

Elijah . . .

The Prophet

of Israel. .

BY L. T.



LONDON :

G. MORRISH, 20, PATERNOSTER SQUARE, E.C.

1906.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.	
SAMARIA AND AHAB - - - -	I
CHAPTER II.	
ELIJAH BY THE BROOK CHERITH - - -	II
CHAPTER III.	
ELIJAH AND THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH -	21
CHAPTER IV.	
THE WIDOW'S SON RAISED FROM DEATH -	33
CHAPTER V.	
THE PROPHET BEFORE AHAB - - -	44
CHAPTER VI.	
THE SACRIFICE ON CARMEL - - -	55
CHAPTER VII.	
THE FLIGHT FROM JEZEBEL - - -	66

	PAGE
CHAPTER VIII.	
THE WILDERNESS AND HOREB - - -	76
CHAPTER IX.	
THE VINEYARD OF NABOTH - - -	87
CHAPTER X.	
AHAZIAH AND HIS CAPTAINS - - -	98
CHAPTER XI.	
FROM GILGAL TO JERICHO - - -	109
CHAPTER XII.	
TRANSLATED - - - - -	120



ELIJAH THE PROPHET.

CHAPTER I.

“A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.” (Matt. v. 14.)

“Across the will of nature,
Leads on the path of God ;
Not where the flesh delighteth
The feet of Jesus trod.
O bliss to leave behind us
The fetters of the slave,
To leave ourselves behind us,
The graveclothes and the grave.”

WHEN the Lord Jesus Christ was down here on earth, teaching the sin-stricken children of men of the love of God, He used similes and parables of everyday life to bring before them the things of the kingdom. He spoke of the lilies of the field, of the birds of the air and of the city set on a hill that cannot be hid. There were many such cities in a hilly country like Palestine, and one may have been in full view of His hearers that day as their divine Teacher spoke.

Whether the city of Samaria was visible we do not know, as we have no certain knowledge of the place where the Lord was when He spoke these words. That it was set on a hill we do know, and from its peculiarly prominent position it formed a sort of landmark for the surrounding country.

The surpassing beauty of its situation is spoken of in the most glowing terms even now by all travellers who visit Samaria. Built on the crest of a beautifully rounded height, which was also surrounded by hills in the far distance, with the gleaming Mediterranean sea on the west, and a perfect sea of verdure all around, the city of Samaria stood almost alone for loveliness. More than once it had been reduced to desolation before the time of the Lord Jesus on earth, but it was then in great magnificence. Herod had his family passion for building, and he purchased the hill and soon began to erect the most splendid palace and a colonnade which was built of marble of great value. To get any idea of all the changes this city has passed through we have to go back long ago, even as far as the close of the reign of Solomon, or soon after.

To understand at all the character of any great man we must also know something of the times in which he lived. We are all formed in some degree by the days in which our lot is cast. This is plainly seen in the case of one who has left such a deep imprint upon the ages as the prophet Elijah. They were terrible times in which he lived. Israel as a nation seemed to have rushed into the most

daring defiance of Jehovah. Anarchy and revolt had swept through that naturally fair land of Canaan time after time since Jeroboam had headed the ten tribes in their rebellion against the house of David.

At last the commander-in-chief of the army of Israel was raised to the throne by the suffrages of the soldiers whom he commanded. Omri seized the reins of government with a firm hand and was able to put down all who opposed him. Then his first care was to strengthen himself in the kingdom. The capital was a lovely but defenceless town called Tirzah, and the new king soon saw that the hill of Samaria could be rendered almost impregnable, and would be a far better site for the centre of government than Tirzah. He soon began to build a fortress and palace there.

In the sixth year of his reign the city of Samaria became the residence of the kings of Israel and the capital of the kingdom. Omri bought the hill of its owner, named Shemer, whence its name Shomeron or Samaria, meaning a watch-tower. From this time the history of the ten tribes who formed the kingdom of Israel is inseparably linked with Samaria, till the day came when the long-delayed judgment of Jehovah fell and the nation was captive in Assyria and scattered far from its own country.

Though from the first day of the reign of Jeroboam, the first king of Israel, the nation had started on a path of reckless disregard of all the

laws of Jehovah, and king after king had done worse than his predecessor, yet of Omri is it said that he "wrought evil in the eyes of Jehovah, and did worse than all that were before him." (1 Kings xvi. 25.)

The outward prosperity and glory of the nation were gained at the cost of departure from Jehovah. The alliance with the idolatrous Zidonians, though only for purposes of commerce at first, resulted in the fatal marriage of Ahab, Omri's son, to the princess Jezebel, a woman whose name has been synonymous all down the ages since for the most merciless wickedness.

Now the beautiful city of Samaria, with its stately palaces of the nobles and the gorgeous palace or castle of pure ivory that Ahab had built, was defiled by a huge temple of the horrible idol Baal, where some hundreds of idol priests led the people of Israel in a still greater departure from Jehovah. Small wonder would it have been had the wrath of that One who redeemed His people from Egypt been seen in the utter overthrow of Samaria as in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah! But there is yet one thing recorded of this time which seems to fill the cup of evil to the very brim.

Jericho was rebuilt by Hiel the Bethelite. Joshua—by the command of Jehovah—had pronounced a solemn curse upon any who should dare to rebuild that city, and the warning was also added that the man who should do so would build it at the cost of his firstborn and of his youngest

son. To rebuild the city of the curse was to defy Jehovah to keep His word. The unhappy Bethelite had to learn that it would literally be fulfilled. The foundation of Jericho was safely laid it is true, but the cherished firstborn son was smitten down in death at the moment, and though all else of the building went on successfully till the wall was finished, yet when the gates were set up the beloved youngest son was also taken—the two sons were dead—Jehovah's word was fulfilled.

The very next thing after the record of this terrible defiance of Jehovah is the abrupt appearance of the prophet Elijah—God's answer in grace to the unmingled evil of the mass of His people Israel.

"And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." (1 Kings xvii. 1.) This was a warning which, if heeded, might have led the people of Israel to ask why Jehovah had sent His prophet to them with such a threat of judgment. It should have led them to remember the words of Moses, the man of God. He had said to them, "Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; and then Jehovah's wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain." But Israel had despised this word of Moses, as they had the whole of the

law of Jehovah, and it was probably unknown to many of them, for the command to read the book of the law was disregarded and at last forgotten.

There was one man who kept it in his heart, and as he saw the flood of vice and every kind of evil surging through the land he felt in his inmost soul that the sorrow of drought, of famine and pestilence would be better far than that ever-rising tide of sin and self-will. So Elijah prayed. James tells us in his epistle what he prayed for. "He prayed earnestly that it might not rain." Yet Elijah knew full well what it would mean if that prayer should be regarded and answered by Jehovah. He knew it would mean that the vineyards and olive groves and cornfields should gradually wither and die. It meant that the green fields of grass where the flocks and herds flourished should be turned into brown and parched wastes. It also meant untold suffering to innocent little children and to tender, delicate women. It meant depths of anguish to the prophet himself. Yet he prayed, and prayed earnestly too, that it might not rain.

Who was this prophet who chose seas of suffering for himself and his nation rather than idolatry and sin? Like Melchisedec, he comes with startling suddenness upon the scene. Nothing is revealed to us of his parentage or of his antecedents. There is an old tradition that he was a descendant of the priestly house of Aaron, but we have not any proof of this. That he was an inhabitant of the moun-

tainous region of Gilead is all that we know about him, except that we learn from James what his occupation had been before he appeared to Ahab. Elijah had spent days and nights, it may be, in prayer upon the mountains before Jehovah. He had learnt there, as few do, the horribleness of sin. He had God's thoughts about it, and though in scant measure it is certain, yet he shared in some degree the love for his nation which had led Jehovah Himself to call them a peculiar treasure to Himself.

In the forest solitudes of Gilead he was separated from the life of luxury and pleasure indulged in by the king and his court. Separated, too, from the gorgeous and debasing ritual of the temples of Baal, that dared to rear their heads in many places in the land. He was apart from the rush and whirl of the business life of the merchants who traded with the nations around them, and he was apart with God. He had learnt what it meant to wait on God. Yet was he a man of like passions with us. A man who felt pain and sorrow and isolation as we do ; but have we learnt as he had to find his *all* in God? Elijah was filled—at this time of his history at any rate—with the overwhelming sense of the deep dishonour to Jehovah from the way Israel had forsaken Him. The sorrow of this swallowed up every thought of his own ease or safety. He forgot himself, thinking only how Israel could be restored.

So his very first appearance on the page of holy

scripture reveals to us a volume, as it were, of his inner history. Leaving the peaceful solitudes of his forest home in the Gilead hills, where he had sought to learn Jehovah's will, and where he had prayed in accordance with it, Elijah boldly goes to the court of the idolatrous King Ahab, and there alone, defenceless as it would look, announces to the guilty sovereign, "As Jehovah God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word."

Though we have no record of it, yet it must have been made clear to the prophet that God would have His testimony given to Israel before the judgment was sent. If it produced repentance, if the nation turned to Jehovah and sought pardon, that judgment might not fall. If on the contrary the king and his people treated the solemn words of God's servant as of no moment, and heeded them not, then the rain would be withheld. Fascinated by the idol worship introduced by Jezebel, the people were saying throughout the land that Baal was the giver of its marvellous fertility. If the heavens were shut up at the word of Elijah, or in reality at the word of Jehovah, by Elijah, then would it be proved that neither Baal nor any other of the idols they bowed down to had any power at all over the heavens or the earth. Jehovah alone had that power.

Faith in the word of the living God grows by a close communion with Him. When Elijah said to

Ahab, "Jehovah God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand," the prophet was entering into the honour and blessedness of what he said. To him there was no higher happiness to be known, no greater dignity to be conferred, than to be permitted to stand before Jehovah, God of Israel. To Elijah the words were no meaningless form, but the deepest reality of his life. Yet he knew nothing of what God's people know now. The presence of God as a Saviour-God, as Father, too, in our Lord Jesus Christ, with all the love of Him who *is* love given to those who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. All this and much, very much more, has that infinite love of God bestowed upon every one who has gone to Christ as their own Saviour.

Yet what the prophet did know of the God of Israel filled his soul with perfect and entire confidence in Him—what else could it do? So he could pledge Jehovah to the fulfilment of his word to Ahab, and he knew he would not be confounded. Do we so know God that we can rest in what He is when everything around us would cause heart-break and perplexity? The one great need for us now is to know God. Not to know about Him—we may do that and yet be strangers to Him in reality. Elijah knew God. He could ask in faith then for what no man had ever asked since the world began. And the heavens were closed in answer to the prayer of one man.

But judgment is God's strange work. To save

and to bless is what He delights in. This has been fully proved by His sending His own Son to bear the sins not only of guilty Israel, but of every one who *bows* to Him as Saviour. To all who rest their souls' salvation on Him He gives not only forgiveness of sins but a new life in Himself—He becomes the life of His own redeemed ones. He gives them living water that never again shall they know thirst—living bread that they may never hunger. That they may rejoicingly be able to take up the words of the Apostle Paul in very truth and say, "The Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Not only gave Himself for my sins—but for me. So that the one who lays hold of this in the power of the Spirit in dependence upon Him can realise that it is Christ now *instead of himself*, for Christ is his life.

Perhaps these pages may be read by some one who as yet is far off from God. If so, are you willing to spend your life here without Him and then to pass into eternity without God? Surely no one could think of that without shrinking from it. Have you ever seriously thought that God gave His own beloved Son to die for the ungodly? His love for this poor world made Him do that. Will you go on neglecting and despising that love? If you turn to Him you will find all His grace and mercy waiting for you, and He says, "him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." You can never know real happiness till you know Him as your Saviour-God.

CHAPTER II.

"And the word of Jehovah came unto him, saying
turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith."
(1 Kings xvii. 2, 3.)

"Thou art my hiding place." (Psa. xxxii. 7.)

"Where the lonely heart His sweetness learneth,
Sheltered there beneath the shadowing wings—
In the depths of hidden rest encompassed
By the tender gleam of heavenly things.
Who amidst the world's sad mirth can tell
What it is apart with God to dwell?"

IN the last words of Moses to the people whom he had led through the wilderness, he specially charged them to keep the commands he had given them in their hearts and in their souls. They were to speak of them when they sat in the house and when they walked by the way, when they lay down and when they rose up. And this was in order that their days might be as the days of heaven upon earth.

As Elijah turned away from Ahab after making the announcement that the rain would only be given at his word, how bitterly he must have felt the mad folly of his people in bringing such dire

distress upon their land, when they might have had such supreme bliss as Moses spoke to them of. None knew better than the prophet himself how severe the suffering must be in the whole country if the early and latter rains were to fail. He must have left the royal presence with something like a sinking heart in spite of all his great faith. Till now the very greatness of the evil and the terrible remedy must have filled his thoughts as a servant of Jehovah, and his own imminent danger never seems to have had a place in his mind. As he thought not of himself, the God for whose honour he was so jealous will think of his safety and provide for it immediately, before the startled king has time to think of stopping his retreat.

Jehovah now speaks Himself to His servant. He tells him to go and hide himself by a certain brook, and to prevent any anxious thought as to his subsistence there the words are added, "thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there." Elijah had learned priceless lessons when pleading with Jehovah in the heights of Gilead. He had learned to prefer judgment to the deceitfulness of sin. He had learned to rely with implicit confidence upon the One who had cherished His wilful people for forty long years of desert wanderings, and who was now bearing with them in unspeakable grace in spite of their being rebellious and apostate.

Now the prophet was to pass to another form in the school of God. He had looked down from the

hills of his Gilead home on the country of Samaria across the Jordan, and his heart had been filled with burning indignation and perhaps with contempt against the thousands of Israel who crowded the temples of Baal and yielded themselves to the corruption of the debasing idol worship. There was danger of his becoming hard and embittered if only the judgment side filled his vision, and Jehovah would have His servant's zeal tempered by love and pity. Little as he knew it, there were even then many who were true to the God of Abraham. Few indeed when compared to the mass of the nation, but enough in number to have been a host of friends to the man who thought that he alone stood for Jehovah. Thus thinking, there was a very strong temptation to feel that he was better than his fellows, and Satan would watch to get him out of the path of entire dependence upon God at such a moment.

So the first recorded words of Jehovah to him came to him as he turned away from the king of Samaria, the king of Israel. "Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan." This command shews us the tender care of God for Elijah, providing a refuge from the enmity of Ahab, and also giving the quiet that was needed after the strain of the interview with the king, and all the prayerful anguish of spirit that had preceded it. Spite of all this, it was another great test of faith. For the one who had encountered alone the head

of all the nation of Israel, who had, as it were, closed the heavens over the guilty country, thus proving that he was indeed a prophet of the living God, for him to hide himself in a remote ravine of the Jordan far from any other human being—this was discipline indeed !

“Go hide thyself.” This was the will of Jehovah for him, and this was enough. Elijah obeyed and went. Alone with God there, shut in by the narrow valley, with only the blue sky above him, he had the leisure to learn the new lessons this was to teach him. In some way or other all the children of God must learn to obey that word, “Go *hide thyself*.” We must learn what it is to leave ourselves for the Lord. To have Christ instead of ourselves. The Spirit of God *will* teach us, will make it good in our souls if we are willing—if we are subject to His guidance. It is the entrance into blessing, for then we are freed in spirit from all that we are in ourselves, and are free to be taken up with the things that belong to Christ, who is our real life. Then we can sing :

“Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Grace hath hid me safe in Thee.”

This is really the beginning of true christian life. We can go on then and learn something of the unsearchable riches of Christ, of all the purposes and counsels of God. We can learn to know Him.

Elijah may have been taught some of these things in the months of his lonely sojourn by the brook Cherith. God would not leave him comfortless, and twice every day he was reminded that His eye was upon him and that His almighty power was more than enough to overcome mountains of difficulties. Morning and evening the black-winged messengers of Jehovah darted down from the blue sky and laid at Elijah's feet the provision for the needful meals. If we think of the wild ravens with their voracious craving for food, we can but see that only the power of God could compel them to go against all the strongest instincts of their nature and day after day, week after week, bear to the solitary stranger what they would greedily have devoured otherwise. It was a daily miracle that proved to Elijah every night and every morning that he was the object of the care of heaven. Surely this must have been a powerful object lesson, resulting in adding a loving tenderness to the fiery energy and unfaltering faith of the prophet !

