

WOMEN OF BETHLEHEM.

THE SWEET PSALMIST OF ISRAEL.

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.	
BETHLEHEM—CITY OF DAVID - -	I
CHAPTER II.	
"THERE WERE GIANTS IN THOSE DAYS" -	12
CHAPTER III.	
DAVID ONE OF THE CHIEF CAPTAINS - -	35
CHAPTER IV.	
DAVID GOES TO JONATHAN - - -	38
CHAPTER V.	
THE RIGHTFUL KING PERSECUTED - -	52
CHAPTER VI.	
THE FUTURE KING OF ISRAEL - -	66

CHAPTER VII.

GLOOM IN THE CAREER OF DAVID	-	-	80
------------------------------	---	---	----

CHAPTER VIII.

DAVID'S ANOINTING OR CORONATION	-	-	94
---------------------------------	---	---	----

CHAPTER IX.

DAVID'S LAST PRAYER AND PRAISE	-	-	108
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"THE SWEET PSALMIST OF ISRAEL."

CHAPTER I.

"Beth-lehem Ephratah . . . 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." (Mic. v. 2.)

"To the heart subdued and lowly,
God His mighty grace shall bring.
Shiloh's prophet—patient waiting—
But precedes Jehovah's King.
Yea! His ways our hopes excel,
David follows Samuel."

BETHLEHEM—city of David—how many memories circle around the name of the bright little town, which has more than once proved itself worthy of its name—the house of bread! The lovely story of Ruth the Moabitess, of Naomi, and "the mighty man of wealth," is inseparably linked with it, for the mention of the cornfields of Bethlehem will ever remind us of the patient gleaner, whose faith led her to take shelter under the wings of the Lord

God of Israel, and who as the wife of Boaz became the mother of Obed, the grandfather of the sweet psalmist of scripture, David, the well-beloved king of Israel. The name David signifies beloved. And he was beloved of God.

When first David comes before us in the scripture history we see him in the pasture lands of Bethlehem, feeding or keeping the sheep of his father—the shepherd lad of the family—yet he was to be the anointed king, chosen of Jehovah, and ancestor of that One who also was to be born at Bethlehem, of whom the angel herald proclaimed to other shepherds, "I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." (Luke ii. 10, 11.)

No wonder that the angel spoke of *great* joy when he proclaimed such tidings to "*all* people," for no deeper gladness could be given than that which is bound up with the name of Jesus, now made Lord and Christ. Very few of the children of men would not be glad to have the abiding consciousness of forgiveness, and salvation, and eternal life; and all these blessed realities, and many more, are made good now to every soul who appropriates this glorious Saviour, whose birth was announced that day to the shepherds in the fields of the city of David.

It was a sad time in the history of the people of Israel when the young son of Jesse was feeding his father's sheep in the fields around the "city of

bread," as the name Bethlehem means. The king whom they had chosen had proved himself utterly unworthy of his exalted position, and from fear of his subjects he disobeyed the command of Jehovah, and was rejected by Him when all the attempts of the venerable prophet Samuel to lead him to repentance had failed.

Then the word of Jehovah came to the prophet, "How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Beth-lehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons." (1 Sam. xvi. 1.)

So from his home at Ramah the aged Samuel now goes up to the little town, which lay on an elevated ridge of land about six miles from the place where the beautiful temple was afterwards built by Solomon. Passing up the hill-sides, which were probably then, as now, terraced to the summit, so as to form a space for the fertile orchards of figs and pomegranates and vines, the house of Jesse was reached at last, and he and his sons are called to take part in the sacrifice which the prophet offers to Jehovah before anointing the future king. As the eldest son of the house appeared, and Samuel looked on his pleasing face and commanding stature, he thought that this must be the one whom he was to anoint; but the voice of Jehovah comes to him and says, "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have re-

fused him . . . for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."

Then one after the other of the seven sons of Jesse are passed before the prophet, but not one of them is chosen, and he asks the father if all his sons are there; and in his reply we see how the youngest, and perhaps the least esteemed of the family, had been neglected or overlooked when they were called together. The aged father tells him that the youngest of all is not there, but is keeping the sheep, and to his surprise possibly, the prophet answers, "Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither." A messenger is sent in haste to the fields, where all unconscious of what was passing at home, the young shepherd was faithfully doing his work of caring for and feeding the flock.

Brought at once into the midst of the waiting company in the shepherd's dress he wore in the fields, with the fresh, ruddy glow of health and youth upon his face, Samuel sees a lad of a beautiful countenance before him, and immediately the voice of Jehovah comes, "Arise, anoint him: for this is he." So the holy anointing oil is put upon the head of Jehovah's chosen king in the midst of all his brethren, and he is anointed by the prophet also chosen of Jehovah as a special witness to Himself in the midst of Israel. As a little child in the tabernacle at Shiloh, Samuel had heard the voice of the Lord God calling him by name for the special place he was

henceforth to fill ; so we can understand that when the years of his long and faithful service were drawing to a close, and he was conscious that his work was well nigh done, it was a consolation to him, and a natural thing as it were, to be allowed to see and anoint the one who was now to be the link between the people of Israel and Israel's God.

It was not enough for the future king that he should be thus chosen and set apart ; for he would need peculiar power in the position in which he was placed, and this is at once conferred ; for we read, "and the Spirit of Jehovah came upon David from that day forward." Did the young shepherd understand the wonderful character of what thus took place in such simplicity in his quiet home at Bethlehem ? We can hardly think any of those present, excepting Samuel, could fully do so, for Saul still reigned in his kingdom, and none but the prophet knew that not only was that wilful king rejected of Jehovah, but also that the one chosen to succeed him was already appointed of God, and invested with divine power.

This did not mean that the youth who was "of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to," was at once to be placed in the sight of the nation as God's king ; on the contrary, he has to return to the work of keeping his father's sheep for a time, where he, who was to be the shepherd of Israel, had already proved his fitness to be so by the way he had met the many difficulties and

trials of endurance of actual shepherd life in the hills and valleys near his home. Had David been a careless or cowardly keeper of his father's sheep we can safely say he would never have been called to the royal throne of Judah and Israel ; nor would he have been so had he not, even as a shepherd lad, met all the dangers and emergencies in a spirit of real dependence upon God. David realised his own weakness to face the lion and the bear, that lurked in their hiding-places near the fields where he kept the sheep, and this made him strong, for he leaned wholly upon God, who was his strength, and so was delivered from them and able to overcome them.

The family of Jesse, who saw the holy anointing oil put upon the head of David that day, could little have foreseen what a path of difficulty and danger and trial lay between him and the throne for which he was destined. The king who is to be strong for Jehovah must learn to be strong in faith, by passing through circumstances where that faith is tested and strengthened. The one who is to lead his people to know Jehovah better must learn himself what it is to know Him through finding every other fail.

" For David's Psalms had ne'er been sung,
If grief his heart had never wrung."

The greatest rulers are those who have best learned to obey, so David must learn obedience and dependence before he can "sway the royal

sceptre, or wear the royal crown," and he must go back to the lonely pasture lands around Bethlehem till the moment comes when he is called of God to enter the courtly circle around the king, whom he was to serve before he succeeded him.

The calling of a shepherd in such a region as the lands around his home naturally fitted the young son of Jesse for the years of training he was to pass through. Situated as the city is on the highest level of the highlands of Judah, with deep valleys or wadies running down to the Dead Sea on one side, and to the land of the Philistines on the other, he would have ever to be on his guard against the wild beasts of the deep ravines, and also against Bedouin robbers from the east, and daring foes from Philistia, who were always on the alert to pillage the flocks of the Israelites.

So it was probably in defence of the lambs and sheep of the flock that David became so expert in the use of the sling, and in braving every sort of danger, enduring fatigue and privation, and heat and cold, those strong, fearless elements in his character were called out and trained, which afterwards so fitted him to become the warrior king of his country, and the faithful dependent servant of Jehovah. That he never forgot his shepherd life we see plainly in the beautiful psalms he was inspired by the Spirit of God to write. Wherever the scriptures are read and valued, there, too, his wonderful Psalm xxiii. is loved, and known by heart generally. How well we

can imagine that on some quiet sunny day of early summer, when there was a little time of rest as the flock was lying around him, the young shepherd first wrote, "Jehovah is *my* Shepherd ; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters."

Then, too, the sense of having been set apart for some special service to the God of Israel might have found expression in his words: "Thou anointest my head with oil ; my cup runneth over."

How long David remained keeping the sheep after he had been anointed by Samuel we do not know, but there was evidently no effort made either by his father or himself to leave the simplicity of his ordinary life. He was just going quietly on doing his duty, leaving everything to the God whom he had learned to confide and rest in. So it came about quite simply and naturally, that when the king whom Jehovah had rejected was troubled by an evil spirit of sadness and dread, his servants advise him to have a skilful musician brought to play before him, hoping that the sweet strains of the harp, of which the Israelites were so fond, might dispel the gloom that clouded their master's life.

The king agrees to this, and commands them to find a man that can play well and bring him to the court. We could hardly have expected that a shepherd would be the one out of all Judah chosen for this delicate service, but we find one of

Saul's servants telling him that he has seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is a skilful player on the harp, and also a valiant and prudent man, and fitted by his pleasing appearance to stand before the king. At once a message is conveyed to Bethlehem, asking Jesse to send David his son to the king, and he replies in the courteous eastern fashion by taking an ass and lading it with a kid and bread and a bottle, or skin, of wine, probably made from their own vineyard, and sending all to the monarch by the hand of his youngest son.

With all the beauty of fresh young health and strength, and better still, with the beaming, happy countenance of a young man finding his rest and joy and strength in God, the God of Israel, David appeared for the first time before the unhappy king, who is at once attracted by him and makes him his armour-bearer, and we are told that he loved him greatly. Thus did the shepherd lad become an attendant at the court of Saul, and his skilful use of the harp often soothed the king, for God so ordered it that when the evil spirit troubled him and David took his harp and played before him, Saul was refreshed and made well and the evil spirit departed from him. For the time relief was permitted to the man whose wilful rebellion against God had caused him to be set aside, for not until he had wholly cast off all true fear of the Jehovah of Israel do we read that "the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul."

It was probably for a short time only that David now remained with Saul, and we can but feel that it would be with a deep sense of relief he once more found himself on the way to his native city, and passing up the white limestone road leading through the groves of olives and pomegranates, once again entered his own peaceful home, far from the royal dwelling with its constant alarms from the Philistine foes, who were always on the watch to harass and oppress the Israelites.

Obedient to the call of the king when he was needed, he returned to his father as soon as his services are no longer called for; and the very memory of his short stay at the court as the shepherd minstrel boy quickly faded from the monarch's mind. To David himself the time spent with Saul must have been a strange revelation of the utter departure from Jehovah, and the consequent misery and weakness of the kingly power. Yet it is beautiful to find how the young son of Jesse looked at Saul as the anointed ruler of the people of Jehovah, and thus one to be served and obeyed with the most loving and loyal allegiance; and this even when relentlessly persecuted and hated by him.

A few months, or perhaps years, now passed quietly over the home at Bethlehem, where, learning more of what the God of Israel was to the one who trusted in Him, David only heard rumours at first of the invasion of the land by the dreaded foes from Philistia. In the peaceful path

of homely every-day duty he goes on strong in his own simple confidence in God, which he may possibly have first learned from his grandfather Obed, or even from Ruth herself, for he often repeats the lovely expression of Boaz when welcoming her as a gleaner to his fields, and turning it into prayer he says, "Hide me under the shadow of thy wings." (Psa. xvii. 8.) Several times in his psalms we find the same words, and they had been possibly heard by him very often when as a little child the story of Ruth the Moabitess, afterwards the honoured wife of Boaz, was told to him.

He would hear of the tender devotion of the mother of Obed—his grandfather—to the aged Naomi, and the comfort she found in the kindness of Boaz, who owned her faith when he said to her, "The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." So in the midst of preparations for war that were all around him David could rest in his sure and calm confidence in God, which was wrought in him by the Holy Spirit, and when others were trembling for fear he could say to Him whose servant he was, "My soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast." (Psa. lvii. 1.)

CHAPTER II.

"Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." (Psa. xxiii. 4.)

"'Tis He, the mighty Saviour comes, the victory now is won,
And lo, the throne of David waits for David's royal Son.
Shine forth in all Thy glory, Lord, that man at last may see,
That joy, so long estranged from earth, can only flow from
Thee."

"THERE were giants in those days," as scripture itself tells us, and the people of Israel seem to have always had a peculiar terror of them. Their faithless fear of the sons of Anak was one of the reasons they gave before Moses of the impossibility of their overcoming the enemy in Canaan. They said, "We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight." (Num. xiii. 31-33.)

In all this the people looked only at themselves and at the giants. Jehovah and His almighty power were forgotten. It was the same with Saul and his

people at the time of which we are now speaking. The Philistines had invaded Judah, and with them they had a champion whose appearance filled all the host of Israel with terror, for Goliath the giant was indeed of "great stature," being nearly ten feet high. Had there been any faith in the hearts of the men of Israel they would have known that it mattered nothing to God whether the enemy was of giant strength or childlike weakness—all would be alike powerless before Him, and if He was with them an army of giants would be easily overcome.

Who were these Philistines who were so constantly a source of trouble to the Israelites? Little is actually known of them, though some writers think that they were of Egyptian origin. That they had settled on the coast of Canaan before Israel entered the land is certain, and the name of Palestine, now so generally used for the land of promise, really means the land of the Philistines. Had the twelve tribes been faithful to the word given by the mouth of Moses they would have driven them all out of their territories, but they were unfaithful, and thus the various peoples whom they allowed to remain afterwards became their conquerors. It was so with these enemies of Philistia. They were always at hand and claiming possession of the most fertile parts of the country. They had so far become the masters of Israel that in the early days of Saul's reign they would not allow any smith to live in his dominions, so that

there could be no weapons made or even sharpened, for only files were allowed them to sharpen the ox goads and mattocks and gardening tools.

So that when the king whom Israel had chosen first began to gather an army around him, for he had been appointed to save Israel out of the hand of the Philistines, not a single sword or spear was there amongst them all excepting with the king himself and Jonathan his son. As the years went on, however, God in His mercy often gave His people the victory over the many different nations who came against them, and of the spoils they gathered armour and arms for themselves, and at last had so far freed the country from the Philistines that they probably had an arsenal where swords and spears were made, so that when David comes before us the army of Saul had greatly increased, and had their needful arms also.

This did not supply them with courage, however, for "their defence was departed from them," and when once again the powerful foe enters the territory of Judah and their camp is pitched on the mountainous ground south of the valley of Elah, all the army of Saul is utterly dismayed and terror-stricken. The Israelites had their camp on the north, and thus the valley of Elah lay between the two armies. Now the dreaded champion of Gath, clad in his glistening coat of mail, with a helmet and breastplate of the same metal, and greaves of brass upon his legs, daily advances towards the Israelites, and cries aloud

to them in taunting fashion to choose a man of them to go down and fight with him.

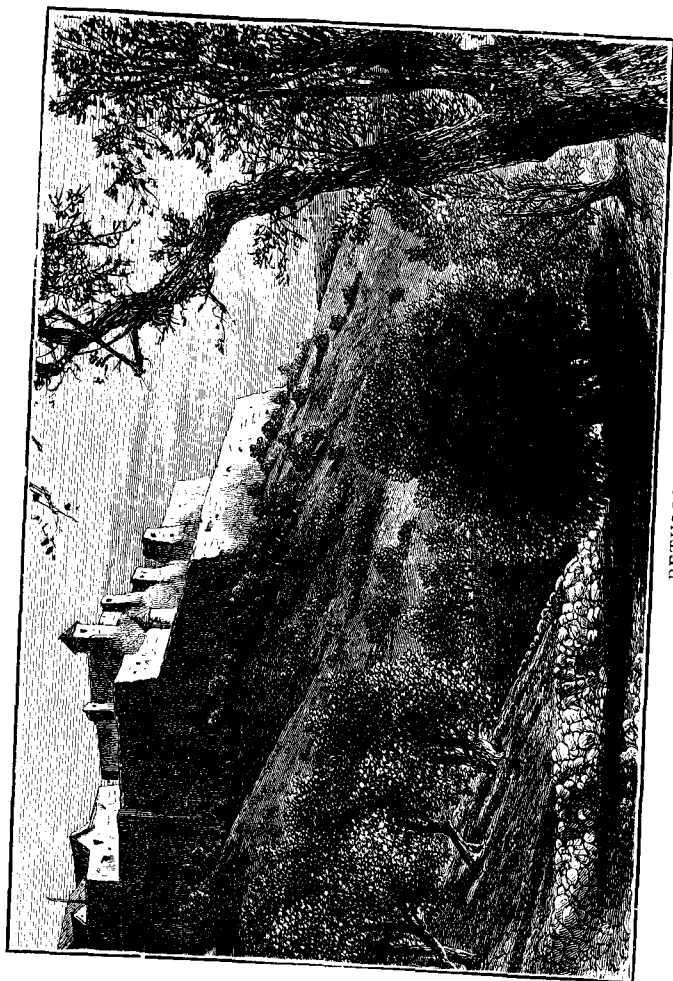
Day after day did the giant thus present himself, saying, "I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together." Even the faith and courage of Jonathan failed him now apparently, for though before this he had been the means of a great victory gained over these enemies of Philistia, he is not spoken of now, and seems like the rest to have been too terrified to attempt anything. The three eldest sons of Jesse had followed Saul to the battle-field, as volunteers perhaps, but David himself had remained at his usual duties of keeping the sheep, though he had probably heard of the dreaded Goliath of Gath, as all hearts in the army seemed to fail because of him.

