting in a sinful course has to force out truth from thought. The internal war consists partly in crushing the free evidence of knowledge. Men know more than they like to admit and act upon; and all kinds of devices are resorted to, to explain away or to divert attention from what is manifestly true. The suppressions of truth in controversy are denounced as very wicked, but in relation to personal moral conduct and religion it is possible for the advocates of candour to shut their eyes to much that is out of harmony with their wishes. It is a truth that self is sinful before God, that efforts to find true rest apart from Christ are unavailing, that the chosen life of sin is "hard," that the holy are happier than the sinful, and that

Christ is waiting to be gracious, and yet this truth is constantly put away from view as unwelcome, troublesome. Doubtless, also, many who under the influence of stronger wills are bold in their denial of Christ's authority know in their secret heart that he *is* Lord and will establish his kingdom. Sin makes men dishonest to themselves; under its power they are not of the truth. They prefer darkness because their deeds are evil.

General lessons:—1. In the issue goodness will be recognised by those who despise it, and generosity is always influential. 2. The anguish of wrong-doing occasionally felt is fearfully suggestive of the future experience of the unrepenting. 3. The occasional triumphs of the good over all their slanderers and oppressors are intimations of the final triumph of Christ in the establishment of his kingdom. 4. Vows and promises in reference to future acts in so far as they embrace the quality of mercy may be freely and at all times made (ver. 21).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—7. (ENGEDI.)—*David's forbearance toward Saul.* "Would it not be manly to resent it?" said one, on receiving an affront. "Yes," was the reply, "but it would be Godlike to forgive it." In the spirit of this answer David acted when he spared Saul in the cave at Engedi, and thereby proved that he was guiltless of the design which the latter in his delusion attributed to him—of aiming at his throne and his life (ch. xxii. 8). Saul himself had shown generosity toward enemies in the earlier part of his career (ch. xi. 12); but his character had fearfully deteriorated since that time, and his generosity toward others was far surpassed by that of David toward him. "Generosity toward his enemies was a part of David's very being. And he alone is the true hero who, like David, forces involuntary recognition and friendship even from his bitterest foe" (Ewald). Observe that—

I. HE WAS STRONGLY TEMPTED TO AVENGE HIMSELF. He had been bitterly hated and grievously wronged; "was a man of like passions with ourselves;" and the temptation came to him, as it comes to others, in—1. *A favourable opportunity* to take revenge. His enemy was entirely in his power, and his life might be taken away at a stroke.

> "O, Opportunity! thy guilt is great;
> 'Tis thou that execut'st the traitor's treason;
> Thou set'st the wolf where he the lamb may get;
> Whoever plots the sin, thou point'st the season;
> 'Tis thou that spurn'st at right, at law, at reason;
> And in thy shady cell, where none may spy him,
> Sits sin, to seize the souls that wander by him" (Shakespeare).

2. *A plausible argument* used by others. David's men not only desired to see the deed done and sought permission to do it (vers. 7, 10), but also said, "See, this is the day of which Jehovah hath said to thee, Behold, I give thine enemy into thine hand," &c. "The speakers regarded the leadings of Providence by which Saul had been brought into David's power as a Divine intimation to David himself to take this opportunity of slaying his deadly enemy, and called the intimation a word of Jehovah" (Keil). Men are apt to interpret the Divine purpose of events according to their own interests and inclinations (ch. xxiii. 7), and it is often the exact reverse of what they imagine it to be. It was not that David should slay Saul, but (among other things) that he should be *tried*, and by sparing him vindicated, blessed and made a blessing. What is meant for good is by a deceived heart turned to evil. "And those temptations are most powerful which fetch their force from the pretence of a religious obedience" (Hall). 3. *A sudden thought* tending in the direction of revenge (ver. 10, Vulgate: "And I thought to kill thee"). He did not cherish it or form a distinct purpose to carry it into effect, but came perilously near doing so in the indignity he offered to the king. "He does not seem to have been quite free from the temptation to kill Saul. The words (ver. 5) are only intelligible on the supposition that, on cutting off Saul's skirt, his thoughts were not directed only to the use which he afterwards made of it, at least in the beginning, but that his object was

rather to prove the goodness of his thoughts at the first weak beginning he made to carry them into effect. But his better self soon awoke; all impure thoughts fled; his eye became clear; with horror he put the temptation from him" (Hengstenberg). "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation," &c. (James i. 12).

II. HE COMPLETELY OVERCAME THE TEMPTATION. By—1. *The possession of a tender conscience*, which enabled him to perceive the will of God, shrank from sin, and smote him for his "thought of foolishness" (Prov. xxiv. 9) and irreverent act. "It is a good thing to have a heart within us smiting us for sins that seem little; it is a sign conscience is awake and tender, and will be a means to prevent greater sins" (M. Henry). 2. *Regard to the Divine will*, which directed him not to avenge himself, but to leave vengeance with the Lord; to honour the king, and love his neighbour as himself. His regard for it was lowly, reverent, and supreme. The purpose of providential events must be interpreted in harmony with conscience and the moral law. How often do the Scriptures enjoin forbearance and forgiveness toward enemies! (Prov. xx. 22; xxv. 21, 22; Matt. v. 44; Rom. xii. 19—21; Col. iii. 13). 3. *Repression of evil thought* and impulse; immediate, firm, and entire. "The better to know how to guard against the wiles of the enemy, take it for a certain rule that every thought which discourages and removes thee from growing in love and trust towards God is a messenger of hell; and, as such, thou must drive him away, and neither admit him nor give him a hearing" (Scupoli). David repressed such a thought in himself and in his men, became the protector of Saul, was not overcome of evil, but overcame evil with good, and was made by means of temptation stronger and more illustrious. "Temptation is the greatest occasioner of a Christian's honour; indeed, like an enemy, it threatens and endeavours to ruin him, but in conquest of it consists his crown and triumph" (Hales, 'Golden Remains').

As aids to the practice of forbearance—1. Consider the "goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering of God." 2. Contemplate the example of Christ. 3. Watch against the first thought of evil. 4. Pray for the spirit of patience, forgiveness, and love.—D.

Vers. 8—12. (ENGEDI.)—*Calumny.* "Wherefore hearest thou men's words, saying, David seeketh thy hurt?" (ver. 9). Saul's hatred and persecution of David were stirred up by slanderers; and, in vindication of himself from the charge of seeking his hurt, David referred to them on this and on a subsequent occasion (ch. xxvi. 19). One of them seems to have been Cush the Benjamite (see Kitto, 'D. B. Illus.'), on account of the calumnies of whom he wrote Ps. VII., 'The righteous judgment of God' (see inscription):—

> "Jehovah my God, in thee have I found refuge;
> Save me from my persecutors and deliver me!"

How much he felt the wrong which they had done him, and how intensely his zeal burned against their sin against God and man, appears in many of his psalms (Ps. xxiv. 13; xxxv. 11; lii. 2; lvi. 5; lvii. 4; lix. 7, &c.). Good men are often exposed to the calumnious attacks of men of similar character.

> "Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow,
> Thou shalt not escape calumny."

I. IT IS ONE OF THE MOST ODIOUS OF VICES. It is "the uttering of false (or equivalent to false, morally false) speech against our neighbour in prejudice to his fame, his safety, his welfare, or concernment in any kind, out of malignity, vanity, rashness, ill nature, or bad design" (Barrow, Ser. xviii.); and it is exhibited in an endless variety of ways. 1. It is *marked* by falsehood, folly, injustice, malice, and impiety. 2. It exerts a most pernicious *influence.* The tongue on which it dwells is like a fire, which (though at first but a single spark) may set a whole forest in a blaze (James iii. 5); is "full of deadly poison," and sends forth "arrows, firebrands, and death." In private reputations, domestic life, social intercourse, the Church and the world, what mischief it works! 3. It is frequently forbidden and condemned in the word of God (Levit. xix. 16; Prov. x. 31; 1 Cor. vi 9). "I say unto you that

every idle (empty, insincere, wicked, and injurious) word," &c. (Matt. xii. 36, 37). "God is angry (with the wicked) every day" (Ps. vii. 11).

II. IT OUGHT NEVER TO BE COUNTENANCED. "Wherefore hearest thou?" No one should listen to it; for by doing so—1. He *encourages* the wicked in their wickedness (Prov. xxv. 23). "When will talkers refrain from evil speaking? When listeners refrain from evil hearing" (Hare). 2. He *injures himself;* becomes a tool of designing men, and is led to do things which his better nature cannot approve; whilst, at the same time, he manifests his own unreasonableness and sinful disposition. 3. He makes himself "*partaker* of their evil deeds," and exposes himself to the same condemnation. Although incited by others, Saul was not guiltless in "hunting after" the soul of David "to take it" (ver. 11).

III. IT SHOULD ALWAYS BE MET IN A RIGHT MANNER by those who are calumniated; as by—1. An *open assertion* of innocence, direct denial and rebuke of false statements, and faithful remonstrance against their being entertained. "Whose mouths" (says Paul concerning unruly and vain talkers and deceivers) "must be stopped" (Titus i. 11). 2. A *clear proof* of innocence afforded by becoming, righteous, and merciful actions (vers. 10, 11; compare Ps. vii. 3, 4). 3. A *sincere appeal* to God as the Vindicator of the innocent; lowly submission to his will and firm confidence in the manifestation of his righteous judgment. "The justice of God is a refuge and comfort to oppressed innocency" (M. Henry). "The Lord judge between me and thee," &c. (ver. 12).

> "Jehovah judgeth the people.
> Judge me, O Jehovah, according to my righteousness,
> And according to my integrity be it done to me.
> Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end,
> And establish thou the righteous;
> For thou that triest the hearts and reins art a righteous God.
> My shield is with God,
> Who delivers the upright in heart" (Ps. vii. 8, 9, 10).

Learn—1. To use the gift of speech in speaking well, and not ill, of others. 2. To rely on God more than on your own efforts for your vindication when evil spoken of. 3. The blessedness of those against whom men "say all manner of evil falsely" for Christ's sake.—D.

Vers. 13—15. (ENGEDI.)—*A proverb of the ancients.* "Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked" (ver. 13). Proverbs are brief and apt sayings expressive of the general experience of men. They have been described as "the wisdom of many and the wit of one" (Russell); and, more poetically, "jewels five words long, which on the stretched forefinger of time sparkle for ever" (Tennyson). The most valuable of "the words of the wise" were uttered by Solomon, and are contained in the Book of Proverbs. But this saying was already ancient in the days of David. It is also "true and faithful" and very instructive. Consider—

I. ITS MEANING. "Ill men do ill things." "Actions usually correspond to the quality of the mind" (Grotius). 1. *An evil disposition is possessed by some men.* The ancients noticed the distinction between evil *actions* (as well as good) and evil *character* (as well as good). There is in some men, in contrast to others, a selfish and bad disposition. All men, it is true, are sinful; but some, instead of striving against sin and overcoming it, are the slaves of sin; their supreme affection is set upon unworthy objects, and the ruling principle of their life is wrong. This is due to many causes—previous voluntary acts, wilful neglect of Divine aid, &c.; but the fact is certain. Their *nature* differs from that of good men just as (though not so necessarily or to the same extent) the serpent from the dove, and the thistle from the vine. 2. *An evil disposition expresses itself in corresponding actions.* It uses power and opportunity according to its nature (ver. 19), and turns to evil the same circumstances which a good disposition turns to good (ver. 6). This is in harmony with the established order of things in the world. "A good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit" (Luke vi. 43). "Do men gather grapes of thorns?" &c. (Matt. vi. 16—20; xii. 35). "Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?" &c. (James iii. 11—13;

Prov. xiii. 16). 3. *An evil disposition is plainly proved by evil actions.* It is so especially when they are performed deliberately, habitually, and on occasions of decisive trial. "By their fruits ye shall know them." The proof is perfectly reliable, easily perceivable, and generally applicable.

II. ITS APPLICATION (ver. 11). "But my hand shall not be upon thee" (vers. 12, 13). "David means to say that if he had been guilty of conspiracy against the king he would not have neglected this favourable opportunity to kill him, since men usually indulge their feelings, and from a mind guilty of conspiracy nothing but corresponding deeds could come forth" (Clericus). The application may be made to the conduct of *others*, but it should be made first and chiefly to our *own;* and it should lead us—1. *To test our character* by our actions, and to prove to others when it is suspected and calumniated that it is good, and not evil. As wickedness proceedeth from the wicked, so goodness proceedeth from the good. 2. *To feel increased aversion to evil*, to act according to the integrity we assert of ourselves, to resolve to do nothing wrong, and to endeavour to prevent others from doing wrong (ver. 14). 3. *To appeal to God*, who searches the heart, and, in the consciousness of sincerity and innocence, to put confidence in his righteous and merciful aid (ver. 15). "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God" (1 John iii. 21).

In the review of the subject let us bear in mind that—1. Men are responsible for the character they possess. 2. An evil character may be transformed into a good one by the power of Divine grace and the use of proper means. "I will give you a new heart." "Make you a new heart." 3. We ought to strive continually to attain the highest degree of virtue and goodness possible.

> "Such is this steep ascent,
> That it is ever difficult at first,
> But more a man proceeds less evil grows.
> When pleasant it shall seem to thee, so much
> That upward going shall be easy to thee,
> As in a vessel to go down the tide,
> Then of this path thou wilt have reached this end.
> There hope to rest thee from thy toil" ('Purg.' iv.). D.

Vers. 16—22. (ENGEDI.)—*The goodness of bad men.* "And Saul lifted up his voice and wept" (ver. 17). The opportunity given to David to avenge himself on Saul was a severe test of principle, but by the use he made thereof it became a means of his further advancement. His forbearance was also another test of the character of Saul, over whom Divine mercy still lingered, and toward whom it was in such forbearance shown afresh. Nor was it without effect. The heart of the man who had ordered the massacre of eighty-five priests and was bent on the destruction of his most faithful servant relented at the words addressed to him; his voice trembled with emotion, tears flowed down his cheeks, he wept aloud, acknowledged his guilt, and turned from his purpose. It seemed as if he had undergone a sudden transformation and become a new man. But his heart remained unchanged. And his goodness, as on former occasions, was like that of those to whom the prophet said, "Your goodness" (fits of piety) "is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away" (Hosea vi. 4). Concerning such goodness, notice that—

I. IT IS NOT UNFREQUENTLY DISPLAYED. There is in the worst of men some capacity of moral and spiritual impression; and those who might be least expected to be moved are often most powerfully affected by—1. *The force of a powerful appeal*, in which the truth is set before their minds and brought home to their hearts and consciences (vers. 9—15). They walk in the darkness of error and illusion, and the light breaks suddenly upon them, revealing what they could not or would not see before. It is made so plain that they are unable to deny its reality or resist its impression. 2. *The exhibition of unusual generosity* and superior excellence, which shows by contrast their own defects, shames and subdues them, overcomes not only them, but also, in some degree, the evil that is in them—their envy, hatred, and sin. "The simple self-presentation and self-witness of moral purity and truth has a great missionary power, and often makes a mighty impression on spiritually darkened and

morally perverted natures, in such wise that the Divine in them is freed from the binding power of evil, and the religious moral element of the conscience, which is concealed deep under religious moral corruption, breaks freely forth, at least in some bright and good moments, in order to point to the way of salvation and show the possibility of deliverance, provided the man is *willing* to be saved and renewed" (Erdmann). 3. *The apprehension of an extraordinary escape* from danger and death (ver. 18). Saul had been placed by the hand of God within reach of the stroke of death, and if David had acted as men would ordinarily have done he would not have been now alive (ver. 19). The heart must be hard indeed if it be not melted by such things as these.

II. IT IS APPARENTLY GENUINE; the proof of a radical change of disposition. In tears and words and actions there is—1. *The presence of strong emotion.* It is evidently not simulated, but real. 2. *The operation of an awakened conscience* (ver 17), which produces the recognition of what is right, the vindication of one who has been wronged, the confession of sin, and prayer for the blessing of God on one who has been regarded as an enemy (ver. 19). 3. *The conviction of the Divine purpose.* "And now, behold, I know well," &c. (ver. 20). That purpose had been indicated to Saul by Samuel and by the course of events; but he refused to recognise it, sought to change it, and fought against it. Now he acknowledges its inevitable fulfilment on the ground of the superior worth of David (ch. xv. 28), submits to it without complaint, and even seeks a solemn pledge of forbearance toward his house on its accomplishment (ver. 21). He says in effect, "The will of the Lord be done." 4. *The abandonment of evil designs.* His amendment goes beyond good resolutions, and appears in his actually leaving off the pursuit of David and returning home to Gibeah (ver. 22). When good actions follow good words, what more can be needed? Yet Saul among the saints, like Saul among the prophets, was Saul still.

III. IT IS REALLY WORTHLESS. Although the signs of repentance and reformation in Saul were greatly valued, they were not absolutely relied upon by David, who had experience of his impulsive and changeable nature, and "knew what was in man." The most promising signs may be, and often are, connected with a goodness which is—1. *Superficial;* the depth of the heart being still hard and stony. 2. *Defective,* in hatred of sin, renunciation of self, return to God, surrender of the will, true faith, inward renewal, and spiritual strength to resist temptation. 3. *Transient.* "They *soon* forgat his works," &c. (Ps. cvi. 13). Not long afterwards Saul was again in pursuit of David, and his heart was more obdurate than ever (ch. xxvi. 1). Transient goodness issues in permanent destruction. "Water that riseth and floweth from a living spring runneth equally and constantly, unless it be obstructed or diverted by some violent opposition; but that which is from *thunder-showers* runs furiously for a season, but is quickly dried up. So are those spiritual thoughts which arise from a prevalent internal principle of grace in the heart; they are even and constant unless an interruption be put upon them for a season by temptations. But those which are excited by *the thunder of convictions,* however their streams may be filled for a season, they quickly dry up and utterly decay" (Owen, 'Spiritual-Mindedness').

Consider that—1. Men may be near the kingdom of God and yet never enter into it. 2. We are liable to be deceived by the appearance of goodness in others, and even in ourselves. 3. Whilst we should "search and try our hearts," we should also pray, "Search me, O God," &c. (Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24). "Create in me a clean heart," &c. (Ps. li. 10).—D.

Vers. 16, 17.—*Evil overcome by good.* Recent passages of this history have shown more of David's weakness than of his strength. But here he is again a hero. The fine points of his character shine out—his self-control, his magnanimity, and his reliance on the justice of God to vindicate his integrity. To this period is ascribed the seventh Psalm, in which the son of Jesse appeals against the slanders with which he was assailed, and looks to God for solace and deliverance. The situation strikes both the imagination and the heart. The young chief stands at the mouth of the cavern, holding up the proof of his generous forbearance, and protesting with picturesque eloquence against Saul's hot pursuit. The king amazed, ashamed, and subdued; the sternness fading from his face, the haughty anger in his eyes drowned

in tears. So evil was for the time overcome by good. David was helped to this noble behaviour at Engedi by his recent meeting with Jonathan in the forest of Ziph. At and through that meeting he had been encouraged in God. So in the hour of temptation he abstained from revenge, confided to God the vindication of his innocence and the preservation of his life, would not lift a hand, or let one of his officers lift hand, against the king. With what thankfulness and joy must Jonathan have heard of the sparing of his father's life by his friend! Their meeting had borne fruit very soon. Their prayers were heard. Perhaps we have a happy meeting with a friend, or a strengthening and refreshing service at church, and the reason why is not at once apparent; but soon we fall into some temptation or danger, and then we are helped by the recent confirmation of our faith to endure with patience. Our "good time" in the wood of Ziph is meant to prepare us for the hour of temptation in the cave of Engedi.

I. MARK THE RESTRAINT OF GOD UPON THE PERSECUTOR. Saul seemed to have every facility for gaining his object. No one disputed his will. Armed men by thousands followed him in pursuit of David; and Saul knew how to lead men, and how to fight. He had spies to track out the fugitive. The country was small, and the inhabitants, both at Keilah and at Ziph, showed their readiness to help the king. Yet he could never reach David to arrest or to smite him. More than once he had thrown the javelin at him, but missed. In the highlands of Judah he was more than once close upon his steps, but still missed him. He went on one side of a hill while David moved round the other side. He had almost caught him when he was called off to repel a sudden inroad by the Philistines. He actually entered the cave in which David and his men lay hid, and did not see them. This was no mere luck. It was God who preserved David and baffled the malice of Saul. And in the tragical history of persecution the restraining hand of God has often been shown. As Saul was allowed to kill the priests but not to kill David, so has the Lord allowed many a tyrant to go so far, but no farther. Jezebel could make away with Naboth, but not with Elijah. Herod could kill St. James, but not St. Peter. The Roman Catholic persecutors could burn Huss, but not Wickliffe; George Wishart, but not John Knox. There has been a cord of Divine control round every oppressor, and whenever God saw meet he has simply drawn that cord, and so has restrained the remainder of wrath, defeated the devices of cruelty.

II. DISTINGUISH BETWEEN A RELENTING MOOD AND A REPENTING HEART. An evil-doer may be thrown into a fit of shame and grief over his own misconduct, promise amendment with tears, and yet never truly repent. The generous conduct and appeal of his son-in-law overwhelmed the king with confusion, and woke lingering echoes of good feeling in his troubled breast. He even wept before all, and, with the hot tears pouring from his eyes, confessed that he was in the wrong, praised the noble forbearance of David, acknowledged that the young captain was destined to fill the throne, and even asked him to swear that on his accession he would not exterminate the royal family. David swore, and they parted. Saul went home, but David did not attend him, for he was too shrewd to trust to the altered mood of the king. Well for him that he was so cautious, for Saul had only relented for a little while, not really repented of his malignant purpose. Softened feeling is one thing, repentance in mind and purpose another thing. This is familiar to those who try to reclaim criminals. They find them melt under kind words, bewail their misconduct, promise to lead lives of honesty and sobriety, and yet after all this fall very soon under temptation, and not only renew, but increase, their wickedness. It is because they have only a gush of feeling, not a grasp of principle, and are sorry for themselves, but not penitent towards God. It is often illustrated in persons who have succumbed to the infatuation for strong drink. One has allowed this vice to grow insensibly, and does not know how far it has mastered him, till at last there comes an exposure of drunkenness which covers him with shame. A friend speaks to him about it seriously and kindly, and tears come promptly to his eyes, expressions of poignant regret and promises of the utmost caution flow from his lips. He is quite surprised that he should have been so foolish, hopes that no more will be said about it, and is quite sure that nothing of the kind will ever happen again. But there is little disturbance of conscience, no grave sense of sin, no humbling of self before God with

petitions for pardon and for help to cease from this insidious vice. So in a little while the shame is gone, the good promises are forgotten, the friend who spoke so kindly is hated for his pains, and the perverse man succumbs to temptation, and goes on to a drunkard's disgrace, goes down to a drunkard's grave. There are many other instances of this folly without descending to gross vice. Men have twinges of compunction and gusts of admirable feeling, and so resolve to lead better lives. But there it ends. They mean well, but somehow cannot carry out their intention. It is for want of repentance toward God.

III. RECOGNISE THE SUPERIOR STRENGTH OF MORAL WEAPONS. Whatever good is done to those who are going astray is effected by moral means and weapons only. David might have fought Saul and beaten him, but that would not have brought even a temporary relenting to his heart. It would probably have hardened him. David smote him with the moral power of truth and love, and so disarmed him for the time, and subdued him to unwonted tenderness. So now we can best benefit our fellow-men by using the moral influences of probity and kindness. So may our nation influence other nations as a Christian people ought to do, not by vaunting our power to go where we like and kill whom we please, but by showing righteousness and good-will towards all mankind. Physical weapons of destruction are not worthy to be compared with the moral weapons that reach the conscience and the heart.

IV. RISE TO THE THOUGHT OF GOD'S MAGNANIMITY TO US. Though we have conceived in our minds enmity against him, he does not crush us by the might of his arm, or willingly slay us as with the edge of a glittering sword. The gospel conveys to us the sublime appeal of his truth, righteousness, and pardoning love. We enter no cave where God is not. We are never beyond his reach; and if he should smite, who is there that could deliver out of his hand? But he has no pleasure in our death. Much as we have provoked him, he has compassion, he spares, he even pleads with us to be reconciled to him. Let us consent to his proposals of grace not with mere evanescent feeling, but with inward repentance and cordial faith. Then we shall not part from our God, as did Saul from David, but abide and "walk together as those that are agreed."—F.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXV.

DEATH OF SAMUEL (ver. 1). Ver. 1.—**And Samuel died.** According to Josephus, Samuel had for eighteen years been contemporaneous with Saul's kingdom. If this calculation, which probably rests upon some Jewish tradition, be at all correct, we must include the years of Samuel's judgeship in the sum total of Saul's reign (see on ch. xiii. 1), as evidently his fall was now fast approaching. Samuel's life marked the beginning of the second age of Israelite history (Acts iii. 24). Moses had given the people their law, but Samuel in the schools of the prophets provided for them that education without which a written law was powerless, and called forth also and regulated that living energy in the prophetic order which, claiming an all but equal authority, modified and developed it, and continually increased its breadth and force, until the last prophet, Jesus of Nazareth, with supreme and Divine power re-enacted it as the religion of the whole world. And as neither his educational institutions nor the prophetic order, whose ordinary duties were closely connected with these schools, could have flourished without internal quietness and security, Samuel also established the Jewish monarchy, which was ideally also necessary, because the Messiah must not only be priest and prophet, but before all things a king (Matt. ii. 1, 6; John xviii. 37). And side by side with the kingdom he lived on to see the military successes of the first king, and the firm establishment of the royal power; but to witness also the development of that king into a despot, the overclouding of his mind with fits of madness, the designation of his successor, the probation of that successor by manifold trials, his ripening fitness under them to be the model of a theocratic king, and his growth in power so as practically to be now safe from all Saul's evil purposes. And so in the fulness of time Samel died, and all Israel gathered together and made lamentation for him (see Gen. l. 10), **and buried him in his house.** The tomb at present shown as that of Samuel is situated upon a lofty hill, the identification of which with Ramah is very uncertain. Probably he was buried not actually in his house, as that would lead to perpetual ceremonial defilement (Num. xix. 16; Luke xi. 44), but in some open spot in his garden (comp. 2 Kings xxi. 18; 2

Chron. xxxiii. 20). So Joab was buried in his own house (1 Kings ii. 34). **At Ramah.** Thenius thinks that the prophets shared with the kings the right of intramural burial.

DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS OF PARAN (vers. 1—42). DAVID ASKS A GIFT OF THE WEALTHY NABAL AND IS REFUSED (vers. 1—13). Ver. 1.—**David arose.** This is not to be connected with the death of Samuel, as though David had now lost a protector. But as he had fully 600 men with him, and his force was continually increasing, it was necessary for him to roam over a wide extent of country in order to obtain supplies of food. **The wilderness of Paran.** Paran strictly is a place in the southernmost part of the peninsula of Arabia, a little to the west of Mount Sinai; but there can be little doubt that it gave its name to the vast extent of pasture and barren land now known as the desert of El-Tih (see 1 Kings xi. 18). Of this the wildernesses of Judah and Beersheba would virtually form parts without the borders being strictly defined. We need not therefore read "the wilderness of Maon," with the Septuagint and many commentators. On the contrary, we have seen that **the hold** in ch. xxiv. 22 was the hill Hachilah in that neighbourhood, and David now moved southward towards the edge of this vast wilderness.

Ver. 2.—**A man in Maon.** Though strictly by descent belonging to Maon (for which see on ch. xxiii. 24), his **possessions**—rather, "his business," "occupation" (see Gen. xlvii. 3, and Eccles. iv. 3, where it is translated *work*)—**were in Carmel**, the small town just north of Maon, where Saul set up a trophy at the end of the Amalekite war (ch. xv. 12), and to which Abigail belonged (ch. xxvii. 3). He is described as **very great** because of his wealth arising from his large flocks of sheep and goats, which fed upon the pasture land which forms the elevated plateau of Carmel, where **he was shearing his sheep**, usually a time of lavish hospitality (2 Sam. xiii. 23, 24).

Ver. 3.—**Nabal**, the word rendered *fool* in Ps. xiv. 1; literally, "flat," "vapid." **Abigail** means "one who is the cause (father) of joy," *i. e.* one who gives joy. She, with her bright understanding and beautiful person (the Hebrew word takes in much more than the **countenance**; see ch. xvi. 18, where it is rendered *comely person*), is in contrast with the coarse, churlish man who was her husband. His name was either one which he had acquired by his conduct, or if given him by his parents shows that they were clownish people. **He was of the house of Caleb.** The written text has, "he was according to his heart," *celibbo*, i. e. a self-willed man, or one whose rude exterior answered to his inner nature; but there are linguistic difficulties in the way of this reading, and the Kri is probably right in correcting *calibbi*, a Calebite, a descendant of Caleb, who had large possessions assigned him in the neighbourhood of Hebron (Josh. xv. 13—19), which is only ten miles north-west of Carmel. The versions support the Kri, though the Syriac and Septuagint render *doglike*—one who, like a dog, though he has plenty, yet grudges others. The meaning of the name Caleb is literally "a dog."

Vers. 4, 5.—Though David had gone some distance southward of Carmel, yet it was worth his while to send men to Nabal's sheep-shearing, as the maintenance of his numerous force must have been a continual difficulty. The large number, **ten**, also shows that he expected a liberal gift of food. Probably such missions were not uncommon, and the large sheep-masters were glad to supply the wants of one who guarded their flocks and defended them from the incursions of the desert tribes.

Vers. 6—8.—**Say to him that liveth in prosperity.** The Hebrew is obscure, but the rendering of the A. V. is untenable, and also very tame. Literally it is, "Ye shall say to him, For life!" Probably it was a colloquial form of greeting, and equivalent to "good luck," "success," *life* in Hebrew being sometimes used for prosperity. So Luther translates it, and Rashi and the Babylonian Talmud are also in its favour. The reading of the Vulgate, "To thy brothers" (be peace), is to be altogether rejected. **We hurt them not.** Literally, "we caused them no shame" (see Judges xviii. 7), we did nothing to vex and injure them. Really the words mean that David had protected them, and enabled them to feed their flocks in safety. The fact that David waited till the sheep-shearing, when hospitality was the rule, proves that he did not levy black-mail upon his countrymen, though necessarily he must have depended upon them for the food indispensable for the support of his men. **A good day.** *I. e.* a festive day, which should bring us a share in thy prosperity. **Thy son David.** A title expressive of the reverence due from the youthful David to his senior, and an acknowledgment of Nabal's superiority over his fugitive neighbour.

Ver. 9.—**They . . . ceased.** Literally, "they rested;" *i. e.* either they remained quiet awaiting Nabal's answer, or sat down, as is the custom in the East, for the same purpose.

Vers. 10, 11.—**There be many servants,** &c. Nabal would scarcely have ventured to speak in so insulting a manner if David had been at Maon, but as he had moved with his men a long distance towards the south, he gave free vent to his rude feelings without restraint. David was to him a mere slave

who had run away from his master, Saul. **My bread, . . . my water.** These are the necessaries of life, while the flesh was the special luxury provided for the festival. David's ten young men would not literally carry water to him at so great a distance, nor did Nabal mean more than our phrase "meat and drink." The use, nevertheless, of *water* as equivalent to *drink* marks the value of water in the hill country, and also the abstemious habits of the people.

Vers. 12, 13.—**Gird ye on,** &c. David's determination was fierce and violent. No doubt Nabal's insult irritated him, and possibly also the rude outlaws round him would have protested against any other course; but Nabal's words, rude though they were, would not justify David in the rough vengeance which he meditated. Abigail throughout her speech argues that David was taking too violent a course, and one for which he would afterwards have been sorry.

ABIGAIL PACIFIES DAVID (vers. 14—35). Vers. 14—17.—**One of the young men.** Hebrew, "a lad of the lads," *i. e.* one of the servants (see on the word ch. i. 24); when used in this sense it has no reference to age (see ch. ii. 17). This man was probably some old and confidential servitor. **To salute.** Hebrew, "to bless" (see ch. xiii. 10; 2 Kings iv. 29). **He railed on them.** Literally, "flew upon them like a bird of prey." **We were not hurt.** Literally, "not put to shame" (see on ver. 7). The language of a people always bears witness to their character, and it is a mark of the high spirit of the Israelites that they thought less of the loss than of the disgrace of an injury. **As long as we were conversant with them.** Hebrew, "as long as we went about with them." **In the fields.** Really, "in the field," the wilderness, the common pasture land. **A wall.** *I. e.* a sure protection both against wild beasts and Amalekite and other plunderers. **A son of Belial.** A worthless, bad man (see on ch. i. 16), so coarse and violent that it is hopeless to expostulate with him.

Vers. 18—20.—**Five measures of parched corn.** The measure named here, the seah, contains about a peck and a half. As this seems little, Ewald reads 500 seahs, but probably it was regarded as a delicacy. **Clusters of raisins.** Rather, as in the margin, lumps of raisins. The bunches of grapes when dried were pressed into cakes. Sending her servants in front leading the asses which carried the present, she followed behind, and met David as she was coming **down by the covert of the hill.** Hebrew, "in secret of the hill," under cover of the hill, *i. e.* she met him as she was descending into some glen into which he had entered from the other end.

Vers. 21, 22.—David justifies his fierce anger by referring to the services he had rendered Nabal, and which had been requited so shabbily. For the phrase **so do God unto the enemies of David** see on ch. xx. 16. A superstitious feeling probably lay at the root of this substitution of David's enemies for himself when thus invoking a curse.

Vers. 23—25.—**Abigail . . . fell before David on her face.** This very abject obeisance may have been grounded on her belief in David's future kingship, or it may simply mark the inferior position held by women in those days (see ver. 41). Her whole address is couched in very humble terms. David (ch. xxiv. 8) only stooped with his face to the ground before Saul. **Upon me.** Abigail represents herself as the person really guilty, on whom the **iniquity,** *i. e.* the punishment of the offence, must fall. Nabal is a mere **son of Belial,** a worthless, bad man, whose name Nabal, *i. e.* fool, is a sign that folly is with him, and accompanies all his acts. As a fool he is scarcely accountable for his doings, and Abigail, whose wont and business it was to set things to rights, **saw not the young men,** and so was unable to save them from her husband's rudeness.

Vers. 26, 27.—Abigail begins her appeal by affirming that it was Jehovah who thus made her come to prevent bloodshed; she next propitiates David with the prayer that his enemies may be as Nabal, insignificant fools; and finally asks him to accept her present, not for himself,—that would be too great an honour,—but as good enough only for his followers. The first of these affirmations is obscured by the rendering in the A. V., and should be translated, "And now, my lord (an ordinary title of respect, like our *sir*), as Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, so true is it that Jehovah hath withholden thee from blood-guiltiness, and from saving thyself with thine own hand; and now let thine enemies," &c. The same words recur in vers. 31, 33. **Blessing.** *I. e.* gift, present (see ch. xxx. 26). This beautiful term shows the deep religiousness of the Hebrew mind. The gift is something that comes not from the donor, but from God, in answer to the donor's prayer.

Ver. 28.—**Forgive the trespass of thine handmaid.** Reverting to her words in ver. 24, that the blame and punishment must rest on her, she now prays for forgiveness; but the intermediate words in ver. 26, emphasised in ver. 31, have raised her request to a higher level. Her prayer rests on the ground that she was saving David from a sin, and that in his thirst for vengeance he was bringing upon himself guilt. If the form of Abigail's address was most humble, the matter of it was brave and noble. **A sure house.** *I. e.* permanent pros-

who had run away from his master, Saul. **My bread, . . . my water.** These are the necessaries of life, while the flesh was the special luxury provided for the festival. David's ten young men would not literally carry water to him at so great a distance, nor did Nabal mean more than our phrase "meat and drink." The use, nevertheless, of *water* as equivalent to *drink* marks the value of water in the hill country, and also the abstemious habits of the people.

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perity (see on ch. ii. 35). **Because my lord fighteth.** Hebrew, "will fight." David was not fighting these battles now because he was not yet enthroned as the theocratic king. It was Saul's business at present to fight "Jehovah's battles," either in person or by his officers (ch. xviii. 17). The words, therefore, distinctly look forward to the time when David as king will have the duty imposed upon him of protecting Jehovah's covenant people. **Evil hath not been found in thee.** Hebrew, "shall not be found in thee," *i. e.* when the time comes for thee to take the kingdom no one shall be able to allege against thee any offence by which thou hast lost thy title to the kingly office; nor afterwards as king shalt thou be guilty of any breach of thy duty to Jehovah, Israel's supreme Ruler, so as to incur rejection as Saul has done.

Vers. 29—31.—**Yet a man is risen.** Rather, "And should any one arise to pursue thee," &c. The reference is of course to Saul, but put with due reserve, and also made general, so as to include all possible injury attempted against David. **Bound in the bundle of life.** Hebrew, "of the living." The metaphor is taken from the habit of packing up in a bundle articles of great value or of indispensable use, so that the owner may carry them about his person. In India the phrase is common; thus, a just judge is said to be bound up in the bundle of righteousness; a lover in the bundle of love. Abigail prays, therefore, that David may, with others whose life is precious in God's sight, be securely kept under Jehovah's personal care and protection. In modern times the two words signifying "in the bundle of the living" form a common inscription on Jewish gravestones, the phrase having been interpreted in the Talmud, as also by Abravanel and other Jewish authorities, of a future life. **Shall he sling out,** &c. In forcible contrast with this careful preservation of David's life, she prays that his enemies may be cast away as violently and to as great a distance as a stone is cast out of a sling. The **middle** is the hollow in which the stone was placed. **Ruler.** *I. e.* prince. It is the word rendered *captain* in ch. ix. 16; x. 1, but its meaning is more correctly given here. **Grief.** The word really means much the same as stumbling-block, something which makes a person stagger by his striking against it unawares. Abigail prays, therefore, that when David has become prince, and so has to administer justice, this violent and revengeful act which he was purposing might not prove a cause of stumbling and an offence of heart to himself, by his conscience reproaching him for having himself done that which he had to condemn in others.

Vers. 32—35.—David, in his thankful acknowledgment of Abigail's remonstrance, sees in it the hand of **Jehovah the God of Israel,** who had **sent** her, *i.e.* stirred her up to come. He commends also her **advice,** literally, her "taste," *i. e.* wisdom, discretion. It is the word rendered *behaviour* in ch. xxi. 13. But for this prudent conduct on her part in thus coming to meet him on the way, he solemnly assures her on oath that nothing could have saved Nabal and every male in his household from death. Finally, he accepts her present and dismisses her with the assurance that all was forgiven.

DEATH OF NABAL AND MARRIAGE OF DAVID AND ABIGAIL (vers. 36—42). Vers. 36—38.—**For he was very drunken.** Hebrew, "and he was very drunken." This was not the cause of his heart being merry, but the result; he gave himself up to enjoyment till he became drunken, and then his merriment was over. When Abigail came back he was stupefied by drink, and it was not until the next day, when his debauch was passing off, that he was capable of being told what his wife had done. And when Abigail recounted to him David's fierce resolve, and how she had pacified him, he seems to have given way to a fit of violent indignation, flying out possibly at her as he had at David's messengers (ver. 14), the result of which was an attack of apoplexy, and after lying in a state of insensibility for ten days, he died.

Vers. 39—42.—**Hath pleaded the cause of my reproach.** In the causes tried at the gate of an Israelite city the friends of the accused both pleaded his cause, defended him from wrong, and punished any who had wronged him. So God had avenged David, while preventing him by Abigail's interference from avenging himself (see ch. xxiv. 13). As a widow's legal mourning seems to have lasted only seven days, David, on hearing of Nabal's death, sent messengers to Abigail at Carmel to ask her in marriage. He was probably moved to this not merely by her sensible conduct, but also by the news that Michal had been given to another. She expresses her willingness in true Oriental fashion by saying she was ready to perform the most abject menial duties, even for his servants, and at once with five maidens proceeds to join him. It is a proof that David considered himself practically secure against Saul's attempts that he thus married and allowed women to accompany his small force, as their presence would not only impede the rapidity of his movements, but also implies a certain amount of ease and comfort for their maintenance.

ADDITIONAL PARTICULARS RESPECTING DAVID'S MARRIED LIFE (vers. 43, 44). Vers. 43, 44.—Besides Abigail, David also took to wife **Ahinoam of Jezreel,** a small village among the hills of Judah (Josh. xv. 56), and

not the better known town of that name in the tribe of Issachar. Ahinoam was the name also of Saul's wife (ch. xiv. 50). **They were also . . . his wives.** *I. e.* besides Michal. She had been given by Saul to **Phalti the son of Laish,** called Phaltiel in 2 Sam. iii. 15, where we read of his lamentation at her being torn from him by Ishbosheth in order that she might be restored to David. **Gallim** is described in Isa. x. 30 as being situated between Gibeah of Saul and Jerusalem.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—12.—*Honour to the dead and insult to the living.* The facts are—1. Samuel dies, and is buried at Ramah amidst the sorrow of Israel. 2. David, returning to the wilderness, sends a greeting to Nabal, a wealthy man at Carmel, and asks for some favour to his young men on account of the friendly aid recently rendered to Nabal's shepherds. 3. Nabal, in a churlish spirit, sends an insulting reply, and refuses the request. 4. Whereupon David resolves on taking revenge for the insult. The allusion here to the death of Samuel, while a necessary part of the history of the age, seems to be introduced to prepare the way for the continuance of the narrative concerning David, who now has become the principal figure in the national life. We have to consider the teaching of the *good man's death and the churlish man's insult.*

Honour to the dead. The various points brought out in the brief reference are, the brevity of the notice compared with the length of service, the ground of the public homage, the loss and gain to Israel, the extent of influence revealed, and the temporary subsidence of party conflicts. Formulating the truths thus suggested, we see—

I. That THE SCANTY REFERENCE IN THE BIBLE TO THE PERSONAL WORK AND DEATH OF GOD'S BEST SERVANTS is in instructive CONTRAST WITH THE RECORDS CONCERNING CHRIST. Samuel's life was long and immensely useful to the world by the reformation wrought in Israel by the force of his character, and the preparation made for prophetic teaching and stable government. A holier and more devoted man was not found, and yet one verse tells us all about his death and burial. The same reticence is true concerning Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, and indeed all the most distinguished of men. They during life spoke little of themselves, and referred little to their ancestors. The apostles also live, labour, and die, and no stress is laid on their work and death, a circumstance in keeping with the self-abnegation which never made themselves prominent objects of faith. The contrast with Christ is impressive. He is all and everything. His self-reference is perfect egotism if he be a mere human being ordained only in higher degree than others to execute a Divine purpose. The exaltation of his name, work, and death by the apostles is most natural and harmonious with the silence of the Bible in relation to all others if he be really Divine. The question of his personality cannot be settled by mere verbal discussions. Broad facts must be considered, and these clearly determine the verbal sense where exegetes may be supposed to differ. This kind of argument appeals to the common sense of men, and accords also with the instinct of the Christian heart to worship Christ.

II. That THE HONOUR PAID TO THE DEAD, so far as referred to in Scripture, is THAT DUE TO HOLY CHARACTER AND SERVICE. The allusion here and elsewhere to a proper homage to the dead is clearly associated with the holy life and conduct previously recorded in the sacred narrative. There is a singular silence in the Bible with respect to any honours paid to men, on account of the greatness supposed to consist in warlike exploits. True greatness lies in good abilities being pervaded by a spirit of piety, and consequently consecrated to the advancement of the kingdom of God on earth. The value of a man's life is to be sought in the contribution he makes to the spiritual impulse by which the world is brought nearer to God. The supreme honours often paid to mere titular rank, to wealth, to military prowess, and even to bare learning, are expressive of a human judgment which is discounted by the language of the Bible, and will be reversed when, adjudged by the lofty standard of Christ, every man shall receive according to the deeds done in the body.

III. That THE DEATH OF TRULY GOOD MEN is both a LOSS AND A GAIN TO THE WORLD. Israel properly mourned because the "godly man" failed, for the activity and

personal influence of the greatest man of the age henceforth would cease. We cannot say whether a good man's activity of spirit no longer operates as a power on men after his death—probably it does if there be any truth in the conservation and persistence of spiritual forces; but so far as survivors are concerned they are unconscious of it, and, on the other hand, are henceforth more open to the action of other visible influences. We lose much when good men die; yet we gain something. The whole life becomes more impressive in death than during its continuance. The germinal good sown in the heart by silent goodness and actual effort is quickened around the grave into healthy growth. The sobering, elevating influence of a sainted memory is a permanent treasure. Many have to bless God for the death of his saints. Heaven becomes more real to those whose beloved ones have gone before, and the levities of life are subdued by the thought of our temporary separation from the "general assembly."

IV. That THE REALITY AND EXTENT OF A GOOD MAN'S INFLUENCE OVER OTHERS IS BROUGHT OUT IN DEATH MORE THAN IN LIFE. The public homage paid to Samuel was the nation's response to his life's appeal to the heart and conscience. Like Elijah, he no doubt often deplored the degeneracy of the age, and questioned whether he was doing any substantial good. This doubt is the common experience of all God's servants. They cannot see the incidence of the rays of light as they silently fall on the dull heart of the people, though in theory they know that every ray performs its part in the great spiritual economy of the universe. But the subjects of holy influence do receive in some degree all that comes forth from a consecrated life, and it often requires the removal of a good man from this world to make manifest how strong a hold he has had on the thought and feeling of others. There are many instances of this in all grades of society. Churches and families reveal the power of a character when that character ceases to exercise its wonted energies. This should induce calmness and confidence in all who strive to bless the world by a devoted life. Those who exercise moral power are not always the best judges of its force and extent. God mercifully keeps from our view some of the good we are doing, lest we fall into the snare of the devil.

V. That MAN'S CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE SACREDNESS AND MYSTERY OF HUMAN EXISTENCE, when aroused, is SUPREME OVER EVERY THOUGHT AND FEELING. All Israel, embracing Saul, David, the prophets, and the slanderers and conspirators at the court, assembled around the grave of Samuel and wept. The strifes and rivalries of parties, the deadly feuds and cruel animosities of life, the most urgent of human passions, were for the time set aside under the influence of that deep, all-mastering feeling that human existence on earth is a sacred mystery. The holiest and most honoured are seen to succumb to the strong hand which carries off the most worthless. Each asks, Is this the end? Is there nothing beyond? If there is, what? Thus it is man's reflectiveness, awakened by the death of the great, which causes him to recognise at the same time both his littleness and his greatness. The solemnity of having a rational existence comes on all in presence of death. That we are made for something far above what now engages our attention is forced on the spirit, and our connection with an invisible sphere and final tribunal rises into awful distinctness. This frequently-recurring sense of the sacredness and mystery of existence is a check on sinful tendencies, and furnishes occasions for the application of the gospel to the hearts of men. Gospel truth learnt in early years will often assert its power in men as, leaving awhile the contentions and sins of life, they stand by the open grave.

Insult to the living. The question arises, Why is it that this narrative of Nabal's churlishness occupies so prominent a place in the sacred records, seeing that so adventurous a life as that of David must have abounded in striking incident? Among, then, the topics suggested by the account of the churlish man's insult we may notice—

I. THE PRINCIPLE ON WHICH EVENTS ARE RECORDED IN SCRIPTURE. Is this principle ascertainable? Can any hypothesis concerning it be verified by an induction of facts? Granting an affirmative reply to these questions, do we here get a harmony of Scripture superior to that of literal agreement in details? Now, in dealing with such questions we have to be guided by a few broad facts, such as, the order of Providence among men is subservient to the working out of the redemptive purpose

in Christ; the redemptive purpose is wrought out through the instrumentality of chosen servants, succeeding one another by Divine arrangement; events touching the lives of these men affected the performance of their part in the accomplishing of the purpose, in so far as they developed character or brought the great principles for which they lived into conflict with opposing principles; the Bible is designed to be a record of the events which advanced the unfolding of the redemptive purpose, either directly, or by indirectly shaping the character and conduct of those engaged in its outworking, and forcing the Divine idea into sharp contrast with various forms of evil. The attempt to find the principle of selection of facts for incorporation in God's record of the history of redemption in any other direction must fail. The great thought of this Book of Samuel is the conflict of the Messianic hope with opposing evils. Hence all through the life of David we see that the "salvation of the Lord," *i. e.* the great spiritual reformation to be wrought as a prelude to a future and more blessed one, was the issue at stake; and those events are evidently related which helped it on, and such as were opposed to it. Principles are embodied in each of these instances, and thus the relation of events to the unfolding purpose of God is that quality in them which accounts for their insertion in the Scriptures. The verification of this is an interesting study. It may suffice here to note that when we consider the great influence on the life of David of such a woman as Abigail, and therefore on his work for the world, we can see the propriety of some account of her in relation to him, and we shall see directly how completely Nabal's churlishness was an illustration of the grovelling spirit which scorns such lofty spiritual aspirations as are involved in working out the Divine purpose for mankind.

II. THE CAUSES AND CURE OF DOMESTIC INFELICITY. The home life of Nabal was evidently not happy, arising partly from utter diversity of taste, temperament, and culture, and partly from dissimilarity of moral conduct and religious principle. A low, grovelling disposition, revelling in sensual indulgence and proud of wealth, could not but embitter the life of a "woman of good understanding," and of such fine spiritual perceptions as are indicated by her words to David (vers. 27—31). There are unfortunately many such homes. Wise and holy women are held to the humiliation and sorrow of a lifelong bondage. In modern times the causes of domestic infelicity are various—fashion, that considers station before happiness; love of wealth, that lays beauty, sweetness, and culture at the feet of mammon; inconsiderate haste acting on partial knowledge of character; concern for a livelihood irrespective of moral qualities; incompatible religious sentiments; selfishness on the one side, seeking inordinate attention, and neglect on the other, heedless of the sacred bond. In many cases the release is only in death, so utter is the desolation. So far as Abigail was concerned, her discretion and self-command mitigated the evils of her home; but the radical remedy is a renewal of the spirit, a turning of the life to God.

