



Barzillai.

HIS SERVICE AND REWARD.

When the king is firmly settled on his throne, and no rebel rises up to dispute his right to fill it, it is easy enough to appear loyal, and to cry with the multitude, "God save the king!" But, where rebellion has made great progress amongst the masses, and the popular idol is no longer the king, but some aspirant to regal power and honour, then the sovereign, but

lately perhaps welcomed wherever he went with acclamations, discovers who are his real friends, and discriminates between the flattering courtier and the loyal subject. The day of the king's rejection is the day for the subject to declare himself. Thus it was with the aged Barzillai and those who were with him at Mahanaim.

Fickle indeed are the masses of any nation. The idol of to-day may become the object of popular hatred on the morrow, and the benefactor of a people find himself a wanderer in the very country over which he has reigned. Such was David's experience when Absalom's rebellion broke out. "*Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands,*" had been the song of the women of Israel as they returned from the conflict with the Philistines. He had known what it was to be the man whom Israel delighted to honour. He had received the homage of the twelve tribes of Israel at Hebron, when they went there to anoint him king over all Israel. Now he was an outcast with a company who remained faithful, a fugi-

tive too from the face of his own son Absalom. The warrior and benefactor of his country, who had raised her to a pitch of glory, prosperity, and influence never before enjoyed, was rejected for the king's son, remarkable for nothing but his personal appearance, unbridled will, and immense powers of dissimulation. Absalom had stolen the hearts of the men of Israel. It was true David had sinned grievously in the matter of Uriah's wife, and the cold-blooded murder of his faithful soldier. But of what could Absalom boast except the treacherous murder of his own elder brother Amnon? God was now punishing David for the sins by which he had given occasion to the enemies of the Lord *to blaspheme, and at the same time was testing the loyalty and fidelity to His anointed of all the children of Israel; and with what result?* The king had fled from Jerusalem, Shimei had manifested what he was as he cursed him, the people of Israel shewed what they were as they clustered round Absalom, and David and his followers had at length crossed the Jordan, and to put for the time

being that river between himself and his rebellious son.

At this juncture, when the fortunes of David were at the lowest ebb, Shobi, Machir and Barzillai declared themselves on his side, as they met him and his company at Mahanaim, and brought with them what they felt must be needed. David had not summoned them to entertain him; no superior force compelled them to yield up to the king what they possessed. They brought of their own accord such things as were suited for the occasion. David was at Mahanaim, but Machir belonged to Lodebar, and Barzillai to Rogelim. What distance there was between these two places and the Levitical city, the scene of Jacob's meeting with the angels of God, has not been ascertained; but this at least is clear, these three men made advances to David, and Barzillai apparently surpassed them all as he "provided the king of sustenance whilst he lay at Mahanaim." Very marked then was their attitude at this time, most acceptable to David, and, we may

surely add, pleasing to the Spirit of God, who has seen fit so fully to notice it.

Shobi was an Ammonite, the son of Nahash, David's friend, but a former enemy of Israel, defeated at Jabesh-gilead by Saul. He was also Hanun's brother, whose capital, Rabbah, the armies of Israel had taken, and whose crown of gold had adorned David's brow. Machir had been the firm friend of the family of Saul when David ascended the throne, in whose house Mephibosheth had found shelter till his father's possessions were restored to him by the man his grandfather had persistently persecuted. Of Barzillai's earlier history we read nothing. These three, however, who once probably had trodden different paths, were now united in succoring David and his men. The Ammonite and the friend of Saul's house, agreed with Barzillai in this. But what made them thus unite? David deserved his punishment, that all men must have admitted. Was it simply the son of Jesse they saw? Was it not rather the Lord's anointed? As such they combined to show kindness to him.