There was another reason for the peaceful retreat at Cherith. Strong rugged character as he was, he felt too keenly the sin of his people to be insensible to their suffering. Had he been in the midst of them and seen the privations which the drought caused, had he heard the despairing anticipations of the famine that all knew would follow the lack of the rain, his heart might have quailed and his faith given way, or else he would have

become hardened, and closed his eyes and his compassions on what he had been the means of causing. Alone at Cherith he was spared the sight of the horrors of famine, and was taught of God Himself. He was being fitted for other scenes in his history where he would be enabled to bear witness of the love as well as of the almighty power of Jehovah, God of Israel.

Morning by morning as Elijah awaked from sleep he knew he had no store of provision for the daily needs. But day by day he proved the truth of a word spoken long ages after, but true then as now—"My God shall supply all your need." God may see good to let some of His children find all their own resources fail. They may have nothing to meet the daily demands of this life down here but their confidence in the love and care of God. Well, that love and that care will never fail. God has His ravens now, though they may appear in other guise than those who day by day failed not to visit the waiting prophet. God's people are never left to the cold charities of a heartless world if they are truly depending upon Him. They are cast upon the tender care of a Father-God who considers their every need and *will* supply it if they abide with Him, as He supplied Elijah.

We fail to remember sometimes that God has given the very greatest gift even He could give. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" It is really a question of

how we value that one great gift of God ; of whether we have ever known our own deep need of Him. Have we ever walked about in this world with the deepening consciousness that we were not only guilty but *lost* ? Has this terrible fact been burnt into our souls, as it were, so that in our gayest moments the thought of it would intrude and spoil all the gaiety and worldly pleasures we sought to drown our misery in ?

If we have known what this is, it is indeed a thing of joy to learn for ourselves that the Lord Jesus Christ loved us and gave Himself for us. That He has not only forgiven us all our sins and put them away, but has brought us right home to God. We are not only willing then, but very glad to hide ourselves, glad that Christ should be everything. Not looking into our hearts to find peace or joy, but having it as a settled reality to us that He is our peace, He Himself our one source of joy, our resource always and everywhere.

That Elijah was taught something of this we may be sure. If any vestige of self-consideration had intruded upon him it would have made the time of the Cherith hiding hang very heavily upon his hands. What a waste of time it would have seemed for one who probably was in the prime of manhood, to be just waiting there for the word from God which should send him out once more into the midst of his people. But when God orders stillness no time is wasted. Elijah found that the solitary valley became the very presence-

chamber of Jehovah. He had known before—as he said to Ahab—what it was to stand before the Lord God of Israel, but he was taught it in a deeper way now than ever. This was the secret of Elijah's power.

As weeks and months passed on and he saw that the deep blue of the eastern sky above him grew deeper and unflecked by the smallest cloud, he knew that his prayer was still being answered and that there was no sign of rain, that all over the country men would be eagerly scanning the heavens for the first trace of the longed-for down-pour. It was not the rain only that ceased to fall, but the dew also, and in eastern countries this is secondary in importance only to the rain. The day may have been intensely hot and the evening dry and starry without sign of dampness, but in the early morning the whole face of the country seems to lie under a fleecy white veil of vapour or mist. When this is lifted off by the breeze every twig of the trees and every blade of grass glisten as if gemmed with diamonds, and the heavy drops roll off the tents of the traveller like rain, so abundant is the beautiful dew.

Knowing this, we can understand why the bestowing of it is looked at as a blessing in Deuteronomy xxxiii. 13. When David first heard of the death in battle of Saul and Jonathan he was deeply distressed and uttered a most pathetic dirge over the loss of them. He called for judgment, as it were, upon the place where they fell,

saying, "Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew . . . upon you." And when, by the prophet Hosea, Jehovah in the most touching way entreats Israel to return to Him, He says: "I will be as the dew unto Israel," thus shewing the value of its being given, and the heavy loss entailed when it was withdrawn.

It is not probable that the river Jordan would be greatly affected by the drought, as its sources lie far north and are fed by the snows from Hermon and Lebanon, which were outside the region of the land of Israel, and so were probably not affected by the drought. But for this unfailing river the whole country must have been depopulated, which was not then the will of God. The smaller streams which flowed from it were kept full as long as the Jordan stood at its usual height, but when it sank even a few inches as the consequence of having no rainfall, then the dependent streams and brooks began to lower too.

The Cherith, which has lately been thought to have been identified as running through the Wady Ajlun, and still called Fakarith, the last two syllables of the word being almost identical with the ancient name of the brook—Chrith—was one of the lesser streams flowing from the Jordan, that is if the valley Ajlun on the other side of the river and almost exactly east of Samaria is really the spot where the servant of Jehovah was miraculously sustained for many months, it may have

been a whole year. He was at the widow's house in Zarephath for more than two years, and the time of the famine was three and a half years, so that twelve months would be about the time that Elijah spent there alone.

One would imagine that there must have been unfailing delight to him to see the swift-flying ravens coming to the deep valley every sunrise and sunset. How the prophet must have been conscious that he was a special object of the loving care of Jehovah, God of Israel! That his faith and confidence were thus strengthened must have been the natural result, and before he was sent to other scenes and to active service the day came when he needed both.



CHAPTER III.

"And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there." (1 Kings xvii. 7-9.)

"The shadow, solemn and dark and still,
Lay cool on the purple sand ;
The shadow deep of a mighty Rock
In a weary, thirsty land.
And the Hand that reft with the thunder dread
The Rock of the ages hoar,
Down to my lips the waters led,
And I thirsted nevermore."

"AND the brook dried up."

How long was that brook in drying up? Did Elijah suddenly become conscious that the gentle ripple of the flowing water over the pebbles was fainter than it had been? We wonder if he watched and waited to make sure that the stream was really getting feebler in its course, and whether this being the case was a signal to him that he would soon be sent elsewhere. That it would be any great trial of faith to one who had been taught that almighty love and power were caring for him we can hardly think. After a year of Cherith

training surely he would be able to calmly wait to hear the voice that had guided him there now directing him to leave, nor did he wait long. Doubtless the ravens came to him at sunrise and brought the last meal of their providing for him, and there was still enough water in the brook to quench his thirst. God would not start him on his journey thirsty, but when the sun fairly shone down into the valley the last drop dried up.

It may be that at that moment it was that Jehovah again spoke to the prophet: "Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee." It mattered not to the prophet then whether the brook dried up or not, he would no longer be near enough to it to need its limpid waters, and strengthened and energised for what was before him he could leave Cherith with a psalm of deep thanksgiving in his heart for all he had gained there.

We sometimes have to see our brook dry up. It may be the dwindling brook of failing health without prospect of recovery, or the loss of our tried and valued friends, or the failure of business and thus of income and means of subsistence. God is never unmindful of us then. He will have some Zarephath for us where our real needs will be met if not all our wants. We can imagine how Elijah would turn round when he got to the head of the ravine, as he started on his journey, to take a last look at the place where he must have

spent many hours of such joy as is seldom given to man in this world. To be there by the express will of God, to be there alone with Him, being taught of Him, all earthly cares and earthly voices shut out, surely at times he must have been conscious that those days were indeed "as the days of heaven upon earth."

They were over. The word of God now sent him to the very last place we should suppose that he himself would have chosen. To go and dwell in Zarephath, which belonged to Zidon, would seem only second in danger to returning to the city of Samaria, as Zidon was the old home of Queen Jezebel, and her power would still be great enough there to endanger his life if he were recognised. When God conceals His people they are well hidden, so though Elijah must pass over the Jordan and through parts of Samaria and Galilee before his long walk of about eighty miles ended at Zarephath, yet no one knew him as the man for whom king Ahab was seeking, and he passed on safely and unknown.

Though barely a third part of the time of drought had passed, yet there must have been enough of scarcity to sorely pain the heart of the prophet, as he walked on the dusty roads and saw everywhere the once fertile plains and gardens only kept from utterly withering up by a scanty watering from the river. Hungry children and emaciated men and women must have passed him as he travelled on, and often must his heart

have been touched as he saw everywhere signs of suffering, but not of repentance for the sin and guilt that had caused it.

As the prophet neared the boundary of Galilee he was approaching the oldest city of the ancient Phœnicians, that wonderful people whose vast commerce in many countries had made them both rich and powerful and civilised when England was almost unknown except to them, their ships reaching as far as the British Isles. Like many other cities of this part, Zidon lies in the midst of beautiful orchards or fruit gardens where all the produce of warm climates is found in the richest profusion—pomegranates, figs, apricots, bananas, peaches and many other fruits, especially oranges, are to be had for the asking even now.

Zidon was once the most famous city of the Phœnicians; its manufactures were highly valued, and Zidonian garments held much the same rank in that day that the best Parisian ones do now. The purple dye that was then so valuable was also made at Zidon, and remains of the vast heaps of the shells thrown out from the dye-works are still to be seen. The dye was made from a secretion of a certain kind of shell-fish of the species called *murex*. None are found now in the shallow water round the coast, and the dye-works have long since ceased to exist. The merchant princes of Zidon were known in all commercial countries, and the fame of their sailors was spread far and wide. The "coasts of Tyre and Sidon" were visited by

the Lord Jesus Christ when He was on earth, and when Paul was being taken as a prisoner to Rome the vessel he was in touched at Zidon, and the Roman officer in whose charge he was allowed him to land there and see his friends. This closes our scriptural notices of the ancient city.

In the division of the land under Joshua amongst the twelve tribes the whole of this region was assigned to the tribe of Asher. It was never taken possession of by them, and remained the prize of the Phœnicians until the Philistines wrested it from them. The chief interest of the district to the Christian is the fact that Zarephath, which joined Zidon, was the abode for over two years of the greatest prophet of the nation of Israel. Zarephath—better known in New Testament times as Sarepta—must have been a large place if we judge from the heaps of ruins scattered over the plain. Part of these ruins lie on the coast, but others are farther inland. The word Zarephath means a furnace, or rather a smelting-furnace, the place having been one of the chief centres of Phœnicia's glass-works, which were only less celebrated than the metal-works of Zidon.

The terrible drought which was withering up all the green freshness of the land of Israel had spread to the region which should have been populated by the tribe of Asher. When, wearied with the long walk through the parched country, the prophet Elijah at last reached the suburbs of Zarephath outside the gate, he saw a poor widow gathering

sticks amongst the trees. He at once knew that it was the very widow marked out by Jehovah to sustain him there—at least, so it would seem. He was weary and spent, it may be, and to test her perhaps, as the servant of Abraham tested Rebekah, he called to her and asked her for a drink of water. There seems to have been a willing response to his request, for she quickly turned away to get the wished-for water, in silence, it would seem, for no word of hers is recorded until after the stranger had made a further request.

Had Elijah not had those months of entire dependence upon Jehovah at Cherith it might have been a terrible blow to his faith to find the deep poverty this woman was now in. As she left him to fetch the drink of water he again spoke to her, asking her to bring a morsel of bread also. Now a sorrowful tale is heard by the one who is to be her guest. Not a morsel of bread has she to bring, nothing but a scraping of meal at the bottom of the meal-barrel—a mere handful—and a little oil in a cruse. She had not even fuel to cook this scanty meal, she had come out of the city to find a few sticks if she could, and then she was going back to her desolate home to cook the cake for herself and her son, the very last they had, and then they would eat it and lie down and die. Heathen fatalism this was, but it was not all; she has met one who will reverse things for her in a way she did not even hope for, much less expect.

"Fear not" are the first words she now hears from Elijah; "go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me. . . . For thus saith Jehovah God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that Jehovah sendeth rain upon the earth. And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah."

One hardly knows, as we read the words, which is the most wonderful, the faith of the prophet who could thus pledge the God of Israel to supply the needs of one who was outside all the promises of Jehovah—one who belonged to a race doomed to be cut off if Israel had not failed in obedience—or the faith of the widow herself who on the word of a stranger could take the food from her starving child and give it to him. Hers was indeed "great faith." In this same part of the country, in this very town it may be, to a woman of the same race the Lord Himself said, long ages after Elijah's time: "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." In Mark's gospel we are told this woman also was a Syro-phœnician.

The widow who could obey the word of the prophet and share her last meal, as she thought, with him must have had a like faith with the Syro-phœnician of later days and shared her reward, for her desire, too, was fulfilled. That her great poverty had been caused by the famine resulting from the drought is the most likely

.

thing. From the fact of her house having an upper chamber—not loft, as in the English translation of the Bible—we know that it was not one of the poorer classes, for they never have them. The word in the original is alliyeh, and this is still the common Arabic word for the upper rooms of houses. They are better fitted up than any other parts, and kept for honoured guests.

That Elijah should be sent to the house of a Canaanite was even then a strong rebuke to the people of Israel, who, in spite of their determined turning away from the law of Jehovah, still considered themselves His chosen nation, and so bore themselves with haughty superiority in their dealings with other races. The Lord Jesus took this circumstance that is recorded of the widow as a proof of God's grace to the Gentiles. When He who was in very truth the Jehovah of Israel was down here amongst His own He told them that no prophet was accepted in his own country. Then He went on to say, "But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow." (Luke iv. 25, 26.)

The woman of Sarepta was a wonderful testimony to the grace of God, which would flow out far beyond the limits of rebellious Israel. She

believed the word of Jehovah through His prophet, and instead of rejecting it she acted on it in faith, and was preserved all through the famine, and her son also. There was need of very real self-denial on her part, and this before she *saw* any proof of the prophet's power. Her faith enabled her to implicitly obey his word. To go to her house and use that last handful of meal to make bread for the prophet when her own child was nearly starving was grand trust in God. She indeed did put God between herself and her poverty.

Notice the words of Elijah to her: "make me thereof a little cake first . . . and after make for thee and for thy son." There was enough to make one cake, and when she had taken that to the stranger and returned to get ready those for her child and herself she found that there was plenty left for them both, but no *full* barrel, no full cruse. Had there been, faith would have gained no strength from exercise, but day by day there was just enough and no more. The barrel of meal wasted not, the cruse of oil failed not, they were never quite empty.

To us it may not seem any great thing to have trusted the word of Jehovah about it, because we know now that they did not waste the whole time of the famine. It was a very different thing at the time it happened, and needed to be met by real reliance on God. Happily it was so, and the faith of the widow of Sarepta, and the grace that sent

Elijah to her, remains a lovely lesson for us all in the pages of scripture, especially as our attention is drawn to it in the gospels.

Outside the gate of Zarephath Elijah ate his first meal. That he did not remain there many hours we may feel assured, for when the now grateful and rejoicing widow saw that there was sufficient again in the barrel and cruse for another meal, surely her first impulse must have been to go to him and tell him how his word was being fulfilled. Before long the prophet is at home in her house in the city, and while the guest-chamber was reserved for him, we may be certain that he was often with the little family.

What times they must have been for the widow and her son! How Elijah would delight to teach them both of the mighty works of the God of Israel, who had redeemed His people from the midst of another nation, from the hard bondage of Egypt. Now he could speak to her also of the grace that had even thought of her and offered her not only deliverance from the famine, but deliverance from the power of sin and Satan.

Can we imagine that she would refuse this proffer of salvation? Well, if we did not know our own hearts we might think she would never be so mad as to turn away to the powerless idols of her land from the God of Elijah. If we do know even a little of what our hearts are capable of, we know that we have often done the same thing that looks so utterly foolish in her. Many a

time have we turned away from the preacher who has been urging us not to neglect God's great salvation. We thought perhaps that there was time enough yet, we would wait a little longer. Or we felt that it would mean giving up our old friends and we were not ready for that, and so we passed on and would not let ourselves think any more about it. It may be that God in His mighty love put all these feeble excuses away and brought us to the feet of Jesus repentant and believing; then what joy it was to find out what regions of blessing He had brought us into. First to find out that our sins no longer stood between us and a God of infinite love and tenderness; our sins were all put away through the precious blood of Christ.

