

WOMEN OF SCRIPTURE.

REPRINTED FROM
"SUNBEAMS FOR THE HOME."

By LENA.

G. MORRISH,
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LONDON, E.C.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE title of this little book may bring to mind a series of short articles written some years ago for the monthly magazine called "Sunbeams for the Home."

Several friends have expressed the wish that they could be published together in book form, and now the way is clear for this to be done.

They have been collected and prayerfully revised with the thought of emphasising the main lessons to be learned from each life. Surely, if God honours these women to place incidents from their lives on record in the scriptures, we may gain by considering them.

Ruth and Esther appear first, for the reason that their lives occupy a book each in the scriptures; the rest follow in Biblical order.

Our great desire is that the Lord may use the little volume in some way for His glory, and for the help and encouragement of those who are young in His ways.

LENA.

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.	
RUTH THE MOABITTESS	I
CHAPTER II.	
RUTH THE STRANGER	6
CHAPTER III.	
RUTH'S DEVOTION	11
CHAPTER IV.	
BOAZ	15
CHAPTER V.	
RUTH THE GLEANER	20
CHAPTER VI.	
RUTH BLESSED	24
CHAPTER VII.	
RUTH BLESSED (<i>continued</i>)	28
CHAPTER VIII.	
RUTH CAPTIVATED	32
CHAPTER IX.	
RUTH AT REST	36
CHAPTER X.	
RUTH REDEEMED	40

CHAPTER XI.

RUTH SATISFIED	45
--------------------------	----

CHAPTER XII.

ESTHER THE ADOPTED DAUGHTER	50
---------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER XIII.

ESTHER THE QUEEN	55
----------------------------	----

CHAPTER XIV.

ESTHER THE QUEEN (<i>continued</i>)	60
---	----

CHAPTER XV.

ESTHER THE QUEEN (<i>continued</i>)	65
---	----

CHAPTER XVI.

ESTHER THE QUEEN (<i>continued</i>)	69
---	----

CHAPTER XVII.

EVE	74
---------------	----

CHAPTER XVIII.

SARAH	80
-----------------	----

CHAPTER XIX.

HAGAR	86
-----------------	----

CHAPTER XX.

THE CALL OF REBEKAH	92
-------------------------------	----

CHAPTER XXI.

MIRIAM	97
------------------	----

CHAPTER XXII.

RAHAB	102
-----------------	-----

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DAUGHTERS OF ZELOPHEHAD	108
---------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXIV.

ACHSAH	112
------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXV.

DEBORAH	116
-------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXVI.

HANNAH	121
------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXVII.

ABIGAIL	125
-------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH	129
--------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA	134
------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXX.

THE PROPHET'S SON'S WIDOW . . .	139
---------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE RICH SHUNAMMITE—TWICE GIVEN .	144
-----------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SHUNAMMITE—RESTITUTION . .	149
--------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXIII.

GOD'S VIRTUOUS WOMAN	154
--------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ELISABETH	160
---------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXV.

MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS . . .	165
--------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS (<i>continued</i>) .	170
---	-----

	PAGE
CHAPTER XXXVII.	
MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS (<i>continued</i>) .	175
CHAPTER XXXVIII.	
MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS (<i>continued</i>) .	179
CHAPTER XXXIX.	
ANNA	184
CHAPTER XL.	
THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA	188
CHAPTER XLI.	
THE SYROPHENICIAN WOMAN . . .	193
CHAPTER XLII.	
THE SISTERS OF BETHANY	198
CHAPTER XLIII.	
THE SISTERS OF BETHANY (<i>continued</i>) .	202
CHAPTER XLIV.	
MARY MAGDALENE	208
CHAPTER XLV.	
RHODA	213
CHAPTER XLVI.	
LYDIA	218
CHAPTER XLVII.	
PRISCILLA	223

WOMEN OF SCRIPTURE.

CHAPTER I.

RUTH THE MOABITESS.

IT is very wonderful that God should condescend to record in His scriptures of truth the history of a heathen girl and the way she was brought into marvellous blessing. It indeed magnifies His wondrous grace and sovereign mercy, and the story is so full of beautiful teaching that a little time spent in considering it cannot but be profitable to us.

We are first introduced to an Israelitish family of four persons—Elimelech, Naomi and their sons Mahlon and Chilion. They lived at Bethlehem-judah at the time when the judges ruled, when, as is significantly stated, “there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes,” and our consciences tell us where that must lead every one—farther

and farther from God and the ways of uprightness.

However, we might be led to expect better things from the head of our family, for his name means *God is King*, and points to the fact that, in spite of the sad departure of God's people, Elimelech's parents, at least, still recognised God's authority, and well would it have been for Elimelech if he had held tenaciously to the truth of his name. What sorrow and suffering it would have saved him and those he loved ! It brings strength and comfort to remember that, however dark the outlook around us, and however black and threatening the clouds may be that gather overhead, "the Lord sitteth upon the flood ; yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever." (Psa. xxix. 10.) But it needs faith to believe that God is King when all around seems to deny the fact ; and Elimelech does not appear to have had this faith. Anyhow, he is greatly affected by the lawless state of his country, and so, when finally a famine threatens him and his countrymen with privation, he plans to emigrate to the land of Moab with his family.

In this he acted without God, not seeking His will about it. How often are we tempted to act on our own initiative without asking

counsel of the Lord ! And all we gain is sorrow and disappointment. If we belong to Him, He must sit chief and rule supreme in our hearts and lives, or disaster will follow. And which of us who knows in any degree His rule of love, would have it otherwise ?

Elimelech, although belonging to God's earthly people and having possessions in the land of promise, had so far departed in heart from the God of his fathers, that, in spite of the constant reminder of God's power and faithfulness in the meaning of his name, he bore no testimony for God, and when the test came he only proved his faithlessness and lack of confidence in Jehovah. And how bad example spreads and affects others ! In his backsliding he does not act alone, but both wife and sons decide with him to turn their backs on the place of God's choice and sojourn in a heathen land where God is not owned. The land of Israel was steeped in moral confusion and darkness in these days of general departure from God—still, it *was* the land of Israel, the land God had promised over and over again to bless—the place He had chosen for His people, and where His promises of love would be made good. If only Elimelech had waited for God, He

would have brought him through the testing time triumphantly! Have we ever proved how good it is to wait for God to act for us when a crisis arrives in our lives, and to go on when and where He leads, resting on His wisdom and love, supported by His power, and cheered with His companionship? Poor Elimelech and his family missed all this through their lack of faith and their possible self-will. Still, God is faithful and did not leave His erring children, though He had to follow them with a correcting hand.

Elimelech dies. He is taken from the scene where he had failed to be a testimony for God, and the widow and orphans are left to mourn his loss in a foreign land. Do they recognise God's hand and learn the lesson this sorrow was to teach them? Far from it. Instead of doing so they seek earthly comfort and consolation in a heathen country and decide to make Moab *their home*.

Mahlon and Chilion marry Moabitish girls, Orpah and Ruth, and *dwell* there. In verse 1 we are told they went to sojourn in the land of Moab, and in verse 4 "they dwelled there." When once a backward step is taken the enemy of our souls makes it his business to see that we have every facility for going on in

that direction. Oh, let us beware of the first step—soul departure from God—and if we are conscious of a distance between our souls and Him, a little cloud arising, perhaps no bigger than a man's hand, let us remember that the hindrance is on our side, and let us immediately (delay will only make it more difficult) go and confess to Him who has promised, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely." (Hos. xiv. 4.)

We are told in Proverbs xiv. 14 what marks a "backslider in heart," so we need have no doubt as to his identity, "he shall be filled with his own ways," and if this is the case, God's ways have no place with him. God in His longsuffering allows Naomi and her sons ten years in which to see the folly and wickedness of their course, and repent and return, but at the end of that time they are still with their backs to the One who loves them best.

God must *repeat* the lesson. Mahlon and Chilion are both called away by death, and Naomi is the only survivor. The name Mahlon means *sickness* and Chilion *pinning*, which suggests to us the soul sickness and pinning discontent which characterise those who are really God's children, but have left their first love.

CHAPTER II.

RUTH THE STRANGER.

POOOR Naomi is now the sole survivor of the family of four who had emigrated to the land of Moab ten years previously. Indeed "the hand of the Lord was heavy upon her," as she afterwards owned, but even when chastisement was necessary, the Lord, in His tender compassion, remembered mercy, and as a sun-glint through her dark clouds of sorrow she hears a rumour that the Lord had "visited his people in giving them bread." The land was yielding plenteous crops again, and, in her affliction and loneliness, her stricken heart turns back to her native country, and she decides to return.

Orpah and Ruth, her two daughters-in-law, desire to accompany her, and the three begin their journey together. What it was that attracted these two heathen girls to poor Naomi in her desolation is difficult to say. That she was the one remaining link with those they had loved and lost may have drawn their hearts to her in the bond of a common sorrow, but with Ruth there appears to have been a

much deeper reason for her desire to go with Naomi on her homeward journey. Jehovah, the God of Israel, had spoken to her heart and had called forth a response. What instrument He used we know not, but from what follows in verses 8-15 we cannot think that Naomi herself had borne much testimony to the God she had distrusted even to supply them with the common necessities of life.

May it not have been that Mahlon, in his pining sickness, had recognised God's hand and had sought to teach his loved wife of the only true God? But of this we are told nothing, we only know that God, in His sovereign mercy, had touched Ruth's dark heart and kindled a desire to know more about Himself. Naomi offers her no help—she is so far from communion with God herself that she is a positive hindrance to those who were seeking after Him, and entreats them to leave her and return to their own land and their own gods. She shews much outward affection and desires their earthly rest and happiness, but does not seem to consider their souls' prosperity. How unutterably sad that one of God's children should be such a hindrance to those desiring light and spiritual help!

Is there any danger of our being like Naomi in this respect? Our influence for the Lord is only felt as we are near Him ourselves. Our love for souls and desire to lead them into blessing will only be active in the measure that our hearts have drunk into divine love and realised the blessing that belongs to those who are Christ's. And if we are not "helpers to the truth" (3 John 8) there is a great danger lest we should "hinder the gospel of Christ." (1 Cor. ix. 12.)

There is no middle path—if we are not helpers we must be hinderers, and if we give ourselves ten minutes to think this over in the Lord's presence we shall come to the conclusion that, in many and varied ways, unless we are very watchful and prayerful, we can easily become hinderers to others. Let us take warning from Naomi and seek with the Lord's help to take example from Moses, who could say to his brother Hobab with the confident boldness that faith in God gives, "We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good." (Num. x. 29.) What a contrast are these strong words to Naomi's faltering entreaties to her daughters-in-law to return!

Return to what? To a land where God's blessing did not rest (Isa. xxv. 10); to an idolatrous nation that manifested contempt for God and His people (Jer. xlviii. 26-30); upon which God's curse remained (Num. xxi. 29), and upon which God's judgment would assuredly fall. (Jer. xlviii.)

Orpah acts upon Naomi's sad advice, and bidding her an affectionate farewell, she turns her back on the only road to blessing. But Ruth is not to be so easily influenced, although Orpah's decision is urged upon her by Naomi.

"Intreat me not to leave thee," says she, "or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." What beautiful words of purpose! Ruth was a woman with purpose of heart. No wonder after such a declaration of steadfastness that Naomi should be silent. Ruth was bent on the blessing of Jehovah, and she recognised that, unwilling though she appeared, Naomi was the one who could lead her to God's people—and to God. "Thy God shall be my God." He was the Object of her aspirations.

Is He yours, dear reader? Can *you*

truthfully use such language as this : "With my soul have I desired thee . . . yea, with my spirit . . . will I seek thee early." (Isa. xxvi. 9.) If so, be assured that the unfailing promise is yours : "He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him." (Psa. cxlv. 19.)

CHAPTER III.

RUTH'S DEVOTION.

GREAT purpose of heart, and a definite longing after God, marked Ruth; but there was another prominent feature of her beautiful character that we must not overlook, and that was her devotion. With what persistency does she cling to Naomi! "Whither thou goest, I will go . . . where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me." After such a declaration we are not surprised that a following verse tells us of the completion of their journey together. "So they two . . . came to Bethlehem."

We are not told any details of the long, weary journey of these two defenceless women—the many, many miles trodden by the heavy, joyless footsteps of the elder, true index of a heart burdened with remorse and affliction, and the light, hopeful footsteps of the younger, encouraged by a new vista of blessing opening out before the vision of her faith. Naomi

was retracing her steps after chastisement in brokenness of spirit. Ruth was treading the path for the first time with "the blessing of the Lord that maketh rich" illuminating it. But though the journey itself is not dwelt upon in the divine record, we are definitely told of the finish—that they came to Bethlehem.

God, in His protecting love, saw that *that* was accomplished. It is a wonderful illustration of the truth that has often been insisted upon by the Lord's servants, that the point of departure from God must be the point of restoration. When a definitely wilful act, or a course of heedlessness of God's truth, leads you away from Him and you lose the joy of communion, the only way in which it can be regained is to make a clean breast of the whole truth to God and, hiding nothing and excusing nothing, lay your heart open to His scrutiny. You can then apply Isaiah lvii. 18 as the Lord's answer to yourself: "I have seen thy ways, and will heal thee: I will lead thee also, and restore comforts unto thee," and the joyful response of your heart will be: "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love." (Cant. ii. 4.)

Naomi started from Bethlehem, and it

is to Bethlehem she returned. And now that she is in her right place she can make an open confession to the inquiring townsfolk: "I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty."

"*I went out full*"—she does not say, "My husband and sons were anxious to go, so I accompanied them." No! she makes no excuses. She has learned the lesson of humiliation, and, in humbleness of spirit before the Lord's chastening hand, she owns freely that it was *her act, her sin*.

Until the Lord shewed her her emptiness, how full she had thought herself! Wrapped up in herself and those she loved, God and His claims were forgotten. But now she recognises the Lord's dealings, and adds in bitterness of spirit, "The Lord hath brought me home again empty." Mourn no more, Naomi! Think not of the emptiness of your aching heart, of the thorny path by which you have been led, of the graves left behind in a foreign land, but rejoice that He has led you home again! home to the land of plenty! home to the house of bread! home to God! "He satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness." (Psa. cvii. 9.)

Hearts cannot remain empty in the

presence of God's full provision, and there is nothing but blessing, satisfaction and rest of heart for the returning one, be he saint or sinner.

One more beautiful little touch attracts our attention before the close of this chapter, namely, they returned to Bethlehem "in the *beginning* of barley harvest." The harvesting of the barley was only just commencing and there was that of the wheat to follow. How perfect in every detail are the Lord's ways! How wonderfully He times things! The backslider and the stranger were not to miss any of His bounty, but come into the complete benefit of all His mercies, and enjoy to the full the blessings that were being showered upon the land from the heavenly treasure-house. Oh, what a God of love! and "This God is *our* God for ever and ever." (Psa. xlviii. 14.)

CHAPTER IV.

BOAZ.

THE second chapter introduces us to the central figure of this little book, and as he is such a beautiful type of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall gain spiritually by pausing to consider what we read of him.

Boaz was God's great administrator of blessing to the needy stranger and to the backslider.

Every need was met by him, and every blessing came from him; but before we trace what he did for Ruth, and the way he brought her to the closest place of nearness and relationship, we will see how fitted he was for his office of administrator.

His name Boaz means "strength," or "the strong one." There was power with him to bless and to redeem.

He was "a mighty man of wealth." He had unlimited resources.

He dwelt at Bethlehem, the house of bread, the place of life.

Cannot we see in these three facts told us of Boaz what is true in a far deeper and more wonderful way of Christ?

Jeremiah, in prophesying of the redemption of Israel speaks thus of Christ—"Their Redeemer is strong; the Lord of hosts is his name." (Jer. l. 34.) In Hebrews vii. 25 we read, "He is able . . . to save . . . to the uttermost," and in Ephesians iii. 20, "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."

The "mighty man of wealth" reminds us of three beautiful little verses—

(i.) "It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell." (Col. i. 19.)

(ii.) "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." (Col. ii. 9); and then

(iii.) "Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." (John i. 16.)

The first passage tells us how it was God's purpose and pleasure that all the Godhead "fulness" should reside in the perfect Man—Christ Jesus. The second speaks of it as an accomplished fact, and the third shews that He is God's grand Administrator of blessing according to this wonderful "fulness" to those whose desires are toward Himself. Do we realise, dear reader, anything of this marvellous fulness of divine wealth? If we love the Lord, let us just bring Him our hearts, emptied of self in every form, and He will fill them to overflowing with the fulness of His love and

grace so that we can truly exclaim with the Apostle John, "And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace."

John, again, tells us of Christ's dwelling-place—"The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." (John i. 18.)

A few lines of a well-known beautiful hymn have often voiced our appreciation of the above truth.

" . . . The Son who knows,
He only—all His [the Father's] love.

Dwells in His bosom—knoweth all
That in that bosom lies,
And came to earth to make it known,
That we might share His joys,"

Boaz, however, is not only a type of Christ in his own person, but, in his dealings with Ruth, we have a little picture of what the Lord has done for many who were once strangers to His grace and love, and also what He is now willing and able to do for many more who are still far from Him.

Boaz owns relationship with Naomi and Ruth, and his kinship was necessary that he might be a redeemer according to the law.

Christ in His wondrous condescension "was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he . . .

became obedient unto death." (Phil. ii. 7, 8.) We all know why God's beloved Son humbled Himself. Peter realised it when he wrote "Ye were . . . redeemed . . . with the precious blood of Christ." (1 Peter i. 18, 19.)

Speaking of these redeemed ones owned by God as "sons" in resurrection and on their way to glory, Paul says, "He [Christ] is not ashamed to call them brethren." (Heb. ii. 11.) Wondrous words follow as the sayings of Christ Himself—"I will declare thy name unto my brethren" (ver. 12), and then still having before Him all the pain, sorrow and travail that this marvellous redemption cost, He adds, "Behold I and the children which God hath given me." (Ver. 13.) What wonderful relationships breathed in these blessed utterances! What weight is given to them being spoken by Him "who is the Truth."

Boaz shews personal and individual interest in Ruth, supplying her immediate needs, quenching her thirst, and satisfying her hunger. Is not this just the way the Lord often begins working with individual souls? When on earth He could say, "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." (John vi. 35.)

Boaz arranges for her "daily provision"

in the future. "Handfuls of purpose" were dropped for her to glean. Thus she gets to know daily more of the solicitous love of the one who finally makes himself indispensable to her. Have we so learned Christ?

His persistent lovingkindness captivates her heart and she can only find rest at his feet (chap. iii. 14), seeking redemption and new relationship, the need of which he has all along been schooling her untutored heart into realising.

Jeremiah could say, "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." (Jer. xxxi. 3.)

He redeemed Ruth to himself, makes her his bride, the object of his dearest affection, and in the birth of Obed we learn that she reaches the spirit of a worshipper.

Just so, the Lord in winning the affection of individual hearts redeems to Himself His bride, His church (see Eph. v. 25, 27, 31 and 32), a company of "true worshippers." (John iv. 23 and 24.) Do you belong to this company so loved by Christ, dear reader?

Has your heart been won by the true, tender love of the heavenly Boaz?

CHAPTER V.

RUTH THE GLEANER.

WE will now turn back to Ruth and trace how she came into touch with the wonderful person we have been considering, who was to change her life so completely.

Ruth and Naomi had evidently settled down at Bethlehem, but Ruth cannot be idle. Chapter ii. 2 shews her energy is as lively as ever, and yet, though eager to be up and doing, she first consults Naomi. Remember Ruth is not a child, but a woman, and yet she hesitates to act on her own initiative before consulting one older than herself. I often think if some of us were less headstrong and took those older in years and experience more into our confidence, we should save ourselves from taking many a wrong step, and from getting into slippery places and false positions where our own *ignorance* (though probably we should not call it this) might lead us.

Ruth wants to be a gleaner—to glean

“ears of corn.” At this time of blessing and plenteous ingathering she is determined not to lose her share. She does not ask for whole sheaves, but she *does* claim ears of corn of her own gleaning.

And she had a *right* to claim them. In the law given by God to His earthly people there are beautiful little details mentioning God’s will concerning the Israelites’ behaviour toward the stranger dwelling among them, and if you will turn to Leviticus xxiii. 22, you will find the words of thoughtful love that Ruth acted upon: “When ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou gather any gleaning of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger: I am the Lord your God.”

It seems a natural thing that Ruth, in her desires after God, should make herself acquainted with His mind as then revealed in the law, and what she learns she acts upon. This is the way to learn more, so we are not surprised that she is led on and blessed in such a marvellous manner.

If God has implanted in our hearts a desire after Himself the only way to grow

in divine things is Ruth's way. Act in simple faith upon the truth you have learned, and the Holy Spirit, who is ever ready to take of Christ's things and shew them unto us, will find in you an apt scholar. Would you not like to be one ?

Naomi agrees to Ruth's suggestion, and she starts out. Then we are told that "her *hap* was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz." How simple the statement, but what depths lie behind ! It reminds me of a favourite couplet :

"Our God delights to bring
Great issues from a little thing."

To a casual observer it would appear a mere chance that Ruth should begin to glean in Boaz's field, but it was nothing more or less than one of God's appointments for her—a little bit of bright colouring, weaved by His loving hand into the pattern of her life. It is a wonderful thing to be able to say with the Psalmist, "God that performeth all things for me" (Psa. lvii. 2)—to feel that He is ordering our lives, and, if we are His children, nothing can ever happen to us by chance. What a rest this affords, and what freedom from care ! Who would wish to have it otherwise ?

Boaz's interest is immediately awakened

in the "Moabitish damsel" when he learns who she is, for Ruth's constancy and faithfulness is no secret in Bethlehem, and it has reached Boaz's ears, who now has an opportunity of putting it to the test as regards himself. She has *come* to the one who can bless her, but she must abide. "Hearest thou not, my daughter?" says he; "go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here." She knows nothing of his love yet, as she is to learn it, but what she does realise bows her heart in gratitude as she marvels at the grace shewn to her, a stranger.

Have we ever felt in any way overpowered by the wonderful grace shewn to us by the Lord, making us realise a little of our own nothingness—nay, more, our worthlessness, but for the wonderful price His love valued us at? "Ye are bought with a price." (1 Cor. vi. 20.) "Redeemed . . . with the precious blood of Christ." (1 Peter i. 19.) If so, we shall, like Ruth, raise no objection to His will for us, and shall find our delight in abiding in the sphere of His love and rule.

CHAPTER VI.

RUTH BLESSED.