III. THE OBLIGATIONS OF WEALTH. That every talent imposes on its possessor corresponding obligation is a first principle of morals and religion. No man holds material wealth for himself. He is a member of society, and bound to exercise his gifts for the welfare of others. The common responsibilities attached to wealth therefore devolved on Nabal, and no narrow, private views or acquired greed of gain could release him from the laws of God, however irksome they might make obedience to it. But there were special reasons why he was bound to allow David to share in his plenty; for was he not known to be a man persecuted for righteousness' sake, of the same tribe as Nabal, admitted by the popular voice to have been a benefactor by his prowess on behalf of the nation, the guardian, by means of his men, of Nabal's servants in a recent season of peril, and regarded in Nabal's house (vers. 27—31) and elsewhere as the coming king, well fitted by his qualities to raise the spiritual and social condition of the people? The modest request of David was just, and the duty of the rich man was clear. The question of the obligations attaching to the possession of wealth needs to be pressed home with earnestness and elucidated with intelligence. The "love of money" is so strong in some as to blind the intellect and harden the heart against a recognition of the proper uses of it. No fixed standard can be set up for the distribution of wealth, for the duties of giving and spending are relative to position and surroundings. The first thing to recognise is that wealth is not for self-indulgence or aggrandisement, but for the enrichment of

all around. The next is the cultivation of a kindly, generous spirit that looks tenderly on the more needy, combined with a sound judgment as to the best means of enabling many to enjoy the distribution of wealth as the recompense of labour and skill. Above all, every man should, in a spirit of love and gratitude, lay all on the altar of God, and see to it that a good proportion be devoted to the cause of Christ. None have ever regretted consecrating wealth to God. But that is not consecration to God which appropriates to religious uses when dependent ones are lacking means of support (Mark vii. 11). It would work a revolution in the social condition of our country, and that of the mildest and most beneficent kind, as well as give an immense impulse to the cause of religion, did men of wealth but conscientiously estimate their obligations to God and man, and act accordingly.

IV. CONTEMPT FOR SPIRITUAL ASPIRATIONS. "Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now-a-days that break away from their masters." Thus did Nabal, knowing well who David was, what course he had pursued, what trials had befallen him, and what high spiritual anticipations were associated with his chequered life, express his contempt for the coming king and his supposed mission in Israel. This was clearly the case of a rich man, fond of sensual indulgence, boastful of his possessions, indifferent to the culture, moral elevation, and spiritual prosperity of his countrymen, and looking with scorn on the men who long for a higher form of life in which purity, knowledge, and joy in God are prominent features. He wanted to have nothing to do with "theorists," "fanatics," and men of that type. The country was well enough, and the son of Jesse was not wanted. The insult to the living was insult to man. Men are often only the exponents of principles that survive when they are gone. Samuel during his early labours was the energetic exponent of the spiritual idea of God's kingdom as against the grovelling conceptions of Israel's function entertained by the degenerate nation. Later David became its chosen representative, and in this his anointing as a more worthy man than Saul had its significance. Those who, like Jonathan, Gad, and Abiathar, identified themselves with David became a party in the State devoted to the assertion of the higher hope, while the men who prompted Saul to evil, the Ziphites, and now Nabal, were the supporters of the low, earthly ideal of Israel's life. Their antagonism to David was, therefore, deeper than at first appears; it was based on lack of sympathy with, and in fact positive dislike of, the spiritual aspirations cherished by David, and which he in the providence of God was destined largely to enunciate and realise. What is meant by "*such as love thy salvation*"? (Ps. xl. 16). Evidently those who are yearning for that great deliverance from evil which God was then working out for Israel—typical of the wider deliverance which the true King of Zion is now working out for men. And as men like Nabal despised the holy aspirations of David, so do the same men now despise the aspirations of those who think not their work done till spiritual religion is universal. The Saviour heard men say, "Is not this the carpenter's son?" The pure and lofty aspirations of his life met with the reverse of a response in grovelling minds. Men do not object to a religion, but they do dislike a holy religion.

Practical lessons:—1. Let it be our effort so to live that men may remember us with feelings of loving interest. 2. The tone of our daily life may often be raised, and a shield against temptation may be found, by occasionally communing in spirit with the honoured dead whom we have known. 3. In all arrangements for life we should allow moral and religious considerations to have chief influence. 4. Conscientious regard for the teaching of God's word in reference to wealth, and special prayer for guidance in its use, cannot but make it a blessing to the possessor and to others. 5. It requires careful thought to trace out the connection between growing riches and distaste for spiritual religion (Mark x. 23—27).

Vers. 13—17.—*Creed and practice.* The facts are—1. David, stung by the insult, prepares to take summary vengeance on Nabal. 2. A servant, overhearing his intention, reports it to Abigail. 3. He also relates to her the circumstances of David's kindness to Nabal's men, and appeals to her for intervention, as he has no faith in Nabal's wisdom or generosity. The course taken by David would ordinarily be termed natural for an Eastern chieftain; that of the servant was more considerate

than usually is found among men of his class when placed in personal peril. Regarding the two causes separately, we may express the teaching thus:—

I. THERE IS AT TIMES A SAD DISPROPORTION BETWEEN THE BELIEFS AND THE PRACTICE OF EVEN THE BEST OF MEN. David was undoubtedly the most spiritually enlightened, patient, and devout man then living. The psalms of the period indicate a wonderful faith in the care and goodness of God, and his recent conduct had illustrated his patience, generosity, and forbearance. The elevated tone of his language to Saul (ch. xxiv. 11—15), in which he commits his personal wrongs to God, is worthy of New Testament times. The common faith of his life could not but have been strengthened by the solemnities of the funeral from which he had lately returned. Nevertheless David could not bear an insult and ingratitude, but must in unholy zeal cease to trust his cause to God, and avenge evil with his own hand. Sons of Zebedee live in every age, who cannot wait the calm purpose of God to vindicate his saints, while at the same time professing to be of a spirit born of heaven, and akin to that of him "who when he was reviled, reviled not again." This falling below our ideal is a too common calamity in individual and Church life. The question may rise whether we really believe what we say we do when conduct does not harmonise therewith, for is not real faith influential? The great verities of our Christian Scriptures, respecting Christ's love, our destiny, the world's spiritual need, and the unspeakable importance of eternal things, are enough to enchain every soul to holy consecration that knows no reserve. It is well that we estimate the disparity between creed and conduct; the dishonour it brings, the harm to religion it entails, and the effect of it on our prayers (James v. 16).

II. OUR STANDARD OF CONDUCT IS TO BE TAKEN NOT FROM GOOD MEN, but from the EXPLICIT TEACHING OF SCRIPTURE AND THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST. As we read the books of men with reserve, and accept only that which accords with a standard of truth apart from them, so our reading of the conduct of saints is to be discriminating. They are often illustrious examples of good, but not our models. Our conduct under analogous circumstances is not to be regulated by that of David, but by the teaching which tells us not to "avenge" ourselves, but to return good for evil, and even love our enemies. If men ask what this *non*-personal retaliation means, the answer is, *the life of Christ*. That it is alien to human tendencies and often regarded as unmanly does not make it less Christian. Very few persons "enter into the kingdom of God" in the sense of behaving in the world as Christ did. Even Christian men sometimes speak as though it were madness to display just the spirit of meekness, love, and compassion which marked his career under provocation. Who dare say in the truest sense, "We have the mind of Christ"?

III. DISCRIMINATION AND PROMPTITUDE ARE VALUABLE QUALITIES IN AVERTING EVILS INCIDENT TO HUMAN WRONG-DOING. The evil consequences of one great sin on the part of a good man may be very serious, and, as in this case, calling for exceeding care if they are to be averted. The conduct of the servant (vers. 14—17) is worthy of imitation in many departments of life. He did not selfishly flee to secure himself, but, reading well the purpose of David, thought of the safety of all, formed a just estimate of Abigail's tact and courage, and of Nabal's stupidity, and without delay laid before his mistress the provocation offered to David. A wise and prompt servant is a blessing in a home. These qualities go far to render men successful in life; and if more attention were paid in early years to the development of them, many an one would be saved from disaster, and the whole machinery of saints would move more smoothly. May we not also see an analogy here to the case of a man who, foreseeing spiritual calamity to others, promptly devises means of delivering them from it?

Practical lessons:—1. We should be on the watch against sudden provocations of our unholy tendencies, and we shall find an habitually prayerful spirit one of the best aids to the immediate suppression of passion. 2. It is worth considering how much the Church and world have lost by failure on the part of Christians to live out the spirit and precepts of Christ. 3. It is a question whether sufficient attention is paid to the suppression of the love of fighting and taking of revenge in children, and how far literature and customs foster these evils. 4. In cases of moral conduct prompt action is always best.

Vers. 18—31.—*Wise persuasiveness.* The facts are—1. Abigail, aware of the danger, provides an ample present, and secretly sends on her servants to prepare the mind of David for an interview. 2. On seeing David she humbly seeks an audience, and intimates that Nabal was not to be regarded as of importance. 3. She pleads her cause by reminding David of the kind restraint of Providence in keeping him from wrong, of Nabal's utter unworthiness of his notice, of the provision made for the young men, of his own integrity and coming distinction, of his spiritual safety amidst trials, of the future satisfaction of not having causelessly shed blood, and then begs that she may not be forgotten in coming days of power. This narrative may be considered in relation to Abigail and to David. In the former it affords—

I. AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE ART OF PERSUASION. The course pursued by Abigail was creditable to her courage, tact, piety, and loyalty to truth. A more beautiful instance of the art of persuasion in the sphere of private life is not found in the Bible. It may be considered in two ways. 1. *In relation to the method adopted.* This may be seen by noticing the line of argument. David is, after a respectful act of obeisance, informed that the omission of which he complained was without the knowledge of the person who was largely responsible for acts of hospitality (ver. 25). Then, with exquisite delicacy, he is reminded of the sin of avenging self, and of the goodness of God in restraining from it (ver. 26). This appeal to the moral sense is strengthened by an assurance that the offending person was far beneath the notice of one so distinguished, and that dignity could well afford to let him alone (ver. 24). Moreover, the occasion which properly roused his generous concern for hungry and deserving servants was passed, as ample provision was at hand for them (ver. 27). Passing from others, David is assured of confidence in his Divine call and the integrity of his life, despite all slanders (ver. 28). And though persecution is hard to be borne, yet he is reminded that full compensation is made in being securely kept by God, and thus blessed with the spiritual life embraced in the everlasting covenant (ver. 29)—a blessing which wicked foes cannot share. To crown all, he is led to think of the not distant day when, as king of God's people, he will enjoy the highest honours; and it is gently suggested that it would be a pity to mar the joys of such a time by reflection on an act of personal revenge by deeds of blood. A beautiful instance of what a wise, holy woman can do when emergency arises. 2. *In relation to the general principles involved.* Persuasion is required in the pulpit, the home, and the common intercourse of life; and observation proves how much depends on the adoption of right principles in using it. Some never succeed. The human soul can be successfully approached by certain avenues only. To be successful there ought to be—(1) A tone and manner befitting the persons and the circumstances. (2) A clear but delicate reference to the governing sense of right; for conscience properly addressed is sure to become an internal advocate for us. (3) A readiness to meet every lawful claim and satisfy every generous instinct; for heed is given to those who are zealous in doing right. (4) An evident appreciation of the actual position in which those are whom we address; for confidence in our judgment and professed sympathy is then awakened. (5) A gentle appeal to the most sacred religious hopes and aspirations which, though unexpressed, may exercise a controlling power over life. (6) Regard to the principle of self-interest as a force in life supplementary to higher considerations. It is worth a study to become "wise to win souls."

II. AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE INFLUENCE ON TEMPER AND CONDUCT OF RELIGIOUS CONSIDERATIONS. There was power in Abigail's argument derived from her appeal to David's sense of the wrong of revenge, and the assurance that his generous concern for his young men was now unnecessary. But that which evidently touched David most was her reference to his being the object of God's love and care. To be restrained by a loving God, to be in favour with him amidst the wrongs of evil men, to have an interest in the higher spiritual life which is nourished and guarded by God was more than all beside. How could one so richly and undeservedly blessed be revengeful or act in any way unworthy of the name of God? The apostle adopts the same line of argument when he, enjoining a spirit of forgiveness, reminds his readers of the forgiveness they have received (Ephes. v. 32). If we would be humble, gentle, forgiving, and grateful, let us consider what it is to have

our "names written in heaven" (Luke x. 20), and to be objects of a love from which nothing can separate us (Rom. viii. 38, 39). A judicious use of such reflections and considerations is extremely important in spiritual culture. Men are deeply touched by the thought of what God has done for them. A little religious retrospect would save many a man from yielding to violent impulses. The same result is secured by cherishing due regard to our lofty aspirations. Those who are to be raised to thrones will not do mean and wrongful deeds. Who can estimate the influence of Christian anticipations on present conduct?

III. AN ILLUSTRATION OF DEEPENING FAITH IN MESSIANIC PURPOSES. Men like Doeg, Cush, and the Ziphites might combine and by slander seek to destroy faith in David's integrity, and so seem to put back the realisation of the purposes for which he had been anointed; and the Psalms reveal how these things sometimes depressed his spirit. But all this time the more intelligent and devout saw clearly that he was the man to build up the kingdom, and Abigail, by this beautiful revelation of her confidence in his coming elevation to power, was only a revelation to him of advancing faith. The strength thus brought to his heart reminds us of the comfort evidently conveyed to the Saviour's heart by Peter's explicit avowal (Matt. xvi. 16, 17). And as time advances there will arise, as a cheering set-off to the scorners and detractors, superior minds bearing witness to the Divine truth and coming triumph of Christ's kingdom. Equally so will confirmations rise up of the call of the Christian to share in the higher service of the future.

General lessons:—1. A wise man will bring his impulses to the light of religious truth and allow it to tone them down. 2. In cases of difficulty, where temper is concerned, a quiet, fervent spirit is of great importance. 3. To have a place in the Lamb's book of life is full compensation for the ills we may suffer at the hands of men. 4. It is beneath the dignity of a Christian man to contend with the mean and base. 5. It is a sound maxim to suffer inconvenience rather than do anything that will tend to mar the enjoyment of the success we hope to win.

Vers. 32—35.—*Restraining mercy.* The facts are—1. David, recognising the hand of God, expresses his sense of his mercy and blesses Abigail for her advice. 2. He perceives, in the light of her remonstrance, the terrible evil of the passion that had swayed him. 3. Accepting her present, he dismisses her in peace. The success of Abigail's wise conduct was now assured in a good man being saved the guilt and shame of acting at variance with his professed trust in God; and while duly honouring the instrument of deliverance, God's restraining mercy is fully brought into prominence. Notice—

I. RESTRAINING MERCY IS A FACT IN EVERY LIFE. This instance was conspicuous, but David elsewhere acknowledges the constant keeping of his God (Ps. xix. 13; cxli. 9). We owe much to God for what we are not and do not, as also for what we are and do. "By the grace of God I am what I am" applies to prevention as well as endowment. Every man is conscious of carrying within him a power of evil in excess of what finds outlet in deeds, and its repression is due not only to human wisdom and strength. The conditions of social life that check the development of inward sinfulness are of God as truly as the truth we cherish that we may not sin against him (Ps. cxix. 11). The friends who counsel and warn, the ordinances that tend to weaken the force of evil and nourish holiness, are the agencies of the same gracious God who endowed us with the helping conscience to which they appeal. If occasional providences, be they disasters or personal interventions, draw special attention to the unseen hand, they do not render the restraint at other times less real because they are more steady and gentle. There is a spirit that strives silently with man and holds him back from ruin.

II. OUR RECOGNITION OF RESTRAINING MERCY IS MORE PRONOUNCED WHEN WE HAVE PASSED THROUGH UNUSUAL TEMPTATIONS. Temptations are common experience, but sometimes they come in "like a flood." The admission of God's kindly and constant restraint is an item of daily belief, attended with more or less gratitude; but when the soul has been brought face to face with a terrible sin by the force of violent impulses, and kept from committing it by what is called a narrow chance, then the good hand of God is distinctly recognised. In the lull of the storm we see

clearly the rocks on which character well-nigh made shipwreck. The light of truth reveals whither we were going, and the soul is aghast at the spectacle. In the lives of most there have been occasions when we were on the very verge of destruction, or, like David, were about to mar our consistency and usefulness by a sad transgression. The refined spirit of a Christian shrinking in horror at the very thought of what might have been cannot but say, "Blessed be the Lord God;" and where human instruments have been employed, a benediction falls on them for their kindly aid. These acts of recognition, so full of gratitude and joy, are but faint indications of that inexpressible joy and gratitude when, in survey of all life's dangers, the soul will praise the "mercy that endureth for ever."

III. A PROPER RECOGNITION OF RESTRAINING MERCY IS ATTENDED WITH A CALM AND STEADY ATTENTION TO THE DUTIES OF OUR SPIRITUAL POSITION. David, as chosen servant of God, quietly accepts the gift of Abigail, and, dismissing her, reverts to the normal course of trusting in God and biding his time. He lived out his true character all the better for this narrow escape. It is the natural effect of mercy, when recognised, to render us more true to our holy calling in God's service. We go on our way with stronger determination to submit to his will, whatever it may bring, and to live in closer fellowship with him.

General lessons:—1. It is good to place our stormy passions in the clear light of God's truth. 2. Our spiritual life acquires more elevation and tone by occasionally reflecting on God's restraining mercy. 3. The sin of indulging in violent passions must not be overlooked in the deliverance from their overt expression. 4. From an experience of deliverance from fearful moral perils we may enlarge our knowledge of the possibilities of life, and find increased reasons for habitual watchfulness.

Vers. 36—44.—*Contrasts, patience, and domestic ties.* The facts are—1. Abigail, finding Nabal in the midst of a drunken revel, refrains from speaking of her interview with David. 2. In the morning, on her relating what had transpired, he became insensible, and soon after dies. 3. On hearing of his death David recognises afresh the mercy that had restrained him, and sees the wisdom of leaving judgment to the Lord. 4. David, deprived of his wife Michal, though possessed of Ahinoam, seeks to take Abigail to wife, and she, accepting his advances, consents. The sacred narrative is wonderfully effective in making David the central figure amidst the diversity of detail alluded to, and thus indicates the unity of principle on which it is framed, as well as foreshadows the higher presentation of Christ as the one figure, discernible by the eye of faith, amidst the varied teachings of Scripture. The manifold teaching of this section, while associated with David as the central figure, may be most conveniently represented under three heads. We have here—

I. CONTRASTS OF CHARACTER. Nabal may be regarded as an instance of a type of character well known in every age—low in taste, devoted to material gains, insensible to lofty spiritual aspirations, the miserable victim of disgusting habits, exercising a pernicious influence, and coming to an end dishonourable and ruinous. Grades of this character may be found, but the essential features of it are sensuality, irreverence, and earthliness. The chapter presents us with three characters agreeing in a common contrast to this—Abigail's, David's, Samuel's. Each of these, in the sphere allotted by Providence, stands out as the very opposite of Nabal. That which formed the inspiring power in them was intelligent devotion to the higher interests of life and strong faith in the Divine purpose that was being worked out in Israel. The reference in ver. 1 to the honourable burial of Samuel, and in vers. 36—38 to the disgraceful end of Nabal, as well as the intermediate references to David and Abigail, show that the contrast of characters lies in *four* things—*spirit, aims, influence,* and *end.* All characters may be tested by these *criteria.* The *spirit* is either devout, reverent, trustful, and obedient, or grovelling, profane, alien to God. The *aim* in life is the creation of the spirit, and is either to promote individual and public righteousness in association with God's purpose in the Messiah, or to gather wealth and find transitory gratification. The *influence* is either to elevate, inspire, and enrich the world with what is best and enduring, or to drag down, embitter, and brutalise mankind. The *end,* as in the case of Samuel, is either peace, honour, and future blessedness, or wretchedness, dishonour, and future woe. In every age and

locality where truth is loved and rejected these opposite tendencies and issues are found, and it would be instructive and impressive to develop with illustrations from history the gradations of contrast. The clue to contrasts in taste, habit, and final condition is to be sought in the state of the spirit in its relation to God. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." "You hath he quickened who were dead."

II. THE JUSTIFICATION OF PATIENCE. It is possible to take David's words (ver. 39) as expressing thanks for preservation from sin, and at the same time pleasure that his churlish enemy was now smitten; but the sense more congruous with the circumstances seems to be that he was, on reflection, more and more grateful for Divine restraint; and the fact that God had, without his agency, done what seemed to him best was evidence that man need never hasten to vindicate himself by violent measures, but may be patient under wrong. He was glad that God, and not he, had vindicated right. Events in the course of Providence will justify abstention from evil even under strong provocation. Many a man, patiently repressing violent passions, and content to endure rather than savagely avenge wrong, has lived to see the day when God, in some unlooked-for way, has visited the wrong-doer with chastisement, and then, while thankful for restraint, he is able to see in the Divine conduct a justification of the patience once so hard to exercise, and that seemed to men of the world so inexpedient and weak. And here comes out the great truth that the meek and quiet virtues enjoined by Christ are always justified by Providence, though at the time they are exercised they seem to be contrary to human nature. This is but a branch of a still wider truth, that all holiness of feeling and conduct is in the issue coincident with self-interest. Utility may not be the basis of morality, but in its broadest sense, taking in endless existence and future relations, it is exemplified in the effects. A few observations may suffice on this subject. 1. *It often requires much effort to be truly virtuous.* David felt it harder to abstain from avenging wrong than to avenge it. The positive side of his virtue was patient trust in the justice of God, and the impulses of the old man are against this. Very often personal losses and social disadvantages attend our patient endurance of evil, and these set into operation our strong feelings of resentment, our estimate of profit and loss, and our professed love of right. 2. *All such virtue has the promise of success.* To trust in God, to be patient in tribulation, and kindred qualities are pregnant with victory. Right feeling and conduct *per se* have a tendency, as Butler has shown, to ultimate happiness; and the ordinations of Providence are all subordinate to the vindication of right. 3. *Personal and general history show that patient trust in God's justice is honoured.* Martyrs have found it better to leave their cause to God. The results of their endurance are perpetual, and most blessed and powerful. Every Christian can see in his own life that God does not forsake his saints, but turns their patient trust to his honour and glory, and the higher education of the individual and the race. Events will justify religious feeling in any form. It answers in every way to be like Christ.

III. THE DOMESTIC FACTOR IN LIFE. The details concerning Nabal are given because of David's place in the history of redemption, and for the same reason we have an account of David's domestic relationships. It is well known that the domestic tie is of extreme importance in every life. Men are helped or hindered, blessed or cursed, by the kind of influence that sways the home. Considering how much the general character is affected by the development of the tender and pure feelings proper to home life, the loss to the world arising from domestic miseries is incalculable. What a change in society were our toilers blessed in the person of their wives with the love, the refinement of feeling, and the intelligent Christianity which knows how to make home a welcome, cheery place! Men like Nabal would be much worse were it not for the restraining influence of an Abigail. David's public and private career was necessarily the better for the presence in his home of such a woman, though the elevating influence of her character was impaired by his adoption of polygamy. Many are the counteracting influences under which the best of men develope, and Scripture, by thus calling attention to David's domestic affairs, gives us a clue to some of the circumstances amidst which his virtues and failings appeared. The extreme importance of the domestic factor in life should urge to care in contracting alliances, in the maintenance of a spirit at home in harmony with

the sacred character of the marriage bond, and in rendering home life subservient to a faithful and efficient discharge of one's calling in life (Ephes. v. 22—33; 1 Pet. iii. 1—7). The question of marriage is a delicate one, and needs to be handled with great care, but it is doubtful whether the Church has in her pastors and teachers done as much for the education of the people on the subject as is required. A wise pastor will know how to incorporate earnest Scripture teaching with his ordinary ministrations without intruding into the privacies of life, and wise parents have it in their power to save their sons and daughters from many troubles by first winning confidence, and then judiciously aiding to right decisions.

General lessons:—1. In order to form a correct estimate of a life we must take into account the end, and the bearing of the principles cherished on the endless existence beyond the grave. 2. The practical exhibition of the Christian spirit in our dealings with bad men is often more difficult than the maintenance of a devout spirit in relation to God. 3. The cure for some of the ills of modern life is in making home more attractive to those now seeking unhallowed joys elsewhere. 4. A nation careful of the purity and fulness of domestic life will survive those making light of these qualities.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1. (RAMAH.)—*Samuel's death and burial.* "And Samuel died." 1. The end of the great prophet's life is recorded in brief and simple words. This is according to the manner in which the death of men is usually spoken of in the Scriptures. Whilst their life is narrated at length, their death is either passed over in silence or mentioned only in a sentence, as of comparatively little consequence in relation to their character, work, and influence. There is one significant exception, viz., that of him "who once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." 2. In the last glimpse afforded of him *before his decease* he is described as "standing as one appointed over the company of the prophets," and occupied with them in celebrating the praises of God (ch. xix. 20). During the years that had since elapsed he was left unmolested by Saul; and it is hardly likely that David ever ventured to Ramah again, although he probably kept up indirect intercourse with his aged and revered friend (ch. xxii. 5), and was often in his thoughts. 3. In *connection with* the mention of his death it is stated that "David arose and went down" (from "the hold" in the hill of Hachilah, to which he had returned from Engedi) "to the wilderness of Paran." He may have done so for reasons independent of this event, or without the knowledge of it; or possibly because he feared that with the removal of Samuel's restraining influence Saul might renew his persecution. However it may have been, the melancholy intelligence would speedily reach him. 4. "Samuel died." Good and great as he was, he could not escape the common lot of men. "One event happeneth to them all." But that which comes as a judgment to "the fool" (ver. 38) comes as a blessing to the wise. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." The news of it came upon the people as a surprise and filled them with grief. "It was as if from that noble star, so long as it shone in the heaven of the holy land, though veiled by clouds, there streamed a mild beneficent light over all Israel. Now this star in Israel was extinguished" (Krummacher). "Another mighty one had passed away. The very heart of the nation sighed out its loving, weeping requiem. But who among them all mourned as that son of Jesse, on whose head he had at God's command poured the anointing oil, as he arose and went down to the wilderness of Paran? Doubtless in those waste places he heard again in living memory the echoes of the prevailing cry of him who was so great among those that call upon the name of the Lord. Doubtless his own discipline was perfected in this new sorrow, but he learnt in losing Samuel to lean more simply and alone on Samuel's God" ('Heroes of Heb. Hist.'). We have here—

I. THE DECEASE OF AN ILLUSTRIOUS MAN: saint, prophet, intercessor, judge, restorer of the theocracy, founder of the monarchy. "He was a righteous man, and gentle in his nature; and on that account he was very dear to God" (Josephus). "Samuel, the prophet of the Lord, beloved of the Lord, established a kingdom and anointed princes over his people. And before his long sleep he made protestations in the sight

of the Lord, &c. And after his death he prophesied, and showed the king his end" (Eccles. xlvi. 13—20). He died—1. *In a good old age.* At what age we know not; but long ago he spoke of himself as "old and grayheaded" (ch. xii. 2). His protracted life was an evidence of his self-control and piety, a mark of Divine favour, and a means of extended usefulness. He was cut down not like "the flower of the field," which blooms for a day and is gone, nor like the spreading forest tree smitten by a sudden blast; but rather like the ripe corn, bending down beneath its golden burden and falling under the sickle of the reaper; and "as shocks of corn are brought in in their season," so was he "gathered to his people." 2. *At the proper time.* When his appointed work was done, the new order of things firmly established, and he could by his continuance do little more for Israel, he was "taken away from the evil to come" through which the nation was to attain its highest glory. "He was the link which connected two very different periods, being the last representative of a past which could never come back, and seemed almost centuries behind, and also marking the commencement of a new period intended to develop into Israel's ideal future" (Edersheim). "If David's visible deeds were greater and more dazzling than Samuel's, there can be no doubt that David's blaze of glory would have been impossible without Samuel's less conspicuous but far more influential career, and that all the greatness of which the following century boasts goes back to him as its real author" (Ewald). 3. *In peaceful retirement;* removed from public strife, under Divine protection, surrounded by prophetic associates, reviewing the past, contemplating the present, and awaiting the final change. A holy and useful life is crowned with a peaceful and happy death. 4. *In Divine communion,* which constitutes the highest life of the good. In God (with whom he had walked from his childhood, and whose inward voice he had so often heard) he found his chief delight, to his will he cheerfully submitted, and into his hands he committed his spirit in hope of continued, perfect, and eternal fellowship. The ancient covenant to be "the God" of his people overshadowed the present and the future; nor did they suppose (however dim their views of another life) that he would suffer them to be deprived by death of his presence and love "All live unto him" and in him. He "died in faith." His decease was like a peaceful summer sunset.

> "Not the last struggle of the sun
> Precipitated from his golden throne
> Holds, dazzling, mortals in sublime suspense;
> But the calm exode of a man,
> Nearer, but far above, who ran
> The race we run, when Heaven recalls him hence" (W. S. Landor).

II. THE MOURNING OF A WHOLE PEOPLE. "And *all* Israel" (represented by their elders) "were gathered together" (out of common veneration and love), "and lamented him" (whom all knew and none would see again), "and buried him in his house at Ramah" ("the ancient and the manor house," so long his residence, and endeared to him by so many tender associations). It was "a grievous mourning," as when Jacob was buried at Machpelah (Gen. l. 11; Acts viii. 2). The honour rendered to his memory was simple and sincere, very different from that which, it is said, was paid to his dust in later times, when "his remains were removed with incredible pomp and almost one continued train of attendants from Ramah to Constantinople by the Emperor Arcadius, A.D. 401" (Delany, i. 148). But "of Samuel, as of Moses, it may be said, 'No man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day'" (Stanley). The national mourning was an indication of—1. *The high esteem* in which he was held, on account of his great ability, eminent piety, and beneficent activity—his integrity, firmness, gentleness, consistency, disinterestedness, adaptability, and living communion with God (ch. ii. 30; Ps. cxii. 6). "A true Christian may travel in life under troubles and contempts; but mark his end, and you shall find (as peace, so) honour. Life is death's seed-time; death life's harvest. As here we sow, so there we reap. He that spends himself upon God and man shall at last have all the honour that heaven and earth can cast upon him" (R. Harris). 2. *The deplorable loss* which had been sustained. "The men who had once rejected Samuel now lamented him; when the light of his presence was departed they felt the darkness which remained; when the

actual energy of his example had ceased to act they remembered the strength of his principles, the consistency of its operation. There was a feeling common to man. Whilst we enjoy the gift we ofttimes forget the Giver, and are awakened only to the full consciousness of the value of that which we once possessed by finding that we possess it no longer" (Anderson). 3. *The unjust treatment* which he had received, and which was now regretted. His predictions had proved true (ch. viii. 11), and his course was fully vindicated. "The sorrow at his decease was the deeper, the more heavily the yoke of Saul's misgovernment pressed on them." 4. *The continued influence* he exerted upon the nation. "The holy expression stamped by him on the tribes of Benjamin and Judah remained for centuries uneffaced. Never was a single man more instrumental in sowing the soil of a district with the enduring seeds of goodness. It seems to have been mainly through his influence that piety found a home in Judah and Benjamin when it was banished from the rest of the country. Humanly speaking David could never have been king if Samuel had not prepared the way. He was to King David what John the Baptist was to Christ. Unquestionably he is to be ranked among the very greatest and best of the Hebrew worthies" (Blaikie). "And he being dead yet speaketh."

> "O good gray head which all men knew,
> O voice from which their omens all men drew,
> O iron nerve to true occasion true,
> O fall'n at length that tower of strength
> Which stood four-square to all the winds that blew!" (Tennyson).

Learn to—1. Honour the memory of the good. 2. Praise God for their lives. 3. Imitate their example. 4. Carry out their purposes.—D.

Vers. 1—44. (THE WILDERNESS OF PARAN.)—*David's activity and advancement.* "And David arose, and went down to the wilderness of Paran" (ver. 1). Samuel was dead. Saul was becoming more and more incapable of fulfilling the duties of his high office. Meanwhile David was being prepared by Divine providence to grasp the sceptre when it fell from his hand and wield it in a nobler manner. He was the rising sun of the new era. And we see in this chapter numerous signs of his peculiar qualification for his future rule and of his gradual progress towards it; such as, *e. g.* —1. *The strict discipline* which he exercised among his men. Those 600 warriors dwelt in the neighbourhood of Nabal's shepherds, and could easily have supplied their wants from the flocks kept by the latter; but "the men were very good to us," said one of them, "and we were not hurt, neither missed we anything," &c. (ver. 15). "He was bringing his wild followers under a loving discipline and government which they had never experienced; he was teaching them to confess a law which no tyrant had created, no anarchy could set aside" (Maurice). 2. *The valuable service* which he rendered to his people. "They were a wall unto us both by night and day" (ver. 16). He employed his followers (whom he could not lead against Saul without incurring the charge of rebellion) in protecting those who were occupied in honest industry against the plundering Bedouin, and thus doing the work which had been left undone by the king. There is no place or position but affords opportunity for useful work. Even an outlaw may be serviceable to his country. 3. *The perfect equity* of the claim he made. His defence of the sheep gave him a right to some share in them; and he was justified in voluntarily undertaking it by the condition of society at the time and his own peculiar position. The reply of Nabal, in its application to David, was destitute of justice, truth, and charity (vers. 10, 11). 4. *The respectful consideration* he showed in urging his claim. He did not make it unseasonably, but waited till "a good day" (a festive occasion on which men were usually disposed to be generous), and then sent ten young men to offer him a courteous greeting, state the case, and humbly seek as a favour what might have been demanded as a right (vers. 6—8). He appealed to what was noblest and best in the man. 5. *The conscious power* which he displayed. "Greet him in my name"—a name well known in Israel as that of a faithful, though persecuted, servant of Jehovah. Not a word escaped his lips, indeed, on this or any other occasion concerning his royal destiny. But he knew the strength of his position (see ch. xxvi.), which

was very different now from what it was at the beginning of his wanderings, was manifested in his whole bearing, and especially in the marriage relationships into which he entered (vers. 42—44). 6. *The increased renown* which he had acquired. The words of Abigail (vers. 28—31) expressed the growing conviction of the godly in Israel that David was destined to be their theocratic ruler. She may also have "received certain information of his anointing and destination through Samuel, or one of the pupils of the prophets" (Keil). 7. *The Divine restraint* by which he was kept from doing what would have imperilled or interfered with his future honour and happiness (ver. 26). When God has an important place for a man to fill, he prepares the way to it and prepares him for it, and a part of his preparation consists in his being taught faithful co-operation with the Divine purposes.—D.

Vers. 2—39. (MAON, CARMEL.)—*The prosperous fool.* "Now the name of the man was Nabal" (ver. 3; "a son of Belial," ver. 17; "Nabal is his name, and folly is with him," ver. 25). This chapter is like a picture gallery in which are exhibited the portraits of Samuel and the elders of Israel, David and his men, with the Bedouin marauders in the background; Nabal, the wealthy sheep-owner, his sheep-shearers and boon companions, Abigail and her maidens, and Ahinoam of Jezreel (mother of Amnon, the eldest son of David). Let us pause and look at one of them—Nabal. "As his name is, so is he;" a fool, *i. e.* a stupid, wicked, and godless man. "According to the Old Testament representation folly is a correlate of ungodliness which inevitably brings down punishment" (Keil). He is such an one as is described by the Psalmist (Ps. xiv. 1), often mentioned by the wise man (Prov. xvii. 16; xix. 1; xxi. 24), called a churl by the prophet (Isa. xxxii. 5—7), and referred to by our Lord in the parable (Luke xii. 13—21). What a contrast between his appearance and that of Samuel!

I. HIS ADVANTAGES WERE GREAT. 1. *He belonged to a good family.* "He was of the house of Caleb," who "wholly followed Jehovah God of Israel," and had "a part among the children of Judah." But he inherited none of the better qualities of his illustrious ancestor. "A good extraction is a reproach to him who degenerates from it." Religious privileges also (such as he enjoyed from his connection with Israel), unless rightly used, only serve to increase condemnation. 2. *He possessed an excellent wife;* "a woman of good understanding and of a beautiful countenance," prudent, generous, and devout. "A prudent wife is from the Lord" (Prov. xix. 14). But many a man is little benefited by the gift. His worldly prosperity may be increased by her skilful management of his household (vers. 14, 25), whilst his spiritual condition is not improved by her example, counsel, and prayers. The persistently bad are hardened by their intimate intercourse with the good. 3. *He enjoyed immense prosperity.* "The man was very great (wealthy), and he had three thousand sheep, and a thousand goats," a palatial residence in Maon, and a house at Carmel (Kurmul), where his business lay (vers. 2, 36). He may have inherited his wealth, or he may have had wisdom enough to know how to make and keep it, industrious himself, and profiting by the industry of others; it is not improbable from his language concerning slaves (ver. 10) that he was one of those usurers and oppressors from whose exactions many of David's men sought to free themselves by flight (ch. xxii. 2). "Here we may see the fickle and uncertain state of the world" (Willet); "the wicked in great power" (Ps. xxxvii. 35), and the good oppressed (Ps. lxxiii. 10). But "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke xii. 15). His abundance should make him thankful to God and generous to men. It has often, however, the reverse effect, and "the prosperity of fools shall destroy them" (Deut. viii. 10—20; Prov. i. 32).

II. HIS CHARACTER WAS WORTHLESS. "The man was churlish" (hard and harsh) "and evil in his doings" (ver. 3). 1. *He had evidently no thought of God* as the living, ever-present One, the true King of Israel, the Author and Preserver of his life, the Giver of all his blessings, the moral Ruler to whom he was responsible for their proper employment. What was material and sensible was to him the only reality. He recognised in practice no will superior to his own, and lived "without God in the world." 2. *He was regardless of the claims of other people;* despising

those who were beneath him in social position, headstrong, and resentful of every word which his servants might say to him in opposition to his way and for his good (ver. 17); illiberal toward the needy, unjust and ungrateful, "requiting evil for good" (ver. 21); disparaging the character and conduct of others (vers. 10—12), and railing upon them (ver. 14) in coarse and insulting language. "His wealth had not endowed him with common sense; but, like many in our own day, he imagined that because he was in affluent circumstances he might with impunity indulge in rude, ill-mannered sneers at all who were around him" (W. M. Taylor). 3. *He lived for himself alone;* regarding his wealth as his own ("*my* bread and *my* water," &c.), using it only for himself; making an ostentatious display ("the feast of a king"), and indulging in intemperance, "the voluntary extinction of reason." "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not *rich toward God.*"

III. HIS END WAS MISERABLE (vers. 36—39). 1. *He was overtaken by death very suddenly* and unexpectedly, and when he was unprepared for it. "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee," &c. 2. *He suffered the natural penalty* of the course which he had pursued. 3. *He was consigned to his grave without honour.* Whilst "all Israel mourned" for Samuel, none lamented him.

Learn that—1. The worth of a man consists not in what he has, but in what he is. 2. Wealth entails on its possessor a serious responsibility for its proper use. 3. The inequalities of men's earthly position disappear in the light of truth and eternity.—D.

Ver. 10. (CARMEL.)—*Masters and servants.* "There are many servants now-a-days that break away every man from his master." What Nabal said was probably the fact. Many servants did in that unsettled time break away from their masters, preferring independence with its risk and privation to servitude with its protection and provision. But the imputation which he intended to cast upon them was either wholly unjust, as in the case of David, or partially so, as in the case of many others. He omitted to state that their conduct toward their masters was due to the conduct of their masters toward them. People are never so ready to see and condemn the faults of the class to which they belong as those of the opposite class. Concerning masters and servants, consider—

I. THE NATURE OF THE RELATION. It has been aptly illustrated in the following language:—"A party of friends, setting out together upon a journey, soon find it to be the best for all sides that while they are upon the road one of the company should wait upon the rest, another ride forward to seek out lodging and entertainment, a third to carry the portmanteau, a fourth take charge of the horses, a fifth bear the purse, conduct, and direct the route; not forgetting, however, that as they were equal and independent when they set out, so they are all to return to a level again at the journey's end" (Paley, 'Mor. Phil.,' book iii.). The relation is confined to life's journey alone. 1. It is, in some form or other, *necessary and mutually beneficial.* The benefit received is really greater on the part of masters than servants. 2. It must of necessity *vary with the circumstances* of those among whom it exists. Hence the Mosaic law tolerated and regulated a species of slavery (though no Hebrew could become other than a "hired servant" for a specified time); but "no other ancient religion was ever so emphatically opposed to it, or at least to all inhumanity connected with it, or made such sure preparations for its abolition" (Ewald, 'Antiquities'). 3. It always involves *mutual obligations.* These "now-a-days" are often neglected. The tie between master and servant (mistress and maid, employer and employed) is not what it once was. There is less dependence on the one hand, and less authority on the other. Each complains of the other: "servants are careless and too independent;" "masters are too exacting and selfish." And the relation can only be what it ought to be by their common submission to "the law of Christ" (Gal. vi. 2).

II. THE DUTY OF SERVANTS (Ephes. vi. 5—8; Col. iii. 22—25; 1 Tim. vi. 1, 2; Titus ii. 9, 10; 1 Pet. ii. 18). 1. *Obedience*—lowly, respectful, cheerful; always in subordination to the supreme will of God. This is the first duty of a servant. 2. *Diligence* in performing the work given them to do, with attention and earnestness, and in the best possible manner. "And be content with your wages" (Luke iii. 14). 3. *Faithfulness* to the trust committed to them, seeking their masters' interests as

their own; honesty, thorough sincerity, "as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart."

III. THE DUTY OF MASTERS (Ephes. vi. 9; Col. iv. 1). 1. *Equity;* giving to them "that which is just and equal," and imposing upon them no unnecessary burdens (Mal. iii. 5; James v. 4). 2. *Consideration,* respect, courtesy, kindness, seeking their physical, moral, and spiritual welfare. "Thou shalt not rule over thy servant with rigour" (Levit. xxv. 43). And a mere money payment is not all that a fellow-creature is entitled to expect, or an adequate compensation for his services. 3. *Consistency;* acting in accordance with their position, reproving wrong-doing, setting a good example, exercising their authority and influence as a trust committed to them by God and in obedience to his will. Those who expect to receive honour must seek to make themselves worthy of it.

Let both learn—1. To be less observant of the faults of others than of their own. 2. To be more concerned about fulfilling their duties than insisting on their rights. 3. To look for their chief reward in the approbation of God.—D.

Vers. 14—42. (CARMEL.)—*Abigail.* Of her family and early life nothing is recorded. When first mentioned she was the wife of the wealthy and churlish Nabal. It was an ill-assorted union, probably due (like most Oriental marriages) to parental arrangement. She was distinguished by a beautiful countenance and form, and (what is not always associated therewith) by a beautiful mind and character, embodying the ideal of womanhood (Prov. xxxi. 10—31). "Where do we find in all the heathen world a woman comparable with Abigail, the daughter of the wilderness?" She was a woman of—1. *Superior intelligence,* practical wisdom, prudence, tact, and good management. "Of good understanding" (ver. 3). The part she took in the affairs of her husband is evident from the servants telling her of the threatening danger (ver. 17), and her apology (ver. 25). Her discretion was also shown in her reserve (ver. 19). 2. *Prompt decision,* energy, and activity. "Abigail made haste," &c. (ver. 18). Not a moment was lost, and she was promptly obeyed. 3. *Unaffected humility,* meekness, modesty, and self-devotion. "She fell before David on her face," &c. (vers. 23, 41). Her meekness and patience must have been greatly tried by the temper of Nabal, and had doubtless previously averted many a disaster. 4. *Noble generosity* and sacrifice. "Two hundred loaves," &c. (ver. 18). She felt that no sacrifice was too great to save her husband and his household. "David's men and David felt that these were not the gifts of a sordid calculation, but the offerings of a generous heart. And it won them, their gratitude, their enthusiasm, their unfeigned homage" (Robertson). 5. *Conciliatory, faithful, eloquent speech,* and pacifying, beneficent influence (vers. 24—31). Having taken the blame upon herself (as intercessor), and referred to her husband "with that union of playfulness and seriousness which above all things turns away wrath" (Stanley), she directed the thoughts of David to God, by the leadings of whose providence she had been sent to divert him from his purpose, utters the wish that he to whom vengeance belongs would avenge him, humbly begs the acceptance of her offering for his young men, and beseeches his forgiveness. Then (assuming her prayer to be granted) she assures him of the brilliant future that awaited him, inasmuch as he would fulfil the purposes of Jehovah, and not his own; that, should any one seek to do him harm, Jehovah would preserve him in safety, and punish his adversaries; and that when he should be "ruler over Israel" it would be a source of comfort, and not of trouble, to him that he had not shed blood causelessly, nor taken vengeance into his own hand. Finally she says, "And Jehovah will do good to my lord, and thou wilt remember thine handmaid" (for good)—"remember the things which I have spoken" (Dathe). No dissuasions from revenge could be more effective.

> "When a world of men
> Could not prevail with all their oratory,
> Yet hath a woman's kindness overruled."

"Doubtless she had not studied eloquence in the schools, but the Spirit of God alone made her such an orator. God put wisdom into her heart, and it flowed out in wise discourse" (Roos). 6. *Exalted piety;* faith in the righteousness and goodness of

God, his overruling providence, and the establishment of his kingdom (see the song of Hannah), devotion, spiritual insight, manifested in this appeal, and in her whole conduct (Prov. xxxi. 26, 30). It is not surprising that, after the death of Nabal, "David sent and communed with Abigail, to take her to him to wife" (ver. 39).—D.

Ver. 29. (CARMEL.)—*The bundle of life.* 1. The bundle of life, or the living (the word bundle, *tseror*, being used once before of the bag or purse of money which each of Joseph's brethren found in his sack of corn, Gen. xlii. 35), signifies the society or *congregation of the living* out of which men are taken and cut off by death (Barrett, 'Synopsis of Criticisms'). It contains those who possess life, continued and prosperous life, in the present world in the midst of the dangers to which they are exposed, and by which others are taken away from "the land of the living" (Isa. iv. 3). Life is a gift of God, and its continuance is presumptive of his favour. 2. What is here desired and predicted concerning them is based upon their *moral distinction* from other men. They are, like David, servants of God, and differ from others, as David from Saul and Nabal, in their character and conduct. They constitute the community of the godly in "this present evil world," and "their names are written in heaven." 3. They are of *inestimable worth* in the sight of God. He values all men because of their *capacity* for goodness, but much more some on account of their actual *possession* of it. Their worth surpasses all earthly possessions and distinctions. "The whole system of bodies (the firmament, the stars, the earth, and the kingdoms of it) and spirits together is unequal to the least emotion of charity" (Pascal). 4. They are his *special possession;* belong to him in a peculiar manner, because of what he has done for them "above all people," and their own voluntary devotion to him. "Know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself." "The Lord taketh pleasure in his people," and calls them "my jewels" (Mal. iii. 17). 5. They live in *intimate communion* with him. "A people near unto him" (Ps. cxlviii. 14); "bound up in the bundle of life *with* the Lord thy God." 6. They are *preserved safely* from the malicious designs of their enemies, and from all evil. "Should a man arise to pursue thee and seek thy soul," &c. The expression is derived from the common usage of men, who put valuable things together and keep them near their persons to prevent their being lost or injured. "Your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. iii. 3). 7. They have a *common participation* in the strength and blessedness afforded by his presence and favour. Their life is of the highest kind—life in the truest, fullest sense, directly derived from him who is "the Fountain of life," and involving all real good. "In thy presence," &c. (Ps. xvi. 11.) The life of others is but "a race to death," and they are "dead while they live." 8. They are designed for *useful service;* not merely to be looked upon and admired, but employed according to the will of the owner. It is for this that they are preserved. 9. They have "the promise of *eternal life.*" Their spiritual fellowship with God and with each other in this life is an earnest of its continuance and perfection in the life to come. "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." The pious Jew dies with the words of the text upon his lips, and has them inscribed upon his tomb. "Whosoever is so hidden in the gracious fellowship of the Lord in this life that no enemy can harm him or injure his life, the Lord will not allow to perish, even though temporal death should come, but will then receive him into eternal life" (Keil). "And so shall we ever be with the Lord." 10. Their destiny (like their character) is the *opposite* of that of the ungodly. "Concerning the bodies of the righteous it is said, 'He shall enter into peace; they shall rest in their beds' (Isa. lvii. 21); and of their souls it is said, 'And the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God.' But concerning the bodies of the wicked it is said, 'There is no peace, saith God, to the wicked.' And of their souls it is said, 'And the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out, as out of the middle of a sling'" (Talmud, quoted by Hurwitz).—D.