As long as we are unbelievers our sins are between us and God. When we are really trusting in Christ we have Him between our sins and ourselves. What a marvellous exchange! Who would not desire to have it verified in their own history?

There is an old tradition still lingering amongst the Jews around Zidon and the ruins of Sarepta regarding Elijah's stay there. They will tell the traveller who inquires about it that the son of the widow became an ardent follower of Elijah, and a worshipper of the one true God. His name they say was Jonah, and he afterwards was owned as a prophet and known as the prophet Jonah of scripture. There is no proof of this, but it is also impossible to say it was not so.

We are sure, at any rate, that great blessing must have been sent to the woman who for two years and more provided a home for God's servant. When an alien from Israel received the Ark of God into his house, the greatest blessing was bestowed upon him for doing so. We may thus be sure that not only temporal mercies, but real spiritual blessings to both the widow and her son were the result of the prophet's sojourn there. Results that would last for eternity and not only for the fleeting days of time. Are we living only for time, or are we taking eternity—God's eternity—into account?

Eternity, eternity,
How long art thou, eternity?



CHAPTER IV.

"I am the resurrection, and the life." (John xi. 25.)

"From the brightness of the glory,
 'Go ye forth,' He said ;
Heal the sick, and cleanse the lepers,
 Raise the dead.
Freely give I thee the treasure,
 Freely give the same ;
Take no store of gold or silver—
 Take My name."

ZAREPHATH, the name of the city where Elijah found a refuge with the widow and her son, means a smelting furnace. And it was to prove a furnace in very truth to the prophet himself as well as to his hostess. Except for our knowledge of the almighty power of God, and of His care for His own, we could scarcely understand the possibility of Elijah being safely hidden in the chief city of the Zidonians, when a princess of Zidon and her apostate husband were sending messengers everywhere to try and find him. We can only think that "their eyes were holden that they did not know him." Thus God threw a veil of protection around His servant, which effectually sheltered him

as long as the famine lasted. Month after month passed quietly away in the house at Sarepta, for a wall of defence, unseen indeed, but none the less real, had been built around it by the almighty power and love of Him whose servant was sheltered there. Spite of the seclusion in which the prophet would live, he must have heard of the increasing severity of the privations caused by the drought and famine. Had he looked only at the different steps by which he had arrived in the Zidonian city he might have found his faith faltering. The years when he had seen his nation gradually sinking deeper and deeper into the dark abyss of departure from the one true God. Then the idol worship eagerly embraced, and the idol priests set up in power. The earnest prayers and supplications to Jehovah that He would put away this horrible evil. Then the cry wrung from his anguished heart for judgment rather than rushing on in sin.

The first part of the answer to his prayer led him to Samaria and Ahab. The next to Cherith, where he had to learn that Jehovah Himself was enough for His people everywhere and always, and that He had all power in His hand. The journey to Zarephath and his long sojourn there was one more step in the way God was fitting him for His service. The upper room where he dwelt became hallowed by prayer, as the rocky cliffs at Cherith had done before. As Elijah heard the tales of sorrow and starvation, of parched fields that could yield no pasture for herds and flocks, of little

children crying for the food their distracted parents knew not where to find, how easy it would have been for him to begin to question as to whether after all he had not made a sad mistake. How often he would need to renew his strength, to have his faith fixed upon the word of God, and to hear His voice bidding him fear not, for Jehovah would never leave nor forsake him.

Elijah had to continually look away from outward things and rest in the word, "I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee." Had he not been in the path of God's will he would not have found God's provision there for him, neither would he have had God's protection. So he could wait quietly on and on all those long months, which grew into years, and still he heard no word from Jehovah to send him back to his own country and people. But he prayed. This was his resource. In prayer he drew near to all the divine calm of the presence of God, and he ever found that in waiting there his spirit was strengthened and he was daily taught how to meet the everyday life that otherwise might have chafed and fretted him. He was yielded to God. If only we knew more of that how much more peacefully we should face the little worries or the great emergencies that come in our path. It is never lost time to wait on God.

We may be sure, too, that the widow who sheltered Elijah, and was herself miraculously provided for in consequence, also was being taught

lessons she had never even thought of before. What living interest must have filled her mind and that of her son as they listened to all Elijah would tell them! What would be Bible lessons to us now would be told them by one near enough to the glorious reign of Solomon and the loving rule of David to have heard from old men what their fathers had seen of these kings. Then all the wanderings of the Israelites in the desert were doubtless told them, and at last they began to see a little of the loving-kindness of Jehovah. The daily supply of meal in the barrel and of oil in the cruse shewed them the power and mercy of God; but they had to learn something else.

The son of the widow began to fail in health, at last he was very ill, and the mother knew that his life was in danger. How the prophet must have marvelled at this new discipline! He would pray also, we are sure, and earnest may his pleadings have been, but this time they were not answered as he desired. The day at last came when death entered that quiet home—death, which no human power or human love can shut out. The only child of his widowed mother lay before her in the cold quiet of death. Distracted by the blow, as it would seem, but brought by it to a consciousness of her guilt, she turns upon Elijah as though he were the author of this terrible blow.

Wild words fall from her lips. "What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to

slay my son?" As if she had said, Why did you come to a poor alien from Jehovah, one who had no part in Israel? Did you come to torment me with the sense that I am a guilty sinner, and to take away my son, all that is left to me? Yet this woman had cared for Elijah in many ways, and he doubtless felt grateful to her. How keenly her charge of ingratitude—for it probably was that—would go home to his heart, which must have been full of tender sympathy for her, as we see from his way of meeting her reproach. Calmly he replies, in the sense that he has a power to lean upon that is supreme even in the sphere of death. Though there was this quiet trust in the Lord God, yet who could tell the distress that filled Elijah's soul in the presence of the dead child?

Yet the grace of God was to be more fully shewn out in this very thing than in even keeping the widow and her son alive in famine. But for that, death must come in. All the abounding mercy to her in sending the prophet to her house and providing for them thus had not brought her to a knowledge of what she was before God. Only too often it is the same with us. Mercies are freely lavished by God upon all His creation, but who of us were turned to Him in contrition by them? In some way or other death generally has to come before us—very near to us—before we are awakened to a true sense of our sinfulness and of our sin. We may learn it, as we surely ought, when we see the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary,

there on that cross of shame, dying, dead—and for me, for you! Have you ever thought for one short five minutes what that death meant for you?

For the woman of Zarephath the death of her son meant that the very light of her eyes, the light of her home, was taken away. The one being she had to live for was gone, and what was life worth to her then? Elijah saw and felt all this. He did not express his sympathy with the poor mother by telling her so, he knew she was in no state to be comforted thus, and his own grief was too great also. He turns to God—a mute cry it may have been. Some prayers are never framed in words. But he prayed. Then turning to the widow, who was closely clasping the lifeless child to her breast, he said: “Give me thy son.” Taking him in his arms he carried him into the upper room which was specially his own, and laid him upon his bed.

Then—shut in with death—he *cried* unto Jehovah. It does not say that he prayed. It was the cry of a soul in the deepest distress which reached the ear of God from that room there. He seems to expostulate with God at first, saying, “O Jehovah my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?” Surely Elijah must have felt that when God wounds He does it for blessing, that there must be something more than this that the only child should be slain—God must have some-

thing more for them both than that! Was it then that the first thought of resurrection flashed into his mind like a bright ray of sunlight across the black cloud? Surely there was something of the kind. As if to completely identify himself with the lifeless child, the prophet now "stretched himself upon the child three times," and again he *cries* unto Jehovah. This time we are also told that he prayed, and it was such a prayer as never before had man ventured to pray. He prayed for the life of the child to be given back. "O Jehovah my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again."

It was a wonderful request. We feel that not in vain had this servant of God been alone with Him so long. His was the boldness of faith that at this moment could trust enough to ask even for life for the dead. Only one could thus pray who knew what it was habitually "to stand before God," as the prophet surely did. The God of Elijah was to be proved to be the conqueror of death, and the woman was to have her faith in His love and in His power so strengthened, that never again would she trust in false gods. In the presence of death she had discovered that she was guilty. This was needful, though not then could it be told her what the cross of Calvary tells us now. "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." (1 Pet. iii. 18.)

We learn there—at Calvary—that death was the thing our sins deserved: the death of Christ has

taught us *that* if we are believers in Him, whilst it gives us the assurance that that same wondrous sacrifice has put them away. The widow surely learnt that death was her rightful desert. Now she was to learn how grace could meet it. The power of resurrection must be known something of in our souls before we can see every enemy destroyed, and the resurrection of Christ sets His own redeemed ones in risen life, beyond death and every hostile power.

“And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah ; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived.” What a supreme moment in life that must have been to Elijah ! Not only the son restored to his heart-broken mother, and the silence of death lifted off the household, but to the one who had so prayed there was the blessedness of knowing that Jehovah had done this, had raised the child up out of death. It was a moment so full of intense thanksgiving that one doubts if the prophet could do anything else than bow down in silent adoration.

The clear childish voice of the only son, raised up from death free from sickness and in the full vigour of health, would soon rouse the thankful Elijah to remember that the poor mother was still mourning for her child. Very soon they were descending the outside stairs which such upper chambers generally had, and going into the house the widow has the bliss of seeing her child strong and well by the side of the one who had carried

him away from her lifeless only a short time before. We are only told one thing that the mother said. There may have been much of delight and surprise and gratitude that was left unrecorded, but we are told that she said to Elijah, "Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of Jehovah in thy mouth is truth."

We can hardly understand the effect this miracle had upon the widow. Never could one of the idols she was familiar with have done this. None but Jehovah God of Israel, she was sure, and her trust in Him was fully established by the glad resurrection of her cherished son. To Elijah also it was as wonderful a revelation of the grace that even then must flow out to the Gentile world—the love that was in the heart of God for all. What a meeting it must have been that evening when the prophet, with the rejoicing mother and her given-back son, gathered around their evening meal! Elijah with a fresh sense of this—that the God he had to do with, whose servant he was—was a God of boundless grace, beyond all his thoughts, One whose compassions could not be confined to Israel.

It is impossible for us to conceive the revolution of thought and feeling wrought in the soul of the widow by her son being raised out of death. She knew now that Jehovah was the living God—able to speak the dead into life, having life at His command. She knew that His word was truth, that it alone was truth, and one can but think that from that day she too was registered in heaven as one

saved by faith in the God of Israel, the God of heaven and earth. Thus this death in her home, which had been a very furnace of fiery trial to both Elijah and herself, became the doorway into a deeper blessedness than they had ever realised before. This was because they had gained a deeper knowledge of God. They saw something more of the love that later on would not even spare His own Son, but would give Him up for the life of the world.

To learn something more of God is always blessing. Christians are sometimes disappointed in their christian life. If we search into the cause of this we invariably find it is because they are not growing in the knowledge of God. They are looking to find something in themselves. It matters little what it is—but they are *not* looking at Christ, they are not thinking of Him; and as all their blessedness and joy is in Him, and they are neglecting Him—more or less—they as a natural result get unhappy and disappointed. If only they turn their hearts and minds to Christ Himself, satisfied to find all in Him, they will soon learn that there are regions of joy for them, far more than they can receive.

For those who still have the heavy burden of their sins between themselves and a Saviour-God, I would add these precious words—"The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Take these words and fix your heart and mind upon them till you see something of what they

mean. Then go to God and ask Him to enable you to put your whole trust in Christ. Cast yourself entirely upon His pardoning love, and you will soon be rejoicing in the fact that you are saved with an everlasting salvation, though you still have everything else to learn. Then go on "looking off unto Jesus" for all the rest of your life here. If you do that He will undertake for you in everything.



CHAPTER V.

“And it came to pass after many days, that the word of Jehovah came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab ; and I will send rain upon the earth.”
(1 Kings xviii. 1.)

“As strangers among strangers,
No home beneath the sun ;
How soon the wanderings ended,
The endless rest begun.
We follow in His footsteps :
What if our feet be torn ?
Where He has marked the pathway
All hail the briar and thorn ! ”

IF we had only the historical account of Elijah's life we should not be certain that the long years of drought and of famine were brought to an end in answer to his prayers. As an encouragement to “continue in prayer,” the Holy Spirit has recorded this fact. “Elias . . . prayed earnestly that it might not rain : and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.” This testimony given by James in his epistle is of the greatest

interest, as it unveils the secret of the latter part of the sojourn at Zarephath. How, we do not know, by some means Elijah became conscious that the time for Jehovah to have mercy upon His people was near at hand ; so again he prayed. No less earnestly than when he prayed for it to be withheld would he now pray that the rain might once more be given.

The third year was half gone before any word came directing the prophet to return into the land of Israel. But at last the command from Jehovah came to his ears : "Go, shew thyself unto Ahab ; and I will send rain upon the earth." Here again there is a very great demand upon his faith. "Go, shew thyself unto Ahab," seemed like running into danger ; but though Elijah was not a man who would foolishly seek for martyrdom, a word from the God whom he served was enough. To hear was to obey ; when Jehovah said "Go," Elijah went. This time he left sorrowing hearts behind him. He had been an inmate of the widow's house so long that he had become a part of the household. Then, too, he had been the means of averting the deepest sorrow that could befall his hostess, and this had formed a very strong link between them all. The last farewells are said at the parting, and then Elijah passes out through that gate of the city where he first saw a despairing heathen woman gathering sticks. What a revolution has taken place in her life since then !

"Go, shew thyself unto Ahab." This command must be obeyed before rain can be sent. Elijah had said to the king at their last meeting, "there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." If the rain should be sent without any word from him about it, all Israel would be left in ignorance as to whether it was bestowed by the Jehovah they had so dishonoured, or whether it came in the ordinary course of the seasons after drought. Indeed, there was a danger of the idol priests ascribing it to Baal and as an answer to their supplications.

Elijah knew all this. Without a thought of his own risk, joyfully entering into the mercy of the long famine being over, he walks on mile after mile scarcely feeling fatigue, one would think, in the sense that he was a messenger of good tidings to his land and people. Yet, as he passed on through the parched fields and lanes of the country districts and through the dusty cities or villages crowded by well-nigh famished people, with hungry, eager eyes that seemed wearied in looking for relief, he heard no word even now of repentance, no turning in their deepest extremity to God. The worship of Baal still going on, the priests in power and Jezebel supreme, well might the heart of the prophet sink as he scanned every face he met to see some sign of cheer for him in a look of contrition for the sin the nation was guilty of, but he looked in vain.

Then it was, perhaps, that first the sense dawned

in his soul that some mark of God's judgment, or at least of His displeasure, must be given before the life-giving showers could be sent. He would remember how Moses had sternly executed God's "strange work" upon the people when Aaron at their demand had made the golden calf. He would ponder all the ways of Jehovah with His people, and we can but feel he was guided in his thoughts by that Holy Spirit who conveys the will of God to His own.

Was it all in vain that the once beautiful olive groves were withered and fruitless, the labour of the olive failed, the vineyards all desolate and bare, the fields yielding no fruit? Was this message from God to the king and the nation not enough? Then over the soul of the prophet may have come the sense that sterner measures even than these might be needful, and as he passed on day after day till he neared Jezreel all these questions must often have been turned into prayer, and in approaching God the burden was taken away, and he would feel that it was his part to obey—Jehovah would provide. Yes, He would provide the wisdom which would enable him to do His will at every step while depending upon Him. Strengthened and comforted thus, the meeting with the king became less his concern than God's.

Could he have looked into the city of Samaria and seen the misery there he would have rejoiced still more at the message he was bearing. It may

be also that he would have felt that there could be no mercy for those who had led the nation into the deeper depths of sin and departure from God. "The famine was sore in Samaria." This may have been the reason why the court of the king was at Jezreel, the second capital of the kingdom. The king himself was more concerned about saving his horses and mules than his starving people. We hear nothing of his care for them, but we are told of his calling for the governor of the palace and consulting with him as to what can be done to save the horses. It is decided that the whole land shall be searched most vigilantly to see if there may not be some moist spot where a little grass may be found. Apparently the king had only one man whom he could trust on this important search, for he decides to divide the country between himself and Obadiah, the governor or chamberlain of the royal household.