AFTER reading verses 10 and 13 of chapter ii., it is quite evident that it is because Ruth is unimportant and small in her own eyes that she makes such a fit subject for blessing. She reminds one of the Syro-phenician woman who came to the Lord requesting the healing of her daughter. (Matt. xv. 21-29.)

You will remember how the Lord probed her, and how she was content to take the place of a Gentile "dog," if only it would bring her the crumb of blessing she craved.

But the Lord was not satisfied with merely granting her request and healing her daughter. Now that she has taken her true place before Him, He first commended her as a woman of great faith, and then, instead of a "crumb," gave her freedom of access to heaven's unlimited stores. He made no limitations to the blessing bestowed. "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." (Matt. xv. 28.)

In the same kind of way Boaz acts with regard to Ruth. She takes her place as a stranger, only claiming her "crumb"—gleaned ears—and Boaz lavishes blessing after blessing upon her, cheering and comforting her heart by appreciative words of her conduct, thus making her at home in his presence, and shewing her that there was one, at least, who read under the surface and understood, not only the motives that actuated her past behaviour, but the depth of her present longings.

He first gives her liberty to satisfy her thirst with the water provided for her, and then *he speaks to her heart*.

He understands why she has undertaken that long journey—she has come to learn of Jehovah and to put her trust under His wings, and he breathes a prayer in her hearing, that the Lord would recompense and reward her. No wonder that she exclaims, "Thou hast comforted me, for that *thou hast spoken to the heart* of thine handmaid." (See margin, ver 13.)

Is not this often the way the Lord takes with us when we first come to Him ?

The message comes to us, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." He first satisfies our soul-thirst, sets us at ease in His presence, and then speaks to

our hearts. Dear reader, has He ever spoken thus to yours, bringing that rich comfort, that, once tasted, one always wants to enjoy?

He does not speak in the same terms to every heart, because He fully knows the peculiar desires, longings and difficulties of each one, and deals with each accordingly, so that it becomes an intensely individual matter—this heart to heart interview with the Lord. But though the Lord's dealings may be varied, the final result of each interview will be, "Thou hast comforted me"; or, in the beautiful words of the Psalmist that shews that Ruth was not alone in her experience, "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul." (Psa. xciv. 19.) We shall then find the resting-place of our hearts where Ruth found hers—under the Lord's protecting wings.

There are several places in the Psalms where these wonderful "wings" are spoken of:

They are a hiding-place in Psalm xvii. 8.

They are a trusting-place in Psalm xxxvi. 7.

They are a refuge in Psalm lvii. 1.

And a place of rejoicing in Psalm lxiii. 7.

"How precious [margin] is thy loving-

kindness, O God ! *therefore* the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings " (Psa. xxxvi. 7) gives us the reason for Ruth's trust.

She evidently had learned enough of God's "precious" lovingkindness to attract her to this divine resting-place. How near, how safe, how restful ! Oh that we might know more of this retreat from all earth's attractions and distractions, and it will indeed become a place of rejoicing, and we shall find the joy of this nearness a "*full reward*" for any hindrance, deliberately set aside, that might mar our place by Him.

CHAPTER VII.

RUTH BLESSED.

(*Continued.*)

“**A**T mealtime come thou hither.”
What an invitation for Boaz to make to Ruth!

He is removing any difficulty to her “abiding” by inviting her to come to him for the necessary sustenance for the day.

When she came, in obedience to his call, he gave her “parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed.”

What important lessons we can learn from this! Have we a definite daily “*meal-time*” for our souls?

No doubt we have three or four stated times when we seek nourishment and refreshment for our bodies, and thus keep them fit, vigorous and healthy, but what about our souls? Are we seeing that they get nourished, or are they neglected, starved and stunted in growth?

We cannot plead that we have no invitation. In Isaiah lv. 2, 3, Jehovah is lovingly pleading with His people—“Where-

fore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me."

The Lord Jesus Christ, in John vi. 27 and 35, speaks in the same strain—"Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you." "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger."

Boaz gives Ruth "parched corn"—that which had been subjected to heat—a little picture of Christ having borne the judgment of God due to us—and she was not only thoroughly satisfied herself, but had sufficient to take home to Naomi.

In the same wonderful chapter in John that we quoted from just now, the Lord says (ver. 51), "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." If we know what it is to feed on Christ thus, our souls will be so satisfied and refreshed that there will be something of Him that

we can minister, out of a full heart, to others.

Re-invigorated, Ruth rises to glean, and then how the following details prove that "her hap" was really God's providing for her. Boaz not only allows her to glean among the sheaves without rebuke, but instructs the reapers to drop "handfuls of purpose" for her. There was kindly purpose in all his dealings with regard to her, and every handful, intentionally scattered, breathed solicitous love to that lonely heart. And it was not lost on Ruth. When evening came, and with it the end of the day's labour, she carefully beat out the grain from the gathered ears and found she had about an ephah of barley, equivalent to four or five gallons according to English measure. Not a bad beginning, was it? I should imagine any gleaner would consider it a record gathering for one day.

When we have had handfuls of spiritual grain ministered to us, and we can have it if we wish, I wonder if we adopt Ruth's plan and first thresh it out, and then weigh it well over. By so doing we make it our own and get untold sweetness from it, as the Lord intends we should. There will be no stunted spiritual growth if we are thus nourished. But we must be set

for it; forceful feeding is not a divine method. This is one way in which, though perhaps unconsciously, we become a testimony to others, for those around will notice. "*Naomi saw* what she [Ruth] had gleaned," and evidently in surprise asks, "Where hast thou gleaned to day?"

Can our friends tell where we have been gleaned by our satisfied, overflowing hearts, which will be reflected in our expression and ways? What a contrast is produced when we seek from this poor world "that which is not bread," and spend our labour for that which satisfieth not. The empty husks of disappointment and dissatisfaction are our only reward for *this* gleaned. Oh! to remember the Lord's loving exhortation already quoted—"Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat . . . which the Son of man shall give unto you." "He that cometh to me shall never hunger."

CHAPTER VIII.

RUTH CAPTIVATED.

IF I were asked to summarise the third chapter of Ruth, I should write the three words "*at His feet.*" Chapter ii. is marked by *activity*, chapter iii. by *rest*.

Ruth's activity is perfectly right and in its place in chapter ii. We must be definitely *set* for divine blessing or the nourishment and sweetness of spiritual food will be lost on us, and we shall learn nothing of the love of the heart of the great Administrator of it all, which brings the *rest*.

The harvesting is over—both barley and wheat have been gathered in, and Ruth's occupation as gleaner is at an end. She has obeyed Boaz's instruction to "abide" and work in his fields only, and the result is that Ruth has gained infinitely more than her daily gleanings, as the chapter now under our notice shews.

She has learned Boaz's heart and disposition towards her sufficiently to justify her mode of action here. What does she do? According to the custom of her adopted country she claims:—

(1) His redemption.

(2) His protection.

(3) The nearest ties of relationship, and unreservedly yields herself to be directed by him in everything. She owns his absolute rights over her and responds to his love by choosing a resting-place near him.

His presence spells REST to her now, and he has so completely drawn out her heart's affection in response to his love that he, and he alone, fills her vision, and life is nothing without him.

Let us stop a minute to question our own hearts. Do we know Christ after this fashion? Do we find the resting-place of our souls in His presence? Have we claimed His glorious redemption for ourselves, and do we know what His constant protecting love is?

It is a wonderful thing to be quietly going on, with spirits unruffled, because enjoying the sense of His protection, knowing that we are the objects of His special watchful care and solicitude. But then, like Ruth, we must be ready to yield ourselves entirely to Him, to own His rights of love over us, and be willing in everything to be directed by Him, when verse 4 will be individually realised—"He will tell thee what thou shalt do." Then all that remains

for us is to do His bidding, and what so often appear as complications in life's pathway will resolve into simplicity, for we shall be content to follow instead of pushing ahead for ourselves. But this will only be true when we have learnt to know our Redeemer and Guide as Ruth now knows Boaz.

Ruth's hands have been busy, now her heart is active and sends her to claim him as her redeemer and to rest at his feet.

Have we ever sat at Jesus' feet? It may be a lowly place, but it is a very blessed and restful spot. We find it mentioned at least four times in Luke's gospel. I will point them out, and then perhaps you would like to think them over at your leisure. They are full of beautiful instruction for us :—

(1) In Luke vii. 37, 38, "A woman . . . which was a sinner . . . stood at his feet . . . weeping." The result we find in verse 47, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven."

(2) In chapter viii. 35 we see the man who had been freed from the terrible power of Satan "sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind"—the saved sinner.

(3) In chapter x. 39, "Mary . . . sat at

Jesus' feet, and heard his word." She is the learner.

Note in the first case the unsaved sinner stands at His feet behind, etc., but the saved sinner and the one who has experienced the Lord's love (see John xi. 5) are at home in His presence and take the restful attitude.

(4) In chapter xvii. 16 the leprous Samaritan stranger, overcome with gratitude by the wondrous grace of Christ that had cleansed him, "fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks." He is a worshipper.

At His feet, therefore, we get forgiveness, clothing (suitability for God's presence), rightmindedness ("the mind of Christ"), and divine instruction. Surely when we have been recipients of all these blessings we shall bow at His feet in thanksgiving, adoration and worship, for we cannot be there drinking in divine consolation and instruction without His presence soon eclipsing everything else, even the blessings we have received from Him. It was so with Ruth. She thinks not of her barley gleanings, nor of her wheat gleanings, nor even of the many tokens of Boaz's love and care. She is just wrapt up with himself, and I think Boaz fully recognised it in his answer to her attitude.

CHAPTER IX.

RUTH AT REST.

“**A**SK, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find.”

Although these words were written long years after Ruth's time, how true she proves, in principle, this divine statement to be. She asks that Boaz's love, power and influence might be exerted for her redemption ; she seeks his loving care and protection, and she does not ask or seek in vain. There is an immediate answer from the one who has loved her before she cared one whit for him, when she was a stranger in a strange land, and who had been gently wooing her heart, until now he has entirely gained her confidence.

He has nothing but blessing and promises of love for her in answer to her attitude of dependence. “Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter,” says he, and he speaks of her “kindness” and calls her “a virtuous woman.”

Boaz sees nothing but goodness and virtue in the object of his affection, al-

though it is his love that has called them forth.

How beautifully this illustrates Christ's attitude to the church, which He has redeemed to Himself, and which is to be displayed as His bride in a future wonderful day, when He will "present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." (Eph. v. 27.) How blessed, too, to think that we can each belong to this company so loved by Christ, redeemed by His precious blood, and clothed in divine righteousness, if, like Ruth, we individually, sincerely and in humbleness of spirit go to Him for the wondrous results of His grand, far-reaching redemption.

Boaz continues, "And now, my daughter, **FEAR NOT**; I will do to thee all that thou requirest." Those two precious little words, so often found in scripture, what comfort they bring, and what confidence they give when spoken by the all-powerful, all-loving One! Have you ever had fears, anxieties and doubts scattered to the four winds by one of God's "fear nots"?

Then, too, they are very often, if not always, followed by some beautiful promise, that one could not enjoy but for the banish-

ment first of the fearing, doubting spirit; hence the need for, and the power of "Fear not."

The flutters of Ruth's heart are stilled as she drinks in Boaz's unqualified promise: "I will do to thee all that thou requirest." (Chap. iii. 11.)

Let us see to it that when we go to Christ we tell Him all our needs, and they are many, for He too will do for us all that we require.

Boaz is a beautiful type, but only a type, so what is told of him will be of no use to us unless by it we learn more of the beauties of the great Antitype, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Verse 13 gives us Boaz's second promise, "I will do the part of a kinsman to thee." Obstacles may appear to obstruct, but Boaz is perfectly competent to carry through his purposes of blessing and he will not fail Ruth now. This I think he shews her by his gift. When she leaves to return to Naomi he measures out to her six measures of barley, much more than she ever gathered herself when active in the harvest field; still he deliberately measures out *six* not *seven*.

We have often been told that seven in scripture expresses perfection and com-

pletion, and six incompleteness. Why then does he give Ruth what is incomplete ?

Because he does not mean her to be fully satisfied, even with his gifts, apart from himself. He must be her seventh measure, the completion of her cup of joy.

Cannot we draw a spiritual lesson for ourselves from this beautiful little touch ?

Naomi seems to grasp Boaz's meaning and expresses great confidence in him in her words to Ruth in the last verse of our chapter, "Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall : for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day."

There is no rest for Boaz until Ruth is undisputably his—his entirely—his alone—until her redemption and union with himself is an accomplished fact, and until then he must act, while Ruth—the heathen, Moabitish damsel of chapter i. ; the humble but busy gleaner of chapter ii. ; the earnest seeker of chapter iii.—is to "sit still," and with wondering eyes and adoring heart, see all that is being done for her, until the time she is claimed and owned as his, and his joy as well as hers is complete.

CHAPTER X.

RUTH REDEEMED.

THE confidence of Ruth and Naomi in Boaz is not misplaced. A work is confided to him by two trusting hearts, and he will not rest until it is finished.

What a beautiful lesson for our hearts ! But perhaps there is one, like Naomi, who has drifted, turned aside, or dropped back from "the truth as it is in Jesus." A cold, earth-bred cloud has come between the soul and heavenly light, enveloping it in a chilly fog, eclipsing the warmth and sunshine previously enjoyed, and the joys of communion are lost.

What follows ? Unrest, irritability, discontent, distaste for the Lord's things ; prayer and Bible-reading become a mere form, or are neglected altogether, while the heart is miserable in the extreme. What is the remedy for this wretched state ? Have you ever watched a little child who is truly sorry for some misconduct ?

He runs in all haste—his little legs will hardly carry him fast enough, so eager is he—to the parent he has grieved by his sin, and clinging close to that loving heart he pours out his repentance in incoherent phrases, amid many tears.

He fears no punishment, but the more he feels his sin, the closer he clings to the one he has sinned against, and unburdens his little heart of its load, encircled by the loving arms of the parent in whom he confides. With the kiss of forgiveness, so willingly given, the cloud lifts, and in a moment more, sunshine again wreathes the little face in smiles. Follow the little child's example. Go to the Lord with the same simplicity and confidence, unburdening your heart at His feet. Satan's restraining power over you is broken there, and restoration, with all its joys, will result.

If again you are like Ruth, hitherto a stranger to the Lord's love and grace, stay away no longer, He is longing to give you the knowledge of redemption and make you His for ever, numbering you amongst those that form His church, His bride. Will you not yield to His love?

Although I have spoken of Naomi and Ruth as illustrating the individual back-

slider and stranger returning to God and blessing, I think they typify something far more extensive.

Naomi no doubt is a type of Israel, God's favoured, earthly people, and Ruth, a type of the church, gathered from among the Gentiles, redeemed by Christ to be His joy and delight—His heavenly bride in the yet future day of display.

Naomi for a moment stands aside while Boaz works for Ruth's redemption. To-day the Jewish nation is set aside while God is working among the Gentiles, "to take out of them a people for his name." (Acts xv. 14.) The foundation for this work was laid by Christ. He bought the field for the treasure He saw in it. (Matt. xiii. 44.) Boaz typifies this in the redemption of Ruth and the inheritance. And what a kinsman-redeemer he proved to be! The work begun must be completed and carried out in triumph if he is to be a true type of Christ.

"How hast Thou triumphed, and triumphed with
glory,
Battled death's forces, rolled back every wave."

God had expressed His mind as to the redemption of land sold by His earthly people on account of poverty.

Naomi was evidently too poor to purchase their property back herself. It therefore became the duty of a near kinsman to buy it. In Leviticus xxv. 23-35 we read: "The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me. And in all the land of your possession ye shall grant a redemption for the land. If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away some of his possession, and if any of his kin come to redeem it, then shall he redeem that which his brother sold." Boaz's difficulty is that there is one nearer of kin than himself, who therefore had the greater right to redeem under the Levitical law, and this person typically represents the law.

When Boaz suggests to him that he should redeem the land that belonged to Elimelech, he willingly agrees to do it, until he learns that Ruth's redemption and introduction into the congregation of Israel as his wife, is, according to Boaz's statement, an unalterable part of the transaction. Then he says, "I cannot redeem it . . . lest I mar mine own inheritance." His objection you will understand better if you read God's law concerning this in Deuteronomy xxv. 5-10. But there is another thing. In Deuteronomy xxiii. 3 we read: "An

Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation . . . even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the Lord for ever."

This seemed an obstacle indeed, one that could not lawfully be annulled or set aside. No wonder that the law in type said, "I cannot redeem it."

But *grace* supersedes law, and Boaz takes the whole responsibility upon himself, the land is publicly bought, and with it Ruth becomes his. It needed nothing short of the power and grace of the Son of God to pick us up and make us His, and "He is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." (Rom. x. 4.)

CHAPTER XI.

RUTH SATISFIED.

BEFORE adding a few closing remarks we must gather up the threads of our thoughts on this wonderful little book of grace, full of God's tender dealings in restoring the backslider and attracting the stranger to Himself.

As we noticed earlier, what enhances the beauty of the lovely picture of out-flowing goodness is its very sombre setting. It appears as a bright, heavenly sunbeam, a ray of light and hope when Israel as a nation was at its lowest ebb, in its sad history of departure from God, indicating in a beautiful way the unchanging character of the divine heart of love in spite of all the failure of a people that outwardly owned His name. Naomi has been recalled from the land of distance and given grace to retrace her steps to God and home, and Ruth has been attracted, wooed and won by the love of Boaz, and both now know what true *rest* is. The union of Boaz and Ruth is blessed, and a little son is

born and significantly named Obed, "a worshipper of the Lord." The top-note of heart adoration is reached now, a fitting close to this beautiful history, and a suitable answer to the wondrous grace shewn therein.

Is it not the desire of the Lord that the company of His redeemed ones, conscious, by faith, of what is their present portion in Christ, and in the enjoyment by the Spirit of their relationship to Him, should bear fruit to God by the outflowing of full hearts in praise and worship, which will be fittingly exemplified in a consistent walk here? (Gal. v. 25.)

But complete rest of heart and conscience must come first before this is possible.

Once more Naomi comes to the front. She is to be a sharer in the closing joy, and the way she is congratulated by her neighbours is very beautiful: "Blessed be the Lord," say they, "which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age."

This reminds us forcibly of the beautiful passage in Isaiah ix. 6, 7, which will be the language of Israel in the latter day, when they at last will recognise the only

One through whom even earthly blessing will be enjoyed by them : "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given : and the government shall be upon his shoulder : and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever."

The angelic messenger's promise to Mary in Luke i. 32 bears testimony to the same wondrous Person in a similar strain : "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest . . . and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever ; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

In that day Christ will indeed prove Himself to be Israel's kinsman-redeemer, the Restorer of her life as a nation, and *His* name will then be famous in Israel whose glad song will burst forth : "His name shall endure for ever : his name shall be continued as long as the sun : and men shall be blessed in him : all nations shall call him blessed. . . . And blessed be his glorious name for ever : and let the whole earth be filled with his glory."

Surely we who have learnt to bow in full surrender to that glorious name now can heartily add the closing "Amen, and AMEN"! (Psa. lxxii. 17, 19.)

Once more are the names of Boaz and Ruth associated together in scripture. In Matthew i. 5 they are mentioned in the genealogy "of Jesus Christ, the son of David." So, as a crowning act of grace, Ruth the Moabitess, in turn the lonely stranger, the humble gleaner, the earnest suppliant, and the redeemed bride, is thus honoured by God, and her name is recorded on that distinguished list of the ancestors of Israel's future Messiah and King, whose dominion shall be from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth; in whose days the righteous shall flourish and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth, and who will judge the people with righteousness and the poor with judgment. (Psa. lxxii.) Who so competent and worthy as He?

And yet, although then He will prove Himself to be the mighty God, the true Son of David, and Prince of Peace, whose shoulder will uphold the government of the universe in perfect righteousness, He now waits for us to taste the same grace that was extended to Ruth, and fully

appreciated by her, but which has been so much more fully manifested and expressed since then.

Dear reader, what do you know of the wondrous grace of God revealed in our Lord Jesus Christ? If, through reading these few feebly-penned chapters, you have gained a deeper heart-knowledge of His grace, to Him be all the praise.

CHAPTER XII.

ESTHER THE ADOPTED DAUGHTER.

THE worst that could happen to a nation had happened to Israel, and it came about in this way. In the emphatic words of the divine record, "All the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the Lord which he had hallowed in Jerusalem."

Their covenant-keeping God, in His long-suffering love, "sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people . . . but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy." (2 Chron. xxxvi. 14-16.)

Nebuchadnezzar, the mighty king of vast Babylon, was used by God as a scourge for His unrepenting, wayward people, and on three separate occasions he carried the reigning monarch of Judah, and many of

his people, as captives to Babylon, together with the valuable vessels of the temple; and in the last campaign he entirely destroyed Jerusalem and the house of God.

Among the second band of unwilling exiles accompanying their youthful, though wicked king, Jeconiah, or Jehoiachin, into captivity, was a young Benjamite named Mordecai, who, years afterwards, is introduced to us as "*a certain Jew*," dwelling in Persia's royal city of Shushan.

Seventy years of exile melted into the past, and then the time came when God's promise through Jeremiah was to be fulfilled. (Jer. xxix. 10.)

Cyrus, king of Persia, obeying the divine command, made a decree, and the royal proclamation rang through the whole kingdom, bringing rapturous joy to many a faithful heart. "The Lord God of heaven . . . hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem. . . . Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up."

Such an opportunity of returning to their loved land was not to be neglected, and many joined the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, who were the first to respond to the call, until the caravan

numbered nearly fifty thousand persons, with horses, mules, camels and asses. The interesting events recorded in the Book of Esther took place between the return of this first company of exiles under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua, and the second detachment, years later, under Ezra the priest.

It seems strange to us, perhaps, that Mordecai, as a devout Jew, did not return with his brethren, and it is the more remarkable as he belonged to the tribe of Benjamin, which, with Judah, set the example and took the lead in the expedition.

No doubt God's hand was over his remaining in the land of his captivity. He needed him there for the furtherance of His will in the interests of His people, many of whom still dwelt in Shushan and the neighbouring provinces. He needed, too, the fearless testimony of faithful men like Mordecai in that heathen land, and I think the history shews he was in his right place.

God had His eye on His people and His preserving love was over them though their circumstances were abnormal, and not those in which they could nationally enjoy the presence of Jehovah. Although

Mordecai stayed behind, he, no doubt, was among the number who greatly helped their departing brethren with freewill offerings of gold and silver, and who also sent by their hand a special offering to the Lord for His house to be rebuilt at Jerusalem. (See Ezra i. 4, 6.)