As week after week passed on till forty days had gone by since his sons left him, Jesse, their father, at last desired to have tidings of them, and turning to his youngest son as one in whom he could trust, he tells him to take some parched corn and ten loaves of bread to his brethren in the camp, and also a present of ten cheeses for the captain of their company, and find out how his brothers are, and take their pledge.

How little could David have known when he rose up early the next day and started on his journey to the battle-field, that he was leaving behind him for ever his shepherd life in the fields of Bethlehem! The time had come when

he was to be put in a place where before all Israel his fidelity to Jehovah and his dependence on Him would be tested to the uttermost. The miles that lay between the peaceful home of Jesse and the turmoil and dismay of the camp were passed over as quickly as possible by the young shepherd, still in his shepherd dress, and with his sling as his only weapon. He soon finds himself among the armed soldiers around Saul, or rather amongst those who had charge of the waggons or cars, which were all gathered closely together and formed a defence in the rear of the army.

Here David leaves his father's presents for his brethren and their captain in the care of the one appointed for such a duty, and goes himself into the ranks where his brothers were, and soon finds them out, and gives them the message from their father. While he is talking to them there is a movement in the forefront of the army, and to his surprise and distress probably, he sees many of the host of Israel fleeing before the enemy. The only undaunted one there, as it would seem, his calm countenance appears to have impressed his frightened countrymen, and they ask him if he has seen this tremendous foe, who so proudly defies the armies of Jehovah. They tell him also of great rewards that are to be given to any one who shall slay this giant, and in it all he hears no word of turning to the God of Israel, for Jehovah is as much forgotten by them as He



BETHLEHEM.

was by Goliath when he said, "I defy the armies of Israel." He left out Israel's God, but he was to prove that he had made a fatal mistake in so doing.

Calm and fearless in his confidence in the Lord, David sees in the champion only an uncircumcised heathen ; he discerns that it is really a question now between the Lord and this daring defier, and he knows there can be only one issue to that. Thus he replies to those who have been speaking to him by saying, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" It was truly a *living* God whom David knew, and thus he was preserved in a calm rest and confidence that seemed something strange and wonderful to the unbelieving ranks of Saul in their abject dread of the giant.

Even his own brother does not understand him, and he angrily asks him with whom he has left his sheep in the wilderness, and blames him for having come down to *see* the battle, but, in reality, this younger brother, he soon finds, has come "to fight and win the battle," and not merely in idle curiosity to look on. Not stopping to waste time in many words, David simply replies : "What have I now done? Is there not a cause?" and again he turns to another of the soldiers and speaks to him in the same trustful, undaunted spirit, seeking to encourage them to look at the foe as he actually was before God.

At last the king himself hears of this strangely

brave shepherd lad, whose faith, which ought to have been shared by them all, puts him so much above them. Saul sends for him, and without a boasting word he at once takes the place of his servant, and simply says—referring to Goliath—"Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine." Looking only at his youth and inexperience as a soldier, the king tells him that he is not able to meet such an antagonist as this, and then he hears what had probably never been told before, that when David was keeping his father's sheep, a lion and a bear had both attempted to carry off a lamb from the flock, but he had pursued the lion, and so smote him that he had saved the lamb who had been seized; and then as the enraged lion attacked the faithful shepherd he had seized the powerful animal and killed him; and thus it was also with the bear, the dreaded Syrian bear, that hunters never venture to encounter alone if they can possibly escape.

Then to shew Saul why he had told him this he adds, "this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. . . . Jehovah that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine."

Syrian bear, or lion, or Philistine giant were all very much the same to David, because he looked not at them but at Jehovah, and he forgot himself. The

conflict was the Lord's, and He it was who would decide the victory, and this strong, simple faith gave the one who had it real supremacy over all there. The king was touched and impressed by the quiet trust in God which he could not help seeing, and with a faint hope perhaps that this young shepherd lad might indeed be able to overcome the champion of the enemy, as he had the wild animals of the jungles, he permits him to go on what seemed a very desperate venture to the one without faith, and replies to him, "Go, and Jehovah be with thee."

But if he can do nothing himself in this deadly struggle with the enemy's power, he will at least have his own armour used to defend the one who can, and so he clothes him with a shining coat of mail and a helmet, and girds a sword upon him. At once the free unfettered strength of the shepherd warrior has fled from him, and armour-clad thus he is hindered and weak. In obedience to the king he had allowed the armour to be put upon him ; but in confidence in God he now puts it off, and garbed in his loose, everyday dress, with no other arms than his sling and staff, he goes down to the brook near and chooses five smooth stones out of the water, and with these in the wallet he had slung around him he goes down into the valley of Elah to encounter the giant of Gath. We can imagine how the thought of this day would be woven into his own words, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of

death, I will fear no evil : for thou art with me ; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

From the camp of the Philistines on the other side of the deep valley David would be plainly seen, and probably thinking he bore some message, the champion approaches to meet him. Surprised at seeing him alone he looks about to find if some armed soldier is not there also, for he only disdains this youth of fair countenance, who has not even a bow or sword or spear in his hand. His pride aroused at such a mean adversary being sent to fight with such a noted soldier as himself, the haughty Philistine asks, "Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves?" And then he pronounces a wrathful curse upon David, and says, "Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field."

The proud boast was not met in the same vaunting spirit by his young antagonist, but calmly he answers the giant Philistine, who must have looked like a huge brazen statue, with the words, "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield : but I come to thee in the name of Jehovah of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied." This was not all, however. David knows that deliverance is at hand, and so he goes on to say, "This day will Jehovah deliver thee into mine hand ; . . . that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that Jehovah saveth not with the sword and spear : for

the battle is Jehovah's, and he will give you into our hands."

Now the glittering, armour-clad giant leaves the spot where he had listened to what David had to say to him, and advances to crush the slight stripling form, as he thought, but the young shepherd has proved the value of his trusty sling in more than one hard fought encounter with foes as much to be dreaded as the Philistine; and without a quiver of fear he runs forward, putting a stone into the sling as he does so. Then with arm nerved by confidence in God and with steady unerring aim he sends the stone flying through the air with the force of a pistol shot.

Another moment, and the ponderous figure of Goliath is falling with deafening clang upon the earth he had trodden so proudly just before. The stone sent with such true aim had struck the one vulnerable spot and sunk deep in the giant's forehead, and he falls never to rise again. Well might David say, "Jehovah is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? Jehovah is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell." (Psa. xxvii. 1, 2.)

David uses the sword of the giant to cut off his head, and then all the host of Israel—who must have looked on in breathless suspense till that moment—utter one great shout of victory which is echoed back by the hills on every side; and the

dismayed and disheartened Philistines, seeing that their mighty champion is slain, flee from their camp in utter rout and confusion. Great was the victory and triumph of that memorable day, for the foes were pursued by the Israelites to the very gates of their cities, and many were slain ; and the returning victors had the tents of the deserted camp of the enemy with all that they contained left in their hands as the spoils of victory.

It has seemed strange to some, that in the scripture history we are told that when David went forth to meet Goliath, the king said to Abner, the captain—or commander-in-chief—of the host : "Abner, whose son is this youth?" as though he had never seen David before ; yet we know that he was for a time in the court of Saul, and soothed the monarch with his skilful playing on the harp. Now he appears as a perfect stranger, and it shews that though Saul had valued the relief gained by his sweet music at the moment, yet he had no real knowledge of the one who was living in dependence on God—no intimacy of fellow-feeling with him—they had nothing in common, and when David left the court he was very soon entirely forgotten by the king, who now commands Abner, "Enquire thou whose son the stripling is."

Only a few minutes pass, and then David returns out of the valley with the head of the giant in his hand as proof to all of the victory, and Abner takes him to the king, who asks him : "Whose son

art thou, thou young man?"—they were strangers! So it is, and must be, to-day. The people of God are unknown by the world if they are true to their calling. It was so with the One of whom David was a type. He who went down into the dark valley—not only of the shadow of death, but death itself—to deliver His people from a worse enemy than Goliath, from Satan himself who had the power of death, but who was utterly vanquished in his own stronghold—even He—the Lord Jesus Christ, was unknown and a Stranger in the world His hands had made. "Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not." (1 John iii. 1.) If we are walking in faith on God we shall, like the son of Jesse, be strangers to those whom, nevertheless, we seek to serve and to lead into the same path.

When David was taken by Abner to the king he found that Jonathan was there with his father, and the faith that burned in both their hearts—for Jonathan had real trust in God—quickly became a powerful link between the two young men. He listened to all that was said to his father by the conqueror of Goliath, and he saw much in him that won his respect and affection, but the chief bond between them was that of obedience and devotion to God, the God of Israel; and thus we are told, "the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." This friendship with the son of Saul must have greatly recompensed him for the many

trials and sorrows that soon came upon him, for his peaceful home life at Bethlehem was over for ever ; Saul would not allow him to return there, but attached him to himself as one of his most distinguished captains, and David's career as a warrior began.



CHAPTER III.

"Our God is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death." (Psa. lxxviii. 20.)

"Every joy or trial falleth from above,
Traced upon our dial by the Sun of love.
We may trust Him fully all for us to do;
They who trust Him wholly find Him wholly true."

AS David became from this time one of the chief captains over the men of war, and of those specially appointed to be near the king—his body-guard, as it were—he found his place in the house of Saul and Jonathan, and had therefore the opportunity of seeing the king's son constantly. For a time he was probably in the camp with them, and it may have been there—in the greater freedom of tent life—that Jonathan and he made a covenant, to confirm and cement the friendship which began on the day when from the valley of Elah David returned in triumph, having delivered the whole host of his countrymen from their foes.

To ratify the covenant, it may be, Jonathan strips himself of his princely robe, and clothes the son of Jesse with it, and also puts upon him his own sword and bow and girdle, putting David

thus in his own place, for his loving, unjealous heart had no shade of fear as to any possible rivalry between them. His one thought seems to have been to do honour to the one who had braved a danger no other would face, and who had become the deliverer of all Israel, and bound Jonathan's heart to himself for his whole life, as one who shared the same dependence and faith.

Saul also honours the one who had set him free from the Philistine bondage, and places him over a company of the army, where he goes in and out at the bidding of the king. Obedient now in the royal household, as he had been in his life of a shepherd in his father's home, he gains the esteem and respect of all Israel and also of Saul's household. Great rewards had been promised to the man who should slay the giant Goliath; but the danger was no sooner over than these promises appear to have been forgotten, and no more is heard of them, and David himself would never remind the king of them.

The camp near the valley of Elah was at last broken up, and the march homeward to Gibeah of Saul was begun. The distance between the two places is about twenty miles, as what has been identified as the place of the conflict with the champion of Gath lies about fifteen miles southwest of Jerusalem, while the city of Gibeah, which no longer exists, was on the hill Gibeah about four miles north of Jerusalem.

The land of Israel was not then the desolation

it has since become, and though now the traveller passing over the same route might go for miles without seeing anything more than a few miserable huts, then the whole face of the country was either cultivated ground with fertile and luxuriant crops, or covered with thickly populated cities and villages. As the army of Saul returned in a sort of triumphal procession the women came out of all these cities and met them with songs of joy, and playing on their tabrets and other musical instruments they sang a refrain in answer to each other of "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands."

The jealousy of the king is immediately aroused, and full of anger he is intensely displeased with the women's song, and not caring to hide his wrath he says, "They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom?" From this day he cherished bitter feelings of jealousy against the son of Jesse. Did he understand that David was "the neighbour" of whom the prophet Samuel had told him years before when he had disobeyed the command of Jehovah respecting the Amalekites? Samuel had then said to him, "Jehovah hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, better than thou."

Saul may have remembered this, and the song of the women, who though they paid honour to the king yet justly gave to David what was his

due, was the means of arousing a terrible jealousy, to which he gave way until it completely mastered him. Satan quickly takes advantage of what he sees in the monarch's mind, for now the evil spirit came back upon him on the morrow after the return home to Gibeah. Those around him, who knew how David's playing on the harp had once dispelled the gloom and caused the evil spirit to depart, now get him again to use his skill as a harpist, hoping the remedy might be as effectual as before. So the strains of the sweet music rise and fill the place where the king is sitting in sombre silence—javelin in hand—while David is trying his hardest to divert the mind of his master from what evidently troubles him. Alas! all he does is in vain. The jealousy Saul has been nourishing has become hatred so deep that the deadly javelin is cast at the one who had risked his life for him a few days before. Saul casts the javelin at David, saying to himself he would smite him to the wall.

A second time this was done, and a second time David was able to avoid it, for God would not allow him to be touched.

Finding that he cannot get rid of his faithful servant by means of the javelin, a dread of David comes upon the unhappy man, and he will not have him in his own guard but removes him to the ordinary troops and makes him general over a thousand of them, where he is ever before the army and goes in and out with them. Thus the slight that Saul put upon him was really turned to

account by God to fit him for the day when he should bear rule over the army, and the whole kingdom. In all his duties as leader of his troops David was taught of God to behave himself wisely and all Israel and Judah learned to know and love their fearless, self-forgotten young general or captain, who went out and came in with them, and cared for their welfare as tenderly as he used to care for his father's sheep.

The wisdom with which he bore himself made Saul still more afraid of him, and he seems to have been ever on the watch for an opportunity to destroy him. Nothing of this terrible hatred, however, altered the lowly loyal allegiance of the one who was the chosen king of Jehovah, but who, for the time, was to serve and obey the man whom he would eventually succeed; and so he patiently endures all the jealousy and dislike which is ever shewn him by the king. The love of Jonathan must have been the one solace and comfort of his life at this period, and many a time probably would the friends leave the city together when the military duties of the day were over, and go out into the open country where they could unhinderedly speak together of what was dearest to them, the glory of the God of Israel, who had brought His people up out of Egypt—the house of bondage—and given them the fair fertile land of Canaan, of which in neglect of His will they had never fully taken possession, and indeed had well nigh forfeited by their sin and disobedience.

From the heights around the city the stronghold or fort at Jebusi—now better known to us as Jerusalem—would be visible, and though when Joshua had divided the land amongst the tribes Judah had conquered Jebusi and burnt the city with fire, yet they had allowed the Jebusites to regain possession of the fort, and in Saul's time they were masters of the place. To the young and ardent David it must have been a strange and sorrowful fact that so much of the land of promise was in the hands of the enemy still, and the view of the distant hills may have caused the beautiful words of Psalm cxxv. 2, "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so Jehovah is round about his people from henceforth even for ever." Then why should they fear their foes?

It was this consciousness of the abiding nearness of the presence of God, that enabled David to pass through all the difficulties and dangers that the hatred and malice of the king so often involved him in, in quietness of spirit, untinged by resentment or opposition. In all this David shews his true greatness, though it was—we need hardly say—the fruit of the grace of God in him. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." (Prov. xvi. 32.) This is a greatness, too, open to most of us. Though very few can have such a place as David's otherwise, they can in this respect.