Vers. 32, 33. (CARMEL.)—*Moral restraints.* 1. Between the purpose to transgress and the intended act of transgression there is usually an interval, and in that interval there may occur *physical* restraints, rendering the act impossible but not affecting the purpose or disposition; or *moral* restraints, affecting the purpose, and often alter-

ing it and thereby preventing the act. The latter alone truly tests and reveals the character. And of this nature was the restraint put upon David when he was on his way to inflict vengeance on Nabal and his household for the affront which he had received. 2. His terrible purpose seems surprising after his forbearance toward Saul (ch. xxiv. 7, 22). But the conquest of temptation is not unfrequently the occasion of subsequently succumbing to it. This happens when any one supposes that he is no longer in danger from it, and ceases to watch against it, and depend on God for his safe-keeping. "David was not secure against the temptation to personal vengeance and to self-help, although he had previously resisted it. The lesson of his own weakness in that respect was all the more needed that this was one of the most obvious dangers to an ordinary Oriental ruler (ch. xxiv. 21). But David was not to be such, and when God in his good providence restrained him as he had almost fallen, he showed him the need of inward as well as of outward deliverance, and the sufficiency of his grace to preserve him from spiritual as from temporal dangers" (Edersheim). Consider special moral restraints as—

I. MUCH NEEDED EVEN BY A GOOD MAN, because of—1. *External incentives to sin.* The language of Nabal was adapted to excite anger and revenge, as his servant plainly perceived (ver. 17). 2. *Sudden impulses of passion,* under which one of ardent temperament especially is in danger of taking a rash oath (ver. 22), and rushing towards its accomplishment without fully considering what he does, or "inquiring of the Lord" whether it is right. 3. *Natural deficiency of strength* to resist temptation, and natural liability to self-deception. Reason and conscience should always hold the rein, but how often is it torn from their grasp by fiery passions! David probably also thought for the moment that it was right to avenge the wrong which had been done; but even if Nabal's offence were the greatest conceivable, he was not yet constituted king and judge of the people, much less ought he to inflict so fearful a vengeance for a private offence. "Lord, what is man? What need have we to pray, Lord, lead us not into temptation!"

II. VARIOUSLY VOUCHSAFED ACCORDING TO HIS NEED. What is most needed is the restoration of reason and conscience to their proper place and power, and this is often brought about by—1. *Providential circumstances,* leading to reflection and the recognition of the will of God. 2. *Wise and faithful counsel* (vers. 26—31), indicating that will, addressed to conscience, and persuading to the adoption of a worthier course. 3. *Inward influence,* exerted by the Spirit of God, giving the inclination and strength to walk in "the good and right way." "Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man," &c. (Job xxxiii. 29). And with him whose heart is not "fully set to do evil" he worketh not in vain.

III. GRATEFULLY ASCRIBED BY HIM TO GOD. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel," &c. He is grateful to the messenger of God, but first and chiefly to God himself; and his gratitude is sincere and fervent on account of—1. The *evil* which has been prevented. 2. The *good* which has been conferred. 3. The *abounding mercy* which has been experienced. "Do you think that any one will praise God in heaven with so loud a voice as I shall?" said one (who had been speaking of the course of flagrant transgression from which by Divine mercy he had been reclaimed). "Yes," was the reply, "I hope to do so, because by Divine mercy I have been kept from it." "It is not a converting, but a crowning grace; such an one as irradiates and puts a circle of glory about the head of him upon whom it descends; it is the Holy Ghost coming down upon him in the 'form of a dove,' and setting him triumphant above the necessity of tears and sorrow, mourning and repentance, the sad after-games of a lost innocence" (South, 'Prevention of Sin an Invaluable Mercy').—D.

Ver. 29.—*The bundle of life and the sling.* The appeal of Abigail had all the more persuasiveness that she avowed her sympathy with David's cause, and her faith in the Divine purpose to make him king. Such a conviction was by this time widely diffused in the land among those who feared Jehovah and honoured the prophet Samuel. We have seen that it was confessed by Saul himself, and by Jonathan it was cherished with generous pleasure. But Nabal would not have it mentioned in his presence. In his eyes David was a mere runaway servant of the king who had turned freebooter. His wife showed the vigour of her mind, the

clearness of her judgment, and the strength of her faith in not fearing the displeasure of Nabal or the wrath of King Saul, but declaring her confident belief that the Lord would raise David to be ruler over Israel. On this ground she entreated him not to burden his conscience or sully his name with a hasty deed of blood. What a power of figurative expression those Eastern believers had; and not least those devout women whose spirits were stirred by urgent occasions to ardent utterance —Deborah in her triumph, Hannah in her song, Abigail in her appeal!

I. THE FIGURE OF SAFETY. A soul bound up in the bundle of life with Jehovah. What could a Nabal's churlishness, or even a Saul's pursuit, avail against a man whose life God guarded by night and day? If we use Abigail's phrase we extend its meaning. The question with her was of David's preservation to fill the throne of Israel; but it is not for us under the New Testament to set our hearts on earthly rank. Our treasure is in heaven. Our inheritance is reserved for us till our Lord's return. Our days are few and uncertain. But we have an eternal life, freely given to us in Christ Jesus; and the bundle of life means for us the unity of all the living ones in Christ, the totality of the life which "is hid with Christ in God." They who are bound up therein have been taken out of the bundles of sin and death, extricated from what is evil and therefore doomed to destruction, and have been by the power of the Holy Ghost joined to Christ and the Church. Happy day that sees this done! Strong security that follows! Who is he that can harm us if we are Christ's, bound up in the bundle of life with God our Saviour?

II. THE FIGURE OF REJECTION. Abigail made no further reference to Nabal. He was her husband, and in no case could he be formidable to David. All she asked was that the son of Jesse would magnanimously overlook his churlishness. But the whole country rang with reports of the angry pursuit of David by the king, and Abigail predicted that his enemies would have discomfiture and rejection from the Lord his God. With rare felicity of allusion she spoke of their souls as flung away, as a stone is cast "out of the middle of a sling." The very mention of the weapon with which David had gained his first great success must have stirred his faith and courage. The figure, as the history shows, was remarkably appropriate to the career of David's chief enemy, Saul. "As he that bindeth a stone in a sling, so is he that giveth honour to a fool" (Prov. xxvi. 8). Now honour had been given to Saul. He was anointed and exalted to the throne, and yet was at heart unwise and disobedient. So was the stone laid in the pan of a sling. After a while we see the stone whirled round in the sling, *i. e.* we see Saul troubled and tossed—wayward, disturbed, passionate, insanely jealous. The end was now drawing near, and the stone was about to be cast out of the sling in despair and death on Mount Gilboa.

On vers. 32, 33 Dr. South has left us a sermon entitled, 'Prevention of sin an invaluable blessing.' In the "application" of it the preacher shows that a much higher satisfaction is to be found from a conquered than from a conquering passion. "Revenge is certainly the most luxurious morsel that the devil can put into a sinner's mouth. But do we think that David could have found half the pleasure in the execution of his revenge that he expresses here upon the disappointment of it? Possibly it might have pleased him in the present heat and hurry of his rage, but must have displeased him infinitely more in the cool, sedate reflections of his mind." Another point which South enforces is that the temper with which we receive providential prevention of sin is a criterion of the gracious or ungracious condition of our hearts. "Whosoever has anything of David's piety will be perpetually plying the throne of grace with such like acknowledgments as—Blessed be that Providence which delivered me from such a lewd company or such a vicious acquaintance! And blessed be that God who cast stops and hindrances in my way when I was attempting the commission of such and such a sin; who took me out of such a course of life, such a place, or such an employment, which was a continual snare and temptation to me! And blessed be such a preacher and such a friend whom God made use of to speak a word in season to my wicked heart, and so turned me out of the paths of death and destruction, and saved me in spite of the world, the devil, and myself!"—F.

EXPOSITION.

DAVID A SECOND TIME SPARES SAUL'S LIFE (CH. XXVI.).

CHAPTER XXVI.

SAUL, ON INFORMATION FROM THE ZIPHITES, AGAIN SEEKS TO DESTROY DAVID (vers. 1—3). Ver. 1.—**The Ziphites came unto Saul.** There are so many points of similarity between this narrative and that contained in ch. xxiii. 19—24; xxiv. 1—22, that it has been argued that in these two accounts we have substantially the same fact, only modified by two different popular traditions, and not recorded until a late subsequent period, at which the narrator, unable to decide which was the true form of the story, determined upon giving both. The main points of similarity are—(1) The treachery of the Ziphites (ch. xxvi. 1; xxiii. 19). (2) David's position in the hill Hachilah (ch. xxvi. 1, 3; xxiii. 19). (3) Saul's march with 3000 men (ch. xxvi. 2; xxiv. 2). (4) The speech of David's men (ch. xxiv. 4; xxvi. 8). (5) David's refusal to lay hands on the anointed of Jehovah (ch. xxiv. 6; xxvi. 9, 11). (6) Saul's recognition of David's voice (ch. xxiv. 16; xxvi. 17). (7) David's comparison of himself to a flea (ch. xxiv. 14; xxvi. 20). Besides these there are several remarkable verbal coincidences; but some other matters which have been enumerated are either such as must have happened, supposing the two events to have occurred, or are even points of difference. Of these there are many. Thus the first occasion on which David spared Saul's life was in a cave at En-gedi; the latter was in Saul's entrenched camp. In this second narrative David's return to Maon was the natural result of his marriage with Abigail, and when the Ziphites report his presence there to Saul, which they were sure to do for fear of David's vengeance for their former betrayal of him, he awaits Saul's attack, whereas before he fled in haste, and was saved for the moment by the wonderful ravine which Conder has so unmistakably verified (see on ch. xxiii. 26), and finally by an invasion of the Philistines. Mr. Conder's visit to the ground, and the way in which the difficulties in the previous narrative are cleared up by what he saw, sets the historical credibility of that account above all reasonable doubt. Had there been a mountain between David and his pursuers, he would have been safe enough; but as it was he was in full sight of his enemies, and the ravine alone enabled him to escape from Saul's vengeance. The number of Saul's army, 3000, was the number of the chosen men whom he always had in attendance upon him (ch. xiii. 2); and it is Saul who encamps on the hill Hachilah, while David, instead of being all but caught as before, had scouts to watch Saul's movements, and was himself safe in the wilderness on the south. On the previous occasion Saul had withdrawn from his men, but here he lies in his camp surrounded by them, when David, accompanied only by Abishai, undertakes this bold enterprise, which was entirely in accordance with his growing sense of security. The argument, moreover, that Saul must have been a "moral monster" thus to seek David's life after his generous conduct towards him keeps out of view the fact that Saul was scarcely accountable for his actions. We have seen that he was subject to fits of madness, and that the form which it took was that of deadly hatred against David. Even this was but a form of the ruling passion which underlies all Saul's actions, namely, an extreme jealousy of everything that in the slightest degree seemed to trench upon his royal prerogative and supremacy. To what an extreme length his ferocity was capable of proceeding in punishing what he regarded as an overt act of resistance to his authority we have seen in the account of the massacre of the priests at Nob with their wives and children (ch. xxii. 18, 19). No worse act is recorded of any man in history, and we may hope that Saul would not have committed such a crime had not his mental faculties been disturbed. Nor was Saul alone in his estimate of what was due to him as Jehovah's Messiah; David had equally high views of Saul's rights and position, and regarded them as fenced in by religious sanctions. But in Saul's case the passion had grown till it had become a monomania, and as he brooded over his relations to David, and thought of him as one that was to usurp his crown, and was already a rebel and an outlaw, the sure result was the return of his hatred against David, and when news was brought him that his enemy was so near, he gladly welcomed another opportunity of getting him into his power. **On the hill of Hachilah.** See ch. xxiii. 19. It is there said to be "on the right hand," but here "over against," *i. e.* facing the desert which lies on the north-eastern coast of the Dead Sea.

Vers. 2—4.—**Three thousand chosen men.** Not chosen for this expedition, but the force which Saul always kept under arms (ch. xiii. 2). **By the way.** The high road which led down to Arad. **David abode in the wilderness.** Hebrew, "abides." Instead of fleeing in haste as before, he remains apparently on

the higher ground, as he speaks in ver. 6 of *going down* to Saul's camp. **And he saw.** *I. e.* learned, was told. It was only when his scouts brought him their report that he knew that Saul was come **in very deed**, or "for a certainty" (see ch. xxiii. 23).

Ver. 5. — **David arose.** It seems as if David could scarcely believe that Saul would thus a second time pursue him; but when the scouts informed him that it was really so, he went in person to reconnoitre Saul's camp. From the opposite hill he was able to see that **he lay in the trench**, *i. e.* the barricade formed by the wagons. At night Saul's place would be in the centre, with Abner near him, while the rest would lie sleeping around, but all of them within the rampart. When David reconnoitred them they would probably be arranging their wagons to form this barricade.

Ver. 6.—**Ahimelech the Hittite.** Though a portion of this once powerful people (Gen. xv. 20; Judges i. 26) was reduced to the position of bondmen (1 Kings ix. 20), yet others had retained their independence, and their kings even are spoken of (*ibid.* x. 29; 2 Kings vii. 6). As Ahimelech is mentioned before Abishai, he must have held an honourable place with David, as did subsequently another Hittite, Uriah (2 Sam. xi. 3). **Abishai the son of Zeruiah.** Zeruiah is described in 1 Chron. ii. 16 as sister to Jesse's sons, but apparently only by adoption, as both she and Abigail seem to have been daughters of the king of Ammon (2 Sam. xvii. 25), whence probably the absence of any direct reference to their father. Abishai, who was probably about David's age, and his two brothers were high in rank among David's heroes (1 Chron. xi. 6, 20, 26), and apparently he was one of the three captains who, when David was in the cave of Adullam, broke through the host of the Philistines to fetch him water from the well of Bethlehem. **Who will go down?** It is evident that David and his men remained upon the mountains, which extend from Maon far to the south-west. Saul's camp, being "by the way," *i. e.* near the road, would be on the lower ground. David having personally examined it, and seen that the watches were ill kept, asks which of the two will accompany him for the more hazardous enterprise of penetrating into it. Ahimelech seems prudently to have declined, but Abishai at once offers his services.

Vers. 7, 8.—The two accordingly go **by night**, or "at night," as soon as night came on, and find Saul asleep **within the trench**, *i. e.* inside the wagon-rampart, as in ver. 5, and **his spear**, the sign of his royal authority, stuck in the ground; not **at his bolster**, but "at his head;" and so in vers. 11, 12, 16. The word literally signifies "the place where the head is." Like David's men in ch. xxiv. 4, Abishai secs in Saul's defenceless condition a proof that it was God's will that he should die, but there is a difference of language in the Hebrew which the A. V. does not represent. There the word rendered *deliver* is really *give;* here it is "hath locked up." **At once.** Hebrew, "once." Abishai would pierce him through with a single stroke so thoroughly that no second blow would be necessary. The purpose of this would be to prevent an outcry.

Vers. 9—11. — David forbids the deed as before (ch. xxiv. 6), because of **Saul's** office. As we there saw, this was an ingrained principle in David's mind on which he constantly acted. Present with equal strength in Saul's mind, it was the cause of moral ruin to the one, and of a noble forbearance and self-control to the other. David therefore leaves him in Jehovah's hand, saying, **As Jehovah liveth, Jehovah shall smite him; or his day**, &c. Literally, "As Jehovah liveth (I will not smite him), but Jehovah shall smite him; either his day shall come and he shall die; or he shall go down into battle and perish." Whenever he falls, it shall be Jehovah's doing, whether he die a natural death, or a violent one in battle. "The smiting of Jehovah" does not imply a sudden death. God smites men with disease (2 Kings xv. 5) and other troubles. What David means is that he will leave the matter entirely to God, but that if Saul's death is to be a violent one, he must fall honourably, not by the hand of a subject, but in battle with Israel's enemies. **Jehovah forbid.** The same phrase as in ch. xxiv. 6. **Cruse of water.** *I. e.* water-bottle, as in 1 Kings xix. 6.

Ver. 12.—**And no man saw it**, &c. The Hebrew text describes the occurrence in a much more lively manner: "And none saw, and none knew, and none awaked." **A deep sleep from Jehovah**, &c. So surprising a fact as that two men could penetrate into the very centre of a considerable army, and remove the king's sceptre and water-bottle from his side, could only be accounted for by the interference of Providence in their behalf.

Vers. 13—16.—**The top of a hill.** Hebrew, "the top of the hill," the particular mountain from which David had reconnoitred Saul's camp (ver. 5). **A great space being between them.** At En-gedi Saul was alone, and had placed himself in David's power; he therefore had followed him closely. Here Saul had his army round him, and David had entered his camp by stealth. It is not, therefore, till he had placed an ample interval between them that he calls to **Abner**, and asks in derision, **Art thou not a man?** The irony is enfeebled by the insertion of

the word *valiant* (comp. ch. iv. 9). No special valour was needed; any one worthy of the name of man ought to have guarded his master better. **Who is like to thee**—Hebrew, "who is as thou"—**in Israel?** Among all Saul's subjects there was no one so powerful and highly placed as the commander-in-chief, and he ought to have shown himself worthy of his pre-eminence. Justly, therefore, for neglecting his duty and exposing the king to danger, he and his people were **worthy to die.** Hebrew, "sons of death" (see on ch. xx. 31). Finally David bids him search for the king's spear and water-bottle, that he may understand how completely Saul had been in his power. It has been suggested that Abner was probably a personal enemy of David, with whom he could never have held the high position which he occupied with his near relative Saul. Possibly instead of dissuading Saul from persecuting David, he stirred up his ill feelings. Still absolutely there is nothing in this banter which was not justified by Abner's official position.

Vers. 17—19.—**Is this thy voice?** So ch. xxiv. 16. In the darkness the only way of recognising David was by his voice. **If Jehovah have stirred thee up,** &c. This is one of the many passages indicative of the intensity with which the Israelites had grasped the idea of the omnipresence of the Deity, and of his being the one power by whose energy all things exist and all acts are done (see on ch. ii. 2). Alike evil and good come from God, for he alone is the source of all; but it does not therefore follow that everything which he makes possible, or to which his providence seems to lead, is therefore right for man to do (ch. xxiv. 4, 6). On the contrary, all leadings of providence are to be judged by God's immutable law, and the conduct of a Shimei may be absolutely wrong and unjustifiable, even though "Jehovah had bidden him do it" (2 Sam. xvi. 11). If, indeed, an external command come by the hand of a properly accredited person, it may take the same high position as the published law of God, and so over-ride the conscience; but Shimei's bidding came through the working of his own passions, and was no more binding than the moving of David's mind by Jehovah to number Israel (2 Sam. xxiv. 1). David, then, here sets forth the two only possible cases: first, Saul may be stirred up by Jehovah to persecute David, *i. e.* the temptation may come by the working of his own mind under those strong impulses which to the Israelite had in them always something Divine. But this was an impulse to break God's law, and was therefore to be resisted; and just as in modern phrase we should bid a person when strongly moved to some act to carry it to God's throne in prayer, so David urges Saul to seek for the quieting of his emotions in religion. Under holy influences these fierce passions would pass away, and Jehovah would **accept an offering.** Hebrew, "would smell it," because the offering, *minchah*, consisting of flour and frankincense, was burnt for a sweet odour before God. But, secondly, Saul might be stirred up by the calumnies of wicked men, in which case David prays that they may be **cursed before Jehovah;** because by forcing him to leave the covenant land of Israel they virtually say to him, **Go, serve other gods.** To a mind so intensely religious as David's, not only was the private devotion of the heart a necessity, but also the taking part in the public worship of the Deity (Ps. xlii. 2; lxiii. 2; lxxxiv. 2); and, therefore, to deprive him of this privilege and expel him from **the inheritance of Jehovah,** *i. e.* the earthly limits of Jehovah's Church, was to force him, as far as his enemies could do so, to be a heathen and a worshipper of strange gods.

Ver. 20.—**Let not my blood fall to the earth before the face of Jehovah.** Hebrew, "far from the presence of Jehovah." The point of David's appeal is not that his life may be spared, but that he may not thus be driven far away from the land where Jehovah manifests himself; nor does he seem so much to contemplate Saul's putting him to death as the probability that sooner or later the life of an exile will be cut short by one or other of the many dangers by which he is surrounded. **A flea.** Hebrew, "a single flea," as in ch. xxiv. 14. **A partridge.** Many emendations of the text have been proposed on the supposition that partridges are only to be found in plains. But Mr. Conder tells us that partridges are among the few living creatures which still tenant these wilds; and, speaking of the precipitous cliffs which overhang the Dead Sea, he says, Here, among "the rocks of the wild goats, the herds of ibex may be seen bounding, and the partridge is still chased on the mountains, as David was followed by the stealthy hunter Saul" ('Tent Work,' ii. 90: see also ch. xxiii. 19).

Ver. 21.—**I have sinned.** Saul's answer here is very different from that in ch. xxiv. 17—21, where the main idea was wonder that David should with such magnanimity spare the life of an enemy so manifestly delivered into his hand. Here a sense of vexation seems uppermost, and of annoyance, not merely because his purpose was frustrated, but because his own military arrangements had been so unsoldierlike. **I have played the fool.** His first enterprise had ended in placing his life in David's power, and it was folly indeed a second time to repeat the attempt. But though the words of Saul

convey the idea rather of vexation with himself than of sorrow for his maliciousness, yet in one point there is a sign of better things. He bids David return, evidently with reference to the grief expressed with such genuine feeling by David at being driven away from Jehovah's land. It was of course impossible, as Saul had given David's wife to another, and David had himself married two other women, but at least it expressed a right and kindly feeling.

Vers. 22—24.—**Behold the king's spear.** Rather, "Behold the spear, O king." The other is an unnecessary correction of the Kri. Having restored to Saul this ensign of his authority, David prays that **Jehovah** may **render to every man his righteousness,** *i. e.* may requite David for his upright conduct towards Saul, and by implication punish Saul himself for his unjust conduct. And also **his faithfulness,** his fidelity, and steady allegiance. This refers exclusively to David, who gives as proof of his faithfulness to his king that he had spared his life when it was delivered into his power. In return for which act God, he affirms, will protect his life. Ver. 24 would be better translated, "And behold, as thy life was great (in value) in my sight this day, so shall my life be great (in value) in the sight of **Jehovah,** and he shall deliver me out of every **strait,**" every narrowness and difficulty into which Saul's persecution might drive him.

Ver. 25.—**Thou shalt both do,** &c. Better, "Thou shalt both do mightily, and **thou** shalt surely prevail." The words are very general as compared with those in ch. xxiv. 20, 21, where Saul expressed his conviction that David would be king, and intrusted his family to his care. The poverty of sentiment here, and the mere vexation expressed in ver. 21, justify Keil's remark that Saul's character had deteriorated in the interval, and that he was more hardened now than on the previous occasion. And so they parted—David still leading the life of a fugitive, for Saul's *return* in ver. 21 was the most evanescent of good purposes, while the king went back **to his place,** his home at Gibeah.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—12.—*The moral use of Biblical difficulties.* The facts are—1. At the request of the Ziphites, Saul goes out in pursuit of David, who by spies ascertains his true position. 2. David, observing Saul's camp, goes to it by night with Abishai while all are asleep. 3. Abishai urges David to seize the opportunity to slay Saul, but is rebuked by the declaration that if Saul dies it shall be in such way as God may ordain, and not by the self-chosen hand of David. 4. David carries off Saul's spear and cruse of water. Expositors raise the question as to whether this narrative is identical in point of time and main circumstance with that of ch. xxiii. 19—26; xxiv. 1—15. That question is dealt with elsewhere. Our business is with the fact of the difficulty and with the teaching it involves. We may therefore consider—

I. THE MORAL USE OF BIBLICAL DIFFICULTIES. The difficulty raised in reference to this section is only one of a class on which for ages much ingenuity and learning have been spent, and which have been the occasion of no little trouble and anxiety to certain minds in consequence of their supposed bearing on the reality of revelation and the authority of Scripture. The enemies of Christianity have not been slow to take advantage of any apparent discrepancies or confused statements. The following considerations may be of service from a practical point of view:—1. These various difficulties *teach us the vanity of our wisdom* in relation to the unfolding of the purposes of God. God has certainly revealed his will to mankind, and wrought out a merciful purpose in Christ. None but those who reject plainest evidence can doubt that he has been pleased to give this revelation concerning his merciful purpose in the Bible as we have it. The presence of variations in narrative, as here and in Gen. i. and ii., and in the Gospels, is the fact which causes great perplexity. Now had *we* the construction of a vehicle of revelation intended for man, our wisdom would have suggested its freedom from all such difficulties to its reception. Is not this the real feeling of many? Man would have left no room for hesitation. All should have been so clear that no adverse criticism should be possible. Facts, however, are against this wisdom. It is shown to be inadequate to deal with the vast problems of universal life. God's ways are not our ways. 2. These difficulties *enable us to believe in the honesty of the writers of the sacred history.* As soon as our wisdom is assessed we discern in the variations and free representations of the same or similar events clear evidence that the book could not have been the work of

cunning men intent on making out a consistent theory of their own. For such men would have made each document to square in detail with the one preceding, and compilers intent on furthering a theory handed down by tradition would have been careful to exclude all separate documents not manifestly coherent with others. 3. *We can use the Bible*, with these variations in it, *with deeper interest because of the intensely human character of its narratives.* Had all been so sifted and reduced to such mathematical precision and sameness of statement as to eliminate any possible appearance of discrepancy, we should have felt the *non*-human character of the historic record. As it is, we see human life in its pages, and trace human idiosyncracies in its varieties of representation, and as "one touch of nature makes the whole world kin," so this human element in the Bible lays hold of men, and excites in them a greater interest in its narratives. 4. The careful reader also, by means of these variations, *sees in stronger light the one spiritual purpose running through the whole.* The great revelation of God in Christ is more conspicuous in its oneness and continuity by reason of the very diversities and sometimes irreconcilable differences of the narrative. Our appreciation of the spiritual is the higher because we see that not one great truth is in the slightest degree affected by any verbal, chronological, or historical difficulties. Admit them all, if need be, and the real saving truth is as clear as the sun at noonday. 5. The *difficulties in question are a means of wholesome discipline.* All historic studies furnish scope for the exercise of caution, discrimination, patience, reticence, and suspended judgment because of the necessary incompleteness of all historic records. This is especially true of the Bible, the more so as we do not always know the particular reason of the selection or omission of items, while we do know that we have not a thousandth part of the actual events associated with the unfolding in the long line of human history of the great purpose of God in Christ. The light thrown on obscure passages by advancing discoveries is an additional reason for the exercise of patience and cautious reserve. God is educating us by the intricate lessons, written often with an appearance of confusion, in the rocks that form the crust of the globe; and likewise in the peculiar manner in which he has been pleased to allow his revelation to man to be incorporated by human hands with narratives of events.

II. THE SPECIAL TRUTH EMBODIED IN THE FACTS WHICH CONSTITUTE THE DIFFICULTY OF THIS SECTION. The object of the narrative is evidently to point out that David was under a strong temptation to forestall the order of Providence by forcing events with his own hand, and that he, with true spiritual heroism, resisted the suggestions of expediency. As we have dwelt on this topic in treating of ch. xxiv. 1—8, and xxv. 36—44, it may suffice here to note how, in this triple reference to the same form of trial, the historian was impressed with the persistence of this peculiar temptation during this period of David's life. Doubtless other unrecorded instances of the same, in one form or another, occurred during the period of his persecution, but these three representations are enough to indicate the fact. The persistence of the temptation to desire the disposal of events to be in our own hands, by wishing something to be done which God does not do, or to take the disposal into our hands by actually doing what is not warranted by religious principle, but only by the rules of a contracted expediency, is real in the lives of many of God's servants. Our Saviour himself was tempted to it again and again. There is an hypothesis that even Judas was induced to betray Christ to force him to assert his power, and so hasten the establishment of his kingdom. The trials of the persecuted Church suggested the expediency of rising in armed endeavour to defend and extend their principles. The slow progress of Christianity suggests to some the adoption of methods other than apostolic. The safe rule for us is that of David—God carries on his cause on earth according to laws which he himself has ordained, and no improvement can be made on them, even though their working appears to us to be too slow and painful. Saul was anointed by God's command; David was chosen to succeed Saul. He who appointed Saul had power to end his life; till he did this of his own will, and in his own way, David must wait as the coming king. So the laws of the human mind, of the social forces at work in the world, and of the spiritual agencies that operate on the soul of man are of God; the cause of Christ among men is to be established by action in harmony with these; we are to resist any temptation to seek to set them

aside by the introduction of agencies not spiritual, and are not to wish that other agencies operating according to other laws were in existence. The principle of living and acting according to *law* will also apply to private life and enterprise.

General lessons:—1. A reverent spirit will prove a good solvent of many Biblical difficulties, and will extract many lessons from them. 2. Where there is not concern for spiritual life the verbal and historical difficulties of the Bible will not assume great importance. 3. It is a matter of gratitude that the way of life is clear to the most unlettered of men (Isa. xxxv. 8). 4. While we are waiting and doing our best as God's servants, his providence is quietly at work to realise the purpose of our life. 5. In dealing with men who urge expediency, it is safe to appeal to God's word and his unceasing government of men. 6. No man ever regretted fidelity to principle; many have mourned over the bitter fruits of expediency.

Vers. 13—25.—*Afflictions and righteousness.* The facts are—1. David seeks to arouse the attention of Saul by an appeal to Abner, blended with reproof of his negligence. 2. Saul, on recognising David's voice, is answered by him in terms expressive of loyal homage. 3. David appeals to Saul with respect to his conduct, pointing out its harshness and unreasonableness. 4. Saul, valuing his own life just spared, admits the force of the plea, and promises to desist from persecution. 5. David reasserts his integrity, and expresses the hope that God would accept his motives and actions. 6. Saul acknowledges the moral superiority of David, and professes to foresee his success in life. As the persistence of trial is set forth by the various items of the history, so the integrity of David is also variously illustrated. Afflictions and righteousness are most conspicuous features of his experience during the period prior to his accession to power; beautifully suggestive to us of the conditions of our attaining to fitness for the higher service of Christ (Acts xiv. 22). The general teaching of the section may be arranged under the following statements:—

I. That IT IS CONSISTENT WITH SUBMISSION TO THE WILL OF GOD TO ENDEAVOUR TO REMOVE THE HUMAN CAUSES OF TROUBLE. The life and writings of David prove his trust in God and acquiescence in his appointments; at the same time he spared no pains to get rid of the troubles of his life by removing the causes of them as existing in the mind of Saul. In this fresh appeal he declares to Saul that if God be the mover of his spirit to do these things (ver. 19), he has no more to say, only let it be proved. His appeal to Abner was an additional effort to remove the trouble, since not Saul only, but the general and army would now see in his abstinence from violence the purity of his motives. The same course is proper for all in tribulation. Trials are permitted, and are blessed in their effects when rightly received (Heb. xii. 6—11); but we have to do with preventible causes, and may seek to remove them. Even the failure of effort to remove causes of trouble which, being human, ought not to operate, in becoming itself a trial is the more blessed in its effects because of our having done our duty. God's secret purposes and methods are not the rules of our action, and any fruitless action of ours performed in reverent submission to his unsearchable will is itself a means of grace, because of his turning it to spiritual profit.

II. That THERE IS A DOUBLE BASIS OF APPEAL TO MEN BENT ON A WRONG COURSE which should regulate our dealings with them. David addresses himself to Saul's sense of right and to his reasoning powers. "What have I done?" The answer was clear in Saul's conscience. "Now, therefore, I pray thee, let my lord the king *hear the words* of his servant." The reasoning powers of Saul gave heed and were convinced by the subsequent argument. In our private controversies, in our efforts to win men over to Christ, and in our treatment of the young, we are on safe ground when we address the moral and rational nature. A wise appeal to the two cannot be wholly lost. Man is compelled by force of his nature to recognise right when placed before the eye of conscience, and the laws of thought insure the acquiescence of reason when the argument is intrinsically as well as formally sound. It is this necessary recognition of truth and right which forms the philosophical ground for faith in the final triumph of Christianity, and wise teachers as well as private Christians may labour on in confidence as long as they present the truth of God in an earnest and prayerful spirit.

III. That THE DEFECTIVE MORAL CONDITION OF WEAK MINDS LAYS THEM OPEN TO THE PERNICIOUS CONTROL OF BASE MEN OF STRONGER MIND. David hit the mark when he said, "If they be the children of men." The strong-willed men at the court of Saul, and referred to in the Psalms, had obtained influence over him, and by lies and slanders had embittered his spirit against David. But it was the decayed piety and persistently impenitent spirit in Saul which exposed him to this danger; for even a weaker intellect will resist the stronger in matters of moral conduct when the heart is sound in its spiritual tendencies. A man's moral condition has more to do with his superiority to the devices and urgencies of the strong and crafty than his knowledge or force of intellect. Moral affinities are powerful for good or evil, and moral repulsions are life's safeguards for the good. Hence the supreme importance of a new heart and a right spirit. Hence, also, the profound wisdom of the New Testament teaching and the mercy of the provision for our renewal. The bearing of this on our education of youth, on personal resistance of temptation, and on the means for counteracting the influence of powerful but unholy men, is obvious.

IV. That a RECOGNITION OF RIGHT AND WRONG IN CONDUCT MAY BE PERFECTLY SINCERE, BUT DESTITUTE OF GOVERNING POWER OVER THE LIFE. Under the appeal to conscience and reason Saul admitted his wrong and folly, and David's right and wisdom. Being just then keenly alive to the value of deliverance from death, he was prompted to let right and reason exercise a legitimate sway over his thoughts, and thus was honest in his declaration. Yet the recognition was, so to speak, intellectual, and not moral. It was admission of truth, not response to its power over the life. Men are not governed in conduct by thoughts, or propositions, or formal confessions of right and propriety, but by positive tendencies of their moral nature. And as Saul's tendencies were not altered by the interview with David, his recognition of right failed to become a power over his conduct in days hence. We often see how men delude themselves by regarding a recognition of right as tantamount to a healthy moral condition for the time being. Here again we come upon the fundamental truth that a radical change of nature is the only hope of salvation and safeguard of daily life.

V. That THE PAIN OF SEPARATION FROM THE PRIVILEGES OF WORSHIP IS ONE OF THE SEVEREST TRIALS OF GODLY MEN. Of hunger and thirst David said nothing, nor of loss of social position; but he dwelt with emphatic language on the grievous wrong of driving him from "the inheritance of the Lord," virtually saying, "Go, serve other gods." As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so did his soul pant after God (Ps. xli. 1—4). As the patriot feels the anguish of exile, so more keenly does a servant of God feel banishment by man from the fellowship and hallowed joys of the sanctuary. Those in authority should be very careful lest by harsh conduct they drive away into godless regions of thought and association men of noble, reverent spirit. Origen, Luther, and others have shared the bitterness of David; and even our Lord was cast out from the Jewish Church, and was taunted with the suggestion of going to "teach the Gentiles" (John vii. 35). Our love to the house of the Lord and for the communion of saints is a test of the reality of our piety.

VI. That INTEGRITY OF CONDUCT IS A CONDITION OF RECEIVING GOD'S BLESSING, AND MAY WITH ALL HUMILITY BE ASSERTED. David was most deeply conscious of being a loyal, loving subject, free from ambition or desire to do other than good to his king. He referred to his sparing Saul in evidence of this, and now, as in the presence of God, affirms that, so far as his conduct toward Saul was concerned, he was quite prepared to abide by the Divine rule of rendering to every man "his righteousness and his faithfulness." So far as his own personal deliverance from tribulation was to be measured to him according to his treatment of Saul, he was quite satisfied that it would be complete. Here is no trusting to personal goodness for pardon and eternal life, no glorying in his own virtues; but a strong assertion of his integrity of conduct in one particular, and a belief that, so far as integrity in this case was a condition of being blessed, he would not come short of the blessing. The Old Testament is one with the New in the conditions of pardon and eternal life, and also in the condition of godly men being prospered in their way. When challenged with reference to a particular deed, it is legitimate to affirm our righteous-

ness with all solemnity, and with a deep sense of our general unworthiness before God.

VII. That MEN WHOSE LIVES ARE CONSCIOUSLY WRONG AND UNSATISFACTORY INWARDLY RECOGNISE THE SUPERIORITY OF THOSE THEY OPPOSE, and discern the signs of coming success. Saul felt David to be the nobler man, and under the transitory influence of truth he openly avowed what was always felt (ver. 25). Much of the resentment cherished against him had arisen from the conviction, so unwelcome to the envious, of his being endowed with qualities that would justify the anointing by Samuel. The silent homage to goodness is universal. Instances have occurred in biographies testifying that while in former antagonism to Christian truth and Christian men the writer was sensible of the beauty and power of Christian character, and saw in it elements of future happiness not in his own. The tone of the opposition to Christ and his apostles reveals the same fact. The character built up by a true piety is a creation of God, and is among his noblest works, as it is also most permanent. The more we can present such a character before men, the more shall we multiply the evidences of Christianity, and reveal to mankind in what lies the germ of permanent success.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—12. (THE HILL OF HACHILAH.)—*The man worthy of the sceptre.* "And David took the spear and the cruse of water from Saul's bolster" (ver. 12). 1. David's *innocence* with respect to any evil design against Saul was fully vindicated at their previous meeting. Saul himself was melted to tears, confessed, "Thou art more righteous than I," &c., prayed that the Lord might reward his preserver, and declared, "I know well that thou shalt surely be king" (ch. xxiv. 17—20); but his insincerity, instability, and perversity were such that as soon as he was informed by the treacherous Ziphites that David was again in the hill of Hachilah (ch. xxiii. 19), he started in pursuit with his 3000 men (ch. xiii. 2). His sin was now greater than before because of its opposition to his clearer conviction of the integrity of David and the purpose of God, and there are indications in this interview of the increased obduracy of his heart. 2. The aim of David is not so much to afford a further vindication of himself as to *stay the persecution* of Saul, and induce him to act in accordance with his former confession (ver. 18). For this purpose he proves to him that although he might have the power to deprive him of his authority and life, he has no wish to do so, and is his most faithful guardian (ver. 16); appeals to his best feelings, and warns him that he is fighting against God and exposing himself to his righteous judgment. He takes away his spear-sceptre (an emblem of royal authority—Gen. xlix. 10; Num. xxiv. 17; Ps. xlv. 6) and his cruse of water (a necessary sustenance of life—ch. xxv. 11), but only to restore them into his hand (ver. 22). 3. In acting thus David shows his incomparable *superiority* to Saul, and that he alone is worthy to reign over Israel, even as he has been ordained to succeed to that exalted dignity. "Behold now, once more, our David, as he goes away with Saul's spear, the emblem of his sovereign power. At that moment he presents a symbolically significant appearance. Unconsciously he prophesied of his own future, while he stands before us as the projected shadow of that form in which we must one day behold him. In the counsel of the invisible Watcher it was indeed irrevocably concluded that the Bethlehemite should inherit Saul's sceptre, and here we see before us a dim pre-intimation of that fact" (Krummacher). As the man most worthy to rule, and furnishing in some respects a pattern to others, he was distinguished (see ch. xiii. 14) by—

I. PRE-EMINENT ABILITY (vers. 4—7). In the enterprise which he undertook during the night (either with the express intention of doing what he did, or from some internal impulse) he displayed those qualities for which Saul and his ablest general, Abner, were noted, and in a higher degree than they, viz.—1. *Sagacity,* skill (Ps. lxxviii. 72), and practical wisdom; perceiving what was defective in the condition of his adversaries and how to take advantage of it. Tact, although by no means one of the highest mental endowments, is an indispensable qualification in a successful ruler. 2. *Vigilance.* His experiences in the desert had taught him to be

ever on the alert, and he watched while others slept (vers. 4, 16). 3. *Courage.* "Who will go down with me to Saul to the camp?" (ver. 6). Even the brave Hittite dared not accept the challenge, and only Abishai (afterwards David's preserver—2 Sam. xxi. 17) would accompany him. They went fearlessly (like Jonathan and his armour-bearer) right into the midst of danger. 4. *Energy* and activity, by which alone he could achieve success. Mental and physical strength is of God, should be ascribed to him and employed for him.

> "For by thee I can scatter a troop,
> And by my God do I break down walls;
> Who maketh my feet like hinds' feet,
> And setteth me on my high places;
> Who traineth my hands for war,
> So that mine arms can bend a bow of brass"
> (Perowne, Ps. xviii. 29, 33, 34).

II. LOWLY REVERENCE, submission, and obedience. "The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the Lord's anointed" (ver. 11; ch. xxiv. 6). There was in David (as there should be in others)—1. An unbounded reverence for *God* as the source of power, justice, order, and all excellence. This was the principle from which his conduct toward Saul proceeded. 2. Profound respect for every *authority* ordained by God. Saul had been anointed king, and was still openly reigning by Divine permission (his rejection having been only privately declared to him); his person was therefore regarded by David as sacred. "Liable as the Israelite kings were to interference on the part of priest and prophet, they were, by the same Divine power, shielded from the unholy hands of the profane vulgar; and it was at once impiety and rebellion to do injury to the Lord's anointed" (Kitto, 'Cyc. of Bib. Lit.'). "He gives two reasons why he would not destroy Saul, nor permit another to do it:—(1) It would be a sinful affront to God's ordinance. (2) It would be a sinful anticipation of God's providence" (M. Henry). 3. Due subordination of the *claims* of every such authority to the claims of God; which both rulers and subjects, who have proper reverence for him, must observe. 4. Entire subjection of *personal impulses*, purposes, and aims to the will of God, in the assurance that he will "render to every man his righteousness and his faithfulness" (ver. 23). "Commit thy way unto the Lord," &c. (Ps. xxxvii. 5—9).

III. NOBLE GENEROSITY. "Destroy him not," &c. (vers. 8—11; Ps. lvii., inscription, Altaschith = Destroy not; see Hengstenberg). The opportunity of slaying his enemy was again placed in his hands, and in sparing him a second time David showed still greater forbearance than before, because of—1. The renewed persecution to which he was subjected, and the increased hopelessness of turning Saul from his purpose. "I say not unto thee, Until seven times," &c. (Matt. xviii. 22—35). 2. The peculiar circumstances of the case. He was there *alone* with Abishai in the night, and his companion entreated that he might be permitted to give but one stroke (ver. 8). None else would witness the deed. Moral restraint alone prevented his permission of it. 3. His not entertaining the temptation for a moment; even the thought of it could find no place in his breast. Recent experience had evidently strengthened his spirit (ch. xxv. 32). 4. His fixed determination to leave the matter entirely with God (ver. 10). "It is evident that David's faith in God was one of the great roots out of which all these fruits of forbearance and compassion grew. He was confident that God would in his own way and in his own time fulfil the promises which had been made, and, therefore, instead of taking the matter into his own hands, he could rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him" (C. Vince). And he alone who will exercise power in mercy as well as in justice is worthy to have it intrusted to him.

IV. DIVINE APPROVAL. "A deep sleep from the Lord was fallen upon them" (ver. 12), indicative of the fact that the Lord "favoured David's enterprise." He was providentially preserved from harm, and this, along with many other circumstances (all concurring with his eminent personal qualifications), manifested it to be the will of God that he should rule over his people. The sceptre which he had no desire to wrest from the hand of Saul would be given to him by the hand of God, and be "a

sceptre of uprightness." The highest realisation of these principles appears in One greater than David, and alone "worthy to receive" the sceptre of universal dominion (ch. ii. 10; 2 Sam. xxiii. 2; Phil. ii. 9; Heb. i. 8; Rev. v. 5, 12).—D.

Vers. 13—16. (THE HILL OF HACHILAH.)—*Manliness.* "Art not thou a man?" (ver. 15). A man should prove worthy of himself; his nature, power, dignity, and responsibility. Every man should do so (not only every one who, like Abner, occupies an exceptional position), for every man (fallen though he be) is great. "Let us not disparage that nature which is common to all men; for no thought can measure its grandeur. It is the image of God, the image of his infinity; for no limits can be set to its unfolding. He who possesses the Divine powers of the soul is a great being, be his place what it may. You may clothe him with rags, may immure him in a dungeon, may chain him to slavish tasks; but he is still great. Man is a greater name than president or king" (Channing, 'Self-culture').

> "A beam ethereal, sullied and absorpt;
> Though sullied and dishonoured, still Divine!" (Young).

In order that he may act according to his true nature, and not unworthily of it—1. *The body must be the servant of the soul.* It was designed, with its various passions, to obey, and not to rule; and to keep it "in subjection" (1 Cor. ix. 27) requires watchfulness, self-control, and manly strength.

> "Call to mind from whence ye sprang;
> Ye were not form'd to live the life of brutes,
> But virtue to pursue and knowledge high" (Dante, 'Inferno').

2. *The mind must be faithful to the truth;* esteeming it as more precious than gold, searching for it as for hid treasure, receiving it on proper evidence, cleaving to it when discovered, and confessing it without fear. Here is room for the exercise of the highest *virtue* or martial courage. "In understanding be men" (1 Cor. xiv. 20). 3. *The heart must be set on the supreme good;* resisting and overcoming the temptation to set its affections on wealth, pleasure, fame, that "satisfy not" (Ps. iv. 6).

> "Let thy heels spurn the earth, and thy raised ken
> Fix on the lure which heaven's eternal King
> Whirls in the rolling spheres.
> O ye misguided souls!
> Infatuate, who from such a good estrange
> Your hearts, and bend your gaze on vanity,
> Alas for you!" (Dante).

4. *The conscience must be reverenced as the king;* its integrity defended against all foes, its voice obeyed at all risks, and its favour desired above all earthly dignities. "Reverence thyself" (ch. xxii. 22). 5. *The will must be fixed on doing the will of God*—resolutely, firmly, and constantly; in striving against sin, advancing in holiness, and promoting his kingdom. "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong" (1 Cor. xvi. 13).

> "Be as the tower that, firmly set,
> Shakes not its top for any blast that blows."

6. *The character must be conformed to that of "the man Christ Jesus,"* the highest and only perfect pattern of true manhood (John xiii. 15; Ephes. iv. 13; Phil. ii. 5), and the Saviour and Helper of all who endeavour to be like him. 7. *The present life must be a preparation for the future.* Man is made to live for ever, and it is not manly to live only for the passing moment. He who sleeps at his post of duty and neglects to watch and pray is surely "worthy to die" (ver. 16). "Look up to heaven, look down to hell, live for eternity!"—D.

Vers. 13—25. (THE HILL OF HACHILAH.)—*David's last meeting with Saul.* 1. This meeting took place *at night.* The encampment of Saul was over against the desert by the way (ver. 3). The light of the stars, or of the moon, and the flickering

camp-fires, together with the intense silence of the place, would enable the quick eye and ear of David to perceive its position and defenceless condition. And it may have been early morning when, on his return from his adventurous and successful enterprise, the voice of David rang across the ravine which separated him from it. "Answerest thou not, Abner?' 2. The conversation that followed occurred in the presence of the *followers of Saul*, and was doubtless heard by them, on awaking, like Abner, out of the deep sleep that had fallen upon them (ver. 12). At the former interview Saul was alone with David and his men, and, having no reason for concern about the manner in which his royal dignity, of which he was always so jealous, might be regarded by others, his feelings were less restrained and his expressions more explicit. What was now said must have shown them the evil of the course he pursued; it was a public testimony against the wickedness of the men who incited him to it (ver. 19), and could not but convince them of David's integrity and future success (ver. 25). 3. It took place under circumstances which made it *impossible* for Saul to do him harm. David's distrust of him was such that he took care to gain a safe position before speaking. The temptation to get him into his power was always too strong for Saul to resist. He was not morally, but physically, restrained from effecting his purpose (ch. xxv. 32). David could have destroyed Saul, but he would not; Saul would have destroyed David, but he could not; he was under the dominion of a depraved will, even when he expressed his determination to abandon his evil designs, and seemed to himself and others sincerely penitent. In this interview then we see—

I. THE CONSCIOUS INTEGRITY OF AN UPRIGHT HEART. After asking, "Wherefore doth my lord pursue after his servant?" &c., David said, "If the Lord have stirred thee up against me," &c. (vers. 19, 20); and again, "The Lord render to every man his righteousness," &c. (vers. 23, 24). His conscious integrity appears in—1. *Earnestly urging the adoption of proper means to overcome temptation.* "Pray to God that he take the temptation from thee" (Bunsen). "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God," &c. (James i. 13, 14). But God often affords him opportunity to manifest the evil that is in his heart, with a view to his conviction of sin and turning from it; and "if he does not repent, the *forms* in which sin exhibits itself are no longer under his control, but under God's dispensation, who determines them as pleases him, as accords with the plan of his government of the world, for his own honour, and, so long as he is not absolutely rejected, for the good of the sinner" (Hengstenberg). And he has respect to the offering that is presented to him in righteousness (Gen. iv. 7). The meat offering (*minchah*) here meant "was appended to the burnt and peace offerings to show that the object of such offerings was the sanctification of the people by fruitfulness in well-doing, and that without this the end aimed at never could be attained" (Fairbairn). David spoke from his deep experience of temptation, his faithful endeavour after holiness, his exalted estimation of the Divine favour and help, and was as desirous that Saul should stand in a right relation to God as of his own deliverance from persecution (Ps. cxli. 2). "The way in which he addresses Saul is so humble, so gentle, and so reverent that we may sufficiently thence recognise the goodness of his heart." 2. *Solemn invocation of Divine judgment on wicked men who incite to wickedness.* "If it be the children of men," &c. (ver. 19). This is in accordance with the tone which pervades the imprecatory psalms, and should be interpreted in the light of his personal conduct toward Saul, his zeal for the kingdom and righteousness of God, the facts of the Divine treatment of evil men, similar expressions in the New Testament (Matt. xi. 21; xxiii. 13—39; Acts viii. 20; 1 Cor. v. 5; 2 Tim. iv. 4), and the inferior position occupied by saints under the Old Testament dispensation (see commentaries on the Psalms by Tholuck, Perowne, and others). "When David's whole career is intelligently and fairly viewed, it leaves on the mind the impression of a man of as meek and placable a temper as was ever associated with so great strength of will and such strong passions" (Binnie, 'The Psalms'). "David is the Old Testament type of the inviolable majesty of Christ, and therefore his imprecations are prophetic of the final doom of the hardened enemies of Christ and his Church. As such they are simply an expansion of the prayer, 'Thy kingdom come.' For the kingdom of God comes not only by the showing of mercy to the penitent, but also by the executing

of judgment on the impenitent" (Kurtz). 3. *Fervent entreaty of an enemy to abandon his unjust, unpitying, and unworthy designs.* "Now, therefore," &c. (ver. 20). "This speech of David was thoroughly suited to sharpen Saul's conscience and lead him to give up his enmity, if he still had an ear for the voice of truth" (Keil). 4. *Confidently appealing to the perfect justice of God and his merciful interposition on his behalf.* "The Lord render to every man," &c. (vers. 23, 24). This is not the language of boastfulness or self-righteousness, but "the answer of a good conscience toward God." He desired that God would deal with him as he had dealt with others (Ps. vii. 4, 5), and fully vindicate his "righteousness and faithfulness" by delivering him "out of all tribulation." Only one who was consciously upright in heart could speak thus; and similar expressions often occur in the Psalms (Ps. xvii. 1—5). "The Psalmist is not asserting his freedom from sin, but the uprightness and guilelessness of his heart toward God. He is no hypocrite, no dissembler; he is not consciously doing wrong" (Perowne). In addition to the eight psalms previously mentioned as referred by their inscriptions to the time of Saul's persecution, there are two others, viz., Ps. LXIII., 'Longing in the wilderness for the presence of God in the sanctuary' (see inscription; vers. 19, 20):—

> "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee.
> My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh pineth for thee,
> In a dry and weary land where no water is."