God's name does not occur in the Book of Esther, except in Hebrew acrostic form, but His activities on behalf of His afflicted people are very evident. He does not begin to work in any arbitrary way, but the most natural "happenings" are over-ruled by His wisdom and used by His love.

Mordecai had a young relative, his uncle Abihail's daughter, who was early left an orphan, both father and mother dying in a foreign land. In her deep sorrow and loneliness this beautiful girl found in her cousin her greatest friend and comforter. Mordecai adopted her, bringing her up as his own daughter.

Under his careful tuition and training, her character developed in strength and beauty, vieing with the gracefulness of her figure, and the loveliness of her countenance.

She thoroughly loved and respected her adopted father, as is shewn by the record of her absolute confidence in his advice, and implicit obedience to his wishes, even

when she was raised to the position of the first lady in the kingdom (Esther ii. 10, 20), and the trust Mordecai reposed in Esther is beautiful to notice.

It is evident, too, that Mordecai early taught her the fear of the Lord, for it is only the knowledge of God that displaces self-esteem and gives in its place humility, and Esther shews no pride or haughtiness, even though her beauty is publicly recognised and she later receives both wealth and position. (Esther ii. 15.)

One more thing she learns, and that is, that she definitely belongs to God's people and shares their lot whatever it may be (Esther vii. 3, 4); beautiful lessons which, when learnt, fit her to be the instrument in God's hand of delivering His people when all the power that an earthly monarch can wield is exerted for their downfall.

CHAPTER XIII.

ESTHER THE QUEEN.

A ROYAL seven days' feast was in progress, and the people of Shushan, as well as King Ahasuerus and his courtiers, were banqueting and revelling amid elaborate and costly decorations in the palace gardens. Great was the consternation of all on the last day of the feast when Vashti, the queen, deliberately refused to obey her royal husband's command to appear before his half-intoxicated nobles to be publicly gazed upon and admired for her beauty.

For this Vashti was deposed and divorced. True womanly feeling sympathises with her in her action, although the despot Ahasuerus unwittingly was maintaining the divine principle "that every man should bear rule in his own house."

You will perhaps remember how highly God spoke of Abraham for this very thing, saying, "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him." (Gen. xviii. 19), but doubtless, unlike this

Persian king, his rule was based on *love* and that made all the difference. True love *can* command, and, if reciprocated, is certain of being obeyed.

However, this decision of an angry, heathen monarch was overruled by God to further His plans with regard to the emancipation of His people from the pressure of a great impending danger.

Esther, the Jewish maiden, was chosen by the king to fill Vashti's empty place, and thus she was put in a position in which she could be used of God to accomplish His purposes.

Her personal charm, and modest behaviour during the tedious months of ceremonial purification and preparation for her dignified position brought her into favour, from the first, with all about her. Her lack of ambition and greed, and her quiet, contented spirit is shewn when "she required nothing but what Hegai . . . the keeper of the women, appointed," although she had the right to ask for anything she desired, with the certainty that it would be given her. (See chap. ii. 13-15.)

She had a peculiar and difficult office to fill, and her training in implicit obedience, and respect for the judgment of others, prevented her from being too self-confi-

dent and over-elated at her high position. (Ver. 20.)

Again there was feasting and rejoicing in Shushan, this time in honour of the new queen, and here we meet with Mordecai classed among the servants in attendance at the gate of the king's palace.

Then two events are recorded which apparently had no connection with each other, but later are dovetailed together in divine wisdom :—

(1) The plot against the king's life by his two chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, discovered by Mordecai and reported to the king by Esther ; and

(2) The promotion of Haman the Agagite as chief of the princes about the king. With this promotion the king commanded that all the servants doing duty at his gate should bow and reverence Haman each time he entered or left the palace. What a test for Mordecai ! How would he meet it ? Was it possible for a godly Jew to prostrate himself before a prince of Amalek, the sworn foe of God and His people ?

This nation was the first to war against Israel when they began their journey from Egypt to Canaan, attacking them from behind when they were faint and weary,

and is recorded as a nation that "feared not" God, and upon whom God's promise of absolute destruction rested. (See Deut. xxv. 17-19; Num. xxiv. 20; Exo. xvii. 14-16.)

No doubt Mordecai had read or heard those words, coming as a distinct command from God to His people: "Thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven: thou shalt not forget it." (Deut. xxv. 19.)

No! Mordecai would not, could not forget it. Haman was not in his power, but whatever it involved—and it might cost him his life—he would publicly acknowledge him as God's enemy and his own. So, when all the servants bowed low before the king's favourite, Mordecai sat, or stood, erect. A small action, but oh, how much it involved!

So often it is upon the "*little* things" that great results hinge. It is the same, too, in spiritual matters. The enemy's temptations more often come to us in apparently trivial ways, and if we are off our guard, and yield, they soon assume alarmingly huge proportions, and it is often not till then that our eyes are open to the *true* character of the "*little thing*" that has thus interfered with our spiritual growth. May the Lord

keep us ever watchful, and in such communion with Himself, that we may be alive to Satan's subtle devices and strong to stand the test.

Mordecai knew this strength, so no amount of questioning and reasoning could make him conform to the ways of his fellow-servants, consequently they told Haman, and with evil curiosity awaited developments, for they knew that Mordecai was a Jew.

Haman's heart burned with bitter hate and indignation at Mordecai's personal affront. In his swollen ideas of his own importance it was too light a punishment for Mordecai to suffer alone, the annihilation of *all* the Jews throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus could alone atone for the insult, and to this end he planned.

CHAPTER XIV.

ESTHER THE QUEEN (*continued*).

“**T**HE king took his ring . . . and gave it unto Haman . . . the Jews’ oppressor [margin]. And the king said unto Haman, The silver is given to thee, the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee.”

Thus, by false representation and bribery, Haman gained his desire, and he did not lose time in sending documents, in the king’s name, to all the provinces, ordering the governors “to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women . . . upon the thirteenth day of the . . . month Adar.”

The decree was formally announced in Shushan, and “the city was perplexed.” And no marvel, for “when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.” (Prov. xxix. 2.)

The Jews wept, fasted and wore sackcloth, thus taking a low place before God, when they understood that their death-

warrant was signed, and Mordecai in particular made a great display of mourning, as he knew he was the unwilling cause of Haman's outburst of animosity.

Had God forgotten His people? Were they to be exterminated and the Amalekite to triumph? The king's decree was irrevocable, so they could expect no help from man, but it was, after all, human, and human weapons are useless against almighty power. The Jews were shut up to God and their case could not have been in better hands.

Esther, restricted to her apartments in the palace, did not immediately hear of the decree, and it was only through her concern for her relative's grief that she learned the blow that had fallen upon her people, and received from Mordecai a copy of the proclamation that she might read the details for herself. Mordecai also charged her that she should go to the king and petition him for the lives of her people.

Esther explained that in venturing into the king's presence uncalled she would risk her own life, but Mordecai could not tolerate shrinking from what he knew was the right step though it might be fraught with danger and difficulty. He felt that

God had allowed Esther to fill her exalted position for that very moment, and if she wavered then, just at the crisis, God would deliver His people through some other means, but she herself would lose the privilege of being the instrument of deliverance. His faith was in God and it was not misplaced, He would yet shew Himself strong on behalf of His own as He had done in their past history over and over again.

Esther promised she would venture, after Mordecai and the Jews at Shushan had joined her in a three days' fast.

In thought we follow the beautiful queen, as, having dressed herself in her state robes, she tremblingly made her way to the inner court of the king's house on the third day. Good was it for Esther that "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), for "it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre."

Then the king invited her to make known her request, for naturally it was something

very important that made her thus set aside all court rules of etiquette, and brave the expected wrath of the monarch, and possible death.

Esther, however, did not at once disclose her real mission, but requested that the king and Haman should attend a banquet that she had prepared. They went, and then again she requested that they should come a second time the following day, when she promised to disclose what was upon her mind.

Haman had reached the pinnacle of his ambition. To be twice invited by the queen to a banquet, as the king's only companion, elated him much, and he returned home "joyful and with a glad heart."

But his ambitious pleasure dimmed as he passed the motionless figure of Mordecai at the king's gate, and his heart burned with such indignation that he could not rest until, at the wicked suggestion of his wife, he had erected a gallows, fifty cubits high, intending, as soon as the morning broke, to get the king's permission to execute Mordecai there on the following day. Plot and plan Haman might, and do his worst. How little he guessed that he was fighting against almighty power,

that his downfall was sure and imminent, and that his days were numbered.

God was already working for His people and *must triumph*, though Haman perceived it not, nor the truth of that divine statement, "The hope of the righteous shall be gladness: but the expectation of the wicked shall perish." (Prov. x. 28.)

CHAPTER XV.

ESTHER THE QUEEN (*continued*).

“**O**N that night could not the king sleep.” God takes pains to record a man’s sleepless hours, because during those quiet, dark watches a wonderful bit of divine weaving of events was to take place. The monarch tossed on his luxurious couch, but slumber fled from him. Had he but known it, he was in the same position as the Psalmist when he exclaimed, “Thou [God] holdest mine eyes waking.” (Psa. lxxvii. 4.)

Finally, giving up all thought of sleep and yielding to the inevitable, he commanded that the scribes should read to him from the state records to while away the hours till morning dawned. As the king listened his interest became awakened, for the scribes were reading the account of the conspiracy made against his life by two of his attendants, and how Mordecai had then become his preserver. Strangely enough the event seemed to have entirely slipped the king’s memory.

It was considered a terrible breach of etiquette if a Persian monarch remained indebted to any one for a personal benefit. Here was a man who had saved his life by his vigilance! Had he received any reward or acknowledgment? The king anxiously inquired of those about him, but only to learn that no honour had been shewn to Mordecai.

What an oversight! Ahasuerus must make it his business to remedy this long-standing slight to his preserver, or the superstition of his age forbade him to expect prosperity.

Day was dawning as he arrived at this decision, and there was a movement in the outer court.

Haman, bent on Mordecai's destruction, was seeking an early interview with his sovereign to gain his permission to hang him on the gallows already erected for the purpose.

How opposed were the thoughts of these two men. The king's were being controlled by God to work His divine will with regard to His servant, and Haman's were prompted by the arch enemy of God and man. Haman was seeking to *destroy* the man whom the king was *delighting to honour*, and thus he was acting in direct

opposition to God; and who can do this and prosper?

There is One, a glorified Man, "*the man Christ Jesus,*" whom *God* is delighting to honour, and who will have wonderful regal glories bestowed upon Him in a coming day, when every knee shall bow to Him and every tongue confess Him Lord.

The world, on the contrary, rejected Him, and *still* rejects Him, banished Him from this scene by death—the shameful death of crucifixion. What extremes! How opposed are man's thoughts to God's! How necessary it makes it that each one of us individually should seriously face the question, "What think ye of Christ?" and decide what *our* hearts will do with the One whom *God* delights to honour.

Haman was asked the question respecting Mordecai by the king, but, being so full of pride and self-esteem, he decided at once, in his own mind, that the king was wishing to shew *him* a personal mark of his favour.

So a characteristic suggestion followed. To be regally arrayed and paraded through the street, riding the king's charger, was the honour he craved. "Then the king said to Haman, Make haste, take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do

even so to Mordecai the Jew . . . suffer not a whit to fall [margin] of all that thou hast spoken." (Ver. 10.)

How mortifying to Haman's pride, but obedience to the king's command was imperative, and both astonished friends and foes in Shushan soon heard the proclamation uttered again and again by Haman's unwilling lips as he led his exalted enemy along the streets, "Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour."

Many will have to publicly acknowledge Christ's exaltation at His coming display, who, sad to say, have never bowed to the authority of His love in this the day of grace. The present period of the Lord's long-suffering patience has almost run out. May each dear reader make a full surrender of himself to the One who has every right to his loving allegiance before the surely approaching "day of vengeance of our God" takes the place of the present "day of salvation."

CHAPTER XVI.

ESTHER THE QUEEN (*continued*).

THE second banquet was prepared, and Esther the queen again entertained her distinguished guests. The time was come for her to reveal to the unsuspecting monarch the duplicity and wickedness of the official who had gained his royal master's full confidence and the highest place in his kingdom.

Perhaps we wonder why Esther did not unburden her heart to the king on the first occasion. If nervousness or lack of courage held her back, Mordecai's honour and exaltation, though temporary, must have been a great encouragement to her failing spirits, and was it not timed by the ever-watchful God on that very morning to strengthen her heart and keep her steadfast in her purpose?

Anyway she was fulfilling the will of Him who is before all time, and has eternity to work in, and who is never in a hurry. So many of us, wishing to have something to do in the planning of our

own pathway, act impulsively and in haste, and often, if not always, have cause to regret it later on, because we have not waited for the Lord to mark our pathway for us and lead us therein as He has promised to do. "Blessed are all they that wait for him." (Isa. xxx. 18.) Esther deliberated, and no doubt waited upon her covenant-keeping God in great humility and prayer, so that we are not surprised that the best of results followed for all God's people in that place and neighbourhood.

Haman's head was not held quite as erect as usual as he accompanied the chamberlains into the queen's presence. He could not banish the mortification of the morning's parade from his mind, nor could he easily forget his wife's prophetic words upon hearing of it: "If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him." Did he at all suspect that the queen's petition was connected in any way with himself?

The banquet was in progress when the king turned to Esther with the question of the day before: "What is thy petition, queen Esther? and it shall be granted

thee." Esther held back no longer, but with perfect candour replied : " If it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request : for we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish." The astonished monarch exclaimed : " Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so ? " " The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman," replied Esther.

The astonished king left the banqueting-hall and paced the palace garden in his anger and indignation, while the wretched Haman, filled with terror and dismay and fearing for his life, flung himself down before the queen to seek her pardon.

The king soon returned, but his face forbode nothing but ill for the hapless prince, who was soon removed from the royal presence by attendants and hanged by the king's orders on the very gallows he had erected for Mordecai.

Just retribution ! " With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again " is a divine principle.

After this the king's wrath was partially pacified, but there was more to do yet. Unfortunately the evil could not be undone, the edict could not be revoked, and

this greatly distressed Esther, so that she pleaded again with tears that the king would rectify, by some means, "the mischief of Haman the Agagite."

The king had immediately advanced Mordecai, promoting him to the dignified position in his court previously held by Haman, but this would not save the Jews, so in distress of mind she exclaimed: "How can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?"

Ahasuerus, though powerless to withdraw his decree, could make another, and this he did. He gave the Jews full permission to stand for their lives and defend themselves and their wives and children against any that might make an attack upon them, and letters to this effect were sent by swift messengers to every part of the king's provinces. Esther and Mordecai had the whole matter in their hands and had the king's authority for all that they did.

The Jews took courage, and when the time came shewed a bold front to their enemies, and slew altogether seventy-five thousand, eight hundred men, including Haman's ten sons, but they did not take

any prey for themselves, although they had permission from the king to do so.

Their hearts seemed so full of joy and thankfulness at the goodness of God, exerted so wonderfully for their deliverance, that they could not enrich themselves by spoiling others.

This commenced a time of peace and prosperity for God's people, though in a foreign land, and a yearly two days' feast was instituted in memory of their wonderful preservation.

As for Mordecai, the last words recorded of him are very beautiful. He was "accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed." Thus God rewarded faithfulness to Himself, and the truth of the words were beautifully exemplified: "Them that honour me I will honour." (1 Sam. ii. 30.)

CHAPTER XVII.

EVE.

“**A**DAM called his wife’s name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.” (Gen. iii. 20). What ages this takes us back in thought; and yet, before ever the woman was formed, God’s thoughts were of those descendants of hers, called to be eternally blessed in the Son of His love, and of them she is a wonderful type.

In Genesis i. 26–28 we read, “Let us make man . . . and let them have dominion . . . male and female created he them. And God blessed them,” etc. The pronoun changes to the plural, and the man and the woman unitedly are given dominion over all created things, to hold them for God. In God’s purposes this is a beautiful type of a coming day when the church will share Christ’s throne, and with Him reign over the earth. How very little she realises her high calling now, and consequently how feebly she responds to it!

God formed the woman for the happi-

ness and satisfaction of the man. Amongst all the animal creation brought in review before Adam there was not found *one* that could supply the lack, fill up the incompleteness, and be a suitable companion—"an help meet for him."

Such a one must be part of himself, one of whom he could say "bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman [Isha], because she was taken out of Man [Ish]." And this was true of the woman. There was a blank in creation without her, she was necessary to Adam's perfect satisfaction. Oh, the marvellous beauty of the truth of such scriptures as these: "The church, which is his body, the fulness [or completion] of him that filleth all in all." (Eph. i. 22, 23), and "We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." (Eph. v. 30.) "The last Adam," "the Lord out of heaven," regards the church, His bride, as the completion of His joy and satisfaction in the new creation. She holds the nearest place to His heart. Oh, that we might realise more what we are to Christ!

How very wonderful that God, in the opening pages of His revelation, should bring before our vision such a beautiful type of His highest thought for man!

How very different the second picture!

We all know the story of the serpent's subtle temptation, and the consequent sad fall of our first parents. God tested their confidence and obedience. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil spoke of death in the midst of a scene of life, brightness and beauty, and the tempter raises a doubt as to God's love and goodness in Eve's mind, shaking her confidence in Him.

The subtle question of the serpent, "Yea, hath God said?" soon leads to the bold hiss of his contradicting lie—"Ye shall not surely die." This is too much for Eve, who, losing confidence in her Maker, and also subjection to His word, acts in independence, listens to the tempter and disobeys God, involving her husband in her downfall.

Now they had the knowledge of good without the power to do it, and the knowledge of evil without the power to avoid it. What a discovery! They immediately realise their miserable nakedness in the sight of God, and make efforts of their own to cover it. Aprons of man's own construction cannot remedy his condition, or exclude it from God's deep-searching gaze. Conscious of this, they flee from the sound of His familiar voice, seeking a

hiding-place behind the trees of the garden. Formerly the sound of their Creator's voice was responded to with pleasure and gladness, but now it only breathes terror in the hearts of the guilty couple. Such is the havoc made by the enemy of God and man.

If we take a retrospective look into our own little experience do we not recognise that the enemy's wiles are the same to-day? How well he has achieved his end, if, in any measure, he succeeds in getting us to doubt God who has given us such proof of His love and faithfulness. All doubts in divine things belong to the father of lies and are suggested by him. Every shadow of doubt clouds communion, and all the attendant misery of a heart away from God follows only too quickly. How very watchful and prayerful we need to be! So much for us individually.

Then, if we look around us, how clearly we see on every hand the trail of the serpent—sin, sorrow, suffering and death—and yet in this scene of death God in His wondrous grace sends His message of life—eternal life—in the gospel. What a contrast to the warning of death when all spoke of sparkling life in Eden! Have we taken advantage of God's wondrous grace,

and do we know what it is to be "alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord"? (Rom. vi. 11.)

Adam and Eve make their helplessness more apparent by their paltry excuses. God alone in His infinite love can work for them—and He does.

He clothes them with skins that speak of death, looking forward, no doubt, to the precious, atoning death of Christ, and puts the flaming sword of justice between them and the scene of what might prove further temptation. (See Gen. iii. 21-24.)

Living for ever in their present sinful state, in a sin-polluted scene, at a distance from God, with the knowledge of good and evil, and yet utterly helpless either to do the one or flee the other, would be anything but a blessing to them, so God in His mercy makes it impossible.

But before sending them forth He thrills their sad hearts with a clear note of divine hope. In pronouncing judgment upon the serpent Eve hears God say that *her seed* should bruise his head. (Ver. 15.) How she seems to cling to this indirect promise, for when her first child is born out of Paradise she calls him Cain, saying, "I have gotten *the man* from the Lord." She proves, to her sorrow, that he is *not*

the promised seed—centuries must roll ere He should come—but it shews she still had faith in God's word and looked for its fulfilment. In the darkest circumstances there is always the brightness of hope in laying hold of God's promises, for they are as unfailing as Himself.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SARAH.

THERE is not space in a short chapter to take up in detail every incident in connection with the life of this remarkable woman, but we can mutually profit by considering together the growth of her soul as taught by God.

The first time that Sarah acts independently is recorded in Genesis xvi., when, too impatient to await the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham that they should have an heir, and evidently faithless with regard to it, she suggests to her husband that he should take her Egyptian maid to be his wife. We are told in Galatians iv. 24, 25 that she represents the covenant made on Mount Sinai—the law—and this speaks to us of bondage.

Abraham yields to Sarah's suggestion, and faith for the time gives place to nature.

Nature finds its resources and even its religion in things down here quite apart from God, in contrast to faith which makes

God, who is the source of its very existence in a soul, the centre of everything.

Is Sarah alone in this phase of unbelief? If we challenge our own hearts how often must we plead guilty to seeking some relief from pressure, or some way out of a difficulty, by having recourse to this world and to the things of this life.

What a slight upon the God who has given us so many proofs of His love, faithfulness and wisdom! If we know Him in any measure we are without excuse. Sarah had not the full revelation that has been made known to us, and it does not appear from the text that she was even present when the promise was made to Abraham, thus she missed the faith-inspiring object-lesson of the star-bespangled heavens, and the deep, solemn, soul-teaching of the night's watch by the sacrifice. (See Gen. xv. 4-18.) Her sad act of unbelief, however, cannot fail to bring sorrow and discord in its train, and this soon becomes evident.

Sarah is despised by Hagar, and harshness ensues in consequence on Sarah's part, so that Hagar flees. But she is not allowed to remain away. Sarah has lessons to learn through Hagar's presence in her home, so God, who is just as interested in

Sarah's spiritual growth as in Abraham's, sends her back. It must have been a trial to Sarah when Ishmael was born, and a test during the fourteen years he and his mother remained in the home. But Sarah was doubtless in the school of God all this time, for we do not read of any more quarrels, although she laughed in derision when the heavenly strangers reiterated God's promise, giving all the full details connected with it. (See Gen. xviii.) Unbelief still! How loth we are to believe divine statements when they are contrary to nature, forgetting that "with God *all* things are possible." When faith is not in exercise in a believer there is something in him that is hindering, because there are no hindrances on God's side. How aptly does Eliphaz put the question to Job: "Are the consolations of God small with thee? is there *any secret thing* with thee?" I think we shall find that this was the case with Sarah. On two occasions she and her husband acted in a deceitful manner, so that, though knowing more of God, and taking a higher ground than those around them, they are reproached and reprov'd by them. Let us beware, as Christians, of giving occasion to those about us to blaspheme the name of Christ.