Finding that open violence is of no avail against

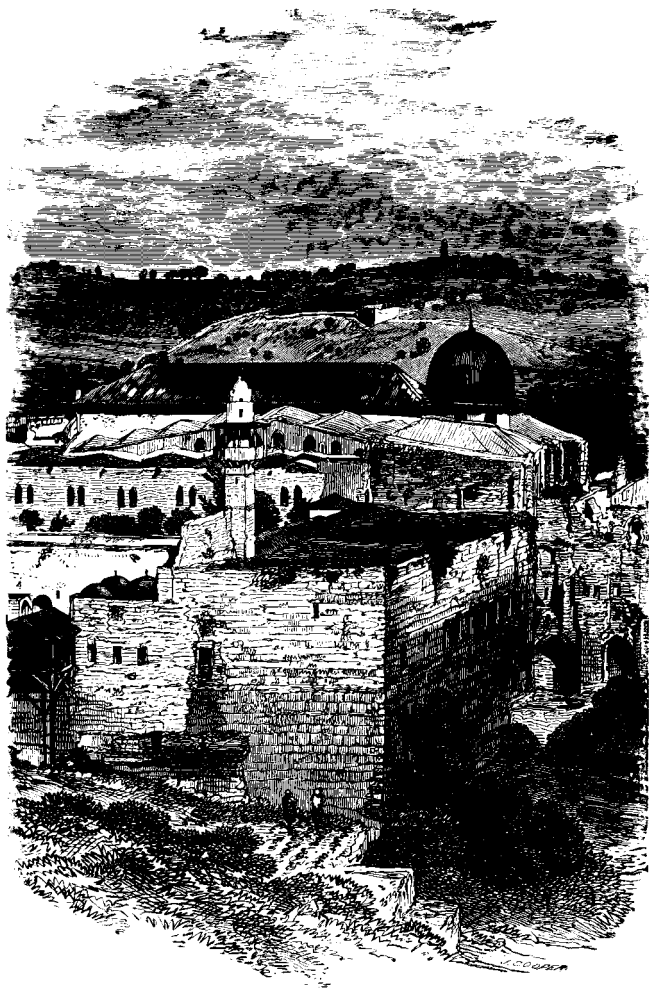
his young "chief of a thousand," Saul now tries what craft will do, and seeks to send him on war-like raids into the land of the Philistines, hoping that he might rashly go into danger that would prove fatal. In doing this he offers to make David his son-in-law by giving him his daughter as wife. In his reply the true humility in his heart shines out, for he esteemed it a very great honour to be in relationship to the king who had once been owned of Jehovah as *His* king, and for David it was in this that all his greatness consisted. So he says, "Who am I? and what is my life, or my father's family in Israel, that I should be son in law to the king?" As the conditions Saul desired of David in order to his marriage with his daughter were those with which he could comply, being the destruction of the power of the enemy—the enemies of Jehovah and of His people—Saul's proposal is agreed to by David and becomes the opportunity of a successful inroad into the country of Philistia, from which he returns victorious, having slain two hundred of the enemies.

The hatred shewn by the king to him happily was not shared by Saul's family; for Michal, his daughter, loved David, and now became his wife. Even this new bond, which would have naturally been a cause of affection, failed to be so with the jealous Saul. He saw and knew that the Lord was with his faithful young son-in-law, and he knew that his own daughter loved him as a wife

should, and for her sake one might have thought he would have cast away his envy and dislike. Alas! the scripture tells us "Saul was yet the more afraid of David; and Saul became David's enemy continually."

There is little doubt that the state of matters in the king's household was well known, even amongst the ranks of the foes, and possibly thinking the domestic differences might weaken the hands of Saul the Philistine princes proclaim war again, but now they have to meet one whom God has endowed with wisdom and might, and his wise generalship is so beforehand with all the strategy and schemes of the adverse princes that they are unable to gain any advantage. Thus David's name was much set by. He proved himself wiser than all the veterans in the service of the king. He tells us the secret of this when we hear him say, "It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect. . . . He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms." (Psa. xviii. 32-34.)

Throwing off all pretence of friendship, at last the king openly speaks to his son Jonathan and to his servants that they should kill David. To his son such a desire was most terrible, for David was the delight of his heart, and he loved him as a brother; so while he has to warn him of danger, Jonathan so intercedes with his unhappy father that even his obdurate heart is touched. He reminds Saul of the day of terror and dismay in



OLIVET.

the valley of Elah, when the young shepherd took his life in his hand and went down to meet and overcome Goliath—when Jehovah wrought by him a great salvation for all Israel. Saul saw it all then and rejoiced with the rest, and now his son says to him, "Wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause?"

Reasoned with thus, the better feelings of the king for a little time return, and he relents towards David, and tells his son, "As the Lord liveth, he shall not be slain." Glad at heart for his friend's sake, Jonathan goes and tells him all that has passed between his father and himself. Ever ready to forgive, David shews his freedom from any bitter feeling by going to the king with Jonathan and then by taking his usual place in the court. How long this time of peace lasted we do not know, but the time came when war again broke out with the Philistines, and again the son of Jesse becomes the instrument of a great deliverance. He is used of God to completely overcome the massed ranks of the enemy and slays them "with a great slaughter," so that the remainder of their army is unable to face the victorious Israelites, and they retreat to their own land.

Now we see how well nigh impossible it is for one who has cherished a spirit of envy and jealousy to escape from it. Saul may have been sincere for the moment when he swore to Jonathan that his friend should be left unharmed, but he had put himself under the power of one who was

completely his master now, and who used the fresh distinction gained by the successful campaign of David to re-awaken the animosity which was only slumbering in the heart of Saul. When first he became king, Saul had for a time acted in obedience to God, and then had been used to gain victories over many foes. Thus he had acquired a reputation as a skilful soldier which he had vainly attributed to himself, without owning the real source of his power. David's success thus touched all his foolish pride, for he felt himself injured by another getting a glory which he once had alone.

The evil spirit now manifests itself in the sullen gloom on the face of the monarch, which must have made all in his household tremble. David is sent for, and only thinking of how he can give relief to the man whom he seems to have truly loved—spite of all his hatred—he again plays upon his harp to soothe if possible the melancholy madness which seized him, poor tool of Satan as he had now become.

All is in vain. The deadly weapon again cast at him by the king shews David that his life is still in jeopardy while he remains there, so he escapes to his own house, and when the messengers are sent by Saul to take him, Michal his wife is obliged to let him down by the window from an upper room to ensure his getting away from them in safety. Where shall the son of Jesse find refuge now? To go to his father's house at Bethlehem would have been the desire of his heart, but this

would have involved them in danger, he knew, and would have been no safe place for him, so he resolves to go to the one who was the revealer—for many years—of the mind of Jehovah for His people.

To the aged Samuel at Ramah, the prophet whom God had commanded to anoint His chosen king, David now turns, knowing that God alone can protect and shield him, and owning thus his own dependence upon Him. Naturally he might have felt that with troops at his command who loved him, and would follow him if he called them, he might soon have been able to defy Saul and all his power; but such a course would have been to take himself out of the path of faith, and so without any shadow of resistance to that power which was still permitted outwardly of God, though in reality already judged and doomed, David bends before the storm, and quietly submits to become an outcast in the kingdom of which he is the anointed king.

The time for his being received openly in the kingdom has not yet come, he has to suffer many things first, and thus he becomes a type—faint though it be—of that One who “was in the world, . . . and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.”

Welcomed with all the kindly affection of Samuel, who must have grieved deeply over the terrible depths of evil to which Saul had now descended, David does not long remain in the house of the

prophet, but together they go to Naioth, where there was a school or college of the prophets, who all recognised Samuel as their head or chief. He may have thought that they would be safer there than in his own quiet home at Ramah, for Samuel knew something of the implacable nature of Saul, and may have felt that at Naioth they would be secure from his intrusion.

It soon became known that David had taken refuge with the aged Samuel, but casting off all respect even for him now, Saul dares to send men to arrest David to the place set apart for those who were the special servants of Jehovah. Now they are met by a power that lays hold of them and renders them utterly incapable of doing their master's bidding. They see all the company of the prophets, and Samuel standing as their appointed head, and these messengers of Saul are seized by the same spirit and compelled to utter prophetic words also in spite of themselves. No thought have they then of taking David—they have to own their entire defeat, but Saul will not hear, and sends others, and yet others, who all meet the same discomfiture.

Driven on by Satan, the king now ventures to go himself, only to be in his turn humbled and mastered by the same power that had met his servants. The Spirit of God laid hold of him and he was forced to prophesy before Samuel, instead of slaying David. Then, stricken with weakness, he lies down—stripped of his kingly robes—all

that day and night, unable to do that for which he had come. It might have been hoped that this would have wrought a change in the heart of Saul and led him to repentance, but it was not so. He had resolutely closed his eyes to the light, and is allowed to remain in the darkness he has chosen. *He at last leaves Samuel and the company of the prophets, even more hardened in evil than before, because he had been in the presence of the Spirit of God and had resisted His power.*



CHAPTER IV.

“They wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.” (Heb. xi. 38.)

“Thou knewest not where to lay thy head ;
When over the twilight sea
The birds of the mountain homeward sped,
There was no home for thee.
And thou, an outcast in Abram’s land,
On the midnight mountains lone,
Didst look to the Home where thy feet should stand
When the long day’s work was done.”

FINDING his place of refuge with Samuel no longer a safe one, because of the way in which the now apostate king had cast off the last shadow of respect for the prophet of Jehovah, and thus for Jehovah Himself, David now leaves Naioth and goes to Jonathan, for he sees that never again can he return to Saul. To serve him now would be to ally himself with one who despised the witness of God, and better far to be an outcast in the earth than do that. Before he finally severs all connection with the court he must once more see Jonathan face to face, so he goes to him and

tells him what has happened. Unable to comprehend such a terrible state of things, the son of Saul seeks to persuade him that he must be mistaken, thinking that his father would not break his promise—made, too, with a solemn oath—that David should not be slain. He cannot conceive the depths of evil Saul has fallen into, though David says, “as Jehovah liveth . . . there is but a step between me and death.”

His own fidelity to his friend comes out as strongly as ever. Though he must have known that David's coming to the throne of the kingdom meant the exclusion of himself and his family, yet in entire self-abnegation he thinks only of his glory, and of his present safety, and does all he can to forward them.

Now a test is agreed on between them : if Saul shall say it is well when Jonathan speaks of David to him, then they will both know that there is no further reason to fear ; but if, on the contrary, he is angry, and answer his son roughly, then it will be a proof that the time for David to forsake Saul's service has really come. On the third day Jonathan is to meet his friend at the place agreed upon and tell him all. And then Jonathan, foreseeing what would inevitably come, makes a fresh covenant with David, causing him to swear that he would ever shew kindness to the house of Jonathan, even when Jehovah had cut off all his enemies from the face of the earth. Then he causes David to pronounce a solemn confirmation

of this covenant or agreement, by the love he had for him, for he loved him as he loved his own soul.

Two days after this when the king and his household are assembled for the usual evening meal Saul asks Jonathan why the son of Jesse is not present, ignoring completely his own deadly attack upon him so short a time before. Jonathan replies that David had asked leave of absence from him in order to go to Bethlehem. Now the wrath of his father is turned upon himself, and he says to him, "Thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own shame. . . . For as long as the son of Jesse lives upon earth, thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom. And now send and fetch him to me, for he must die." Impossible for Jonathan to do this! He would lose his own life rather, so he expostulates once again, "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?"

Then for the first time the spear in the hand of Saul is flung at his own once loved son. This tells him that the death of his friend is indeed resolved upon, and "in fierce anger" he rises from the table and refuses to eat that day, for "he was grieved for David, because his father had done him shame." In the morning he goes to the place they had appointed and there the friends meet. It was a sorrowful meeting, for it was keen pain to both to go their separate ways and live their lives apart from each other as strangers would. In these cold matter-of-fact days we can hardly understand perhaps the strong bond between these two young

men. If we think of it simply as a matter of personal affection we certainly shall fail to do so. We must see the faith that lit up Jonathan's heart to understand it; he saw in David much that marked him out as "a man after God's own heart," one whom He had appointed to feed His people Israel, and whose fitness for this place was so fully owned by him. Faith in Israel's God was the undying bond between David and Jonathan.

"And they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded." Then Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, we have sworn both of us in the name of Jehovah, saying, *Jehovah be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever.*" This farewell is their last word—David turns away to find shelter where he can, but Jonathan goes back to his father.

Alone, and sad at heart, wearied too probably by the wanderings of the previous days, which the comparative luxury of his life as the king's son-in-law would ill fit him for, the son of Jesse now turns his face southward and goes to the city of Nob, the place where the tabernacle was, and where the priestly family resided. As he leaves Gibeah behind him the hills around Jerusalem come into view, and from the hill on which the city of the priests was built would be plainly visible. At another time the sight of the encircling mountains reminded David of the care of Jehovah for His people, but now his confidence has become less vigorous, and his faith is dimmed by the

bitterness of being forced to leave all he loved and wander, a homeless stranger, in his own land.

He goes to the priest, and from him obtains food, the bread that had been the shewbread on the holy table before the Lord, and which was for the priests alone. But David was the anointed king, though now rejected and persecuted, and his need was enough to warrant his asking for even this bread; for God cared more for him than for what must be merely a form, when the one on the throne openly disowned God's king and God's prophet. Years before the son of Jesse had known no other weapons than his sling and stone, but now they have long been unused by him, and he is utterly defenceless, having been forced to flee without armour. He asks the priest if he has any weapon there that he can take, and strange as it may seem, he is offered the huge sword of Goliath, that sword which he had once wielded with such effect in the valley of Elah.

What a rush of memories must have come over the mind of David as he hears of this sword again, kept by the priests as a memorial of a great deliverance wrought for the land! "There is none like that; give it me," he said, and soon the huge weapon is in his hand.

That sword would have been *his* death on that day when he met the giant, had not faith enabled him to overcome, and then to turn his own weapon against the foe. It should now have been an encouragement to him to persevere in the

same path of faith and confidence in God, but there has only been One in this world who ever trod that path without swerving a hair's breadth.

David was truly a type of the Son of God when He in grace passed through this world as a lowly dependent Man, but we see continually how vast a chasm was between them. After receiving the sword, which in his ability to wield it is a proof of his great physical strength as well as his skill, his heart seems to have failed him, and apparently without any reference to the mind of God he determines to cast himself upon the generosity of the king of Gath—chief of the Philistines. It was an utterly false step as he soon finds. The servants of Achish say to him, "Is not this David the king of the land? did they not sing of him Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?"

No wonder that their mention of this fills their captive—for he appears to have been this—with terror; and that he should feign madness before the king is a sad proof of how his faith in God had failed. The very greatness of his danger and distress may have been used to recall him to his usual trust in the One who had so defended and kept him hitherto, and in Psalm lvi. we see him once more returning to the walk of faith, which for a time he had left. There we find what his heart endured during that sad time at Gath, as we hear his words, "Be merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up many that fight against

me, O thou most High. What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. . . . Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book? . . . In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me. . . . For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou keep my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?"

His pretence of madness may have been the means of his leaving Gath, for Achish asks his servants why they had brought a mad man to him; and in accordance with the eastern custom, David, as such, was allowed to go where he chose. Once more in his native land, but not daring to go to his own home, he finds a refuge in one of the caves, of which there are so many in Palestine. The cave of Adullam, which now became for a time his only shelter, lies between Bethlehem and the Dead Sea, in the limestone cliffs which overhang a deep gorge. A narrow path or shelf runs along the face of this cliff, and the cave itself can now only be reached by traversing this giddy height for some distance, till a projecting rock is reached just opposite the entrance, and from this a leap has to be taken into the cavern. Once there, all the power of Saul and his army could not have forced David and his followers from it, for one man could guard the entrance against a host.

When wandering over all this region to find pasture for his father's sheep, the shepherd lad would be sure to know all these caves, and as

they often became shelters from storm or robbers then, it was natural he should turn to them now. It was out in the wildest part of the country, where Saul himself would rarely go, and large enough to become the refuge of hundreds of men. It soon became known that the son of Jesse was driven from his home by the jealous hatred of Saul ; and, as under his oppressive rule many were subjected to cruel wrongs, it is not wonderful that there were some of his subjects who were in distress, and discontented, and in debt, from the heavy taxation it may be, and gradually these men began to realise that David was the anointed of Jehovah and the hope of His people as to any better government in the kingdom. So day after day saw first one and then another come to range themselves under him as their chief, till at last there were four hundred following him. His aged father and mother, and his brethren also came to him.