Obliged by prudential motives to put the Jordan between himself and Absalom, backed by the masses of Israel, he meets in the midst of the general defection with substantial tokens of loyalty from these three men. They saw in him the Lord's anointed: so for them the popular idol had no attraction. What others might do they stopped not to think. They did not calculate the chances of success, nor wait to earn which side appearances favored. Had they looked at the matter in this light, would they have befriended David? Would not the hosts which followed Absalom have determined their place in Israel? With them, however, surely, the question was a most simple one. *Should they side with the Lord's anointed or not?* Such an alternative admitted then of but one answer. Can it admit of any other than one now? Worldly caution might have counselled delay before they committed themselves so irrecoverably as they did; but, had they delayed, all opportunity of manifesting their loyalty and devotion would have passed away. It was with them now or never. Reason might

have suggested further consideration, and a conference with the leaders of Absalom's party, before they took this bold step and occupied so prominent a place. Should they not hear both sides before they took the part of the fugitive king? Had not Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counsellor, actually espoused Absalom's cause? and did not all Israel acknowledge that his counsel was as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God? Would they pit their wisdom against his? Besides, had not David dishonored the throne, and perverted the fountain of justice? That was true of the man David, but he was the Lord's anointed. So they ministered to his need, and thus openly sided with *him before all*. It was a noble act on their part, as all must acknowledge. It was also a right act, as it was in accordance with God's thoughts; and the Spirit of God surely delighted to dwell on the tokens of their faithfulness, as He has recounted the different items of refreshment thus furnished for the king, and those with him in the wilderness. They "brought beds, basons and earthen vessels,

and wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched corn, and beans, and lentils, and parched pulse, and honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese of kine for David, and for the people that were with him, to eat : for they said, "The people is hungry, and weary, and thirsty in the wilderness" (2 Sam. xvii. 28, 29). Nothing that the people could want seems to have been forgotten ; nothing that they brought, it would appear, has been overlooked in the account.

Events rolled on. Absalom crossed the Jordan with the hosts of Israel under his command. The issue of the battle is well-known. David was to be chastised but not deposed. He had been chastised, and now Absalom's turn came. That on which he had especially prided himself became the means of his capture. Suspended by his hair between heaven and earth, the fratricide, and would be parricide and regicide met with the due reward of his deeds. Thus ended the rebellion and David's temporary exile. Preparations were now made for his return. The tribes of Israel spoke of it, the tribe of Judah, at first cold-hearted towards

him, stirred up by Zadok and Abiathar sent word, "Return thou, and all thy servants." "And all the people of Judah conducted the king, and also half the people of Israel."

Now again owned by all as king in Israel, David acted as such by disposing of the life and possessions of his subjects. He spared Shimei's life who had cursed him, he restored in some degree to Mephibosheth the possessions of his father, hastily bestowed on Ziba on the day of his flight, and offered to reward Barzillai. Life to Shimei, possessions in the land to Mephibosheth, but nearness to the king's person and feeding with him for Barzillai, were what he meted out to each. "Come thou over with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem." Barzillai had served David when beyond Jordan, David would have Barzillai beside him ever after, beholding his royal state, blessed with the favor of the Lord's anointed. "With me"—nothing less than this—was what he desired for Barzillai: with himself, and that in Jerusalem. Most fitting was this reward. When outside the land of Canaan it was Barzillai's

place and duty to own and serve the rejected king; again in power in that land, it was David's place to reward his faithful adherent. And, as the words "with me" fall on the ear, do they not recall similar language used by David's Son in the presence of His disciples, when addressing His Father? "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given Me, be *with Me* where I am," etc. Little did Barzillai think of the honor in store for him as a reward for his service, and of which he only heard after the time of such service was over, and the day for rewarding those faithful to David had arrived. But we know, whilst the Lord Jesus Christ is absent from the earth, rejected by His people Israel, and especially His own tribe Judah, what will be the future place of privilege and blessing of all, who side with Him during the time of His rejection by the world.

To this offer Barzillai interposes an objection. He had not worked with any view of reward, richly though he deserved it. He had thought of the king in his rejection, and had done what he could to succor him; he had come too, to do

honor to David now returning to his capital; but, to be at the court was unsuited to such an one, for his age forbade his enjoyment of the pleasures of the king's house. When David was in need in the wilderness, Barzillai's age was no hindrance to the bringing it in person. When the king was to recross the Jordan, he suffered not the infirmities of age to be a reason for his absence. He would testify his delight at the king's return, as he had proved his devotion to him whilst he lay at Mahanaim; but to go to Jerusalem as a reward for his service was what he felt himself unequal to undertake. In how different a manner do men too generally act, putting forth an excuse to avoid the service, but grasping eagerly at the reward! Barzillai was not like this, he thought of the king and acted at once. Much as he, and all Israel, had enjoyed of comfort under the king's reign, he did not stay at home counting up the blessings he had shared in; for, self-interest or self-ease he knew nothing of, when the Lord's anointed was driven out of Jerusalem, and obliged to take refuge across the Jordan. As