Abraham's excuse for their behaviour to Abimelech in Genesis xx. 11-14 tells of a secret arrangement made between Sarah and himself when he first responded to God's call. In spite of a fuller revelation of God to them as time went on, they still harboured this evil thing and had recourse to it, and of this we have a twofold account. (See chaps. xii. and xx.) How soul-deadening! No wonder that faith is fettered! Let us carefully avoid secret sins, always seeking to live transparently before God and man, for it is the only path in which fruit can be borne to Him and blessing can accrue to us.

But now let us pass on to a brighter picture. In Hebrews xi. 11 we read, "Through faith also Sara herself received strength . . . and was delivered of a child . . . because she judged him faithful who had promised." We are not told how God worked in her soul to accomplish this marvellous change, but her faith and hope is now entirely and firmly placed in Him, and she trusts Him implicitly.

She has, at last, come to the end of herself, and has discovered her own utter weakness and resourcelessness. When she was acting for herself everything went wrong and only brought bitter disappoint-

ment. *God* must undertake everything for her if His promise is to be made good in her, and "she judged him faithful who had promised."

When we reach this point and leave *self* out of the question there is no longer any hindrance to our progress in God's things, because the wisdom of the One who has our training in hand is infinite, and "Who teacheth like Him?"

God's promise is fulfilled, and Isaac, the child so long waited for, is born. Sarah now seems almost to outshine Abraham. He *names* the child at God's direction (see Gen. xvii. 19), but Sarah shews intelligence and *interprets* it. She seems to recognise what springs of refreshment and joy she has in Isaac, for she says, "God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me." (Gen. xxi. 6.)

What a contrast to her laugh of unbelief behind the tent door! This is the pure laugh of the deep joy of fulfilled desire and faith in God, and it bears its testimony. It is a case of "my cup runneth over."

Do we know anything of this joy in a spiritual sense? We all know that Isaac is a very distinct type of Christ. Is our appreciation of Him so great that He has

become the source of a deep joy that no one can deprive us of, and that, bubbling up and over, ministers refreshment to those about us, and becomes the source of true fellowship? Sarah says, "all that hear will laugh *with me*."

One step further Sarah goes. She now has faith in God, an awakened and intelligent heart that can fully appreciate Isaac, but *he must be supreme*. He must have no rivals. Now is the time for decision, and Sarah is ready for it. "Cast out this bondwoman and her son" is the advice she gives Abraham, and Ishmael has to go. There is no place for the flesh when faith is in activity and Christ is truly appreciated. God has put a wonderful seal to this decision of Sarah's, and honoured it in a very special way. In Galatians iv. 30 we read, "What saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman," etc. Sarah's actual words are quoted, and God deigns to call them "*scripture*," clearly shewing that she had His mind in her decision, and that her action met His approval.

May we each imitate Sarah, and seek that Christ shall have the supreme place in our hearts.

CHAPTER XIX.

HAGAR.

HAGAR, an Egyptian slave, was probably bought in Egypt by Abraham during his sojourn there on account of the famine, as told us in Genesis xii. 10. She is introduced in this way into a household where God is known. She is, however, taken out of her sphere and raised in position, with the natural result that she soon despises her mistress. Sarah retaliates with great harshness, so that Hagar's life soon becomes unbearable, and she seeks refuge in flight.

This poor slave-girl wanders aimlessly about in the wilderness, until, coming across a spring of water, she stops to rest. This is the picture in Genesis xvi., and at this point God takes her up. The angel of the Lord finds her by the fountain of water and addresses her as "Hagar, Sarai's maid."

God always goes to the root of the matter. How often we judge by what appears on the *surface*—but the *truth* is ever seen by

God, and before we can be blessed by Him, all must be laid bare. Yes, although He is about to promise Hagar a son, and disclose to her that she should be the mother of multitudes through the birth of Ishmael, yet in God's eyes she is Sarai's maid still, and that existing relationship must be maintained by Hagar. We do well to remember this principle in our pathway through life.

The angel of the Lord then puts two very important questions to her—"Whence camest thou?" and "Whither wilt thou go?"

Have *we* ever been asked similar questions by God? Although, perhaps, not in the same position as Hagar, we can draw a very possible comparison.

"Whence camest thou?" It is well to take a retrospective gaze sometimes, or as Isaiah li. 1 puts it—"Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged." May it not be true of some of us, that we have been drawn out of the world (Egypt), and have come into touch with the Lord's people. Perhaps for a number of years we have thrown in our lot with them, and then, because our hearts were *not right with the Lord*, we began to despise them. Possibly

some among them appeared to us harsh and narrow-minded, and we made this an excuse, or, perhaps, more truly, in the words of the sons of the prophets to Elisha, we said, "The place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us," and out into the wilderness we go. What a wilderness it proves to be!

The joys of communion are lost, the support of the Lord in crises and difficulties is not realised, we are not in touch in the same way with the Lord's people, and so the refreshment of true fellowship is not ours.

On the other hand, we do not, perhaps, go as far as to seek the passing pleasures and superficial friendships of this poor world, so we find ourselves in a wilderness indeed, a tractless waste which marks its influence in restless aimlessness of heart, mind and action. Has any one of my readers had a similar experience? If so, remember the Lord has His loving, watchful eye on you all the time and He is just letting you find out the hollow emptiness of it all, and when through practical experience, your heart has learned the terrible lack on all sides, He will ask you these searching questions: "Whence camest thou?" and "Whither wilt thou go?"

Oh! to answer them honestly before God, and to come to the same conclusion as the disciples, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life."

The Lord's injunctions in answer to a truthful confession are the same as to Hagar, "return," and "submit." The returning and submission must be to Him first, and when all is owned and you are happily and restfully at His feet in restored communion, everything else will be simple. You will prove Christ to be sufficient to fill to overflowing your heart's small measure, and you will be satisfied.

If we only realised how the Lord is longing to welcome the backslider-in-heart, we should not find it a difficult matter to return and submit to Him. Complete submission to Christ is everything! We are truly conquered by love then.

Hagar learns and owns that she has seen Him who liveth and seeth her (vers. 13, 14), and this vision of Him makes it possible for her to return and submit.

Oh! for one such soul-sight of Christ, the living One, with all its blessed, eternal results!

* * * *

Fourteen years pass away and Hagar is again a wanderer, this time an outcast

with her son, but through no wilfulness on her part. Her present circumstances have their place in the purposes of God, so His support and cheer are at her disposal. And she needs them. Deprived of all sustenance—the water is spent in their bottle—Ishmael, the centre of her hopes and of all God's promises to her, lies dying under a stunted shrub.

What a test of faith! Can Hagar still believe God? No; she prepares her mind for the worst, and in abandoned grief she lifts up her voice and weeps. God saw those tears, and also "heard the voice of the lad," and made haste to deliver. The question from heaven, "What aileth thee, Hagar?" is immediately followed by the comforting, "Fear not."

What need for grief and fear when God is about to work for them? Hagar's knowledge of God was small, but what she *did* know she had evidently instilled into the mind of her child, for in his extremity he knows to whom to turn, and his prayer is immediately heard and answered by the ever-faithful One. Hagar is told to raise him in her arms, and the promise is repeated, "for I will make him *a great nation.*"

God now opens her eyes and she sees a

well of water—probably there all the time had she only eyes to see—the bottle is hastily filled, and Ishmael drinks and revives. How much, dear reader, we need to pray, “Open thou mine eyes.” You will remember how the Lord walked for miles with the two disciples going to Emmaus before they had the joy of knowing that they were in His blest company. It was not until their eyes were opened that they knew Him. Oh! may the Lord open our eyes to see the exhaustless supply of life and refreshment we have in Himself, that we, too, may know Him.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CALL OF REBEKAH.

WE have doubtless often heard servants of the Lord speak very beautifully of Rebekah as a type of the church—the bride of Christ—in that she was attracted by the message of the servant (the Holy Spirit) and conducted by him across the desert to Isaac (the risen One) to be his bride, joy and comfort.

This is too vast a subject to be dealt with in this short chapter, so we will consider Rebekah rather in an individual way. We should do well to read Genesis xxiv. carefully, where Rebekah first comes into prominence, since the details are so beautiful and full of instruction, but for want of space they will have to be passed over rather superficially here.

Eliezer, sent by Abraham to secure a wife for Isaac from amongst his kinsfolk in Mesopotamia, crosses the desert and reaches the gates of the city of Nahor in safety. Making a halt by a well he lifts his heart in prayer to God for guidance as

to his choice amongst the maidens of that place. In *immediate* answer to his prayer Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel, Abraham's nephew, comes out of the city with her waterpot to draw water from the well, and to Eliezer's wonderment and joy fulfils the special sign he had asked of God. How simple is a life of trustful dependence upon God ! Oh, that we knew more about it, especially in these difficult, complicated times ! Rebekah receives the gifts offered by Eliezer, possibly in recognition of her willing services, but what seems to have more weight with her is what he has to tell of the ways of the God of glory with the family in the distant land. She silently listens to Eliezer's heartfelt thanksgiving to God for thus hearing prayer and prospering his journey, and she hastens home and tells all she has heard. As a result the servant is entertained by her parents and her brother Laban, whose covetous soul seems greatly stirred by the sight of his sister's jewels.

During Eliezer's short stay Rebekah learns more of God and His goodness to her relations, so when the call came to her it found her ready. The simple and yet searching question, "Wilt thou go with this man ?" was responded to with the

equally straightforward and unhesitating answer, "I *will* go."

Beautiful reply, only possible from one to whom the God of glory has in some measure been revealed! Rebekah was no poor homeless maiden, and the choice was not made between poverty and loneliness and love and plenty. She possessed home, friends and wealth, and these would have remained to her had she decided to stay. What then could have been the power that attracted a girl to leave all she had hitherto held dear to undertake a long, weary desert journey, with all its attendant heat and discomfort, accompanied by a strange escort, to a strange country and unknown people, except in name? Years previously the God of glory had called Abraham from the same locality, and constrained by divine power and in response to the call, he started out on an altogether untried path, but what proved to be in his case, and ever *must* be, a path to certain blessing. Now a similar call had come to Rebekah, and with it, however detaining and hindering the earthly ties, came *power to obey* from the same *Lord of glory*. I think the report of the servant had much more weight with Rebekah than the gifts he conferred upon her, and learning thus some-

thing of the blessing in the far-off country in which she is invited to participate, she is impelled by an unseen power to follow in the footsteps of the one who was first called, and so is "*blessed with faithful Abraham.*"

What a mighty detaching and attracting power is that of the Lord of glory! Do we know anything about it, dear reader? If not we are still very far from blessing. The sad thing is that to so many the call seems to come in vain. May none of those who read these lines be found among them, but like Rebekah respond willingly to the call of God into the circle of true blessing.

Rebekah knew very little as yet of Isaac, the risen one, whose bride she was destined to be, or of what lay before her in the future, but the point is she *believed* the report and *obeyed* God's call, and so made a distinct break with all her old connections and chose the path of blessing.

Probably many a time you have heard the report of God's love and grace through His faithful servants. How are you treating it? Has it had any real effect upon your life, or are you simply *going on as usual* and ignoring the call—the call of God *to you*? Time is *so* short and is fast running to its close, as everything around shews.

Oh, to simply *obey*, and blessing untold is before you!

No doubt Rebekah learnt much during that never-to-be-forgotten journey. How readily would Eliezer reply to her queries, and how gladly would he tell her about his master Isaac. How in wonder she must have listened to the story of Mount Moriah, drinking in every day more about the one who in perfect subjection to his father's will could unresistingly yield himself to death at his command. And *she* was to be linked with such an one in risen life. No wonder, when at the journey's end the servant pointed out his master, that she took a veil and covered herself. Her heart was won and from henceforth she was for Isaac alone.

Has not this a voice to us? If we only realised more what depths of perfection there are in Christ and what He can be to us and what He wants us to be to Him, I am sure we should, like Rebekah, turn our back on the world and its attractions, and desire to be for Christ alone!

CHAPTER XXI.

MIRIAM.

A CAREFULLY-MADE, covered cradle of rushes, rocking among the reeds of the ancient Egyptian Nile, with its helpless baby tenant, is alike the object of God's deep interest and solicitude, of a mother's steadfast faith, and of a sister's watchfulness. God's purposes with regard to the future of His chosen people, their release from bondage and safe conduct to the land of promise are centred in that little babe of three months.

He was to be Israel's deliverer and leader, and his mother Jochebed seems wonderfully taught of God when she accepts for her child what so vividly spoke of death, putting full confidence in the God of resurrection and power. In the dignity of faith she commits her little son to the waters of death and calmly waits for God to work. There is no nervous hurry, worry and excitement. Her trust is in Jehovah and nothing seems to shake it.

Miriam, Moses' elder sister, was standing

“afar off” to see what would happen to her little brother. Although perhaps she possessed not the far-seeing faith of Jochebed that pierced the gloomy clouds of oppression and cruelty weighing so heavily upon God’s people at this time, she was not *too* far off for God to use in the furtherance of His purposes, and she is ready when the moment for her to act comes.

It is a very great honour to be used of God in the carrying out of the smallest part of His all-wise plans, and for this we need to have His mind about things and to take stock of everything from the divine standpoint. Naturally we have such a warped, exaggerated vision. How much we need to be taught of God—even how to stand and wait.

Miriam stands and waits to some purpose. She watches the finding of her baby brother by the Egyptian princess, and then, with a God-given thought, she hastens to the royal lady’s side. May she find a nurse for the child among the Hebrew women? This is God’s ordering and the hearts of all are in His hand, so a ready assent is given. Miriam’s heart directs her feet and she hastens to fetch her mother, which results in the fact that her dearly-loved babe is given back to her tender nurture

and training, and with him the wages—that which will provide for every temporal need.

That is how God rewards faith—faith His own gift. Oh! to have to do with such a God of love, for He is the same to-day—"Changeless through all these changing years."

Miriam, having fulfilled her part, disappears from view and many years elapse before we meet with her again. Doubtless all this time she was being taught by God for the post she had yet to fill, which was by no means an unimportant one. She had evidently linked herself with the people of God in a marked way and was looked up to by them, for she is introduced to us in Exodus xv. 20 as "*the prophetess*, the sister of Aaron."

From this we gather that she was used of the Lord to reveal His mind to, and instruct in His ways, at least the *women* of Israel, over whom she seemed to have influence.

When Moses and the children of Israel, exulting in their wonderful deliverance from Egypt and their enemies the Egyptians, sing that beautiful song of triumph to the Lord, it is Miriam who, stirred by the glorious words, leads forth the women

to join the wondrous song and swell the chorus, "Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously."

Thus, at the outset of the wilderness journey, in company with the Lord's redeemed people, with their enemies dead behind them, the deep waters of the Red Sea between them and the land of their bondage, with the Lord's presence with them in the visible pillar of cloud to be their guide and protection, she can lead the Lord's praises in notes of triumphant song.

If *we* know what it is in our souls to be in Miriam's position of victory, we too shall love to sing His praises, not with voice only, but from the depths of our adoring hearts.

The beautiful song itself we cannot here consider in detail, but the close is grand—the inheritance, the sanctuary and the Lord's everlasting reign. Oh, that this might have been the closing act of Miriam's life!

But there is another picture, and a very sad one, portrayed for us in Numbers xii. Miriam and her brother Aaron speak against Moses for an act which they consider to be unseemly, throwing doubt on his God-given leadership, thus manifesting, in a very sad way, jealousy and insubordination.

What an example to the congregation,

and how their conduct added to the burden of their brother's already strenuous life.

This is most displeasing to God, who will not allow this evil spirit to continue for a moment. It is very beautiful how the Lord comes in and absolutely vindicates Moses as His servant above reproach.

As a mark of His deep displeasure the Lord afflicts Miriam, the instigator of the evil speaking, with leprosy, thus shewing her and all the congregation how sinful her action was in His sight. It was only upon Aaron's confessing and judging the sin, and Moses' earnest prayer on her behalf, that the Lord healed her.

The solemn impress of the Lord's hand of chastisement was felt by the whole congregation, for they "journeyed not" until Miriam was again restored to the camp in health. How deep and far-reaching is the effect of sin !

How careful we should be to have everything open to the sight of "him with whom we have to do." "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psa. cxxxix. 23, 24.)

CHAPTER XXII.

RAHAB.

“**B**Y faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.” (Heb. xi. 31.)

Thus, in a few simple yet forceful words, the New Testament records the chief event in the life of this heathen yet wonderfully blessed woman. The verse is well worth our careful consideration for a few moments.

The first fact we learn is that “by faith she perished not.” She lived in the doomed city of Jericho that was distinctly under the judgment of God, where there was not a single pulsation of life towards Him, the whole population lying in heathen darkness. They heard, by rumour, sufficient of Jehovah’s mighty power, exerted on behalf of His people Israel, to fill their hearts with terror, hence “Jericho was straitly shut up” to exclude the advancing armies of this mighty God. But what availed man’s puny efforts? They all perished, while Rahab and her house

“perished not.” Why this difference? Rahab placed her faith in God while the rest of the inhabitants “believed not.”

Secondly, we are told “she received the spies with peace.” What a paradox this seems! The two men were sent by Joshua to “spy out the land” and acquaint themselves with any fact about the city that would be useful to the furtherance of its overthrow. Anything but a peaceful errand, and yet to the heart ready to submit they proved the true messengers of the God of mercy, and in receiving them she obtained peace. Shall we let these facts appeal to our hearts? We are living in a world lying under the judgment of God—a doomed world, where the power of the arch-enemy of God is distinctly felt, in spite of the thin exterior profession of Christianity.

The inhabitants of Jericho acknowledged the power of God but they made no personal appeal to His mercy—“they believed not,” and this is the attitude of the world to-day. Jericho perished—was utterly destroyed—and the time is fast approaching when this huge world-system, built up by man in opposition to God, will feel the power of His destroying hand, and this earth, which has been the scene

where God has displayed His infinite love and redeeming grace, will by His mighty power be folded up and laid aside as a worn-out garment for which there is no longer any use. (See Heb. i. 10-12.)

All in Jericho shared its destruction except Rahab and those for whom her faith was active. Is there any danger of any of us sharing the awful fate that awaits this poor world, or have we like Rahab accepted God's message of mercy so often faithfully spoken by His messengers?

This is no time to treat the things of eternity lightly, as so many of us have done in the past. Thousands of our fellow creatures are daily passing into eternity. Yet God is a God of mercy, and still His glorious gospel is being announced, and whosoever will may accept it now and thus obtain peace—"Peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Rahab enjoyed peace as to her own salvation and as to that of those dear to her when she had taken God's messengers into her confidence and trusted implicitly their promise, "Our life for yours."

The lives of this trusting though heathen woman and her friends were to be held as precious, and to be as secure as those of

the conquering armies of the Lord of hosts, and we know from the account of the capture of Jericho in Joshua vi. that not a drop of their blood was shed. What led to this peace-giving security? Rahab makes a beautiful confession to the messengers whom she saves from capture and probable death, which shews how the report of God's works affected her. "The Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath," she exclaims. The vast power and supremacy of the Almighty filled her vision, and through His messengers she appeals for salvation.

No one ever appealed in vain to the God of heaven and earth, as Rahab was to prove, for the messengers who knew God's love as well as His greatness can unhesitatingly make her a solemn promise of salvation. She learns indeed what the "kindness of God" is. Although a heathen sinner, and not having the slightest claim upon His love, she opens her mouth wide and God indeed fills it with blessing. Such is the reward of simple faith, because such is the heart of love of the God of heaven and earth. Oh, that we realised this more, and reaped more fully the benefits of simple faith!

But how was she blessed? The chapters

referred to at the commencement give us all the thrilling details of her escape from the midst of a scene of utter destruction, but God had much more in store for her. She obtained infinitely more than she asked—nay, than she ever dreamed of. She was brought into the congregation of the people of God to learn more of the wonderful ways of the God in whom she had put her trust, and far from being treated as a menial and a foreigner she became the bride of Salmon, one of the princes of Israel, and thus was raised to the position of a princess among God's people. Matthew i. 5 tells us another interesting detail, that Rahab was the mother of the godly Boaz, and thus a direct ancestress of King David and through him of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. What an honour for a Gentile ! Does not such love appeal to our hearts ? To me it suggests such marvellous scriptures as these :—

“ Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light : who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.” (Col. i. 12, 13.)

“ Who hath blessed us with all spiritual

blessings in heavenly places in Christ.”
(Eph. i. 3.)

“ If children, then heirs ; heirs of God,
and joint-heirs with Christ.” (Rom. viii.
17.)

Is not this enough to bow our hearts in
adoration ?

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DAUGHTERS OF ZELOPHEHAD.

WHAT a mark of distinction for five sisters to have their names recorded four times over by God in His scriptures ! You will find them in Numbers xxvi. 33, xxvii. 1-11, xxxvi., Joshua xvii. 3-6, but we may well mention them here—Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah.

And why were they thus honoured ? It was just this : their hearts were set on enjoying to the full the *present possession* of the inheritance Jehovah had for His people, and this delighted His heart. They grasped what His will was for Israel—the immediate possession of the promised land—and although, as yet, no provision was made by law for them, being women, their hearts were so set on having a part in the division of the land that they bring their cause to Moses. He willingly makes their request known to God, and an immediate answer of definite approval is the result. “THE LORD SPAKE.” He deigns to voice a distinct command, promising the

fulfilment of the desires of these keensouled maidens of Israel. "The daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren." (Num. xxvii. 7.) This divine declaration is ratified by a new statute providing the same privilege for all similarly situated Israelitish women in the future. They were, you will notice, anxious to continue their father's name in their tribe, as he had no son to succeed to his inheritance.

How this shews God's entire appreciation of any individual heart-response to the blessings His love has provided for His own!

Now, for His heavenly people, God has "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven." (1 Peter i. 4.)

Does this appeal to the hearts of us who are His, and do we desire, through faith, and by the Spirit's power, to enjoy the possession in our souls of its joys now? Oh, that it may be so!

These women belonged to the tribe of Manasseh, and their purpose of heart is in striking contrast to the half-heartedness of the other half-tribe that requested that they might have their inheritance on the

east side of Jordan. (Num. xxxii.) They were content with possessions, wealth and pleasures on *this* side of death, and although the heads of families themselves crossed the Jordan to help their brethren in conquering the land, they left all they held dear behind, and, when the warfare was over, and rest was in view, they returned, leaving the place where the Lord's presence was known, and the fellowship of their brethren, to enjoy the life they had *chosen for themselves*, separated from the Lord and the rest of His people by the full-flowing waters of death.