In pursuance of this plan the king goes one way and his servant the other. When we think of the state of the nation at this time, with the law of Moses despised, and the word of Jehovah rejected, Baal acknowledged as the supreme object of worship in every tribe, and the false priests with immense influence over the queen and court, and over Ahab through his wife, we can see a little how greatly the grace of God valued the faith of this one man when we read the words, "Now Obadiah feared Jehovah greatly." "The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of knowledge." It was no light

thing to have this in such a day as Obadiah lived in. His place as chief ruler over the king's house made it very difficult for him to openly avow himself as true to the God of his fathers, yet we find that not even the wrath of the pitiless queen hindered him from rescuing and sheltering a hundred of the prophets of the Lord when they were in the greatest danger. At the risk of his life—as he well knew—for Jezebel was cutting off all the prophets of God she could get into her power—this man had concealed in two caves no fewer than a hundred of his hunted brethren. There he provided for their daily needs as long as it was necessary for them to stay in the caves. We are apt to judge hardly of Obadiah. It is a very significant fact then, that before telling us anything more about him the Spirit of God has recorded that "Obadiah feared Jehovah greatly."

That he was a timid man we cannot help seeing. That he was treated with perfect confidence by his royal master would prove that he was a faithful keeper of the charge committed to him. Like many godless men now, Ahab knew the value of an honest servant, and probably shielded him from the rage of the queen, otherwise he could hardly have escaped. How long he had been going through the country in search of grass for the horses we are not told, but it could not have been long before he saw Elijah approaching him. At once he knew that he was face to face with the man who had been the object of Ahab's hatred, and for whom

he had sent spies throughout the length and breadth of all Palestine.

Falling on his face at the prophet's feet, he asks, "Art thou that my lord Elijah?" "I am : go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here." This was too hazardous an undertaking for Obadiah to obey at once. He evidently knew that the prophet had been hidden of God, or otherwise he would have been discovered by the king's messengers. So he says in reply, "What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me?" Well he knew that, like all tyrants, Ahab could not be trusted if his wrath were once fully aroused. He knew the eagerness of the king to get the prophet into his power, but he felt that God had sheltered His servant from danger and would do so again. Then if Elijah were to be caught away miraculously while he went to find the king, little hope would there be that the life of Obadiah would be spared. In great terror at the danger he thinks he is in he tells Elijah of his keeping the hundred prophets in safety, in order to shew that he had already risked his life for their sake.

As we read the account we wish there had been more courage to bring this man definitely out on the side of truth and right in obedience to the law of Jehovah. Like Jonathan he lost great blessing because he did not break with the evil. Elijah listened in patience to all that the frightened Obadiah had to say, and calmed his fears by a

solemn "As Jehovah of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to-day," for Obadiah had ended his defence by saying that Ahab would slay him if he went to tell him that Elijah was there. Reassured by the positive declaration that he would that very day meet the king, the trembling servant goes to meet his master and tell him the startling news.

Soon the two men confront each other: the apostate king of Israel, and the prophet who could say, I stand before the God of heaven and earth—Jehovah of hosts. The first moment of that meeting must have made Ahab conscious of his own wrong-doing, but seeking to hide it under a show of anger and bravado he accosts the prophet with the words, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" Surely as he uttered the words he must have known how futile they were—how utterly false. This one quiet though dignified man—alone, unarmed, how could he be the troubler of the nation? The conscience of Ahab, not quite seared as yet, must have acknowledged the truth of the prophet's reply. "I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of Jehovah, and thou hast followed Baalim." They were the real troublers, as Ahab well knew.

Will the king bear to be thus reproved by Elijah? will he not call for his officers and have his rebellious subject shut up in the dungeon below his palace? or will he allow his conscience to own that

the prophet speaks truth? A weak vacillating being when not able to lean upon a stronger character than himself, the king is speechless at this bold charge. Smitten with an entire powerlessness he can do nothing but still listen to the man whom he has for years been trying to arrest. His attendants were close at hand doubtless, but he made no attempt to give Elijah into their hands. He has still to hear words that might well send a thrill of dismay through his hardened heart. Listen!

"Now therefore send, gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table." What a command to give to the king of all the many thousands of Israel! Had Elijah been taught what he was to do? Did he see that the question of whom they would serve must be put to the whole nation, and not only to the king who ruled over them?

There can be little doubt that between the time of his leaving the widow's house at Zarephath, and the moment of his meeting with Ahab, the prophet had learned that judgment must fall upon the false priests of Baal before the rain could be given once more to the whole land. The ten tribes must have it proved to them that the idol they bowed down to was a mere block of wood and stone, lifeless and powerless as any of the stones or rocks in their rough valleys or wadys. They must see too that

the God from whom they had turned away was all-powerful in heaven and on earth; the living Jehovah of hosts: a God that could answer by fire from heaven in the sight of all the assembled thousands of Israel.

All this must have been in the heart and mind of Elijah as he said to Ahab, "gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal . . . and the prophets of the groves." There must have been not only fiery zeal for the honour and glory of the one true God before whom he stood habitually, but surely a great yearning of soul for the hearts of his people to be turned back to Jehovah and away from their idols. May not the words of Moses, as he spoke in his last address to all the twelve tribes before he went up to his lonely last resting-place on Mount Nebo, have been passing through his mind? After putting before them in the most vivid way what would befall them if they forsook Jehovah and worshipped the idols of the heathen, Moses had said, "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live. (Deut. xxx. 19.)

What longing Elijah must have felt that Israel would "choose life" that they might live; not only live in the earthly land of Canaan, but live for ever in the paradise of God. To men and women in this day in which we live there often comes a moment when life and death are set

before them. The Spirit of God may press upon them the importance of this. As it were, it is said to them: I have set before you life and death—life, if you trust all that you are and all that you have done to the Lord Jesus Christ as the one only Saviour for sinners; death, if you go on rejecting or neglecting Him. Therefore choose life that ye may live.



CHAPTER VI.

"And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, Jehovah God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word." (1 Kings xviii. 36.)

"Oh that Thy name may be sounded
Afar over earth and sea,
Till the dead awaken and praise Thee,
And the dumb lips sing to Thee !
Sound forth as a song of triumph
Wherever man's foot has trod,
The despised, the derided message—
The love and the grace of God."

"GATHER to me all Israel," Elijah had said to King Ahab, who, compelled to do the bidding of his own subject, had gone away from the place of their meeting to assemble the people. We are not told how long time was needful to bring the many thousands of Israel to the spot chosen by the prophet, but it would take some days probably. This interval of waiting we may be almost sure was spent by the prophet in earnest prayer. He had proved more than once, as we have seen, that God ever hears the prayer of His people. James

in his epistle tells us that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much," and perhaps never had Elijah prayed more fervently for guidance in his work as the servant of Jehovah than now.

The place he had chosen as that where he would have all Israel assembled was well fitted for such a scene. Its identity has never been called in question, for so deep was the impression made by the terrible close of that day for the idol priests, or rather by all the incidents that there took place, that the memory of them has never been lost, and the names still given to the different parts would prove this. On the eastern end of the Carmel hills there is a natural slope which forms a wide half-circular open space, with the hills towering some hundreds of feet above, and sloping down to the plain which lies a thousand feet below, with the river Kishon slowly winding its way to the sea, some ten or twelve miles away.

The place is still called "The place of burning," in the native language El-Marakah, as the fact of the fire descending from heaven and burning the sacrifice has always been linked with this one particular place. Many large hewn stones still mark the spot near which, at all events, the altar stood which was rebuilt by the prophet, which was only the re-construction of one still more ancient. Quite near to this there is a spring which has the remains of a very ancient reservoir beside it. This spring has never been known to dry up of late

years, even in times of very great scarcity of rain, and it was from this supply doubtless that Elijah was able to get the water which he had poured on the altar and sacrifice.

To this spot on Carmel it was that Ahab and the ten tribes assembled, with the four hundred and fifty priests from the temple of Baal. It does not appear that those who were specially protected by Jezebel and ate at her table were there. They were called by Elijah the prophets of the groves, and it is thought that they were the priests of the temple of the idol Astarte, a Phœnician goddess, to whom Ahab had built the temple to please his wife Jezebel. Fearing danger for them, it may be, the queen would not allow them to attend this great parliament of the whole nation, where it was to be put to the test as to whether they would serve Jehovah, the living God, or Baal.

At last all were assembled in the vast hollow of the hill on Carmel, where Jezreel, more than twelve miles off, was clearly seen. When all were gathered closely together, Ahab and the false priests in the front ranks and the mass of the tribes closely around, forming a great multitude, Elijah appears alone before them and stands calmly facing the crowd of his countrymen. He may have said much more than is recorded for us, but the word that we are first told of his speech to them is well-fitted to bring them to a decision. "How long halt ye between two opinions? if Jehovah be God, follow him : but if Baal, then follow him."

Not a single word comes from all that large crowd of people. They are conscious that the man who appears before them in solitary dignity is in the right, and they can answer him not a word. The king, too, is silent, he has no defence to offer, and the shameless priests of Baal are all speechless.

What now will the prophet of Jehovah do? He speaks again to the thousands ranged before him: "I, even I only, remain a prophet of Jehovah; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of Jehovah: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God." At once there is a shout from the people, a shout of assent: "It is well spoken," they say, and so it is to be done.

Glad enough would Ahab and the priests of Baal have been to avoid this test. All in vain was it now to resist, for the evident fairness of the proposal carried conviction to the minds of Israel, and they would see that it was carried out. There was no difficulty in getting the bullocks from some of the parched meadows near, and it was still early morning. The priests being many had soon prepared their sacrifice, and began chanting their weird songs over it, calling vainly upon the name of Baal as they did so. Some hours passed, the

sun was now at its noontide height and would shine down full on the hill-side, with the eager expectant crowd waiting there to see the end of this strange conflict. As time passed on and there was no sign of their sacrifice being accepted, Elijah speaks with scathing irony to the false priests. Mockingly he says to them: "Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked."

His mockery seems to have goaded on the poor idolaters to frantic efforts. Their loud cries were now mingled, it may be, with shrieks of pain, for they gashed their skin with their knives till the blood gushed out upon them. As they must have known all along, there was no response to this any more than before. They had always until now been able to delude the people by their crafty artifices, but now the naked truth as to them appeared, and before all their shameful deception was manifested.

For three hours after noon did Elijah wait, then at the time that the evening sacrifice would have been offered in the temple at Jerusalem, if the law of Jehovah had been obeyed, Elijah called to all the people, saying to them, "Come near unto me." He stood by the heaps of stones where an altar of Jehovah had been, but which had probably been broken down by Jezebel. Choosing twelve large blocks from the heaps that lay there, thus shewing all that stood near that he embraced the whole

twelve tribes in his action, he then built an altar to Jehovah, and he made a trench all round it. This being ready, in a very short time the wood was laid in order upon the altar, and the bullock cut in pieces for the sacrifice. Those who were intently looking on would naturally think that there was nothing more to be done. All was ready for the fire from heaven to fall upon and consume the offering. Not so thought Elijah.

He would so order it that it would be impossible for any ordinary fire of man's kindling to burn on this altar. Looking at the people around him he said, "Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood." Plenty of willing hands were there to do this. Down to the fountain where, spite of all the three years of drought water could still be got, went enough of the men to bring up the four large vessels full, and they poured it on the sacrifice and on the wood. Once was not enough, and so again Elijah commands, "Do it the second time," and "Do it the third time." All was thoroughly soaked in the sight of the priests of Baal, of the king and the people. The trench also was filled with the water. Every one there well knew that no ordinary fire could at once consume this sacrifice ; nothing less than a miracle could do so, and now they wait in eager expectation.

Very soon they see the prophet advancing close to the altar. They see his uplifted face and they hear his words, as he cries to the One whom he

well knew as the answerer of prayer : " Jehovah God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Jehovah, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Jehovah God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again."

Not a long prayer is this of Elijah's, yet it must surely have touched the hearts of those who heard it. It was at once heard in heaven, for as soon as the words were ended, "Then the fire of Jehovah fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench." What a marvellous sight that must have been! The fire descending from the blue sky above them, not simply as lightning might, but fire that could consume the drenched wood and even the water itself in the trench. No wonder that "when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, Jehovah, he is the God; Jehovah, he is the God."

The whole multitude saw the fire from heaven fall, they had heard all the words of the prophet's short prayer, and they knew that the fire was given in answer to the prayer. What else could they do than own before the king and the false prophets of Baal that the God who had answered by fire was alone the true God—Jehovah God of Israel. Who of all the men who stood on that Carmel range that

day was the true king? Not the weak, wicked Ahab, but the prophet of God who had stood solitary there to vindicate the holy name of God. Elijah takes the place that the king should have done. He feels that even now no mercy can be shewn to the nation until they have put away the evil that has brought the wrath and judgment upon them, so he acts in stern power himself, as the king will not.

The prophets of Baal had seen and heard all that happened, and now stood in a group near the king. Elijah speaks not to him but to the people. "Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape." So they were taken there, brought down the hill to the brook or river Kishon and there slain, as those who had wilfully led Jehovah's people in rebellion against Him. They knew well—must have known it all along, that their lives were forfeited according to the law of Israel. Pity for them one cannot feel. For the sake of gain they had not only been rebellious themselves against Jehovah, but they had enticed others to be so. Pity for such there could not be.

If fire is sent down from heaven, if at any time we are given to see that God is acting down here on earth in answer to the prayers of His people, then, as it was at Carmel, no evil that we are fully aware of must be tolerated. It is the same with each one of us individually. The youngest believer in the Lord Jesus Christ instinctively feels, when first he is brought to God, that he cannot go on

with many things in his daily life that before had never cost him a thought. The one who has been given to singing the worldly songs of the day or reading its books, or joining its sports, generally soon finds out that he must give them up if he wishes to keep near the Lord. He learns that he has had a wonderful treasure given him, a joy in the Lord which is so precious that every earthly pleasure pales before it, and he dreads whatever would rob him of it. Thus the songs or books or amusements become utterly distasteful to the new life he has, and though it may entail suffering to give them up utterly, yet the recompense of so doing is far greater than the pain.

It is the same in everything. Elijah knew that where Jehovah was acknowledged the idols could not be tolerated. At all costs they must go. His appeal to the people of Israel is one that we may well remember. "If Jehovah be God, *follow* him." To follow Jehovah in that day and land was to incur the displeasure of the powerful queen, and to lose all hope of advancement in the world where she ruled. What a mere worthless trifle that was to the faith of a man like Elijah! What a trifle it is also if the young Christian now should lose preferment in seeking to follow the Lord. When on earth amongst the men and women of that day the Lord Jesus said, "If any man serve me, let him *follow* me." We cannot follow the Lord and keep our idols too. An idol may be a very different thing with some people from what it is with others,

but whatever keeps us away from Him who died to save us from "this present evil world" is not far from being an idol.

In the governor of Ahab's household, Obadiah, we see a man who did not *follow* Jehovah. He owned Him in a feeble way, and we are glad to think he truly feared Him; but though on an emergency he would even risk his life to save and shelter the prophets of God, yet he never had enough purpose of heart to become a real servant of Jehovah, because he did not follow Him. Obadiah may have thought that he would have so many more opportunities of doing good where he was than if he had separated himself from the royal household, but we are not to decide where we can be most useful, for that is not the question. If the Lord says "follow Me," and He does—then it is for us to obey without any word of hesitation or questioning.

Obadiah found he had no influence over any of his courtly associates to induce them to turn away from Baal. His very presence in the palace sanctioned the evil he may have perhaps grieved over. Had Elijah not been wholly separated from the grievous sin of Israel he could never have borne testimony against it, nor could he have gained such a signal victory over the enemies of Jehovah as the one we have been looking at on Carmel.