Not a very distinguished set of men were his followers then ; but they needed David, and we can say David needed them. Nor did they remain as they were when they first went to him. They were so moulded and influenced by living with him, and sharing his place of rejection, that they became imbued with his spirit in a measure, and in the day of his glory they were not unworthy to share it with him. When the Lord Jesus was here on earth it was not the rich or mighty or learned who were attracted to Him, but the poor

and sorrowful and sinful and outcast. Whether poor or rich, He never turned one away who sought Him in faith, and He is the same to-day. Now in the glory of heaven He is as accessible to all who go to Him as in His lowly days of rejection on earth. Never does a soul honestly seek Him now but finds Him, and finds far more than the heart can desire in finding Him, the Son of God in the glory.

The cave of Adullam, though a shelter, and a safe one for David and his hardy band of followers, may hardly have been a very fit place for his aged father and mother. His thoughtful love for them urges him to find some better refuge for them, but where can he find it? Many a prayer may David's heart have flashed up to Jehovah on their behalf, as silent and more rapid than the electric messages we are familiar with, and the place was at last found where they could be in safety, and without the many discomforts of the cave.

Through his ancestress, the much-loved Ruth, he had a link with Moab, and now David takes his father and mother there, to the king of the country, and without any hiding of his own outcast condition he speaks to the king in a kingly fashion, saying, "Let my father and my mother, I pray thee, come forth, and be with you, till I know what God will do for me." God is once more everything to him. Then he presents his parents to the king of Moab, who receives them at once, and they remain with him as long as he is in the hold.

They were not only those who were in distress, or debt, or sorrow who had been attracted to David, for now we find that the prophet Gad is with him, and through him the word of divine guidance comes: "Abide not in the hold; depart, and get thee into the land of Judah. Then David departed, and came into the forest of Hareth." This forest being in the mountains or hills of Judah was not so inaccessible as the cave, and many others now came to David to share his rejection and sufferings, but looking on to the time when the glory of his kingdom should compensate for all. Indeed, many would probably have said that to be with him—to share his shelter, and his food, or may be his hunger—to win his loving regard and care was all that they wanted. David himself made up for the loss of all else. How much more is this true of the One who condescends to call Himself "the root and offspring of David, the bright and morning star."

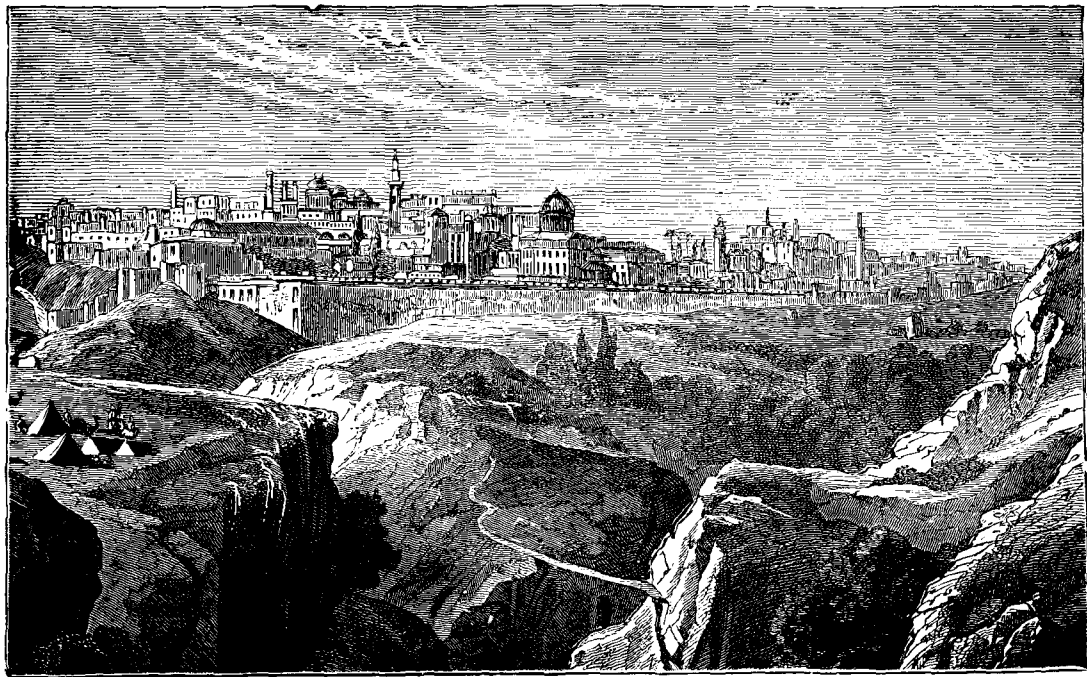
How long David and his band had been in the forest when Abiathar, the son of the priest Ahimelech, came down to him, we do not know, but most likely it was not long. A terrible story had the sorrow-stricken priest to tell the fugitives; and he himself, priest of Jehovah though he was, came to them as a fugitive also. When Saul, with his servants around him, heard that the son of Jesse and his followers were in the forest of Hareth, he had questioned them about David, and then heard from Doeg, his herdman, of his having been

supplied with food and the sword of Goliath when he went to the priests at Nob.

Sending for Ahimelech and also for all the priests that were in Nob, the king had them brought before him, and in spite of being assured that they knew nothing of David's fleeing from the court, he determines that they shall all be slain for having shewn him kindness.

Even his own servants might have hindered him from daring to carry out this frightful revenge, for when he commands them to slay the priests of Jehovah, not one of them will be guilty of the deed. There was one man there as cruel and full of hatred for the people of God as Saul was for his innocent son-in-law. This was Doeg the Edomite, who had informed against David, and he obeys the command, and slew that day of the priests of the Lord "eighty-five persons that did wear a linen ephod." Nor was this all. The very place where they had dwelt was to be made a desolation and the whole race of the priests annihilated, as, urged on by Satan, the king would have not one of them left to reproach him with this deed of darkness and guilt.

"And Nob, the city of the priests, smote he with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep, with the edge of the sword." Well can we enter somewhat into David's words, as we hear this sad story! "My heart is sore pained within me: and the terrors of death are fallen



JERUSALEM.

upon me. Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me. And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove ! for then would I fly away, and be at rest. . . . Give ear to my prayer, O God ; and hide not thyself from my supplication." (Psa. lv. 4-6, 1.)

To God David could pour out the deep distress he felt at Abiathar's account of the terrible tragedy, from which he had only escaped as preserved of God, and hidden of Him from the cruel Doeg. To the priest himself he said, "I have occasioned the death of all the persons of thy father's house. Abide thou with me, fear not : for he that seeketh my life seeketh thy life : but with me thou shalt be in safeguard." Terrible as was the cause of it, it must have been a great cheer to him that both the prophet and chief priest of Jehovah were with him, and with him through all his wanderings, and then when he was crowned king over Israel they shared in his glory. Many a name is put down in the list of David's mighty men, after he came to the kingdom, who were among the despised band in the cave of Adullam, and he delighted then in recording their brave and loving acts for him. He speaks of the Gadites who went there to him, and calls them "men of might, fit for the battle . . . whose faces were like the faces of lions ; and they were as swift as the roes upon the mountains." When their leader became ruler over the land we may be quite sure he was as glad as they when he made

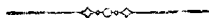
them officers in his army, for he records then "of the sons of Gad, captains of the host: one of the least was over an hundred, and the greatest over a thousand." (1 Chron. xii. 14.)

There was one act of *special* devotedness to him which David had *special* delight in, and the Spirit of God has twice recorded it in the scriptures. It was the sultry harvest time when these men, who became great chiefs afterward, went down to the cave to him. The heat in the sultry Jordan valley is very great, and it is possible that there was a lack of water, for the hundreds of his followers would need a great deal. At any rate, a longing for a cool draught of the water from the well of his birthplace, and of what had been his peaceful home for many years, came over the spirit of their captain, and they heard him say, "Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!" David may not always have been in the full flush of health and vigour. It is quite possible that sickness at times came upon him, a touch of the Syrian fever, perhaps, which few travellers in Palestine now wholly escape from.

Whatever it was, the three men who heard the longing of their leader determined to do all they could to gratify it, but how? Sad to say, Bethlehem itself was now in the hands of the enemy, and a Philistine garrison guarded the gate and the well. To these fearless followers of a generally fearless captain this was not an insuperable diffi-

culty, and without a word to any the three stole away from the cave and made a rapid march to the city of David—took the garrison so by surprise that they broke through their cordon of sentinels, reached the well and filled their skins and bottles with the pure, cold water, and made good their retreat all unharmed and untouched, hurrying back to their captain triumphant.

The tender heart of David was most deeply touched by this devotion, but much as he had longed for this water from Bethlehem's well, he could not, would not drink it, for he valued it at the untold value of the lives of these three men. To none but Jehovah, God of Israel, could such a costly drink offering be poured out. To the soul of David that water became the cause of real worship, of thanksgiving, too, doubtless, for he poured it out as an oblation to Jehovah, in the faith and grace that would renounce it for himself. What a link was formed that day between those three men and their king!



CHAPTER V.

“Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.” (Psa. lxxiii. 3.)

“That love is the love that bears me o’er starless deeps ;
That never, through long night watches, slumbers nor sleeps.
That filleth the lonely desert with psalm and song,
And along my journey guards me, all, all along.”

THOUGH the rightful king was persecuted and pursued, he had the compensation of the presence of the priest and prophet with him. When Abiathar had fled from the midst of the terrible slaughter of his family, he had been careful to take with him the high priestly ephod—now his in succession to the murdered high priest. To David, this was the joy of having the Urim and Thummim with him, and, as we can plainly see, it was a special mark of God’s favour ; for though David was a man of faith, and one who—spite of failures—walked in simple confidence in the Lord habitually, yet through the priest who was now with him he is put into a place where the

mind of God with regard to all his movements can be made known to him. While looking at the outward history of "the sweet psalmist of Israel," and seeing the chequered circumstances through which he passed, would convince us that he was a man of no ordinary stamp, but one gifted to excel in everything he took in hand; yet unless we know something of his inner life, as revealed to us in the psalms he wrote, we should fail to become really acquainted with him.

There we see David as he actually was. Often rising to heights of true worship—as far as possible then—delighting in the Lord God of Israel, and rejoicing in all He was. Then again we see him as the heart-broken, penitent man who has been guilty of enormous sin, who confesses it absolutely, without a shadow of guile or hiding, and whose faith so enters into the depths of the grace of God that it rises even above his sense of sin, and enables him to go on in the consciousness of perfect forgiveness; subdued and chastened, but able to rejoice in God—*not* in David, but in David's Lord.

It must soon have been known in Judah that the prophet and priest of Jehovah were now with David, part of his following; and the eyes of many in Israel began to turn to him as the one to fly to for help in emergency, rather than to Saul. Messengers come to him to tell him that the Philistines are again making raids upon the city of Keilah and robbing the threshing floors. It

was harvest time, and these tireless foes took the opportunity of getting a supply of wheat from the poor farmers as they were threshing out the newly reaped grain.

The poor people looked to David to prevent this, but now he will not move till he has inquired of God and gets the command to go. At first his followers question the prudence of this, and then he again inquired of the Lord, who answers him by telling him to go to Keilah, and He would deliver the Philistines into his hand. The result was that the foe was driven back, his cattle taken and Keilah saved. Spite of this great service rendered to them, it was soon proved that the city was no safe place for David and his men, for the people of Keilah would have betrayed him into the hands of Saul. So he goes to a forest near, in the wilderness of Ziph, and in the mountains there he remains for a while, Saul daily seeking his life.

By some means Jonathan is able to find out where his persecuted friend and brother-in-law is taking refuge, and he risks everything to go to him for a last interview, though he did not know it was the last. Very little is recorded of this meeting between them, but Jonathan strengthened David's hand in God. He said also to him, "Fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth."

Alas, for Jonathan! Most truly did he love David, but "David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house." His faith did not rise to the height of leaving everything to follow his friend. He failed to discern that not only was Saul rejected of God, but Saul's house also, as far as the kingdom was concerned. David was now the one in whom God had centred all blessing for Israel, and to be with him was to be in communion with the purpose of God. It was the place of safety also, though still that of shame and reproach and suffering. They who followed David were preserved because they were with him. When the Lord Jesus was on earth He said, "If any man serve me, let him *follow* me." It is not enough that His people should own Him as Saviour, He desires that they should *follow* Him. He would not have them identified with this guilty world, nor sharing in its schemes or plans for bettering it. Our only place is to be apart from it all in spirit, as one with Him who is actually outside it, and in the glory of God. Jonathan did not suffer with David, and instead of sharing his glory when his day of glory came, he falls with his father by the hand of the Philistines.

Some years were to pass before the chosen king had been so tested and tried that he was fitted to feed the people of God as a shepherd, and to rule over them with mercy and wisdom. It was to be made plain to all, too—to David him-

self as well as to others—that in himself he was only a weak erring man like any other. It was the grace and power of God alone that put him in his kingly place and preserved him through all difficulties till the day of his triumph over all his enemies.

In a wonderful way we see how he was imbued by the Spirit of God with those lovely traits of character which come out so fully in his intercourse with his father-in-law. He never leaves his place of faithful subject, or of loving relative, but in a faith which shines out all the more brilliantly because of the darkness that surrounds it, he casts himself in absolute dependence upon Jehovah to order everything for him. Day after day did Saul seek to destroy him—it became the one master passion of his unhappy mind—but again and again he was thwarted by divine power. Obligated at last once more to shelter himself and men "in dens and caves of the earth" (Heb. ii. 38), David finds refuge in a cave on the western shores of the dreary Dead Sea. Engedi, or, as it is now called, Ain Jidy—fountain of the goat—is in a wild gorge, whose cliffs have numerous caverns still in them. A desolate part of the country, from its nearness to the Dead Sea, there was still enough pasturage to make it a place for feeding sheep, and the caves were—and still may be—often used as folds for the sheep and goats.

Not long had the son of Jesse been in this

cavern home when the king is told of it, and then we read, "Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to seek David and his men upon the rocks of the wild goats." Three thousand of the flower of his army against one man and his little band of followers! Evidently Saul had a very high opinion of their prowess, that he should think it needful to take such overwhelming numbers with him. The long march to Engedi, and the heat of the sultry region, had wearied the king, and coming to the mouth of a cave, he enters it to lie down and rest before going further. As the cave was by the sheepcotes, it is quite likely there were sheep also resting in it, and they would not disturb the sleep of Saul.

Neither did the inhabitants of the cave of Engedi arouse him from the deep slumber into which he fell, little thinking that in the darkness David and his men were hidden from him in the sides of the cave. To one going into the gloom of the cavern from the sunlight outside, all would be black darkness beyond the entrance, while to those who were already there and farther in its depths everything at the opening would be perfectly visible. David and his men would see every action of Saul, and clearly recognise him, while he was unconscious of their presence.

Now the king is completely in the power of his persecuted subject. Will he avail himself of what seems a providential way of escape from all his

difficulties, will he slay Saul who has so long and persistently sought to destroy him?

David's men say to him, "Behold the day of which Jehovah said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee." Then they see their leader arise and go to the sleeping Saul with his drawn sword in his hand, and they watch him as he bends over the king. Instead of seeing the sword plunged into the heart of Saul, they only see the sharp weapon used to cut off part of the royal robe. Leaving the sleeper unharmed, David's heart now smites him even for cutting off his robe, and he tells his eager men, "Jehovah forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, Jehovah's anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing that he is the anointed of Jehovah." Thus did he stay his followers by his words, and did not allow them to harm the king, who soon awakened, and rose and left the place where he had been so preserved.

He is not allowed to go in ignorance of the marvellous grace that has spared him. David also arises and follows him, and a few paces from the mouth of the cave he calls—"My lord the king." As he looks behind to see who is calling him, David bows lowly before him, but asks why the king listens to any who say—David seeketh thy hurt. Then he tells him how he and his whole band have been in the cave all the time Saul was there, and how they would have killed him,

but he, as their leader, would not put forth his hand against the anointed of the Lord. Then, to prove how easily he could have taken his life, he says, "My father, see, yea, see the skirt of thy robe in my hand: for in that I cut off the skirt of thy robe, and killed thee not, know thou and see . . . I have not sinned against thee; yet thou huntest my soul to take it."