What a solemn lesson for us! Is there any danger of our hearts being held by the pleasures and prosperity of this scene which are terminated by death, when it is our privilege to have our treasure and inheritance above, beyond the reach of death, and our hearts set on them *there*?

When it came to the actual division of the land by Joshua the five sisters again come forward to claim their promised possessions. Did the Lord consider an inheritance with their brethren on the east of Jordan good enough for them? No, indeed! God *never* disappoints hearts that are in harmony with His will, and that desire to enjoy and appreciate His blessings

for them. Referring to Joshua xvii. 5-7 we learn distinctly that the portion of the sisters was in the land on the *west* of Jordan. We read (ver. 6), "The daughters of Manasseh had an inheritance among his sons : and *the rest of Manasseh's sons* had the land of Gilead" (East Jordan).

There is one more thing of importance to notice. God makes a stipulation to which they acquiesce and closely adhere. They may marry whom they see fit, but *it must be in their own tribe*. In other words, their affections and relationships must be subject to and suitable to their destiny. They must in no way mar their inheritance or interfere with their enjoyment of it.

In forming new relationships, let us see to it that they are "in the Lord," and then they will not lessen, but rather strengthen, our enjoyment of the joys of the world of bliss which the Lord desires we should possess in spirit here and now.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ACHSAH.

WE are told very little about this daughter of Israel, but I think we may learn much from what *is* written in Joshua xv. and Judges i., remembering that all scripture has a voice to us, if only we have a ready ear and an understanding heart.

Achsah was the daughter of Caleb, the man of faith, who could say without boasting that "he wholly followed the Lord his God."

The consequence was that there was no halting or wavering in him, but instead, he possessed that keen purpose of heart that made him superior to apparently insurmountable obstacles and difficult circumstances, maintaining him steadily in the pathway of God's will for His people until he ultimately became a victor and an overcomer. His words of encouragement to his dispirited brethren, "The Lord is with us: fear them not," tells us the secret of his strength.

We are not surprised that Achsah proves herself a true daughter of this spiritual giant. She is given by Caleb as a bride to her cousin Othniel, when by his dauntless bravery he captures the stronghold of Kirjath-sepher from the enemy, thus proving himself a fitting partner for her.

He seemed as keen as his uncle in making his own the inheritance God had given His people to possess, and he was thus training for his later important position when he became Israel's saviour, deliverer and judge for forty years, during which time God's people had rest from the constant harassing attacks of their surrounding enemies. It is on the occasion of her presentation as bride to the returning conqueror, that Achsah shews that the present possession and enjoyment of the blessing of God has the first place in her heart also.

At her father's hand she had already received an inheritance, the south land, which without water would be unproductive and unfruitful, so she makes a further request. "Give me a blessing . . . give me also springs of water."

She goes a step further than the daughters of Zelophehad. They asked for an inheritance; Achsah has an inheritance, and

requests, in effect, that which will make it a *present* source of satisfaction and pleasure to her. It only needed the bubbling springs of living water, upper and lower, so readily granted, to make the inheritance everything she wished it to be to her—a source of constant joy.

If we have committed ourselves to Christ and form part of that bride given to Him, the true Overcomer of the world, *we* have an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, reserved in heaven. It is God's will that we should be in the present enjoyment *now* of that heavenly inheritance and the blessings connected with it, which are centred in Christ at His right hand, but the mere knowledge of this will not bear fruit, nor bring joy to our own hearts, unless made good to us by the power of the Holy Spirit—"the earnest of our inheritance." (Eph. i. 14.) We, unlike Achsah, do not need to ask to receive, for as a wondrous gift from God, He is sent to indwell all believers since the Lord has been glorified.

You will remember what the Lord said to the Samaritan woman: "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

(John iv. 14), and again in John vii. 38, 39 He says to the Jews, "He that believeth on me . . . out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive." It is for us to see to it that there is nothing in our life and ways that would grieve the Holy Spirit, and thus hinder Him from making the abiding joys of heaven so real to our souls that we anticipate them now, entering into those marvellous things that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard," but which God hath revealed unto us by His Spirit. It is only by His power that these things afford us real joy, or are made fruitful to our souls; without this our heavenly inheritance affords us but little pleasure.

May we each, as man's day is fast hastening to its close, and Christ's return draws nigh, be so subject to God's Holy Spirit that we may increasingly enter into and enjoy by His power the *reality* of our portion in Christ, until that moment when in *actuality* we shall possess it to the full in His presence.

CHAPTER XXV.

DEBORAH.

“ **I** DEBORAH arose . . . I arose a mother in Israel.” (Judges v. 7.) Surely there was no time that Israel needed a spiritual mother more!

Led away by their own wilfulness they had sunk to their lowest ebb in departure from the God who had delivered them from bondage, led them with every possible care through the many dangers of the wilderness, and now had given them the land so long promised.

Their appreciation of the gift does not, however, seem to have been great, and as a nation their spiritual energy was nil; in consequence there remained much unconquered land still in the hands of the numerous enemies who daily gained more power over them and practically manifested it by years of terrible oppression.

Poor Israel! How very different things might have been if they had only gone forward as at the first, strong in the divine power at their disposal, determined not to

relax their energies until all the enemies of the Lord and of His people had been vanquished. Then they would have been masters of the situation, and in a position to thoroughly enjoy their inheritance as God desired they should. Surely this speaks to our hearts. How often, like Israel, do we, through heart-departure from the Lord, and spiritual indolence, allow the enemy to rob us of the present enjoyment of our heavenly inheritance. Our spiritual appetite then soon gets blunted and deadened, and unless the Lord in His mercy keep us some form of real evil will soon follow, as in the case of Israel. Although the Lord, in consequence of their sin, sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, His heart yearned over His wayward, rebellious children and He raised them up "*a mother*" in the faithful prophetess Deborah. There does not seem to have been a man sufficiently near enough to the Lord to be qualified to judge Israel at this time, but though it was such a day of small things there was a devoted woman whom the Lord could trust with the office of counselling and nurturing His people.

She was a true woman, too, with no self-assertion although she held so high

an office. Her consulting-room was a secluded spot under the shade of a leafy palm-tree, and thither the children of Israel bent their steps when they felt their need of judgment, counsel and encouragement, or wished to know more of the mind of the Lord; and whatever the hour, Deborah was always ready for them.

For twenty long years Israel had borne the yoke of bondage and oppression, and the Lord in His mercy was about to deliver them.

Deborah is the first to learn what the Lord intends to do. She is near enough to know His mind as to how the deliverance is to be effected. How one envies her close walk with God! She sends to Barak, whom God has chosen to collect an army to fight Sisera (Jabin's captain) and his host. But what a poor weakling he is! In spite of God's promise to deliver the Canaanitish army into Israel's hands he absolutely refuses to go unless Deborah agrees to accompany him. He has not sufficient faith and dependence on God to undertake the responsibility of directing operations alone, but shews full confidence in Deborah.

One is not surprised at this. Her close walk with God, sound judgment, ready

sympathy and helpful advice for twenty years had left its mark on the nation, and the weight of her influence was felt. Had she not been a *true mother* to them, and would she fail them now?

Was her pity slightly mixed with scorn when she gives her brave, decisive answer to the timorous man before her? "I will *surely* go with thee," says she, "notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for *thine honour*; for the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." (Judges iv. 9.)

True to her word she instantly arises and accompanies Barak to Kadesh, the rallying-place, and when the ten thousand warriors had answered the call to arms, she goes forward with the army to meet the mighty heathen foe, cheering them with strength-giving words. (Ver. 14.)

When the promised victory is an accomplished fact, Deborah joined by Barak pours out the thankfulness of her heart in a burst of eloquent song ascribing all praise to the One who, in spite of their backsliding and idolatry, had proved Himself again the Deliverer of His people.

"Praise ye the Lord for the avenging of Israel . . . I will sing unto the Lord; I will sing praise to the Lord God of Israel."

Thus Deborah's history closes with song, a fitting end of one who lived for God and His people alone.

Oh! that there were more Deborahs among the Lord's people to-day—those who live near enough to the Lord themselves to be able to help others forward on the heavenly road with cheer, advice and sympathy, and to possess the spiritual power to strengthen the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees, and to say unto them of a fearful heart, "Be strong, fear not." (Isa. xxxv. 3, 4.)

CHAPTER XXVI.

HANNAH.

HANNAH was sad and tried, or, as she describes herself, was “a woman of a sorrowful spirit.” Naturally, there was plenty of reason for her sorrow. She had a deep longing at her heart which was, as yet, ungratified, and in addition the adversary used Peninnah to further try her with unkind taunts and teasing speeches.

Even the love of her devoted husband could not bring permanent sunshine into her life, and we are introduced to her in all her sadness and depression. However, although she knows it not, God has His eye on her for blessing. Her weeping may indeed endure for a night, but she is to prove that “joy cometh in the morning.”

The sorrow of unfulfilled desire is too deep to confide to an earthly friend, but Hannah turns to the Lord, whose sympathies fail not, and in the bitterness of her soul, and with the burning tears of a wounded spirit, she pours out her heart to Him in prayer. A special opportunity is

afforded her for this when she accompanies her husband Elkanah and the provoking Peninnah to Shiloh for the yearly worship and sacrifice to Jehovah. Here, in the depths of her earnestness, she requests the Lord to remember her, and give her a son, whom she promises to give back to Him for His service as long as he lives.

Did any one ever go to the Lord in sorrow or distress in vain? I think we shall all agree that our individual experiences of His loving dealings makes a definite "*No*" the only answer possible.

His eye was upon this poor, sad woman, and He would not let her be crushed with over-much sorrow, but in answering her request, according to His infinite wisdom, He was about to bring such rejoicing into her heart as would tune it to lofty praise in one of the most beautiful inspired songs on record. Who teacheth like Him? Can we think that her daily trial and burden of heart was *unnecessary* when, under the training hand of God, it was productive of *such* results?

When looking back upon the trial Hannah could say, "The Lord is a God of knowledge, and byⁿ him *actions are weighed*." (1 Sam. ii. 3.) She realised then that He had been training her all the

time, that every unkind action of her tormentor, and every action of hers, were all noticed and estimated at their right value by Him, and when patience had had its perfect work He came in to deliver.

The Lord granted her request, and in due time little Samuel (asked of the Lord) is born, bringing joy and gladness to the heart that had known so much of weeping.

I believe the Lord continued to teach Hannah much of Himself during those two or three years of seclusion with her infant son, for what she desires for him speaks eloquently of what the presence of the Lord had become to her own soul. When the infant Samuel is weaned she brings him to the tabernacle that "he may appear before the Lord, and there abide for ever." What greater ambition could she have for her child than that he should *abide* in the sunshine of the Lord's presence? Could she wish it for him unless she had proved something of the sweetness of it herself?

How gladly did she "lend" her precious gift to the Lord, little realising how He would use him to stand for Him and the truth in a day of Israel's deep departure. At this time the priesthood was marred by such wickedness that the offerings of the Lord were actually held in abhorrence

by the people, the priests thus acting as a barrier between the Lord and His people instead of drawing their hearts more closely to Him.

Thus the Lord not only became the timely Deliverer of the downcast Hannah, but, in lifting her up from the depths of sorrow and granting her petition, He became the sadly-needed Deliverer of His backsliding people Israel, by raising them up a prophet and spiritual leader in Samuel. We have only to carefully read Hannah's beautiful song to see how full she is of the Lord and all that He has wrought, and no wonder ! She has proved Him *for herself*, and found Him to be far better than her highest expectations.

Have *we* so learned Him ? If not, may we prove Him *now*. He loves to be confided in, and the result will not be less blessed than that experienced by Hannah.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ABIGAIL.

ALTHOUGH Abigail, naturally, may be rather a difficult character to understand, yet she was a woman of faith, and there is very much that we can learn from her in a moral way and from the place given her in scripture.

Samuel, God's faithful prophet, is dead—he who was the true link between the people and God. Saul, although rejected by God, is still in the place of power, and outwardly acknowledged by the people as king. David, God's anointed one, is rejected and despised by the masses, persecuted by the existing powers, and is a wanderer in the land which, in God's purpose, he is shortly to reign over.

Just at this point Abigail is introduced to us. She is attached, by the closest ties of nature, to one who is prosperous in this world, believes the general false opinion of David, and is a supporter of Saul's government.

Abigail shares Nabal's earthly peace and prosperity, but in heart she has nothing

in common with her foolish, churlish husband. God calls her a woman of good understanding, and this is fully shewn in the fact that, in spite of all that opposed, she was in the current of God's thoughts, and had His mind, estimating persons and actions in the light of divine wisdom.

David, "the man after God's own heart," was given the first place in hers. David, the despised, scorned, runaway servant, as man regarded him, was in her eyes God's anointed king. David, the pursued wanderer, whose life was in hourly jeopardy at the hand of Saul, was, in her esteem, "bound in the bundle of life" with the Lord his God.

Abigail, being thus taught of God, does not blindly follow public opinion. She now looks at everything, not according to appearances, but from God's true standpoint, and so she has a right estimate, and everything is measured by the relation in which it stands to David, God's chosen king. She speaks of Saul, the people's king, merely as "a man" risen up to pursue David.

She recognises the evil and folly of Nabal's attitude towards him, and that he is, in consequence, under the judgment of God.

She counts herself, although a beautiful

and rich woman, and wife of one of the largest land-owners of Israel, but David's handmaid—David, the poor, homeless fugitive! How contrary to what is natural! Nothing but the teaching of God could produce such an attitude of heart!

She seeks two blessings at his hand, *forgiveness* and *remembrance*, and David beautifully answers her in true kingly style. "I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person," says he, and so when, after ten days, God's righteous judgment fell on the wicked Nabal, he put his answer into force, and she who had made such a bold declaration of loyalty is united to him and personally shares his rejection.

After the lapse of a few years David is invested with his royal rights, and then the one who has shared his rejection and sorrow, shares his glory and joy.

Surely all this has a voice to us. David is a distinct type of the Lord Jesus Christ, and perhaps especially so just at this time in his life, when he walked the path of rejection.

Christ, although occupying the highest place in the glory of God, and being the true Man after His own heart, is still the rejected One on earth, and the point for

us is whether we are going on with the course of this world—following public opinion and careless of Christ's claims of love over us—or, on the other hand, whether, like Abigail, we are willing to surrender all and commit ourselves to Him during the time of His rejection, sharing the outside place assigned Him by the world.

Soon will come that wondrous day of display when Christ will come forth in His glory, and then those who have been true to Him in the face of opposition during His rejection will share His triumph as belonging to that chosen company that forms His heavenly bride, and occupies the closest place in His affections.

What a wondrous portion ! Who would not make the important choice and willingly drop their hold of the things that are so soon to pass away, receiving instead the blessings of *forgiveness* and the Lord's loving *remembrance* and also knowing the joy of being "accepted in the beloved" ? (Eph. i. 6.)

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH.

“O THE depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” So exclaimed the Apostle Paul, and we have it beautifully illustrated for us in the Lord’s dealings with this poor woman.

The word of the Lord spoken by His faithful prophet Elijah had come to pass, and the land of Israel and surrounding districts were suffering from the terrible drought which lasted for three and a half years. Meanwhile, whilst famine miseries were rife everywhere, the bold proclaimer of the divine fiat must be provided for, so when Cherith’s babbling brook dries up, God gives him a fresh command, and a strange one it seems: “Arise, get thee to Zarephath . . . and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.” (1 Kings xvii. 9.)

A poor widow woman in time of famine hardly suggests to the human mind a suit-

able person to "sustain" a vigorous man. Yet such are the unsearchable ways of God. He had a deep reason, in His sovereignty, for sending His prophet there, not only to test and strengthen Elijah's faith, but in mercy to take up and bless this widow in her extremity, dwelling as she did in a district outside the pale of earthly blessing, and belonging to a people upon whom God's judgment rested. (See Isa. xxiii. 11, 12.)

Elijah does not argue or reason, but immediately obeys God's command and makes the journey to the little seaside town of Zarephath, and as he approaches the gate his eyes light on his future hostess. She is stooping low over the ground gathering dry sticks to make a fire. Such is her apparent poverty!

Elijah addresses her, craving a drink of water. As she turns to accede to his request, he asks, in addition, for a morsel of bread. This unseals her lips, and the whole touching tale of privation and want is told into the sympathetic ears of the prophet of God.

"*Fear not,*" replies he. How many times have these blessed words of comfort brought renewed hope and fresh life into despairing hearts crushed with sorrow! In this case Elijah leaves her no excuse for

further fear, for he follows up his exhortation with the power of that which abides for ever—God's irrevocable word: "For thus saith the Lord God of Israel." He loses no opportunity of introducing and revealing to her ignorant heart the God whose ways of wisdom and love she was about to prove so practically. Well He knows just where the lack is, and how to touch us in His grace, to draw forth a full confession of our real state.

The widow owns her helplessness in her extremity, and God, in answer, sends her another mouth to fill, but in so doing He makes Himself chargeable for the supply of the needs of the whole household! "The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth."

Beautiful promise, with such depth of meaning to us! Surely the *meal* speaks eloquently of Christ as the bread of life, the sustenance of His people, and the *oil* of God's Holy Spirit making good *to us* all that Christ is *for us*.

Being thus supplied with God's two greatest gifts there is no lack, even though famine exists all around. So the poor widow with her household is satisfied by

God, but she has yet a further lesson to learn.

She is allowed to enjoy God's plenty and the company of His prophet for a full year, and then in His loving wisdom God shews her *how* these divine blessings can come to her. It is a lesson we each have to learn, that death and resurrection lie at the base of all our spiritual blessings.

The widow's son dies, and this probes her deeper still. She has owned her weakness and dire need, now she recognises the frightfulness of *sin* and its consequences, and owns herself a *sinner*. What a necessary confession! The recognition of God's love and care over us in temporal matters, and the wisdom of His ways with us, is not enough, but the death of Christ teaches us, as nothing else can, what sin is in God's sight, and gives us the consciousness of it. Sad and needful as this lesson is, God would not leave us there.

Resurrection follows and assures us of justification: He "was raised again for our justification." (Rom. iv. 25.) Elijah, indued with power from God, raises the boy to life again, and places him, a living child, in his rejoicing mother's arms. So she, in figure, learns the lesson too, and it is no marvel that she owns that the word

of the Lord is truth. The word of the living God has been powerfully and practically fulfilled in her experience, and now it is livingly cherished in her heart as *truth*. May we, in these days of greater light and revelation, in no way come behind this heathen widow in learning these all-important lessons.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA.

FAR away to the province of Sheba, in Southern Arabia, the report of the fame and wisdom of Israel's third king travels, and reaches the ears of its queen. (1 Kings x. 1-13.)

Although a lady of such high rank, her brow is often furrowed by puzzling over the difficulties, perplexities and unsolved problems that face her on all sides.

Only a report, but it arrives at an opportune moment and sets the queen's heart and feet in motion. Here is an opportunity for the solving of her many "hard questions," and she embraces it. In her eagerness to reach Solomon and prove his wisdom for herself, the long desert journey, with all its discomforts, presents no hindrance to her, and, with a present of gold, precious stones and costly spices, a worthy offering in her estimation for so great a personage, she and her attendants make the journey.

The anticipated moment arrives at last,

and she finds herself in the presence of the one whose fame had reached her in that far-off land, and to him she unburdens her difficulties, communing with him of all that was in her heart. Was Solomon equal to the occasion? Was there *any* tangle he could not unravel, or *one* knotty question he could not solve? Did his wisdom fail him when put to such a test? Let scripture answer: "And Solomon told her all her questions: and there was nothing hid from Solomon which he told her not." (2 Chron. ix. 2.)

Everything, too, around spoke of his greatness and wisdom; even the apparel and bearing of his servants and attendants manifested forth his glory, and she is not blind to all this. In fact, it has such an overwhelming effect upon her that, although a queen, she sinks into insignificance in the presence of such a revelation of glory, and "there was no more spirit in her." She owns, in humbleness, that it was a true report that she had heard—not overstated or too highly coloured, as most reports are. Still, she did not really *believe* it, until, being in his very presence, it was made real to her vision. She came, she saw, and was conquered. No marvel that she exclaims: "Behold, the one half

of the greatness of thy wisdom was not told me : for thou exceedest the fame that I heard." How eloquently scripture speaks ! Cannot we see something deeper in this beautiful, divinely-drawn picture than appears on the surface ?

No doubt primarily it depicts the coming wonderful day of Christ's display, when "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth" ; when *the monarchs of Sheba* shall offer gifts and *the gold of Sheba* shall be given Him ; when *all* nations shall serve Him and call Him blessed. (Psa. lxxii. 8, 10, 15, 11, 17.) However, we can also give it a more present and personal application. Can we trace anything in our little history that at all corresponds ? Have not we, like the Queen of Sheba, heard a very distinct report of the One who is King of kings and Lord of lords, and perhaps like her at first we do not fully believe it, or we underrate its significance ? Have not we burdens and difficulties that no earthly friend can relieve us of ? If so, may the divinely-given "report" set *our* hearts in motion towards the true Solomon, and may we allow no obstacle to keep us from coming into personal touch with Him. He could say

when on earth, referring to this very incident, "The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here." (Luke xi. 31.) If the Solomon of old could satisfactorily answer all her questions and solve all her difficulties, rest assured that the "greater than Solomon" is perfectly *able*, and more, is *longing* to set every heart at rest which is unburdened in His presence. There self-esteem and pride have no place, but the Lord Himself and His glory fills the vision of the soul, and the heart is captivated and conquered. As we thus begin to learn His inestimable worth the language of our hearts will be, "Thou exceedest the fame" that we heard. This must always be the result of coming to the Lord Jesus Christ and having personal dealings with Him.

One thing more, Solomon was not content that she should *witness* his wealth and greatness; she must participate in the blessings of it too, and so he gave her:—

(1) "*Whatsoever she asked.*" Wonderfully gracious, but the gift is limited to her consciousness of need!

(2) "*All her desire.*" Now he goes beyond her *requests* merely, and satisfies her heart's unuttered longings. Even this does not content him, and so he gives her

(3) "*Of his royal bounty.*" He does not now consider her capacity to receive, but his own resources from which he draws. Wonderful picture of the attitude of the heart of Christ to all who come to Him in need !

Dear reader, would you not like to receive at His hand whatsoever you seek, all you desire, and increasingly learn the unlimited supply and unfailing character of *His royal bounty* ?

CHAPTER XXX.