Ps. XVIII., 'An idealised representation of the experience of Divine deliverances (see inscription; 2 Sam. xxii.). Other psalms have also been referred by many to the same period as "the fruitful soil of David's psalm poetry," viz., Ps. vi., xi., xii., xiii., xvii., xxii., xxvii., xxxi., xxxv., xl., lvi., lviii., lix., lxiv., lxix., cix., cxx., cxl., cxli.

II. THE UNCONSCIOUS INSINCERITY OF AN EVIL HEART. "And Saul said, I have sinned," &c. (vers. 21, 25). He acknowledged the sin and folly of his past conduct (though not with tears, as before), invited David to return, and promised no more to do him harm, uttered a benediction upon him, and predicted that he would "do great things and prevail" (omitting, however, any allusion to his royal dignity, as on the former occasion)—"at once a vindication of David's conduct in the past, and a forecast of his glory in the future." He doubtless meant at the time what he said, but it is to be observed that—1. *The most corrupt heart is capable of good impressions, emotions, and purposes.* History and observation afford innumerable instances of the fact. 2. *It is apt to be the subject of them under special circumstances* (ch. xxiv. 16—22), and particularly when convinced of the futility of sinful endeavours, and restrained by a power which cannot be effectually resisted. "Behold, thou hast spoken and done evil things as thou couldest" (Jer. iii. 5). So long as the power to do evil things is possessed, it is exercised; but when it is taken away men often seem sincerely penitent and fully determined to do good. But how seldom does the "goodness" exhibited in such circumstances prove really sincere and enduring! 3. *The experience of them is no certain evidence* to a man himself or others of a right state of heart. They are liable to deceive, and can only be depended upon when expressed and confirmed by corresponding and continuous acts. Strong feeling is often temporary and never transformed into settled principle. 4. *The removal of the influences* by which they are produced, and the occurrence of favourable opportunities for the manifestation of the true character, commonly prove its utter *insincerity*. It was thus with Saul. He did not repent in deeds of righteousness, nor "bring forth fruits meet for repentance." On the contrary, he soon afterwards renewed his persecution, and ceased not until David was wholly beyond his power (ch. xxvii. 1). "They return, but not to the most High: they are like a deceitful bow" (Hosea vii. 16). He was under the dominion of an evil disposition and depraved will, and with every broken promise of amendment his moral condition became worse, until he sank into despair. "The only good thing in the world is a good will" (Kant).

> "But ill for him who, bettering not with time,
> Corrupts the strength of heaven-descended Will,
> And ever weaker grows through acted crime,
> Or seeming genial venial fault,
> Recurring and suggesting still!

He seems as one whose footsteps halt,
Toiling in immeasurable sand,
And o'er a weary, sultry land,
Far beneath a blazing vault,
Sown in a wrinkle of the monstrous hill,
The city sparkles like a grain of salt" (Tennyson). D.

Ver. 21. (THE HILL OF HACHILAH.)—*Playing the fool.* "Behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly." At his first wrong step it was said to Saul by Samuel, "Thou hast done foolishly" (ch. xiii. 13); and now (a man of about sixty years of age), looking back upon a long course of disobedience and self-will, and more especially upon his recent persecution of David, he himself said, "I have sinned. . . Behold, I have done foolishly, and have erred exceedingly." "There is no sinner so hardened but that God gives him now and then a ray of illumination to show him all his error." And under its influence many a man, in reviewing the past, has been constrained to make a similar confession. With reference to the case of Saul, a man plays the fool—1. *When he suffers illusive thoughts and sinful passions to find a place within him.* This was the root of Saul's wasted and miserable life. How different would it have been if he had adopted proper means to expel such thoughts and passions from his breast, and prevent their return! "How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?" (Jer. iv. 14). 2. *When he listens to the false representations of wicked men*, insinuating, it may be, suspicions of his best friend, and urging him to regard him as his worst enemy (ch. xxiv. 9). 3. *When he acts in opposition to what he knows to be right.* Saul had done so continually, following the impulses of "an evil heart of unbelief," instead of the dictates of reason and conscience. "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James iv. 17). 4. *When he rests in feelings merely, and does not translate them into deeds* (ch. xxiv. 17). They are "dead without works." Every delay to act in accordance with them weakens their power, renders it less likely that they will ever be acted upon, and prepares the way for the return of the "evil spirit." 5. *When he makes good resolutions and immediately breaks them* (ver. 21), thereby destroying his moral power, and hardening himself in sin. 6. *When he contends against the Divine purposes in the vain hope of succeeding* (ver. 25). Sooner or later he must be crushed. "Who hath hardened himself against him and prospered?" (Job ix. 4). 7. *When he expects to find happiness except in connection with holiness.* The illusion is dispelled, if not before, at the hour of death and the dawn of eternity, and he has to confess his folly when it is too late to repair it.—D.

Ver. 21.—*A fool returns to his folly.* I. THE BIBLE IS FULL OF REDUPLICATION. It teaches by line upon line, precept upon precept, and narrative upon narrative. There are repetitions of the same story or song. There are also separate and independent narratives which go over similar ground, and teach the same lessons, the second confirming the first. Joseph is described as having had duplicate dreams with one and the same meaning. So also Pharaoh. Nebuchadnezzar's dream of empires is followed by Daniel's dream of the same. And there are duplicate parables of Jesus Christ. Then actual events described are followed by other events so closely resembling them that they might almost be taken for the same—*e. g.* Abraham's weakness, Sarah's danger, and Pharaoh's respect for the sanctity of marriage (Gen. xii.) seem to be all repeated (Gen. xx.), with the Abimelech of Gerar substituted for the Pharaoh of Egypt. And then all the incidents are told again of Isaac and Rebekah, and the Abimelech of their time (Gen. xxvi.). We have Moses fetching water from the rock in Horeb, and the same prophet fetching water from a rock at Kadesh Barnea; Jesus Christ anointed by a woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee, and the same Divine Master anointed by a woman in the house of Simon the leper. Again, we have Jesus feeding 5000 men, besides women and children, from a small stock of bread and fish, and then the same Lord feeding 4000, besides women and children, from a similar inadequate supply. The similarity of the story in this chapter to that which we have read in the twenty-fourth chapter of this book need not surprise us, or raise a suspicion that they are independent reports of the same adventure admitted into the pages of the history by a

clumsy compiler. The reduplication is in harmony with Biblical usage; nay, more, it is in harmony with historical truth.

II. HISTORY IS FULL OF REPETITION. In private life the same conditions recur with startling precision; and in public affairs the same emergencies occur again and again, and lead to the same line of action, the same remedies, and even the same blunders. Why should it be thought incredible, or even improbable, that Saul fell back into his former mood of hostility to David? Alas, what is more common than that fools forget admonition, and return to their folly; sinners, after promises of amendment, relapse into their old sins? The amendment goes against secret inclination, whereas the sin indulges some constitutional propensity or passion. So it is that a man who has grown too fond of strong drink, after abstaining from it for a time, goes back to his bottle. A libertine, after a short attempt to live purely, goes back to his intrigues. And in like manner Saul, being passionately jealous, forbore from the pursuit of David only for a season, and then, at the first offer of help from the Ziphites, went back to his cruel pursuit of the son of Jesse. There are cases in which history repeats itself on the favourable side, in a return to goodness; but such is man, that the more frequent experience is of a return to evil courses, obliterating the very traces of a short-lived, superficial repentance.

III. SUPERFICIAL REPENTANCE MAY BE EXPECTED TO END IN RELAPSE. We mean by superficial repentance a mere emotional effect, while the root of sin lies undisturbed in the unrenewed will. A man of impulsive constitution can repent in this fashion again and again, with no conscious insincerity, and yet remain at heart the same; nay, grow worse in the very habit of lamenting without abandoning his besetting sin. There is some indication of such a falling off in Saul. On the first occasion, when his life was spared at Engedi, he shed tears over David's magnanimity and his own folly, and he openly confessed that the man whom he had sought to kill was more righteous than himself, and was destined to fill the throne. On the second occasion, at Hachilah, he was ready again to confess his fault and to promise abandonment of his unnatural and unjust pursuit of David, but we hear nothing of tears. There is a ring of vexation rather than of contrition about his confession: "I have sinned. I have played the fool." Cases of superficial repentance leading to relapse and deterioration are not rare. Emotion fades away; and some temptation is sure to come, as the Ziphites came to Saul and induced him to resume what he had renounced. So it happens that converts from among the heathen, who are changed only on the surface, and not in heart, but are baptized and endure well for a while, relapse under temptation into their old customs. Criminals in our own country, who have to all appearance sincerely repented, and have, after undergoing punishment, begun a new course of life, relapse after a while into the old roguery, tired of honest industry. In fact, it is not so difficult to induce men to turn over a new leaf as to keep them, after turning it, from turning back again.

IV. ONE MAY MUCH ADMIRE NOBLE CONDUCT AND YET NEVER IMITATE IT. Saul retained enough of his early magnanimity to feel the moral superiority of David's behaviour—his grand forbearance and chivalrous loyalty. He acknowledged the contrast between David's conduct and his own, and yet he never imitated what he admired. He turned back from the pursuit, as he had done before, but he did not reinstate his son-in-law in the honour to which he was entitled, or relieve him of the harassing sense of insecurity. So we often see that it is one thing to recognise and applaud what is good, another thing to do it. How many admire great and generous characters in history, poetry, and romance, and yet themselves remain small-minded and ungenerous! How many applaud good men and kind actions, and yet continue in their own bad habits and selfish lines of conduct, without any vigorous effort to follow what they praise! After all, a man is himself, and not another, and as his heart is, so will his action be. Unless the tree be made good from the root, it is vain to expect good fruit on its branches.

V. A SELF-ACCUSER MAY BE PROUDER THAN ONE WHO PROTESTS HIS INNOCENCE. A careless reader might think better of Saul confessing his folly so frankly than of David appealing to God for his integrity. But he who appeared so humble was still proud and obstinate, and he who maintained his rectitude was of a lowly and tender heart. A certain amount of self-reproach is quite easy to a pliant nature, which

takes emotion quickly on its surface, and yet is quite unchanged beneath. Such was Saul's confession, which did not for a moment change his character or delay his fate. On the other hand, self-vindication against misrepresentation and unjust treatment may issue from a man who entirely abhors self-righteousness and self-praise. It is this which we trace in David and the prophets; in the Apostle Paul, and in the greatest and lowliest, the man Christ Jesus. A servant of God breaks no rule of humility when he repels calumny, and asserts his innocence or his integrity. In this view read the seventeenth and eighteenth Psalms, the latter of which has a significant title—"Of David, the servant of God." All the Psalms are for the servants of the Lord. Sometimes, alas, they can chant none but those which are penitential, because sin has prevailed against them and defiled them. But in their experience of the mercies and deliverances of the Lord they can sing praises; and in the consciousness of the cleanness of their hands, their innocence and integrity of purpose and action towards their fellow-men, they may even venture to go through the hundred and nineteenth Psalm in all that wonderful strain of devout feeling which combines with cries for Divine pardon and direction, assertions of loyal obedience and entire sincerity.—F.

EXPOSITION.

DAVID FINDS A REFUGE AT ZIKLAG (CH. XXVII.).

CHAPTER XXVII.

DAVID AGAIN SEEKS PROTECTION AT GATH (vers. 1—4). Ver. 1.—**David said in his heart.** Hebrew, "to his heart," to himself (see ch. i. 13). **I shall perish by the hand.** The verb is that used in ch. xii. 25; xxvi. 10, but instead of *by the hand* the Hebrew has *into the hand.* Hence the versions generally render it, "I shall some day fall into the hand." Really it is a *prægnans constructio:* "I shall perish by falling into the hand of Saul." It was the second treachery of the Ziphites which made David feel that, surrounded as he was by spies, there was no safety for him but in taking that course to which, as he so sorrowfully complained to Saul, his enemies were driving him (ch. xxvi. 19). His words there show that the thought of quitting Judæa was already in his mind, so that this chapter follows naturally on ch. xxvi., and not, as some have argued, upon ch. xxiv.

Vers. 2—4.—**Achish, the son of Maoch.** No doubt the Achish of ch. xxi. 10; but if the same as **Achish, son of Maachah,** in 1 Kings ii. 39, as is probably the case, he must have lived to a good old age. As it is said in 1 Chron. xviii. 1 that David conquered the Philistines, and took from them Gath and other towns, it would seem that he still permitted Achish to remain there as a tributary king, while Ziklag he kept as his private property (ver. 6). On the former occasion, when David was alone, Achish had paid him but scant courtesy; but now that he came with 600 warriors, each **with his household,** and, therefore, with numerous followers, he shows him every respect, and for the time David and his men settle at Gath, and Saul gives over his pursuit knowing that if he followed him into Philistine territory he would provoke a war, for which he was not now prepared. It has been pointed out that David probably introduced from Gath the style of music called Gittith (Ps. viii., lxxxi., lxxxiv., titles).

ACHISH ASSIGNS ZIKLAG TO DAVID AS A RESIDENCE (vers. 5—7). Vers. 5, 6.—**If I have now found grace in thine eyes.** *Now* is not an adverb of time, but means "I pray," *i. e.* If verily I have found favour with thee. David's position was one of difficulty. The fame of his exploits, and of Saul's vain pursuit of him, made Achish no doubt regard him as a bitter foe of the Israelite king, and expect valuable assistance from him; whereas David was unwilling to take up arms even against Saul, and much less against his own countrymen. He is anxious, therefore, to get away from a too close observation of his acts, and requests Achish to give him **a place in some town in the country.** Hebrew, "a place in one of the cities in the field." **Why should thy servant,** &c. David's presence with so large a following must in many ways have been inconvenient as well as expensive to Achish. In some small country town David and his men would maintain themselves. Achish accordingly gives him **Ziklag,** a small place assigned first of all to Judah (Josh. xv. 31), but subsequently to Simeon (*ibid.* xix. 5). Its exact position is not known. It seems to have been valued by David's successors, as it is noted that it **still belonged unto the kings of Judah.** This phrase proves that the Book of Samuel must have been compiled at a date subsequent to the revolt of Jeroboam, while the concluding words, **unto this day,** equally plainly indicate a date prior to the Babylonian exile.

Ver. 7.—**A full year.** Hebrew, "days." Rashi argues in favour of its meaning *some days*, and Josephus says the time of David's stay in Philistia was "four months and twenty days;" but already in ch. i. 3; ii. 19, we have had the phrase "from days day-ward" in the sense of *yearly*, and comp. Levit. xxv. 29; Judges xvii. 10; also *ibid.* xix. 2, where the A. V. translates the Hebrew *days four months* as meaning "four months" only. Probably, as here, it is a year and four months, though the omission of the conjunction is a difficulty. So too for "after a time" (*ibid.* xiv. 8) it should be "after a year"—Hebrew, *after days.*

EXPEDITIONS OF DAVID FROM ZIKLAG (vers. 8—12). Ver. 8.—**Went up.** The Geshurites inhabited the high table-land which forms the north-eastern portion of the wilderness of Paran. Like the Kenites, they seem to have broken up into scattered tribes, as we find one portion of them in the neighbourhood of Bashan (Deut. iii. 14), and another in Syria (2 Sam. xv. 8). Probably, like the Amalekites, they were a Bedouin race, and so great wanderers. Hence the verb translated **invaded** is literally "spread themselves out" like a fan, so as to enclose these nomads, whose safety lay in flight. **Gezrites.** The written text has *Girzites*, which the Kri has changed into Gezrites, probably from a wish to connect a name never mentioned elsewhere with the town of Gezer. But Gezer lay far away in the west of Ephraim, and the connection suggested in modern times of the Girzites with Mount Gerizim in Central Palestine is more probable. They would thus be the remains of a once more powerful people, dispossessed by the Amorites, but who were now probably a very feeble remnant. **For those nations,** &c. The grammar and translation of this clause are both full of difficulties, but the following rendering is perhaps the least objectionable: "For these were (the families) inhabiting the land, which were of old, as thou goest towards Shur," &c. *Families* must be supplied because the participle *inhabiting* is feminine. What, then, the narrator means to say is that these three Bedouin tribes were the aboriginal inhabitants of the north-western portion of the desert between Egypt and South Palestine. On the **Amalekites** see ch. xv 2. We need not wonder at finding them mentioned again so soon after Saul's expedition. A race of nomads would sustain no great harm from an expedition which soon began to occupy itself with capturing cattle. On **Shur** see ch. xv. 7.

Vers. 9, 10.—**David smote the land.** These expeditions were made partly to occupy his men, but chiefly to obtain the means of subsistence. They also seem to have brought David great renown, for in 1 Chron. xii. 1—22 we read of warriors from far distant tribes coming to him to swell his forces, and the enthusiasm for him was even such that a band of men swam across the Jordan to join him (*ibid.* ver. 15); while others from Manasseh deserted to him from Saul's army before the battle of Mount Gilboa, so that at last he had with him "a great host, like the host of God" (*ibid.* vers. 19—21). **He came to Achish.** To give him a portion of the spoil. **And Achish said.** Like the verb *went up* in ver. 8, the word indicates repeated action. David made many expeditions against these wild tribes, and on each occasion, when presenting himself at Gath, Achish would inquire, **Whither have ye made a road**—*i. e.* an inroad, or a raid—**to-day?** As it stands the Hebrew means, "Do not make an inroad to-day;" but the correction of the text given in the A. V. has considerable authority from the versions. **The Jerahmeelites,** mentioned again in ch. xxx. 29, were the descendants of Hezron, the firstborn of Pharez, the son of Judah (1 Chron. ii. 9), and so were one of the great families into which the tribe of Judah was divided. Apparently they occupied the most southerly position of its territory. **The Kenites** (see on ch. xv. 6) are here described as being in close alliance with the men of Judah. Probably they lived under their protection, and paid them tribute. **The south** is literally "the Negeb," the dry land, so called from the absence of streams (comp. Ps. cxxvi. 4), which formed not only the southernmost part of the territory of Judah, but extended far into the Arabian desert. Achish naturally understood it as the proper name for that part of the Negeb which belonged to Judah, whereas David meant it as it is translated in the A. V., where there is no obscurity as to its meaning.

Vers. 11, 12.—**To bring tidings.** The A. V. is wrong in adding the word *tidings*, as the Hebrew means "to bring them to Gath." Prisoners to be sold as slaves formed an important part of the spoil of war in ancient times. But David, acting in accordance with the cruel customs of warfare in his days, and which he practised even when he had no urgent necessity as here (see 2 Sam. viii. 2), put all his prisoners to death, lest, if taken to Gath and sold, they should betray him. The A. V. makes his conduct even more sanguinary, and supposes that he suffered none to escape. **And so will be his manner all the while he dwelleth.** The Hebrew is "he dwelt," and thus the rendering of the A. V., though supported by the Masoretic punctuation, is untenable. But this punctuation is of comparatively recent date, and of moderate authority. The words really belong to the narrator, and should be translated, "And so was his manner all the

days that he dwelt in the field of the Philistines." It seems that Achish was completely deceived by David, and supposing that his conduct would make him hateful for ever to his own tribesmen of Judah, and so preclude his return home, he rejoiced in him as one who would always remain his faithful vassal and adherent.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—4.—*Loss of faith.* The facts are—1. David, fearing lest he should fall by the hand of Saul, deems it better to go to the land of the Philistines. 2. He and his family and attendants are received by Achish at Gath. 3. Saul, hearing of this, seeks him no more. There is a latent thought in many minds that the great and good men of whom the Bible speaks ought to figure in Scripture as only models of excellence, and hence a sense of disappointment is experienced when, in its fidelity to facts, the Bible relates their failings and sins. Here we have David in despair of preserving his life by the means hitherto adopted; and in his evidently long and painful meditations on the path of prudence (ch. xxvi. 19; cf. xxvii. 1) he comes to the conclusion to avoid collision with Saul by fleeing to an enemy's country. This is not absolute despair, but despair of preserving life for the realising of one's vocation by the means consistent with that vocation and the character suited to it. Loss of faith in righteous means is, so far, loss of faith in God.

I. PROTRACTED AND PAINFUL CONFLICTS MAY BE INVOLVED IN ATTAINING TO THE HIGHEST PURPOSE IN LIFE. To become king in Israel and bless the world with wise rulership was the high purpose revealed to David; and for moral reasons the long discipline of trial was inevitable. The position into which he was often brought seemed to render the accomplishment of life's purpose impossible, and the nearer the goal the more severe the risks of life. The more numerous his men and able his captains, the greater difficulty in preventing collision with Saul, and the more impossible to find food apart from trespass on property. A righteous cause was therefore a suffering cause. This is the case with us. Often Christians have been evidently called to a work for God, and yet become so beset with perils that the end for which they live seems impossible of realisation. How the heart becomes pained and oppressed with incessant struggle with evils that stand in the way of a rise to perfect holiness! The enemy is ever upon us, and humanly speaking it seems as though we some day shall fall by his hand in spite of all endeavours of the past.

II. THERE ARE RECOGNISED MEANS BY WHICH THE HIGHEST PURPOSE OF LIFE IS TO BE ATTAINED. David was to wait God's time, and not force the hand of providence. To make such movements as to avoid collision with Saul, to look up to God for promised or implied help when, in spite of care, life is threatened, and to seize occasions for softening the heart of his foe, even if for a season only—these means hitherto had been honoured with success, and, so far as we can see, were the only lawful means. In attaining to our ultimate position as Christians we have to follow the spiritual methods of the New Testament in humble dependence on God—watchfulness, abstention from evil, evasion of deadly arrows and poison of adders, and whatever will keep the soul holy and true for Christ. In doing our work in the world we have to avoid falling into the power of the great enemy by severe simplicity, love of truth, spirituality of mind, and prayerful use of the gospel. So, in reference to any specific holy end in view, the means used are to be in harmony with the goodness of the end. We are not to do evil that good may come.

III. UNDER THE PRESSURE AND PAIN OF LONG CONFLICT WE BECOME EXPOSED TO THE TEMPTATION TO SEEK RELIEF BY NEW METHODS. Probably some degree of mental and physical exhaustion, accompanied with increasing worries of providing for a large following, laid David open to the thought of fighting the battle with his difficulties on new ground. There is a risk to the cultivation of our spiritual life arising from the weariness consequent on long trial. The tension may seem to justify and necessitate diminished watchfulness and prayer—virtually a departure to new ground. In work for Christ, good men, when oppressed and worn down, and not attaining to their goal, are induced to think of expedients hitherto not approved, and apparently more easy in application. This temptation gains force when, amidst the mental confusion incident to weakness and disappointment, the value of the securities given us by God is not

duly assessed. More consideration on the part of David of what security was implied in his being the anointed, and in the repeated assurance of God's intention to raise him to the throne, would have induced the conviction that, using ordinary means in Judah, he *must* be safe from Saul. Temptations gain power when we fail to consider that the promises of salvation and of blessing on our toil are yea and amen in Christ Jesus.

IV. A SLIGHT DALLYING WITH TEMPTATION DURING A LONG CONFLICT MAY ISSUE IN A NEGLECT OF PRAYER FOR GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT. The fall of good men is seen, but the real causes are not. The probability is that during his absorption in details he may have lost the spirit of devotion which hitherto had distinguished him, and hence his decision in this case without seeking counsel by the Urim. The secret departure of the heart from God is fraught with mischief and trouble. We then devise means of our own and distrust those which God has blessed. Then it is that we become faint and despondent and impatient, and, while not renouncing our life's calling of God, yet we pursue it in a manner inconsistent with our profession. Near to God in private life, humble dependence on his daily strength and guidance, this alone fosters faith in his wisdom and protection, and saves from recourse to expedients that reflect on his care.

General lessons:—1. Temporary ease in a righteous cause may mean loss of spiritual power and a beginning of disaster. 2. A course of duty hitherto successful for the specific purpose in view, though very painful, ought never to be exchanged for another line of conduct. 3. If we would endure hardness as good soldiers we must be one in fellowship with the Captain of our salvation. 4. In the service of God the weight of evidence is in favour of confidence and against fear, and we misread God's word and discipline when fear prevails.

Vers. 5—12.—*The perils of expediency.* The facts are—1. David, being unwilling to live in the royal city, seeks and obtains Ziklag as his place of abode. 2. During his stay there he makes war on neighbouring tribes. 3. He gives Achish the impression that he was acting in hostility to Judah, and so creates the belief that henceforth he must be an ally of the Philistine. The painful backsliding of David is a reminder of the frailty of the best of men, and should induce great watchfulness over the subtle springs of thought and feeling. The prominent teaching of this section may be arranged thus:—

I. THE PERILS OF SELF-CHOSEN MEANS OF SAFETY. David's passing over the border was a step unwillingly taken, originating in the proper belief that when possible dangers ought to be avoided, but chiefly in the fear that the oft-experienced help in Judah would not be continued there. The imperfect spiritual condition which rendered groundless fear possible also induced a self-choice of means of safety irrespective of guidance of prophet or Urim. But no sooner is the step taken than dangers thicken. A sojourn with Achish meant dependence for support, exposure to treachery, increasing obligations to serve a heathen king, the evils to religious life of association with idolaters, and consciousness of self-debasement. We have to learn that the path of duty may be encompassed with difficulties, but is always better than any course we may from love of ease strike out for ourselves. The Church has never gained anything but ultimate loss and dishonour in evading the pains and sorrows of high spiritual service by a spirit of conformity to the world. The merchant beset with risks incurs worse dangers by passing over the line of truthfulness and fraud. The soul sensible of its spiritual dangers and annoyed by restless temptations finds no real relief in leaving the "way everlasting" for the expedients suggested by a deceitful heart.

II. THE SHAME OF SUPPRESSING OUR TRUE CHARACTER AND THE OBJECT FOR WHICH WE LIVE. Obviously David was careful not to let Achish know that he was the anointed, and was living in hope of rising to the throne of Israel. For as Israel was the declared and natural enemy of Philistia, this would be to foster the means of his future overthrow. It was impossible for a man of fine sensibilities to thus suppress his real character and objects without constant sense of shame, and even dread lest by some means he should be detected and suddenly assailed. Occasionally for political reasons men have adopted a policy of concealment, though even in this

department of life it is attended with loss of self-respect and considerable peril. There are temptations for religious men to hide their religion, to pass unknown as professors, to assume for a while the habits and enter into too intimate associations with the irreligious. In festive scenes, in plans of business, in converse with strangers, there may arise a feeling of shame, or a thought of inexpediency, which not merely restrains from a natural expression of Christian feeling consonant to the occasion, but even prompts to an effort to give the impression that we are not religious. The sin of this suppression of our Christianity, this hiding of the great end for which we profess to live, cannot but bring most grievous trouble to the soul, as it so manifestly dishonours the name by which we are called.

III. THE FUTILITY OF ALL EXPEDIENTS FOR COURTING THE FAVOUR OF THE IRRELIGIOUS. David's scheme was to live in favour with the Philistines, and to this end he represented himself as their friend and the foe of their foe. Not only did he produce the false impression of having attacked Judah,—an act of untruthfulness,—but he did himself and brethren the cruel wrong of representing himself as alien to them. For awhile Achish was misled, but his people were suspicious (ch. xxix. 3), and the result was a loss of reputation to David. Good men cannot compromise their position with irreligious men and secure or confer any permanent advantage thereby. The consideration and interest they manifest for a season, resting on false representations, will soon yield to suspicions, distrust, and contempt. If it be thought that accommodations of life to the standard of the unspiritual will tend to benefit them, events will prove the thought to be delusive. "Be not conformed to the world" is the wise policy, as it is the solemn duty, of the Christian.

IV. A COMPROMISE WITH THE IRRELIGIOUS MAY INVOLVE THE CONTRACTION OF VERY UNWELCOME OBLIGATIONS. From the day that David sought the friendly protection of Achish to the outbreak of war with Israel, David was becoming involved in obligations which could only be set aside at the cost of a reputation for deceit and ingratitude. He had to play a double part to save his own life and to avoid the fearful sin of raising his hand against his own countrymen (cf. vers. 11, 12; xxviii. 1, 2). There is here warning for the Church and the individual. Christian action should always be so free and truly based on righteous principles as to raise no claim for service or friendship inconsistent with the holy vows of consecration to Christ. He who by suppression of his religious principles puts himself in the power of irreligious companions or associates will find his position to be one of increasing embarrassment; and after a painful and tortuous line of conduct it will be necessary to lose all respect by breaking away from the wicked alliance or retain friendship by a shipwreck of faith. "The friendship of the world is enmity with God" (James iv. 4). Young persons who are thrown much among the irreligious should take to heart the lessons of David's experience.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*Unbelief and its unworthy device.* This history metes out equal justice, and, having shown to us the perversity of Saul, immediately exposes to us the fault of David, for he also, though no fool, returned to folly. In both cases equity and charity allow some plea of extenuation. Saul's hostility to David was due in some measure to an unsound brain, unable to shake off morbid suspicion. And David's mistrust of the Divine protection was the result of a very sensitive temperament tried beyond measure, a chafed and weary spirit. How far such pleas may be considered in weighing actions is a question for the Divine justice rather than for our sentence. Enough for us to recognise them, that we may the better understand how Saul could renew a pursuit which he had abandoned with tears, and how David could return to the land of the Philistines, from which he had formerly escaped only by simulating madness.

I. THE FAULT OF DAVID WAS UNBELIEF. It was not his habit; but it came upon him as a fit or mood, and, while it lasted, led him into actions unworthy and unwise. 1. *He broke down at a strong point, as men often do.* His faith rose to a heroic pitch in the valley of Elah, when the stripling, as a believer, encountered the blaspheming giant. But when he was put among princes his faith failed under appre-

hensions of mortal peril, and he fled to Nob, and thence to the Philistine town of Gath. He recovered his faith in God, and, assured of Divine protection, refused to injure Saul when the king on two occasions was within his power. But again his faith failed, and he was afraid. There is no mention of his having prayed, or consulted God through the priest as at other times. In his unworthy fear he took counsel with himself, and "said in his heart" that he would surely perish. Such is man. He falls at a strong point. Noah stood in his integrity against a whole world of sinners, but when he had no world to stand against he fell, and disgraced himself by intemperance. Moses was the meekest of men and most observant of the word of the Lord, and yet he erred at Kadesh in respect of self-control and fidelity to the Divine command, so forfeiting his entrance into Canaan. Hezekiah was eminent for prayerfulness and humility, and yet he fell in not spreading a matter before the Lord, but giving way to vain boasting. Simon Peter was all ardour and devotion to his Master, and yet, just after honest protestations of attachment, he lost courage, and denied his Lord. In like manner strong believers may fall into a fit of unbelief, in which past blessings are forgotten, promises are doubted or let slip, dangers are exaggerated, and the heart, instead of asking counsel of the Lord, takes counsel with itself, and suggests all sorts of folly. 2. *Unbelief seems to have been the sin to which David was most tempted in his youth.* We infer this both from this history and from the Psalter. The former tells how he more than once despaired of his life, and how Jonathan exerted himself to reassure his desponding mind. The latter reveals to us with touching candour the apprehensions of his youth in those psalms which plainly refer to his wanderings and hairbreadth escapes. The sorrows of death had compassed him, and the floods of the ungodly made him afraid. He saw his enemies ready to swallow him up. And though he was naturally brave, unbelief enfeebled and distracted him, so that his "heart was sore pained" within him. Indeed David's cries to God in the Psalms, and his way of repeating to himself that God was on his side, and was able to defend and deliver him, indicate not obscurely his inward struggle. If he had felt no fear he would not have thought of writing, "I will not fear what man can do to me." If he had known no failure of faith he would not have said so much as he has of crying after God and putting his trust in him. We read of Abraham simply that he believed. He fell on his face and listened to the voice of God; then he acted, journeyed, obeyed in faith; but we do not find him speak of his believing. David had a struggle to hold fast his confidence, and therefore has he given so much expression to the life of faith and its conflict with doubt and fear.

II. UNBELIEF LEADS A SERVANT OF GOD TO UNWORTHY DEVICES. "Nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines." Now we know that God did order and overrule this flight for the good of David and of Israel; but none the less was it, on the part of his servant, an unworthy action springing from unbelief. Better surely to have lived by faith in the forests and caves of Judæa than live by sight and behave like a freebooter in the land of the heathen Philistines. His stay at Ziklag, the town assigned to him by the king Achish, marks a bad period in the life of David. His incursion into the territory of certain southern tribes was most unjust and cruel. The injustice, indeed, may not have been apparent to his mind; for David and his men had, of course, been educated in the ideas of their own age and country, and had no scruple about invading and laying waste any territory of the heathen. They had also little, if any, respect for the lives of the heathen. Yet David must have sinned against his conscience in the cruel massacre of the southern tribes. One sin leads to another. And the son of Jesse added deceit to cruelty, and exulted in covering the first sin by the second, leaving no man or woman alive to contradict the tale he told to the Philistine king. Lord, what is man? When thou didst not hold up the goings of thy servant, into what miry places did he stray, into what a ditch did he fall! When his faith failed, what a break-down of his character and conduct! Restraint of prayer, self-direction, then rapine, bloodshedding, and falsehood! What are we that we should have immunity from similar deterioration of character, if we give way to unbelief? A Christian in good repute takes some course that we should have thought incredible and impossible. We ask in amazement, What infatuation seized him? or, Can it be that he was always insincere, and wicked at

heart under a cloak of seeming goodness? The real clue to his misconduct lies here—that he lost hold of God and fell through unbelief, allowed himself to doubt whether God would or could keep him in some strait, and took to trusting and keeping himself. So he fell into unworthy company, or betook himself to unworthy devices; and the end is what you see—dishonesty, duplicity, prevarication. Remember that nothing is so hard to be extirpated from the heart as unbelief. In his book of the Holy War Bunyan shows that when the town of Mansoul was in the devil's power, Incredulity was first made alderman, then lord mayor. When Immanuel took the town, Incredulity (unbelief) was doomed to execution, but managed to break out of prison, and lurked in hiding-places where he could not be found. When the devil assaulted the town in hopes to retake it, "Old Incredulity" reappeared, and was made general of the army. After the assailing army was defeated, and many of the officers and soldiers in it were put to death, Unbelief still evaded capture. He did yet dwell in Mansoul, though he "hid in dens and holes."

Application:—1. Let believers beware. It is easy to slip off the way of faith and it may seem to answer well for a time. You may get your Ziklag to dwell in, and find it more comfortable than the hold at Engedi or the hill of Hachilah, but you are in a state of declension from God, and on the way, as David was, to commit presumptuous sin. Matthew Henry remarks in his sententious way, "Unbelief is a sin that easily besets even good men. When without are fightings and within are fears, it is a hard matter to get over them. Lord, increase our faith!" 2. Let unbelievers be warned. If unbelief be so damaging when it prevails even temporarily over a servant of God, what ruin must it work in those who lie always under its power! "He that believeth not in the Son of God shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."—F.

Vers. 1, 2. (THE WILDERNESS OF ZIPH.)—*Despondency.* "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul" (ver. 1). It is seldom (at least in a climate like ours) that a day passes in sunshine without clouds. And human life is as varied as the aspects of the sky. The best of men are liable not only to adversity as well as prosperity, but also to seasons of spiritual depression as well as of spiritual elation; and the one often follows the other very closely. These seasons of depression ought not, indeed, to be attributed to a Divine, sovereign, and uncontrollable influence. They are due to certain causes in men themselves which ought to be watched against. Yet who resists them constantly, effectually, and completely? Here is David, who recently said, "Let the Lord deliver me out of all tribulation," and heard Saul say, "Blessed be thou, my son David," &c. (ch. xxvi. 24, 25), talking to himself in a desponding mood, and coming to the conclusion that there is nothing better for him than to flee into the land of the Philistines. It may be preferable for a man to "commune with his own heart" of his fears and doubts, rather than pour them indiscriminately into the ears of other people; but his proper course is not to continue brooding over them, or surrender himself to their power, but to "inquire of the Lord," and "hope in God" (Ps. xlii. 11). "More of these no man hath known than myself, which I confess I conquered not in a martial posture, but on my knees" (Sir T. Browne). Concerning the state of mind which this language expresses, consider—

I. WHEREIN IT CONSISTS. 1. *Fear of approaching danger.* Saul had renewed his persecution, and David thought that he should be "consumed." There was apparently no more reason why he should think so now than there had been before; but the desponding mind projects its shadow over all things, and magnifies ordinary into extraordinary peril. Imaginary evils are often occasions of greater trouble and temptation than real evils, and more difficult to overcome. 2. *Distrust of Divine care.* This is its chief element. If his faith had been in vigorous exercise he would have said, "Whom shall I fear?" (Ps. xxvii. 1). But it seems to have completely failed, leaving him a prey to overwhelming anxiety and fear. "My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God" (Isa. xl. 27). "Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost" (Ezek. xxxvii. 11). 3. *Depression of personal energy.* He has lost heart, and thinks it impossible to continue safely in the land of Judah, to which the prophet had formerly recalled him, and where

Divine providence has appointed his lot. The fearful and faithless shrink from difficulties which in a better state of mind they encountered boldly.

II. WHEREBY IT IS OCCASIONED. The influences productive of it are partly—1. *External and physical.* Numerous perils, long hardship, constant watchfulness, great exertions, bodily exhaustion and suffering. "There are hours in which physical derangement darkens the windows of the soul; days in which shattered nerves make life simply endurance." Much of this may be removed by the adoption of proper methods, and where its removal is impossible, special grace should be sought that it may be borne cheerfully and patiently. 2. *Mental and emotional.* Perplexing thoughts, conflicting arguments, unjust and ungenerous treatment, want of sympathy, deferred hope, reaction from excited feeling. "Something of it might be due to those alternations of emotion which seem to be incidental to our human constitution. We have ebbings and flowings within us like the tides; and just as in nature the lowest ebb is after the highest spring-tide, so you frequently see, even in the best of men, after some lofty experience of spiritual elevation and noble self-command, an ebbing down to the lowest depth of fear and flight" (W. M. Taylor). 3. *Moral and spiritual.* Omission of duty, parleying with temptation, contemplating doubtful expedients (ch. xxvi. 19), intimate association with persons of little or no piety, self-confidence, bedimmed spiritual vision, loss of spiritual fervour, "restraining prayer before God." It is significant that nothing is said about David's asking counsel of the Lord concerning the step which he was contemplating, as he did on other occasions. "Josephus tells us that he advised with his friends, but no writer informs us that he advised with God" (Delany). His state of mind appears to have been unfavourable to his doing so; and it is probable that if he had done so the course on which he had half resolved would have been forbidden. Communion with God prevents or cures despondency and averts many a disastrous step.

III. WHEREFORE IT IS BLAMEWORTHY. For that it is so there can be no doubt. In it—1. *Past deliverances effected by God are ungratefully forgotten.* Of these David had experienced many; they were assurances of continued help, and in better hours he regarded them as such (ch. xvii. 37). But now his remembrance of them is clouded with fear, and produces neither thankfulness nor confidence. He speaks to his heart, but says not, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." 2. *The faithful promises of God are faithlessly ignored.* He who doubts them despises the Giver, deprives himself of the treasures of wisdom, strength, and blessedness which they contain, and "forsakes his own mercy." 3. *The great name of God is greatly dishonoured.* It is a "strong tower," and not to "run into it," but to continue in despondency, as if it were inaccessible or incapable of affording adequate protection, is to oppose the purpose for which it is made known, to act unworthily of the knowledge of it, and to incur just reproach. "Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker?" (Isa. li. 13). Surely nothing dishonours him more.

IV. WHERETO IT LEADS. "And David arose," &c. (ver. 2). He thought nothing could be better for him; but, in reality, nothing could be worse. "For by this step he would alienate the affections of the Israelites from him, justify the reproaches of the enemy, deprive himself of the means of grace and the ordinances of religion, grieve his soul with the vice and idolatry of the heathen, put himself out of the warrant of Divine protection, and lay himself under peculiar obligation to those whom he could not serve without betraying the cause of God." He escaped from one danger only to rush into another and much greater. Unbelieving and desponding fears commonly—1. Incite to unwise and foolish courses of action. 2. Conduce to temptation and transgression (ver. 10). 3. Involve in embarrassment and great distress (ch. xxviii. 1; xxx. 1—5).

> "Beware of desperate steps. The darkest day,
> Live till to-morrow, will have passed away."
> (Cowper, 'The Needless Alarm.')

Exhortation:—1. Guard against the causes of despondency. 2. At its first approach turn instantly to God in faith and prayer. 3. Take no new step under its influence, nor until the will of God is clearly seen. 4. "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might."—D.

Vers. 3—12. (GATH, ZIKLAG.)—*David's residence among the Philistines.* David had taken the decisive step, crossed the border, and passed with his 600 men and their families ("a little ambulant kingdom") into the Philistine territory. His position was very different now from what it had been five or six years before, when he came to Gath as a lonely fugitive (ch. xxi. 10); and he was gladly received by Achish, who regarded him as in open revolt against Saul and Israel, and expected to obtain from him valuable assistance in his future conflicts with them. And here and at Ziklag he continued sixteen months (ver. 7). His condition (like that of other good men who enter into intimate association with the ungodly, voluntarily, unnecessarily, and for the sake of worldly advantage; see ch. xv. 6) was marked by—

I. TEMPORARY SECURITY (ver. 4). By placing himself under the protection of Achish, David gained his end; for Saul dared not follow him lest he should excite another Philistine war, and (*physically* restrained, though still retaining an evil will) "sought no more again for him." His outward circumstances were completely changed. Instead of the uncertain, anxious, hazardous, and despised life which he had led in the wilderness, he enjoyed repose, comfort, safety, and respect in a royal city. To obtain advantages such as these men often swerve from the appointed path of duty, especially in times of persecution, not considering at what a cost they are obtained, how brief is their duration, or how great the trouble by which they may be followed.

II. CONSCIOUS INCONSISTENCY (vers. 5—7). In open alliance with the enemies of Israel, silently witnessing their idolatrous practices, looked upon as a traitor to his country, and ready to aid them against it, David must have felt what a contradiction there was between his apparent and real character. Yet he might not declare himself by a single word or act, for thousands of watchful eyes were always on him. He did not feel at home, and requested (under the plea of the unsuitableness and expensiveness of his residence with his large retinue at Gath) that the king would give him "a place in some town in the country," his real motive being that he might be "out of the way of observation, so as to play the part of Saul's enemy without acting against him." At Ziklag he would be less under restraint, and his real sentiments less likely to be discovered, though even there he might still be suspected. No outward advantages that good men may gain by their alliance with the ungodly can afford adequate compensation for the insincerity, distraction, restlessness, and vexation of soul which it involves (2 Pet. ii. 8).

III. SUCCESSFUL ENTERPRISE (vers. 8, 9). As soon as he was settled at Ziklag he made warlike expeditions against the Amalekites, Geshurites, and Gezrites, "of old the inhabitants of the land" (unlike the Philistines); and from the rich booty which he procured he supplied the wants of his men, and gave valuable presents to Achish (ver. 9). His setting forth on these expeditions, and the cruel severity with which he executed them, must be judged of in the light of "the circumstances of those times, and the constant practices of nations one to another, especially of the neighbouring nations towards the Hebrews" (Chandler), and of the ban under which some of them had been placed (see ch. xv. 1, 32, 33). He was doubtless animated therein by public spirit and religious zeal (ch. xxx. 26), but his motives were not altogether unmixed, and his successes brought him a doubtful honour (ver. 12).

IV. CRAFTY POLICY (vers. 10, 11). To retain the confidence of Achish, he gave him the impression that his expeditions were directed against his own countrymen and their allies, instead of against Amalek and other neighbouring tribes; and he was thus, through distrust of God, again guilty of deceit (ch. xxi. 1, 10). "If a man will put himself among Philistines, he cannot promise to come forth innocent" (Hall). "David might perhaps seek in some way to justify himself by the thought that in his ambiguous manner of speech he made use only of an allowable stratagem, and that he was a *heathen* to whom he veiled the truth. But he will yet be made to experience that God will weigh those who would be his in the balances of the sanctuary, in which, among others, that inviolable word is found as one of the weights, 'Thou shalt not bear false witness'" (Krummacher).

V. INCREASING POWER and importance. While at Ziklag he received large reinforcements (ch. xxii. 1, 2; 1 Chron. xii. 1—22), some of whom were "of Saul's

brethren of Benjamin'—evidently from dissatisfaction with the turn which things had taken (see also 2 Sam. xv. 16—23). "As a matter of fact, David in this city laid the foundation of all his kingdom. Here he could already rule with greater freedom and independence, collect fugitives and deserters around him in larger and larger numbers, send or receive embassies like a prince (ch. xxx. 26—31), and, as a ruler over soldiers and over peaceable citizens, rehearse, on a small scale, those arts by which he afterwards acquired and maintained his great kingdom" (Ewald). Notwithstanding all this, his condition was one of—

VI. SPIRITUAL DISADVANTAGE, and even spiritual deterioration. That which he had dreaded as the worst of evils (ch. xxvi. 19) had come about by his own voluntary act. Although he was not forbidden the exercise of his religion under Achish (ch. xxix. 6), yet his circumstances were unfavourable to it; he was absent from the land and the sanctuary where God manifested his gracious presence to his people (ch. xxvi. 20; Ps. xlii. 2, 3), and his whole course of life is indicative of a lower tone of piety than before. "Being a genuine poet and lover of art, he took advantage of all his opportunities in this direction, and exercised himself as a musician in the Gittite and the Philistine style (Ps. viii., inscription), which he afterwards transferred from there to Jerusalem" (Ewald); but not a single psalm of his can be referred to this period.

VII. DANGEROUS ENTANGLEMENTS, intense suffering, and probably also serious delay in the attainment of his high destiny (ch. xxviii. 1, 2; xxx. 3). The evils that sprang from his want of faith and patience were truly great. "His presence in Judah would have given an opportunity which Saul could hardly have refused, for calling him forth as the champion of Israel. At all events he would have been at hand to relieve the disaster, and would doubtless have been hailed as king by the united voice of Israel. As it was, his nation suffered a terrible defeat, which, instead of doing his best to avert, he narrowly escaped taking a share in inflicting; his recognition as king of Israel was postponed for seven years and a half at the cost of a civil war and a permanent alienation of Judah from the rest of Israel; and meanwhile he was involved in a course of pitiable deceit" (Smith, 'Old Testament Hist.'). Nevertheless the overruling hand of God must be recognised in all, and by Divine mercy he was delivered "out of all tribulation."

"Ay me, how many perils do unfold
The righteous man, to make him daily fall,
Were not that heavenly grace doth him uphold,
And steadfast truth acquit him out of all!
Her love is firm, her care continual,
So oft as he, through his own foolish pride
Or weakness, is to sinful bands made thrall" (Spenser). D.

EXPOSITION.

DOWNFALL AND DEATH OF SAUL (CHS. XXVIII.—XXXI.)

THE PHILISTINES GATHER TOGETHER FOR WAR. DISTRESS OF SAUL, AND VISIT TO THE WITCH OF ENDOR (CH. XXVIII.).

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ACHISH SUMMONS DAVID TO JOIN HIM IN THE WAR AGAINST ISRAEL (vers. 1—2).