Even the hard heart of Saul is touched at this generosity of the one he was so relentlessly pursuing. His emotions were stirred, though his conscience remained untouched, and weak tears come to his eyes, and he exclaims, "Is this thy voice, my son David?" Then, forced to confess what was so plainly true, he says, "Thou art more righteous than I: for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil." With his three thousand picked soldiers within call doubtless, he is despicably weak before the injured David, and though he has found the one he has been seeking for, he is unable to do anything but ask for mercy at his hand, and causes him to swear that he will extend mercy to his house.

He owns that he knows well that David is the future king of Israel, but only fearing his vengeance, Saul is still unrepentant, though for a time the influence of this meeting prevented his seeking the death of the son of Jesse, but every link between them was now broken.

Leaving the cave at Engedi, with its beautiful fountain of clear cold water gushing out of the hill-

side, and which still flows in a sparkling stream to-day past the tangled thickets, which are the remains of what once may have been fertile gardens, David goes to the desert of Paran, some ten miles from Ain Jidy—fountain of the kid or goat—where even now wild goats and kids are found. Around this Engedi are now masses of what appear to be the ruins of ancient terraces, which in Solomon's days were first so much used, and continued to be so till the land fell into desolation.

The mention of the immense flocks of sheep and goats belonging to the wealthy Nabal, near whose pastures David now remained for a time, proves to us that this part of the land must then have been of marvellous fertility to support such large numbers. Nabal had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. Such a rich sheep-master needed to employ a great many men as shepherds, for the nearness of Ishmeelite or Bedouin robbers on the one hand, and Philistine marauders on the other, made a strong guard and a constant watch always necessary.

Camping near these shepherds and their flocks David and his men formed a very powerful protection for them. The most daring sheep-stealers, who would not hesitate to attack the shepherds when alone, could not venture to do so while he and his faithful band were on the spot, so that Nabal's shepherds were in perfect security all the time they were there.

The day came when the vast flocks began to be driven down to the shearing ground to pass under the hands of the shearers, and then the shepherds found that not a single sheep or goat had been lost or stolen. Shearing time was generally marked by a sort of "open house" hospitality, when all friendly comers were made welcome. David and his men often knew probably what privations meant, but it would seem as if at this time it must have been real need with them. He sends his young men to the wealthy sheep-master to ask for some provision, and trying as it must have been for him to do this he accepts the humbling it involved, and seeks a favour from the man whose flocks they had guarded.

Nabal was utterly unable to appreciate either the care of David and his men, or the fact that the son of Jesse was God's king. To the respectful message given by the servants of David he has only a taunting answer, and even the fact of the help they had been to his shepherds does not move him to supply the need of those who could have helped themselves from his flocks with impunity had they chosen.

Greatly angered at Nabal's churlish conduct, the young men return to their leader and tell him all. The usual patience with which all the slights and trials of his outcast life were met is overborne for a time by indignation at the unkind treatment of Nabal. "Gird ye on every man his sword," is his command to four hundred of his men, and

thus armed they take the way to Carmel where the sheep were being sheared.

The message sent to Nabal had been heard by one of his men who had kept the sheep while David and his men were near them, and he seems to have judged that such a hard reply must bring some danger upon them if not averted. He goes to his mistress, Nabal's wife, who is spoken of as a woman "of good understanding, and of beautiful countenance." To her he tells the whole story, and of the goodness of the son of Jesse and his followers to them when they were in the wilderness, saying, "They were a wall unto us both by night and day. Now therefore consider what thou wilt do; for evil is determined against our master."

Nabal had violated the common law of eastern hospitality, and Abigail his wife at once did all she could to repair this fault. We get a glimpse of the resources of such a household in those days when we read that she "took two hundred loaves, and two bottles of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, and an hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on asses." Mounting an ass herself, she takes the way toward the wilderness, where David and his band are encamped, bidding the servants go on before her with the asses laded with this present, which was doubtless part of the plentiful provision made for his shearers, which Nabal—the degenerate descendant of Caleb—had spoken of to the young men sent by David.

Not very far had she to go before she is met by the armed band, and seeing at once which is their leader, she alights from the ass and falls at his feet, saying, "Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be: and let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak in thine audience." Then she goes on to prove by her words how fully—before this present danger came—she had entered in faith into what the son of Jesse was to Jehovah. Many there may have been in Israel who knew in their inmost hearts that the career of Saul had been one entirely apart from God, and they saw in the persecuted outcast one whom He had chosen, but who was to suffer before he could reign.

Abigail owns all this. She begs him first not to regard the folly of Nabal—taking it for granted that he will accept the reparation she has sought to make, and not go on to avenge himself—but then she turns to speak of what her heart is plainly full of, that she is before the one whom Jehovah has chosen to fight His battles, the one who is to be placed upon the throne of the kingdom by Jehovah Himself. Then with what seems a truly marvellous insight into the depths of the grace of God, she speaks of Saul as a man who has risen to seek the soul of this chosen one of God, and says, "but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the *bundle of life with the Lord thy God.*"

Did this woman of great faith lay hold in anticipation of what has only come out fully since David's Lord was on earth? Had she been given

to see a little of what "the root and offspring of David" would bring all His people into? Whatever light she had as to this she clearly held it fast, and her faith enabled her to see God's purposes as to David and his kingdom. Then, it mattered little to her that he was a persecuted exile for the moment, she looked on to the time when Jehovah would place him in kingly dignity over all his adversaries, and owned him already as the one true king of Israel.

She saw him as in one bond of life with the Lord. What would her joy have been could she have known what every believer in the Son of God is privileged to enter into now! That Christ Himself becomes the life of His own redeemed ones, so that they can look on Him in glorious resurrection power and say, That is my life. Abigail accepted the shame and reproach that lay then upon the anointed of Jehovah—the death that lay upon him—and through this same path of acceptance of death, the believer passes, through resurrection—the death and resurrection of Christ—into His life, His blessed risen life. As this woman of exceeding faith put it—they are bound in the bundle of life with the Lord.

Abigail went on to speak to David—saying that when he should become ruler of Israel it would be no grief to him that he had turned from his purpose of avenging on Nabal the rude treatment he had received, and that he had shed no blood causelessly. She had asked for forgiveness,

and felt it was granted, and then she adds, "When Jehovah shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thine handmaid."

Blessed be Jehovah God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand. As Jehovah God of Israel liveth, except thou hadst hasted and come to meet me, surely there had been no male left to Nabal by the morning light. This was David's reply to Abigail. He received from her the present she had brought, and said to her, Go up in peace unto thine house; see, I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thee.

Ten days pass over and then "Jehovah smote Nabal, that he died." When David heard this he saw in it a proof that God had vindicated him, and he rejoiced that he had been kept from the evil of smiting Nabal himself. Some time later on Abigail shares the rejection and suffering of David and becomes his wife.



CHAPTER VI.

"I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord ; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." (Psa. xxxii. 5.)

"Lord, I was in the far-off land, I loved from Thee to stray,
But when unto myself I came, an outcast far away,
One moment—then the welcome sweet, the kiss, the
Father's home ;
Far distant was the distance ; to Thy bosom I am come."

THROUGH the treachery of the Ziphites Saul is once again aroused to seek to get rid of the future king of Israel. Casting off the thought of the way in which his life had been so magnanimously spared in the cavern of Engedi, the three thousand picked men of his army are summoned to attend him in pursuit of David. Marching to the south of Judah, they reach the hill of Hachilah and pitch their camp there. The baggage and provision cars or chariots—wagons, as we should now call them—were as usual packed closely together in a circle, forming what is called "the

trench." Inside this circle the king and his chief officer, Abner, would pass the night.

Such a band as Saul had with him could not come near the place where David was without his knowing it. As a skilful general he probably had his spies or scouts on the look out at all times. Long before the king knew where to find him David had heard of his coming, and the very first night he went to the place where the camp was pitched, and sees the sleeping monarch and his men around him.

It was from the top of some hill that he looked down upon the camp of Saul. Now he resolves to go into the midst of the sleeping host, and turning to two of his chief men he asks, "Who will go down with me to Saul to the camp? And Abishai said, I will go down with thee." With the quiet courage that confidence in God's care for him imparted, David has made up his mind what to do. He will not fight battles with Saul, though he well knew that he must prevail; but he will go beforehand with him, and so act that he shall be compelled to give up this cruel hunting for one who had ever treated him in such a way as that no fault could be found in him.

David and Abishai pass down the hill and enter into the trench where the king is with his whole band around him. Now they stand over the sleeper, and Abishai begs David to let him slay Saul at one blow. Well did he know his captain would not harm a hair of his head himself, and

now he hears his voice speaking, still words of utmost grace for the poor, guilty king, "Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against Jehovah's anointed, and be guiltless?"

The death of Saul shall never be from his hand, nor from one of his followers. He goes on to tell his faithful Abishai, "Jehovah shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle, and perish." To Jehovah he leaves him, in the unshaken determination that nothing shall induce him to stretch forth his hand against the man who had been the anointed of the Lord. Never perhaps did he feel more keenly the pain and distress that this seeking his life cost him, but his resolve does not falter, and with a stern, set face he says to his captain, take I pray thee, the spear that is at his bolster, and the cruse of water, and let us go.

Not very far do they go. Only to the top of the hill opposite to where the camp was, and their movements awakened none of the sleeping host, for a deep sleep from Jehovah was fallen upon them, and preserved David. Now with the whole valley between them, but in full view of Saul and his men, David calls aloud to Abner, and awakens him with the scathing inquiry, why he had not kept a better guard over his royal master, why his sentinels were all asleep when the king was in danger? Then he tells him that one of his people had gone to destroy the king—he does *not* say how he himself had kept Abishai back from doing

so—and then asks them where the king's spear and cruse of water are.

By this time the whole camp must have been aroused, and all are compelled to hear. Saul knew the voice—far off though it was, and yet he asks, "Is this thy voice, my son David? And David said, It is my voice, my lord, O king. . . . Wherefore doth my lord thus pursue after his servant? for what have I done? or what evil is in mine hand?" Then come a few words which let us see how bitterly he felt the being driven out of his home, and from his friends, to the wandering outcast life he had led all the time of Saul's persecution of him. He tells the king, in words which must have touched all hearts there, that if men have stirred him up against him, "cursed be they before the Lord; for they have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of Jehovah, saying, Go, serve other gods."

But for the grace of God, David feels this would have been the result of what he had endured, and to him nothing could be greater disaster than to be away from God. Again Saul is touched for the moment, and he replies, "I have sinned: return, my son David: for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day: behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly." David cannot trust these words. He does not contradict them, but will not condescend to answer them. The time has come to let the king see that he recognises the purpose

of God concerning him, and will order his actions in consonance with this.

"Behold the king's spear! and let one of the young men come over and fetch it." Thus he reminds Saul of the way in which his life has again been spared. Seeing also that he has himself been set apart by the Lord God of Israel for the chief place amongst His people, he tells the king that now it is a question not simply of men but of Jehovah—He is acting, and will act, and will render to every man his righteousness and faithfulness. To Him David then commits his safe keeping—in the hearing not only of Saul but of all his men. This was his farewell to the king—never again did they meet—Saul returned to his home at the head of his three thousand, and David went back to his wandering life.

All who were with Saul must have heard the words of David. They knew now that the envious hatred of the king had caused him to be as an exile in his own land, and many a heart may have been touched by his generous treatment of their master. That David was no rebel seeking his own glory became known by all. And later on many of these men may have been amongst those who found themselves attracted irresistibly to the son of Jesse, while yet he was an outcast from the land and kingdom of Israel.

After seeing the noble way in which David had acted, when having his enemy put completely into his power by God, it is with a sense of disappoint-

ment we read what immediately follows in the scripture history. "And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines; and Saul shall despair of me, to seek me any more in any coast of Israel: so shall I escape out of his hand."

It seems scarcely possible that this can be the man who had spoken—from his heart, too—such words of complete confidence in Jehovah, and whose fearless action in going into the very midst of the band who were seeking his life proved that they were not mere words, but a living reality in his soul. That night must have tried David to the uttermost. His faith rose to the call upon it, and never faltered throughout that painful scene, but the reaction came, and then—wearied and worn physically—he failed.

Like Peter at a later day, he trod the surging waves triumphantly as long as he looked at his Master, but when his eye was turned to the dark depths all around him he began to sink. There was no power in himself to sustain him. His own thoughts—and perhaps the advice of his followers—now govern him, and he forgets to consult Jehovah through the priest. His plans are made according to his sense of the danger he is in from Saul, and they take him to again seek a refuge in the enemy's land.

This time, however, he goes as head of a

company which is powerful enough to win him a certain respect, even as a refugee from the hand of Saul. The Philistines doubtless knew all about the cause of his leaving the land of Judah, and the king of Gath seems to have been a generous kindly man, and received him in a kindly manner. For a short time he remains in the royal city, but not for long could David stay there. He had indeed started on a course of deception, but the living in the presence of Achish was too painful for him, and he begs to be assigned some place where he and his followers can form a little colony of their own, as it were, for the time of their being away from their own land.

To this also Achish agrees, and gives him a place called Ziklag, on the boundary of the country, where David and his men would form a great defence to Philistia as a sort of outpost garrison. Thus he became of great service as long as he remained there. Nevertheless it is sad to see how even the man of faith is weak as water if that faith is not exercised in a living way through daily dependence upon God.

Not that any of us can throw stones at David. If we are honest we most of us have to own that we have had *our* Ziklags—the times when we sank under the pressure of trials far lighter than his, but when we forgot our resource in God, and tried to escape from the trial by our own wisdom, and by turning to others to help us, even to the world it may be.

If David fails, the infinite grace that has watched over and kept him hitherto does not fail. Even while at Ziklag there were numbers of trusty men who came to him, not only out of Judah, but of Saul's own tribe of Benjamin. Nor were they the least or lowest who came, but some of the most distinguished archers and slingers, those who could use both the right hand and the left in warfare, a feat that was rare, and so is specially named. The land of Philistia is one of the most fertile parts of the country even now, and though much of it is being overwhelmed by the ocean of sand which is gradually sweeping up from the desert, yet its groves of olives and figs, and orchards where apples flourish, besides the immense stretches of cornfields, prove what it must have been formerly.

In such a land David and his ever-increasing company would not find it very difficult to subsist, yet they were driven to make constant incursions into the districts near, where dwelt those tribes whom the Israelites should have expelled when first they entered Canaan. The Amalekites were one of these whom David now invaded, taking their spoil and destroying the people. As this was a common mode of life amongst the Philistines and other of the border tribes, it excited no surprise amongst them when Achish questioned David as to where one of these warlike raids had been made, and he in reply told him that they had gone against Judah and some of its villages.

It is sorrowful to see the continual deception thus practised by the one whose frank open character had endeared him to many. The ruler of Gath seems to have been a man who was trustful and unsuspecting, and believed what David said, and thus had increased confidence in him. This we see when at last—after a longer peace than usual—the armies of the Philistines are to be gathered together to invade the land of Israel. Then the king tells David of this, and also that he expects the help of himself and his men in the coming campaign. To this the son of Jesse can offer no resistance. He replies, "Surely thou shalt know what thy servant can do."

In his heart, however, he must have bitterly felt the degrading part he would now have to take: to go against his own countrymen and king as an ally of the people he had so often defeated! It was the natural result of his sin in putting his trust in the world rather than in God. Yet even here the grace that so often delivered him does not fail. God uses the lords of the Philistines themselves to rescue David from the terrible position he had put himself in. The army is assembled at Aphek. The Israelites are encamped at Jezreel. The hour comes when the various companies of the Philistine army are led out in review previous to marching to the field of battle.

The lords of the country pass on first, each at the head of his thousand or hundred. Last of all comes Achish, and with him David and his band.

Their evidently unexpected appearance arouses the jealous suspicion of the Philistine princes, and they ask Achish, "What do these Hebrews here?" The king tries to conciliate them by telling them that David has been with him a long time and he has found no fault in him; but this angers them still more, and they demand that he and his followers shall be at once dismissed from their army. They recall the time when the women sang of his victory over them, and naturally feel that he may become an adversary to them in the battle instead of an ally.

Thus is David spared the terrible necessity of fighting against Israel; yet when Achish tells him of the determination of his lords that he shall be sent back to Ziklag he falls so low as to expostulate with him about it, apparently resenting the slight put upon him. The end is that he and his men take the road back to their homes and families—as they think—but they find a very different place from the one they had left a few days before.

The city is a heap of smoking ruins, deserted and desolate. All their wives and children are gone, their property also, and something like despair settles down upon the hearts of all the band. What could they do but weep? "Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep."