When Daniel was carried captive to Babylon, years after Elijah's time, but as the result of the nation's sin, he stedfastly "purposed in his heart

that he would not defile himself." God saw and blessed this purpose of heart. He does the same now. Any young Christian who starts with steadfast purpose of heart to follow the Lord—to abide in Him—to keep near Him, will have the power of God with him. He will not be alone in the conflict, for he will be specially kept by the One whom he is seeking to obey and follow.

"If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour." (John xii. 26.) Is there not wonderful encouragement in these words, and a great incentive to any of us to more earnestly seek not to defile ourselves with the things of this world, but to follow Him who speaks to us in them to-day?



CHAPTER VII.

"Let us not be weary in well doing : for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." (Gal. vi. 9.)

"Led by wandering gleams o'er fen and moorland,
What are we, outwearied at our best !
For the heart amidst the world's allurings
Craveth evermore for God and rest—
God and rest—all else the weary load
Of a toiler on an endless road."

THE work of that eventful day on the hills of Carmel was not ended for Elijah by the execution of the false prophets at the Kishon. There was still much to be gone through. Judgment had been executed, and that was inevitable if mercy was to be shewn to Israel. Ahab had evidently remained near the prophet. He does not appear to have sought in any way to defend the priests of Baal ; he was as lukewarm about the worship they had taught as he was about the one true God. Little did it matter to him that Baal was left in his temple without any to attend on him, his priests all slain and cast into the Kishon, where the swift flood that was soon coming would bear the lifeless bodies out into the sea.

Elijah was not at ease in the presence of such a

man ; he needed now to be alone in prayer for the rain that had been promised, and Ahab could only be a hindrance. "Get thee up, eat and drink," he now says to the king, for, in spite of the terrible scene he had been a witness of, he could yet sit down and eat and drink as though the awful solemnity of that judgment had been only an ordinary event. What could be done with one so callous and hardened as this King Ahab? So we cease to wonder at Elijah telling him to go up and partake of the feast which had come to be a regular part of the sacrifices offered. Ahab goes up the steep hill again to the place where the altar had been rebuilt by Elijah, and apparently thinking only of the feast leaves the prophet in peace.

He too went up again, but not stopping where Ahab was he climbs up some three hundred feet higher to the crest of a crag, which is still remaining ; there he cast himself down with his face to the earth and prayed. Of this we may be quite sure, though the record of it is not given. Elijah would pray for the rain, although it had been promised ; he felt that earnest prayer alone suited him now. After a little while he speaks to his servant, telling him to go up to the place from whence the wide Mediterranean could be seen, and look toward the sea. The young man went and looked, but was soon back to his master saying, "There is nothing."

He probably knew how earnestly the master was pleading for the rain that was sure to come,

but for which Elijah would not wait in stolid indifference, but in the attitude of expectant dependence. Seven times over does he send his servant to scan the face of the sky over the sea, for it was from there, from the west, that the rain-clouds might be first seen. We almost marvel at the waiting prophet remaining bowed down before Jehovah so long; but faith does not weary of crying to God, and he may have felt that unless rain came that very day—came as the answer in mercy to the dread work of judgment—the effect of the miracle of the fire from heaven, of all the events that had been crowded into those few hours, might be weakened, and the people would fail to see that the rain was given immediately by the God of heaven—Jehovah of hosts.

After the young man had seven times gone to look over the sea, which surged restlessly to and fro more than a thousand feet below where he stood, he came to Elijah with the glad news: "Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand." A little fleck of cloud the size of a man's hand! was that all after all this waiting? Ah, well did the prophet know that in a very short time that tiny cloud would so spread that the whole western horizon would be covered. He knew how rapidly the storm would come driving across the sea and that torrents of rain would fall. If this happened before the king and his retinue should cross the plain that lay for miles between Carmel and Jezreel, they would be unable to go at

all, for the low-lying ground would become a very swamp or slough, and no chariot could be driven over it.

Careless of any sign of the storm, Ahab was still at the place of the banquet prepared for him. He had in no way sought to stay the judgment upon the Baal-prophets, he had seen the miracle of the descending fire from heaven, and given a tacit consent to all that Elijah had done. In the face of all Israel, who for the moment had been swayed by the overwhelming proofs put before them, he could do nothing else than yield himself to the current ; but his conscience was not reached, his heart was untouched. He was still as far as ever from being what a true Israelite should have been ; there was no fear of Jehovah before his eyes.

But Elijah had to warn him of the coming storm and of his danger if he did not hasten. He sends his servant to him with the message, "Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not." While Elijah was on his face before God Ahab was eating and drinking. He was rested and refreshed, but the prophet had fasted the whole day. Nevertheless, while the king was getting all ready to drive to Jezreel, Elijah was being made ready by divine power to go the same journey. The storm came across the sea with such rapidity, and the heavens became so black with the heavy rain-clouds, that they may have started in the gale of wind that generally accompanies such a downpour, for "there was a great

rain"; great joy, too, throughout the land because of it.

The king with his fleet horses in the royal chariot would pass swiftly over the twelve or fifteen miles that lay before him ere he reached the palace of Jezreel, but that would be little to him and would not take two hours in ordinary weather. Whatever it was this special time, Elijah closes the history of this day by shewing before all that if he has had to disregard the will of the king it is not out of a spirit of opposition or rebellion. We read, "the hand of Jehovah was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel." It was a mark of respect for his kingly office, not for the man who held that office. By thus acting as an outrider to Ahab Elijah clearly shewed that he would have all men to "honour the king." He was no partizan of revolt, or of despising the government, and this act would make that patent to all.

So closed that eventful day. The many thousands of the ten tribes who had been assembled there had all dispersed, most of them probably had gone before Elijah went up to the top of Carmel to watch for the first sign of the coming rain. From one end of the kingdom to the other the tidings of what had been seen and heard that day would soon spread from one home to another until every family had heard it. They heard of Elijah facing the great multitude with the words, "If Jehovah be God, follow him," and it may be that many

hearts were turned afresh to Jehovah by what they heard. At any rate, as there were seven thousand who had never bowed the knee to Baal, there must have been some who were strengthened and encouraged by Elijah's acts and words then.

"The hand of Jehovah," we are told, was on Elijah when he girded up his loins and ran before the king's chariot. It was supernatural power that enabled him to perform this feat. It was not only a wonderful proof of physical strength, but in the prophet taking the lowly place of a servant to the king we see the humbleness of mind which becomes one who loved to own that he held no lower place than that of the servant of the King of kings and Lord of lords. While Elijah had the consciousness of this before him he was invincible. He lost sight of himself in Another.

When standing on the Carmel hills—one man against the whole nation—he had carried everything before him, for he was upheld and guided by the mighty power of the Spirit of God. He was consciously dependent then, but even if an Elijah leaves that place of leaning entirely upon the Lord he at once becomes as weak as any other. It was from no inherent power that the prophet became the greatest man in all Israel that day; he derived all his power from above. It was there for him as long as he felt his need and drew from its inexhaustible supply.

To-day it is the same for all the children of God, only in a deeper way even. Elijah could know

nothing of all we can delight in now. We look back at the Lord Jesus Christ on earth, and we know that He came here to live and die, so as to be able to give to all believers in Him that living water which springs up into eternal life—the Spirit, which will subdue us to Christ. We have *power* then to walk down here so as to please the One who has so thought of us, for the Lord Jesus has not only saved us, saved us for ever, so that we never need have one more anxious thought about that, but He has made us suitable to Himself. It is like the prodigal in the wonderful parable which was spoken by the Lord's own lips for our teaching and joy.

The prodigal son was not only received by the father, but after that the best robe in the house was put upon him, and the ring and the shoes. When he was thus clothed by the love of his father he was consciously fit to sit down at the table and enjoy the feast *with* his father. Think of the love in the heart of Christ that made Him speak thus in the parable. We see how He delighted to get the people then to understand the grace and mercy of God! He is the same to-day. He would give us all a deeper appreciation of that mercy and grace. He knows it would keep us in the peace and joy He wishes His own to be filled with. It would glorify His name too, for when we really see what He has made us—accepted in the Beloved—then we cannot help praising Him, and “whoso offereth praise glorifieth me.”

Elijah could take the place of a servant to the king, and he ran before him till they reached the entrance of Jezreel. Then we are not told what became of him. One wonders whether he was for the moment tempted to think that *he* had done wonderful things that day. Satan would be on the watch to tempt him out of the path of perfect dependence, and just when the prophet was physically worn and weary he would seek to get one of his poisoned darts into his mind, and then he would gain a triumph over him. Whatever it was that caused it, we now see an utter breakdown in this great servant of God.

When Ahab returned to the palace from Carmel he would be met by the queen, anxious to know the result of the great meeting there of all Israel and of Baal's prophets, with Elijah. When she heard that the false prophets had all been slain her wrath was great, and she instantly sent a message to Elijah, who must have been near at hand, to say, "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time."

From all that we have seen of the prophet until now we should have thought that he would have treated this message in the same spirit that he had first met Ahab in. Alas! it was not so. It is with a feeling of deep sadness and surprise, as it were, we read the words that follow: "When Elijah saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah."

Plain enough is it now that Satan had succeeded only too well in getting the prophet's eye off God. He thought only of the power of Jezebel, and in his panic of fear exaggerated that. Had he only waited quietly for a little, a few minutes' calm thought about it would have proved to him that Jezebel would not have sent that message if she had really been able to take away his life. The fierce queen knew that she dared not touch Elijah then; all Israel would have risen up in defence of the man whom they had so implicitly obeyed on Carmel that day.

As long as the miracle there was fresh in their minds, and especially as the nation saw that the longed-for rain was given at his word, the people would have defended him even against the queen. If only he could be sent out of the country her end would be gained, so the threatening message is sent and the plan unhappily succeeds, and Satan triumphs for the moment.

The prophet was exhausted from the immense strain upon him the whole day that ended with the prophets of Baal being slain. He would naturally feel that now the people might be led back to obedience to Jehovah since their terrible influence over them was gone. He might think with something like a proud exultation that the idol temples might be destroyed while Israel was impressed with the sense that Jehovah was God, and, as he was a man subject to like passions as we are, there may have been a tinge of self-compla-

cency in his heart. Oh, the sad end to all these thoughts!

Instead of Elijah going about amongst those who had stood with him on Carmel to teach and help them, to encourage them to still further put away the idols, he now at the mere vain threat of a woman leaves them untaught and unhelped and flees for his life out of the kingdom. It is a picture of ourselves that may well humble us and turn us to the only One who can save us from the snares of the enemy.

Elijah himself, already wearied as he must have been, starts on his hurried walk through the country to reach the district of Judah, where Ahab had no power. He is not satisfied without passing mile after mile through Judæa till he reaches Beersheba, almost on the borders of the wilderness and ninety miles from Jezreel. Yet the prophet was under the eye of God all the time; he was not left to take care of himself even then. The grace and mercy of Jehovah were as much for him now that he was discouraged and faint of heart as when he had been executing judgment at the river Kishon; he was ever the beloved servant of Jehovah.

We are slow sometimes to realise that the favour of God to us as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ is unchanging, for it rests not on what we are, but on what He is, and thus it is always the same, always perfect.



CHAPTER VIII.

“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust : his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.” (Psa. xci. 1, 4.)

“In the great and terrible wilderness
I wandered in thirst and dread ;
The burning sands were beneath my feet
And the fierce glow overhead.
Then came a day in my journey drear
When I sank on the weary road,
And there fell a shadow across the waste—
The shade of the wings of God.”

THOUGH Elijah was fleeing before Jezebel, his heart was truly turning to God, even if it were not in the way of grace. When he and his servant, who would not leave his master, but chose to share his flight, had reached Beersheba, and so were far from Jezreel, even then the alarmed prophet did not think himself safe. He must have rested there at least for a short time, and then, feeling he must be alone with God, he decides to leave his servant at Beersheba while he himself will go a day's journey into the wilderness.

The same One who said to His tired disciples when He was here on earth, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile," was watching over His servant, as he painfully toiled on mile after mile through the dreary region of the desert country. The whole day passed before Elijah's fretted spirit would allow him to stop the weary march; then at last, overcome by fatigue that was too great even for his iron frame, he went and sat down under one of the desert shrubs and prayed that he might die.

As we read his words we feel what a picture of our own hearts we get in them. Even when there is real devotedness to God in the main, if once our eyes are turned away from the Lord to ourselves we are on the brink of failure unless God in His grace comes in to prevent. We have to learn what we are, and if we *will* not learn this in His presence then we must learn it in the misery of being left to ourselves, though this is not God's way for us; He would teach us through all His own Son has suffered for us. Elijah had not the power we have, and we therefore cannot blame him as we would ourselves. Still, if he had been before Jehovah in the sense of His omnipotence and of Elijah's weakness he would never have fled from the crafty Jezebel.

As the prophet seeks to shelter himself under the desert shrub, or juniper tree, let us listen to his words: "It is enough; now, O Jehovah, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.'

Notice those last few words. In his almost despairing mood he is brought to own what he is. Had he been buoying himself up with the thought that he *was* better than his fathers? It would seem so from his confession now. It was a great lesson for a man like Elijah to learn, and we must not forget that in his days God had not revealed to men what they were as He has now. It has not only been revealed to us—to you and to me—in His word, but it has been proved beyond all question at Calvary. When the one only perfect, holy Man was here on earth, He was put on the cross because mankind would not have Him. They hated the only righteous One and crucified Him. They loved darkness, and would not have the light because their deeds were evil. That is what men are, what we are, only evil.

Thank God, there is the other side to this sad picture. When we own to God what we are in very truth, when we leave ourselves for the Lord, when we have received His Holy Spirit, we are then brought not only into a new place where all is of God, but we have another life, we live in His life. Christ is our life, and He will keep us. It is to be a life of constant leaning upon Him, and while we do that we shall be safe. We shall not learn this all at once, but we may learn it. The Holy Spirit alone can lead us into the reality, but this He will do if we do not hinder Him by going our *own* way or thinking our own thoughts. The Spirit is given to *us* to be a new source of thought

and feeling and desire. How intensely important it is then that we should not grieve Him. "Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." (Eph. iv. 30.)

When Elijah had been brought to own that he was no better than his fathers, he was so wearied by the long strain he had been subjected to, that he could only lie down and sleep. He probably felt he was suffering as a martyr for the sins of others, but as we can see now he was wrong. Alone in the world we know he felt himself to be, and he was mistaken also in this. The tender care of God for him was shewn in the most lovely way even while he lay sleeping under the poor shelter of the shrub.

In the evening of that day, we should suppose it was, an angel from heaven came and touched the sleeper and aroused him, and then said unto him, "Arise and eat." Then when Elijah looked round wonderingly he saw "a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again." We see from this how the deep depression under which the prophet was suffering was partly caused by his having undergone a very great mental and bodily strain. The terrible judgment—needful as it was—which he had been compelled to execute at Carmel, must have tried his spirit to the very utmost, and when that long day was at last over, the reaction came, and he failed, for he did not turn to God.

Too worn even to be thoroughly awakened by the visit of the angel, he lies down again to the sleep that seemed the only thing he wanted then. Another day dawns and he is still lying sleeping in the desert in the same place. Again the angel is sent to him by Jehovah, who had watched over him and kept him from harm all the time. This time the words of the heavenly visitant must have revealed to the sleeper how tenderly he was being cared for. Elijah hears the words, "Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee." The food had again been prepared for him, and now he eats and drinks and is so rested and strengthened that he goes forty days and forty nights "in the strength of that meat."

Where did the prophet go? His heart truly turned to the God whose servant he was, but not in that sense of His grace which even the tender care now shewn him might have awakened. He went to Horeb where the law had been given, as if that only was in his mind. The grace of Jehovah had still to be learnt, that grace which must pass outside the limits of the law and bless His people in spite of all that they were. In this same mountain range to which the steps of Elijah were turned Moses had once gone up to God, to speak to Him of the apostasy of many in Israel in making the calf of gold, and that in the very presence of the cloud by day and the fire by night which proved His grace. Moses did not accuse the people, but putting himself entirely aside he interceded for them in the most touching way.