Ver. 1.—**In those days.** *I. e.* while David was dwelling at Ziklag. **The Philistines gathered their armies together.** This was, as Josephus has observed, a war upon a much larger scale than any that had been carried on since the defeat of the Philistines in the valley of Elah; for we find that the invasion was made from the north, and the decisive battle fought not in the usual field of operations, but in the territory of the tribe of Issachar, in the neighbourhood of Jezreel. We are not indeed to suppose from this that the Philistines had conquered all the central districts of the land, and, driving Saul before them, at last brought him to bay, and slew him in the north; for though Ishbosheth was compelled to withdraw to Mahanaim, a city on the eastern side of the Jordan, yet Abner is said to have made him king there not only over the trans-Jordanic tribes, but also "over Jezreel, and over Ephraim, and over Benjamin" (2 Sam. ii. 9). It may be said, however, that these were but titular claims; but the Philistine conquests, as described in ch.

xxxi. 7, if not confined to the valley of Esdraelon, as in 1 Chron. x. 7, were nevertheless all of them to the north of Mount Gilboa, thus leaving Ephraim, Benjamin, and Judah untouched. Nor do we find the Philistines encamped between David at Hebron and Ishbosheth at Mahanaim, or interfering in their contests; and it is only when David was made king over the whole of Israel that they again assembled their forces to dispute the empire with him, and twice suffered defeat (2 Sam. v. 20, 25). More probably, therefore, they marched northward through their own territory, raising the whole of the military population as they went, and then, turning eastward, broke into the Israelite territory by the valley of Jezreel. It was probably the rapid decline of Saul's power which encouraged the Philistines to attempt once again to place their yoke upon the neck of Israel; and Saul, conscious that God's blessing had departed from him, in pitiable agony sought for unholy aid, but finally, with his sons, made a last brave defence, and died a soldier's death. **Achish said unto David.** As a vassal David was bound to accompany his lord to the field; and Achish, supposing that David had of his own accord made war upon Judah, probably assumed that the invitation was one which he himself desired. **To battle.** Hebrew, "in the army."

Ver. 2.—**Surely thou shalt know.** Hebrew, "Therefore thou shalt know," *i. e.* if the case be so, thou shalt know, &c. The rendering of the A. V. makes David repeat the words of Achish, which literally are, "knowing thou shalt know," the Hebrew way of making a strong affirmation. David's reply is really ambiguous, but is understood by Achish as a boastful assent, and he thereupon promises, **Therefore will I make thee keeper of mine head,** *i. e.* captain of my body-guard, **for ever.** **Therefore** is exactly the same word as that used by David, and has just the same meaning, namely, "If the case be so," if thou provest thy valour, then I, &c.

SAUL AND THE WITCH OF ENDOR (vers. 3—25). Ver. 3.—**Samuel was dead.** A repetition of ch. xxv. 1, inserted to explain Saul's conduct, as is the other fact, that **Saul had put away those that had familiar spirits,** &c. We are not told when Saul did this; but at the commencement of his reign, when he brought the ark to Nob, he was probably earnest generally in his observance of the precepts of the Mosaic law. **Familiar spirits.** Hebrew, *ôboth*, the plural of *ôb*, a leathern bottle. It is generally taken to refer to the distended belly of the conjurer, into which the summoned spirit of the dead was supposed to enter, and thence speak; for which reason the Septuagint renders the word "ventriloquist," and is followed by most modern commentators. **Wizards.** Hebrew, "knowing ones," from the verb *to know;* just as *wizard* comes from the old verb *to wiss.* With ignorant people unusual knowledge is always looked upon with suspicion; but these supposed magicians professed a knowledge to which they had no claim.

Ver. 4.—**The Philistines . . . pitched in Shunem.** Having collected their forces, the Philistines entered Palestine as we have seen, by the valley of Jezreel, also called Esdraelon, and, marching eastward, encamped at Shunem. This was a village in the tribe of Issachar (Josh. xix. 18), rendered famous as the abode of the woman who made a little chamber for Elisha (2 Kings iv. 8); and from thence also came Abishag (1 Kings i. 3). Conder describes it as being at present only a mud hamlet, with cactus hedges and a spring, but the view extends, he says, as far as to Mount Carmel, fifteen miles away ('Tent-Work,' i. 123). It is now called Sûlem, a name given to it also by Eusebius, and lies upon the slopes of the little Hermon, opposite Mount Gilboa, from which it is separated by the valley of Jezreel. This broad plain "is bounded on the east by the range of Gilboa, rising 1500 feet above the sea, and consisting of white chalk; while on the west a long spur runs out at about the same average elevation with Gilboa, and wends north-west to the ridge of Carmel (Conder, 'Handbook,' p. 209). As the valley is about 250 feet above the sea level, Saul, from an elevation of 1200 feet, would easily see the camp of the Philistines pitched upon the slopes of the opposite range at a distance of about four miles.

Vers. 5, 6.—**When Saul saw,** &c. It is plain from this that the Philistines had not forced their way up through the Israelite territory; for this was evidently Saul's first sight of their forces, and his alarm was caused by finding them so much larger than he had expected. He therefore in his anxiety **enquired of Jehovah,** but received no answer, **neither by dreams.** He had expected these to be vouchsafed, possibly to himself, but more probably to some class of prophets (see Jer. xxiii. 25, where false prophets claim to have dreamed, in imitation no doubt of true prophets); but though dreams were thus recognised as a means for communicating God's will to man, yet, as Erdmann well remarks, "a subordinate position is certainly assigned in the Old Testament to the *dream* as the medium of the Divine influence on the inner life, which in sleep sinks into a state of passiveness." **Nor by Urim.** Though Abiathar after the massacre of his family had fled to David with the ephod, it is quite possible that Saul may have had another ephod made, and have set

up a fresh sanctuary, perhaps at Gibeon, with Zadok, of the family of Eleazar, as high priest. This would account for Zadok being joined with Ahimelech, the son of Abiathar, as one of two high priests early in David's reign (2 Sam. viii. 17). It is remarkable, however, that Saul does not mention the Urim himself in ver. 15, and very probably it is named here not because the ephod was actually used, but as enumerating all the various ways by which men inquired of Jehovah. **Nor by prophets.** In his despair Saul may have turned to some reputed soothsayer present with the host, but his wilful life had alienated both priest and prophet from him. And this is the meaning of the passage in 1 Chron. x. 14: "Saul enquired not of Jehovah; therefore he slew him." He may have gone through the form of inquiring, and certainly now would have been glad of an answer, but his whole mind was determinately set upon carrying out his own purposes, and he would never permit, after the first year or two of his reign, the royal prerogative to bend to the will of God.

Vers. 7, 8.—**Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit.** Hebrew, "owner of an *ôb*" (see on ver. 3). This determination of Saul proves how obstinate was his self-will. He wanted an answer simply that he might know what was about to happen, not that he might receive guidance and counsel from God. From his bidding them seek him out "a woman mistress of an *ôb*," we gather that women were the usual claimants to these occult powers, just as now they are the most successful clairvoyantes. **Endor**—"the spring of the round," *i. e.* perhaps of the dwelling, houses being originally circular in shape, like tents — lay a little to the north-east of Shunem, and it was therefore a hazardous matter for Saul to visit it. Conder ('Tent-Work,' i. 122) says, "East of Nain is a village of mud huts, with hedges of prickly pear. This is Endor, famous in connection with the tragic history of the death of Saul. The adventurous character of Saul's night journey is very striking when we consider that the Philistines pitched in Shunem on the southern slopes of the mountain, and that Saul's army was at Jezreel; thus, to arrive at Endor he had to pass the hostile camp, and would probably creep round the eastern shoulder of the hill, hidden by the undulations of the plain, as an Arab will often now advance unseen close by you in a fold of the ground." He proceeds to speculate upon the cave in which the sorceress may have lived, dismissing those in the town as too modern, but suggesting one on the hill-side. But there is nothing in the narrative to suggest that she lived in a cave, but rather the contrary, and the idea may be dismissed as due to the imagination of painters. As the journey was very dangerous, Saul **disguised himself**, and **went by night**, accompanied only by two men; and nothing could more plainly set before us his mental anguish, and also his intense desire to pry into the secrets of futurity, than this strange journey. All faith and hope are gone, and a feverish excitement, ready to catch at any aid, however lawless and untrustworthy, had taken their place. In this state of mind he arrives at the woman's dwelling, and says, **Divine unto me by the** *ôb*. Though divination was strictly forbidden (Deut. xviii. 10, 14), yet we find the *diviner* (A. V. prudent) in high popular estimation in Isa. iii. 2; and it was probably a lucrative profession, or this woman would not have been willing to incur so great a danger as was involved in its practice. **Bring me him up,** &c. The fancy that we can see the spirits of the dead is a most natural and enduring superstition, and it seems generally assumed that they must have some knowledge not accessible to the living. It must be said for Saul that he did not become the victim of this folly until after his reason was disturbed, and as a punishment for heinous sins.

Vers. 9, 10.—**Thou knowest what Saul hath done.** Not only had Saul in the earlier part of his reign been earnest in his zeal for the Mosaic law, but even now it seems as if a witch was in danger of death; for he has to take an oath before she will acknowledge that she practises any illicit art.

Ver. 11.—**Whom shall I bring up to thee?** Assured by Saul's oath, the woman now asserts her ability to call up the spirits of the dead, and asks, just as would happen now with those who claim similar powers, who it is to be. We need not suppose that she possessed either greater or less powers than those claimed or even exercised now; for many of the phenomena of clairvoyance, though undoubtedly natural, still belong to an unscientific, and therefore vague and illusory, region. Perhaps on this very account these arts have always had an extraordinary fascination for men, and been practised in all ages and among all people with considerable skill. **Bring me up Samuel.** Samuel had been Saul's friend in his youth, and his guide and counsellor in those happy days when the young king walked uprightly, and all went well with him. But gradually the light yoke of respect for one who loved him became too heavy for a despotic temperament, which would brook no will but its own. Now that self-will is broken; it had brought the warrior king to a hopeless despair, and in his distress his mind once again returns to its old channels. Intense as was the degradation for one so haughty, in disguise by night, at

the risk of his life, to seek help from a sorceress, he bears it all that he may at least for a few minutes see the spirit of the true though stern monitor, whose memory once again filled his whole heart.

Ver. 12.—**When the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice.** Evidently the last thing that she had expected was that anything else should happen than the usual illusion by which she imposed upon her victims; nor is it certain that anything else did happen. Her assertion that she saw Samuel was probably false; and it was in feigned excitement that she cried out, **Why hast thou deceived me? for thou art Saul.** She could not but have noticed the tall stature, the dignified manner, and also the intense excitement of her strange visitor; and when he bade her call up the spirit of Samuel, she must have been dull indeed not to know who the stranger was.

Ver. 13.—**What sawest thou?** Thus far Saul had seen nothing; and as the words literally are *What seest thou?* it is plain that she had not gone into another room, as some have supposed. The vision was entirely unsubstantial, and Saul, hearing her cry, and observing her excitement, and her steady gaze upon some object, asked what that object was. Probably she was at some distance from him, as was no doubt her custom when performing her incantations, in order that what she did might not be too closely observed; probably, too, she burnt odours, and surrounded herself with the smoke of incense. In answer to Saul she says, "I see Elohim ascending out of the earth." As the participle is plural, she does not mean God; nor, as it was a single appearance, is the rendering **gods** correct. What she means is that she saw some grand supernatural appearance rising out of the ground, which she calls *a god* in a general way, without attaching any very exact meaning to the term.

Ver. 14.—**What form is he of?** Rather, "What is his aspect?" *i. e.* his look. As the term *a god* conveyed no other idea than that she had seen something majestic, Saul asks for a more exact description. She answers that it was an old man clad in a robe, *meïl* (see on ch. ii. 19). Samuel seems never to have worn the prophetic mantle (see on ch. xv. 27), but always the *meïl*. There was nothing, therefore, distinctive in the dress; but as she says that she has seen an old man, Saul concludes that he for whom he had asked had appeared to him. Instead **of Saul perceived,** the Hebrew has "Saul knew." There is nothing to prove that Saul really saw anything; all that is said is that by the woman's description "Saul recognised that what she had seen was Samuel, and he bowed himself to the ground, and made obeisance."

Vers. 15, 16.—**Why hast thou disquieted me?** *I. e.* Why hast thou caused me to be disturbed by the incantations of this woman? **Neither by prophets nor by dreams.** It is suggested in the Talmud (Berach xii. 2) that Saul omitted all mention of the Urim from shame at having murdered the priests. **Is become thine enemy.** By a slight difference of reading the Septuagint have, "is on the side of thy neighbour."

Vers. 17—19.—**Jehovah hath done to him.** Rather, "hath wrought for himself;" but the LXX., Vulgate, and some MSS. read "hath done *to thee*," as in ver. 18. **As he spake by me.** See ch. xv. 28. Saul's rebellion is there said, in ver. 23, to be a crime as great as the witchcraft which he was at that time so zealously punishing; here, where the sentence is being carried into execution, Saul has himself become guilty of what in his better hours he so abominated. **Jehovah will also deliver Israel with thee.** Rather, "will deliver Israel also with thee," *i. e.* the nation is to share thy punishment. **To-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me.** *I. e.* shall be dead. Whence this voice came it is difficult to say. St. Augustine thought that the woman really conjured up a demon, who took the form of Samuel. Maimonides treats the whole as the effect of Saul's diseased imagination; while many modern commentators regard it as a well-played piece of jugglery on the part of the woman, who recognised Saul at once on his entrance, but professed not to know him till his name was revealed to her by the pretended apparition, in whose name she reproached him for his crimes, announced to him, what now all were convinced of, that David was to be his successor, and foretold his defeat and death. In the face of such a passage as Deut. xviii. 10—12 we cannot believe that the Bible would set before us an instance of witchcraft employed with the Divine sanction for holy purposes; but we can easily believe that the woman would gladly take a bitter revenge on the man who had cruelly put to death all persons reputed to have such powers as those to which she laid claim. The object of the narrative is plainly to set before us the completeness of Saul's moral downfall and debasement. Here is the man endowed with so many and so great gifts of genius, and who in so many things started so well and behaved so nobly, the victim of a despairing melancholy; his conscience is blackened with the wholesale massacre of the priesthood, his imagination is ever brooding over the sick fancy of treason plotted by his son-in-law, whom now he supposes to be in the Philistine camp; his enemies have invaded his territory in extraordinary numbers and upon new ground; to him it seems as if they have come to dethrone him and place his crown on

David's head. In this dire extremity his one wish is to pry into futurity and learn his fate. There is no submission to God, no sorrow for disobedience, no sign of even a wish for amendment; it is to unholy arts that he looks, simply that he may know what a few more hours will make known to all. Neglecting his duties as a general and king, instead of making wise preparation for the coming fight, he disguises himself, takes a dangerous and wearisome journey round the enemies' camp, arrives at his destination by night, and, exhausted with hunger and mental agitation, seeks there for the knowledge unattainable in any upright manner from a reputed witch. He has rejected God, lost all the strength and comfort of true religion, and is become the victim of abject superstition. Whether he were the victim also of the woman's arts, or of his own sick fantasy, is not a matter of much consequence; the interest of the narrative lies in the revelation it makes to us of Saul's mental and moral state; and scarcely is there in the whole of Scripture anything more tragic than this narrative, or any more intense picture of the depth of degradation to which a noble but perverse intellect is capable of falling.

Vers. 20—25.—**Saul fell straightway all along**, *i. e.* at full length, **on the earth**. He fainted, partly from mental distress, partly from bodily exhaustion, as he had gone **all the day** and **all the night** without food. It was this long-continued violent emotion of feeling which had driven Saul to this rash enterprise; but fasting and agony of mind were the worst possible preparation for a visit to one used to cajole her victims by pretended magical arts, and gifted, as people of her class usually are, with great shrewdness. But practised as she was in deceit, yet even in her triumph over her enemy she felt, when she saw him swoon away, a natural sympathy for his misery and weakness, and urged him to take food. Perhaps she saw that without it he could never have got back to the Israelite camp. At first he refused, but the necessity of it was so plain, that when the two men with him also urged it, he at last consented. **So he arose from the earth, and sat upon the bed.** During this colloquy he had remained prostrate upon the ground, but now he seated himself, not on a *bed*, but upon the raised bank, or divan, which runs along the wall of an Oriental house, and is furnished with carpets and cushions for men to sit or lie upon. There he rested, a prey, we may well believe, to bitter thoughts, while the woman hastily prepared a meal, killing a calf and baking unleavened cakes, as there was no time to leaven the dough. And so "they ate, and rose up, and departed that night."

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—5.—*The operation of moral causes.* The facts are—1. On war arising between the Philistines and Israel, Achish reminds David of his obligation to assist him in battle. 2. David, although answering ambiguously, is trusted by Achish, who promises him promotion. 3. On the opposing forces being assembled, Saul's heart faints for fear of his enemy. The narrative shows that both David and Saul were at the same time in embarrassed circumstances, and each as the consequence of his sin. They were bent on totally diverse objects, but neither of them was in a position of safety. The penalties of transgression were being paid. We see here an instance of—

I. THE QUESTIONABLE AMBIGUITIES OF LIFE. David's false step in yielding to unwarrantable fear, followed as it was by actions unworthy of his fair fame, was now developing to a crisis in which the principles of his entire life would be put to an unavoidable test. His heathen friend and protector naturally claimed his help in the coming struggle with Israel. Painfully must David have winced as Achish, trusting to his honour and gratitude, reminded him of his obligations. Although he had simulated hostility to Israel for his own selfish purposes, and had done himself and his countrymen a wrong by allowing it to be supposed that he could ever be their enemy, yet there was enough of fidelity in his heart to save him from so dire an evil as was suggested by Achish. To escape from the awkward position, recourse was had to the craft of an ambiguous statement, to which he and Achish attached different meanings. The common judgment on David's conduct will be adverse. Even though some would apologise for it under the plea of danger, yet they must condemn its essential falsehood. It is not lawful to palliate our deceit by reference to difficulties created by our own misconduct. Plain, straightforward words and conduct, even in times of perplexity, are not only morally best, but, even from a utilitarian point of view, are most conducive to permanent welfare. It is to be feared that ambiguities abound in life more than becomes a Christian profession. There is conduct as well as language admitting of double interpretation. We should always aim to be and

to speak so as not to be objects of suspicion. To say exactly what we mean and to act with singleness of purpose is to approximate towards the "simplicity that is in Christ" (cf. Rom. xii. 8; 2 Cor. i. 12; xi. 3).

II. UNTIMELY TROUBLES. Troubles are in the way at any time, but there are seasons when their presence is most inconvenient. It was annoying to David that war should break out between Israel and the Philistines just when he was, according to the ordinary judgment of men, under obligation to assist Achish; and it was especially inconvenient to Saul that this trouble of war should occur when, by reason of Samuel's long discountenance of his reign, the gradual alienation of able men, the loss to the kingdom of David's prowess, and his own private sorrows, it was not possible to gather adequate forces and act with wonted energy. Providence has a manifest tendency to allow troubles to cross the path of the wrong-doer just when, for his own purposes, it is desirable to have it quite clear. "Behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns," is a prediction likely to be fulfilled in the lives of rulers and nations bent on a crooked course of conduct; nor can individuals escape the law of providential vexation when they practise deceit or, like Saul, cherish an impenitent spirit. It is thus that the delusiveness of sin appears; for the ease and pleasure anticipated in doing one's sinful will vanish before events, which, like mists around a mountain, seem to come from we know not where. A man's sin will be sure to find rebuke in forms he could not foresee. It is very inconvenient to be on the wrong side in the moral conflicts of life. Good men can bear trouble in patience, knowing that it is as truly helpful to their highest interests as is joy; wicked men not only lose the support of a clear conscience, but have to learn that the end for which they have striven will be frustrated (cf. Ps. vii. 9; xxxvii. 38; cxii. 10).

III. THE OPERATION OF MORAL CAUSES. The troubles which thus came on David and Saul, producing in the one a questionable ambiguity of conduct, and in the other a sense of helplessness, were connected with a set of moral causes that had been in steady operation for a considerable period, and had interacted with the physical in producing the crisis. Taking the case of Saul, we see how his sin in the early part of his reign, being unrepented, induced the line of conduct which drove David from the land, alienated the spiritual power and many of the ablest men, gradually drew around himself evil men, and created uneasiness and distrust in the nation. Whatever reluctance on the part of the people to assemble in full force, and whatever want of nerve on the part of Saul to lead them on, might have been the immediate cause of his fear—these were the result of the moral defection which had slowly worked on all departments of life. Besides this, the sin of Saul had had the effect of so withdrawing the Divine favour that Providence, by not restraining their will, permitted the attack of the Philistines. For moral reasons Saul's predicted doom was preparing, in spite of all his efforts to avoid it. It is one of the most striking characteristics of the Bible, as compared with other books, that it brings into prominence the moral causes that affect the present and future position of men. Assuming the orderly action of physical laws, it impresses us with the truth that the mental and moral are above the physical, and that man by his conduct sets in motion moral forces which, by a subtle interaction, ultimately govern the bearing of the physical upon his condition. Moral causes are *primary*. In so far as we may imagine the Divine action in creation having a beginning, the moral cause of action was antecedent. The reason of the exercise of power was moral. In our world's sad history moral causes have been primary. The same is true of our personal life. They lie at the spring of our joy or woe. They are also *silent and slow*. Saul's sin and impenitence were not uttered, and they worked on in silent, slow course all through his life. It seems to require time for the higher moral laws to work out their legitimate consequences in the sphere of the physical. There are many illustrations of this in the lives of evil men, as also of good. They are also *invincible*. No energy or cunning on the part of Saul could obviate the political and military weakness of his kingdom. No power can check the tendency to physical and political decay consequent on the sins of statesmen and peoples. The whole universe submits to the action of the moral forces that are tending to bring men into judgment. The sea even will obey and give up its dead.

General lessons:—1. In embarrassments brought on by our sins it is honouring to God to speak the plain truth and trust to his care. 2. The affairs of life will be

easily conducted in proportion as men are honest and simple in word and deed. 3. Those only who learn the lessons of trouble in their early stage will escape later evils. 4. We should be thankful to God for hedging our erring steps with difficulties. 5. It is a comfort to the holy that the principles ruling in their souls are destined to finally subdue all things to their truest welfare.

Vers. 6—14.—*Man's appeal from God to man.* The facts are—1. Saul in his trouble seeks in vain guidance from God. 2. In despair he has recourse to the witch of Endor, promising her that no harm should come to her for assisting him with her incantations. 3. Saul desires of her to bring up Samuel. 4. On Samuel coming forth the woman is in terror, and also discovers Saul's identity. 5. By the aid of the woman Saul recognises Samuel, and bows himself to the earth. The strange events here narrated awaken feelings of wonder, and, in minds not acquiescent in God's methods of developing his purpose in connection with the Hebrew race, some degree of incredulity; but the important spiritual teaching is obvious, and the difficulties of the subject, also, are not without their practical value. We have here an instance of—

I. A MAN RIGHTEOUSLY LEFT OF GOD IN TIME OF DISTRESS. The triple reference to dreams, prophets, and Urim indicates the intense desire of Saul to obtain some intimation of the Divine will; and this renders the futility of his endeavour the more impressive. Outwardly he conformed to the usages of a ruler in Israel, and, were he judged by men who have regard only or chiefly to the zeal which meets the eye, he would be regarded as, so far, a religious man, and within the range of blessing. To those who are unfamiliar with Scripture it may seem painfully strange that a man presumably in earnest should be so utterly left of God; but, as in other instances, a little more knowledge will afford a solution of the fact and justify the ways of God. 1. *It is a fact that men are left to themselves.* Divine guidance had been withheld from Saul from the day of his rebellion (ch. xv. 20—23) up to the date of this event. The antediluvians and, at one stage of history, Israel were abandoned to their devices (Gen. vi. 1—3; Isa. i. 15). Pharisees were left to the blindness of their hearts notwithstanding their many prayers. When men deliberately darken the light that is in them God does not enable them to see the "Light of the world." 2. *There are moral reasons for such abandonment.* In Saul's case there was an absence of that state of mind which alone would render attention to his cry for help honourable to God and blessed to mankind. There was no penitential recognition of his former sin, nor of the years of persistent impenitence, nor of his cruelty to David; his desire for God's guidance and help sprang entirely from fear of military disaster, of loss of influence, and of the fulfilment of the prediction outstanding against him (ch. xv. 28, 29). The response of God to man's cry is based on law as beautiful in its orderliness as anything in the physical world. The notion that God *must* help every one in trouble is based on sheer ignorance, and is profoundly unscientific. Even in home and society we recognise the necessity of moral conditions of receiving attention and favour. Divine mercy is free, but is righteous in its flow. It never sets a premium on selfishness and impenitence; it is never exercised in such a way as to do violence to our radical sense of right and moral propriety. This will account for the deaf ear which God is represented as turning to bad men when, in desperation, they cry to him in adversity, and when, at the end of life, they seek him in vain; for they do not care for God, for holiness, for anything but selfish deliverance from uncomfortable circumstances and great danger. Hence—3. *The abandonment is in harmony with the current of God's promises.* Again and again we are encouraged to seek the Lord. Nothing is more certain than that God delights to answer our cry for help. The appeal of David later on in life, and the dumb pleading of the Magdalene, were freely answered; but the fifty-first Psalm reveals the contrast of David's spirit with that of Saul, and the tears of the unholy woman told of a heart altogether turned toward God.

II. THE SUPERHUMAN CHARACTER OF GOD'S WAYS. There is in some minds a feeling of surprise that such a narrative as this should find a place in a book supposed to be written or compiled under Divine inspiration for the instruction of the world in spiritual truth; and, assuming that its fitness in such a book can be made out, it is deemed incredible that God should allow his servant to come from the invisible world

at the request of such a man as Saul, and through an agency condemned in the Bible. Now on this difficult subject it may suffice for our purpose to observe—1. A *revelation of God's purpose* towards mankind in connection with and by means of the history of a race is *natural only in so far as it embraces what the chief figures of the history actually did*, and especially in their relation to him, be it good or bad. That Saul actually did as here recorded is evident on the face of the whole narrative, for never was there a more perfect air of truthfulness on a record. The very unreasonableness of his conduct in applying to a witch for such a purpose, and after executing the law against witchcraft, is quite reasonable when we reflect on the utter mental and moral confusion involved in his despair. Compare his unreasonable act of seeking a blessing through a sinful act (ch. xiii. 8—14; xv. 21—23). The record, therefore, of such a transaction is reasonable in an inspired book. 2. There *are cases in which God allows bad men to have their desire* without the advantage they expect from its being granted. Quails were given to men to their grief. A king was desired contrary to God's will, and one was given, much to the affliction of the nation. There is so far a similarity in this instance, that the granting of the desire to see Samuel was only to seal Saul's doom, not to give the guidance anticipated, and which had been hitherto refused (ver. 6). 3. There was *a manifest fitness in Samuel being permitted to declare the fixity of Saul's fate and its equity*. He had instructed and warned Saul at first in private (ch. ix. 25, 26), and subsequently (ch. xv. 26—31). All through he had looked with sorrowful pity on this poor wayward, sinning man. With Saul's belief in the existence of the spirits of good men after death, it was the most natural thing to wish, if possible, to see this wise, kind, and faithful friend, and in his utter despair appeal to his pity; and considering that there evidently still lurked in his mind a last hope that the old, long-deferred prediction of downfall might yet be averted, with a feeling that it was very hard, and perhaps unjust, for him to be thus left in misery, there seems to be a blending of Divine tenderness and judgment in this kind and faithful friend being permitted once more to be seen and heard, and at the same time to vindicate the justice of God in the doom about to be accomplished. The Divine tenderness and judgment which had borne with and chastised Saul all through his perverse life were now conspicuous in the irrevocable sealing of his doom. He would rather hear his sentence from Samuel than any other being, if it is to be pronounced. 4. There is *no evidence that the woman had anything to do with the appearance of Samuel*. He came forth before she called, and hence her wild shriek. That she subsequently played her part as a witch was consistent with the character of such persons. That Saul should suppose her to be the cause of the appearance does not touch the question. He was not in a mental condition to discriminate. That God should allow an invisible being to become visible under such conditions is to be settled by history, for—5. There is *no moral principle violated in God allowing a being from the invisible world to become visible*. There is here no sanction of witchcraft, no admission of its powers. Kindness and judgment only are displayed in relation to Saul. The whole difficulty, therefore, resolves itself in a visible appearance of a dead man. Will any one say that God *cannot* cause a Samuel to appear as truly as a Moses and Elijah? Does the incredulity lie in the fact that *we* never see the departed, or that God does not cause them to appear to others? By what law is God bound to make a specific exercise of his power common? Will the case be improved by saying it is such an exercise of power as *we* should not deem wise and useful? What is that but saying we make our method of government a standard by which God's reported acts shall be judged? Is it not wiser to submit to the force of historical testimony, and admit that his ways are not our ways? God does strange things in the earth, at which men marvel, but never unholy things. There is nothing incredible in the existence of departed spirits, nor in their employment when God has a fit purpose to accomplish through them.

III. THE PERMANENCE OF RELIGIOUS SENTIMENTS. It is noteworthy that although Saul had lived so long in impenitence, and had become even hardened in his sinful course, he still retained an awe and reverence for the supernatural and invisible. His very folly and sin in having recourse to a witch revealed the strength of the feeling which could not rest without some help from the unseen world. If God cannot be found men will seek out a substitute. Idolatry and all forms of religious super-

stition are evidence of the power of the religious sentiment in man. Thousands of men have done much to crush it out, but it has reasserted itself in seasons of distress. Because man is formed for religion, and carries within him feelings which crave for the unseen and eternal, therefore he often becomes the slave of false systems of belief and worship. The permanence of this sentiment gives hope to the missionary, and adds to the remorse of the finally impenitent.

IV. THE POWER OF RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE. The influence of Samuel over Saul appears in this bitter cry for his presence in the hour of misery. The foundation of this influence was laid in Samuel's character, and in the kind and wise interest he took in Saul when entering on his public duties as king. Holy example, faithful warning, wise instruction, tender forbearance, and pitiful concern had not been altogether lost on this erring, self-willed man, although in the perversity of his heart he had for years gone counter to Samuel's guidance. In the dark and painful hour of despair the thought of the wise counsellor and sincere friend came over the soul with memories rich in homage to him. How often does the poor prodigal, when sinking in misery, feel the spell of a mother's piety! How many a man after years of neglected instruction thinks of the faithful pastor, and perchance takes to heart the lessons of his words and life!

General lessons:—1. The climax of trouble is reached when God refuses to hear our prayer, for "What can I do?" then admits of no satisfactory answer. 2. We ought to search our hearts, to see whether we so "regard iniquity" therein as to be in an unfit moral condition to receive a blessing from God (Ps. lxvi. 18). 3. God has methods by which he can vindicate the justice of his judgments, even when we are craving for relief from them. 4. It is important to exercise religious influence over others as early and constantly as possible, since we know that it will be a power even when we are gone.

Vers. 15—25.—*The last fruitless effort.* The facts of this section are—1. Saul, in reply to Samuel's question, declares, as the reason of seeking him, his deep distress and desire to know what to do. 2. Samuel intimates that the inquiry is vain, as he cannot go against God; that the event causing so much distress was simply the perfecting of what had long before been declared; that David was the coming king, and that all this was the consequence of deliberate disobedience. 3. He also declares that the morrow should witness the overthrow of Saul's power and the death of himself and sons. 4. The effect of the message on Saul is to prostrate him in terror on the ground. 5. Out of compassion the woman seeks in vain to rouse Saul from his helpless despair, but by the aid of his attendants he is at last constrained to rise and partake of the meal she had prepared. Among the many truths suggested by this impressive scene we may notice a few.

I. THE DARING OF DESPERATION. Ordinarily men shrink in dread from all thought of contact with visitants from the unseen world, and bad men especially tremble at the possible presence, seen or unseen, of the ghosts of the departed. The experience of all ages testifies to this. And yet here we have an instance of a man, not usually distinguished by calm self-possession, deliberately seeking, and actually holding, converse with one from the dead. The solution of this reversal of the course of human feeling and conduct lies in the desperation of despair, which so overpowers all thought and feeling as to dare to do what at other times would be impossible. Such the urgency of conscience, the pressure of misery, the violent struggle of a will caught in the coils of its own perversity. The same occurs in other circumstances, as when, to extricate themselves from self-brought miseries, men dare to perpetrate deeds of honour or shame, or even commit suicide. Is there not a similar feeling implied in the cry to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the wrath of the Lamb"?

II. AN UNANSWERABLE QUESTION. One question had agitated Saul for some days. He appealed to God, and no answer came; and now Samuel is told that the object for which he was summoned into the visible sphere was to reply to this one question, "What shall I do?" The silence of God and the words of Samuel show that practically this was a question for which no answer was possible. The day for doing was in the past, when Samuel delivered instructions in the name of God. Years of persistent impenitence for disobedience and of self-willed warring against the pur-

poses of God had brought the unhappy man to a time and position in which no action on his part could reverse the judgment impending. Too late! So is it in human life still. Men may persist in evil ways at home or in business till ruin of domestic peace and of prospects is inevitable, and no course is open for retrieval. The question of the jailor, "What must I do to be saved?" was opportune, and then, as generally, it admitted of a blessed answer; but it is possible for men to scorn and despise Christ so long that the other question may arise, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" (cf. Heb. ii. 3; vi. 3—7; x. 26—31).

III. THE UNALTERABLE LAW OF LIFE. The whole of Saul's conduct during these closing days of his life was based on the ignorant supposition that by some device he could be sustained in the kingdom notwithstanding his former disobedience and continued impenitence. Conformity in act and spirit to the mind of God is the law of true prosperity in life. Israel's king rises or falls according to this law. As a servant called to perform an important part in unfolding Messianic purposes, Saul's hold on the kingdom was made to *depend on character*. No plea, no consideration of personal misery, no device suggested by the living or the dead, could avail to give to a self-willed, impenitent man what is due to the obedient and holy. In all his misery and desire for guidance there was not a trace of the broken or contrite heart which God accepts; there was only and always a blind effort to avert the passing away of the power which sin had forfeited. This law of life is never changed. Men struggle against it, seek to evade its action, crave for some relaxation of its pressure, but it is unbending, unrelenting. Character determines destiny. The lines of experience in the future are the outcome of the present, and not disconnected. As we sow we reap.

IV. THE MORAL INTERPRETATION OF EVENTS. No doubt there were hours when the revival of conscience would enable Saul to read the meaning of the troubles that had long befallen him; but generally, and especially at this juncture, he appears to have wondered at the miseries of his position. Men do bring on themselves manifold troubles, and then, forgetful of the conduct which gave rise to them, or not tracing them carefully back to their own former moral condition, they marvel at, and perhaps complain of, the sufferings endured. The visitant from the unseen world threw light on Saul's position by reference to conduct and character. Here was an interpretation, from a moral point of view, of a long succession of events in the political, physical, and mental spheres. We never estimate events in our life aright if we leave out the moral element. A vast accumulation of disasters in the history of nations and individuals, Churches and homes, is understandable in the light of what men have been and have done. Hence the value of the Bible, which comes as a visitant from the spiritual sphere, casting light on the matters that worry and distress the heart of man. Sinful men need a voice to tell them how to estimate the experiences of their life.

V. THE VINDICATION OF GOD'S SEVERITY. It seemed hard to Saul to be thus left of God, the mere wreck of his former self, and now exposed to a great disaster as commander of an army. Had casual observers, unacquainted with antecedent moral facts, looked on his miseries, they might pronounce the treatment severe. There is, however, in the conscience of even the most self-willed sinner that which recognises the majesty of right and echoes the voice of judgment. It was only for Samuel to refer to the deliberate disobedience of former days, and Saul saw at once the connection of all his woes with the depraved moral condition then manifested and subsequently cherished. Divine patience had borne with him during years of rebellion, content to let the natural outgrowth of his own acts bring on the judgment predicted, and, now that it was falling on him with crushing force, this reminder of great and continuous sin was even to the suffering king a full vindication of the course of Providence. Here is *warning* and *instruction* for us. Let us never suppose that we or others bear more than we deserve. We should avoid the bare thought that God deals harshly with any of his creatures. The bitterest element in the cup of suffering is that *we* put into it by our transgressions; for facts prove that overwhelming material disasters, with a good conscience, are not the worst of evils, and become not only endurable, but means of spiritual good. The hour may come to each when, by a voice full of truth, we shall be made to see how just are God's judgments on

ourselves. The escape from so awful a position is by fleeing now for refuge to Christ our Righteousness. The dumb consent of Saul to the truth of Samuel's words is in keeping with the acquiescent silence wherewith, in the future life, the wicked are represented as bowing to the sentence of the Judge (cf. Matt. vii. 21—23; **xxv. 11**, 12, 31—46; Luke xvi. 23—25; xix. 22—26).

VI. THE GREAT DISAPPOINTMENT OF LIFE. Saul certainly cherished hope to the last that by some contrivance, some casual aid, he should avert the evil due to his sins. With all the unreasoning energy of desperation he sought Samuel as a final resource; but instead of the hoped-for guidance of what he shall do, he meets with a declaration of his doom. Sentence of death is passed by the very friend whose counsel is sought. This doubtless was the most grievous disappointment of his earthly life, and might well lay him low in the dust. Not instruction, but judicial utterance. Not deliverance, but destruction. There are bitter disappointments during the life of most men, and the heart sinks in pain and dismay, but *the* great disappointment of some is at the end of their earthly course. Christ represents some as expecting to be received into heaven, and all the hopes of years are blasted by the awful words, "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity." The parable of the Pharisee and publican points to the same fearful issue. Would that men did but "ponder the path" of their feet, and by timely penitence and renewal of soul obviate that most calamitous of all disappointments!

VII. SYMPATHY WITH FALLEN GREATNESS. There is an awful and instructive contrast in this closing scene of Saul's career—between the calm, measured, though evidently tender words of Samuel, followed by his return to the invisible world, leaving the wretched king prostrate and helpless on the ground, and the active compassion of this evil woman for the distinguished sufferer at her feet. Samuel was still the true, loving man as of old; but in the invisible sphere he saw things in a clear moral light, and was restrained by his judicial commission from manifesting in action sympathy for the fallen king. It is a question how far a perfect perception of the enormity of sin, such as must be attained by the "spirits of the just made perfect," diminishes what we ordinarily understand as sympathy for those who receive "according to the deeds done in the body." Be that as it may, we cannot but note how even those addicted to a life of sin, as was this woman, are touched by the presence of a great sorrow. There is something exquisitely beautiful in her conduct. For a time the old cunning and moral insensibility and cynicism are set aside, and the humane feelings of her soul find free exercise, as perhaps in the days of her youth—suggestive to us of the germ of true humanity that underlies the accretions of a guilty life, and of the power that may be exercised over even the worst, if only we knew the art of touching the hidden spring. Every reader of the narrative must enter into her gentle and respectful feelings towards the fallen monarch; and we feel that had we been there we also should have sought to raise him from the earth, and provide generous nourishment for his exhausted frame. For sympathy with the righteous judgments of God does not extinguish pity for those who fall under them. In fallen greatness we see the majesty and the dishonour, the possibilities and the actualities, of our common humanity. It is as though a large part of ourselves had come to grief; and though we cannot but deplore the sin, we feel disposed to weep over the lost one, and to render the last offices of kindness with a tender hand. So did our blessed Lord, the *perfect Man*, weep over the lost city when proclaiming with full acquiescence its righteous doom (Matt. **xxiii. 37**, 38; Luke **xix. 41—44**).

General lessons:—1. The only safe course when sin has been committed is at once, after the example of David and Peter, to return to the Lord and cast ourselves entirely on his mercy. Saul's neglect of this was the secret of his subsequent miseries. 2. There is great probability of cherished sin issuing in a state of mind such that men shall imagine they are seeking good of God when in reality they are seeking only the evasion of his righteous judgments. 3. It cannot be too earnestly and frequently impressed on young and old that moral character is the governing element in the determination of their present and future condition. 4. The occasional justification of God's apparently severe judgments recorded in Scripture may be regarded as foreshadowing the future moral solution of the dark and painful

events connected with the history of the intelligent universe. 5. If we would be prepared to end life with a realisation of our hopes we must give heed to the reality of our oneness with the mind of God.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—6. (GILBOA.)—*Darkening shadows of retribution.* "And when Saul saw the host of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled" (ver. 5). 1. The *end of Saul* was now approaching. How long he reigned is not stated ("forty years," Acts xiii. 21; perhaps a round number, including the judgeship of Samuel). But his course from his first wrong step (ch. xiii. 8—15) had been a downward one, broken only by brief seasons of amendment. His mental malady may account in part for some of his actions in his later years. During his persecution of David the enemies of Israel became more powerful and aggressive, and, in retribution for unfaithfulness to Jehovah, he was about to be delivered with the host of Israel "into the hand of the Philistines," from whom he had been chosen to effect deliverance (ch. ix. 16). 2. The *Philistine invasion* was on a larger scale than any that had recently occurred (ch. xiii. 5; xvii. 1), and in a different part of the country. It was evidently planned with a view to inflict a fatal blow on Israel. The enemy marched northward, entered the plain of Esdraelon (Jezreel), the battlefield of Palestine (stretching out eastward in three branches, like fingers from the hand), and encamped at Shunem (at the base of Little Hermon, north of the central and principal branch). "And the Israelites pitched by the fountain which is in Jezreel" (ch. xxix. 1), on a spur of Mount Gilboa (south of the central branch), from which they could see the Philistines, three miles distant across the plain, where on the morrow the conflict must be waged. 3. What *the issue of the conflict* was likely to be Saul's heart told him only too plainly. He felt that what he had so long dreaded was about to come upon him; that the sentence of rejection formerly uttered by Samuel (ch. xvi. 14—16), now gone to his rest (ver. 3), was to be fully executed, and that he would be deprived of his crown, and probably of his life. David, who had once saved Israel in similar peril, had gone over to the Philistines (ch. xxvii. 4), was now (as he thought) among them, and would "surely be king" (ch. xxiv. 20). The night of retribution is setting in. The ministers of vengeance are gathering, like vultures to the prey,

> "From the invisible ether;
> First a speck, and then a vulture,
> Till the air is dark with pinions."

The experience of Saul is shared by many a persistent transgressor in the presence of imminent danger and approaching death, when "the terrors of God do set themselves in array against" him (Job vi. 4; xxiv. 17). He is—

I. BESET BY IRRESISTIBLE FEAR. The sight of superior hostile forces is calculated to produce such fear, but its power to do so depends chiefly upon the inward state of a man himself, more or less conscious of his condition; 1. *The remembrance of past transgressions*, and of the punishment threatened against them, and already in some measure experienced. Circumstances often quicken the memory and open its secret records, so that former actions and events reappear, are seen in their true character, and fill the soul with consternation. "I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes" (Ps. l. 21). 2. *The consciousness of Divine displeasure* in consequence of disobedience, and the heart not being right with God. Although conscience may slumber long, the hour of awakening comes, and when it asserts its power "its frown is more to be dreaded than the frowns of kings or the approach of armies. It is a fire in the bones, burning when no man suspects" (South). "A wounded spirit who can bear?" (Prov. xviii. 14).

> "O conscience, conscience, man's most faithful friend,
> How canst thou comfort, ease, relieve, defend!
> But if he will thy friendly checks forego,
> Thou art, oh, woe for me! his deadliest foe" (Crabbe).

3. *The foreboding of approaching doom.* Conscience "exerts itself magisterially, and approves or condemns, . . . and if not forcibly stopped, naturally and always, of course, goes on to anticipate a higher and more effectual sentence, which shall hereafter second and affirm its own" (Butler).

II. IMPELLED TO SEEK DIVINE COUNSEL. "And Saul inquired of Jehovah" (ver. 6). It is not recorded that he had ever done so since he "asked counsel of God" and "he answered him not" (ch. xiv. 37). His communication with Heaven had evidently been long interrupted. But under the influence of fear he felt the urgent need of it, as other men who have neglected to seek God often do in times of danger, and he expected that it would come at his bidding, as a matter of course, when he made use of the recognised means of obtaining it, apart from a proper state of heart, therein exhibiting the same blindness as of old (ch. xiii. 9). Cherishing a spirit of envy and hatred, how could it be expected that he should be visited by the Divine Spirit in *dreams* of good? Having slain the high priest, and compelled his son to flee to David "with the ephod" and the *Urim*, how could it be expected that he should obtain counsel through another whom he had appointed in his stead, or, having alienated the *prophets*, that he should gain it through them? Divine aid is often sought through proper channels in vain because—1. *It is not sought at the right time*,—"When thou mayest be found" (Ps. xxxii. 6). "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer" (Prov. i. 24—33),—which takes place not merely as a just punishment for long neglect, but also on account of the increased hardness of their hearts thereby induced, and rendering them incapable and utterly unworthy of holding communion with God. "If we do not hear God's voice when it goes well with us, God can and will refuse to hear our voice when it goes ill with us" (Starke). 2. *It is not sought in a right spirit*—with humility, penitence, self-renunciation, and faith. Of these principles there is no trace in the inquiry of Saul. 3. *It is not sought with a right purpose*, but with some earthly and selfish end in view, rather than the Divine honour. "As the event proved, Saul did not really inquire of the Lord in the sense of seeking direction from him, and of being willing to be guided by it. Rather did he, if we may so express it, wish to use the Lord as the means by which to attain his object. But that was essentially the heathen view, and differed only in detail, not in principle, from the inquiry of the familiar spirit, to which he afterwards resorted" (Edersheim). "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss," &c. (James iv. 3; Ps. lxvi. 18; Isa. lxvi. 4; Ezek. xiv. 4; xx. 31).

III. DENIED THE DESIRED RESPONSE. "Jehovah answered him not," &c. (ver. 6). "I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more" (ver. 15). "Saul received from God no answer more, except for judgment." 1. What dreadful *silence* and *loneliness* are here revealed! "We read of the silence of the desert, the silence of midnight, the silence of the churchyard and the grave; but this is something more profound and appalling—the silence of God when appealed to by the sinner in his extremity. It is not the silence of indifference, nor of inability to hear, nor of weakness, nor of perplexity; but of refusal, of rejection, of displeasure, of abandonment" (Bonar, 'Bible Thoughts'). "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone" (Hosea iv. 17). 2. What utter *helplessness!* 3. What intolerable *darkness* and *distress!* (Heb. x. 27).

Consider—1. That if "inquiry of the Lord" be left unanswered, the reason of it is to be sought in the moral condition of the inquirer. 2. That nothing but the offering of the sacrifice of "a broken and a contrite heart" can prevent despair. 3. That the boundless mercy of God should awaken hope even at "the eleventh hour."—D.

Vers. 7—10. (GILBOA, ENDOR).—*Resorting to superstitious practices.* "Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and inquire of her" (ver. 7). 1. The religion of Saul (like that of many others in Israel) was largely pervaded by *superstition*. He regarded Jehovah as an object of dread rather than of trust and love, and observed the outward forms of his service not in a spirit of willing and hearty obedience, but because he thought that they would of themselves procure for him the Divine favour. Hence his zeal in putting away "those that had familiar spirits" (*Oboth*=spirits of the departed, supposed to be called up from the unseen world

to make disclosures concerning the future, and dwelling in them and speaking through them in hollow tones of voice, Isa. viii. 19; xxix. 4; ventriloquists, LXX.; necromancers) "and wizards" (sorcerers). And when his inquiry of the Lord was not answered, he resorted to one of these, in the expectation of being told what he must do (ver. 15) to avert the wrath which he feared. In like manner the heathen resorted to their priests and diviners (ch. vi. 2). He was an embodiment of the heathen mind in Israel. "There were three courses open to him: he might sit down in quiet hopelessness, and let the evil come; or he might in faith and penitent submission commit the whole matter to God, even amid the awful silence; or he might betake himself to hell for counsel, since heaven was deaf. He chooses the last! 'God has cast me off; I will betake myself to Satan. Heaven's door is shut; I will see if hell's be open'" (Bonar). He had about him *servants* who pandered to his superstitious propensities (ch. xvi. 15), and informed him of a practitioner of the heathen art residing at Endor, eight miles distant (north of Little Hermon); and thither two of them conducted him "by night." (Another of the *night scenes* of this book—ch. iii. 3; v. 3; ix. 25; xv. 11; xix. 10; xxv. 36; xxvi. 7; xxx. 17). It was "a dreadful journey, a terrible night; both symbols of Saul's condition, lost on the way of inner self-hardening and thorough self-darkening" (Erdmann). The readiness with which he was directed to the sorceress shows the secret prevalence of superstition in Israel. 3. He *failed* to obtain the aid he desired, committed his crowning act of apostasy, and hastened his doom. "So Saul died for . . . asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to inquire of it" (1 Chron. x. 13). "There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord" (Prov. xxi. 30). There may have been "an objective reality, a dark background of magical agency" (Delitzsch, 'Bib. Psychology,' p. 363); but, on the other hand, "the actual references to magic in Scripture do not involve its reality. The mischiefs resulting from the *pretension*, under the theocracy, to an act which involved idolatry justified the statute which denounced it with death" (Kitto, 'Cyc.,' art. Witchcraft). "In the doctrinal Scriptures magic is passed by with contempt; in the historical Scriptures the reasonableness of this contempt is shown. Whenever the practisers of magic attempt to combat the servants of God they conspicuously fail" (Smith's 'Dict.,' art. Magic). Resorting to superstitious practices of various kinds (the selection of "lucky" days, fortune-telling, spirit-rapping, psychography, necromancy, and, in more direct connection with the Christian religion, image-worship, prayers to the dead, superstitious rites and ceremonies of various kinds) is not unknown at the present day. Notice—

I. ITS INDUCEMENTS. Among them are—1. *Unbelieving fear.* "Superstition is the restless effort of a guilty but blind conscience to find rest and peace and good by unauthorised propitiations and ceremonies" (R. Watson). "The true cause and rise of superstition is indeed nothing else but a false opinion of the Deity, that renders him terrible and dreadful, as being rigorous and imperious; that which represents him as austere and apt to be angry, but yet impotent and easy to be appeased again by some flattering devotions, especially if performed with sanctimonious shows and a solemn sadness of mind" (Smith, 'Sel. Dis. Superstition'). "The human heart needs something to cling to, something to which it may hold fast, a prop which its tendrils may firmly clasp; therefore when it leaves him for whom it was made, when it sinks into unbelief, then it clings to superstition and darkness" (Schlier). 2. *Unhallowed curiosity*, which is not satisfied with what has been revealed in the word of God, and wishes to become acquainted with the secrets of the unseen world and the future, designedly concealed. Such curiosity "is a flattering serpent, which promises us the wisdom of God, and cheats us out of a blessed paradise of happier, childlike waiting." "Let no man beguile you," &c. (Col. ii. 18). 3. *Foolish presumption*, which fancies that it can attain the knowledge and help of the supernatural by other ways and means than God has appointed. "He who, in respect of supersensual things and of the mysterious background of sensible things, regards as true, and allows impressions to be made on himself by thoughts or occurrences whose reality has neither the warranty of undoubtedly credible tradition nor the warranty of internal force of conviction in their favour, is rightly called superstitious" (Delitzsch).