There was something even worse in David's

cup of sorrow now than in that of these men who had followed him to Aphek. David loved his men, and it is very sure that he was loved by them. What must then have been the intensity of his grief when he found they were blaming him as the cause of all this terrible desolation of their homes? "And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters."

His own men stone him! The men who had lived with him and shared all his wanderings, and risked their lives for him! has it come to this that their hands threaten the life they have been seeking to shelter? Well may David be greatly distressed! If his own faithful followers forsake him what is left for him? Never in his life before had he such suffering. Never had he so left the path of faith, and God meant by this severe chastisement to recall him to Himself. In His grace He causes David once more to turn to Him in contrition and real repentance through the terrible heartbreak it was to him to find his men actually regarding him as the cause of their depths of sorrow and speaking of stoning him. Long have his eyes been blinded, but now they are opened and he sees how far off he had strayed, sees that it is indeed he who has been the author of this calamity to his whole company, and his soul is grieved bitterly. "But David encouraged himself in Jehovah his God." He finds that the

instant he turns again to the One he had well nigh forgotten for the moment there is pardon and guidance.

His own words may have been heard then, "Hear me speedily, O Lord: my spirit faileth: hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit. . . . Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee." (Psa. cxliii. 7, 8.)

Once more the priest is consulted, for now David is again with God, and he says to Abiathar, "I pray thee, bring me hither the ephod. And Abiathar brought thither the ephod to David." Now he asks of Jehovah whether he shall pursue after the troops who have wrought such desolation at Ziklag. They had probably left traces sufficient to shew the way they had gone. The answer comes to him, "Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all." How wonderful the grace of God thus to encourage His servant! Very soon the whole band is marching on the tracks of the enemy, but some of his men find their strength failing, and by the time they reach the brook Besor they are too weary and faint for the toil of fording it.

Two hundred are therefore left behind there, while their leader and four hundred continue the pursuit. On the way they find an Egyptian lying in the field, apparently dying, and great as their haste is they are too pitiful to pass him by. He is taken to David, and food given to him, and

when he has eaten the figs and clusters of raisins he revives, for he was really dying of starvation, having had no food for three days and nights. The compassion of David and his men which caused them to stop in their march to succour this poor young Egyptian is soon rewarded, for when he is asked who he is, and where he had come from, he tells them that he was servant to one of the troop of Amalekites who had invaded and destroyed Ziklag.

At once David sees the use he may be to them. He asks him if he can guide him to this troop, and the young man replies that he could ; but as his cruel master had left him to die in the field when he fell sick three days before, he dreads falling again into his hands. Thus he says, "Swear unto me by God, that thou wilt neither kill me, nor deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will bring thee down to this company."

He kept his promise and guided them to the place where the Amalekites were feasting and revelling because of the great spoil they had taken, unconscious that the avenger was near.

Falling suddenly upon them they are smitten utterly, excepting the men mounted on camels, who fled before them. Now the captives are sought for and soon found ; and what a meeting that ! Not one of all the wives, or sons and daughters missing. All are recovered. Neither is anything lost of all they had carried away, everything is restored, and besides this there are herds and

flocks which had been taken from other places and which now fall into David's hands, and he calls them "David's spoil."

What a song or psalm of thanksgiving the heart of the son of Jesse must have sang that night! Now he thinks of his weary men at the brook Besor and hastens back to them, and there decrees that it shall be a standing rule that those who tarry with the stuff—as these men had—shall have an equal share with those who went down to the battle. He has just been dealt with in infinite grace and now deals in grace with his men. He will not enrich himself either with the spoil, for as soon as they reach Ziklag he sends presents of it to all the elders of the places where he had been treated with kindness while in the land of Judah, thus shewing his gratitude to them.



CHAPTER VII.

"I will sing of mercy and judgment : unto thee, O Jehovah, will I sing. . . . Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me." (Psa. ci. 1, 6.)

"Our heart and our flesh may fail us,
And the mists of sin may rise ;
They may hide the land of the glory
From our faithless wandering eyes.
But the Spirit within us fails not
For ever to tell of Him ;
And His face is seen in its beauty
When all is dim."

THE darkest night-hour is just before the dawn. This is often true in the life-story of men and women on this earth. It was so here at Ziklag. Never had there been such a moment of gloom in the career of David up to this time. Never had he fallen so low, but he has learnt this lesson : he turns from all that he is and from all his sin—though not till it was fully confessed—and finds the surpassing grace of Jehovah can abound over all his deep failure. Then he can rejoice in God once more, and go on humbled and dependent, his conscience and heart restored to the loving

faith that had marked him before his fears led him to the foe for shelter.

Only two days had passed since their return to Ziklag, after the pursuit of the Amalekites, when news came to David of the utter defeat of the army of Israel and of the death in battle of Saul and three of his sons. Here again an Amalekite appears, for he it is who brought to Ziklag the tidings of the death of Saul, and not only this. The crown that was upon the head of the dead king, and the bracelet that was upon his arm he had dared to take, and now presented them to David, shewing how not only all Israel and Judah must have known that he was the future king, but that the neighbouring nations also knew it. When he was closely questioned by David it came out that he was wandering over the field where the battle had been, and found Saul lying amongst the wounded and slain leaning upon his spear. Mortally wounded and longing for death he tells the Amalekite to slay him and thus end his bodily sufferings. This he did, and then—with the crown and bracelet as proof of his death—he goes to tell David of Saul's last moments.

He knew—as who did not?—of the persecution that the son of Jesse had endured at the hand of the dead king, and he no doubt counted upon getting a large reward for his service in being the first one to bring the news to Ziklag. He could not conceive they would be anything other than welcome, but in reality it was grief and sorrow

to David to hear them. That even an Amalekite should dare to slay the anointed king was very terrible to him, and he lets him know this before he orders his execution as the one who had slain Jehovah's anointed. There was no rejoicing or exultation in David's heart over the fall of his enemy. All the sufferings he had caused him were at once forgotten, and he only thought of Saul as he had been used to do, in hearing of the time when all Israel gloried in their newly-crowned king and in his brave campaigns. Only what was lovely and pleasant does he remember now of Saul, not one word of blame has he, but only of affection.

Very pathetic is the lamentation he utters over him and Jonathan, and deep was his sorrow at their fall, as he said, "The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen! . . . I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"

A day of fasting and mourning for Saul, and his sons, and for all Israel, was this day when the Amalekite first told the sad tidings. David and his men—for they had been with him long enough to share his spirit—wept and fasted with sorrow of heart for the blow that had fallen so heavily upon poor Israel.

Some time after this, without any haste, or

seeking to seize the kingdom, David and his men are quietly remaining at Ziklag, till the accustomed days of mourning for the king and his sons had passed away. Then at last David "enquired of Jehovah, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And Jehovah said unto him, Go up." Now this is not enough for the one who is again finding his joy in dependence upon God. So he asks, "Whither shall I go up?" And Jehovah said, "Unto Hebron."

Can we not enter a little into the deep sense of relief and gratitude that must have filled the hearts of David and his faithful followers who loved him, when once more they found themselves in their own land—Jehovah's land—and outside Philistia? It soon became known that they were in Hebron, and before long the men of Judah—the royal tribe—came to him there, and owned his title to the throne as given him by Jehovah. There his whole tribe assembled and anointed David king over Judah. This was the beginning of his reign, he must still wait in patience for the moment when he shall be crowned king over all Israel. And he does wait.

In nothing will he go before God's appointment for him. Abner, Saul's commander-in-chief, had taken Ish-bosheth, the one remaining son of Saul, and made him king over Israel. For this he had, of course, no real authority. David, however, bows quietly to the will of God, and knowing his divine title to the whole kingdom he is able

to wait patiently until he is put into possession of it by Jehovah, who has given it to him.

For the first time now, we find one man amongst the followers of David coming to the front. Joab has not been named in the account of his "mighty men," nor has he signalled himself by any special act of devotedness or faith, as some of them had done. As a relative of David, he has been one who has shared his wanderings, knowing full well that the day would surely come when he would be put in the supreme place of dignity and glory. A clever, bold man, Joab is utterly unscrupulous as to what means he uses to gain his own end. Ambitious and far-seeing, he means to have the chief place in the army of David, and without remorse will get rid of any who seem likely to prevent this. Could the son of Jesse have foreseen the ascendancy this man would get, he would scarcely have allowed him to take the place he did, and thus become a great source of trial to him, for Joab was far from sharing the faith of David. Politic and skilful as a general, he was a support to the king in that way, but it was one of the fatal weaknesses of his rule that he did not at once shew Joab that deeds of injustice should be unsparingly dealt with.

Through personal feeling, Abner, the son of Ner, who had made Ish-bosheth king over Israel, now goes to David, desiring to make a league with him and bring all Israel under his dominion. David is willing to do this, and Abner then goes to the

men of Benjamin and the other tribes and confers with them as to why David has not his rightful place yet. He leads them to desire this now, and then returns to David to hold a council with him. The meeting takes place, and Abner and his suite of twenty followers are hospitably entertained by the king, and when he leaves David it is to go and gather all Israel together and bring them before him to make him king over the whole kingdom.

The tidings of these things are told to Joab when he returns to Hebron, from which he had been absent on a victorious raid when Abner was there. He is little inclined to allow the chief of Saul's army to become a supporter of David. He determines to have no rival in his place with the king, and he even dares to go in and reprove him for sending Abner away in safety. Then with heartless treachery he sends messengers after Abner, who, not suspecting evil, returns to the gate of Hebron, where Joab goes to him as if he wished to speak in a friendly way, and takes him aside from his men and draws his sword and kills him there.

It was an act of horrible cruelty to remove one whom he feared might supersede him. The motive alleged—that Abner had slain his brother Asahel in the battle—may have had some influence, but from what we read of Joab after we are obliged to own that jealousy had a large part in this heartless crime. David was again greatly distressed, for

Abner had won his respect in a degree, and he felt that he had lost a friend. He at once avowed his horror of the deed of Joab, and his condemnation of it, and yet was not strong enough to shew his displeasure by degrading Joab from his rank of chief.

He felt his need of him in the kingdom, but better would it have been, one thinks, had he simply leaned upon God as to this, and removed such a man from his presence. He does what he can—he commands not only the people, but Joab, too, to put on sackcloth and rend their clothes and mourn before Abner. David himself followed the bier, and they buried Abner in Hebron. The king fasted all that day, and all Israel knew that he had no hand in putting Abner to death. To his servants he said, "Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel? And I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these . . . sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me."

Though Joab was a nephew of the king, he could not have been much younger than his uncle. He and his brothers seem to have obtained a great influence over him unhappily, and David felt this, though his more yielding character prevented his ever taking his rightful place over them. Weakness, or worse, we see in all the kingdoms of earth, and shall do so till "a king shall reign in righteousness," for then "the Lord shall be king over the whole earth—and his name one."

The city of Hebron, which became the royal

city and the capital of Judah for the seven years that David reigned there, has a long history. Built seven years before Zoan in Egypt, it was even then—in the time of David—one of the oldest cities of Canaan. From that date until now its history is traceable, and it is even now a place of some importance. Lying along the vale of Mamre the city with its numbers of domed houses appears well built, and for Palestine fairly prosperous. The vineyards were the most famous in the country. It was here the spies found the huge cluster of grapes that they carried back to Moses ; and fifty years ago the vale was still celebrated for its fine grapes.

The destructive government of the Turks has been the ruin of the vineyards, and as all fruit trees were taxed they ceased to be grown. This has caused the valley to lose much of its former beauty, for now the neglected terraces are broken down in many places, and the hills look barren and desolate where once they were fertile and beautiful. The wonderful pools, or reservoirs, built by Solomon are still to be seen to the east of Hebron, and are in a marvellous state of preservation. Constructed of hard marble, of immense size, they provided an almost inexhaustible supply of purest water for Jerusalem, and with the aqueducts along which the water flowed formed one of the greatest possible feats of engineering. A few years ago the aqueduct carried only a trickling stream as far as Bethlehem.

During the last two years, however, Jerusalem has been having a water supply from the city of David's birth, probably brought from these same pools, as they lie very near it.

Hebron, after David's short reign of seven years there, is seldom named in scripture history. The death of Abner was a great blow to the son of Saul, and to all Israel. Two of his captains, who well knew—as all in Israel did—how David had suffered at the hands of Saul, now thought to gain his favour by killing their master and going to him with the news. Cruel and treacherous, they succeed in their plot, and Ish-bosheth is slain by them as he lies at rest, not suspecting danger. They go at once to Hebron to the king of Judah, but when he has found what they have done he is horrified at their heartless treachery. Instead of exulting that the last hindrance to his kingdom is removed, he feels the guilt of what they have done—treats it as murder—and after shewing them his indignation by refusing to own their deed commands their execution.

Again all Israel saw that David was innocent of complicity in this act of the two captains. In patience he waits still, and makes no effort to seize upon the kingdom of Israel. He leaves it to God, sure that His time will come at last—and it did. Maintaining the dignity of the place given him by divine right by forcing all the tribes to see that God's king has no need to snatch at what He has decreed for him, he goes on ruling over Judah till

the people of Israel come to him and own that they know he is the one to whom Jehovah has given the sceptre of the whole land.

Hebron sees the sweet psalmist of Israel anointed king over all the country—the promised land—and David is now in the position where he is the one link between the twelve tribes and Jehovah. We see from his own words that he felt the deep responsibility laid thus upon him, for all blessing for Israel, as a nation, depended upon the king. He says, "Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. . . . He that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight. . . . I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto thee, O Jehovah, will I sing." (Psa. ci.)

Hebron is no longer to be the royal residence. David at once turns in heart to Jerusalem, though the fort was still in possession of the Canaanites. He felt it was a dishonour to allow the strongest citadel in his kingdom to be left in the hands of the race accursed by Jehovah. His first campaign has for its end to take possession of Jerusalem and the stronghold there, and he goes up now at the head of the army of all Israel. The place was considered impregnable by the inhabitants, and they tauntingly tell David that the lame and blind would be enough to hold it against him. Strongly fortified as it was, it was conquered, and David took "the castle of Zion, which is the city of David."

Here Joab comes to the front, for the king had said, "Whosoever smiteth the Jebusites first shall be chief and captain." It was a rash promise, but Joab succeeds in being the one who was first, and is made commander-in-chief of the army of Israel. This post he keeps throughout the reign of David, but only by means as cruel and heartless as his getting rid of Abner had been. David now takes up his abode in the castle of Zion, and Jerusalem was his home for the rest of his life. He soon began building round about, and added greatly to the beauty and strength of the city. Joab is also mentioned as restoring a great part—that which had been destroyed in the siege possibly.

From this time Zion becomes a very marked place. David seems ever to have had a special love for it, and in itself it was a sign of marvellous grace. Never were things at a much lower ebb than just before this time. Saul and his sons dead on Gilboa by the weapons of the Philistines—having been forsaken of God—and the man anointed as king by the prophet of Jehovah seeking refuge in the land of his enemy! Yet soon after this grace restores and begins to bring the kingdom out of the chaos it had fallen into, and at last the very centre of the power of the foe is overcome, and Zion becomes the dwelling-place of the warrior king whom Jehovah uses to establish His people in the land. Well may Zion typify grace! "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.

Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God." (Psa. lxxxvii. 2, 3.)

Here it was that David built his house. Hiram, king of Tyre, seeks his friendship, for the Gentiles soon perceive that a very different rule is being firmly established in the land of Israel from anything that had gone before. The king of God's choice is reigning over a people who are being taught that justice and judgment are to be looked for now, as well as grace and mercy. And the king goes on consolidating the kingdom, and grows famous, for Jehovah was with him. The messengers and cedar trees and workmen sent to him by Hiram, the Tyrian king, are a tribute really to the power of God, who had set him as monarch over His people and was exalting his kingdom for their sake.

Jerusalem was soon to become a great power in the midst of all the countries round about it. This power was very real, but transitory, for evil came in and departure from God, and again it had to be said, "the glory has departed from Israel."

The time is coming though when a glory such as never has been before shall rest upon the dwellings of Mount Zion, when the dreary desolation that has been for so long over the land shall be banished for ever, and the Lord Himself shall be in the midst of His restored people, "and upon all the glory shall be a defence." (Isa. iv. 5.)