When at length Elijah reaches the mount of Horeb, he takes shelter in a cave. The gloom and chill of such a spot were more suited to his still unhappy heart than the bright sunshine and warmth of the outer world. There he waits for God to speak to him. Though his faith had failed at the threat of Jezebel, his soul was true to the God who would not let him utterly fall. The question first put to him when at length he heard the voice for which he waited might well have made him conscious of his weakness. "What doest thou here, Elijah?"

Well might the prophet have learned from these words that part of the work given him to do had been left undone. The host of Israel, who had owned at Carmel that Jehovah was the one only living God, they had been left uncared for by the man who might have led them on to a true repentance. There was much to do in their midst—yet he was alone in a mountain cave! When he did answer the searching question, we see that he still had himself before him. He replies thus to Jehovah, "I have been very jealous for Jehovah the God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

Then again that voice speaks to him, "Go forth, and stand upon the mount before Jehovah." Apparently the prophet feared at once to obey this word. Then Jehovah Himself passed by. The

signs of His power were there: the mighty mass of the mountains was torn apart and the rocks upheaved and broken by the force of the tempestuous hurricane. Then came the earthquake, but Jehovah was in neither of these. Then the desert mountain range was lighted up by fire from heaven; still was not Jehovah there. Elijah heard all that passed, but something more powerful still is needed. Wind, earthquake, fire, penetrate not to the inner being of God's servant then.

"A still small voice" reaches at last to his very soul, and hiding his face in his mantle he goes and stands at the entrance of the cave. Again the question comes to him, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" and again he replies, "I have been very jealous for Jehovah the God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

Though the prophet used the same words as in his first reply, yet it is more than likely they were spoken in a very different tone. The still small voice had done its blessed work, and once more Elijah stood before Jehovah. He had got away from this, his rightful place, from the moment when he deserted his mission in the midst of Israel and fled for his life before Jezebel's threat. Thoughts of judgment upon the nation seem to have been in his mind for a time, but God will not be turned from His longsuffering by the im-

patience of His servant. The day for judgment will come, and this is shewn now to Elijah, though it will be deferred in grace till he has been taken away from earth to heaven.

Now that he once more stands before Jehovah in heart and conscience he is reinstated in his office of prophet as the servant of God ; he is commissioned afresh, as it were, and oh the joy it must have been to him to find that Jehovah is the same spite of all his weakness ! His voice now commands him to return on his way to the wilderness of Damascus, there he is to anoint Hazael, the future king of Syria, one who was then servant to Ben-hadad. From thence he was to return into the land of Israel, and there anoint Jehu, a general in Ahab's army, to be king in the place of Ahab's son. The next commission gave Elijah a friend and companion to be with him in his work and then, when that was ended, to be his successor. Jehovah tells him, "Elisha the son of Shaphat shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room."

Elijah was no longer to be left alone. The company of the man chosen as prophet by divine appointment would be a strength and cheer to him, and as when on earth the Lord sent His disciples out by two and two, so now the two prophets were to be together in God's work. Then come words which prove that all the grace of that God could not entirely avert the judgment on Israel. The mass of the nation wholly given over to evil were just what Elijah had said they were,

and he is told, "It shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay : and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him."

Seven thousand who truly feared Jehovah and were stedfast in cleaving to Him in the midst of the general apostasy, and yet Elijah thought himself alone ! How his heart must have reproached himself as he thought of them, and yet how thankfully he would remember that the tender grace that knew and sheltered them had also kept and cared for him ! Once more in his own true place, Elijah now leaves the rocky desolate region of Mount Horeb. Not a word of reproach has he heard from Jehovah, yet he has been searched through and through. He knows now what he really is, but he has also learned much more of the love of God. Never again do we hear of any failure in his history, and in the strength of Jehovah he can go back to the very place he had fled from—to Jezreel, and face the anger of Jezebel without a quiver.

Though not recorded for us it must have been made clear to him that the time for Hazael and Jehu to reign had not then come. Indeed, a time of great prosperity seemed outwardly to be given to the nation of Israel from the day when at the word of Elijah they had slain the prophets of Baal. From Horeb, with its memories of the law,

Elijah now goes at once to Abel-meholah, and there finds Elisha, who will be the prophet of grace. It is most likely that Elisha was a young man, for he was in the field ploughing. He must also have been the son of well-to-do people, for he had twelve yoke of oxen before him, and yet as soon as he is called by Elijah he is ready to leave all and follow him as a servant in all his wanderings, ready to be poor in this world so that he may but be rich toward God.

As Elijah passed by the young man he cast his prophet's mantle over him, thus investing him, it would seem, with the office of a prophet—it was Elisha's anointing. He is ready at the moment to leave all his home life behind him, and in this we see that he must have been one of the seven thousand who had never bowed the knee to Baal. That his parents were of the number also seems certain, for on Elisha going to bid them farewell, as he says to Elijah, there is no hindrance from them to his going. Then a sort of sacrificial feast is made to celebrate the event of Elisha being called to the dignity of a prophet of Jehovah, and when this farewell feast is ended he follows the prophet and serves him ; serves him till the day when the chariot of fire carries his master away from him for all time.

Though it has not seemed needful to record it, yet there can be little doubt that from this day Elijah set himself to find out those in Israel who were true to Jehovah, those whose names were

written in heaven, though little known on earth. Though for a time judgment was stayed yet Israel was rushing on to its doom. Time for repentance was given over and over again, and we shall yet see Elijah giving the king the warnings from the God of Israel, which might even then have saved him had he really taken them to heart.



CHAPTER IX.

“For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” (Heb. xi. 10.)

“By the heavenly banquet strengthened,
Short the way to me,
Over moor and fen and mountain,
O'er the pathless sea ;
For the glory of His city
Shines along the road
Where the feet unwearied journey
To the home of God.”

ALTHOUGH nothing is told us in the scriptures of what Elijah was doing for the next few years of his life, yet we have indirect proof that he was used of Jehovah to bring His chosen ones out into an open confession of His name. Some six years or so after the calling of Elisha we find that war was going on between Syria and Israel. The kings of Syria were amongst the most determined enemies of the Israelites. They were ever on the watch to harass and spoil them, and God had decreed the destruction of Ben-hadad, the reigning sovereign of Syria at this time of the conflict with Ahab.

We see now that others had been encouraged to

avow themselves servants of Jehovah, and were also used of Him. Ben-hadad had besieged the city of Samaria, and his vast army was encamped before it, thinking that victory was certain. They knew nothing of the God of Israel, who if His people rejected Him would use every means to restore them, and would defend them for His own name's sake.

A prophet of Jehovah is sent to Ahab to tell him that the Syrians shall be delivered into his hand by Jehovah, not by their own might. Ahab humbles himself to ask the prophet for guidance in the war, and receives instructions how to act from him; and the utter defeat of the enemy is the result. Here we find that there were other prophets now openly known as such, witnessing for God even before Ahab. Surely this must have been the fruit of Elijah's work and labour of love amongst the seven thousand who had once been hidden ones, though belonging to Jehovah. Now they were hidden no longer. Four times during the wars with Syria we are told of prophets being sent to Ahab. Three times with guidance and instruction for him, and the fourth time in reproof and warning, Ahab having made friends with Ben-hadad whom he had conquered, whom Jehovah had appointed to utter destruction.

After this we come to the record of the most frightful crime committed by Jezebel, but which Ahab permitted and took advantage of. To mark the enormity of this offence Elijah is now sent to

the thrice-guilty king. He who was specially known as the man of God, Jehovah's servant, is sent to him, to the palace at Jezreel. Though then and for years after the city was known as a place of importance, being fortified and having walls and towers, yet it is best known for its connection with Ahab and with his depraved wife. It was built on the top of a low hill, and commanded an extensive view over the whole wide plain which stretched away in fertile loveliness then to the foot of the Carmel range of mountains. The modern Jezreel, or Zerin as it is called, is a miserable place. About twenty poor huts built around or near the ruined remains of an old castle is all that is left of the once beautiful place.

Ahab had a palace here, and the grounds stretched down the hill, where also was the vineyard of Naboth, a citizen of Jezreel. This vineyard was coveted by Ahab, and spite of its being an unlawful thing for an Israelite to sell his land, as it was commanded in the law of Moses that this should not be done, yet the king sought to get Naboth's vineyard by purchasing it from him for money. The ground was near the palace, and joined Ahab's, who probably wished to have all the land surrounding his house for his own. Naboth, however, refused to sell his vineyard to the king, choosing to meet his anger rather than transgress the command of Jehovah. Had He not said, "The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine"?

Here again we probably see in Naboth one of the seven thousand, they who alone out of all the nation remained true to Jehovah. When Ahab proposed to him that he should sell his vineyard he replied, "Jehovah forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee." Surely one who had bowed down to an idol—to Baal—would not have spoken in this way, he would have cared as little as did the king about the law of Jehovah. Bad as Ahab was, he did not attempt to force Naboth to give up the land to him. He went to the palace sullen and displeased, and like a wilful child "he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread." Kingly behaviour, truly! his servants could have said; but there the matter might have ended, had it not been for his bold unscrupulous wife.

Coming to see why the king had refused to eat, she asks him the reason, and then hears all from him. Her pride irritated at a subject daring to refuse the monarch's wish, she at once plans a deadly revenge that will also give Ahab his desire. False witnesses are to be procured to accuse Naboth of blasphemy against God. It would be easy to find them amongst those who bowed down to Baal. Jezebel herself knew the law of Jehovah well enough to know that blasphemy against Him was a capital crime, and in the irony of hatred, poor heathen as she was, she does not now hesitate to use this to get rid of an innocent man who stood in her way. Naboth is accused of blaspheming

God and the king. The false witnesses do their terrible work, and Naboth is stoned, a martyr for his fidelity to the law of God.

As soon as Jezebel knew that Naboth was dead, she goes in triumph to her husband, saying, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money : for Naboth is not alive, but dead." Not caring by what means this had come to pass, Ahab thinks only that his desire is to be gratified, and he goes down the hill to the vineyard to take immediate possession of it. He may not have known all the terrible details of the way in which his wife had plotted to get that piece of land for him, but he knew enough to be sure it was not righteously his. He goes down, however, to enjoy the sense of possession, but that is for a brief few moments only.

Though the queen had no knowledge of the God whose name she had dared to make use of in her false charge against Naboth, yet even a heathen would know that the terrible crime she had committed must bring retribution upon her. Her weak, wicked husband was as guilty as his more daring wife, for he at least must have known something of the holy law of God, and known too that he was transgressing it, even if he was not fully aware of all the facts of Naboth's death.

The Jehovah of Israel had seen all, had noted all, and now when Ahab has gone down the hill the word comes to Elijah, "Arise, go down to meet

Ahab king of Israel . . . behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it." To none but Elijah is this service committed : the one who had fled from Jezreel years before is now sent back as the ambassador of the King of kings, and invested with His power, protected by His arm. He has a very terrible message to deliver to Ahab : "Thus saith Jehovah, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession ? . . . In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine."

The unhappy king saw Elijah coming to him, and his own conscience at once told him that it was because of his sin he had come. His words to the prophet would tell us this : "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy ?" "I have found thee : because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of Jehovah." Such is the reply, and then Elijah goes on to announce to him the sentence of judgment from God. The house of Ahab was to be cut off, all his posterity should perish and die shameful deaths. Jezebel should meet a worse fate than that she had inflicted upon the innocent Naboth. "The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat ; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat."

Well might the guilty king say to the prophet, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy ?" The man who was faithful to God, who as His prophet taught that righteousness and justice should mark

the one who was ruler over the people, must necessarily be looked upon as an enemy by him. He had linked himself with Jezebel in an act of the grossest injustice and cruelty. Forgetting all that he should have learnt on that day when he last saw Elijah and when he stood with him on Carmel, he had acted now in utter defiance of Jehovah, and he knew that Elijah could only condemn him. What if this man of God should call down fire from heaven and consume him to avenge the death of Naboth! And at that moment surely the king realised a little of the enormity of his offences, and trembled as he met Elijah's calm, stedfast gaze.

Charge after charge is brought against him by the one man in all Israel whom he seemed to fear. His life is unrolled before him by the prophet, and he is compelled to hear and to see it as it is before Him who judges with holy judgment. "Thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of Jehovah." This is the first charge in the overwhelming indictment. What a charge it was! For the paltry pleasures of his own choosing, for the sake of wealth and the power to do his own will, he had sold himself to the powers of darkness, the powers of evil, when he might have been Jehovah's freed man. Now he was the slave of the powers to whom he had sold himself—a slave both body and soul. He had not always been this, but the path of evil gets ever further and further away from the good. Once started on that slippery road the eyes

are increasingly dim, and right and wrong seem much the same, till conscience is deadened and silent. This slave does not know that he is a slave.

Did not something like this pass through the mind of Ahab as he heard the first charge brought against him by a voice that was above the voice of the prophet? The second soon falls upon his ears: "Thou hast provoked me to anger." Sin after sin rushed into, spite of abounding grace shewn to him, this grace despised and scoffed at, the holy name mocked and rejected, His people trodden down and killed, thus had he provoked Jehovah to anger. Again Ahab can only bow his head and own himself guilty. Even this does not fill up the measure of guilt. The third charge comes, "Thou hast made Israel to sin."

Moses had said in his last words to the children of Israel when speaking to them of Jehovah: "Yea, he *loved* the people." To sin against them, worse still, to lead them into sin, was a crime of the deepest dye. It might be said that all evil was included in it. Yet Ahab had done this times without number. Even within a few days before this message from God came to him the nobles and elders of Jezreel had slavishly done the queen's bidding and murdered Naboth. She led them to commit this crowning iniquity, and Ahab had connived at it—he was a sharer in the sin and would share in the judgment of it. Yes, it was verily true that he had led Israel into sin.

Again he could only bow his head before the prophet and own the justice of what he had announced. Of his father Omri it was said in the scripture that he did worse than all that were before him. Of Ahab it is written, "there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of Jehovah, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up."

The king was not alone when Elijah came to him. Two of his captains or generals were riding in attendance upon him, and they too heard the words of the prophet. One of these young men never forgot what he heard that day. Jehu little thought then that he was already marked out as the one who should carry the sentence of judgment into execution. When he was himself king of Israel, anointed king by the prophet of Jehovah, he remembered Elijah's words this day and spoke of them to his chief captain, Bidkar, who was with him then and also heard all that passed.

What was the effect upon Ahab of this message from God? "It came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly." There was at least an outward show of repentance, which, though it did not take him to God in genuine contrition, yet was so far real at the time that it averted for the moment the utter and sudden ruin which ultimately fell upon his house when at last the time for judgment had fully come. A few more years

were given to Ahab to prove whether he would even now turn from his own way to follow Jehovah. We hear nothing of his forsaking Baal, or of anything that would prove that he had really in heart turned to God.

Yet His abounding grace took the fullest account of the way in which the king humbled himself before Him. To the prophet Elijah is now confided the postponement of the judgment, that was only delayed, not averted, by Ahab's partial repentance. The word of the Lord comes to Elijah in the most gracious manner, he is treated as a confidential servant, and very beautiful it is to see how he responds to it. "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me?" This question is asked of the prophet as if to bring him into accord with the divine mind and to let him see how his message had done—at least in part—the work God intended. Then, "because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house."

There is no word of complaint now from Elijah; he has learned the blessedness of grace in a deeper way of late, and he may have rejoiced that for a time the blow would not fall. Three years are given of peace in Israel: three years when Ahab could have wrought a wonderful change in his kingdom had his repentance been deep and lasting. We may be assured they were years of incessant service to Elijah, when he sought to encourage

those who were never seen in the temples of Baal, but who loved and honoured the One whom he served.

At the close of three years we are permitted to get a glimpse of unseen things. Ahab resolves upon war again with the king of Syria. From a prophet of God named Micaiah he gets a more solemn warning than ever before. He is told that a spirit from Jehovah has worked to persuade him to go up to this war at Ramoth Gilead that he may fall there. Ahab not only despises the warning, but orders the prophet to be put into prison and harshly treated till he returns in peace from the war.