THE PROPHET'S SON'S WIDOW.

A WIDOW indeed! No one could dispute that point. Her husband, a God-fearing man and a prophet's son, was dead; in addition, straitened circumstances and extreme poverty had resulted in debt, and now the crisis of her misery had come, for her creditor arrives to demand all she held dear—her two sons—to be bondmen. This, although entirely contrary to God's law, as we see by referring to Leviticus xxv. 39, 40, is nevertheless a cruel fact, for she says, "The creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen" (2 Kings iv. 1), and in this supreme moment of grief she turns to Elisha, God's prophet, for succour, and without making any request she just pours out her tale of woe, thus relieving her overcharged heart. Are we surprised that such a sorrow should have overtaken her?

She was a privileged person, being linked by nature's strongest tie to one who belonged to the most enlightened company

then on earth, those to whom God could make His mind known, and yet *that* could not protect her from bereavement, and the trials of the pathway that are common to all mankind. But in it all she was to learn personally the love and power of the risen One, to whom she now confides her sorrows.

She is answered by two questions, and all-important questions they are. Elisha asks, "What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house?" She does not answer the first question. Perhaps Elisha anticipates this by immediately adding the second.

Does he see that she has reached the point when she distrusts her own judgment and has full confidence in his plans for her? At any rate, it reminds me of a beautiful rendering of a well-known verse: "Commit the care of thy way unto Jehovah, and he shall plan it for thee." (Psa. xxxvii. 5.) Do we know the *test* of committing the care of our way into the Lord's all-wise, all-loving hands, and the *joy* of seeing Him plan each detail of what appears to us a complex pathway? It is a very real thing in the lives of many of the Lord's dear people; and you, dear reader, may know it too.

Elisha's second question is very searching,

"Tell me, what hast thou in the house?" As we have noticed previously, God in His dealings always goes to the root of the matter. The widow is responsible for her house, she has control there. Now the question is, is there anything in the house that God can use, anything that He can work upon for blessing? Yes, small and insignificant as it may seem naturally, it *is* there, that one pot of oil, and she is conscious of it.

Oil, repeatedly in scripture, is a type of God's Holy Spirit, so, though the capacity is small, she possesses the real thing. There is what is of Himself, and she is to prove the truth of that scripture, important enough in God's estimation to be stated five times in the gospels: "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance." (Matt. xiii. 12.)

If *we* were to have the same question put to us, could we truthfully answer as the widow did? What could we say to God's tender "*Tell me*"? What report could we give Him of what He holds us responsible for?

In obedience to the prophet's command she increases her receiving capacity by filling her house with empty vessels. The words, "borrow not a few," or "scant not,"

correspond in meaning to the expression in the previous chapter (ver. 16), "Make this valley full of ditches."

What an assemblage of pots of all sizes, shapes, colours and patterns probably, but in the essential thing they resembled one another—they were all empty! Empty, to be divinely filled! They would be absolutely useless to God if full of various earthly things. And now, in the privacy of their own house, behind the shut door—shut to all disturbing outside elements, but not to God and His power—the widow and her two sons learn practically how God can multiply and increase what is of Himself. There is no public display, but in secret they are to learn "the giving God," and there can be no emptiness when He is known. The oil increases all the time there is capacity to receive it. Every pot is filled to the brim, and this wondrous gift not only delivers her sons from bondage, and clears her of debt, but becomes the maintenance of her life and that of her boys. "Live thou and thy children of the rest" were the prophet's words, and they amounted to a divine command. Not only were they in the possession of what would support life, but they were to make daily use of it. Cannot

we each draw very needful lessons from this beautiful account? Further comment is needless, but in love I commend each dear reader to "the giving God" to prove Him in this capacity individually.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE RICH SHUNAMMITE.

TWICE GIVEN.

DAILY she had noticed his manly form pass the house, and, prompted by the natural hospitality of her race, she had felt constrained to ask him in to partake of some refreshment. This was the Shunammite's first introduction to God's prophet Elisha, although she did not then recognise him as such. But these visits "to eat bread" soon became a constant thing, and Elisha's behaviour, manner and conversation speak eloquently, and convince her that he is no ordinary person but "an holy man of God." (2 Kings iv. 9.)

Now she has made this discovery her heart goes out to him still further, and she is not satisfied until, with her husband's consent, a small room is prepared for his exclusive use. Not a very luxuriously furnished apartment certainly, but there was all that was necessary for his few wants, namely, a bed—rest; a table—refreshment;

a stool—ease; a candlestick—light. Elisha thoroughly appreciates her thought and care of him, and he is anxious not to remain in her debt, so Gehazi is commissioned to summon his hostess.

In answer to the prophet's call she appears, and modestly stands in the doorway. He then suggests that as an acknowledgment of her thoughtfulness for his comfort, she should be recommended at court, or introduced to those in power, but she simply replies, with the unobtrusiveness that seems to be characteristic of this "great woman," "I dwell among mine own people." (Ver. 13.)

She had no ambition for publicity of any sort, but was quite content to live her happy, secluded life where God had placed her, with the prophet of God as her friend and visitor.

May we not draw a lesson for our own hearts from her reply? Many of us have been brought up in christian homes with the influence of God's people all around us. Are we content with our happy lot? or do we shew unrest, and a longing for worldly companionship, or worldly ambition or recognition in some form or other? Oh, let us beware! These desires are not of God, and if persisted in must lead to disaster. Instead, we ought to lift our

hearts in thankfulness to God, who has thus blessed us and hedged us in for our soul's prosperity. He wants us for Himself, and we cannot enjoy Christ and His things and the world too.

The Lord respects the Shunammite's choice, and from His hand, through Elisha, she receives the promise of an unlooked-for blessing that would greatly add to the joy of her chosen quiet life. In due time a little son is born, and for a few years she uninterruptedly enjoys the pleasures of motherhood.

Had she allowed her darling to become an idol? Being engrossed in the *gift* had she forgotten the *Giver*? Be that as it may, God, in His wisdom, finds it necessary to remind her afresh that life is His gift, that He is supreme, and in spite of appearances does all things well. He takes that precious little life and the child dies. She gives way to no uncontrolled demonstrations of grief, but, laying the lifeless little form on the prophet's bed and closing the door, she hastens to find the only one she feels can truly sympathise and help her in her sorrow.

She goes direct to Elisha, the man who, in type, had gone through death himself, and who had been God's messenger of life

to her. On her arrival at mount Carmel, Elisha's keen observation notices her sorrowful mien, and he immediately questions, "Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child?" and with quiet deliberation she replies, "It is well."

Astounding answer, only possible to faith! Surely already she is learning her God-set lesson. It makes one long to be as apt a scholar, that our lives might always bear witness to the rest of soul arising from the really accepted fact that all our God does is absolutely well.

A few reproachful feelings mingle with the sorrow in the mother's heart, but her confidence in God's wisdom is unwavering. Gehazi is sent to the abode of death, but the sorrow-stricken parent clings to Elisha. Gehazi does not satisfy her. It is only in the company of the risen one that she can find solace in the sorrow death brings.

"As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee," exclaims she, and Elisha immediately follows her home.

How vividly must her words have recalled another scene to his mind when, on that memorable last walk with his beloved master Elijah, he expressed the depth of his feelings in identical language!

Behind the closed door of his little chamber, shut in with the dead child, Elisha earnestly prays to Jehovah, then he stretches himself upon the lifeless body, thus, I think, identifying himself with the child *in death*.

This action is repeated in every particular, after which the child shews unmistakable signs of life. In this repetition, I think, he identifies the child with him *in resurrection*. Wonderful hidden truths! May the Lord enable us to apply them for ourselves, and let the sweetness of them sink into our hearts.

The Shunammite is called, and she does not now stand in the doorway as previously. She has learned more of Elisha since then, and emboldened by love she comes "in unto him" to receive her dear one back again in life—twice given her by God.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SHUNAMMITE.

RESTITUTION.

ABOUT four years later than the incidents recorded in our last chapter, Jehovah "called for a famine upon the land" (Psa. cv. 16), to remind His wayward people and their unprincipled king Jehoram by means of seven years' terrible stress and affliction, that He was still jealous of the nation's loyalty and affection, and, in righteousness, must visit their backsliding and idolatry.

But in the midst of judgment it is always God's delight to remember mercy; thus at the very commencement of the dreadful dearth He sends a direct message to the Shunammite through Elisha: "Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn: for the Lord hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years." (2 Kings viii. 1.)

There was nothing wonderful or miracu-

lous about this way of escape selected by God for this true woman and those dependent upon her, but she recognises it as a positive command and immediately acts upon it. This made the distinction between herself and probably thousands of others, who in due course left their homes by choice to avoid the terrors of want and privation. Her pilgrimage was undertaken at God's special direction, and in the knowledge that it was ordered for her in God's providence, and thus she felt sure of His guidance and support whatever sorrows or difficulties might cross her path.

This emigration must have been a severe trial to one who considered it such a privilege and pleasure to dwell among her own people, and we can judge that the seven years spent in the land of the heathen Philistines, direct enemies of the Lord and His people, were not the happiest of her life. No doubt being surrounded by idolaters made her rely more upon the God she had learned in resurrection—"the living God"—and thus she was enabled to wait patiently the termination of the seven years' exile.

It came at last, and Israel's misery and mourning were at an end. Good would it have been if they had benefited more by

the discipline. The fugitive families were now free to return to the land of their fathers. "Good-bye" is readily said to their temporary place of abode, and the Shunammite and her household journey home again. How she must have anticipated this home-coming, little dreaming of the disappointment that awaited her.

Arriving at length at the dearly-loved inheritance, what was her surprise and dismay to find it all in the hand of strangers. Here is a test of faith! Surely she had committed all that she left behind to God's care, confident that He would protect it during her enforced absence, and now it looked as if the worst had been allowed to happen, for her home and land had been taken over by the crown, and others placed there by the order of the unscrupulous Jehoram. But she is to prove further what God can do for her. She is a woman of prompt action, as we have seen on a previous occasion, and does not now give way to helpless grief. Instead, with her son as her companion, she immediately makes the journey from Shunem to Samaria, to plead in person to the king for her home and lands.

Quite unknown to her, God in His watchful love goes before her on that

journey to the palace, smoothing all difficulties, and preparing the heart of the monarch to receive her request.

People speak of "coincidences," but the child of God can often see in these the hand of the Lord, divinely arranging on his behalf, and so it was in this case.

Gehazi, the former servant of Elisha, is at court. He may have been one of the four lepers who brought the glad tidings of the Syrians' flight into poor, starving Samaria, and thus the king tolerated him at the palace in spite of his leprosy, but this we are not told.

The fact remains that Gehazi is in the king's presence at the very time that the Shunammite and her son reach the capital, and wend their way to the palace. Also the king suddenly becomes possessed with a desire to have Elisha's miracles and great deeds recounted to him by Gehazi, who readily acquiesces to the monarch's wishes. But oh, the emptiness and sorrow of it! What a low standpoint Gehazi is taking! what a false position he is trying to fill! Once he was with Elisha, distinctly linked with him in upholding the testimony of Jehovah and delivering His messages from time to time to the nation. Now, to pander to an ungodly king's

curiosity, he tells of the things that displayed God's power and love, but in which he no longer had any share or interest. What a solemn warning to those who full well know God's truth in the head, and can talk about it, but have not received it in power in the heart.

Just at the moment that Gehazi is relating how Elisha raised the Shunammite's son to life, the woman and boy are ushered into the king's presence. Gehazi's astonished gaze recognises them, and he exclaims, "My lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life." The king appeals to the Shunammite for a confirmation of Gehazi's statement, and when she assures him of its truth, his interest in her is awakened, and he immediately orders that not only shall a full restitution be made of all her property, but also that the worth of its produce during the time of her absence should be given her. An officer was also commissioned to see the king's order carried out.

How wonderfully God works for the simplest soul that trusts Him! The hearts of the greatest monarchs are in His hand, and are moved to carry out His purposes when He so wills it.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

GOD'S VIRTUOUS WOMAN.

“WHO can find a virtuous woman?
for her price is far above rubies.”
(Prov. xxxi. 10.)

God asks the question, putting it in the mouth of a king, who remembers and repeats the utterances taught him by his mother. These detail for us the characteristic marks of a woman whom God calls “virtuous,” a little practical consideration of which might help us, especially those of our readers who are leaving girlhood behind and are growing into womanhood.

Which of us would not like to be numbered amongst God's virtuous women, who have to be sought, but when found are worth the seeking, for their price is far above costly precious stones?

This is the only mention of King Lemuel; and his name, we are told, means “unto God.” From the interpretation of his name and the good advice he receives

(vers. 3-9), one can but feel certain that he possessed the priceless blessing of a God-fearing mother. From birth she had dedicated him to God, and later on warns him against the temptations that especially beset those in his exalted position.

We are merely told his name, and that he was a king, and then he sinks into insignificance, while the "weighty words"—the lessons he had learned of his mother, surely a virtuous woman herself, at least in her son's estimation—are faithfully recorded, preserved by God, and handed down the ages, so that we at this present time may learn thereby.

It is all beautifully simple and practical, and we have the key to her many good qualities in verse 30, where the highest touch is given—she is "a woman that feareth the Lord."

This "fear of the Lord" gives her a right sense of duty, and a good influence over those with whom she comes in contact, on the one hand, and safeguards her against evil influences and sins such as idleness, carelessness and selfishness on the other. She has the Lord before her and her life is marked by it. Are our lives so marked, dear reader? It is the daily life that reflects the state of the soul, and

speaks faithfully of its condition ; and, if the Lord has His place in the heart, the life, simple and very ordinary as it may seem at times, must testify to the fact and bring Him glory.

Let us notice how it practically affects the life of this woman, whom God so honours as to designate “virtuous.”

The woman, divinely sketched for us here, is a wife and a mother—the central figure of a household, with many dependent upon her for their well-being and comfort ; but surely the principles apply to all women, even though their circumstances may not be identical.

In verses 11 and 12 we are shewn her attitude towards her husband. She makes his interests her constant consideration, ministering to his every need and wish, and succeeds so well that she gains his unbounded confidence, for his heart “doth safely trust in her ; and he is so satisfied with her loving attentions that he has no need to go further for gain or satisfaction.

Most, if not all of us, have a loved one dependent on us for some little daily comfort or attention. Is it always lovingly, ungrudgingly, uncomplainingly and patiently given ? It is well to remember the manner in which the tiniest action or duty is per-

formed always enhances its value or detracts from it. How watchful we need to be!

Then she "worketh willingly with her hands." (Ver. 13.) It is within the power of all of us to be industrious. God notices willing, nimble, useful fingers.

She is also provident (ver. 14), and takes care that she has a wide sphere whence nourishment for herself and her household can be obtained. As belonging to Christ we have unlimited resources of nourishment whence we may draw our spiritual food. May we use them increasingly!

She is an early riser, too (ver. 15), and God notices even *that*. Such a small, homely detail, is it not? but not an unimportant one. If we allow sufficient time to start the day with the Lord and without hurry, we certainly shall be gainers.

Verse 17 tells us that "she girdeth her loins with strength." How much we need spiritual strength to keep self in control each day. Then, again, how can we fulfil the exhortation to "strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees" of others (Isa. xxxv. 3) unless we have been strengthened ourselves? We need time to seek this at the Lord's hand, do we not? "Wait on the Lord . . . and he

shall strengthen thine heart." (Psa. xxvii. 14.)

In verse 18 she tests her merchandise to see if it is good. We are bidden to "prove all things; hold fast that which is good." (1 Thess. v. 21.)

The poor and needy know her well, and are the recipients of her bounty and industry. In our little measure we may be like her in this respect too. As well as the poor temporally, there are the spiritually poor, and we often have opportunities of ministering to both. May we be more ready to use them.

With careful forethought she provides her household with "double garments" (see margin) as proof against the cold of winter. We are told her clothing in verse 22, "silk and purple," and in verse 25 we have their moral meaning given us, "strength and honour are her clothing." Peter suggests a set of spiritual "double garments" that those who seek to follow Christ do well to wear, "a meek and quiet spirit" (see 1 Peter iii. 3, 4), and "humility" (see 1 Peter v. 5), which God considers "of great price."

From her lips flow kindness and wisdom, and she looks well to the ways of her household. She realises her responsibility

with regard to the "ways" of those under her care and authority, and though well understanding the "law of kindness" and using it, she exercises wisdom too, and allows nothing that should not be in a God-fearing, well-ordered household. (See vers. 26, 27.)

Are we surprised to read at the close that her children bless her, her husband and her own works praise her, all honour her, and, crowning everything, she has God's unreserved commendation, "Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all"?

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ELISABETH.

LUKE in chapter i. of his gospel introduces us to the first of several women whom God mentions by name in this book. A new dispensation—God's dispensation of grace—is to begin, "the fulness of the time was come" (Gal. iv. 4), and God is about to interpose in the most marvellous way in this world's history.

Here, however, as if to throw the approaching new era into a strong light by vivid contrast, we find ourselves surrounded by the old ritual, and in the company of a priestly couple. Elisabeth was of the daughters of Aaron, and her husband, Zacharias, a priest of the order of Abia or Abijah. Both had led blameless lives as regards the requirements of the law, being righteous in God's sight, and both were now advanced in years. How God notices a consistent walk! This godly couple walked in the light of what had already been revealed, and it is to such

that further revelation can be made, and such, too, God can use in the working out of His will. What an honour, yet within the reach of all His people !

God is about to "send forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law." (Gal. iv. 4, 5.) But although coming in such lowly guise, He is the true Messiah, Israel's rightful King, as well as the appointed future Ruler of God's vast universe.

As such He needs a forerunner and herald, one who will go before Him "in the spirit and power of Elias," to turn the hearts of many in Israel to the Lord their God, and "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." God chooses Elisabeth and her husband as the recipients of this special mark of His favour ; and despite their age they were to be the parents of Christ's forerunner.

A cloud had dimmed the "joy and gladness" of their devoted lives. They were childless, and earnest prayer had been offered that this "reproach" might be removed. But all these years no communication from God had broken the silence, and hope had wellnigh expired. When nature fails, it is often the time when God chooses to act. There is so

much He has to wean His people from before they are willing to be cast entirely upon His loving wisdom and infinite power. Elisabeth and Zacharias were to have no ordinary child, and doubtless this period of waiting upon, and for, the Lord was the necessary education.

It was a memorable time for Zacharias. According to lot it had come round to his turn to burn incense in the holy place at the time of the morning and evening sacrifice. It was the most coveted of priestly functions, and if what historians tell us is true, that the twenty-four courses (see 1 Chron. xxiv.) numbered about twenty thousand priests at this time, it would be impossible for this honoured duty to fall to the lot of a priest more than *once* in his life time. Incense is a symbol of prayer and intercession, and is much associated with it in scripture. (Compare Psa. cxli. 2 ; Rev. v. 8 ; viii. 3, 4.)

Here also while Zacharias, clad in spotless linen and with unshod feet, is fulfilling his holy office, the people in the court without are awaiting his return in silent prayer. Zacharias himself, too, is no exception, for Gabriel's statement implies that he was making a definite petition to God ; and in virtue of the sacrifice then

being offered, and the odour of the incense that rose as a sweet savour to God (all a beautiful type of Christ's offering), the angelic messenger could say, "Fear not, Zacharias : for thy prayer is heard." What encouragement ! the dawn of God's gospel day ushered in with the reassuring utterance, "Fear not" !

The birth of John is then promised, but the joy that this announcement brings is clouded by Zacharias' unbelief and consequent temporary dumbness. Distrust of God always brings sadness, and is so often the cause of the lack of soul-rest and happiness among God's people.

It must have been a great trial to Elisabeth not to hear her husband's voice all those months, but it doubtless taught her a needful lesson, as there seems special import in her words of welcome to Mary upon her visit to her later, "Blessed is she that *believed* : for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord."

We are told, too, that on this occasion Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost ; and surely it was in the spirit of prophecy that she uttered those wonderful words when she called Mary "the mother of my Lord." Her faith was strong, and she

appropriated the coming Christ as *her Lord*. Now that He *has* come and His great work is an accomplished fact, have we so owned Him, dear reader?

In due time God's promise had its fulfilment, and John (the grace of Jehovah) is born, and the happy parents, with their relations and neighbours, rejoice at the Lord's great mercy. It is beautiful to think that the first word recorded as *written* in the gospel dispensation means "the grace of Jehovah." It is in striking contrast to the last written word of the Old Testament, which is "curse." (See Mal. iv. 6.)

Eight days later, at the circumcision of the child, Zacharias, as his name implies, is again *remembered of Jehovah*. His speech is restored, and with a loosed tongue and a joyful heart he praises God. How blessed if our hearts have been stirred and our tongues too have been loosed to sing His praises!

CHAPTER XXXV.

MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS.

“**M**Y soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.” (Luke i. 46, 47.) Thus begins the beautiful song of praise that burst from the lips of a young maiden of Nazareth under very exceptional circumstances.

She had been the recipient of a wonderful, divine communication brought straight from God Himself by the angel Gabriel. She, a lowly virgin, had been addressed by her heavenly visitor as “highly favoured” and “blessed . . . among women.” Her nervous anxiety caused by this unusual visit had been set at rest by his comforting “Fear not, Mary,” and then she meekly listened to the wonderful revelation, “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee : therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.”

Marvellous and personal as the revelation was, she accepted it in faith and answered it in a spirit of quiet subjection, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." Did Mary fully realise at once the import of this weighty message?—that she was to become in a miraculous way, by the power of the Holy Ghost, the honoured mother of the long-looked-for Messiah of the Jews—Jesus the Saviour. Gabriel had told her about her aged cousin Elisabeth, and reminded her that "with God nothing is impossible."

The similarity of the angel's mission to each formed a bond of attraction and fellowship between them, and Mary felt impelled to travel the seventy miles between Nazareth and the hill country of Hebron to visit her relative. Here in the rest and seclusion of the priest's home, with the companionship of Elisabeth, who could fully understand and sympathise, she spent three quiet months.

It was upon her arrival here, too, the first greetings over, that Mary voiced her feelings in the beautiful song with which we started. She had a rejoicing spirit, not brought about by earthly circumstances, for they must have been especially trying

(see Matt. i. 19), but her soul's vision was filled with the Lord—God her Saviour—whom she magnified and exalted. Occupied with Him she fully realised then, if she had not before, the depth of the Lord's dealings with her, and thus beautifully and simply expressed it, "He that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name." Her faith in God is very evident here, and she continued to speak of *His mercy*, always active for those that fear Him—*His strength* exerted in righteousness in the earth, and *His help*, which was at the disposal of His favoured people. (Vers. 50-54.)