The Philistines seem to have left David in peace

while he was simply ruling over Judah, but when they hear that he is the anointed king over united Israel, they come up to contest his supremacy. Remembering the kindly way in which Achish, the king of Gath, had treated him, David would probably not have sought war with them without cause, but when they take the initiative and come to attack him he goes to meet them. First, he inquires of Jehovah—in true dependence—"Shall I go up to the Philistines? wilt thou deliver them into mine hand? And Jehovah said unto David, Go up: for I will doubtless deliver them into thine hand." The result of the battle was a signal victory for Israel, the Philistines who were not slain flying before them in such utter rout and confusion that they even allowed their idols to fall into the hands of their enemies, and David and his men burned them there.

It is very beautiful to see the tender consideration of God for His servant in causing so many years to elapse before the Philistines came up to fight against David. When first he left their country, where for a year and some months he had found refuge from the hatred of Saul, it would have been very painful for him to be involved in conflict with those who had at least given him shelter in their land. As year after year passed away, the remembrance of his being there grew dim, and it may be that the king whom he knew had died. At any rate, ten years or so make a great difference, and there was not the same feeling

about war with them now as there would have been at first. It was loving-kindness that ordered it so, and encouragement to us thus to learn something more of our God through His ways with His people of old, for He is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."



CHAPTER VIII.

“Arise, O Lord, into thy rest ; thou, and the ark of thy strength.” (Psa. cxxxii. 8.)

“O path which no eagle knoweth, no vulture’s eye hath seen,
Where never the lion goeth, nor the fierce lion’s track hath
been :

Were I with the trespass laden of a thousand worlds beside,
Yet by that path I enter, the blood of the Lamb who died.
From the depths of the doom and darkness ascends that
wondrous road,

Which leads the heart of the sinner up to the heart of God.”

From MS of the 14th Century.

THE day of David’s anointing or coronation as king over all Israel had been a time such as the nation had never seen before, and has probably never seen since. Even Solomon’s first coronation day was not to be compared with it, for that was confined to Jerusalem as far as the guests were concerned. All the chief men throughout the land—from Dan even to Beersheba—came with one heart to Hebron to anoint David king over them. Over three hundred thousand men of war were assembled there, and with others—the families and friends

from all parts of the country—made a “great host.” For three days they remained there with the king, royally entertained, “for there was joy in Israel.”

Jerusalem was taken not very long after David was made king, and some time was necessarily spent there. Then came the war with the Philistines, but all the while one thought was in the heart of the monarch, and that was to bring the ark of God—the ark of the covenant—home to himself in Zion. Nothing was so dear to the heart of David as the presence of Jehovah typified by the ark.

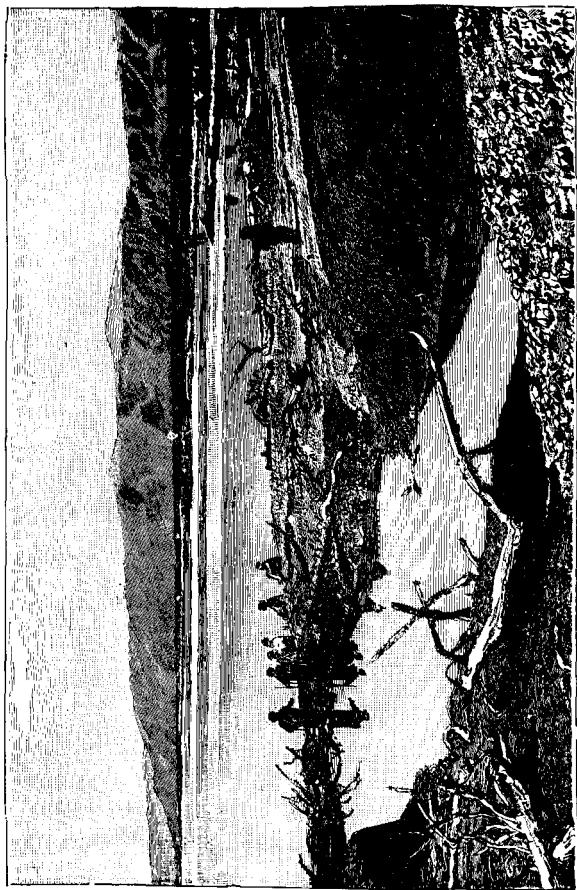
He was inspired of God we know to write the prophetic utterances in his beautiful psalms; but though he may not have been fully conscious of the far-reaching character of what he wrote, yet he expressed the desires and feelings of his own heart in them. When he says, “One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple,” he is telling out the one great longing of his soul. God knew this, and so, spite of all his deep failure in the time of his prosperity, he was granted the desire of his heart, and allowed to be the one distinguished man who should bring the ark of God to its resting-place on Mount Zion.

He would not do this as a mere act of kingly power. He desires that all his people should share in his joy, and enter into the blessedness of having

the symbol of the presence of Jehovah in the midst of them as a nation.

Whatever prosperity might be granted otherwise, there was something lacking as long as the ark was not in its rightful place. David felt it must be where the chief centre of government was, in the royal city. He had the faith that appropriated the real source of blessing—the presence of God; and king though he was, he knew himself as nothing there, save for the love and grace that was everything to him. With this one desire he gathers all the elders of the nation and chiefs of the army together, and consulted them and all the congregation of Israel as to bringing the ark of God to them to Jerusalem. Strangely enough he does *not* consult Jehovah at all about it. He doubtless knew the desire was given of God, and so did not ask for guidance as to the way in which it should be carried out, and this was a great mistake. His own thoughts led him utterly wrong.

His people had been of one mind with him as to recovering the presence of the ark to them as a nation; they desired nationally to own that Jehovah was their God, but not one of the priests or Levites was sufficiently acquainted with the law of Moses as to the service of the sanctuary to be able to tell the king what ought to be done. From one end of his kingdom to the other—to those of his people who had gone to the borders of Egypt on the one hand, and to Hamath on the other—the royal proclamation went out inviting all



THE DEAD SEA.

to Jerusalem to take part in what the king probably felt was the most important event of his reign. And he was right.

When all his subjects had been gathered to Jerusalem, they go in what must have been a magnificent procession to Kirjath-jearim, the place where the ark had remained ever since it had been brought back from Beth-shemesh, where the Philistines had left it nearly a hundred years before. Kirjath-jearim, about three miles from Jerusalem, is now only a miserable village, but with traces left of former greatness. David may have obtained the stone used in his buildings from this place, and its immense quarries could even now supply the city with vast quantities.

To the house of Abinadab David now goes, and the ark is joyfully carried from the place where it has so long remained. We wonder, as we read of its being put upon a new cart, what could have made the king use this mode of transit. That the Philistines should do so was natural, and allowed of God, for they were heathen who knew no better. That His own people should so forget the reverence due to God was another matter altogether, for He had given explicit instructions to Moses and to His people through him how the ark was to be carried. The joy of Israel at seeing the ark was doubtless real. At any rate, we know that of David was. Still, joy in itself is no proof of our being in the secret of God, and if not, is misleading—as we see here.

Everything seemed to go right at first, but at last the oxen who drew the new cart stumbled, and then Uzzah, the son of the man in whose house it had been, put his hand to the ark to steady it. Then we read, "And the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Uzzah, and he smote him, because he put his hand to the ark: and there he died before God." This was a sad and terrible check to the rejoicing of the king and his people, and if only Jehovah had been inquired of might not—indeed, never could—have happened. The neglect had ended in irreverence, for the natural heart cannot ever conceive the true way of drawing near to God. That all there should have been deeply distressed was inevitable, but we are told that "David was *displeased*." It is not said he was displeased with himself—yet that would have been the only righteous anger.

Not only was he displeased, but he was afraid of God, and said, How shall I bring the ark of God home to me? Again it is carried into the house of a private individual, and this time into that of an alien from Israel, a Gittite named Obed-edom. Three months does it remain there, and they were three months of such blessing as Obed-edom had never known before. God will not let the sign of His presence remain in the home of any one who rightly values that presence without bestowing large blessing. If the king—God's chosen one—fears to receive the ark, the man whose house is opened for it shall learn what

a God of grace Jehovah is. "It was told king David, saying, Jehovah hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God."

This seems to have impressed the king with the sense of his own wrong way of acting three months before. Though we are not told of it, he probably did inquire of God now, for we find him assembling the priests and Levites to Jerusalem, and commanding them to sanctify themselves for the service of the sanctuary according to the law given by Jehovah. He tells them, "because ye did it not at the first, Jehovah our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order." His dread of God gone, in the sense of His grace, and owning the wrong doing of the previous attempt, David now again calls all Israel to him. This time it is not merely a joyful bringing again of the ark, but the priests and Levites are there in the solemn recognition of the holiness of God, and that Israel is to be a worshipping people.

The joy is not less—it was really deeper—for worship is mingled with it, and God has His rightful place in the heart of the king, as, without any mark of royal dignity, and clad simply in a robe of linen, and with a linen ephod, he takes the place of a Levite as one devoted to the service of Jehovah. The ark is brought out of the house of Obed-edom, borne by its staves upon the shoulders of the Levites, who also were clad in

white linen robes. We hear nothing now of the men of war, though they were there; the priests and Levites are those who are prominent, as they who were ordained of God for the sanctuary and its service, in which the ark had its chief place. When the Levites had borne the ark a short distance an offering of seven bullocks and seven rams was offered, for God helped the Levites.

There is no sad interruption this time to the praises and joy of David and his people. Jehovah shews Himself to be with them and owns their act. This was probably the happiest time of the king's whole life. His royal dignity remains, but he shews how he esteems his place as the servant of God—to carry out His purposes in making Zion the centre of His government upon earth—as greater than even his kingly throne. "Thus all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of Jehovah" with every sign of joy and gladness, and it was set in the midst of the tent that David had prepared for it, to be there till the temple was built, where it was finally to be put.

Then the burnt offerings and peace offerings were offered, and after that David blessed the people in the name of Jehovah. It is very beautiful to see how he takes the place here of a man whose chief object is God, and whose delight is not only to be in His presence himself, but to lead others to seek it too. He thinks of every one of his people, and to all—both men and women—is dealt "a loaf of bread, and a good

piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine." The Levites who were appointed to their service were left there before the ark of the covenant to minister according to the ordinance, and the priests were to remain before the tabernacle at Gibeon. The time had not then come when everything was to be put in order, but David rightly felt that to have the ark of the covenant in Zion was the greatest blessing that could then be conferred. He could look on and see by faith the One whom it typified—the Christ, the true David, who will yet be a king and priest upon His throne, in the day when the glory will not be a transitory gleam, but for ever and ever.

The psalm which David gave to Asaph, chief of the singers, to be sung on this day of bringing up the ark, is very beautiful as we get it in 1 Chronicles xvi. One verse is specially suited to all who love the same Lord—"seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face continually." It reminds us of the *one thing* that the Apostle Paul desired, "that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." Whether David or Paul, each knew that the whole secret of real blessing is in knowing God.

Great as was David's satisfaction at having the ark of God established in Zion it does not satisfy him. He feels ill at ease at living in his royal palace of cedars when the sign of the covenant

is under curtains. He speaks of this to Nathan, the prophet, who said to him, "Do all that is in thine heart ; for God is with thee." Here the prophet speaks hastily, for the same night the word of God came to him, saying, "Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith Jehovah, Thou shalt not build me a house to dwell in." For this was what the king had in his mind.

Then follows a very wonderful message to David from God Himself, and in it he is told that his son shall build the house of God—where the ark shall be—and his throne shall be a lasting one. He is told, too, that Jehovah has been with him all the time since he was called to be Jehovah's servant, and that He would build David a house. It was wonderful grace, and the king felt it to be so. He must go to the place where Jehovah "dwelleth between the cherubims" to respond to this and pour out the deep, grateful love of his heart. To the tabernacle he goes, and there in a rest that is founded upon the love and mercy of Jehovah he sits before Him. We are allowed to hear his words, for the Spirit of God has recorded them for us. "Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God? And what can David say more unto thee? for thou, Lord God, knowest thy servant. For thy word's sake,

and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all these great things, to make thy servant know them. . . . And now, O Lord God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and do as thou hast said. And let thy name be magnified for ever, saying, Jehovah of hosts is the God over Israel: and let the house of thy servant David be established before thee . . . and with thy blessing let the house of thy servant be blessed for ever."

The full answer is yet to come to this prayer of the king; but when we read his words, "The king shall joy in thy strength, O Jehovah; and in thy salvation how greatly shall he rejoice! Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips," we see that though this was truly the expression of his own soul at the time, yet it could only be really fulfilled in the coming day of glory. He goes on to say, "His glory is great in thy salvation: honour and majesty hast thou laid upon him. For thou hast set him for blessing for ever: thou hast made him exceeding glad with thy countenance." (Psa. xxi. 1-6.) As a prophet—and David was this, as we are told in Acts ii. 30—he was inspired to look on and see the glorious reign of Him who, though He owned the title of "Son of David" when He was here in His work of revealing the heart of God to sinful man, is yet the Messiah of Israel—Jehovah—the true God.

When Jonathan, Saul's son, was slain on Mount

Gilboa he left a son named Mephibosheth. After David was firmly established on the throne, and the ark of God was on Mount Zion, the thought of Jonathan and his family came to his mind, and he inquired of his servants whether any of them still lived. An old servant of the house of Saul is brought before him, and the king asks, "Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may shew the kindness of God unto him? And Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, lame on his feet." This was just what David delighted to hear. Nothing was more pleasure to him than to shew kindness to the son of Jonathan for his father's sake. So Mephibosheth is sent for and comes to the king, and finds himself received with such love and kindness as he may have had little of before. Henceforth his home is to be in the king's palace, for he is to eat bread continually at David's table, as one of the king's sons. All the land of his father is restored to him, and Ziba and his sons serve him. It was no wonder that this generous kingly treatment won the heart of the son of Jonathan, nor that the king had a faithful adherent in him from that time; and David loved him for Jonathan's sake.

The Philistines though often conquered had not been driven out of the country; now the king subdues them so far as to take Gath, the district and the towns belonging to it out of their hands, so that they no longer have a place in Judah, but are driven back to their own country. The

Moabites also are subjugated and become tributary to him, and then the land of Syria, with its beautiful city of Damascus—one of the oldest cities in the world—also owns his sway, and the Syrians are made servants to David. Other nations come and own his dominion—some are conquered in war, but far and wide Israel's king is victorious, and immense spoil of gold and silver and brass is taken by him. With none of this does the king enrich himself—all is dedicated to Jehovah, for he has ever in mind the thought of the house or temple of God that his son is to build, and all the spoil is to be used for that.

All this time the various wars did not prevent David from carefully and faithfully seeking the good of his people. "He reigned over all Israel, and executed justice and judgment among all his people," and as long as he did this, as long as he sought the divine guidance, he was kept in the path of faith. "Thus Jehovah preserved David whithersoever he went." Sorrowful is it to read soon after this time of David staying behind in Jerusalem when the day came for his army to go out to war. He gave himself up to a time of ease as he may have thought, but Satan soon sees this and finds it not difficult to lead him into sin that embittered his whole life after.

Nathan the prophet is sent to him to tell him of the Lord's displeasure at the grievous crime he had committed, and to awaken him to repentance. We are thankful to find that this is done, and confes-

sion made by the king ; but Nathan, while telling him, "Jehovah hath put away thy sin ; thou shalt not die," yet goes on to warn him that because of his sin the sword will never depart from his house, for he had despised Jehovah in committing it. Evil should rise up against him out of his own house—before all Israel. Alas for David ! Henceforth little but sorrow and trial had he as far as his domestic life was concerned. His perfect confession and repentance restored him in conscience and heart to the favour of Jehovah, but he had to submit to the punishment of the evil—for God never condones sin in His people—for all the rest of his life.

His own words tell us of his repentance as nothing else could : "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness : according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions : and my sin is ever before me. . . . Thou desirest not sacrifice ; else would I give it : thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit : a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." (Psa. li. 1-3, 16, 17.)

David looked beyond the mere outward law which ordained sacrifices and offering, and saw what the spirit of it was. He was right in his thought then, but what would his thanksgiving have been could he have known, as we do now,

what that one offering of the Lamb of God has wrought? The depth of blessedness in the knowledge that that perfect offering has not only put the sin away, but the *sinner* too! Could he have known what Paul did when he said, "I am crucified with Christ," death had ended him as to what he was in himself! But there was more: "nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." (Gal. ii. 20.) Could David have known this his joy would have been too deep for words.