A few days later he is wounded in the battle and dies in his war chariot. He is indeed brought back to Samaria and buried there, but returned not in peace, as the prophet had said. Elijah's word was literally fulfilled.

Ahab's history is a warning to us all. He never meant to be the ruin of his house and of his country, but he was both. He allowed himself to be tempted to the first few wrong steps, and then got gradually more and more hardened till he was hopelessly bad. Let us beware of the first wrong step.



CHAPTER X.

"Great is our Lord, and of great power : his understanding is infinite. The Lord lifteth up the meek : he casteth the wicked down to the ground." (Psa. cxlvii. 5, 6.)

"Stillness midst the ever-changing,
Lord, my rest art Thou ;
So for me has dawned the morning,
God's eternal *now*.
Now for me the day unsetting,
Now the song begun,
Now the deep surpassing glory,
Brighter than the sun."

SOME thirty-one years must have passed since the day when the Tishbite first appeared in such startling suddenness to the king of Israel. Now that king has gone and is succeeded by his son. Elijah is no longer in the full strength and energy of manhood, but he is God's beloved and faithful servant still. The years that have passed since he was called away from his mountain home in Gilead have been years of learning deep lessons of the tender loving-kindness of the One who then called him to witness for Jehovah in the midst of His

people, a people who still called themselves by His name, but who had openly forsaken Him. And this was not all. In the worship of the golden calves, and later on of Baal, the sun-god of the Phœnicians, they had brought upon themselves the righteous anger of the God whom they despised.

This gives their peculiar character to the miracles of Elijah. In great measure too it moulded his character, and made him seem hard and stern it may be. But we must never forget that in such days as those in which he lived it was a question of terrible sin, or the judgment of it. Elijah would suffer rather than share in the sin of his people. Though we have a very different form of evil around us to-day, yet in the sense of its still being a rejection of God it is the same. We may truly say it is even of a worse degree, for now God has manifested His love to the world in a way that Elijah could have no conception of.

God spared not His own Son, but gave Him as a ransom for all. Those who trust in Him are saved from everything that could come between them and all the mighty flood-tide of the love of God, that puts them into the same place as His own beloved Son. Those who reject this are surely more guilty than Ahab and Israel in the days of Elijah.

The prophet had only a dim foreshadowing of all this unspeakable grace of the One whom he loved and served. Dim as the light was then compared to what has been brought to this world now,

yet it was enough to fill his soul with peace and joy at the thought of going to Him. He knew that the power and wisdom of God were infinite. He had proved that in His presence was fulness of joy. It was blessed to serve Him on earth, it would be deeper blessedness to serve Him there. The calm and rest of this was surely on the spirit of the prophet as the days of his service drew to a close. Jehovah Himself was his rest, his resource in everything. Is the Lord Jesus Christ that to us to-day ?

The death of Ahab had altered little, if anything, of the sad state of affairs in the land of Israel, that is, as God saw it. Outwardly the reign of Ahab had been glorious and prosperous. A skilful soldier and politician, he had subdued many of the enemies. Commerce had flourished, and he kept down with a strong hand any rebellious spirit amongst the ten tribes owning him as king. All this was only the outward appearance. Man saw only that. God saw that the inner evil was getting like to that which had brought destruction upon the Amorites, whom He had destroyed off the face of the earth. The national sin of Israel would bring national destruction, and that before many years had passed.

King Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, followed closely in the steps of his father. Counsellled by his wicked mother Jezebel, he took no heed of the oft-repeated warnings given and rushed madly on to ruin. The worship of Baal was strengthened by his being

devoted to the idol service, and joining his mother Jezebel in it. In nothing does he seem to have profited by the gracious dealings of Jehovah to Ahab.

Ahaziah had reigned nearly two years when by some so-called accident he fell through a lattice, or open-work trellised shutter, from his upper room. Such a lattice or shutter is in common use in the East still. Ahaziah had possibly been leaning against it when it gave way and he was precipitated into the roadway beneath. This accident was a serious one, and the king became anxious to know whether he would recover. Ignoring the fact that Jehovah was the God of Israel, he sends messengers to the temple of Baal to inquire of him whether this sickness was such that he would recover from it.

To Elijah the angel of Jehovah now comes and tells him to go up and meet the messengers of the king as they were going to Ekron, a city of Philistia, whose chief idol was called Baal-zebub, and to this special Baal it was that the king's servants were to go. Elijah was to tell them that it could not be because there was no God in Israel they were going to inquire of this idol. Jehovah would Himself reply to the question of his recovery. The king was to be told, "Thus saith Jehovah, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die."

Elijah obeys the word of the angel and departed

to do his bidding. He met the messengers and gave them the words from Jehovah to repeat to Ahaziah the king. Surprised at their quick return he asks the reason. They say unto him, "There came a man up to meet us, and said unto us, Go, turn again unto the king that sent you, and say unto him, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that thou sendest to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron? therefore thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die."

Apparently suspecting who was the bearer of this message from Jehovah, the king asks, "What manner of man was he which came up to meet you, and told you these words?" When they said that it was a man clad in a hairy garment, and with a girdle of leather around him, he at once knew that it was none other than the prophet who had several times been sent to his father.

With even greater daring in wickedness, he at once resolves to arrest this servant of the God whom he neither fears nor knows. A captain of his army is sent on this errand, with fifty of his men with him. Having delivered the message given him by the angel, Elijah is now sitting on the hill-top quietly waiting the result of it. Calmly he is resting now, in the invincible power that he knows is surrounding him. With that protection covering him he has no need to flee from the armed band whose approach he has been watching.

Rough, rude men they probably were. A

military despotism does not conduce to gentle or kindly manners, and Israel had been under its rule from the first moment of its existence as a separate kingdom from Judah. To the worshippers of Baal also a prophet of Jehovah was a subject of scorn and enmity. This may have been intentionally shewn in the way the captain of the fifty men now addressed Elijah, "Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down." We have seen in his previous history that there was nothing of the rebel about Elijah. He would pay honour where honour was due. There must have been some special reason why the answer to the captain's words was what it was.

"And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty." It is most likely that the captain thought that the God of Elijah was no more a real power than the Baals whom he was familiar with. The way in which he accosted Elijah may have shewn this, but he was soon to find he had made a fatal error in defying the God of Israel.

Elijah replied with the certainty that he was doing the will of God, and this was proved by what immediately followed. "And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty." Those who were near and heard all that took place on that hill-top soon reported it to Ahaziah. Without any thought of the lives of his men he sends a second captain and band of

fifty. This captain, perhaps thinking that a more imperious call to the prophet would succeed, goes to him saying, "O man of God, thus hath the king said, Come down quickly." He is answered in the same words as the first, and again fire from heaven descends and consumes the whole band.

We should have thought that this would have been sufficient proof to the king that it was in judgment from the hand of the living God these men were thus destroyed. But it was not so. To him it may have been nothing more than their deaths from the vivid lightning of the East. In his persistent unbelief and defiance he would try to persuade himself that it was a mere coincidence that the lightning should fall immediately after Elijah's words to the captains. There is nothing blinder than wilful unbelief.

Again another captain and another fifty men are ordered to go and bring Elijah prisoner to Ahaziah. The captain dared not refuse. He knew that would be certain death if he did, for the king would not be disobeyed and the military law would condemn him. So he takes his men and goes to the hill where Elijah still is calmly waiting. Warned by the fate of the other two captains and their bands, this man approaches in a very different attitude. It may be also that there was in him a certain respect for the prophet, or even for the God whom he served. Instead of roughly calling to him this soldier goes up and falls on his knees before Elijah, beseeching him instead of command-

ing him. In this manner we may be sure that he would be denied nothing that he asked for.

He first of all asks that his life and the lives of his men may be precious in the sight of the man of God. Well he knew that they were not precious in the sight of the king, nor had he dared to speak to him thus. He trusted to the mercy of Elijah more than to his royal master. "The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel," and those who serve the wicked prove this. He tells the prophet that *he* knows it was fire from heaven that consumed his fellow-captains. Whatever the sceptical king may think, this man owns that it was something outside the ordinary course of nature that caused their death.

His submissive appeal is soon answered as he desires. He says no word about the command to take the prophet to the king. He takes it for granted that this is known, and waits before Elijah in the attitude of a suppliant.

Did he hear the voice of the angel that then spoke to the one before whom he was kneeling? That voice now speaks to the ears that were waiting for the word: "Go down with him: be not afraid of him." This was enough. He arose and went. Taken into the presence of Ahaziah he there repeats the same words which he had spoken in the hearing of the messengers when they were on their way to Philistia.

"Thus saith Jehovah, Forasmuch as thou hast sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub the god

of Ekron, is it not because there is no god in Israel to inquire of his word? therefore thou shalt not come down off that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die."

Whether the king took to heart this word from Jehovah we are not told. There was no attempt to seize the prophet, and we can well understand that, like his father Ahab, he was awed by the calm, dignified bearing of the man who was even then standing before Jehovah, and bore the marks of it. The king dared not touch the one who was under the shield of the Almighty. He owned his own powerlessness in the presence of His servant. What pain it must have been to that servant if he saw in the dying king no sign of humbling himself even when death was so close at hand!

Scarcely two years had passed since his word to Ahab had been fulfilled, "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine." Ahaziah must have known that this had been brought to pass at the pool of Samaria, yet his father's sad end had made no lasting impression upon him, and now he was dying also. To God we must leave the issue of his interview with Elijah. With thanksgiving we remember that God is not acting in judgment now. The coming of Christ into the world has altered everything. The Son of God clothed Himself in human form to bring the love of God down into this world, that poor sinful men and women might make that love their own and so be brought to

God in grace, saved and reconciled for ever by His death, His resurrection and His living for them now in the presence of God.

Even to Elijah the prophet what marvellous tidings it would have been if he could have had a glimpse into the far-off future, and seen what we know now of the love of Jesus, the Jehovah of Israel. How past all his comprehension it would have been! It is past ours also. We can bow our heads in silent adoration as we think of the One who went down into the depths of the judgment of God upon sin, who went into death for us; but we shall never fathom that love, never comprehend all its wonders. Love took Him into death that it might become the path of life to all His own, all who are cleansed by that precious blood.

How amazed also the prophet would be if he could see some of those who are truly counted by the Lord Jesus as *His own*. How could they be anything but supremely happy, he might ask? How can they be looking at anything in themselves when all that they see in Christ is theirs if they will make it their own? It is theirs in the sight of God, but they do not take the trouble to appropriate it. They prefer to follow their own thoughts, and try to improve themselves when they might have Him as the full answer to every desire of their hearts.

Elijah had learned to forget himself now. Jehovah was everything to him, and He was

enough. If our eyes are turned to Christ, if our life here is just one continual "looking off unto Jesus," where He is, if we are drawing strength and grace from Him day by day we too shall find that He is enough—more than enough for all we have to meet.

"'Looking off unto Jesus,' let us go forth bravely
His cross-bearers, who lived for us and died.
Taking grief calmly, making conquest gravely,
With the sweet quiet of the satisfied."



CHAPTER XI.

"The Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." (Luke ix. 56.)

"Our God, we adore and we bless Thee,
That we in Thy hands of might
Are the chords whereupon Thou makest
The music of Thy delight ;
Whereon Thou wilt sound for ever,
In wondrous and glorious tone,
The name of Thy Son Belovèd,
His name alone."

IN reading the gospels we can hardly fail to see what a deep impression the ministry and miracles of Elijah left upon the nation of Israel. Nearly a thousand years after it took place, his calling down fire from heaven to destroy the captains and their men was spoken of by the apostles of our Lord as if it had happened only yesterday.

When the Lord Jesus was going up to Jerusalem for the last time before He suffered on Calvary He passed through this same part of the country where Elijah spent a great part of his life.

The Samaritans of that day were no more ready to receive the Son of God than Ahab and his

people were to receive Elijah in his time. A village of Samaria refused to give shelter and rest to their Master when the Apostles James and John were journeying through the land with Him for the last time. Indignant at the refusal, these two "sons of thunder" say to the Lord Jesus, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, . . . even as Elijah did?" or rather, "as Elias did," for the prophet is called Elias throughout the New Testament scriptures.

Before the Lord heard this question of His disciples He knew how little they understood why He had come down to earth at all; He allowed it to be asked to teach them and us a very important lesson. Instead of acting as Elijah did "He turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village."

They may have been walking near the very place where the devouring fire from heaven had consumed the band of Ahaziah's soldiers. At any rate, the event was fresh in the minds of John and James, and would be so with many of their countrymen. They had to learn that another law was ruling now. Love was the ruling power with the Lord Jesus Christ, and His grace would not only forgive His enemies, but turn them into friends if they would receive it. He not only continually pressed upon His followers that they were to love one another, but also He commanded,

"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."

When Elijah was in the mount of Horeb the fire and earthquake and tempest touched not his heart or conscience. He did not see Jehovah in them. When the soft, gentle voice came it penetrated through all the hard crust of impatience and anger, and touched with its exposing but healing power the depths of his being. As he again stood before Jehovah he learned to take account of himself in a way he had never before done. He took God's estimate and made it his own. He had also learned more of Jehovah. He had heard the still small voice that spoke to his spirit of tender love and care, and Elijah was another man from that day. The Spirit of God ruled him now.

As we read the Apostle John's epistle and see how he repeats the exhortation, "love one another," over and over again, we see how he, too, had been taught the same blessed lesson. Who could think he was the same man who once in Samaria had said, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them?" In the days of the epistle being written John, too, was ruled by the Holy Spirit given to him. Never again would he think of calling down fire to destroy those who ignorantly opposed the Lord. The gospel history helps us to understand the indelible mark made by their great prophet upon the men of his own and other nations. In all the

four gospels he is mentioned several times. In some it was even thought by the people that Elijah might appear then. He was still a living power to them. The Apostles Paul and James both speak of him in their epistles, and when John the Baptist came the people asked him, "Art thou Elijah?" Some may say this was nearly two thousand years ago, and except through the holy scriptures the remembrance of even such a man as the prophet must have perished long since.

Let us in imagination visit the house of an orthodox Jewish family to-day. A son of the house, a child of a few days old, is to undergo the rite of circumcision. The rabbi and elders and others are there, but there is an empty chair placed in the chief position of honour. No one takes it. It is left unoccupied all through the ceremony. Ask the father of that family who was the expected and hoped-for guest who did not come, and he will reply—It was the great prophet Elijah; we always put a seat for him, as it is not impossible, we think, that he might come. Go to that house and family at the time of the Passover, you will find the door left wide open in the hope that he may appear. His memory is still cherished, whilst the One of whom Elijah taught, the One whom he served, is rejected.

The death of Ahaziah, which must have occurred soon after the prophet's visit to him, is the last recorded incident connected with Elijah's public ministry. The day for him to leave this sad world

was swiftly approaching. Faithful servant as he had been, he had met with many troublous circumstances, but sorrow and trials were all to be left behind for ever.

While bearing testimony for Jehovah in the midst of a people who disowned Him was Elijah's chief service, yet as the leader of all God's true ones in Israel in that day his loss would be anticipated as a very deep sorrow by them. That God in His grace revealed to Elijah that the time of his departure was at hand we see from the record of it. It seems certain also that in some way it was revealed to the sons of the prophets, who were now no longer hiding away in secret, but openly avowing themselves servants of the God of Israel.

Now that others had been prepared to take up the service, it was made known to Elijah that he should be translated from earth to heaven without dying. God would in his case set aside that death which is appointed to men. It was a marvellous honour bestowed upon him, one never shared by any other save Enoch. We learn from it how God takes notice not only of the detail of daily life, but of the *bent* of that life as a whole. He would mark His gracious approbation of the faithful career of His beloved servant, and this by lifting him up into His own presence without dying at all. Death should not touch him. He should be changed and caught up to meet the One whom he had loved and worked for here.

How it became known to Elisha we are not told.