* * * *

Six months have passed away and Joseph has followed the angelic injunction, and taken his betrothed wife Mary under his protection, and together they have travelled from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be enrolled in the census according to the decree of Cæsar Augustus.

A deeper reason no doubt lay behind. Micah's beautiful prophecy was about to be fulfilled, "Thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel ;

whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." (Micah v. 2.) While Mary was there, sheltering in a stable belonging to an overcrowded inn, this wonderful "Ruler" prophesied of above—the sent One of God—was born.

With her own hands, as in her poverty she probably had none to help her, she wrapped her precious Babe in the customary swathes of linen, and cradled Him in a manger. There was "*no room*" for God's Christ, Israel's true King, in this world. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." (John i. 11.) But though He was unrecognised by men, angelic hosts heralded His advent and proclaimed to some lowly shepherds keeping watch over their flocks during the darkness of night God's "good tidings of great joy." "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

When the heavenly messengers had left they agreed to go immediately to see that which the Lord had made known to them, so they were the first visitors received by Mary to see her holy Child. Convinced of the truth of all they saw they spread abroad the "good tidings," so that they who heard wondered at what the shep-

herds told them. Mary, on the contrary, “kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.” (Luke 2. 19.)

Wonderful truths to keep and ponder, and how they must have strengthened her faith and rejoicing in God her Saviour!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS (*continued.*)

“**T**HINK not that I am come to destroy the law . . . I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.” (Matt. v. 17.) Thus spake the Lord at the beginning of His public ministry, the truth of which is wonderfully exemplified in Luke ii. 21 and Matthew ii.

Circumcision was the oldest institution of God for His chosen earthly people. It was an outward sign that they belonged to Him, a covenant-keeping God, who told Abraham, the father of the nation, “It shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and thee”; and when insisting that every man-child in all his generations “must needs be circumcised,” added “and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.” (See Gen. xvii. 3-13.) Here in the person of this wondrous Babe was the “Yea and Amen” of all God’s purposes and covenants; and although Mary perhaps hardly realised the full mean-

ing of this, eight days after His birth she had the rite enacted for Him. On that occasion His precious, peerless name of Jesus was made public—God a Saviour—the “name above every name”—the name dearly loved by all who have practically known its efficacy, and the name to which in a future day God has decreed that “every knee shall bow.” Have *you* bowed to it now in God’s day of grace, dear reader?

With the coming into this scene of this precious Saviour, God’s day of grace began, and it was not to be limited to the *Jews*. Away in the far east God spoke to some learned astronomers by the outshining in the heavens of a wonderful star. Surely it was by divine revelation that they rightly interpreted its appearance to indicate that a king was born to the nation of the Jews, and that this wondrous Potentate, though yet a Babe, claimed their allegiance and worship.

Accordingly the lengthy desert journey was undertaken, and representatives of the *Gentile* nations travelled westward to do Him homage. They naturally went straight to Jerusalem and inquired at Herod’s palace, but there nothing was known of His advent. Man could not greatly help

them in their quest. God, however, did not fail them, and on leaving Herod's presence they saw the same beautiful star in the sky that they had first seen in their distant home, ready to guide them to the One they sought. They heartily welcomed it and "rejoiced with exceeding joy."

The earnestness of these "wise men of the east," who knew so little of Him whom they sought, puts us to shame, to whom so much more has been revealed. Immediately they started forward, following the onward movement of their heavenly guide, until they reached the house at Bethlehem over which it remained stationary. Without hesitation they entered, and found Mary and the young Child, and bowing low before Him in adoration "they worshipped him."

Note, dear reader, how very definite scripture is. There is not the slightest suggestion that they worshipped Mary or made much of her, neither had she a single desire to be thus made prominent. She and they had been divinely taught, and together they recognised in this little child the One who alone had the right to be pre-eminent.

With eager fingers they unfastened their treasure-bags, and offered Him their costly

gifts—"gold, frankincense and myrrh," presents worthy of a king's acceptance. What a wonderful provision of God for the needs of His beloved Son when in the guise of a helpless infant in this scene.

To the human mind it is remarkable that these men were not deterred or stumbled by the lowliness and poverty of the carpenter's humble abode; but they had spiritual discernment to recognise the *born King* in spite of His mean surroundings. Earthly monarchs succeed to the throne of their fathers or predecessors; but here was something unique—Christ, God's sent One, was born a King, though then, as now, disowned and rejected by the masses. Our travellers were told by God in a dream to return direct to their country by another route, and thus they neglected to give Herod the information he requested—a request prompted only by his evil, murderous intentions.

Man might rage, but God's protecting hand was over that family, and Joseph was told by the angel of the Lord in a dream to take the young Child and Mary and to flee into Egypt, there to stay until Herod's death, about which the angel promised to bring him word.

How useful now were the handsome gifts

of the wise men ! God sent them the means of executing His will before He made that will known to them ; and this is still often His way with His people in their circumstances. Oh ! what a God is ours. May we daily drink more and more deeply into His loving-kindness, which must draw forth increasing praise from our hearts.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS (*continued*).

HERE in the latter part of Luke ii. we have two temple scenes, with both of which Mary is connected. Rather more than a month had elapsed since the holy Babe was born, and she brings Him to Jerusalem to the temple to present Him to Jehovah, and to offer the sacrifice required by the Levitical law for her purifying.

Here is another mark of her extreme poverty, in that she takes advantage of the provision made by Jehovah, should the offerer be too poor to purchase a lamb, and she brings two turtle doves or two young pigeons in its place. What wonderful condescension when we think that this, the cheapest of all offerings, was made when He who was the Creator and Upholder of the universe, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the eternal Son, was in incarnation as a babe presented to God His Father.

Yet this offering, humble as it was, prefigured and pointed forward to the two-fold aspect of the death of Christ: one of the pigeons was offered as a burnt offering and the other as a sin offering. (See Lev. xii. 8.)

This was, then, the first appearance of the Lord in His temple (the Lord whom the remnant were seeking, see Mal. iii. 1), and there were a few waiting, seeking ones whose hearts were immediately attracted to Him. The aged Simeon was waiting for the coming Messiah, whom he beautifully calls "the consolation of Israel," or in other words, Israel's Comforter. It may be that the Lord Himself had this appellation in view when at the close of His ministry, in speaking of the Holy Ghost, He uses the expression "another comforter." Simeon's faith had laid hold of God's personal revelation to him, "that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ."

No marvel that, led by the Holy Ghost, he comes into the temple at this moment and recognises in the Babe in Mary's arms God's sent One. He takes the infant Jesus into his arms, and his overflowing heart finds its outlet in a burst of praise and prophecy, and Mary stands by mar-

velling at the inspired words that ring in her ears about her child.

But why marvel? Has she so soon forgotten the time when she could exclaim, "My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour"? Prompted by the Holy Spirit, Simeon had just uttered, "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation." Is she so out of touch that she does not recognise the same divine teaching? Does no kindred feeling awaken within her heart? "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," but Mary only marvels.

Simeon then personally addresses her, telling her how God's sent One will be rejected by the nation, how He will be "a sign which shall be spoken against," and the Revealer of "the thoughts of many hearts," and then he adds a more personal prophecy still, "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also." How true was its fulfilment when, thirty-three years afterwards, she stood by the cross!

* * * *

It was the feast of the passover twelve years later, and according to the custom Mary and Joseph go up to Jerusalem, taking the child Jesus with them. When the caravan to which they were attached started for home, unknown to His parents

Jesus stayed behind. Although a child, He was on wondrous business bent—His Father's—and He seeks His sanctuary. It is here after three days' search that His anxious parents find Him, sitting among, listening to, and asking questions of the doctors and teachers of God's law. Mary is amazed, and chides Him with a very natural rebuke: "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." Little do they comprehend His answer. "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"

"Wist ye not?" Ah, how the Lord's simple question exposed how little spiritual intelligence Mary really possessed! No, she did *not* know, though she should have known. She failed to grasp who He really was—"God manifest in flesh"—and her amazement and ignorant rebuke just exposed her poor human nature and shewed that she as yet understood Him not, nor His mission.

After this, how beautiful to read that He went down to Nazareth and was subject to His parents. And Mary, as was her wont, "kept all these sayings in her heart." In this, surely, we do well to follow her example.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS (*continued*).

THE scene before us in John ii. is a marriage feast, and Mary is present in what appears some responsible position.

Jesus and His disciples are among the guests at this joyous festival. But how short-lived mere earthly happiness is ! They run out of wine—that which speaks of the joys and merriment of earth. (See *Psa. civ. 15.*) And no wonder. Had they not in their midst the only One who could let them into the secret of lasting joy and they knew it not ? He was the only One, too, who had the power to usher in the time of Israel's peace and prosperity as a nation (yet to come), when, owning Him at last as their Messiah, they yield Him their long-withheld allegiance and drink into earth's deepest joys under His beneficent rule.

But that time of display and rejoicing was not yet, as the Lord Himself said to

Mary, when she came to Him to tell Him of the need, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come." Nevertheless there should be a "sign" for those who had eyes to see and ears to hear, and so He graciously exerts His divine power and makes it manifest. Mary, although losing sight of the deep truth underlying this manifestation, is confident of His miraculous power, and says to the servants, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do."

Following out the Lord's injunction, the large stone water-pots, used for the ceremonial purifying, are filled to the brim with water, which speaks of death. (Compare Psa. lxix. 12, 14, 15 and Psa. cxxiv. 4, 5.) It is then poured out and taken to the governor of the feast, who pronounced it good wine and a great improvement on the previous supply. Could anything but what was absolutely good come from such hands? Oh! that they had had eyes to see and hearts to understand what it all meant.

* * * *

Mark iii. 31-35. The scribes and Pharisees have been blasphemously attributing the Lord's acts of power and grace to the energies of Satan, and gently and yet with

quiet dignity He reduced their own scathing remarks to utter folly.

But in a near circle around Him sat, restfully, and as learners, His disciples and a number of others listening to His words of love and power. (See also Matt. xii. 46; Luke viii. 19.) Mary, however, is not among the number. She has deep sorrow yet to pass through before she identifies herself with His disciples.

So we find her "standing without" when she might have been "sitting within" the circle of blessing. And what a spiritual loser she is! There, in the outside place, with her sons, she hears what the cold world's opinion of Him is, and, probably swayed by it, and her natural love for the Object of its taunts, she calls to Him, and failing to reach Him on account of the crowd, sends a message that they desire to speak with Him. Here is the opportunity for the unfolding of a marvellous revelation, the establishment of new, divine relationships. Let us linger over the wonderful words of the Lord's reply, "Who is my mother, or my brethren?" And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my

sister, and mother." Who would not envy the place of the restful learners at His feet, for such are doing the will of God !

* * * *

John xix. 25-27. The moment of Mary's supreme sorrow had come, and she stood in dumb agony at the cross of Jesus.

What her soul passed through at such a terrible moment is veiled ; but we know that the aged Simeon's prophecy was fulfilled and the sword was indeed piercing her soul. The Lord in His tender love and compassion saw her there in her anguish and desolation, and commended her to the care and protection of the loved disciple John who was standing near, "and from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home."

* * * *

Acts i. 12-14. An upper room in Jerusalem, and those favoured few who had seen the Lord's ascension into glory—His sufferings over for ever—returned to it with the angel's wonderful and reassuring message, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

In this room the apostles had taken up

their abode, awaiting that “promise of the Father,” and with them are the brethren of Jesus and certain women, one of whom is mentioned by name—“Mary the mother of Jesus.” Her soul has found a resting-place in the assembly, and she is a true disciple at last.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ANNA.

HOW truly and how vividly does Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets, depict Israel's increasingly deplorable state of departure from God, in their impious arguments and their boastful pride.

They dare to argue every point of the gentle, patient reasoning of the Lord through His prophet, and then boldly state in defiance of His claims, "It is vain to serve God," vauntingly adding, "And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered." (See Mal. iii. 14, 15.) To such depths had God's favoured people sunk when "the Lord's Christ" appeared among them. No marvel that they had no eyes to recognise Him. "Then," adds the prophet—just at that time of terrible failure—"they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him for

them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels." What a contrast! The nation had irrevocably gone its own way and God could no longer find any pleasure in it, or secure any response of affection from it; but hidden away in all this sad declension He had His eye on a tiny remnant who still—though in much feebleness—"feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name." He still held their hearts' allegiance and formed the subject of their thoughts; and this wonderful divine link bound them together in common interest and love, so that they "spake often one to another."

In Luke ii. 36-38 we are introduced to one of this little company, the aged Anna, a widow and a prophetess. She evidently deeply felt the misery and declension of the nation, for she "departed not from the temple," but fasted and prayed night and day. She realised the value of intercession, and her widowed heart cried mightily to Jehovah for a people, like herself, widowed, for their Maker was no longer their husband.

But her energies did not stop there. Her name means "grace," and her heart had been captivated by the grace of God, so

that she learned His mind and will, and looked forward with great longing to His promised redemption. Others there were to whom this, too, was the absorbing object of their lives, and to these Anna exercised her gift as a prophetess; for she kept them steadfast and cheered by her edifying, comforting words, for she "spake of him."

It was certainly not by chance that she came in at the moment that Simeon had the Christ of God, as a tiny babe, in his arms, and she heartily joined in the thanksgiving to Jehovah, recognising that Jehovah-Jesus, the long-looked-for Redeemer, had come at last—they had not waited for Him in vain.

Dear reader, let us apply this to our day. We are on the eve of the return of the Saviour to complete the work of redemption, by translating His saints and restoring order in this chaotic scene, for God. Men around us are proving daily how far they are from God and the knowledge of His ways, and what an awful harvest they are reaping by going their own way!

In the midst of this scene of confusion the wonderful revelation of God's grace has been accepted by some, and their hearts' affections are set on the abiding

things in God's world to come. These are waiting for the return of their Lord, but are subjected to the trials, anxieties and sorrows so common in this scene.

How needed to-day are the services of the devoted Annas to intercede for all men—for those who never pray for themselves, and by speaking of Him to encourage and comfort the tried children of God. She served God thus, and so may we. Let us seek grace for it, dear fellow-believer; and, believe me, the blessing of Anna's tribe will be enjoyed by us.

We shall know what it is—

(1) To be guided by the Spirit (foot dipped in oil). (Deut. xxxiii. 24.)

(2) To have daily strength. (Ver. 25.)

(3) To experience divine help. (Ver. 26.)

(4) To know the eternal God a refuge, and

(5) To feel His arms of love our support.
(Ver. 27.)

What want we more for the pathway
till we see His face?

CHAPTER XL.

THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA.

IF there was ever a woman in need, and yet one who knew it not, it was she, that nameless woman of Samaria in John iv. She was going on in darkness, just living her careless, fickle life, without thought of consequences, regardless of God or man, living for self-gratification and the pleasures of this world alone. The Saviour, however, knew and fully estimated her need, and in His compassion and mercy went out of His way to meet her, and reveal Himself to her ignorant heart.

So at the end of a tiring journey of many miles on foot, because "He must needs go through Samaria," He rested by Jacob's well, waiting there while His disciples went into the town to buy food. His love to one soul brought Him there, and in divine compassion He waited for her. She soon appeared with her empty pitcher, coming to the well to draw water. The

Lord accosted her with a very simple, straightforward request, "Give me to drink." Instead, however, of complying, and thus refreshing the One who had come on such a mission of grace to her, she gave way to her argumentative spirit and expressed surprise that He, being a Jew, should ask anything of her, a Samaritan. The Lord graciously accepted the opportunity she gave Him, and began to reveal Himself to her. Her understanding, conscience and heart all needed opening, and to quote Mr. Bellett's beautiful expression, "When the whole vessel was open Jesus poured Himself in."

"If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink," were His gracious words, "thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." What a marvellous declaration of grace to this outcast Gentile woman, living her life of sin and reaping the misery that such a life would bring. Ah! *if* she only knew, but at present she knew not, nor cared to know, although she was in the presence of the One who could reveal all to her, and who had come there for that very purpose. What an experienced Teacher was He! In the first place, the grace of His manner

and the novelty of His condescending request excited her attention and curiosity ; and then His language was aptly suited in its simple attractiveness to awaken her heart.

She did not understand what He meant by the “living water,” as she argued about His having no means of drawing from the well, and questioned his “greatness” as compared with that of poor, failing Jacob : but she shewed she recognised her need as she asked for the gift—“Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.”

The Lord then dealt with her conscience. That must be searched and reached. She found she was in the presence of One who could tell her “all things that ever she did.” Her whole life was laid bare to her own gaze, as well as to His divine scrutiny ; and though He, as the Searcher of hearts and the true Prophet knew the whole of her wicked course, He uttered not a single reproach. And although He was the appointed future Judge of quick and dead there was no word of condemnation for the sinner before Him—He had nothing but grace and the gift of God, “without money and without price” to freely offer her. What a Saviour !

Have you ever been in His presence alone, dear reader ?

He is a perfect Saviour, and none can be in His presence without receiving unutterable blessing, as is beautifully shewn here.

Though absolutely holy Himself He did not *repel* her, nor on the other hand was He defiled by His intercourse with her. His love and grace captivated her heart and detained her ; and though He did not conceal her sin, but made her feel that He was perfectly cognisant of her worthless life, yet He in no way alarmed her. She had to own to the truth about herself, and she also parades her outward knowledge of the religious differences of her day.

How empty and flat it all fell when the Lord revealed God as a Father, seeking true, spiritual worshippers, and Himself as the Christ of God, "I that speak unto thee am he !"

She was conquered. Her hard heart was won. She realised in whose presence she was. Her water-pot was forgotten, and she returned to the city full of her wonderful interview with the Messiah. "Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did : is not this the Christ ?"

was her invitation to her astonished fellow countrymen. "Then they went out of the city, and came unto him . . . and many of the Samaritans . . . believed on him," for they could not be in the presence of such a One as the "Saviour of the world" without receiving blessing.

Have you received such blessing at His hand, dear reader? If not, the invitation is to you—"Come and see," and He who remains the same unchanging, unfailing One to-day will not send you away empty.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE SYROPHENICIAN WOMAN.

IN Matthew xv. 21-28 and Mark vii. 24-30 we have before us another nameless heathen woman who received blessing from the Lord ; but in many respects she was very different from the last under our consideration. She was not only a Gentile, but she belonged to the accursed race. She was a *Canaanite*, and lived in the neighbourhood of the wicked and commercially prosperous cities of Tyre and Sidon.

She had, however, in this district, farthest removed from Jewish privilege, heard something of the wonderful Person, the unacknowledged "Son of David," and the One "who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil," and, having a distinct need, she neglected not her opportunity when the Lord visited their coasts. How true it was that He, the DisPELLER of disease and the One who

alone had supreme power over Satan and all his forces, "could not be hid" !

This woman had one very dear to her, a young daughter, who was sadly under the influence of the evil one, and, to use the mother's own words, "was grievously vexed with a devil."

Although Jesus had sought the seclusion of a house, she found Him out, and evidently waiting until He resumed His journey, she fell at His feet, exclaiming, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David" ! and then she asked the favour of healing for her loved one. Faith she had, and in the right Person. She did not doubt His power, and she seems to have been wonderfully taught the dignity of the One she addressed, a dignity rightfully His, but nevertheless denied Him by His own nation. She had, however, yet to learn that as "Son of David" He had nothing for the Gentile. A Canaanite could claim no mercy at His hand on that ground. As Heir to the throne of David there could only be judgment for the enemies of the people of God.

But He was also "Lord over all," and in His infinite grace He was leading her on to learn the truth of the wonderful scripture, "There is no difference between

the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him." (Rom. x. 12.)

In His dealing He had to prove to her that although she was in the presence of the One who could bestow the goodness of God upon her, she had no right to it whatever, and in bringing her to this point He used *apparent* harshness.

At first "He answered her not a word," but she continued her supplication, so that the disciples begged Him to send her away. How could that heart of love drive her from Him without the blessing she craved, and yet which in soul she was not ready to receive. He must probe her still further.

In answer to the disciples' request He said, "I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Faith's insight is keen, and she immediately grasped the meaning of the remark, and also that she was shut up to Him alone for blessing, and she poured out her heart's deep longing in the simple and very appropriate words, "Lord, help me."

She must have felt herself in a desperate position just at that moment. She knew herself to be in the presence of the only One who could help her, and yet she realised

that she had no right whatever to avail herself of that help. If the Lord withheld it she was helpless.

Her faith, however, must have a further test yet. The Lord answered her cry with, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." Her faith stood the test; there was no room for pride and self-assertion in that needy soul. She was nobody, but the "Lord over all" was there and she clung to Him, although He appeared for the moment so unapproachable.

She at once accepted His designation, and her faith took it up very aptly: "Truth, Lord," replied she, "yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." It was only a *crumb* she asked at the hand of the Giver of every good thing. Israel might have their portion, and a large one; but surely the "Lord over all, rich unto all that call upon him," had a crumb of blessing left for the outcast Gentile.

What a full answer the Lord had to such faith and humility! "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt"; and Mark adds, "For this saying, go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter."

How the Lord appreciates the faith that

will not be denied ! He did not limit her to a crumb : " Be it unto thee even as thou wilt " included the restoration of her daughter, but did not necessarily stop there. As another has remarked, " It was as if the Lord opened the larder door, and told her to help herself."

He is still " the Lord over all, *rich* unto all that call upon him." Do we avail ourselves of this richness, and make it an habitual thing to call upon Him ? Surely our daily needs are great and continual, and I feel for myself, that if we who know the Lord made more constant demand upon His richness by turning to Him about everything, our lives would lose their complexities, and difficult places would straighten out wonderfully. We do not half realise how happy and simple our lives would become if we shewed this constant dependence on the Lord.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE SISTERS OF BETHANY.

FAVOURED women were these two, for of no others have we the same record—"Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister." (John xi. 5.)

Yes ! that rich, full stream of divine love, that is still available for all who desire to know it, had flowed into the hearts of these two women, and had given them to open their home to Him, the homeless One here, and make Him welcome, thus affording Him one resting-place in the world where He was disowned and rejected.

It was the one place He loved to resort to—Bethany. Rather a remarkable contrast is drawn for us in Matthew xxi. 17-22 and Mark xi. 11, 12. It was when leaving Bethany, the home of affection and devoted hearts, that the Lord's attention was drawn to the barren fig tree, apt figure of the absence of affection in Israel and the consequent result—lack of fruit-bearing for God.