II. ITS DEVICES. They usually—1. *Involve artifice*, effort, trouble, and sacrifice

(vers. 7, 8). What extraordinary pains do men sometimes undergo in the practice of superstition! (1 Kings xviii. 28). 2. *Affect darkness* and secrecy, and necessitate the adoption of undignified, mean, and shameful courses. They are carried out under the cover of night, which is favourable to deception. Saul disguised himself not to escape the Philistines, but to elude the observation of his own people, and to impose upon the sorceress (ver. 9). 3. *Involve mental blindness* and credulity, so that those who yield to them become the ready dupes of others who traffic on their gloomy fears and illusory hopes, "deceiving and being deceived." "It was a shame that the king who had expelled all sorcerers must himself at last fall into the hands of a sorceress" (Winer).

III. ITS SINFULNESS. 1. *It casts contempt upon the sufficiency of Divine revelation.* "Wilt thou have light for all the riddles and dark questions of this life? betake thyself to God's word, there enough is revealed, and what goes beyond that comes of evil." 2. *It chooses evil instead of good*, disregards the moral dispositions which God requires, and violates the sense of goodness, righteousness, and truth. Saul took an oath "by the Lord" to protect what he knew was displeasing to the Lord, and was guilty of connivance at what he himself had condemned as worthy of death (ver. 10). 3. *It does what the word of God prohibits*, and in its worst forms, casts off allegiance to God, and makes alliance with his enemies (Levit. xix. 31; xx. 6, 27; Deut. xviii. 10; 2 Kings xxiii. 24; Gal. v. 20; Rev. xxii. 15). "Knowing that the act of divination co-operates in no slight degree with the errors of the lives of the multitude, so as to lead them out of the right way, Moses did not suffer his disciples to use any species of it whatever. All these things are but the furniture of impiety. How so? Because he who attends to them and who allows himself to be influenced by them disregards the cause of all things, looking upon those things alone as the causes of all things, whether good or evil" (Philo, 'On Monarchy').

IV. ITS INJURIOUSNESS. 1. It fills the votaries of superstition with miserable disappointment. 2. It makes them the victims of delusion, and further estranges them from the way of truth. 3. It increases their guilt, hardens their heart, and quickens their pace to final ruin. Saul's night-visit was an ill preparation for the coming conflict. It extinguished every ray of hope, and turned his fear into despair.—D.

Ver. 11. (ENDOR.)—*Samuel's counsel vainly desired.* "Bring me up Samuel." The character of Samuel was so great, his life had been so long-continued, his appearance so familiar to all, his influence so powerful and extensive, that after his departure his form must have seemed still to brood over the land. What the thoughts of Saul were at his death we know not. Perhaps he was glad of his removal. Although dwelling near him, he was altogether estranged from him, and entirely neglected to seek his counsel. But the time came—the threatening hosts of the Philistines, his overwhelming fear, the silence of Heaven—when he urgently needed it, and earnestly but vainly desired the benefit of it. Whether he went to the sorceress with the deliberate purpose of seeking an interview with his old and faithful counsellor, or sought it under the impulse of the moment, is not stated. The former is the more probable. He was certainly persuaded of the power which she professed to have (ver. 11) of raising up the spirits of the departed, and (after her expression of surprise, and her description of his well-known appearance) of the actual presence of Samuel in consequence of his request ("I have called thee," ver. 15). The result of the interview, however, proved that his hope of obtaining good from it was vain. It is not unusual for those who have neglected the advice of a teacher or friend to desire, when he is gone, that he might come back and again grant it to them. In such a desire we see—

I. THE VALUE OF FAITHFUL COUNSEL, to which it is a testimony. The reproofs and warnings which a faithful counsellor gives are not always agreeable. They are often deemed unnecessary, regarded with contempt, and cause him to be accounted an enemy. But they are justified by events; and then their worth is felt, and they are longed for, when perchance it is too late. The sore distress which Saul now suffered would have been averted if he had listened to the counsel of Samuel. He is your best friend who tells you the truth, and seeks your welfare rather than your favour. Give heed to what he says while it may conduce to your profit.

II. THE FOLLY OF FAITHLESS NEGLECT, of which it is a confession. "How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me!" (Prov. v. 12, 13). "How many who have despised the advice of a father or a mother, and grieved their parents by opposition and disobedience, long bitterly to bring them back when they have gone down to the grave, that they may have the benefit of the counsel which they once slighted and scorned! If they could go to the necromancer in the hour of their distress, it would not be, 'Bring me up the companion who cheered me in my gaieties, who was with me at the revel and the dance and the public show;' but, 'Bring me up the father with his gray hairs, who solemnly told me that the way of transgressors was hard; or the mother who with weeping eyes and broken voice admonished me against sinful indulgences.' . . . And yet, if you neglect the Lord and continue to resist the strivings of his Spirit, so that at length he departs from you as he departed from Saul, what would it avail that the grave could give up its inhabitant—if the parent, the friend, or the minister should return at your bidding?" (H. Melvill).

III. THE WORTHLESSNESS OF PIOUS WISHES in those who persist in transgression. Saul was deeply humbled. His self-will and pride were broken down into pitiable abasement, and he seemed willing to receive and obey the counsel which he had previously slighted. Yet his motive was doubtless the same as in inquiring of the Lord (vers. 1—6); he looked upon Samuel as more merciful than the Lord, relied upon him to effect a change in the Divine purpose (ch. xv. 29), and expected his aid at the very moment he was committing a capital offence. He was more blinded and self-deceived than ever. Men often abase themselves deeply in affliction while they remain wholly destitute of the spirit of obedience. "Let no man deceive himself." What value can there be in a religious desire which is combined with the violation of the plainest religious duty?

IV. THE USELESSNESS OF EXTRAORDINARY COMMUNICATIONS, such as have been sometimes desired from the dead. Saul had what to him was the fulfilment of his desire; but he was told only what he already knew or feared, he was not led to repentance and faith, and sank into despair. Is it supposed that benefit would be derived from the reappearance and counsel of the departed? Consider that—1. The light which might be brought would only be a confirmation of the truth which has been already revealed. If even future events, as, *e. g.*, the time of death, should be declared, the knowledge thereof would probably be useless and injurious. Should death be distant, it would be a strong temptation to sloth and continued sin; should it be very near, whilst it might arouse some to make preparation for it simply from a selfish dread of threatening evil, it would lead others to feel that it was too late to avert the danger, and resign themselves to reckless indulgence or blank despair (see ch. xx. 3). 2. Those who are not improved by existing inducements to faith and obedience would be proof against such as might be thereby presented, and would in most cases be hardened in sin (John xii. 10). "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke xvi. 31). 3. God has given to men the knowledge and inducements which are best adapted to their probationary condition and sufficient for every practical purpose, and has wisely determined that no more shall be afforded. "He that is unjust," &c. (Rev. xxii. 11). "As no additional dissuasions from sin and inducements to holiness would be presented, they who, notwithstanding these disclosures, remained impenitent and unbelieving must continue in irreclaimable wickedness." "Say not in thine heart," &c. (Rom. x. 6—11). Crave not for "secret things"—the mysterious, the supernatural, the miraculous, the speculative, the impossible. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."—D.

Vers. 12—20. (ENDOR.)—*The sentence of rejection confirmed.* "And Jehovah hath done for himself, as he spake by me" (ver. 17). 1. The *narrative* of Saul's interview with the sorceress is graphic, but brief, incomplete, and in many respects, as might be expected, indefinite. Whether on his request, "Bring me up Samuel," she employed her illicit art is not expressly stated, nor whether any supernatural

agency was concerned in what took place. "The woman saw Samuel," and she *alone* (ver. 14), "and she cried out" (in real or feigned surprise and fear), "Why hast thou deceived me? for thou art Saul." There is no intimation that the name of Samuel or the distinguished stature of her visitor had previously suggested who he was; nor of any "gestures of fearful menace such as he could only show towards a deadly enemy, *i. e.* towards Saul" (Ewald, Stanley). It was from her description of "gods ascending out of the earth," and of the well-known appearance of the venerable judge and prophet, that "he perceived that it was Samuel," and prostrated himself in abject homage before him whom he had formerly moved by his importunity to comply with his request (ch. xv. 30); and while "stooping with his face to the ground" he heard a voice which he was persuaded was the voice of Samuel. The evidence of an apparition or vision (for there can be no question concerning anything else) depended solely on the testimony of the woman; of the hearing of an unearthly voice on that of Saul, from whom also (unless his two servants were present at the time, which is not likely) the whole account must have been primarily derived. 2. It has been *explained* in various ways, *e. g.*, that there was—(1) *A real apparition* of the prophet (Ecclus. xlvi. 20), either evoked by the conjurations of the woman (LXX., Josephus, Talmud), or effected by Divine power without her aid, and contrary to her expectation (see, for authorities and arguments, Wordsworth, 'Com.;' Waterland, Delany, Sir W. Scott, 'Demonology;' Kitto, 'D. B. Illus.;' Lindsay, Hengstenberg, Keil). (2) *An illusory appearance* produced by demoniacal (or angelic) agency, and, according to some, employed as a medium of Divine revelation (Luther, Calvin, Grotius, Gilpin, 'Dæmonologia Sacra;' Hall, Patrick, M. Henry). (3) *A mental impression* or representation produced by Divine influence. (4) *A superstitious self-deception* on the part of the woman, combined with a psychological *identifying* of herself with the deceased prophet (Erdmann). (5) *A conscious deception* practised by her (perhaps not entirely without illusion) on the fearful and superstitious mind of the king, fasting, wearied, terrified, and in the dark (Chandler, W. Scott, 'Existence of Evil Spirits;' Thenius); little other than a dream, though *terribly real to him*. The circumstances of the case were such that the almost dramatic language of the historian may be fairly understood as descriptive of what seemed to Saul, and was afterwards popularly believed, rather than of the actual reality. All that occurred may be accounted for more satisfactorily on this hypothesis than any other. Almost every other involves assumptions concerning the power of necromancy, the reappearance of the dead, evil spirits, &c., which are unsupported by Scripture and exceedingly improbable. A Divine interposition would have been unmistakably indicated in the narrative (which is not the case, ver. 21), inconsistent with the Divine refusal to answer Saul's inquiry, unnecessary in order to reprove him further for the past (for there is no expressed reproof of his present crime), without adequate theocratic purpose, contrary to the holiness of God, and a confirmation (not a punishment) of "the anti-godly attempt of the sorceress." 3. Its *chief significance* (however it may be explained) lies in the revelation which it makes of the depth of degradation to which Saul had sunk and the effect of his apostasy. His "sin of divination" (ch. xv. 23) led to despair, and was speedily followed by the full execution of the sentence of his rejection. The silence of God was the silence that precedes the thunderstorm and the earthquake. Observe that—

I. THERE IS NO APPEAL FROM THE DIVINE JUDGMENT TO ANY OTHER (vers. 16, 17). Saul appears to have clung to the delusion that the sentence of Divine judgment uttered against him might be effectually resisted and entirely revoked; refused to acknowledge and submit to it, and hoped to succeed in his conflict with it when success was plainly perceived by others to be impossible. Hence (and not merely to gratify his curiosity concerning his fate) he sought the counsel of Samuel. In answer to the voice (asking reproachfully the reason why he had "disquieted" the dead, and drawing forth the expression of his feelings and wishes), he pathetically described his distress in consequence of the attack of the Philistines and his abandonment by God, and appealed for aid in his perplexity. Without supposing a desire of revenge on the part of the sorceress, hardly any other reply could be more accordant with his state of mind and deepest convictions than that which came to him. Since (by his own confession) he was abandoned by the Lord, it was useless to expect effectual

help from the prophet of the Lord, who was the exponent and executor of his will. No direction was given "what he must do," and no ground of hope afforded that he might find mercy with the Lord himself if he sought it in a right spirit. "The belief that Samuel had come to revisit him from the dead so worked upon Saul's mind as to suggest to his conscience what seemed to be spoken in his ear" (Smith's 'Old Testament History').

II. THE DIVINE JUDGMENT IS SOMETIMES FELT TO BE IRREVOCABLE. Of this he had occasionally caught a glimpse, but it was now brought home to him with overwhelming force in connection with—1. *The consciousness of his present condition*, as an object of Divine displeasure, and destined to be replaced in the kingdom by David, to whom he had long ago applied the words of the prophet (ch. xiii. 14; xv. 28): "The Lord hath rent," &c. (ver. 17). "The perfects express the purpose of God which had already been formed, and was now about to be fulfilled" (Keil). 2. *The remembrance of his past transgression.* "Because," &c. (ver. 18). The sparing of Amalek was the well-known cause of his estrangement from Samuel and his rejection; and how vividly does some former act of disobedience sometimes rise before the mind of the sinner, increasing his burden of guilt and justifying his condemnation! 3. *The fear of his future fate*, now foreseen to be approaching (ver. 19). Israel would share his defeat, he and his sons would be on the morrow numbered with the dead, and the camp spoiled by the enemy. It was a terrible message, an inward realisation and confirmation of the Divine sentence. How little had he profited by resorting to divination! "The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent."

III. THE CONVICTION THAT THE DIVINE JUDGMENT CANNOT BE ALTERED PRODUCES DESPAIR. "And Saul fell straightway all along on the earth," &c. (ver. 20). Up to this moment some hope lingered in his breast.

> "The wretch condemned with life to part
> Still, still on hope relies;
> And every pang that rends the heart
> Bids expectation rise.
>
> "Hope, like the glimmering taper's light,
> Adorns and cheers the way;
> And still, as darker grows the night,
> Emits a brighter ray" (Goldsmith).

But now it was quite extinguished. "Whilst evil is expected we fear, but when it is certain we despair." "Saul was too hardened in his sin to express any grief or pain, either on his own account, or because of the fate of his sons and his people. In stolid desperation he went to meet his fate. This was the terrible end of a man whom the spirit of God had once taken possession of and turned into another man, and whom he had endowed with gifts to be leader of the people of God" (O. von Gerlach). "All human history has failed to record a despair deeper or more tragic than his. Over the close of this life broods a thick and comfortless darkness, even the darkness of a night without a star" (Trench, 'Shipwrecks').

Remark that—1. If men are forsaken by God, it is only because he has been forsaken by them. 2. Their only effectual resource in distress is the mercy of God, against whom they have sinned. 3. Persistent transgression infallibly ends in misery and despair.—D.

Vers. 20—25. (ENDOR.)—*The witch of Endor.* According to Jewish tradition she was the mother of Abner, on which account perhaps she escaped when others were "put away;" and the two attendants of Saul, in his visit to her, were Abner and Amasa. She dwelt at Endor (the fountain of habitation), a village four miles south of Mount Tabor (Josh. xvii. 11; Ps. lxxxiii. 10). "The calcareous cliffs around are filled with wide caverns, and some of the modern habitations are formed of front walls shutting in these caves," in one of which she may have dwelt and practised her forbidden art. This possessor or mistress of Ob (see vers. 7—10), although differing much from those who were accounted "witches," greatly abhorred and severely punished in more recent times, was a representative of many of them

in—1. *Perverted religiousness.* Her history might have shown that she possessed a more than ordinary measure of the religious sentiment prevalent in women, and that it had been (as it often is) misdirected by the influences under which she fell. She was at first a victim of superstition, and afterwards, finding herself perhaps endowed with peculiar and mysterious susceptibilities, and looked up to by others on account of her superior "wisdom," practised on their superstitious fears, in part deceived and in part deceiving. The mischief of the perversion of the religious sentiment (in deception, bigotry, cruelty, &c.) is incalculable. 2. *Secret criminality.* If she had lived among the heathen from whom her art was derived, she might have been held in general repute, like the oracles of Greece. But in Israel necromancy was condemned as treason against the Divine King, an abomination associated with and promotive of the worship of idols, and she displayed a daring impiety in practising it even in secret. "The Hebrew witch, or she who communicated or attempted to communicate with an evil spirit, was justly punished with death, though her communication with the spiritual world might either not exist at all, or be of a nature much less intimate than has been ascribed to the witches of later days; nor does the existence of the law against the witches of the Old Testament sanction in any respect the severity of similar enactments, subsequent to the Christian revelation, against a different class of persons accused of a very different species of crime" (Sir W. Scott). 3. *Unholy cupidity.* The desire of gain, to which she may have been urged by necessitous circumstances, was probably her principal motive in practising her art at the risk of life. The same desire leads to the basest actions, and even turns godliness into ungodliness. It is "a root of all evil." 4. *Perpetual fear* of discovery and suspicion of deception on the part of those to whose wishes she ministered, and of whose weaknesses she made traffic (ver. 9). The sword of justice hangs over the head of secret transgressors, and suffers them not to enjoy a moment's peace. 5. *Skilful deception.* Saul thought to deceive her, but was himself deceived by her, and fatally deluded. Whatever may have been her power in magic, clairvoyance (Keil), and ventriloquism (Isa. xxix. 4), she certainly professed what she did not possess (ver. 11); employed it in "cunning craftiness," and became (whether designedly or undesignedly) accessory to his ruin (1 Chron. x. 14). How much of the power which is now abused and made a curse might if properly used become a blessing! 6. *Kindly sympathy* and ministration. On observing his heavy fall (for she was apparently in the same room) she came to his side, and seeing that he was "sore troubled," felt a woman's pity, spoke to him in soothing tones as to a wilful child, requested him to gratify her wishes in eating "a morsel of bread" to strengthen him, in return for her obeying his voice (with "a talkativeness characteristic of this class of women, and a certain humour"), perhaps called his servants, and with them constrained him. Her heart was not dead. "She had one calf that she was very fond of, and one that she took a great deal of care of, and fed it herself; for she was a woman that got her living by the labour of her own hands, and had no other possession but that one calf; this she killed, and made ready its flesh, and set it before his servants and himself. Now it is but just to recommend the generosity of this woman" (Josephus). 7. *Pitiable desolation.* Saul is gone forth into the night to meet his fate. Left to herself, distrusted and distrustful, feared and fearful, without the consolations of religion, she is as much an object of pity as of blame. "We take leave of her, as she took leave of the ruined king, with a pitying heart."—D.

Vers. 11—15.—*A God-forsaken man.* I. FOREBODING BEFORE THE BATTLE. As the clouds gather blackness before a storm, so the mind of King Saul became more than ever dejected and gloomy before his defeat and death on Mount Gilboa. He who in the beginning of his reign struck so boldly at the Philistines, and threw off their yoke from the neck of Israel, was now afraid at the approach of their host, and "his heart greatly trembled." Not that his natural courage had deserted him, but, amidst all the disorder of his brain, this one thing he knew, that it was the God of Israel who had given him success against the Philistines, and now he found himself without God. There was no priest with the army to obtain Divine direction by the Urim and Thummim. Saul had slain the priests. There was no prophet to bring messages from God. By his breach with Samuel Saul had alienated from his

cause all those who had any measure of prophetic gift. We hear the wail of a perturbed spirit—"I am sore distressed;" but no confession of sin, no accent of repentance. This is an ominous characteristic of Saul, that he never fairly faces the question of his own misconduct, always palliates his sin, always evades self-judgment and self-reproach. What breaks from him in his extremity is only the cry of hurt pride, the bitter vexation of a man who saw that his career was a failure, and that he had brought himself to disappointment and defeat. His foreboding before the battle was only too well grounded. So Shakespeare describes Richard III. gloomy and desperate before the battle of Bosworth Field:—

> "I have not that alacrity of spirit
> Nor cheer of mind that I was wont to have."

And shadows in the night struck yet deeper terror into the soul of Richard. In like manner Macbeth at Dunsinane, expecting the attack, has dark foreboding:—

> "There is no flying hence, nor tarrying here.
> I 'gin to be aweary of the sun."

II. RECOURSE TO FORBIDDEN ARTS. The troubled thoughts of the king went after that great prophet who had anointed him to be king, and had been to him as the voice of God. All his mishaps had come from inattention to Samuel's instructions and warnings. And it seemed to him that his fortune might still be retrieved if only he could have once more the advice of Samuel. The prophet was dead and buried, and there was no way to communicate with him except through the forbidden art of necromancy. Saul had in his zeal against heathen practices expelled from his dominions those who plied this art for gain; but now he fell in this, as in so many other respects, below his own former level, and repaired to a female necromancer at Endor. As to what occurred at Endor it is not necessary or perhaps possible to pronounce a very decided opinion. It was no mere piece of jugglery. To the perception of the woman there really was an apparition; but there is room for much question whether this was the actual appearance of a departed spirit, or a sort of waking vision dependent on the ecstatic and clairvoyant state of the necromancer. If there was a real presence, it was that of Samuel, or possibly that of an evil spirit personating Samuel. Neither of these suppositions commends itself to our judgment. No doubt the historian says, "Samuel said to Saul." But he describes the scene merely according to appearance, and so as to account for the effect produced on the mind of the king. He does not analyse appearances at all, or look under them for possible elements of illusion or delusion. But if it be possible to account for the apparition any otherwise, we shrink from the belief that Samuel was actually brought into this scene of gloom and wickedness, and, coming into it, spoke to poor distracted Saul without any tone of pity or exhortation to repentance, grimly telling him that to-morrow he would be defeated, and he and his sons would join the ghosts in Sheol. The moral improbability of this is very great. As to an evil spirit personating Samuel in order to drive the king to despair, there is no moral unlikelihood in the conjecture, and it has been the opinion of Tertullian, of Luther, of Grotius, and many more; but it supposes a greater marvel than the phenomena require to account for them, and therefore we reject it. Our view is that the apparition was real, but was no more than an apparition. The old man in the mantle had no existence whatever but to the morbid mind of the woman, who had fallen into a clairvoyantic trance. It is perfectly well known that women of a certain constitution have extraordinary aptitude for such trances and visions, and there is good reason to believe that the female necromancers and sorcerers of antiquity were persons of the same class with the nervous, crazy creatures who are now-a-days spoken of as "powerful mediums." Such persons in our own time see apparitions of the dead, and if they add some elements of trick and imposture the better to establish their reputation, it is only what such unhappy beings have done in the past, and what the woman at Endor very likely did also. The voice that Saul heard may easily have proceeded from her as a practised ventriloquist (see Isa. xxix. 4). Saul had fallen with his face to the ground before the apparition, which was invisible to him. So the ventriloquism was easy enough, and there was nothing in the words ascribed to Samuel which it was beyond the power of the

necromancer to say, well aware as she must have been of the king's unfitness to encounter the great Philistine army, and the strong probability that the battle on the morrow would go against him. The wretched conclusion of the whole matter was that Saul was bereft of all hope, and "was sore afraid."

III. COMMUNION WITH THE DEAD. Necromancy, unfortunately, is not a lost art among ourselves. Men and women of education are not ashamed or afraid to practise arts and consult "mediums" that are referred to in the Old Testament as abhorrent to God and utterly forbidden to his people. In the communication with the dead which is said to be established there may be an element of trickery, there may be an element of power of some evil sort that no one can define; but the process all in all is one of base delusion, its whole tendency is crazy, and its issues are in gloom and madness. Above all, it tends to draw men away from God, or it is an attempt to obtain preternatural direction for souls that have fallen out of communion with him, like the soul of Saul, and it cannot come to good. But we do not say to the children of God, "Have nothing to do with the dead." In the communion of saints we are bound to those who have departed, as much as to those who are in the body. How they may help us even now is one of the things of which we have no certain knowledge. But we pay them most honour when we refrain from any attempt to disturb their sacred repose, and endeavour to remember their counsels, to walk in their steps, to live as they would wish us to live before God and man.

"How pure in heart and sound in head,
With what Divine affection bold,
Should be the man whose thought would hold
An hour's communion with the dead.

"In vain shalt thou or any call
The spirits from their golden day,
Except, like them, thou too canst say,
My spirit is at peace with all.

"They haunt the silence of the breast,
Imaginations calm and fair,
The memory like a cloudless air,
The conscience as a sea at rest" (Tennyson). F.

EXPOSITION.

DAVID'S DISMISSAL FROM THE PHILISTINE CAMP (CH. XXIX.).

CHAPTER XXIX.

MARCH OF THE PHILISTINE ARMY (vers. 1—5). Ver. 1.—**The Philistines gathered**, &c. The narrative, broken off for the description of Saul's abasement, is again resumed from ch. xxviii. 1. **Aphek.** As we saw on ch. iv. 1, this word, signifying a *fortress*, is a very common name for places. If it was the Aphek in Judah there mentioned, David's dismissal would have taken place near Gath, and so soon after Achish joined the Philistine army. Mr. Conder thinks it was the place represented by the modern village *Fuku'a*, near Mount Gilboa, in the tribe of Issachar; but as this was distant from Ziklag eighty or ninety miles, it would not have been possible for David to have reached home thence on the third day (ch. xxx. 1), nor was it probable that his presence with his little army would remain long unnoticed. **A fountain which is in Jezreel.** Hebrew, "the fountain." Conder says, "Crossing the valley we see before us the site of Jezreel, on a knoll 500 feet high. The position is very peculiar, for whilst on the north and north-east the slopes are steep and rugged, on the south the ascent is very gradual, and the traveller coming northward is astonished to look down suddenly on the valley with its two springs: one, 'Ain Jâlûd, welling out from a conglomerate cliff, and forming a pool 100 yards long with muddy borders; the other, the Crusaders' fountain of Tubania" ('Tent-Work,' i. 124). The former is the fountain mentioned here; and it is evident that even now Saul had chosen a strong position for his army. The reading of the Septuagint, *En-dor* instead of "the fountain" (Hebrew, *'En*, or *'Ain*), is indefensible, as the Israelites were many miles to the southward.

Vers. 2, 3.—**The lords of the Philistines passed on.** Evidently they were on their march northward, with their troops arranged in divisions, when David's presence in the rearward with the contingent of Achish was

noticed. The princes—not the strict word for the Philistine lords (see on ch. v. 8), but a loose, general term used again in ver. 4—on having it reported to them in the course of a day or two that there was a body of strange troops in the army of Gath, asked, **What do these Hebrews here?** Hebrew, "What these Hebrews?" *i. e.* What mean these Hebrews? using of them the ordinary Philistine term of contempt. Achish answers that these men were the followers of David, who, having deserted from Saul, had been with him these days or these years, *i. e.* an indefinitely long time, during which he had conducted himself with the utmost fidelity to his new master.

Vers. 4—6.—Angrily rejecting the testimony of Achish in David's favour, they say, **Make this fellow** (Hebrew, "the man") **return, that he may go again to his place,** *i. e.* to Ziklag. **He shall not go down with us to battle.** Though the Philistines marched *up* into the Israelite territory, yet they speak naturally of *going down* into battle, because while armies usually encamped on opposite ranges of hills, they descended into the plain between for the encounter. **An adversary.** Hebrew, "a satan," without the article, and so in 1 Chron. xxi. 1. As a proper name it has the article, as in the books of Job and Zechariah. **Should he reconcile himself.** The verb means, "to make himself pleasing," "to commend himself." **The heads of these men,** pointing to the Philistine ranks. **David of whom they sang,** &c. The song of the Jewish maidens seems to have been as well known in Philistia as in the land of Israel. On the former occasion it had made the Philistines drive him away from the court of Achish (ch. xxi. 11—15); here, too, it made them drive him from their army, but he was thereby saved from the painful necessity of making war on his own country, and returned just in time to rescue his wives and property.

ACHISH SENDS DAVID AWAY (vers. 6—11). **Vers. 6, 7.—As Jehovah liveth.** These words are strange in the mouth of a Philistine, nor can we suppose that out of respect to David he would thus swear by David's God. Probably they are the equivalent of the oath which Achish really used. He sends, however, David away with the utmost courtesy, assuring him that his own wish had been that he should remain with him, because all his conduct had been upright since he had come to him at Gath.

Ver. 8.—David's answer is subtle and prevaricating; he pretends that his honour has been attacked, when really he had tricked the unsuspecting Achish. But truth is a modern virtue, and though David extols it in the Psalms (Ps. xv. 2; li. 6), we too often find him practising falsehood.

Ver. 9.—**I know that,** &c. Rather, "I know it, for thou art good in my sight," *i. e.* I know all that thou wouldst say as to thy trustworthiness, and assent to it. **As an angel of God.** *I. e.* as a messenger of God, as one set to me by God.

Vers. 10, 11.—**With thy master's servants.** It has been well remarked that while this would be a strange description of David's own men, it would exactly describe that band of deserters belonging to the tribe of Manasseh who, instead of obeying Saul's summons to the war with the Philistines, joined David about this time (see 1 Chron. xii. 19—21). **As soon as ye be up early in the morning,** &c. If it was on the second day's march that the Philistine lords objected to David's continuance with them, he would be back at Gath in two days, and on the third day reach Ziklag, as is said in ch. xxx. 1. However difficult David's position may have been, still every one must condemn his conduct towards Achish as dishonourable; but God, who often deals with men more mercifully than they deserve, nevertheless rescued him from his state of perplexity, and saved him from the necessity of either fighting against his own countrymen or of still more dishonourably breaking his word to Achish by deserting in the battle. He also sent him home just in time to rescue from a miserable fate those whom he loved.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1-5.—*The counteractions of Providence.* The facts are—1. The Philistines make preparations for battle, and David and his men form the rear. 2. On the princes complaining of the presence of the Hebrews, Achish pleads the faithfulness of David. 3. The princes insist on the dismissal of David and his men to a safe quarter, being suspicious that he might in battle turn against them. The conduct of David, as recorded in chapter xxvii., now began to be embarrassing both to himself and his Philistine protectors; and had events gone on as once appeared probable, David would have been put in inextricable difficulties. It was only the quarrel between Achish and the leaders of his forces that solved the ambiguity of his position.

I. THE COURSE OF HUMAN EVENTS, regarded in isolated sections, OFTEN SEEMS TO

RENDER THE REALISATION OF GOD'S PURPOSE UNCERTAIN, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE. The prophet Samuel had declared it to be God's purpose to bring David to the throne, as a man worthy of the confidence of the nation. The arrangement that had been made on the accession of Saul to power had been modified in harmony with this fact. Yet in the ambiguous position in which David was now placed by his own erring conduct it seemed as though events were tending in a different direction. The very man on whom the hope of the pious was set was now allied with Israel's foe, and on the way to fight against his own people. Already dissimulation had injured his reputation, and should he now engage against his own countrymen, how could he ever be worthy of confidence as a loyal Hebrew? This is not an isolated instance. The readiness with which the descendants of Jacob seemed to settle in Egypt after his death gave no promise of the fulfilment of God's purpose concerning them. The scattering of the disciples by the first persecution appeared to run counter to Church consolidation, and therefore to power of Christian effort. There are ebbs in the individual Christian life which while in progress suggest the uncertainty of final salvation. Even the long course of evils subsequent to the creation of man, considered in their earthly development, may give rise to the doubt whether the benevolent purpose of a good Creator can ever be attained. It should not be forgotten, however, that we see only sections of life's course, and we must not draw a conclusion from partial knowledge. God allows freedom of action, and trains his creatures by the dearly-purchased lessons of a painful experience, and, moreover, calmly awaits the issue of the whole.

II. THE ERRORS OF MEN OF SINCERE PIETY ARE VERY TENDERLY TREATED BY GOD. We cannot but be struck with the great difference between the conduct for which Saul was so heavily punished and that of David which did not issue in his rejection. Saul's sin was radical—it was "rebellion" (ch. xv. 23). It indicated that self-will ruled his conduct. David's sin in dissembling and in settling without Divine direction as an ally of Achish was the sin of backsliding and neglect. He was radically sincere in his piety, but in an hour of weakness lost his full faith in God, and so yielded to the influence of fear. Hence he was chastised by sorrow, by increasing fears, by self-humiliation, loss of reputation, and that secret sense of Divine displeasure which the erring soul of the devout knows too well. Though the sincere servant of God falls, he shall not be utterly cast down. God remembers that he is dust. In David's case the troubles created by his actions produce regret that he ever put himself in such a false position, and quicken the spirit of true repentance. Our Saviour's treatment of hardened, self-willed men and those whose spirits were struggling to do right and to be right was very different. It is a consolation to us all to know that he is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and does not cast off those who, not being able to "watch one hour," fall into temptation.

III. GOD NEVER FAILS TO EXERCISE CONTROL OVER THE SET OF EVENTS WHICH SEEM TO RUN COUNTER TO HIS PURPOSES, and when the fit time arrives HE BRINGS NEW ELEMENTS INTO OPERATION. David erred and sinned; but David was restrained and inwardly humbled. This dangerous alliance, though bringing him to the verge of a precipice, was limited, in the pressure of its obligations, by a new set of influences being brought into operation. So far as the bond between David and Achish was working, David's hand must soon be raised in battle against Israel; but the inscrutable Providence which ordained him to be future king, and allowed him, for hidden reasons, to come into perilous and damaging relationships, also held sway over the spirits of Philistine princes, and just when the sin of the man of God was about to bear its cruellest fruit, moved them to protest against his entering into the conflict. Thus tenderly does God deal with his erring servant, and, in a manner unknown and unexpected, counteract the course of events which recently had tended to the frustration of his own purposes. How often would God's servants ruin their own reputation and the very cause dear to their hearts did he not raise up means of checking the tendency of their conduct. It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed.

IV. IN THUS COUNTERACTING THE EFFECTS OF OUR MISCONDUCT GOD CAUSES CHASTISEMENT TO COME ON THE ERRING. David was mercifully saved from the peril of smiting his own people, and the pressure of any obligation which human friendships and

customs may have laid upon him was removed, and the prospects of his being welcomed as king in Israel were brightened; yet in his own heart he was made to feel all the pain and shame of being regarded as a man of treacherous character. He could not but smart under the contempt of heathen princes if, as is likely, he knew of their language concerning himself. "Make this fellow return," and for the reason "lest in the battle he be an adversary to us." To profess to be true and faithful, and yet to be scorned and treated as one whose word and profession are worthless, this was one means by which Providence caused the erring one to suffer from the fruit of his own deeds.

General lessons:—1. Let us not be allured into questionable courses by a prospect of present ease, seeing that a perilous crisis may arise out of the very means we take for securing ease. 2. Whatever troubles beset the Church by reason of the imperfect conduct of God's servants, let us still cherish faith in his wisdom and power to counteract the natural effects of their conduct. 3. It is of great importance so to act as never to merit the scorn and distrust of irreligious men, for we thereby dishonour the name of God and destroy our proper influence in the world.

Vers. 6—11.—*Escape from danger.* The facts are—1. Achish informs David of the remonstrance of the princes, and at the same time expresses confidence in his integrity. 2. On Achish urging his return from the scene of conflict, David professes to be surprised that he should be distrusted, and appeals to his past fidelity. 3. Being reassured of the confidence of Achish, and of the determination of the princes, David returns with his men. The relations of Achish and David appear to have been most honourable to both, and there is something beautiful in the respect and consideration with which this heathen ruler treats the refugee. He does his best to lessen the pain which he presumes the communication of the resolve of the princes will cause him, and sends him away with the strongest assurances of interest and confidence. On the other hand, while keenly feeling the implication of the princes, David displays in his self-vindication the art of a skilled diplomatist. He does not say that he wishes to go against Israel, or that he regrets not being permitted to go, but shrewdly asks whether, so far as concerns his past conduct while with Achish, he might not be trusted in conflict with a foe. There are several topics suggested by this discussion between the heathen king and the Hebrew refugee.

I. The STING OF SUSPICION. David was hurt by the imputation of possible treachery. His sojourn among the Philistines had been marked by carefulness not to abuse their hospitality, and to fulfil the obligations incident to his position as a protected refugee. Also, as a pious Hebrew, he claimed to be far above the uncircumcised in all that makes character noble and trustworthy. Moreover, the probability is he did not entertain thoughts of treachery, but rather in his conscious embarrassment was secretly praying to God for some escape from the dilemma of his position. Although, as a man of the world, he must have seen the legitimacy of their conclusion from their premises, yet this did not remove or lessen the sting of the suspicion of the princes. He was reaping the bitter fruit of his former act; and we have noticed under vers. 1—6 the element of chastisement in this pain. To every upright mind it is most distressing to be an object of suspicion, and especially among persons with whom friendship has been maintained. It eats away the joy and strength of the heart, and destroys much of our power with men. Happy is it for us if a good conscience is a private solace; but we should see to it that the suspicion is not warranted by any puzzling ambiguities in our words or deeds.

II. FIDELITY IN ENGAGEMENTS. Achish, in strong language, testifies to the fidelity with which David had kept every engagement involved in his position in the country, and David himself appears to have been honestly conscious that in this matter he was upright. He had done his duty, and that is much to say in a world where so many temptations arise to induce selfish action, regardless of relative claims. It is of great importance in the social order that men understand their position to rulers, to neighbours, and to home, and with careful exactitude discharge the varied obligations resting on them with religious scrupulosity. It is hard to say what material loss, moral injury, and social and commercial disorganisation arise from laxity in keeping engagements. The ease with which some, even professing Christians, can

disregard the obligations of their position in society and the Church, and also fail to meet undertakings deliberately made, is very painful to contemplate. We honour God when we "fulfil *all* righteousness." Our supposed fidelity in great things is deprived of much of its honour and glory by neglect of what are deemed the "minor moralities." Our Lord has taught us the connection between the two. "He that is faithful in the least is faithful also in much."

III. THE INFLUENCE OF SUPERIOR CHARACTER. There is evident sincerity in the words of Achish when he says of David, "Thou hast been upright. . . I know that thou art good in my sight as an angel of God." The fact is, the force of David's superior character as an enlightened Hebrew and a God-fearing man was duly recognised by this heathen king. The disparity between the two men in point of spiritual enlightenment and holy aspiration was enormous. The peaceful, kindly disposition of Achish enabled him to live on such terms of intimacy with David as to feel the full force of his superiority. The highest form of character on earth is realised when great natural powers are fully permeated with the light and love of the Christian spirit; and in any case of moderate powers, elevation is attained in so far as the pure, loving mind of Christ rules the life. Such character is a silent formative power in society. Men who speak not of it consciously recognise its beauty and force. They feel its charm, its restraining power, its elevating tendency, its quickening and soothing effects. How blessed the influence of a missionary among degraded heathen! What power for good is exercised by many a devout pastor in village and city! Who can estimate the value of holy character in the master of workmen, the teacher of the young, the mother of a family, the statesman at the head of affairs?

IV. CONCEALMENT OF THOUGHT. David complained to Achish of the suspicions of his lords, and was prepared to prove that nothing in his conduct since he had been amongst them gave the slightest ground for their imputation; but his defence was so carefully worded as to conceal from Achish the real thought of his heart. He simply reasoned from his known conduct to a general conclusion of fidelity to his protector; he said nothing of the private wish that he may not have to fight Israel, or of any hope that he shall escape the test of fidelity, or of his secret pleasure that a door of escape was opening. The form of the language, to one not keen in detecting shades of thought under general terms, might lead to the belief that he was referring to the impending battle, and so far perhaps David's words may be challenged. Yet he only said what was generally true. He concealed the sentiments pertinent to the coming contest. This practice of concealing thought requires much watchfulness. We are not bound to let out all we think, nor are we to give faculties to men to understand what others would see at once, but we are bound not to *design to give a wrong impression*. Truthfulness lies in intent as also does falsehood.

V. DOORS OF ESCAPE. After the fearful strain that must have been put on David's feelings by the ambiguous position in which he had placed himself, it must have been an immense relief to see the door open for an honourable retreat. The Bible does not tell us all that God's servants thought and felt and did; but judging from David's usual conduct when in great straits, and from the references in the Psalms to times of trial, we may infer that during this painful and self-caused season of peril he cried from the depths of his heart for deliverance. It came, and the "salvation" was of the Lord. How this suggests to us the many escapes which God secures for us during our earthly course! What instances there are of the same Providence in the records of the Bible and the history of the Christian Church! And above all, there is now "an open door" set before us by which, if we will, we may escape from the degradation and woe of sin, and walk in the liberty of the children of God. "Escape for thy life," was once said to Lot. He gave heed, and was saved. He that hath an ear to hear, let him now hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—11. (ON THE MARCH TO APHEK.)—*A good man in bad company.* "What do these Hebrews here?" (ver. 3). The results of the wrong step which David had taken in going into the country of the Philistines now became manifest. In the war

against Israel Achish naturally looked to him and his men to go out with him to battle. What was he to do? He might refuse to go. This would have been his straightforward course. But he would thereby forfeit the friendship of Achish, and expose himself to imminent danger. He might go and fight against Israel. This would be to incur the greatest guilt, and imperil his accession to the throne. He might go and turn traitor on the battle-field. This was what the Philistines expected (ver. 4), but it would have covered his name with infamy. He determined for the present to continue his prevarication with Achish, who said he should be captain of his body-guard for the future (ch. xxviii. 1, 2), and went, probably with a troubled conscience, and hoping that he might in some way be relieved from his inconsistent and perplexing position. He was clearly out of his proper place in the Philistine army. His condition represents that of a good man—

I. IMPROPERLY ASSOCIATED WITH THE UNGODLY. It is by no means uncommon for a good man to yield to the temptation to join the wicked in their pursuits, unnecessarily, and from an unjustifiable motive; such as the desire of personal safety, convenience, information, pleasure, or profit—like Lot in Sodom, Jonah going to Tarshish, Peter in the palace of the high priest (see ch. xv. 6). The relation into which he thus enters is inconsistent with—1. *Truth;* inasmuch as it usually requires him to deceive others concerning his real character and purposes, by pretending to be what he is not, and concealing what he is. 2. *Piety;* inasmuch as he is thereby hindered in his devotions (ch. xxvi. 19), exposes himself to fresh temptations, sanctions sinful or doubtful conduct, strengthens the ranks of the enemy, violates his duty to God and "his own company" and people. "Those that would be kept from sin must not go on the devil's ground" (M. Henry). "What doest thou here, Elijah?" David—Hebrew—Christian? 3. *His own real welfare;* inasmuch as he involves himself in unforeseen but certain trouble, places himself beyond the promised protection of God, and exposes himself to the threatened fate of his enemies.

II. SHREWDLY SUSPECTED BY HIS ASSOCIATES. He may endeavour to escape their suspicion, and for a time succeed, but it is sooner or later excited by—1. *Something in himself*—his name, appearance, relation to past events ("Is not this David?" &c., vers. 3, 5), peculiar behaviour, faltering and ambiguous explanations. "Thy speech bewrayeth thee." "Did I not see thee in the garden with him?" 2. *The occurrence of new circumstances,* which quicken perception, call for decision, test and manifest the character, and its congruity or otherwise with present associations. 3. *The general instinct of the ungodly.* Although some of their number may be deceived, and exhibit unbounded confidence in him (ver. 3), let no one think to escape. "There is nothing hidden that shall not be revealed."

III. DEEPLY HUMILIATED BY HIS TREATMENT. 1. *Outwardly.* In the eyes of others. "Make this fellow return," &c. (ver. 4). He is compelled to leave the society which he has chosen; expelled from it publicly and ignominiously, as one unworthy to be trusted. 2. *Inwardly.* In his own eyes. The heathen king of Gath appears to have been a faithful and honourable man; and his expression of confidence in David (vers. 3, 6), in contrast to the dishonourable prevarication of the latter (ver. 8), must have put him to shame. "The flattering commendations of worldly people are almost always purchased by improper compliances, or some measure of deception, and commonly may cover us with confusion" (Scott).

IV. PROVIDENTIALLY EXTRICATED FROM HIS EMBARRASSMENT. He may not be able to extricate himself from the net in which he has become entangled. But God does not readily abandon him to all the natural consequences of his conduct. He has many ways of working out his deliverance, and effects it—1. From regard to the good that is in him, and in pity toward him in his perplexity and distress. 2. For the honour of his name, that his merciful care over his servants may be seen, and his glory promoted by them. 3. Not without testifying his disapproval of his sin. "David returned the next morning to Ziklag no doubt very light of heart, and praising God for having so graciously rescued him out of the disastrous situation into which he had been brought" (Keil). "The snare is broken, and we are escaped" (Ps. cxxiv. 7). But on the third day he found Ziklag in ashes, was overwhelmed with grief, and more deeply humbled than ever before. The folly and

guilt of the course which he had pursued were at length brought home to him with irresistible force.

Remarks:—1. There are associations with the ungodly which are not sinful, but right and beneficial to a good man himself, as well as to them. 2. No one should place himself in the way of temptation, and then expect that God will preserve him from falling or extricate him from the consequences of his presumption. 3. If any one finds that he has improperly associated himself with the wicked, he ought to adopt all proper methods to effect his speedy separation from them. 4. When he has found deliverance from his perplexity and peril he should give the glory of it to God alone.—D.

Vers. 1—11.—*Achish.* David had, in the course of his life, friendly relations with several heathen princes. One of these was Achish (elsewhere called Abimelech, Ps. xxxiv., inscription), son of Maoch, and king of Gath, one of the five royal cities, the seats of the princes of the Philistine confederacy. What is recorded of him shows that he was a remarkable man. Whilst Saul persecuted David, Achish protected him; and whilst the former, in the midst of Israel, "with the law" of Moses, committed atrocious crime, and sank into heathen superstition, the latter, in the midst of heathenism, "without the law" (Rom. ii. 11—16), exhibited much moral excellence, and approached the faith of Israel (ver. 6). He may have profited in religious knowledge by his intercourse with David; on the other hand, his example was in some respects worthy of imitation by him. We must not attribute to him virtues which he did not possess; but we see in him a man much better than we might have expected to find from the disadvantages under which he lived. He was distinguished by—1. *Self-interested policy.* Although he may have felt some sympathy with David in his persecution by Saul, yet he appears to have received him under his protection chiefly because of the aid he hoped to obtain from him for himself and his people (ch. xxvii. 12). 2. *Unsuspecting confidence.* He had much reason to be suspicious of David from his knowledge of his victory over the champion of Gath, and his recollection of his former visit; but he put an unreserved trust in his representations (ch. xxviii. 2), and even when others suspected him did not withdraw it. A trustful disposition is liable to be imposed upon, but it is always worthy of admiration. 3. *Royal generosity*, in permitting David to dwell in Gath, making him a present of Ziklag, and appointing him to an honourable post in his army. He was without envy or jealousy, and acted toward him in a manner worthy of a king. 4. *Discriminating appreciation;* admiring the military bravery of David and the still higher qualities which he possessed. "I have found no fault in him," &c. (vers. 3, 6, 9). There must have been much in common between these two men to have enabled them to live on such friendly terms with each other for so long a period. Excellence perceives and appreciates excellence. 5. *Honourable fidelity*, both in testifying to the worth of David and in submitting to "the lords of the Philistines," with whom he was associated (ver. 7). 6. *Courteous consideration.* "And now return, and go in peace," &c. (ver. 7). "Rise up early in the morning with thy master's servants," &c. (ver. 10; 1 Chron. xii. 19—22). He was frank and commendatory even to flattery, and desirous not to hurt his feelings by the manner of his dismissal. 7. *Devout sentiment.* "As Jehovah liveth," &c. (ver. 6). How much he meant by this expression we know not. But we may believe that, notwithstanding he was united with others in conflict with Israel, there was in him (as the effect of that Divine mercy and grace which wrought in all nations) "some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel." And "in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts x. 35).—D.

Ver. 2.—*A false position.* What a dilemma for David! He could not refuse the confidence he had sought from Achish. He could not renounce the allegiance he had so recently pledged. If he should disobey the king of Gath, he could look for nothing but indignant reproach and a traitor's doom. If he should obey him, he would, in course of a few days, be fighting against his own nation, and bringing them again under the yoke of the Philistines; and this would be worse than death. Perplexed and reluctant, he marched in the rear of the invading army, suffering inwardly

all the more that he was obliged to hide his unwillingness, and to affect a zeal against Israel which his heart disowned. See in this story—

I. THE ILLUSTRATION OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE. While David wrought himself into a most critical position, and an apparently fatal embroilment with the Philistines, the Lord wrought wonderfully through the very errors of his servant, so as to preserve him in safety, and open his way to a higher destiny. It was well appointed that he should be out of the land of Israel at this time, so that he should neither hasten nor hinder the discomfiture of Saul, and that the Philistines should give him shelter, and yet not involve him in the crime of desolating and enslaving his native land. How to escape from the dilemma in which he was caught baffled even David's ready mind; but the Lord always knows how to deliver. He does so through means and agencies that are natural; in this case through the very natural jealousy of the Philistine lords, and their proper military prudence, objecting to have the person of the king intrusted to the keeping of a band of Israelites, and that band commanded by a skilful and daring captain in the rear of their army, where their defection would be most dangerous. "The lords favour thee not," said Achish. And, like our kings in old times, who durst not disregard the voice of the barons, Achish intimated to David that it was best for him to retire from the army. David was quite acute enough to see the advantage which the Philistine chiefs were unwittingly conferring upon him. They, as his enemies, helped him out of the dilemma in which he had been placed by Achish, his friend. Such things are not infrequent in the providence of God. Often a man's enemies open to him the way out of great difficulty. Disfavour is shown, or a sharp word spoken, and it turns out a great advantage. The wrath of opponents or rivals may act as so much dynamite to explode a rock of obstruction which friendly hands cannot remove, and so to clear the path of deliverance.