CHAPTER IX.

“Glorious and solemn hour, on the verge to stand
Of that endless day of worship, of that blessed land!
Nothing but Himself before us, every shadow past—
Sound we loud our word of witness, for it is the last.”

“Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only
doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name
for ever : and let the whole earth be filled with his glory ;
Amen, and Amen. The prayers of David the son of Jesse
are ended.” (Psa. lxxii. 18-20.)

WE must pass over some years in the life of the king of Israel, and then we find one of his own sons rising up in the most deadly rebellion against him. In looking at the history of David we can scarcely fail to see that in his family he allowed his love for them to prevail over his sense of the due chastisement of wrong doing. This is plainly seen in the case of Absalom, his beloved son.

David had allowed his evil conduct to go unpunished, and from him comes one of the hardest blows a father's heart could ever have to bear. Absalom was one whose appearance naturally

attracted those who looked only on the surface. We are told, "In all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him." Yet to this pleasing exterior was united the most repulsive wickedness and cruelty shewn out undisguisedly to his own father. The very name of Absalom has become the synonym for the most heartless evil.

Grown up to manhood and ambitious of obtaining the regal power, this son of David, who had been so much forgiven, sets himself to work to steal away the hearts of Israel from his father. He was crafty enough to see that this must be done before anything else could be attempted. David was beloved by his people, for spite of his falls into evil he was characterised by faithfulness to God in the main, and so was faithful to all those over whom he bore sway, and the result was that he had the affection of Israel in a way that no other king ever had. Till this love could be weakened Absalom could do nothing. He sets himself to insinuate doubts of his father's justice into the minds of the people, and by the falsest flattery and perversion of the truth succeeds only too well. Pretending to shew them the deepest love he makes them at last mere tools in his hand, for "Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel."

When this was done he openly shews what he desires. He sends spies through all the country to

tell them that he is going to take the kingdom out of the hand of his father, and goes to Hebron. The proclamation is sent out, "Absalom reigneth in Hebron." Even David's counsellor, Ahithophel, is ensnared and joins the son in his horrible conspiracy against his father. And the people increased continually with him, while David was in ignorance of it all. At last messengers come to him to tell him of the conspiracy, and a terrible blow it must have been to him—loving father as he had ever been!

He bows to it—as from Jehovah—does not attempt, at the moment, to combat it, though strongly fortified as Jerusalem was, especially Mount Zion where he dwelt, he could soon have made it impregnable, as he had many of his own special faithful men around him. Instead of that he says to his servants, "Arise, and let us flee; for we shall not else escape from Absalom." He had to feel that this conspiracy was to the death—that no mercy would be dealt to them if they were taken by his son, and for *his* sake he would avoid this, as well as for the sake of others.

His servants are only desirous to do his will, and prove their fidelity, and obey at once. The king and his household go forth out of their home, and all his own personal attendants, and go to some distance before they stop to rest. Now David gets a touching proof of love from one who is an alien. Ittai the Gittite and the six hundred men

of his nation, who had been attracted to the son of Jesse, and appear to have formed the royal body-guard, pass on before the king—the one now flying from his throne and kingdom. Thoughtful for them—even in his hour of distress—David says to Ittai, “Wherefore goest thou also with us? return to thy place, and abide with the king: for thou art a stranger, and also an exile . . . should I this day make thee go up and down with us? seeing I go whither I may, return thou, and take back thy brethren: mercy and truth be with thee.”

Here we see what David was—the lovely unselfishness which would not take advantage of the service of one not bound to him by birth—would lovingly think of the danger they would be in because of himself, and would prevent it by giving them fullest leave to honourably return to their own land. What wonder that Ittai replied, “As Jehovah liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be.” No need to *speak* of love here. One sees the proof of it most touchingly in both David and Ittai. Unable to resist such pleading the king says to Ittai, Go, pass over—for they stood on the brink of the brook Kidron. His one desire to be with David granted, Ittai and all his household—his little ones—pass over before him, his faithful six hundred forming an escort for the royal household.

The people of Jerusalem, who loved David

were weeping at seeing him leaving them—for many could not leave their homes—and they saw all the troops who were faithful to their king passing over the brook Kidron on the way out of the city that led toward the wilderness. Now it is seen that the priest Zadok is also there, and with him the Levites bearing the ark of the covenant of God. They rightly feel that their true place is with Jehovah's anointed king. The wonderful faith and unselfish devotion of David again comes out here, for with all his deep love for the ark as the sign of the presence of God he will not use it as a defence in his hour of extremity, nor place it in danger for his sake. He valued the fidelity that led the priest and Levites to bring it to him, but with the reverence due to it, he commands them to carry the ark back to its place, saying that if he shall find favour in the eyes of Jehovah, He will bring him again to his home on Zion and shew him the ark and his habitation.

We see how truly David was a man of faith. He bows to the government of God as deserving the chastisement, but never loses his confidence in the grace that was beneath it all. He blesses God while bowing to His will. The ark is therefore carried back to the city, and the king gives the priest a command to send his son and the son of Abiathar to him in the wilderness with the tidings of what Absalom shall do. From the brook Kidron the band of sorrowful fugitives passes up Mount Olivet, and David could no longer restrain

himself but wept as he went up. Was it really a truth or only a painful dream, that he and all his were fleeing in fear of their lives from the son he had so loved, Absalom his cherished one? Ah! it was a painful reality, and with heads covered and feet bare the monarch and his followers toiled up the steep ascent weary and sad at heart.

Now the news is brought to him that his most trusted counsellor, Ahithophel, is amongst the conspirators with Absalom. This must have been another painful blow, but the king simply turns it into prayer, saying, "O Lord, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness." The Lord did so, and fully answered this petition. When the summit of the Mount of Olives was at last reached—where David worshipped God—his chief friend, Hushai the Archite, is there to meet him with every sign of sorrow and mourning. He at least was faithful. However, the king will not allow him to go with the band who are around him, but sends him back into Jerusalem to defeat the counsel of Ahithophel. David goes on the way to the wilderness, but at a place called Bahurim, a village that belonged to the tribe of Benjamin, a man named Shimei, of the household of Saul, comes out against them, and heaps insult upon the fallen monarch, casting stones at him and at his followers.

Only a hard heart could have thus heaped humiliation upon the humbled king. As far as he was concerned it only proved more fully how the

grace of God worked in him to enable him to submit quietly to it. His officers were naturally indignant and would have killed the man whose conduct was so cowardly and cruel. They little understood the faith that caused their master to be meek and patient under it. He tells them to let Shimei curse, for Jehovah has said it, and adds, "It may be that Jehovah will look on mine affliction, and that Jehovah will requite me good for his cursing this day." Adversity was the time when David's faith shone most brilliantly. In prosperity he often fell below his true place, but in his troubles he generally is a bright example of real confidence in God.

He had still to bear from this descendant of Saul. "As David and his men went by the way, Shimei went along on the hill's side over against him, and cursed as he went, and threw stones at him, and cast dust." He was taken no notice of and is at length left behind.

The whole band of fugitives, strengthened with many of those of Judah who loved David, and with Joab and his men, reach the Jordan, and weary as they were encamped there. News now came to the king of Absalom having entered Jerusalem, and of the counsel that Ahithophel had given him to pursue after David at once. In his power God so ordered that Hushai the Archite was asked to give his advice by Absalom, and he reverses the former counsel and advises to wait before pursuing the king. Angered at

seeing his own counsel not followed Ahithophel goes to his house, puts it in order, and then hangs himself—a terrible end to his treachery !

The Jordan is crossed by the king's company and they reach Mahanaim, a city and district near the mountainous forest country of Gilead, a beautiful part of the land, and chosen by the people of Reuben and Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh rather than the other side of Jordan on account of its many pasture lands in the valleys and on the slopes of the mountains. Here in Gilead Absalom pitches his camp, having pursued his father with the army of Israel with him. At Mahanaim that father is greatly cheered by the kindness of the son of the king of Ammon, of Machir of Lo-debar, and of Barzillai the Gileadite, who bring to him all manner of provisions for his household and his people, for with him now was the army of Judah. Great must have been the need of such numbers, but it was abundantly met by the kindly generosity of these allies of David, who remained true to him in his extremity.

We will not linger over the sorrowful details of the civil war that followed ; David sent forth his army, in which Ittai the Gittite was commander of a third part, Joab and his brother Abishai being the chiefs of the others. The end was that Israel was utterly defeated and Absalom slain. His death and the sad details of it, with David's pathetic, if weak, lamentation over him,

are so well known that we may pass on to the brighter day when the people of Israel repented of their sin and folly in conspiring against their king given of God.

They see how they had been deluded and deceived by the wicked and crafty prince, and their hearts turn again to the one who had saved them out of the hand of their enemies. Throughout the land men were saying to each other, Why speak ye not of bringing the king back? David hears of this, but not till a message comes to him—Return thou, and all thy servants—will he advance towards Jerusalem. Then Judah and Israel vie with one another as to who shall be first to take David in triumph to Mount Zion.

David thus is brought back again to the place where he had established the ark, and in a short time the rebellion that had been headed by Absalom was almost as if it had never been, only that the effect of it remained in blessing on the spirit of the king, and that Absalom was no more. Some time is taken up, after the return of the royal household, in wars with the Philistines, and four battles followed in quick succession, but Israel was each time victorious.

In the second Book of Samuel we are told—after these wars—that the "anger of Jehovah was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah. For the king said to Joab the captain of the host,

which was with him, Go now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, and number ye the people, that I may know the number of the people." Joab expostulates with the king as to this, knowing that it is contrary to the will of Jehovah and a great mistake at the least; for though we can hardly credit Joab with caring for the will of God, yet he was too clever a statesman to wilfully do anything to bring wrath upon the nation. Nevertheless, the king's command was carried out. For nine months Joab and his servants were occupied in taking this census throughout the whole land, and for nine months the longsuffering of God waited. At last the stroke fell, and fell upon Israel as a people.

At the end of nine months Joab returned from numbering them, and gave the number to the king. And David's heart smote him, and he said unto the Lord: "I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly." The prophet Gad, who had been one of those who went to David when he was in the cavern of Engedi, and had shared his sufferings, and later his glory, now comes to him charged with a message from God. "Thus saith Jehovah, I offer thee three things; choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee. . . . Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies,

while they pursue thee? or that there be three days' pestilence in thy land?" "The sword of Jehovah and the angel of Jehovah destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel."

No wonder that David said unto Gad, "I am in a great strait." Happily the Lord sustains his faith, even while He tries it to the utmost; so he said to the prophet, "Let me fall now into the hand of Jehovah: for very great are his mercies; but let me not fall into the hand of man." A terrible three days followed. The pestilence appeared suddenly all over the land—in most houses some were stricken down, and there was a long wailing cry of distress and death throughout the country. It was the hand of God in chastisement upon the nation, and He allowed Satan in this to provoke David to number the people, as we are told in 1 Chronicles xxi. 1. But the king also was led to see that he had given way to the pride of his own heart in being head over the many thousands of the twelve tribes. Now at one blow those tribes are weakened by the loss of seventy thousand men.

David is allowed to see the angel of the Lord having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. He and the elders of Israel, clothed in sackcloth in sign of humiliation, fall upon their faces, and, taking the sin of guilty Israel upon himself, the king intercedes for them that the plague may be stayed. God hears his prayer and commands the destroying sword of

the angel to be sheathed after David had offered an atoning sacrifice, which is proved to be accepted by Jehovah by the fire which fell from the heavens and consumed it upon the altar he had built upon Mount Moriah.

Now the pestilence ceases, and the heart of the king, guided by Jehovah, fixes upon Mount Moriah where this sacrifice had been offered as the place where the temple is to be built. The place where the grace of God shewed that henceforth everything of blessing for David and for Israel was to be founded on sacrifice. Looking on to the moment when, on that green hill outside the city of Jerusalem, the Lamb of God should offer Himself as the one sacrifice for sin. Though not in the depth and fulness of it, yet David must have been taught something of what would come to pass in the future, for he not only speaks of the salvation that was to be brought in, but of the resurrection of the One who should in grace accomplish it for all His own. Peter speaks of this in Acts ii. 31, where he calls David a prophet, though we do not usually think of him as such.

Soon after this, his son Adonijah made a feeble attempt to usurp the kingdom, but by David's wise promptness the rebellion was at once put down. Joab was amongst the conspirators and slain as a traitor.

When the king found that God heard his prayer and accepted the death of the sacrifice, and proved

this by staying the destroying angel in his course, on Mount Moriah, he said, "This is the house of Jehovah God, and this the altar of the burnt offering for Israel." All his energies are now directed to gather together the materials for the building of the temple. He provides everything that could be needed, and gives Solomon his son the fullest instruction as to every detail of it. Masons are set to work to prepare the stones, each with its bevelled edges, and numbered so as to shew where it was to be laid. Cedar trees are brought from the Tyrians and Zidonians, and the gold and silver and brass all arranged in the most perfect order. Then the service of the sanctuary was appointed also by the king as directed of God—the work of the Levites and of the priests arranged in such a way that all could be carried out in harmony and without the least confusion or distraction. Even the porters for the various gates were all appointed, the tribe and family from which they were to be chosen being given.

It is very wonderful to see how, even to the patterns of the vessels for the house, David was inspired by God. He it is who orders everything, from the service of the priests down to the opening of the doors. In all this we see a shadow of the time of glory soon to come, when the Son of David—the Prince of peace—shall order everything in the universe for God. The honour put upon David was very great, and fully did he answer to it in this. He esteems it the greatest

joy of his life, and desires his beloved people to share in it.

He assembles all his princes and officers of his army, with all the mighty and valiant men, to Jerusalem, and there in a great council the now aged king stands up and speaks his last words to them as head of the whole nation. With simple pathetic speech he tells them how it was *in his heart* to build the house for the ark of the covenant of Jehovah, for the footstool of God, but this was not permitted him because he had been a man of war. It was reserved for his son Solomon, who would be a man of peace. Then in the presence of the whole assembly he gives to his son the pattern, or, as we should say now, the plans, for the porch and for the treasuries, the place for the mercy-seat, for the whole building: "the pattern of all that he had by the spirit . . . of the house of God." (1 Chron. xxviii. 12.)

Then he tells the whole assembly how with all his might he had prepared for the house—for the palace was not for man but for the Lord God—and that because he had set his affection upon this house of God he had devoted his own personal gold and silver to it over and above what he had otherwise prepared. The princes and chiefs of the nation desire to have a part in this great work, and now they bring their offerings in such a generous way—gold, silver, precious stones—that David rejoiced with a great joy. The people also were glad of heart, for they offered it to Jehovah, and

He gave them the joy of so doing. A most beautiful and touching ascription of praise to God now burst from the lips of the king, and when he ceased speaking the whole of the vast assembly bowed their heads and praised the Lord.

The day after this memorable assembly of all Israel they held a special feast of burnt offering to Jehovah, when a thousand lambs, a thousand bullocks and a thousand rams were offered for the nation. Solomon is proclaimed king before all, and anointed unto Jehovah as chief governor, and David saw it and blessed God. Thus ended his public life as king over Israel. We are privileged to follow him into his own house, or royal palace, and hear some of his last words. We do not know to whom they were spoken, but the last words of a great man are generally valued and noted. The Spirit of God has recorded these of David for us; for he was the man whom God had raised up on high—His anointed—and the sweet psalmist of Israel. "The Spirit of Jehovah spake by me, and his word was in my tongue. . . . He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, a morning without clouds." Here we see how he looked on to the day—still future—when "David's greater Son" shall take the kingdom, and be in truth the Sun of righteousness. But there was more. He goes on to say, "Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made

with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure : for this is all my salvation, and all my desire."

Happy David ! he forgets himself—leaves himself—for the Lord. We may do the same, and in a far deeper way than he could. We may have Christ instead of ourselves—Christ as life, Christ everything. In Psalm lxxii. David prays for the king's son, but he is inspired to look on and see the reign of Christ ; his heart and mind are filled with the blessedness of that Person—the true King—and when the wonderful vision of all His glory has been seen by him in spirit, he has done with earth and all its cares, and the sweet Psalmist of Israel passes away from us saying, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name for ever : and let the whole earth be filled with his glory ; Amen and Amen. The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended."

For consolation there is none
Like that Thy Name doth give,
Thy Jesus-name, O David's Son
And Lord, by whom I live.

L. T.