But it was different with Martha and Mary. They had learned something of the love of Jesus, and in Luke x., where we are first introduced to them, each responded in her measure to that love. I say, "in her measure," because it is only in proportion as the appreciation of the love of Christ *displaces self*, in its many assertive forms, that He gets the fuller response to that love from our hearts.

Martha takes the initiative and receives Him into her house. It is a great thing to make Christ welcome in our homes and give Him His place there. There will be no room for friction and discord if this is the case, but on the contrary, every detail will be controlled by Christ, every thought brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, each will fill his place in that home to the glory of God, and love and righteousness will blend in true harmony.

This the Lord eventually brought about in this family; but much had yet to be learned, and Martha, at least, needed the Lord's gentle rebuke. She wanted to shew her love to Him by ministering to His bodily needs. This surely was right, and a great privilege, but her appreciation of the Lord's love for her was, as yet, very slight.

Self was very much in evidence, for she did not like to have all the trouble of the preparation of the meal. It was burdensome to her. Deep affection finds it difficult sometimes to do enough for its object; but she had not so learned Christ: she had not been sufficiently in His company.

Mary was in advance of her sister. The presence of Christ was everything to her. His words of love captivated her ear; self and circumstances were forgotten, they had no place. The Person of the Lord filled her vision; she sat at rest at His feet, drinking into her soul the blessed words of truth and love that fell from His lips.

Martha might have enjoyed them too, but she was "cumbered," not free enough of self to enjoy Him. Mary was ministering to His heart by her appreciation of Him, while Martha was making an attempt to minister to His temporal needs with a burdened, jealous spirit. Mary held the secret of the higher ministry.

The Lord does not rebuke Martha for her service. He knows how to value the slightest thing done for Him, though one often fears it is more mixed with *self* than one recognises. Oh! the grace of His heart to deign to accept such feeble response as ours often is!

He could not, however, allow her to interfere with her sister, and seek to withdraw her from His company. How tenderly He remonstrates with her, shewing her how she was overburdening herself with "many" self-imposed duties that she considered "needful," when all the time she was neglecting the "one thing" that really gratified His heart, and thus was losing much blessing and rest of soul herself. They were both free to choose, and the Lord commended Mary's choice, and would not allow her to be deprived of it.

And what was her choice? His company—the only place of soul-rest and spiritual growth. She had obeyed His invitation, "Come unto me . . . and learn of me . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls." (Matt. xi.)

If our hearts are set for making Mary's choice, the Lord will make it His concern that we are not deprived of it. Let us see to it that, through allowing ourselves to be "cumbered," we do not deprive the Lord of His gratification, and ourselves of the "one thing needful" to our spiritual welfare.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE SISTERS OF BETHANY (*continued*).

SICKNESS and death belong to this sin-stained scene, and they often intrude into the homes of the Lord's people, crushing their hearts with sorrow. It is at such times that we are deeply tested as to our knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the One who is the resurrection and the life.

This was the case in the peaceful home at Bethany. The dearly-loved brother sickened and died, and although the Lord, who loved them all and who had often been their honoured guest, knew of his illness, He, in His wisdom, did not hinder the dreaded approaching end, nor did He hasten to cheer their stricken hearts with divine comfort. He lingered at a distance until death claimed its victim, and yet the fact was perfectly true that "Jesus *loved* Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." (John xi. 5.)

Judging as man judges He was shewing

them no proof of His love, but He had wondrous truths to teach those sorrowing sisters that they could only learn by coming into touch with death itself, and that in the person of one they loved. They had not yet learned Jesus as the Son of God, the One whose voice the dead must obey, the One who could display resurrection power and glory; neither had their hearts been linked to Him by the wonderful tenderness and sympathy He was about to shew them, before He exerted His quickening power.

Oh, what losers they would have been had the Lord hurried to them when He heard of Lazarus' illness and had cured him as the Great Physician; they would then have known nothing of His wonderful compassion and sympathy in the presence of death, nor His superiority over it. They were to learn the love of the heart of the Son of God, and also the power of His hand. They were both available for them.

You will remember that Aaron of old bore the names of the children of Israel both on his shoulders (the place of power) and on his breast (the place of love). We, too, have such an High Priest, One who is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities"—the Son, who is consecrated for

evermore. One shoulder will be strong enough to uphold the government of the world in a future day, but the power of *both* shoulders are at the disposal of His tried saints, whose names He bears upon His breast too. (See Isa. ix. 6 ; and Luke xv. 5.)

When two days had passed away, the Lord told His disciples that Lazarus was dead, adding, "Let us go unto him." Martha, hearing that He was approaching Bethany, hurriedly left the house and met Him with the reproachful words, "Lord, if thou hadst been here my brother had not died." She had faith in His power as healer of diseases, and no doubt both sisters had been longing for Him to come before their loved brother breathed his last, for Mary later uses the same words as her sister, shewing the same longing of heart. Their dearly-loved Master could have prevented death from claiming their brother if only He had been with them earlier.

Lazarus had now been in the grave four days and corruption had already set in. Surely there could be no help now! But in the face of this comes the promise from the Lord of life, "Thy brother shall rise again."

Martha has much to say, but what she

says betrays a lack of ability to grasp what the Lord wanted to impart to her. She appears to be conscious of this herself and returns to call Mary, almost implying that she felt her sister would understand the Lord's words better than she, and doubtless she did, for had she not been at His feet before as a learner? Now assured of His perfect sympathy, Mary falls at His feet and lets her tears flow forth. We are not told either of these facts about Martha.

Witnessing Mary's grief and that of her friends, Jesus groaned in His spirit and was troubled, and then follow those wonderful little words, that still breathe the utmost comfort to bereaved hearts to-day—"Jesus wept!" Oh, tender compassion! Although He was in the sunshine and power of the glorious realm that sin and death can never touch, Himself the resurrection and the life, He shed tears in the presence of the distress and sorrow death had caused. Thus the two sisters walked to the tomb of Lazarus in company with the Son of God! They heard His groans, and they saw His tears, and surely felt the depth of His sympathy for them.

Now came the word of command. "Take ye away the stone." Martha raised an objec-

tion, but Mary remained silent, she was in touch with the Lord, and could await developments in full confidence in Him.

Jesus lifts up His heart in thanksgiving to His Father, and then cries with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!"

"The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live." Lazarus illustrates this. He hears the voice of power that none can resist, and comes forth. Oh, what a moment for the sisters! Willing hands are ready at the Lord's next command to free him of the encumbering grave-clothes, and he stands before them in resurrection.

What a display of the power and glory of God! No wonder that some present believed; the only marvel is that all did not.

"We know Him as we could not know
Through heaven's golden years;
We then shall see His glorious face,
But Mary saw His tears.
The touch that heals the broken heart
Is never felt above;
His angels know His blessedness,
His way-worn saints His love."

* * * *

We have one more scene in which the sisters appear, and it is a beautiful one.

They prepare the Lord a supper at Bethany six days before the Passover—a week before His death—and we find them all together once more in happy fellowship. (John xii. 1-11.)

Martha is busy serving, but uncumbered now, her heart is at rest. Lazarus sits at table with the Lord in happy communion, and Mary has so well learned what resurrection means, that her heart seems already with the Lord on the other side, and she wants to hasten Him to the glorious scene beyond death, and so anoints Him beforehand for His burial, and the fragrance of that anointing fills the house.

How the Lord appreciates her act!

Surely the church, which is the witness to Christ's resurrection power in this day, can thus refresh His heart now!

Dear Mr. Bellett has so well expressed the significance of this scene in its present application; he says: "We see the saints . . . some waiting on Him in the activities of love, some resting beside Him in the calm certainty of His favour . . . some pouring forth the fulness of their loving and worshipping hearts." May the Lord grant that we may each know something of all three of these ways of ministering unto Him.

CHAPTER XLIV.

MARY MAGDALENE.

AT our first introduction to Mary Magdalene we are told two striking facts :

(1) That the Lord cast seven devils out of her, and

(2) That she, with others, ministered to Him of her substance. (See Luke viii. 2, 3.)

Satan had full control over that poor woman, which was manifested by *seven* forms of evil, and he held her absolutely in his power till the One who was stronger than the strong man came, and in His mighty love and power broke the bonds and freed the captive. Now she was free to serve, and, in response to the love that had done so much for her, she delighted to minister to Him.

What she possessed of this world's wealth (formerly, no doubt, used in self-gratification) was now dedicated to the Lord, who had entirely won her heart's allegiance, and was used to supply the temporal needs

of the One who, though He were rich, had become poor for her sake, that through His poverty she might be rich indeed.

From this moment she definitely became one of His disciples, and with the twelve and several other women followed Him from city to city, and village to village, where He preached the glad tidings of the kingdom of God.

* * * *

His marvellous life on earth was completed—His course here finished—and Jesus, the Saviour, was dying on the cross for sin.

Afar off, gazing at the scene in awe-struck sorrow, were a few devoted women who had followed Him from Galilee, and of whom Mary Magdalene was one. Her love and attachment to her Saviour, however, overcame the natural shrinking from witnessing suffering, and the attraction of love drew her near, for John tells us that she stood “by the cross.”

Have we each known what it is to have been in spirit in Mary’s position, and there learnt something of the extent and depth of the love that led the precious Saviour into such suffering—and into such a death—“even the death of the cross”—for our sake? “By the cross” Mary Magdalene

remained until all was over. No power could draw her away from the Object of her affection. She heard the dread cry of desertion fall from the lips of the blessed Sinbearer; the deeply significant "It is finished" also fell on her attentive ears; she heard her Lord commend His spirit to His Father, and witnessed the actual laying down of His precious life and dismissal of His spirit. What deep, deep truths was her soul drinking into!

She was still there when the precious body of the Lord was taken down, wrapped in fine linen by Joseph of Arimathea, and laid in his new sepulchre. Mary was present at the burial, for Mark tells us that she beheld where they laid Him.

To such a devoted heart as hers could be unfolded the deep and far-reaching truths of resurrection.

Returning from the tomb she prepared sweet spices and anointing oil, and then rested during the Sabbath. But by dawn on the first day of the week she returned to the sepulchre to anoint the Lord's body, in spite of the great sealed stone that closed the entrance, and the sentinels placed there to watch. Love is superior to all difficulties; they do not come into its calculation. When they reached the tomb,

however, she and her companions found the stone rolled back from the entrance, two angels in possession, and the guard powerless as dead men.

No need now to ask, "Who shall roll us away the stone?"

Mary hastened back to the disciples to tell of the opened sepulchre, and returned with Peter and John, who speedily satisfied themselves that the Lord was not there, and left. But not so Mary, she remained weeping, "because," as she told the angels, "they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." Her heart was desolate—its Object was gone, and life was nothing without Him. Is the Lord thus enshrined in our hearts? Is this world a real wilderness to our souls because He is not here? We do well to ask ourselves these questions.

See how her devotion was rewarded!

Jesus—her Lord—revealed Himself to her. She, as one of His sheep, knew His voice and responded to the simple "Mary," so lovingly spoken, with the one exclamation, "My Master!"

Then the Lord has more to say, and to her was entrusted the most wonderful message ever sent to man.

"Go to my brethren," said the risen

Lord, "and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." (John xx. 17.)

What wonderful relationships, the results of death and resurrection!

The Lord claims those who love Him and follow Him as His brethren, and unites them with Himself in relationship with His God and Father. Nothing can break such links, forged by the Lord in relation to a new system of things entirely, where He, instead of being disowned and rejected, is supreme.

What love that procures such heights of bliss for its objects!

" In peaceful wonder we adore
The thoughts of love divine ;
Which in that world for evermore
Unite our lot with Thine."

Mary was intelligent as to who were His brethren, for she returned to His disciples and told them "that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her."

CHAPTER XLV.

RHODA.

PERHAPS, strictly speaking, we can hardly number Rhoda among our "women," as scripture calls her a "damsel" (Acts xii. 13), the same term used of Jairus' little daughter of twelve years of age, so Rhoda was evidently not fully grown; but God notices her and mentions her by name, so we may give her a place here.

Rhoda, though young, was linked up with the little band of Christians at Jerusalem in the early days of the church's history, and in the testing time of persecution.

Stephen, who so boldly and devotedly stood for the testimony connected with "the God of glory," had been stoned by a mob infuriated by his truthful utterances.

James, the apostle, had been killed with the sword by Herod's orders, and now Peter was lying in prison chained to a guard, awaiting his execution the next day. Was he also to be taken from them?

These were sad, anxious, apprehensive days for the Jerusalem saints, and, feeling the situation, they did the best thing, and the only thing they could do—prayed “without ceasing to God for him.” Day after day passed, and Peter was not released, and now it was, as far as they could tell, his last night on earth, the next morning being fixed by the authorities for his execution.

How was it spent ?

By Peter, in quiet, restful sleep ; by the little company to whom this honoured servant of the Lord was so dear, in earnest prayer and supplication to God for him ; and Rhoda, though young, was present at this midnight prayer meeting in Mary’s house.

Hers was a true, brave heart—true to the Lord and His interests on earth, and brave, to be so definitely associated with a tried and persecuted people.

And the Lord takes account of her, and, although we are not told her parentage, and what position, if any, she held in the household, her connection with His saints is noticed, and her name handed down to us.

Suddenly the prayer meeting was interrupted by a continued knocking on the

street door, and brave little Rhoda went to ask who was there. She knew not, but it might be a band of soldiers to apprehend *them* for the truth's sake; but no! it was a well-known, dearly loved voice she recognised, that asked for admittance. In her childlike delight and excitement she neglected to admit this welcome midnight visitor, but instead ran back to the friends to tell the good news.

They were incredulous, in spite of Rhoda's confidence, although they had been so constantly praying for Peter, and doubtless for his release.

The answer to their prayers had come and they could not believe it, but told Rhoda, the bearer of the good tidings, that she was mad.

Do we not see our own unbelieving hearts reflected here? Well might the Lord say, "WHATSOEVER YE SHALL ASK IN PRAYER, BELIEVING, YE SHALL RECEIVE." (Matt. xxi. 22.) How wondrous the grace that oftentimes grants a definite, loving answer to our petitions, although not accompanied with belief!

If Rhoda was not mad in her persistency that Peter was without, then reason, which is always opposed to faith, must ask another solution.

They therefore suggested that it must be his angel or spiritual representative—anything but belief in God's power exerted on behalf of His servant in answer to the desires of His people, who had been crying mightily to Him.

The knocking, however, continued; so at last the door was opened, and when they saw that it really *was* Peter, they were indeed astonished.

Once within, and the ejaculations of surprise silenced, how much there was to tell, and Rhoda, with the others, was an attentive listener to the tale of God's wonderful deliverance of His imprisoned servant.

Roman guards, chains, bolts, bars, and heavy iron gates presented no difficulty to "the angel of the Lord," who got Peter clear of the prison and down the length of one street in the city, before leaving him. His heavenly guide did not dictate where he should go then, that was left to Peter's own choice.

He did not need to consider long; he knew where he was likely to find "his own company"—those who had a heart for the Lord's interests, and thitherwards he bent his steps, with the result of which we have already spoken.

What a great thing in these closing days of the church's history on earth to find ourselves, like Rhoda, connected with a similar company, which, though weak, is yet dependent, and one to which the Lord and His interests are dear !

CHAPTER XLVI.

LYDIA.

OUTSIDE the city of Philippi, by a river-side, each sabbath day a few women assembled for prayer. (See Acts xvi. 13.)

A river bank was a favourite resort for this purpose where there was no synagogue, and these praying women were evidently Jewish, as the city was itself sunk in heathen idolatry.

Among them was Lydia of Thyatira, a seller of the richly dyed goods for which her native town was famous.

She was a Grecian woman, but had become a worshipper of the God of Israel.

Consequent upon the vision of a Macedonian crying for help, the Apostle Paul, accompanied by Silas and apparently also by the physician Luke, and Timothy, had reached Philippi, being the bearers of the "gospel of the glory" received direct from the risen and exalted Lord. Hearing of the resort for prayer, they joined the

little company of women at the river-side and sat down and spoke with them about the things of God.

Lydia listened, and as she listened the Lord gave her the capacity to receive the divine message of love and grace, for, in the beautifully expressive words of scripture, the work in her soul is described thus—"whose heart the Lord opened," with the result that "she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul."

She was ready and desirous to learn, and the Lord saw that she did not lack the opportunity. He had His eye on a little company of saints that later on were to be for His glory in testimony in this very city, and a great source of joy and cheer to the beloved apostle. Lydia was to be one of the number, and this was her preparation.

What an inestimable blessing it is to have "an opened heart"—opened by the Lord Himself and thus fitted to receive, and to respond to, divine communications!

When Lydia's heart was opened she *attended* to the things spoken by Paul, and I feel this to be significant.

Many of "the things which were spoken of Paul," and dictated to him by the Spirit of God, are still on record, handed

down to us in the scriptures of truth. Have we attended to them as God's communications to us ?

They are full of wondrous, deep, searching truths, especially encouraging and necessary in these closing days of the church's history on earth to all those who, on account of possessing opened hearts, desire to respond intelligently, and in true affection, to the Lord's will for His own.

Lydia may have had only this one opportunity, during the apostle's stay in the city, of hearing what was in the heart of God for her, but she made the most of it.

She was baptised and her household ; that is, she definitely and publicly identified herself with Christ's death, putting herself and all she possessed under the Lord's control, and then she besought the Lord's servants—"constraining" them (a strong word meaning that she could not take a refusal) to come to her house and abide there. There was one condition, however—if they judged her to be faithful to the Lord ; and they evidently did.

What a triumph of grace !

Once a heathen, but the Lord made an entrance into her heart, she listened to God's communications through Paul, she attended to them, definitely linked herself

with the Lord's interests, owned His control over herself and all hers, earnestly desired to be faithful to Him, and consequently opened her house to His servants.

Have we made as much spiritual progress as Lydia?

A true work of God was begun in that city, so Satan could not let it alone. He tried to spoil it by craft and through the testimony of an evil spirit possessing a young girl, who repeatedly proclaimed that the apostles were the servants of the Most High God.

Paul had spiritual discernment to detect that this was said to elate them, and if allowed would mix what was of God with evil. If what the possessed damsel asserted was true, that they were the servants of the Most High God (and it was, only the time was anticipated, this being God's millennial name), the evil spirit must submit to the power there present by being driven away. "Paul . . . turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour."

Oh! the power of that name. The enemy flees before it.

Persecution and imprisonment followed for God's servants, but it bore fruit in

the conversion and baptism of the jailor and his household, another triumph over the power of Satan exerted against God's truth.

The result of the hatred and tumult raised by him as a last resource is very marked—

1. Paul and Silas sang praises to God. The victims of his hate are rejoicing and exultant.

2. The prison doors were burst open by God's intervention.

3. The jailor and his family were eternally blessed.

4. The magistrates were obliged to come as suppliants to the apostle.

Satan was unmistakably frustrated.

Now for our last peep at Lydia.

Had all this opposition and persecution shaken her faith? On the contrary, the apostle shewed utmost confidence in her and indeed judged her faithful to the Lord, for, being released from prison he and Silas immediately went to her house, where they were certain of a welcome; then, after seeing and comforting the brethren, they started on their journey to Thessalonica.

CHAPTER XLVII.

PRISCILLA.

MANY and varied were the ways in which this dear woman served the Lord, and it is very beautiful to see that in each instance her name is linked with that of her husband Aquila, and the plural pronoun is used. They were evidently “heirs together of the grace of life,” and together their lives were devoted to the Lord and His interests.

By birth they belonged to the Jewish nation and were living in Rome, until, in obedience to an imperial order that all Jews should leave the city, they travelled to Corinth, and there the Apostle Paul found them shortly after their arrival.

As they pursued the same trade as that which Paul had been taught in his youth, that of tentmakers, they offered the apostle occupation and residence with them during his stay of eighteen months at Corinth. It appears as if this was the first time they had met, but it was the commencement of a wonderful friendship, and Priscilla and Aquila received great spiritual

blessing and gain at this time, when as devoted a servant as the Apostle Paul shared their home. (Acts xviii. 1-3.)

By the way they are introduced to us one would almost think that they had not previously heard of Christ, or, at least, that they had not thrown in their lot with His followers.

However, they soon belonged to the "much people" that the Lord told Paul He had in that city, and so attached did they become to the apostle, that, when at the close of his stay at Corinth he proceeded into Syria, they accompanied him as far as Ephesus. (Vers. 18, 19.)

In this city, where they took up their abode for a while, they were distinctly used by the Lord in a remarkable way, and for this the Lord was probably fitting them when they had the grand opportunity of daily intercourse in divine truths with one so deeply taught as the beloved apostle. Just at this time the eloquent Apollos visited Ephesus from Alexandria. He was "mighty in the scriptures," and "fervent in spirit," but had only been instructed in the baptism of John. (Vers. 24-28.) He publicly spoke and "taught diligently the things of the Lord," but only as far as he knew them himself.

The Lord was about to fit him to be a more useful and intelligent servant of His, and He used Priscilla and Aquila as his instructors. They heard his bold speaking in the synagogue, and, inviting him home with them, they "expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly."

What an honoured couple, and how well they must have learned of the Lord themselves, to be thus chosen of Him for this important service!

What an apt scholar, too, they had in Apollos, for eventually he became one of the pillars of the church, and, when he left them for the province of Achaia, to visit the disciples there, we read that "he helped them much which had believed through grace."

From the warm greetings and commendation of Paul in the other scriptures where Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned, we learn that they were "his helpers in Christ Jesus," and so faithful had they been to the Lord's servant and to His testimony that they had offered their own lives instead of the apostle's when his was threatened. (Rom. xvi. 3, 4.)

This devotedness drew forth the thanks and gratitude, not only of the apostle himself, but of all the assemblies of the

Gentiles. We also learn that they opened their house for the meeting together of the saints. (Rom. xvi. 5 ; 1 Cor. xvi. 19.) Faithful and honoured servants of the Lord ! How their *lives* preached Christ, and how united they were in their quiet, private service for Him !

They first opened their hearts unreservedly to Christ and His interests. Henceforth the Lord controlled, and His rule of love swayed their actions. They could willingly offer their lives for the sake of the testimony, and their home, wherever it was, was devoted to the Lord's servants, and was known as the meeting-place of the despised and often persecuted saints of God.

We are not all able to speak publicly for the Lord as Paul and Apollos, but we can minister to such, and labour ; *lives* speak, and those whom the Lord has united together by the closest earthly tie can, like Priscilla and Aquila, *together*, with one mind, giving the Lord the pre-eminent place in their homes, use them in some way for the benefit of His people and the furtherance of the testimony until He come.

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