II. THE ILLUSTRATION OF HUMAN LIFE. See how a man may fall through want of moral firmness into a false position utterly unworthy of his character. It was, as respects David's integrity, unfortunate that he found such favour with the Philistine king. It is always a misfortune to be successful in the beginning of wrong-doing, for it soothes the conscience and leads one on to compromise himself more deeply. And one false step leads to another. David's unbelief led him into a course of deceit and dissimulation from which he saw no way of escape, and every day drew him further into a position which was false and unworthy. It is a story full of admonition and warning. One may easily let himself into a trap from which he cannot let himself out. One may take a false step, which involves another and another, till there is a course of deflection. An object is gained, but in the success the conscience is soiled; and then the penalty is that one is compelled to act out the part he has assumed, to go on in the way on which he only meant to venture for a time and for a purpose. He thought to do a questionable thing and then return to his integrity; but lo! he is in a maze, and cannot find the way out. The gain which he sought turns out to be a loss; the favour which he craftily won proves to be a burden and a danger; and there is no remedy. It is very unsafe to possess great powers of deception. David had them, and they nearly ruined him. But the experience through which he passed taught him to abhor deceit, and to desire, what God desires, truth in the inward parts. For proof of this see Ps. xv. 1, 2; xxxiv. 12, 13; li. 6. Mark, too, how he appeals to the God of truth, and, ashamed of his own unveracity in certain passages of his early life, puts all his dependence in his later years on the veracity and faithfulness of God, who has made with him an "everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure" (see 2 Sam. xxiii. 5; Ps. xxv. 10; xxxi. 5). The security of our salvation rests not on our tenacity of faith, but on the truth of God our Saviour. He cannot lie. The Son of David, our Prince of life, is faithful and true; and he who is our God in Christ Jesus will never fail those who rely on his word. "Yet he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself."—F.

EXPOSITION.

DAVID RESCUES HIS WIVES FROM THE AMALEKITES (CH. XXX.).

CHAPTER XXX.

DAVID UPON HIS RETURN FINDS ZIKLAG BURNT BY THE AMALEKITES (vers. 1—6).

Ver. 1.—On the third day. David evidently could not have gone with the Philistines as far as to Shunem; for, as noticed in the previous chapter, it would have been impossible to march back to Ziklag in so short a time. But as he had gone first to Gath, where no doubt Achish collected his vassals, and then marched northwards with the army for two days, he must altogether have been absent from Ziklag for some little time. **The Amalekites.** Doubtless they were glad to retaliate upon David for his cruel treatment of them; but, besides, they lived by rapine, and when the fighting men of Philistia and of Judæa were marching away to war, it was just the opportunity which they wished of spoiling the defenceless country. **The south.** *I. e.* the Negeb, for which see ch. xxvii. 10. It was the name especially given to the southern district of Judah, whence these freebooters turned westward towards Ziklag. They would probably not dare to penetrate far into either territory. The word for **invaded** is the same as in ch. xxvii. 8, and implies that they spread themselves over the country to drive off cattle and booty, but with no intention of fighting battles.

Vers. 2—5.—**They slew not any.** No resistance was made, as the men of war were all away. It was probably for thus leaving their wives and families absolutely defenceless that David's people were so angry with him. As we are told in ch. xxvii. 3 that the refugees with David had brought each his household with him into the Philistine territory, the number o women must have been large. The Amalekites spared their lives, not because they were more merciful than David, but because women and children were valuable as slaves. All the best would be picked out, and sent probably to Egypt for sale.

Ver. 6.—**The soul of all the people was grieved.** Hebrew, "was bitter." Their great sorrow is pathetically described in ver. 4. But, as is often the case with those in distress, from grief they turned to anger, and sought relief for their feelings by venting their rage upon the innocent. Possibly David had not taken precautions against a danger which he had not apprehended; but, left almost friendless in the angry crowd who were calling out to stone him, **he encouraged himself in Jehovah his God.** Literally, "strengthened himself" in Jehovah, and summoned the priest to ask counsel and guidance of God by the ephod.

DAVID'S PURSUIT OF THE AMALEKITES (vers. 7—16).

Vers. 7, 8.—**Looking only to** Jehovah for aid, David sends for **Abiathar,** who seems to have remained constantly with him, and bids him consult Jehovah by the Urim. In strong contrast to the silence which surrounds Saul (ch. xxviii. 6), the answer is most encouraging. Literally it is, "Pursue; for overtaking thou shalt overtake, and delivering thou shalt deliver."

Vers. 9, 10.—Having obtained this favourable answer, David starts in pursuit with his old band of 600 men. So rapid was his march that one third of these dropped out of the ranks, so that the new-comers from Manasseh would have been useless, nor had they lost wives or children. The **brook** (or rather "torrent") **Besor** practically remains unidentified, as the site of Ziklag is unknown; but possibly it is the Wady-es-Sheriâh, which runs into the sea a little to the south of Gaza. **As there was water here, those that were left behind stayed.** Hebrew, "the stragglers stayed." It seems also to have been wide enough to cause some difficulty in crossing, as it is said that these 200 were too **faint,** or **tired, to go over the** torrent **Besor.** From ver. 24 we find that David also left with them as much as possible of his baggage. Stragglers had no doubt been falling out for some time, but would here be rallied, and obtain rest and refreshment.

Vers. 11, 12.—**An Egyptian,** the slave, as we read in ver. 13, of some Amalekite, left **in the field,** in the open common, to perish. He had become faint and could not travel as fast as they did, and so was left behind with no supplies of food, for he had eaten nothing **for three days and three nights.** The Amalekites had thus a start of at least this time, or even more, as this slave would probably have carried some food away with him from Ziklag.

Ver. 13.—**To whom belongest thou?** As he was probably unarmed, and his garb that of a slave, David asks who is his owner and what his country. He learns from him besides that he was left behind three days ago because he **fell sick.** The word does not imply more than temporary faintness, and is that translated *sorry* in ch. xxii. 8. But his life was of too little value for them to mount him on a camel, or even to leave with him supplies of food, and so their inhumanity led to their destruction.

Ver. 14.—**The Cherethites.** The interest in this people arises from David's body-guard having been composed of foreigners bearing

the name of Cherethim and Pelethim. We here find the Cherethim inhabiting the southern portion of the land of the Philistines, and such was still the case in the days of Zephaniah (Zeph. ii. 5, and compare Ezek. xxv. 16). As David retained Ziklag (ch. xxvii. 6), he appears to have chosen the men who were to guard his person from this neighbourhood, having probably been struck by their stature and martial bearing when dwelling among them. Hence it is probable that the Pelethim were also a Philistine race. Whether the Cherethim and the Philistines generally came from Crete to Palestine is a very disputed question, but they were certainly not indigenous, but immigrants into Canaan. **Caleb.** Upon the settlement of the Israelites in Canaan, Hebron with a large district in the south of Judah was assigned to Caleb the Kenezite, who with his clan had been incorporated into the tribe of Judah. Though the town was afterwards assigned to the priests, the whole country round remained subject to Caleb (Josh. xxi. 11, 12), and continued to bear his name. Evidently the Amalekites, beginning on the east, had swept the whole southern district of Judah before entering the country of the Philistines, where they no doubt burnt Ziklag in revenge for David's cruel treatment of them.

Ver. 15.—**To this company.** Better, "troop." The word signifies a band of soldiers, robbers, or the like. Required by David to act as his guide, the Egyptian consents upon condition that David bind himself neither to kill him, it being one of the unscrupulous customs of ancient warfare to put deserters, persons forced to act as guides, and even noncombatants, to death to save trouble; nor give him up to his master, who would treat him in the same way.

Ver. 16.—**When he had brought them down.** Though left behind, the Egyptian knew the course which the Amalekites intended to take, and was thus able to bring David quickly up to them, as they would move slowly because of their large booty of cattle. On overtaking them David found them dispersed in scattered groups **abroad upon all the earth** (literally, "over the face of all the land"), **eating and drinking, and dancing.** More probably, "feasting." The word literally means *keeping festival;* but though they had solemn dances at festivals, yet, as is the case with our word *feasting*, good eating was probably the uppermost idea; still the word may have only the general sense of "enjoying themselves as on a festival."

DEFEAT OF THE AMALEKITES AND RECOVERY OF THE WOMEN AND SPOIL (vers. 17—20). Ver. 17.—**From the twilight.** It has been debated whether this means the evening or the morning twilight; but the words which follow, "unto the evening of the next day," literally, "of (or *for*) their morrow," seem to prove that it was in the evening that David arrived. Moreover, in the morning they would not have been feasting, but sleeping. David probably attacked them at once, and slew all within reach until nightfall. The next morning the battle was renewed; but as David had but 400 men, and the Amalekites covered a large extent of country, and probably tried to defend themselves and their booty, it was not till towards the next evening that the combat and the pursuit were over. As they would need pasture and water for their cattle, they had evidently broken up into detachments, which had gone each into a different place with their herds. The pursuit must have been prolonged to a considerable distance, as no more than 400 young men escaped, and even they only by the aid of their camels.

Vers. 18, 19.—**Recovered.** Hebrew, "rescued," or "delivered." The word occurs again in the second clause of the verse, and is there translated "rescued." **Had carried away.** Hebrew, "had taken." In ver. 19 **recovered** is literally "caused to return," *i. e.* restored.

Ver. 20.—This verse, which is made unintelligible in the A. V. by the insertion of the unauthorised word *which*, is really free from difficulty. After David, as related in vers. 18, 19, had recovered the cattle carried off by the Amalekites, he also took all the flocks and herds belonging to them; and his own men "made these go in front of that body of cattle, and said, This is David's spoil," *i. e.* they presented it to him by acclamation. It was this large booty which he distributed among his friends (vers. 26—31).

DAVID ENACTS A LAW FOR THE DIVISION OF THE SPOIL (vers. 21—25). Vers. 21, 22—On returning David finds the 200 stragglers, **whom they had made to abide at the brook Besor.** Rather, "whom he had made to abide," as it was David's office to give such a command. The singular is supported by all the versions except the Chaldee, and by some MSS. David had made such men as were growing weary halt at the torrent, because it was a fit place where to collect the stragglers, and also, perhaps, because it would have required time and labour to get the baggage across. All the more wicked and worthless (see on ch. i. 16) members of the force now propose to give the 200 only their wives and children, and send them away with no share of the spoil. Besides the sheep and oxen given to David, there would be camels and other animals, arms, gold and silver, clothing, and other personal property.

Ver. 23, 24.—**Ye shall not do so, my brethren.** David rejects their unjust proposal kindly, but firmly. **With that which.** *I. e.* in respect of that which, &c. **Who will**

hearken unto you in this matter? Literally, "this word," this proposal of yours. David then enacts that those left to guard the baggage are to share in the booty equally with the combatants. Patrick in his commentary quotes a similar rule enacted by Publius Scipio after the capture of New Carthage (Polybius, x., xv. 5).

Ver. 25.—**That he made it.** *I. e.* David. Having been thus enacted by him and practised during his life, no king henceforward would venture to change it. In the war with the Midianites Moses had ordered that half the spoil should belong to the combatants and half to the congregation who remained in the camp (Numb. xxxi. 27). This enactment of David was in the same spirit.

DAVID PROPITIATES HIS FRIENDS BY SHARING WITH THEM HIS BOOTY (vers. 26—31). Ver. 26.—**The elders of Judah.** The spoil taken from the Amalekites and assigned to David must have been very large, as it was worth distributing so widely. He did not, however, send to all the elders of Judah, but to such only as were his friends. **A present.** Hebrew, "a blessing" (see on ch. xxv. 27).

Ver. 27.—**Bethel** cannot be the famous city of that name, but is probably the *Bethul* of Josh. xix. 4, where it is mentioned as lying near Hormah and Ziklag. **South Ramoth.** Hebrew, "Ramoth-Negeb," called Ramath-Negeb in Josh. xix. 8. Like Bethul, it was a Simeonite village. **Jattir** belonged to Judah (Josh. xv. 48), and was one of the cities assigned to the priests (*ibid.* xxi. 14).

Ver. 28.—**Aroer**, a different place from that on the eastern side of the Jordan, mentioned in Josh. xii. 2, is probably the ruin 'Ar'arah, twelve miles east of Beer-sheba. **Siphmoth.** Some village in the Negeb, but unknown. **Eshtemoa** (Josh. xv. 50), the present village Semu'ah, south of Hebron.

Ver. 29.—**Rachal.** Rather Racal, unknown. The supposition that it may be Carmel is untenable. **The Jerahmeelites**; see on ch. xxvii. 10, as also for **the Kenites.**

Ver. 30.—**Hormah.** Anciently called Zephath. For the reason of the change of name see Judges i. 17. **Chor-ashan.** More correctly Cor-ashan, the same place as Ashan (Josh. xv. 42), a Simeonite town (1 Chron. iv. 32) assigned to the priests (*ibid.* vi. 59). **Athach**, never mentioned elsewhere, may be a false reading for *Ether* (Josh. xix. 7).

Ver. 31.—**Hebron**, destined soon to become David's capital (2 Sam. ii. 1), lay about fourteen miles south of Jerusalem. For an account of it see Conder, 'Tent Work,' ii. 79, *sqq.* In comparing the list of David's heroes (1 Chron. xi. 26—47) with this catalogue of friendly towns, it will be found that several of them came from them, and had probably shared his exile at Ziklag. Such were Ira and Gareb, Ithrites from Jattir, Shama and Jehiel from Aroer; perhaps also Zabdi the Shiphmite (1 Chron. xxvii. 27) came from Siphmoth. We find David in this narrative acting justly as a soldier, generously to those who had been kind to him in his wanderings, and forming friendships which he retained and cherished long afterwards, when from being a fugitive he had become a king.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—10.—*The spiritual uses of calamity.* The facts are—1. David, on returning to Ziklag with his men, discovers that the Amalekites had smitten it and carried off the families as captives. 2. In their deep distress David and his men weep bitterly. 3. On a mutiny arising among his men, threatening his life, David betakes himself to God for comfort and guidance. 4. Inquiring of God through the high priest, he receives assurance of success in pursuing the Amalekites, and therefore, leaving the faint at Besor, he presses on with the rest of his force. The sojourn of David in the country of the Philistines had thus far been conducive to his safety, and events had seemed to justify the step taken when, from fear of being slain by Saul, he without positive Divine direction left his native land. It is true the ambiguous position into which he had brought himself exposed him for a while to a danger of being treacherous to his protector or hostile to his countrymen, but this peril had at last been providentially obviated by the opening of a door of escape. It must, therefore, have been intensely mortifying, and, as the event proved, impressively instructive, to learn, just when the joy of escape was at its height, that his self-chosen course had issued in a terrible disaster. A great calamity had come, but religiously it proved a blessing, which fact may be generalised by saying that *calamities brought on by the mistakes of good men have important religious uses.*

I. THE AVOIDANCE OF ONE CALAMITY by the adoption of our own policy of distrust of God's care IS NO GUARANTEE FOR FREEDOM FROM ANOTHER. David, without good reason distrusting the care of God, thought he should one day perish by the hand of Saul (ch. xxvii. 1), and therefore, taking his own course, sought safety under the

protection of Achish. We know how groundless was his fear; but, apart from that, events proved that though the dreaded evil was escaped, another most terrible one came. Nor is there much defence for the self-chosen policy in saying that his own life *was* secure, for escape from Saul gave no immunity from death by the hands of other men, and there are calamities even worse than death. We are too often influenced by present dangers, forgetful that though we avoid them we have no security in that avoidance from others equally fearful. The Israelites feared the giants reported to occupy the promised land, and escaped being, as they groundlessly thought, slain by them; but they saw not the physical miseries and the exclusion from the promised land consequent on choosing thus to escape. David ought to have profited by their example, as also should we from his. The application of this to common life is obvious.

II. OUR SELF-CHOSEN POLICY MAY BE LONG BEFORE IT REVEALS ITS CHARACTER IN ANY POSITIVE DISASTER. The ambiguous position of David rendered the months during which he was with Achish a season for verifying the wisdom of his policy. Although slight inconveniences arose which necessitated minor expedients, as when he sought a separate city and made raids apparently on the south of Judah (ch. xxvii. 5, 10), yet no event transpired to awaken manifest regret for the course pursued. It was only toward the end of the sojourn in the land of the Philistines that his policy bore the bitter fruit referred to in this section. Trouble came at last in addition to the mental embarrassments which had been a secret in his own breast. So long as moral laws have force will every false policy tend to disaster, the form and degree of it being determined by the nature of the case. Men may go on hoping for exemption from trouble, concealing the occasional fears and embarrassments of their own heart, successful escape may be well nigh assured, there may be even joy at the thought of providential deliverance from impending perils; but just then, from unexpected quarters, a blow may fall which confirms the truth that it is better to trust in the Lord than to listen to the fears of a wayward heart. Lot's ungenerous policy toward Abraham, successful at first, issued in loss of all in Sodom. Jonah's timid policy avoided the scorn and stones of the Ninevites, and bid fair to secure life and peace; but the storm arose, and a trouble quite unforeseen sprang forth. In commerce, in Church action, and domestic arrangements, distrust of God and self-seeking cannot but issue in evil, though the evil seem to tarry and be beyond calculation.

III. THE FORM OF CALAMITY MAY PROVE TO BE A NEAR APPROACH TO THAT WHICH SELF-CHOSEN POLICY WAS DESIGNED TO AVOID. David lost his family and his property, the next best things to his own life, and also was put in as much danger of being slain by his own men as ever he had been by Saul. He virtually found himself as he was when the distrust of God's care suggested a flight from Judah. The same was true of the Israelites, who, avoiding the "giants" of the promised land, encountered the physical giants, famine and plague, and at last left their carcases in the wilderness. A merchant, by irreligious policy, may for a season avoid ruin, and yet by the means devised ultimately bring on an event equally disastrous.

IV. THE FIRST EFFECT ON A GOOD MAN OF THE PRESSURE OF CALAMITY IS TO REVEAL TO HIM THE FOLLY AND EVIL OF HIS SELF-CHOSEN POLICY. It often requires a heavy blow to awaken us from our complacent belief in our own wisdom. Such a blow fell on David in the desolation of his city, the loss of his wives, the injury to his adherents, and the mutiny of his own friends and admirers. The well-woven veil of expediency which imagination and reason had fabricated during the past sixteen months was thus rudely rent, and he saw at once how much better it would have been for him and his people to have continued trusting to the care of God in Judah, till, at least, specific directions were given to depart. The reference to David encouraging himself in God (ver. 6) implies the prostration of his spirit in the new light which had broken in upon him. He had not sought the Lord on leaving Judah, and now he sees the mistake. Here notice the diverse effect of calamity on men of real piety and men of no vital religion. David is humbled before God, sees his error, is bitterly penitent; whereas Saul in all his calamities persists in his self-will, and hardens his heart against God. The truly religious spirit may err, may become wretched in its wanderings from God, may for a long season cleave to its self-produced miseries, but when brought face to face with great calamity that bespeaks

the judgment of God, at once bows in sorrow and shame, recognising what an evil and bitter thing it is to depart from the living God. How many a backslider and erring man has had occasion to bless the disaster that rent the delusion of their life and revealed their sin!

V. THE SUBSEQUENT EFFECT OF SUCH CALAMITY IS TO THROW A GOOD MAN MORE ENTIRELY UPON GOD FOR HELP AND GUIDANCE. David, humiliated, self-condemned, looking on to the future not knowing what best to do, took heart by casting his burden on the Lord, and seeking through the appointed channel specific directions as to the future. Affliction worked the fruit of righteousness. This is the proper religious use of all calamity, whether in the nation, the Church, our business, our domestic affairs, or the unrecorded events of private life. Jacob's trouble consequent on his falsehood brought him nearer to God at Bethel. The sorrows that came on Israel in the days of Nehemiah developed a trust in God and earnest looking for his guidance not known in former days. There is good reason for all who are smitten with sorrow brought on by folly and sin to encourage themselves in God; for, as to David so to all his children, he is a covenant-keeping God, having prepared for us a kingdom that cannot be moved. He it is who allows the trial to fall not for our injury, but for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness; the abandonment to ourselves and to the suffering of trouble is all in mercy, and specially intended to remind us of the security and rest to be found in him; and he is willing to hear our cry, and to cover all the sins of the past, as well as to vouchsafe the aid necessary to escape from the present anguish, and even to make it issue in some permanent spiritual advantage. We may therefore "hope in God" when all help fails (cf. Ps. xlii. 5; lvi. 13; Isa. liv. 8; Jer. iii. 12; Heb. xii. 5—12).

Vers. 11—20.—*The consequences of kindness.* The facts are—1. Pursuing the Amalekites, David finds an Egyptian slave in distress, and administers to him food and drink. 2. On being questioned, the man states that his master, who was one of the force destroying Ziklag, had left him there three days before. 3. On promise of not being delivered up to his master, he engages to act as guide to the rendezvous of the Amalekites. 4. On coming upon them in the midst of their revels, David smites them, and recovers all that his force had lost, and acquires also much spoil. 5. David keeps the captured flocks and herds as his portion of the spoil. The incidents of this section suggest—

I. THE UNKNOWN RESULTS OF KINDNESS. Here was a case of a sick, starving foreigner, a poor waif nigh unto death; and the kind attentions of David and his men not only were appreciated by a fellow-creature, but issued in important results which, prior to the act of kindness, were not, perhaps, deemed possible. The feeble man, well used, led on to victory. At the close of that eventful day David must have felt how useful as well as how holy a thing it is to act the part of a good Samaritan. Men are often under temptation to be indifferent to the sorrows of others; but good always comes out of an exhibition of the law of kindness. No man ever lost anything by binding up the wounds of another; and often the healer has obtained an inward blessing as a pledge of some still further good that is to flow from his deed. The blessing of those ready to perish is worth more than the applause and favour of the rich and strong. By single acts of kindness hard hearts have been touched, and a new and blessed course of life has been entered on. Many a waif, fed and nourished by Christian benevolence, has become an honourable and holy member of society, aiding to overthrow an evil power worse than that of the ancient Amalekites. Who can tell the vast and blissful consequences that may ensue if only Christians would care more constantly and wisely for the outcast and degraded?

II. THE VALUE OF DETAIL IN SCRIPTURE HISTORY. The historian is specific in the account of what was given to this poor slave—"bread," "water," "a *piece* of a cake of figs," and "*two* clusters of raisins." This occasional detail indicates the pure historic character of the Biblical narrative, and invests the Bible with a human interest. This circumstantial character of narrative is especially seen in the Gospel by St. Mark, and more or less in every writer. As a book designed for all degrees of culture, and in all ages and climes, the Bible wins its way to the heart and commends itself to the common sense of mankind by the air of reality with which its great

facts are incorporated with an incidental setting of circumstances; and it is singular that its occasional detail is never contradicted by well-established fact, but, on the other hand, is being constantly confirmed by discoveries concerning manners, customs, natural productions, and international relations.

III. THE BARBARITIES OF SLAVERY AND OF WAR. This unfortunate man had a master, but longed not to be restored to him. The barbarous manner in which he had been left to die justified his horror of his former owner. Slavery necessarily hardens the heart and debases the entire nature of all who promote it. The horrors that have been perpetrated under its influence more befit a hell than an earth like this. Christianity has proved its beneficent character in removing from many a fair region this accursed evil; and it enjoins on masters of the free to manifest towards their servants a kind, generous spirit, worthy of the Saviour they profess to follow. It is well when servants care to return to employers, and there is something wrong where there is aversion and reproach. The *barbarities of war*, which in this section and elsewhere are conspicuous, are among the foulest blots on human nature. In nothing as in war do the vilest passions of men break forth in wild licence. The ease and complacency with which many so-called Christians speak and read of war is really shocking to one who enters deeply into the spirit of Christ. More care ought to be taken in preventing our children from imbibing a love of war and its literature, and in the Christian state its manifold, incipient, and actual evils ought to be removed or avoided by the most energetic measures. It is doubtful whether the Church rises to a due sense of its solemn obligations in this respect.

IV. THE RESTORATION SUBSEQUENT TO REPENTANCE AND OBEDIENCE. David had repented of the course to which he had committed himself, and, encouraging himself in God, he had followed the direction conveyed through the high priest. The result was a restoration of all he had lost by his folly and an acquisition of much besides. Of course this was a case of material loss, through misconduct, attended with much anguish of spirit, and the restoration was of the same character; but have we not here something analogous with the result of our repentance and renewal of life? The loss and damage occasioned by our sins are removed when we turn to God and follow the guidance of our High Priest. In due time we recover purity, peace with God, most blessed joys, varied spiritual treasures, and even convert the weapons of our great enemy into means of moral advancement. Much has been ruined by our sins, and the whole race has suffered from the curse; but the effect of our restoration of soul to God through Christ is a recovery of the lost position and blessedness, with also an attainment of a bliss surpassing anything known by our first parent in his state of innocence. The promise reads, "I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the canker-worm, and the caterpillar, and the palmer-worm, my great army which I sent among you" (Joel ii. 25).

V. PRUDENT FORESIGHT IN ANTICIPATION OF COMING EVENTS. David's consideration for his followers in allowing them a large share in the spoil was attended also with a wise prevision of what was soon to take place, and no doubt it was on this account that he kept for himself the cattle taken from the enemy. Having repented of his former self-choosing, and having drawn nearer to his God (ver. 6), his soul rose to the old confidence in his call to the kingdom, and, calm in the fresh assurance of God's care, he saw from impending events that the end of Saul's reign was nigh at hand. Hence, to pave the way for an easy and prosperous return to Judah, he selected what would prove suitable gifts to elders and friends (ver. 20; cf. ver. 26). Thus we see how recovery from backsliding tends to a healthy tone and balance of ordinary mental operations, and how prudent anticipation of requirements becomes one called to high service in the kingdom of God. Faith in God's purposes concerning us should be accompanied with wise effort to obviate difficulties in the realisation of that purpose. Our elevation in the service of Christ's kingdom is to be secured on our part by the vigorous use of our best powers in dependence on God.

General lessons:—1. Amidst the hurry and excitement of our life we, like David, should turn aside to care for the poor and destitute, and shall find in so doing a blessing for ourselves. 2. As slavery was put down by the energetic assertion of the principles and spirit of the gospel, so may not the Church, if in earnest, equally suppress the war spirit which too largely prevails in so-called Christian lands? 3.

After the pattern of David in temporal matters we ought to strive with all zeal and constancy to recover the blessed inheritance of good lost to us individually and as a race through sin. 4. In so far as men are convinced of the certainty and glory of Christ's kingdom will they exercise all their utmost powers to hasten it on and win men over to it. Indifferent action is a sure sign of spiritual decay.

Vers. 21—31.—*The law of service.* The facts are—1. On returning to the men who had remained at Besor, some of David's followers oppose his intention to give them a share of the spoil, and are even desirous of sending them away. 2. David resists this spirit as being inconsistent with gratitude to God for his care and aid, and with strict justice to those who serve in humble form according to their strength. 3. David's decision becomes a standing ordinance in Israel's future national life. 4. He sends presents to the elders of cities that had befriended him during the days of his persecution. David's course all through was wonderfully chequered. He had good reason for saying, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." No sooner had he rejoiced in the triumph of victory, and was devising in his heart kind and generous deeds, than he has to experience the annoyance and pain of contending with a murmuring and mutinous spirit among his own followers. As we look at him, the "man after God's own heart," bent on a noble mission for Israel, generous in spirit to all around, rising high above others in integrity of purpose and spiritual aspiration, and surrounded by a motley group of men, hard to control, and often low in tendency, we cannot but think of One greater, who later on stood among wayward, ignorant men, the Holy One, intent on establishing a throne never to be shaken, and wearied and wounded by the incessant "contradiction of sinners." But God teaches mankind through lessons evolved from the varied and often painful experience of his servants, and it is a consolation to them that the fires which try them should also emit light for the benefit of coming generations. There are three truths practical in bearing brought out by this part of David's experience.

I. THE DIVERSE CHARACTER OF MEN IS SEEN IN THE EFFECT OF SUCCESS UPON THEIR SPIRIT AND CONDUCT. David and his men had achieved a great success, and were returning full of the joy of victory. The record tells us nothing of the bearing of the leader and of the men on the first flush of success; no doubt the wild excitement over the spoil of many of his followers was in striking contrast with the tremulous joy which found vent in his private thanksgiving to God. But on their return to Besor, the depraved, irreligious spirit of those termed "men of Belial" appeared in the love of greed and the cruel indifference to the wants of the weary which drew forth David's remonstrance. Success revealed the iniquity of their hearts, while it drew forth the grateful, tender qualities of David's character. Prosperity is as real a test of what men are as is adversity. It draws forth a different set of qualities, but is not the less a means of proving and intensifying a man's character, be it good or bad. When we say that sometimes success in commerce, literature, science, or military skill makes a man vain and scornful of others, or humble and considerate, we really mean that it has developed hidden weakness in the one case, and moral strength in the other. When the character deteriorates or improves under the influence of prosperity, it depends on casual circumstances as to how the deterioration or improvement will manifest itself. Here the presence of feeble men unable to engage in conflict happened to be the occasion of an outburst of selfish feeling. The same occasion furnished a manifestation of kindly consideration and love of justice. While few things create in generous hearts more disgust and sorrow than the selfishness, luxurious indulgence, and purse-proud bearing of men whose struggles in life have brought material success, few qualities are more admired than those of large-hearted benevolence, simplicity of habit, compassion for the destitute, and the grateful, lowly spirit which ascribes all good to God, and proves the sincerity of the ascription by deeds of self-denial on behalf of others. He who can conquer prosperity is often a greater man than the conqueror of adversity. Only the spirit of him who "made himself of no reputation," who "became poor" that we "might be rich," will enable us to subdue *all things* to his glory (cf. Ps. lxxiii. 3—12; Prov. i. 32; Mark x. 23—25; Phil. iii. 7, 8).

II. THE LAW OF SERVICE IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD. The selfish spirit of some of

David's men gave occasion for the exercise of his authority in a right royal manner, and issued in the establishment of an ordinance in relation to service in his cause which became a law in Israel, and fitly foreshadows the principle on which all service in Messiah's kingdom is based. David would not allow the men who, through exhaustion in the hasty march, had remained at Besor to care for the baggage to be deprived of their share of the spoil through the greed of the actual combatants. His principle was that they were all engaged in one enterprise, that their position had been determined by the circumstances of the case, and that all honour should be done them. The ruling faculty in David was beginning to bear good fruit for the poor and needy—beautifully typical of One who is the Refuge and Defender of the oppressed! Considering the passage in its bearing on service in Christ's kingdom, we may notice—1. *That all his people are equally his servants, and have their proper work.* The equality in Christ's kingdom is that of oneness of spirit, aim, and relationship to him. All true Christians are zealous for his supremacy, eager to see him triumph over powers of evil, and on the same level as servants of one Lord and Leader. They are all workers, warriors, contending in accordance with their power and position for a common issue. Every member of the body has its function in securing the purposes of the head (1 Cor. xii. 12—14). 2. *That diversity of employment is necessary to the execution of his purposes.* The care of the "stuff" was as necessary in so dangerous a country as the pursuit and attack on the foe. In accomplishing the purposes of Christ on earth there are diversities of operations. The analogy of the body is used by the Apostle Paul to enforce this truth on the Church (1 Cor. xii. 12—31). It is an instructive study to notice how the manifold agencies and gifts of the Church and of individual Christians have worked together in producing the complex result we witness in the present advanced position of Christ's kingdom. The recognition of diversity should stimulate and encourage all, whatever their powers and opportunities. 3. *That incapacity for rendering conspicuous service is compatible with quiet yet important service.* Those who by Providence are hindered from fighting in the high places of the field have good work to do in a quieter form. Missionaries, popular preachers, diligent pastors, and men of high literary culture may be in the forefront; but the mothers who train children in the fear of God, fathers who live godly lives in the world, quiet, wise men who conduct religious movements, widows who cast in their mite, and even sick and weary ones who in the solitude of their chamber offer daily prayers for the hosts of God—render most valuable service in the common enterprise. 4. *Where there is loyalty in service, whatever its lowly form, there is to be honourable recognition.* David would not overlook the claims of the feeble men in charge of the "stuff." In this he was true to the principles and precedents of Israel's greatest leaders (Num. xxxi. 27; Josh. xxii. 8). In Christ's kingdom there is to be, after his great example in the case of the widow's mite and the hosannas of children, a recognition by all of the need and value of services apparently insignificant. This is further taught in the blessing pronounced on the giver of a cup of cold water, the mention in the day of judgment of the care bestowed on the sick and needy, and also in the equal welcome which the Lord declares he will give to the gainer of ten and two talents. The rewards of the advancing kingdom are shared in the joy and satisfaction which all true workers experience, and in the material improvement of the world consequent on its advance; and while he makes all "kings and priests" now, he will at last honour them with a vision of the glory he had with the Father before the world was (John xvii. 24).

III. THERE IS A WISE POLICY IN THE EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE. The tenor of David's life shows that the sending presents from the spoil taken to those who had befriended him in his time of need was the genuine expression of a grateful heart. At the same time this was coincident with a wise policy, and, in his mind, distinctly blended with it. Had the gifts been the product of a mere calculation of results, the act would only command the respect due to expediency, but having its root in feeling, it rises to a higher value. The recompense of kindnesses when occasion offers is the suggestion of a true heart, and though utilitarian ideas may not enter into the recompense, yet it is always useful in view of future contingencies. A prudent man called to a great work, is bound to prepare the

way for its realisation by securing as far as possible the good will and co-operation of others.

General lessons:—1. It behoves us to be on our guard against the perils of success, and to remember that as God is a refuge from the storm, so he is a shade upon our right hand to tone down the light of prosperity (Ps. cxxi. 5, 6). 2. A degree of suspicion is always proper concerning ourselves, as there are latent evils which events may draw forth. 3. We should be careful not to disparage the services of persons seeking in a humble way to promote the glory of Christ (Matt. xviii. 6). 4. The chief question for each is the existence within of a spirit of loyalty to Christ; the form of service is a matter of opportunity (John xxi. 15—17). 5. Those who render aid to the people of God in their time of distress are sure to be recompensed on earth as in heaven (Luke vi. 31—38; xiv. 13, 14).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—10. (ZIKLAG.)—*Confidence in God.* "But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God" (ver. 6). Delivered from their embarrassing position in the Philistine army, David and his men set out early in the morning, and by forced marches (evident from the exhaustion of one third of them, ver. 10) arrived at Ziklag on the third day. Instead of being welcomed by their wives and children, they found the city a smoking and desolate ruin. "When we go abroad we cannot foresee what evil tidings may meet us when we come home again. The going out may be very cheerful, and yet the coming in very doleful" (M. Henry). The Amalekites (whom Saul had failed to exterminate, and David often attacked) had been there, and, in revenge for what they had suffered, had carried off the undefended people and property, and given the place to the flames. Deeming their recovery hopeless, the strong men wept like children "until they had no more power to weep." Then their grief turned to exasperation, and seeking a victim on which to expend their wrath, they fixed on David, and "spake of stoning him" as the cause of all their misery. He was reduced to the utmost extremity, and could not fail to see in his trouble a just chastisement for his unbelief, prevarication, and cruelty. Possibly the reinforcements that "fell to him as he went to Ziklag" (1 Chron. xii. 20) rendered him valuable service. But his hope was not in man; and instead of resigning himself to despair (like Saul), he was impelled by his distress and deprivation of human help to seek help in God alone. "The long misery of the first stage of his public career seems to have reached its culminating point. When things are at the worst, as the common proverb says, they must mend. And from that moment when he believingly cast all his dependence upon the Lord his God only, whom he had found faithful in all his promises, and whose providence had never failed him in his deepest dangers, from that moment he was safe, from that moment he was prosperous" (Kitto). Concerning the confidence in God which he exhibited (therein setting an eminent example to others), observe that—

I. IT SPRINGS OUT OF CONSCIOUS HELPLESSNESS. Few men have an adequate conviction of their own helplessness; and one aim of the Divine discipline is to produce it. "When I am weak," said Paul, "then am I strong"—when I feel my utter weakness under the pressure of trial, then I am constrained to depend on the Lord, and become imbued with his strength (2 Cor. xii. 10). In the exercise of "the same spirit of faith" others "out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens" (Heb. xi. 34). True faith and spiritual power have their foundation amidst the "dust and ashes" of self-abasement and self-distrust. Confidence in God began to revive in David when Ziklag was reduced to ashes. The same thing is often occasioned in others by means of—1. Sudden and severe bereavement; wife and children, it may be, taken away with a stroke. 2. The failure of cherished plans and purposes; the loss of property through robbery by men or accidents by fire or flood, the break-down of health, the disappointment of long expectation. 3. The falling away of friends; their unreasonable anger and bitter reproaches. It must have been peculiarly painful to David to bear the mutiny of his own men, to witness the selfishness of many of them (ver.

22), and to learn what little confidence could be put in man (Ps. cxlvi. 3). He was left almost alone. 4. The upbraiding of conscience for past sin. Trouble is a powerful means of bringing sin to remembrance (1 Kings xvii. 18). 5. The threatening of danger; the presence of "the king of terrors" (Job xviii. 14). 6. The lack of wisdom and power to deliver from distress. When we become fully aware of our utter helplessness, two courses lie open before us—either to sink into despair or to cast ourselves wholly upon God. That the latter may be taken trial is sent; it is taken by him whose heart is in the main right with God, and it is never taken in vain.

II. IT LAYS HOLD OF ALL-SUFFICIENT HELP. "When David could not comfort himself in his wives, nor his children, nor his goods, nor in anything under the sun, he could in something above the sun. And the reason is at hand: God is the God of all consolation, the spring of comfort; if any water, it is in the sea; if any light, it is in the sun; if any comfort, it is in God—there it rests, there it is when nowhere else. God is all-sufficient; there the heart finds every want supplied, every good thing lodged. As God is all-sufficient to furnish us with all necessaries, so infinite in power, wisdom, goodness to help us against all evils feared or felt" (R. Harris). Faith strengthens the soul by uniting it to God and making it partaker of his strength. It has respect to—1. *His great name* (see ch. i. 3). "Hope thou in God" (Ps. xlii. 5; ix. 10; cxxiv. 8).

> "Hope, said I,
> Is of the joy to come a sure expectance,
> The effect of grace Divine and merit preceding.
> This light from many a star visits my heart;
> But flow'd to me, the first, from him who sang
> The songs of the Supreme; himself supreme
> Among his tuneful brethren. 'Let all hope
> In thee,' so spake his anthem, 'who have known
> Thy name'" (Dante, 'Par.' xxv.).

2. *His intimate relationship* to his people. "Jehovah his God." 3. *His past doings* on their behalf. When David formerly fell into despondency (ch. xxvii.) he seems to have forgotten all these, and failed to receive the encouragement which they were adapted to impart. But now he remembered them and "took courage." 4. *His faithful promises.* "The free expressions of his goodness and beneficence," the unchangeable assurances of his almighty help in time of need. "The mistake we make is to look for a source of consolation in ourselves; self-contemplation instead of gazing upon God. He is not affected by our mutability, our changes do not alter him. When we are restless he remains serene and calm; when we are low, selfish, mean, or dispirited he is still the unalterable I AM. What God is in himself, not what we may chance to feel him in this or that moment to be, that is our hope" (Robertson).

III. IT MAKES USE OF APPROPRIATE MEANS "He encouraged (strengthened) himself," &c. by—1. *Repressing fear* and unbelief. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" 2. *Directing the thoughts* toward God, the ever-present, invisible, eternal Protector of his servants, and stirring up the heart to renewed trust in him. "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?" (Ps. cxviii. 6; cxxi. 1). 3. *Inquiring of the Lord.* "And David said to Abiathar," &c. (vers. 7, 8). He sought him as he had not done on the previous occasion; sought him in a right spirit, and therefore (unlike Saul) received an answer:—"Pursue, for thou shalt surely overtake and deliver." He was thereby further strengthened. His confidence, moreover, was expressed and perfected in—4 *Obeying the will of the Lord* (vers. 9, 10), and co-operating toward the fulfilment of his promise. Despondency led him to flee from difficulty and danger, but faith and hope incited him to go into their midst, and made him "as bold as a lion." "I will fear no evil, for thou art with me."

IV. IT IS CROWNED WITH COMPLETE SUCCESS. By the help obtained of God fear is removed, strength renewed, and confidence inspired (ver. 9). After a brief delay and some untoward events by which faith is still further tested (ver. 10)—1. The object which is sought is providentially discovered (ver. 11). 2. The enemy is completely

defeated (ver. 17). 3. That which has been lost is recovered (ver. 19). 4. Much more than has been expected is gained (ver. 20). "A few days after David's own people were about to stone him on the ruins of Ziklag the royal crown was laid at his feet."

Observations:—1. When good men transgress they must expect to be "chastened of the Lord," and wicked men are sometimes used as a rod for the purpose. 2. The wickedness of the wicked is mercifully restrained (ver. 2), often turns to the benefit of those whom they seek to injure, and returns upon their own heads. 3. The chief purpose of chastisement is to bring men to God in humility, penitence, submission, and trust, and prepare them for future service and exaltation. 4. The difference in the effects of calamity upon men (as upon Saul and David) manifests the difference of their character. 5. The more heavily trouble presses upon men, the more closely should they cling to God, that it may be rightly borne and accomplish its intended moral end. 6. God never disappoints the confidence of his children, but fulfils his promises to them more richly than they dare to hope.—D.

Vers. 11—20. (SOUTH OF THE BROOK BESOR.)—*An Egyptian slave.* "I was reminded of the poor Egyptian whom David found half dead, and brought to life again by giving him 'a piece of cake of figs and two clusters of raisins' to eat, and water to drink, by an incident which occurred to me when crossing the plain of Askelon. Far from any village, a sick Egyptian was lying by the road-side in the burning sun, and apparently almost dead with a terrible fever. He wanted nothing but 'water! water!' which we were fortunately able to give him from our travelling-bottle; but we were obliged to pass on and leave him to his fate, whatever that might be" (Thomson, 'The Land and the Book'). How the "young man of Egypt" became "slave to an Amalekite" is not stated, but it is probable that he fell into his hands in some marauding expedition, like the Hebrew women and children in the raid on Ziklag. His condition was an involuntary, hard, and degrading one. He was—

I. ABANDONED BY HIS MASTER with—1. *Indifference* and contempt. His worth as a man created in the image of God was disregarded (as is generally the case in the odious institution of slavery). He was treated as the absolute property of his master, "an animated tool" (Aristotle), and when deemed no longer useful, thrown away. 2. *Injustice.* Every claim in return for his services was ignored. He was entirely at the mercy of his master, and unprotected by any law (such as existed among the Hebrews). 3. *Inhumanity.* "My master left me three days agone because I fell sick" (ver. 13). He might have been easily carried forward on one of the camels (ver. 17), but the Amalekites were hard and cruel, and he was left to perish with hunger or to be devoured by wild beasts. "He that is higher than the highest regardeth" (Eccles. v. 8), and the meanest slave cannot be despised and neglected with impunity.

II. BEFRIENDED BY STRANGERS (vers. 11, 12). 1. *Out of compassion* and desire to save his life by every means in their power. 2. *In fulfilment of the law of God*, which required that kindness should be shown to the poor, the stranger, and the slave. "Love ye therefore the stranger, for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deut. x. 19; xxiii. 7, 15, 16). 3. *With appreciation of the service* he might render (ver. 15). The more helpless any one is, the more urgent his claim to assistance; yet no one is so helpless but that he may be capable of requiting the kindness shown to him. Slavery among the Hebrews differed widely from slavery among other ancient and modern peoples (ch. xxv. 10; Ewald, Ginsburg, 'Ecclesiastes,' p. 283; 'Ecce Homo'). "By Christianising the master the gospel enfranchised the slave. It did not legislate about mere names and forms, but it went to the root of the evil, it spoke to the heart of man. When the heart of the master was filled with Divine grace and was warmed with the love of Christ the rest would soon follow. The lips would speak kind words, the hands would do liberal things" (Wordsworth, 'Com. on Philemon').

III. SERVICEABLE TO HIS BENEFACTORS. 1. *From gratitude* for the benefit received. No human heart is wholly insensible to the power of kindness. 2. *Under a solemn assurance* of protection. After his abandonment by his master he could have no scruple concerning his right to his continued service, if any such right ever existed;

but experience had made him fearful and suspicious of men, and therefore he said, "Swear unto me by God," &c. (ver. 15). He had a sense of religion, and believed that Divine justice would avenge the violation of an oath, though it should be taken to a slave. 3. *With efficient and faithful performance* of his engagements. He not only gave David the information he sought, but guided him to the camp of the enemy, and contributed to a result which repaid him a hundred-fold (ver. 18).

IV. PRESERVED AND EMPLOYED BY DIVINE PROVIDENCE, which—1. Cares for the lowliest. "Behold, God is mighty, and despiseth not any" (Job xxxvi. 5). "Neither doth God respect any person" (2 Sam. xiv. 14). 2. Often makes use of the feeblest instrumentality for the chastisement of the "wicked in great power." 3. And for the promotion of the welfare of the people of God, and the establishment of his kingdom. What a rich harvest may spring from a single act of kindness toward even the most despised!

"He prayeth well who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.
He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small:
For the dear God who loveth us
He made and loveth all" (Coleridge). D.

Vers. 21—31. (THE BROOK BESOR, ZIKLAG.)—*The fruits of victory.* When David overtook the Amalekites in the evening twilight he found them given up to riotous indulgence, undefended, and little thinking how near they were to destruction. He forthwith fell upon them, and after a severe conflict, which lasted till the evening of the next day, gained a complete victory. He "recovered all" that had been carried away. In addition he obtained much spoil, consisting of flocks and herds, and of "arms, ornaments, jewels, money, clothes, camels, accoutrements, and so on." The former were assigned to David (according to his wish, and as better adapted to the end he had in view), and driven in front of the recovered flock with the exclamation, "This is David's spoil." The latter were carried away for distribution among his men. By his victory a crushing blow was inflicted on a bitter enemy of the people of Israel, and a great deliverance wrought for them. He evidently regarded himself as (not merely engaged in a private enterprise, but as) acting on their behalf, and carrying out God's purpose; and his conduct after the battle was marked by—1. *Considerate sympathy* with the faint and weary who had been disabled from taking an active part in the conflict. "He saluted them" (ver. 21). As he had not previously urged them beyond their strength, so now he exhibited a kindly interest in them, and a marked respect toward them. His heart was not lifted up by success. They had "done what they could," and formed part of his following. "They also serve who only stand and wait." 2. *Strenuous resistance* to the arrogant, selfish, and unjust procedure of some of his followers (ver. 22). "Rough, wild men were many among them, equally depressed in the day of adversity, and recklessly elated and insolent in prosperity. Nor is it merely the discipline which David knew how to maintain in such a band that shows us 'the skilfulness of his hands' in guiding them, but the gentleness with which he dealt with them, and above all the earnest piety with which he knew how to tame their wild passions, prove the spiritual 'integrity' or 'perfectness of his heart'" (Edersheim). The spirit which these "wicked and worthless men" displayed is sometimes found even in the Church of Christ, and requires to be met with firm and uncompromising opposition (1 Pet. v. 9). 3. *Devout recognition* of the hand of God, in bestowing whatever good is possessed, preserving from harm, and delivering from dangerous adversaries. "Ye shall not do so, my brethren, with that which the Lord hath given us," &c. (ver. 23). "Man could not boast of his own merit in obtaining these possessions" (Ewald). They were a gift of God, and should be used for his honour and the good of all. There is a higher law than that of self-interest. Men are only "stewards" (not absolute owners) of property, ability, time, influence, &c., and as such it behoves them to "be found faithful." "Freely ye have received, freely give." 4. *Equitable distribution.* "And who will hearken unto you in this matter?" &c. (vers. 24, 25). The course proposed was as contrary to the common convictions of men concerning what is reasonable and just as to the

benevolent purpose of God. "The equity of this law appears from hence—that by common consent these 200 men were left behind to look after the baggage; were part of the same body of men, linked together in the same common society; hindered by mere weariness from going to fight, which otherwise they would have done; their will was accepted for the deed; and they were in the same common danger, for if the 400 had been routed their enemies would have soon cut them off" (Patrick). "The members should have the same care one for another" (1 Cor. xii. 25). 5. *Grateful acknowledgment* of friendly aid during his "wanderings in the wilderness." "He sent of the spoil unto the elders of Judah, his friends," &c. (vers. 26—31). They had suffered from Amalekite raids, but it was not to make restitution for their losses so much as to testify his gratitude and strengthen their attachment. His victory enabled him to display a princely munificence. "It is a remarkable proof of the grateful nature of David, and his fidelity to his early friendships, as well as a curious instance of undesigned coincidence, that we find among those employed by David in offices of trust in the height of his power so many inhabitants of those obscure places where he found friends in the days of his early difficulties" ('Sp. Com.'). 6. *Commendable policy*—wise, generous, patriotic, and religious. "Behold a present" (blessing, gift) "for you of the spoil of the enemies of Jehovah." The elders of Judah and others looked to him as their future theocratic ruler. He himself felt that the time of patient waiting was nearly gone, and the time of active effort for the fulfilment of the Divine purpose concerning him well-nigh come, if, indeed, the tidings of the death of Saul had not already reached him. He also foresaw that he must look for his chief support in his own tribe, and adopted the best method of securing it. "Piety without policy is too simple to be safe; policy without piety is too subtle to be good." "This was already a royal act in vivid anticipation of his impending accession to the throne. Already the crown of Israel was unmistakably though dimly visible above his head" (Krummacher). "Whilst Saul's star sinks in the north, the star of David rises in the south, and there begins the long line of fulfilments of the prophecy concerning the Star that should come out of Jacob" (Num. xxiv. 17) (Erdmann).—D.