to the proffered reward, Chimham his son might accompany David; he desired to stay and die among his own kindred. Old age, with the prospect of death not far off, thus effectually opposed the fulfilment of the king's wishes. "Thy servant will go a little way over Jordan with the king: and why should the king recompense it me with such a reward? Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and my mother. But, behold, thy servant Chimham: let him go over with my lord the king: and do to him what shall seem good unto thee."

Who could refuse such a touching request? The king answered, "Chimham shall go over with me, and I will do unto him that which shall seem good unto thee: and whatsoever thou shalt require of me, that will I do for thee." "Do thou to him what shall seem good unto thee," had been Barzillai's prayer. "I will do unto him what shall seem good unto thee," was David's promise, reaching beyond the modest request of his servant. And more

than this, he told him he had gained the king's ear. What a place was this to occupy! Honor, wealth, rank, are nothing compared with this. To be with the king was David's wish for him, to have the king's ear was that of which David now assured him. Thus they parted, but not before David had kissed him and blessed him, and that on the right side of Jordan. The river had been recrossed, the king was again as sovereign of the land of Canaan, when he kissed him and blessed him. All Israel could see that day whom the king delighted to honor. The multitude were right in escorting back king David, but Barzillai had had done what others had not. These were around the monarch on the day of his return, Barzillai had been with him when they had cast him out. Hence the difference between them and this devoted servant of Rogelim.

In time Barzillai died, and perhaps this scene and all connected with it was blotted out before long from the remembrance of many in Israel. There was, however, one heart from which the remembrance of Barzillai's service

was never effaced; the king never forgot it, and Solomon his son was ever to remember it. Occupied after his return, as David was, with many important concerns, he with his latest breath yet spoke of this service at Mahanaim, and commended his sons to Solomon's special care (1 Kings 2 : 7). Before David and Solomon, types of the Lord on His throne, the sons of Barzillai had a place not of distance but of distinguished nearness, for they ate bread at the king's table, and feasted in the king's presence. Never, then, whilst David lived, was this service forgotten, nor, whilst Solomon reigned, was it to sink into oblivion. David as king had portioned it out, Solomon, who ascended the throne without David's death intervening, was charged to continue it. To Rehoboam nothing, we read, was said about it, for he was not a type of the Lord on His throne, the Solomon-character of whose reign will continue to the end. Faithfulness to the Lord's anointed in a time of general defection was never to be forgotten. Such devotion was never to be unrequited.

For how long did the remembrance of all this last, attested by the reward bestowed on Chimham the son? As long as the kingdom lasted in Judah, so long was there a witness of the king's approval of such conduct. For not only did David give Chimham a place before him, but he assigned him a portion in the city of the king's birth. In the city of his father's house Chimham owned a possession (Jer. 41 : 17). Barzillai was of the tribe of Gad, the eldest son of Zilpah, Leah's handmaid, but Chimham had henceforth a portion in Judah, the fourth son of the first wife Leah. And, till the kingdom of Judah was terminated by the Babylonish captivity, Chimham's portion by Bethlehem was an abiding witness of Barzillai's faithfulness, and of David's acknowledgment of it.

The application of all this history is plain, and we understand the reason that it has been preserved. Very evident are the points of resemblance, but marked, too, are contrasts. David was hindered by Barzillai's age from acting as he would toward him, and his hasty

action regarding Mephibosheth tells us we have a man like ourselves before us. But nothing can hinder the Lord Jesus rewarding as He will all who have followed Him in His rejection, and none will suffer injustice at that day. He will confess them before His Father, and before His angels, and the company of heavenly saints, who have served Him whilst absent, shall be with Him on high, as those of earth shall be before Him, when He reigns over the house of Jacob for ever. (Luke 12:8; Rev. 3:5; 7:15; 14:1). He will then be found to have been in their thoughts, they shall be before His face when He takes to Himself the power and reigns.

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