Ver. 6.—*Faith reviving in distress.* I. CORRECTION. David, being a true but faulty child of God, was corrected by the rod. Quickly fell stroke after stroke. First he had to bear the galling scorn and suspicion of the Philistine lords. This was all he had gained by cajoling their king. Next he had to see Ziklag plundered and burnt. This was all he had gained by attacking the Amalekites and concealing the deed. Next, and in some respects most trying of all, he saw the loyalty of his own followers swept away in their passionate grief. "The people spake of stoning him." This was all he had gained by all his unworthy devices to save his own life. All refuge failed him. So God in loving-kindness scourges his children now when they have faltered in faith, and, mistrusting his defence, have betaken themselves to some Ziklag, some position unworthy of them. Their new confidences reject them, and they have to sit like David in dust and ashes.

II. ITS HAPPY ISSUE. Faith revived. When all refuge failed him, David returned to his Divine stronghold. "He encouraged himself in Jehovah his God." Mark the contrast with Saul. When that unhappy king was stricken he departed from God more and more, hardened his heart in pride, found no place of repentance, and at last betook himself to unhallowed and forbidden arts. So we find Saul passing from gloom into thicker and blacker shadow, while David emerges into the sunshine. Such is the happy experience of many of the children of God. Faith revives in distress, and darkness turns to light. This, too, as the New Testament teaches us, always by the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, reviving childlike trust, rekindling holy courage. The way in which David's recovered faith wrought in him is full of instruction for us. 1. *Revived faith rests on the Divine word of promise.* David had let the promise of the kingdom made to him through Samuel slip from his mind when he began to despair of his life; and it is remarkable that he gave way to this fear at a time when there was a lull in the persecution directed against him. But when real danger was upon him, when he had lost all, and his own followers turned against him, his faith again caught hold of the Divine promise. He could not die then and there,

for the purpose of the Lord must stand, the word of the Lord must be fulfilled. Now those who believe in Christ have the promise of eternal life in him. In hours of relaxed diligence they perhaps let it slip; but under real pressure faith revives and grasps the promise again. They shall not perish. They may be humbled and distressed, and they will acknowledge that they have brought this on themselves; but they are persuaded that he is faithful who promised, and so will not cast them off. He has said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee;" so that we may boldly say, "The Lord is my helper." 2. *Revived faith takes to prayer and to diligent effort.* The first thing which David did was to inquire of God. Faith restored always acts thus. Rising against discouragement, it is sure that God can turn darkness into light, loss into gain, death into life, and simply asks for direction. "What shall I do? Shall I sit still, or shall I move? Shall I pursue?" There are trials and dangers in which the only wise course is to be quite patient and passive; the "strength is to sit still." When Daniel was cast to the lions his faith was shown in not struggling with the wild beasts, but sitting among them calm and still till rescue came at break of day. So may a Christian fall into a den of troubles out of which no effort of his own can bring him up; and his faith is shown in prayer and waiting on God, who is able to send his angel to minister to the weak and protect the helpless. Those whose faith has not failed at all may do more than pray—may sing praises, as Paul and Silas did in the dark dungeon. Other cases there are, and more frequent, in which prayer should be promptly followed by active exertion. David did not ask the Lord to work a miracle, or send angels, to restore to him what the Amalekites had taken. It was possible for him and his men to pursue, overtake, and defeat the spoilers. So he asked the Lord whether he should pursue; and receiving the Divine command to do so, he addressed himself at once to the pursuit, and obtained a splendid success. Such is the energetic action of revived faith. Difficulties go down before its resolutions, and lost things come back to him who boldly pursues. Tears of defeat are turned into songs of victory. The troubles that afflict the people of God are to a large extent chastisements for unbelief or unfaithfulness. At the time they are not joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward they yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are exercised thereby. Such are sufferings in sympathy with David. But to some extent those troubles are in sympathy with and for the sake of the Son of David, the Lord Jesus Christ. In such a case we have the comfort that

"Christ leads us through no darker rooms
Than he went through before."

He is touched with a feeling of our infirmities. He has wept and he has loved. So if we are despoiled, he is our present help, and through him we may do valiantly and recover all. If messengers of Satan buffet us, his grace is sufficient for us, for his "strength is made perfect in weakness."—F.

EXPOSITION.

DEFEAT AND DEATH OF SAUL (CH. XXXI.).

CHAPTER XXXI.

SAUL AND HIS SONS SLAIN (vers. 1—7). Vers. 1, 2.—**The Philistines fought.** Literally it is a participle present, "the Philistines are warring," as if it were a mere resumption of ch. xxviii. 1. In the battle fought on the day following Saul's visit to the witch the Israelites were defeated, and fell in large numbers **slain in Mount Gilboa**, either because the Philistines had attacked them there, or because, after fighting in the valley of Jezreel, they had made on its steep ridges their last defence. Among those thus slain were the three sons of Saul mentioned in ch. xiv. 49, where see note.

Vers. 3, 4.—**The archers.** Literally, as in the margin, "shooters, men with bows." As the first word would equally apply to men who threw javelins, the explanation is added to make the meaning clear. **Hit him.** Literally, "found him," *i. e.* found out his position, and came up to where he was. **He was sore wounded.** Rather, "he was sore distressed." In Deut. ii. 25 the verb is rendered "be in anguish." The meaning is that Saul, finding himself surrounded by these archers, and that he could neither escape nor come to close quarters with them, and die fighting, ordered his armour-bearer to kill him, that he might be spared the degradation of being slain by "uncircum-

cised" heathen. **Abuse me.** This verb is translated *mock* in Jer. xxxviii. 19. "Maltreat" would be a better rendering in both places, and also in Judges xix. 25, where, too, the word occurs. Its exact meaning is to practise upon another all that passion, lust, anger, or malice dictate. Probably Saul thought that they would treat him as they had previously treated Samson (Judges xvi. 21—25).

Vers. 5, 6. — **His armour-bearer.** The Jewish tradition says that he was Doeg the Edomite, and that the sword on which Saul fell was that with which he had massacred the priests. This is not very probable; but whoever he was, his horror on being asked to slay his master, and his devotion to him, are deserving of admiration. **All his men.** In 1 Chron. x. 6 "all his house." But Ishbosheth and Abner survived, and the meaning probably is not that his whole army, but that his personal attendants, all those posted round him, fell to a man, fighting bravely for their king, as the Scots fought round King James V. at Flodden Field. As suicide was very rare among the Israelites, the death of Saul is made more intensely tragic by the anguish which drove him thus to die by his own hand.

POLITICAL RESULT OF THE BATTLE (ver. 7). Ver. 7.—**The men of Israel.** The term is here applied to non-combatants, while in ver. 1 it meant those following Saul in arms. **On the other side of the valley.** *I. e.* of Jezreel, and so all the Israelites inhabiting the tribes of Issachar, Zabulon, and Naphthali, and the region generally to the north. In 1 Chron. x. 7 this flight is confined to the inhabitants of the valley, one of the most fertile districts of Palestine; but probably the statement made here, that a very large extent of country was the prize of victory, is the more correct. **On the other side Jordan.** This phrase constantly means the eastern side of the Jordan, nor need we doubt but that the people living near it abandoned their homes and fled; for the river would form but a slight protection for them in this northerly part of its course. Still the conquests on the eastern bank of the Jordan must have been confined to a small district near the lake of Tiberias, as Abner was able to place Ishbosheth as king at Mahanaim, a town about twenty miles to the east of the river, and not far from Jabez-Gilead. South of Jezreel the Philistines made no conquests, and thus Ephraim, Benjamin, and Judah remained free, and of course Gilead, and the most part of the region beyond Jordan (see 2 Sam. ii. 8—11).

MALTREATMENT OF THE BODIES OF SAUL AND HIS SONS (vers. 8—10). Ver. 8.—**It came to pass on the morrow.** The previous verse gave us the results of the victory as they were in course of time developed. We now return to the narrative of the battle and its immediate consequences. As the spoiling was deferred till the morrow, the struggle must have been obstinately contested, and decided only just before nightfall.

Vers. 9, 10.—**They cut off his head.** This was probably done not simply in retaliation for what had happened to their champion Goliath, but in accordance with the customs of ancient warfare. The fierce joy of the Philistines over the fallen Saul proves how great had been their fear of him, and how successful he had been in breaking their yoke off Israel's neck. Had he still had David with him the victory would assuredly have remained on his side. **They put his armour in the house of Ashtaroth.** Hebrew, "of the Ashtaroth." Whether it was divided among the various shrines of Astarte, or whether it was all placed in her famous temple at Askelon, described by Herodotus (i. 105) as the most ancient of the fanes of the Syrian Venus, is uncertain. The former view agrees best with the Hebrew text and with what is said in 1 Chron. x. 10, where we have the additional information that they suspended Saul's head in the temple of Dagon. **They fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan,** as also the bodies of his sons (ver. 12). Beth-shan or Scythopolis lies about four miles from the Jordan on the west, and twelve miles south of the lake of Tiberias. It is almost in a straight line to the west of Mahanaim, and must have been at once occupied by the Philistines, and as they hung the bodies of the fallen king and his sons on its wall, they evidently intended to retain it.

RECOVERY OF THE BODIES OF SAUL AND HIS SONS (vers. 11—13). Ver. 11.—**Jabesh-Gilead.** Eusebius describes this place as situated on the road from Pella to Gerasa, and therefore it would be much nearer the Jordan than Mahanaim, and probably was not more than twelve or fourteen miles distant from Beth-shan. The people there had not forgotten how bravely Saul had saved them, and now showed their gratitude by rescuing his remains from disgrace.

Vers. 12, 13.—**They burnt them.** Cremation, though highly honourable among classical nations, is here mentioned for the first time in Holy Scripture, and was probably resorted to on this occasion to insure the bodies of Saul and his sons against further maltreatment, as, if buried, the Philistines might have made the attempt to get them again into their power. Some suppose that the burning of the dead was afterwards practised by the Jews, and quote in its favour 2 Chron. xvi. 14; Isa. xxxiii. 12; Jer. xxxi. 40; xxxiv. 5; Amos vi. 10, but these passages bear a different interpretation. After

the exile, interment was the sole method of disposing of the dead among the Jews, and in the Talmud cremation is condemned as a heathen practice. The burial of the bones of Saul and his sons proves that their bodies here were really burnt. **Under a tree.** Hebrew, "under the tamarisk," the famous tree of that species at Jabesh. It was under one tamarisk that Saul commanded the massacre of the priests (ch. xxii. 6), and now his bones are placed in rest beneath another. Perhaps the people remembered the king's fondness for trees. For the final fate of these relics see 2 Sam. xxi. 12—14. They **fasted seven days** (see Gen. l. 10). The time of mourning was thirty days for Aaron (Numb. xx. 29) and for Moses (Deut. xxxiv. 8). The Talmudic rule is strict mourning for seven days, less strict for the next twenty-three, in all thirty; and for a father or mother mourning was continued for a year. The fasting was mourning of the strictest kind, and proves that the people of Jabesh-Gilead honoured to the utmost their deliverer.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—6.—*Judgment at last.* The facts are—1. In the battle at Gilboa the men of Israel suffer a defeat from the Philistines. 2. His sons being slain, the conflict presses hard on Saul. 3. Dreading to fall by the hand of a Philistine, and failing to find death through the hand of his armour-bearer, he falls on his own sword, his example being followed by his armour-bearer. Here we have the closing scene in the tragedy of Saul's life, verifying the prediction of Samuel. Our heart mourns over an end so sad, and as we read the narrative we are sensible of a strange pity for this once promising but now ruined man. Notice—

I. THE PRESSURE OF EVENTS WORKING OUT A RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT. Connecting this defeat and death of Saul with the early prediction of Samuel (ch. xv. 23, 28, 29) and the recent solemn declaration in the cave at Endor (ch. xxviii. 16—20), we see how, as by an unseen hand, Saul was urged on to his doom. For instead of making terms with the enemy, or fleeing from the scene of conflict, he, knowing his doom, drew up his men, pressed on to the thickest battle, became a conspicuous mark for archers, and drew around himself and heirs to the throne the fiercest of the assault. We cannot but observe how the Philistine force was unrestrained by the power which checked Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea, weakened Amalek when the hands of Moses were raised (Exod. xvii. 11—13), inspired terror in the army opposed to Jonathan (ch. xiv. 15—23), and generally put fear in the hearts of Israel's foes. Samuel's words make clear to us that Providence was leaving Saul to the impulses which led him to death, and withholding from the Philistines all that would otherwise have impeded their way to victory. It is a fearful thing thus to fall into the hands of the living God. The truth brought out here is, that though judgment is often for unrevealed reasons long deferred, yet events are so disposed as to concentrate irresistibly on the enforcement of the penalty of sin. Men pursue a crooked and unholy course for years, during which time justice seems to linger; but the time comes on when, as by infatuation, they go straight into the concurrences of events which Providence has permitted for their downfall. So also fell Babylon, Rome, and other nations, made drunk with the wine of the wrath of God (Isa. lxiii. 6). So likewise, under the pressure of Providence, will the sea give up its dead, and all that are in their graves come forth, to receive according to the deeds done in the body (John v. 28, 29; 2 Cor. v. 10; Rev. xx. 13).

II. THE SINS OF PARENTS CUT OFF THE HOPES OF SONS. We feel deep sympathy with Jonathan that he, the brightest and best of Israel's manhood, should perish in the calamity brought on by his father's persistent impenitence. Brave, gallant son, knowing and lamenting the failings of his parent, and the woes his conduct was bringing on the kingdom, with true filial piety he stands by him and the kingdom to the end! It was better to die, if so God willed it, than to live and share in the joys of even a David's friendship. The fond hopes of seeing David enthroned over a happy and prosperous people after his father's natural decease (ch. xx. 12—17; xxiii. 16—18) were rudely blighted. It is the old sad story of the sin of one bringing sorrow and suffering to many innocent. The fearful havoc made by sin! The awful responsibility of our conduct! Millions die before their proper time, and a wail of woe rises daily from myriads of hearts because of the transgression of parents

III. A SAD END OF LIFE IN KEEPING WITH ITS ORDINARY COURSE. There is a singular blending of diverse thought and motive in the last utterances and acts of Saul. He knew his doom was at hand; and yet, partly under a sense of utter wretchedness which made him willing to die, and partly from the patriotic feeling that his unwillingness to face his country's foe should not be added to his crimes, he goes forth to battle. Then, also, when pressed in battle and in great straits, was there not a sense of misery, a consciousness of Divine abandonment, which made the continuance of life a burden no longer to be endured, blended with the thought precious to the Hebrew, that he was one of the chosen race, allied by nationality with the great Messianic purpose, and that, as such, it must never be said that Israel's king was abused by the touch of the "uncircumcised" alien? In this commingling of light and darkness, moral quickenings and mad infatuation, we have an analogue to his conduct all through his sad career. It is not for us to say whether there was not in those last sad moments, as he lay on the earth, a melting of that heart which had so long striven against God. As in many other instances, there is no light thrown on the inner experience of the soul in its most sacred relations to God. The case of the thief on the cross may suggest the possibility of a cry from the heart to which the mercy that endureth for ever responds. But it is for us to stand in awe, and take to ourselves the solemn lesson of this sad and perverted life.

IV. A QUESTION AS TO THE MORAL CHARACTER OF SUICIDE. Willet, in his 'Harmonie upon the first Booke of Samuel,' quotes authorities *pro* and *con* on the general question and on Saul's act; but without entering on a wide subject, it may suffice to note that *moral cowardice* is ordinarily the cause of suicide, and that it is a violation of the prerogatives of God. As we have indicated, there may have been considerations of a semi-religious character which influenced Saul in desiring not to be slain by the "uncircumcised," and to him it was *certain* that death was at hand. Nevertheless, no private feeling, no relief from dishonour, can justify a forestalling, in the matter of life and death, of the course of Providence. The principle involved is most vital, and when once the door for its violation is opened, the whole fabric of society is sapped at its foundation.

General lessons:—1. It is instructive to contrast the beginning and end of lives, and note how by the action of a deceitful heart the fatal turn is taken toward disgrace and despair. 2. Although some parents ruin their sons by their sins, yet we all do them wrong and damage in so far as sin taints our life. 3. Although God cuts off the hopes of the good by the calamities which come through the sins of others, yet in his mercy he raises them to a purer and safer joy. 4. Whatever judgments God brings should be submitted to with resignation.

Vers. 7—13.—*The final issues of life a criterion of worth.* The facts are—1. The defeat of Saul is followed by the general flight of the men of Israel from the neighbouring cities, and the occupation of these by the Philistines. 2. The bodies of Saul and of his sons being found, the Philistines strip the king's of his armour, publish the fact in the houses of idols, and dishonour him on the wall of Beth-shan. 3. The men of Jabesh-Gilead, hearing of this, rescue the bodies and bury them at Jabesh amidst much mourning. The historian closes the narrative concerning Saul's reign by a reference to the immediate result of the defeat on the adjacent cities, and to the barbarous treatment of Saul's body. The people who had demanded a king, and who were proud of his powerful bodily presence, were now to learn in saddest form how much better it is to wait the time of God, and to trust rather to righteousness of national life than to physical force and martial display. The people and the king were at fault, and the judgment falls on both. We here see—

I. THAT LIFE'S WORTH IS TESTED BY ITS FINAL RESULT. The public life of Saul at one time promised well for himself and Israel. Every aid which wise advice and holy influence could render had been freely bestowed by Samuel, the man of God, and the promise of Divine help was given on condition of obedience to the Divine voice. Although troubles came in consequence of disobedience, and thus indicated that his life was proving a failure, there were doubtless men so blind to the signs of the times as to refer the troubles to accidents and unforeseen circumstances, and to hope still that there would be a turn in the tide of affairs which would insure a pros-

perous reign. But the panic which came on Israel on Saul's death and the occupation of cities by the detested Philistine must have made clear to the most prejudiced that his public career was disastrous and unrighteous. The issue of a monarch's reign should be the moral and material elevation of the people, the improved administration of law, the greater security of life and property, a prevalence of the blessings of internal peace and freedom from foreign oppression, and a higher degree of national influence. The reverse of this was the outcome of Saul's life. By thus looking at the result of life's labours we may form an estimate of the worth of monarchs, statesmen, merchants, and professed Christians. Have men blessed their fellow-creatures with permanent good? Is the great enemy, *sin*, more in occupation of country, home, and the soul at the end than at the beginning? The day is coming when every man's work will be tried of "what sort it is" (1 Cor. iii. 13). Can we face that test? Will the end be better than the beginning? Dare some men try to answer this question in relation to their spiritual condition and the spiritual effect of their personal influence.

II. THAT THE APPARENT TRIUMPH OF THE WICKED IS ONE OF THE SADDEST CONSEQUENCES OF THE SINS OF GOD'S PEOPLE. The triumph of the "uncircumcised" was complete when, stripping the body of Israel's king, they carried his head in savage delight to the house of Dagon (1 Chron. x. 10), nailed his corpse to the wall of Beth-shan, and proclaimed their victory in honour of their gods. It was this result following on the death of Saul and defeat of Israel that seemed to be an occasion of so much sorrow and dread to David (2 Sam. i. 20). The fond hopes cherished by the pious on the solemn day of repentance and consecration at Mizpeh and Ebenezer (ch. vii. 9—12) were now rudely destroyed. Heathenism gloried in its strength; while Israel, smitten with fear, mourned in bitterness of soul. Ignorance, barbarity, idolatry took a new lease of power, and Jehovah's name was dishonoured in the eyes of the nations. The death of a king is comparatively a small matter, the wasting sweep of war over fair fields and flourishing cities is a material calamity; but for irreligion to flourish, debasing religious rites to manifest all their vileness, and the cause of purity, truth, and righteousness to be made to suffer even apparent defeat, this was the most fearful consequence of Saul's unhappy reign. All actions in public and private individuals are to be judged by their bearing on the honour of God's name and the extension of the kingdom of Christ. Does a monarch's or a statesman's policy give greater scope for whatever is alien to the supremacy of Christ in heart, conduct, and home? If so it is very criminal. Does our private life give occasion for the enemies of the cross to blaspheme? He who so lives and dies as to strengthen the hold of ignorance, superstition, immorality, and anti-Christian principles on the world is the enemy of his country and of God. When men professedly in the Church of God, as Saul was in Israel, so become unfaithful to their privileges as to give an apparent triumph to the irreligious and profane, they, in whatever degree this is true, perpetrate an injury, the spiritual issues of which are beyond all calculation.

III. THAT THE MOST TERRIBLE TRIALS MAY GIVE RISE TO OCCASIONAL DEEDS OF HEROISM. Various were the effects of Saul's death on Israel. On all there must have come that inexpressible anguish which in some degree David sought to express in his beautiful "song of the bow" (2 Sam. i. 18—27). But there were faithful men who could not yield to inaction while God's name was being dishonoured and Israel, in the person of the king, covered with ignominy. The men of Jabesh-Gilead had not forgotten the day when, in the prime of his strength, and bidding fair to defend his country in the fear of God, Saul had come to their rescue and had aroused the patriotism of the nation (ch. xi. 4—11). To them he was more than king; he was hero and friend, and doubtless their children had used his name as a household word. And now dead, forsaken, mutilated, the tall, majestic form exposed to heathen scorn—should they suffer it? Never! "All the valiant men arose." With set purpose, at risk of life, they bring away the mangled remains, and sorrowfully lay them low in the place that witnessed his early heroism. Thus do we see how misfortune, sorrow, and death call forth the nobler qualities of men, and bring to light hidden sympathies and secret friends. There was some hope for Israel yet. The terrible disasters of life stir up the energies of the faithful few, and though they

cannot at once redeem all that others have lost, they can reassert the supremacy of love and the nobler sentiments of life, and so pave the way for a better order of things. Men in Israel revived a little from despair when they heard of this heroism and affection. Was there not a darker night and more complete apparent defeat of Israel's high purpose in the world when another and more sacred body was exposed "a spectacle to angels and to men"? Then also one was found who dared to identify his reputation and all that was dear with respect and love for that holy body. Joseph of Arimathea was morally more heroic than the men of Jabesh-Gilead. In similar ways the disasters of life have drawn forth the heroism of many who could not endure to see the "uncircumcised" triumph. Thus light shines forth in darkness, assuring us that in the long conflict with evil the morning of an endless day full of the joy of the ransomed will dawn on the sorrowful earth.

General lessons:—1. To form a just estimate of our life we should not regard our personal enjoyments as pain, but have chief respect to the ultimate effect of it on our home and country. 2. Wicked men find encouragement to believe in their false principles when men professing opposite principles are untrue to them. 3. We ought to consider how much of the power of irreligious principles and practices over men is due to our want of consistency. 4. It will be blessed for us and our survivors if friends are able to commit our body to the grave with affection and gratitude unalloyed with painful memories.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—6. (GILBOA.)—*The death of Saul.* "So Saul died" (ver. 6; 2 Sam. i. 1—16; 1 Chron. x.). While the events mentioned in the preceding chapter were taking place in the south, and even before their occurrence, "the great drama so closely connected with them was being played out" in the north. On the morrow of Saul's consultation of "the witch of Endor" the Philistines marched across the plain, with their archers, chariots, and horsemen (2 Sam. i. 6), and attacked the army of Israel. The issue appears to have been soon decided. "The men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in Gilboa," up the slopes of which they had been pursued. "And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and his sons," who fell fighting around him. Hard pressed and found by the archers, he trembled ("was sore wounded," A. V.) before them, seeing no way to escape falling into their hands; and (as the night set in), with the reckless courage of despair with which he had fought, his armour-bearer having refused to slay him, he "took the sword and fell upon it." His armour-bearer followed his example. "At that moment a wild Amalekite, lured probably to the field by the hope of spoil, came up and finished the work which the arrows of the Philistines and the sword of Saul himself had all but accomplished" (Stanley). "A remarkable dispensation. As the curse on Amalek was accomplished by Saul, so that on Saul was accomplished by Amalek" (Hengstenberg). Or, perhaps, the story of the Amalekite was false, and told to ingratiate himself with David and obtain a reward for the diadem and bracelet of which he had stripped the fallen king. In either case, self-willed to the last, scorning "these uncircumcised," and more concerned about his own honour than the honour of God, he rushed upon his own destruction.

> "O Saul!
> How ghastly didst thou look, on thine own sword
> Expiring in Gilboa, from that hour
> Ne'er visited with rain from heaven nor dew" (Dante, 'Purg.' xii.).

Observe that—

I. RETRIBUTION SURELY OVERTAKES THE IMPENITENT TRANSGRESSOR. 1. The full desert of sin might be justly inflicted immediately on its commission. But in a state of probation space is allowed for repentance and motives afforded to induce it. Yet, if sin be persisted in, guilt increases and judgment becomes more inevitable and severe. "He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy" (Prov. xxix. 1). "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. vi. 23). "The wages may be deferred or may not be consciously received,

but they are paid without stint sooner or later; the fatal consequences may not always equally appear, but they never fail in some form or other." 2. Although inflicted by the free act of man, it is not less the result of the operation of retributive justice. "Saul took the sword and fell upon it;" but he "died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord; therefore *the Lord slew him*, and turned the kingdom unto David, the son of Jesse" (1 Chron. x. 14). 3. The operation of the law of retribution, so manifest in history and to observation, shows the evil of sin in the sight of God, and is a solemn warning against its indulgence. Even repentance may come too late to avert its consequences in this life.

> "Look to thyself then, deal with sin no more,
> Lest he that saves, against thee shuts the door" (Bunyan).

II. SELF-WILL NATURALLY CULMINATES IN SELF-DESTRUCTION. All self-will, in opposition to the will of God, is a self-injury (Prov. viii. 36); and not less so because the sinner seeks what he falsely imagines to be for his good. Its tendency is ever towards destruction, and, unless checked in its course, it infallibly conducts to that end. It is a special and aggravated form of it when, in order to escape the misery and shame which are experienced or expected, he directly and voluntarily takes away his own life. *Suicide* is—1. *Contrary to the natural instinct* of self-preservation and a properly enlightened and regulated self-love. 2. An act of *unfaithfulness to the trust* that is committed to man by God in the bestowment of life, and of refusal to fulfil the duties that he has ordained in life, which cannot be rightly surrendered or left without his consent nor until the time he has appointed. "Pythagoras forbids us to abandon the station or post of life without the orders of our commander, that is, of God" (Cicero). "'Why do I tarry on earth, and not hasten hence to come to you?' 'Not so, my son,' he replied; 'unless that God, whose temple is all this which you behold, shall liberate you from the imprisonment of the body, you can have no admission to this place'" ('Scipio's Dream'). 3. An act of *cowardice* in the presence of real or imaginary evils, whatever reckless bravery it may exhibit with respect to death and that which lies beyond. "To die and thus avoid poverty, or love, or anything painful is not the part of a brave man, but rather of a coward; for it is cowardice to avoid trouble; and the suicide does not undergo death because it is honourable, but in order to avoid evil" (Aristotle, 'Ethics,' book vii. ch. 7). In Saul it was "the act of completed despair." 4. Expressly *prohibited by the Divine command:* "Thou shalt not kill." In accordance with this Paul said to the Philippian gaoler, when "he would have killed himself," "Do thyself no harm" (Acts xvi. 28). 5. Virtually *forbidden by all the exhortations* of the New Testament to endure affliction with patience and submission to the will of God. "Suicide is the result of impatience" (see Paley, 'Mor. Phil.,' book iv. ch. 3). 6. *Injurious to others* in many ways: inflicting much distress, teaching pernicious lessons, setting a bad example. It is "as unfavourable to human *talents* and resources as it is to human *virtues*. We should never have dreamt of the latent power and energy of our nature but for the struggle of great minds with great afflictions, nor known the limits of ourselves nor man's dominion over fortune. What would the world now have been if it had always been said, Because the archers smite me sore, and the battle goeth against me, I will die?" (Sydney Smith). 7. *Condemned by the example* of good men, who have borne the heaviest calamities with holy courage, and sanctioned only by evil men, like Ahithophel and Judas. How far, indeed, Saul was in full possession of his faculties and responsible for his act, or what was his final destiny, is not stated. "It is evident that more arguments may be gathered of his condemnation than of his salvation; yet because nothing is expressly set down touching his state before God, it is better to leave it" (Willet).

> "O mortal men! be wary how ye judge:
> For we, who see our Maker, know not yet
> The number of the chosen" ('Par.' xx.).

"There appears to be but one efficient means by which the mind can be armed against the temptations to suicide, because there is but one that can support it against *every*

evil of life—practical religion, belief in the providence of God, confidence in his wisdom, hope in his goodness" (Dymond, 'Essays').

> "Nor love thy life, nor hate; but what thou liv'st
> Live well, how long or short, permit to Heaven" ('Par. Lost,' bk. x.).

III. THE EVIL EXAMPLE OF MEN IN HIGH STATION IS ONLY TOO FAITHFULLY IMITATED. "And when his armour-bearer," &c. (ver. 5). He had faithfully fought by his side to the last, and feared to take away his life (of which he was appointed guardian); perhaps out of reverence for his sacred person; doubtless, also, he dreaded to fall alive into the hands of the Philistines and to be put to a shameful death by them; and now, incited by his example, "dares to do that to himself which to his king he durst not." Example is proverbially powerful. No one, especially if he occupy a position of power and influence, can do wrong without thereby inducing others to follow, who thus share his guilt and may not have equal excuse for their transgression. According to Jewish tradition the armour-bearer was Doeg the Edomite (ch. xxii. 18, 19), "a partner before of his master's crimes, and now of his punishment." "That Saul and his armour-bearer died by the same sword is, I think, sufficiently evident. 'Draw thy sword,' says he to him, 'and thrust me through;' which when he refused, 'Saul took *the* sword and fell upon it.' What sword? (Not his own, for then the text would have said so.) Why, in the plain, natural, grammatical construction, the sword before mentioned must be the sword now referred to, that is, the armour-bearer's. Saul and his executioner both fell by that very weapon with which they had before massacred the priests of God" (Delany).

IV. THE INNOCENT OFTEN SUFFER ALONG WITH THE GUILTY. "And the Philistines slew Jonathan," &c. (vers. 2—6). It is impossible not to lament the untimely fate of the friend of David and of God. The sins of the father were visited upon the son. But let it be considered that—1. God is the supreme Proprietor of every human life, and has a right to dispose of it as it pleases him. Moreover, "death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. v. 12). 2. He has united men to each other in relations more or less intimate, whereby they necessarily affect each other for good as well as for evil. 3. The sufferings of the godly, in consequence of their connection with the wicked, serve many beneficent purposes. The death of Jonathan would deepen the impression of the severity of the Divine judgment on the house of Saul for disobedience, and be a perpetual warning. It also made David's accession to the throne clearer and more indisputable. 4. The godly cannot experience the worst sufferings of the wicked—remorse, fearfulness, despair; and if some are called to an early death in the path of duty, they are only called a little earlier than others to their inheritance in "a better country, that is, a heavenly," an eternal kingdom.

> "Joy past compare; gladness unutterable;
> Imperishable life of peace and love;
> Exhaustless riches and unmeasured bliss." D.

Vers. 7—10. (GILBOA.)—*The chastisement of Israel.* The thunderstorm of which they were long ago warned (ch. xii. 18, 25) had now burst upon the people of Israel. Since the capture of the ark they had not experienced so great a calamity, and in it the fatal results of their demand for a king were made manifest. Although the demand was evil, it contained an element of good, and was complied with by God in judgment mingled with mercy. "As no people can show a visible theocracy, so no monarchy can be accused, simply as such, of usurping the Divine prerogative. But still the transaction does involve a moral lesson, which lies at the foundation of all sound policy, condemning the abandonment of principle on the plea of expediency, and pointing by the example of Israel the doom of every nation that seeks safety and power in a course known to be wrong" (P. Smith, 'Ancient History'). They had their own way, yet the purpose of God was not defeated, but accomplished less directly, and in such a manner as to convince them of the folly of their devices, and exhibit his over-ruling wisdom and power. Whilst they pursued their course under a king "according to the will of man," their Divine King was preparing "a man after his own heart to be captain over his people" (ch. xiii. 14; Acts xiii. 22).

When the end came David stood ready to occupy the throne, and, after a brief period of conflict and confusion, the whole nation, taught by experience, gladly received him as its ruler. This is the theocratic "argument" of the greater portion of the Book. In the terrible defeat of Israel we see—

I. THEIR IDOL BROKEN IN PIECES. "So Saul died," &c. "The men of Israel fled, and Saul and his sons were dead," &c. (vers. 6, 7). Men are apt to imagine that something else beyond what God has ordained is necessary to their welfare, to be impatient of his time, to attach an undue value to the expedients which in their imperfect knowledge and sinful desires they devise, to set their hearts upon earthly and visible objects, and depend upon them rather than upon "him who is invisible." This tendency finds expression in many ways, and embodies itself in many forms. And although God may permit such *idols* to continue for a time, he always overthrows them. When Israel made an idol of the ark it was given into the hands of the Philistines, and when they made an idol of "a king" (ch. viii. 5) he was slain. Their hope in him was bitterly disappointed, and inasmuch as he was (according to Divine prescience, though not by absolute necessity nor without personal guilt) a representation and reflection of their sin (worldliness, formalism, self-will), they were severely punished in him and by his instrumentality. How little did they gain, how much did they lose, by having their own way! "I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath" (Hosea xiii. 11). "Cease ye from man," &c.

II. THEIR CITIES FORSAKEN. "And when the men of Israel that were by the side of the plain" (west of the central branch of the valley of Jezreel, "opposite to the place of conflict, which the writer assumed as his standpoint"—Keil), "and by the side of the Jordan" (east of the plain, between Gilboa and the Jordan), "saw that the men of Israel" (who were engaged in the battle) "fled," &c. "they forsook the cities; and the Philistines came" (from that time onward) "and dwelt in them" (so that the whole of the northern part of the land fell into their hands). Instead of overcoming their enemies, they were overcome by them, driven from their homes, reduced to the most abject condition, and without any prospect of regaining by their own strength their lost possessions. "Your country is desolate," &c. (Isa. i. 7). The peaceful government of Samuel gave them prosperity (ch. vii. 13, 14); but the warlike rule of Saul, which they preferred, ended in their overthrow. "Sore distressed," like him (ch. xxviii. 15), whither should they turn for help? Men are deprived of all hope in themselves that they may "set their hope in God."

III. THEIR ENEMIES TRIUMPHANT. "And it came to pass on the morrow" (after the battle, which ended at nightfall) "when the Philistines came," &c. "And they cut off his *head* (as in the case of Goliath of Gath, and afterwards deposited it in the temple of Dagon, in Ashdod, 1 Chron. x. 10; ch. v. 1), and sent (messengers bearing his head and armour) into the land of the Philistines round about, to proclaim the good tidings in their idol temples (to their idols) and among the people (2 Sam. i. 20). And they put his *armour* in the house of Ashtaroth (in Askelon), and they fastened his *body* to the wall of Bethshan" (Judges i. 27). It has been remarked of the Philistines that "so implacable was their enmity to the Israelites, that one would be almost tempted to think that they had been created on purpose to be a thorn in their sides" (Russell, 'Connection,' History of the Philistines). Their victory was the victory of their gods; the defeat of Israel the dishonour of Jehovah. Rather than sanction sin in his people, God not only suffers them to be overthrown by their enemies, but even his own name to be for a while despised and "blasphemed among the heathen." But the triumph of the wicked is short (2 Sam. v. 17—25).

IV. THEIR TRUE STRENGTH UNDESTROYED. It consisted in the presence and power of their Divine and invisible King; his benevolent and unchangeable purpose concerning them (ch. xii. 22); his faithful, praying, obedient subjects in their midst, who had been long looking to David as his chosen "servant," and were now rallying round him daily until his following became "a great host like the host of God" (1 Chron. xii. 22). There was an "Israel after the flesh" (constituting the State), and there was an Israel "after the spirit" (constituting the Church); and in the latter lay "the power of an endless life." Judgment might sweep over the nation like a destroying hailstorm, and leave it like a tree bereft of all its leaves, and even "cut it down" to the ground. But its true life would be spared, would be tried and

purified by affliction, and become a source of renewed power and greater glory. "As a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the *substance* thereof" (Isa. vi. 13; i. 9; lxv. 8).

Observations:—1. That which is wrongly desired as an instrument of good becomes when obtained an instrument of evil. 2. Men may have their own way apparently in opposition to the way of God, but his purpose does not change, and he knows how to carry it into effect. 3. The people who sanction the sins of their rulers justly share their punishment. 4. When the people of God expect to prevail against their enemies by adopting their sinful policy (ch. viii. 20), they are certain to be ultimately defeated. 5. The suffering and humiliation that follow sin are the most effectual means of its correction. 6. The hope of a nation in the day of trouble lies in its praying, believing, godly men. 7. God over-rules all things, including the sins and sorrows of his people, for the establishment of his kingdom upon earth (ch. ii. 10).—D.

Vers. 11—13. (BETHSHAN, JABESH-GILEAD.)—*Gratitude.* The first victory of Saul (ch. xi.) is connected with his death by the noble exploit of the men of Jabesh. It was due partly to loyalty and patriotism; chiefly to gratitude for benefits formerly conferred upon them. It is seldom that any one closes his earthly course without some token of grateful remembrance. Of one of the worst tyrants that ever held the reins of power in Rome (Nero), it is recorded that on the morning after he was buried amidst general execration fresh flowers were found strewn by an unknown hand upon his grave. Saul had done many generous deeds, and they were not forgotten. The gratitude of the men of Jabesh was marked by many admirable features. It was—1. *Unexpected.* Who would have thought that the city which was so faithless and cowardly as to say to Nahash, "Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee," could have furnished such an instance of devotion? The noblest qualities sometimes appear in association with the meanest, and where men expect to find no good thing. Let us not despise our nature, nor think that at its worst it is wholly incapable of generous acts. 2. *Long-cherished.* It was many years previously that Jabesh had been saved by Saul; but its grateful feeling had not (as is sometimes the case) grown cold with the lapse of time. When a philosopher was asked, "what doth soonest grow cold?" he replied, "Thanks." 3. *Spontaneous.* No special appeal was made to them; but perceiving that they could do something to testify their gratitude to their benefactor by rescuing his remains from the indignity to which they were subjected, "all the valiant men arose" of their own accord, "and went all night" (a distance of ten miles, across the Jordan) and accomplished it. Gratitude loses its proper character and ceases to be gratitude when it requires to be solicited and urged. 4. *Disinterested.* Saul and his sons were dead, and no reward for their daring effort might be expected. It was performed in somewhat of the same spirit as that with which Saul himself formerly acted; what was best in his life was remembered and admired by them (as it was by David, 2 Sam. i. 23), and it served to stir them to similar excellence. Disinterested conduct begets its like.

> "Good deeds immortal are—they cannot die;
> Unscathed by envious blight or withering frost,
> They live, and bud, and bloom; and men partake
> Still of their freshness, and are strong thereby" (Aytoun).

5. *Heroic* and self-sacrificing; exhibited practically and at the risk of life, and displaying great energy and valour. "The pillars of fire of genuine human heroism are the noble lights of history, which make us feel at ease while sojourning among spectres, and horrors, and graves" (Lange). 6. *Complete.* It did not stop short of doing its best. "They took their bones, and buried them under the tamarisk at Jabesh, and fasted seven days" (ver. 13; 2 Sam. xxi. 14). They could do no more; and what they did was done tenderly, mournfully, reverently, and in fulfilment of a sacred custom and religious duty.

Exhortation:—1. Endeavour so to live that when you are gone you may be remembered with gratitude, and leave behind the recollection of good deeds which may incite others to the like. 2. Fail not to render gratitude to every one who has

conferred a benefit upon you in the best way you can; be thankful, especially to God, for all his benefits towards you. "Nothing more detestable does the earth produce than an ungrateful man" (Ausonius). 3. Seek above all things to obtain in life and death the honour that comes from God. "This Book began with Samuel's birth, and now ends with Saul's burial, the comparing of which together will teach us to prefer the honour which comes from God before any honours of which this world pretends to dispose" (M. Henry).—D.

Ch. xxxi.—*Saul of Gibeah, and Saul of Tarsus.* It is instructive to compare the characters of different men with each other. This is done by Plutarch in his Lives of celebrated Greeks and Romans; and it may be done with advantage in the case of some of the characters described in the Scriptures. There was an interval of a thousand years between Saul of Gibeah and Saul of Tarsus, "who also is called Paul" (Acts xiii. 9). But if we look at them attentively, "and examine the several parts of their lives distinctly, as we do a poem or a picture" (Plutarch), we shall find in these two illustrious Hebrews, the one under the Old Covenant, the other under the New—

I. RESEMBLANCE in their—1. *Ancestral relation,* religious privileges, and outward circumstances. Both belonged to "the tribe of Benjamin" (Acts xiii. 21; Phil. iii. 5), received the name of Saul when "circumcised the eighth day," were brought up "under the law," after early years of obscure diligence held important public positions,—the one as first king of Israel, the other as a "chosen vessel" unto the Lord, to bear his name "before the Gentiles, and kings, and the people of Israel" (Acts ix. 15),—lived a long life (over sixty years), and died a sudden and violent death. 2. *Natural qualities:* passionate, impulsive, warlike, zealous, daring even to rashness, resolute, persistent; inherited from their common ancestor, of whom it was said, "Benjamin as a wolf shall ravin," &c. (Gen. xlix. 27); and characteristic of their tribe, as appears in Ehud (Judges iii. 15). The Apostle of the Gentiles, "in the prompt audacities of his apostolic career, does not allow us to forget of what tribe he was." 3. *Sudden conversion:* the one on the way to Gibeah, on beholding "a company of the prophets" (ch. x.); the other on the way to Damascus, overcome by the glorious revelation of the Lord (Acts ix.), whose followers he was persecuting; a startling surprise to all, and the commencement of a different course of life. "Is Saul also among the prophets?" "They were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple." 4. *Energetic enterprises,* to which they were called by the Divine Spirit, on behalf of the kingdom of God against its adversaries; in the one case with the sword, in the other with the word (ch. xi.; Acts xii. 25; xiii. 1—3).

II. CONTRAST in still more numerous particulars. They were the opposite of each other; as in physical appearance and mental culture, so also in their—1. Extraordinary change, which in the one was *partial,* superficial, and temporary; in the other *complete,* deep, and enduring. 2. Real character. The one *lived unto himself,* and did not freely and fully surrender himself to the Divine will; the other *lived unto the Lord,* not being disobedient to the heavenly vision (Acts xxvi. 19; Gal. i. 16; Phil. i. 21). 3. Gradual progress: in the one case, after brilliant promise, *downward,* in "pride, caprice, jealousy, cruelty, excusive avenging of himself, and at last open contempt and defiance of God;" in the other *upward,* in heavenly-mindedness, spiritual power, and higher usefulness. 4. Fierce persecution. "The second Saul for a while followed only too faithfully in the footsteps of the first. If the one persecuted David, the other, with an energy of hate that did not fall short of his, David's greater Son. Presently, however, their lives divide, and one is the Saul of reprobation, the other of election" (Trench). The latter began where the former ended (Gal. i. 23), and became himself an object of the persecution in which he once shared. 5. Representative relation. The one represented, embodied, and promoted what was *worst* in his tribe and nation, the other what was *best.* 6. Tragical end: the one in *despair* by his own hand, the other in glorious *hope* as a martyr of Christ (2 Tim. iv. 6—8). 7. Lasting memorial: the one is a *warning,* the other is a *pattern* (1 Tim. i. 16; Phil. iii. 17). The second Saul was "the likeness in the Christian Church" not so much of what the first was as of "what he might have

been—the true David, restorer and enlarger of the true kingdom of God upon earth" (Stanley).

III. INSTRUCTION. 1. Religious advantages and eminent positions are of no real benefit unless they be rightly used. 2. The natural qualities which make one man a power for evil, make another, when sanctified, a power for good. 3. The heart must be right with God in order to a proper use of his gifts and a worthy course of life. "If the heart be not upright, whatever favourable beginnings there may be, there cannot be a uniform perseverance in goodness or any happy conclusion" (Robinson). 4. Divine grace when persistently resisted is withdrawn, leaving the soul a prey to the "evil spirit;" when humbly and faithfully received, is followed by more grace. 5. In proportion as a man lives to himself or to God he becomes weak, sinful, and miserable, or strong, holy, and happy. 6. There is no standing still in moral life; if men do not become better they infallibly become worse. 7. As a man lives so he dies. "Think of the end of Saul of Gibeah, and learn in time to be wise." Think of the end of Saul of Tarsus, and "be faithful unto death."—D.

Vers. 3—6.—*The bitter end.* The tragic element, so conspicuous in this history, is intense in the last scene of all.

I. SAUL'S DEATH. 1. *His despair.* When the battle went against him, and the Philistines, keeping beyond reach of his long arm and terrible sword, hit him from a distance with their arrows, the king's spirit suddenly failed and died within him. "He trembled sore because of the archers." Always fitful in his moods, liable to sudden elation and sudden depression, he gave up all for lost. He would not flee, but he would fight no more. Probably the horrible recollection of the words spoken to him by the spectre at Endor increased his despair, and he thought only how to die. 2. *His pride.* Saul had never shown much regard for the sacredness of human life, but he cherished a most exalted sense of the sacredness of his own person as the Lord's anointed. No descendant of a long line of so-styled Christian or Catholic sovereigns has held a loftier claim of personal inviolability. So he resolved that no heathen should cut him down in battle. Anything rather than this. If his armour-bearer would not kill him, he would kill himself. 3. *His suicide.* With all his horror of being slain by a heathen, Saul died like a heathen—dismissed himself from life after the manner of the pagan heroes; not with any sanction from the word of God or the history of his servants. (Illustrate from the stories of Brutus and Cassius and the younger Cato.) The only instance of what can be called self-destruction among the men of Israel prior to the days of Saul was that of Samson, and his was a self-devotion for the destruction of his country's enemies which ranks with the heroism of one dying in battle rather than with cases of despairing suicide. There is a case after the days of Saul, viz., that of Ahithophel, who, in a fit of deep chagrin, deliberately hanged himself. To the servants of God suicide must always appear as a form of murder, and one that implies more cowardice than courage. English law regards it as a very grave crime, and to mark this our old statutes, unable to punish the self-murderer, assigned to his body ignominious burial. It is, however, the charitable custom of our times to assume that one who kills himself must be bereft of reason, and so to hold him morally irresponsible. Apology of this kind may be pleaded for King Saul, and pity for his disordered brain takes away the sharpness from our censure. Still we must not overlook—4. *The admonition which his death conveys.* Saul had really prepared for himself this wretched death. He had disregarded the prophet, and so was without consolation. He had killed the priests, and so was without sacrifice or intercession. He had driven away David, and so was without the help of the best soldier in the nation, a leader of 600 men inured to service and familiar with danger. He had lived, in his later years at least, like a madman; and, like a madman, he threw himself on his sword and died. Here lies admonition for us. As a man sows he reaps. As a life is shaped, so is the death determined. We speak of the penalty on evil-doers, but it is no mere arbitrary infliction; it is the natural fruit and necessary result of the misconduct. One leads a sensual life, and the penalty on him is that of exhaustion, disease, and premature decay. One leads a selfish life, hardening his heart against

appeal or reproach, and his doom is to lose all power and experience of sympathy, to pass through the world winning no love, and pass out of the world drawing after him no regret.

II. JONATHAN'S DEATH. 1. *Its innocence.* Look at the pious, generous prince, as well as the proud and wilful king, slain on that woeful day. A man who loves God and whom God loves may be innocently involved in a cause which is bound to fail. It may be by ties of family, or by official position which he cannot renounce; and, unable to check the fatal course of his comrades, he is dragged down in the common catastrophe. Jonathan died in the same battle with his father, but not as his father died. Let us remember that men are so involved with one another in the world, in ways quite defensible, sometimes unavoidable, that as one may share the success of another without deserving any part of the praise, so also may one share the downfall of others without being at all to blame for the courses or transactions which brought about the disastrous issue. 2. *Its timeliness.* The death of Jonathan, occurring when it did, brought more advantage to the nation than his continued life could possibly have rendered. It opened the way for David's succession to the throne. Had Jonathan survived his father, he might have been willing to cede the succession to David, but it is not at all probable that the people would have allowed his obvious claim to be set aside, and any conflict between the partisans of two such devoted friends would have been most painful to both. So it was well ordered and well timed that Jonathan died as a brave soldier in the field. He missed an earthly throne indeed, but he gained all the sooner a heavenly home. So is it with many a death which seems to be sad and untimely. A man of God cannot lose by dying. To die is gain. But he may by dying advance the cause of God more than he could by living. His departure may clear the ground for other arrangements under Divine providence, for which the time is ripe, or open the way for some one who is chosen and called to do a work for God and man that must no longer be delayed.—**F.**

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