When the power of the Spirit of God made known to Elijah that the day of his rapture was come, we find him going to three different places where there had been given special marks of God's unchanging care of His people. First of all he goes to Gilgal, with Elisha accompanying him. Gilgal was the place where the children of Israel after their forty years' journeyings from Egypt first encamped after crossing the Jordan. The place where the reproach of Egypt was rolled away and where they were anew set apart for God, as in type alive from the dead. Gilgal should have kept this in the minds of the people; but instead of that it had become a centre of the most terrible idolatry, as we learn from the prophets Hosea and Amos and others.

Elijah, however, goes there once more, because he surely had learned to look at his nation as they should have been if they had been obedient. He looks at them as set apart for God, and it may have been to impress this on Elisha that he now goes to Gilgal. He seems to have wished that Elisha should look at Israel as God Himself did in His own purpose as to them, not as what they had become.

From Gilgal they start for Bethel. This was the place where Jacob had the wonderful vision or dream as he was on his journey from his home to the house of Laban. In Bethel he had laid down to sleep on the ground with the stones for his pillow—a homeless wanderer then—but in that

desolate place he had such wonderful revelations from God that he said, "this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

There God had spoken to him and told him that the land on which he was lying he would give to him and to his seed; they should become so numerous that they would be compared to the dust of the earth—found everywhere—north, south, east and west should they spread, and in his seed (Christ) should all the families of the earth be blessed. We know how this has been fulfilled to the very letter and will be still more in the coming kingdom of Christ. In the days of Elijah the place which Jacob had named Beth-el, the house of God, had become Beth-aven, the house of idols. Some years before Jeroboam had set up a golden calf there as the national object of worship. There he built an altar and established a form of ritual very much like that of the Egyptians; and Bethel was called the king's chapel and the king's court.

Thus the very place which testified of God's faithfulness was become a testimony of Israel's unfaithfulness. Still Elijah looked at it in faith, as God would, and Elisha must see this with him before he is caught away from him. From Bethel the two prophets start afresh. At Gilgal Elijah had told his companion that "Jehovah hath sent me to Bethel; tarry here, I pray thee." This Elisha could not do. His beloved master so soon to be taken home from him—must he leave him for the little time remaining? No, he would stay

by his side as long as this world held him. So he replies to Elijah, "As Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." So together they travel down to Bethel.

How we could almost wish that their conversation, as they walked on mile after mile, had been recorded for us. Yet even to a man like Elijah, on the very eve of being taken into the presence of the almighty God, Jehovah of Israel, there must have been a depth of solemnity, an awe overshadowing them both, which might make silence the most fitting thing.

At Bethel the sons of the prophets, to whom it had been made known that Elijah was to be taken away, come to Elisha and ask him if he also knows that Jehovah will take his master away from him that day. Elisha cannot bear to talk to them about it. He replies to them, "Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace." In the presence of the mysterious event that will so soon leave him alone, Elisha can only speak to God or to his beloved master. No other can enter into the marvellous experience he is passing through, so to the sons of the prophets he says, "Be silent."

Again Elijah speaks to him, "Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for Jehovah hath sent me to Jericho." When he finds that Elisha will not leave him they go on to Jericho, still the place of the curse. There also prophets of Jehovah were now living. The sons of these men came out to meet Elisha, and like those at Bethel they ask if he knows that

he is to lose his master that day. To them too he says, "Yea, I know it ; be silent." The curse that still rested on the place was not then to be removed, that was left for Elisha to be the instrument in God's hand of so doing. Grace was to heal the waters that caused only barren lands instead of fertility. Israel had put themselves under the curse, and grace alone can set them free from it.

In his Epistle to the Galatians the Apostle Paul writes : "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us : for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree : that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Surely these words must go deep into the hearts of every one who has thus been redeemed ! At what a mighty cost that redemption was wrought out for us. The holy Son of God made a curse for us, think of it ! in order that we might be set in the most perfect liberty, that we might receive the Spirit ; the Lord Jesus was willing to suffer that, accursed, that we might be blessed. May His Holy Spirit write it indelibly on all our hearts.

From Jericho Elijah began the last stage of his journey. Of every step of the way from Gilgal to Bethel, from Bethel to Jericho, and now from Jericho to the river Jordan, Elijah was able to say, "Jehovah hath sent me." He did not take one step of that last day on earth of his own will. From one place to the other he was led by the

command of God. Together Elijah and Elisha reach the river whose waters had once been dried up before their forefathers, and the whole host of Israel passed through on dry ground. How short had been the triumphant joy of that day! Now the prophet has to leave the very land which was given them in fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham. He leaves it as a place where the mass of the people have cast off all regard for God.

Though we get no record of it, yet it is more than probable that the prophet went with words of counsel and guidance to each of the places we have been looking at. The mention of the sons of the prophets at each place would shew that there were those there who had been the object of his earnest care, and his last ministry to them on earth would never be forgotten. He visited them all in the one common dwelling-place, or school of the prophets, there is little doubt, and thus the sunset hours of his career were filled up with blessed toil till the very last. After leaving Jericho it would seem that some of these young men followed Elijah and Elisha to see what would happen. Till they got in sight of the Jordan these fifty men kept the two prophets in view; when the waters of the river were visible they went no farther.

The river was flowing on its swift way, as it had done for centuries past; the places on its banks were the same, but soon the one who now stood

there would see them no more. What mingled feelings must have filled the minds of those two specially chosen servants of God, as "they two stood by Jordan."

Elijah no longer asks Elisha to tarry behind. He is convinced now that this one who is to be prophet in his room is to stay with him till the end. Very precious to him was the love of Elisha, it had been a stay and comfort to him in his last years on earth. Now he was going to a love that was infinite and eternal. The Jordan lay before them both, type of that death from which none can escape except God so order it by His almighty power outside the course of nature.



CHAPTER XII.

“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God : and the dead in Christ shall rise first : then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air : and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” (1 Thess. iv. 16, 17.)

“Who are these whose faces are irradiate
With eternal joy ?
With the calm the tempest may not trouble
Nor the grave destroy ?
Changed—transformed ; for ever and for ever
Thine alone to be ;
Knowing none on earth, O Lord, beside Thee,
None in heaven but Thee.”

“AND they two stood by Jordan”—Jordan, the type of death ! Elijah was not taken up from the land of Israel, the land to which the earthly promises belonged, but he leaves it as a place where he had been rejected and disowned as the servant of God. In type only does he pass through death, and so he uses the power of that One whom he served to make a path through the river Jordan which lay between them and the land outside of

Israel. With Elisha at his side, and the fifty sons of the prophets far off watching him, Elijah takes off his prophet's mantle and folding it together he "smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground."

Until after they had crossed dryshod over Jordan and stood on the other side we get no account of what passed between them. Now Elijah is at liberty, for before this the land and people of Israel had claimed his thoughts. Now the river—typically death—lay between all his past service and himself, and he can think of the need of the one who is to carry on that service after he has ascended.

So he speaks to Elisha now, and asks, "What shall I do for thee, before I be taken away from thee?" There seems to have been not the least hesitation on Elisha's part as to what he should ask. To be like his master, to carry on his service, nothing could he desire better than that. So his quick reply comes at once, "I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." Nothing else does he ask. He was willing to have the trials and difficulties of his master here if only the same spirit could be given him. Nothing had he seen in Elijah since the first day he knew him, when the mantle had been cast over him, but what commanded not only his love, but his deepest reverence and respect. To have a *double* portion even of Elijah's spirit would enable him to be

more fully devoted to the service of Jehovah, so for this alone he asks.

Will his master be able to confer this great boon upon him, will it be in his power to do so? Elijah replies: "Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so." Can we not imagine how the eyes of Elisha would be fixed upon his master after he heard these words? No matter what passed around them, he would not be diverted by it, for if for one moment he had turned his gaze to anything else, that moment might see his beloved master caught away and the desire of his heart would remain unfulfilled.

"And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." Thus he who has sometimes fitly been called the prophet of fire was borne up by the fiery chariot into the presence of the God for whom he had lived down here. He was translated that he should not see death. The manner of his translation reminds us of the words of David in his beautiful psalm. He wrote thus, speaking of Jehovah: "Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flame of fire." In a flame of fire Elijah disappeared from the view of the one who was watching him.

Elisha saw it all, the chariot of fire, with its horses of fire, and his master rapt away seated

in his fiery car. As he saw it a cry burst from his lips—half grief, half triumph—"My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." Elijah was gone, caught up from earth to heaven. Elisha was left to go back into the midst of his people as a witness of the *grace* of Jehovah, now no longer seeking to put the claims of the law before them. Nothing but the grace of God could enable him to go on with those who had persistently rejected Him, but grace could and did. Elisha's cry as he saw his master ascending must have reached the ears of Elijah, and he knew that the "hard thing" asked of him had been granted.

A double portion of the spirit of Elijah had been given to his successor. The chariot of fire disappeared from his sight, and he saw Elijah no more. A new life, as it were, now lay before Elisha. He takes his own mantle and rends it in two, thus making it useless. He has done with it, for the mantle of Elijah is left for him. It fell from the prophet as he left the earth—his legacy for Elisha—and he now clothes himself in it, casting off his own—that belonged to the old days now passed away. Clothed in the mantle of Elijah, and in his spirit and power, he is the chosen one of God as prophet in his stead.

It is quickly made plain to the sons of the prophets who were watching that a power is given to him like unto his ascended master. Though they saw not the chariot of fire which bore him

away, yet they may have seen Elisha return to the banks of the Jordan and use the mantle of Elijah to smite the waters as he did, and with the same result, as he does it in the name of the Lord God of Israel. The river parts its swiftly flowing waters, they divide and make a pathway for him to cross over.

When the fifty waiting men see him coming they say, "The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha." They go to meet him, and bow down before him, as recognising that now he is in the place of Elijah to them. He would doubtless tell them of the miraculous way in which his master had been taken from him, but they were incredulous, and instead of seeing the glory of Elijah's ascension, they venture to propose a search party to go and look for him. They were truly sons of the prophets, but they do not appear to have inherited the faith of their fathers. It is significant that the prophets themselves were not there. Like Elisha, they would be conscious that their great leader was no longer on earth; no search was needed to make them sure of that, they would rather be earnestly seeking to carry on even then the work of Jehovah as he would have wished them to do.

"Ye shall not send," was Elisha's reply to the unbelieving proposal of the young men. He knew it would be utterly in vain, but when they would not hear him, and urged the search being made, he at last allowed them to take their own way. The result we all know. The three days' search must

be fruitless. How could they find on earth the one who was in the presence of Jehovah? the one who was in heaven? Thus they return to Elisha owning their search was useless.

To them it probably seemed that anything so magnificent as that which Elisha told them of must be utterly impossible. They knew not then the love and power of God, that could not only cause the rapture of Elijah, but could also take up all His waiting people in the same way if He chose. He has reserved something even better for those who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ.

It is true that death is God's appointment for men as being children of Adam, but the believer has already passed out of death into life, and the hope set before them is not going to heaven by the way of death, but being caught up to meet the Lord in the air. This is so clearly shewn by the Apostle Paul, that it seems one of Satan's most successful devices to rob believers of the joy of it, for we find a great many of them are almost as incredulous as to it as the sons of the prophets were as to Elijah having ascended in the chariot of fire. They are not in the good of 1 Thessalonians iv. 16, 17.

Thank God, the unbelief of some, even of the many, does not alter the blessed truth. "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise

first : then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air : and so shall we ever be with the Lord." In another place Paul tells the Corinthians, " Behold, I shew you a mystery ; We shall not all sleep [or die], but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump : for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

It was a great honour put upon Elijah to be caught up to heaven in the chariot of fire drawn by horses of fire. It is a still greater blessedness for the Lord Himself to come for His own. No messenger will He send now for His blood-bought ones, He Himself—this same Jesus, will come and call up all His own whether living or dead to meet Him in the air, before He takes them into the Father's house. No wonder that the Apostle Paul said, " Comfort one another with these words." Others besides the Thessalonians need the comfort of it. What a sleep of death must have fallen upon Christians that this precious truth was really lost—as to any practical power—for long ages !

At any moment our Lord may come. Are we ready,

" Are we listening for His coming,
Are we waiting for His feet,
Ready in our fair adorning,
Christ our Saviour-Lord to meet ? "

Elijah's work on earth was finished, and Jehovah

lifted him up to His own presence. Age after age passed away, the land of Israel had been given over to other nations, Israel had been swept away like the chaff of the summer threshing floor. Samaria, with its splendid palace of ivory built by Ahab, had been reduced to a heap of ruins and the words of the prophet Micah had been fulfilled. He had said that Jehovah would do this. "I will make Samaria a mire-heap of the field: I will turn it into vineyard plantations, and I will pour down the stones thereof into the valley, and I will discover the foundations thereof." This came to pass to the very letter, and is so now.

Centuries passed on, other revolutions swept through the country, then the Romans came, and there was partial restoration, as in Samaria, which was rebuilt. Then the greatest event that ever happened in the history of all time took place in this land of Palestine. The Son of God "took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name."

While down upon earth in that form of a servant He once took three of His disciples with Him and went up into a mountain to pray. He had told them before this that some of them should not taste of death until they had seen the kingdom of God. Alone with Him upon the mountain,

probably at night, they were overcome with sleep, but were awakened by a flood of dazzling light, that revealed to them the Lord Jesus with His face shining as the sun, and His raiment glistening and white as the light. There in that heavenly radiance of glory they also see Moses, their great law-giver, and the prophet Elijah who had been taken up to heaven long before. It was a brief glimpse of the kingdom glory, but one which reveals much to us, if we have eyes to see it.

The Lord Jesus Christ was there, the centre of that momentary glory, as He will be in that which will fill the whole universe, and not merely this one globe on which we live. Moses was there—one of the Lord's people who *had* passed through death, but was alive out of death, he was there in intimate conversation with the One who was the Lord of glory, though for the time He had veiled that glory. Elijah was there in the same wonderful intimacy as Moses. He had not died, he had been translated. Both were sharers in the glory of their Lord ; and so it will be when the kingdom really comes in power. Those who have slept the sleep of death—as Moses did—will all have been raised, and those who remain, like Elijah, are caught up to meet their Lord in the air. Not one will be missing, all will be with the Lord when He comes to reign over this world from which He is still rejected.

Elijah waits for that coming day of glory. He is waiting *with* the Lord. His redeemed ones who are still left here on earth are waiting *for* Him, and

while they wait He would have them filled with joy and peace in believing. Though, as we have said before, Elijah was only in the dim twilight, as it were, as to his knowledge of the love and grace of God, and we are now in the brightness of "the true light," in all its full radiance, yet Elijah may teach us many a valuable lesson.

We have to "hide ourselves," but now it is in the consciousness that the death of Christ has removed from the eye of God all that we are in ourselves. When we have been taught by grace to see what we are in very truth, then we can and do say, like Job, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Elijah came to a similar conclusion when he said, "I am no better than my fathers." If this were all, however, there would still be a something missing, but it is not. Elijah went on till at Horeb he too saw the glory of the Lord and heard the still small voice.

He had learnt what he was before, now he learns what God is for him. He leaves himself for the Lord. From that time his path—though not exempt from trial—grew brighter and brighter till it ended in the perfect day of the presence of his Lord outside this world altogether.

The Lord Jesus Christ has done everything for us if we are His. He has put away not only our sins, but the *sin* that is part of ourselves. He has caused us to hear the still small voice, has given us

living water, His Holy Spirit, so that we may never thirst, and not only that, but have *power* to live here for Him. He has "given us an understanding, that we may know him," and He has Himself become our life, so that we can think of Him in all His holiness and glory, and reverently and thankfully say, "That is my life."

Then if we are really in the blessedness of this we shall turn away most gladly from the paltry pleasures of this poor sinful world, and from all in it that would keep us away from the One who died to deliver us from it. None but Christ can give living water. Nowhere else can we find salvation. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

"Name of God's tender comfort,
Name of His glorious power,
Name that is song and sweetness,
The strong everlasting tower.

Jesus the Lamb accepted,
Jesus the Priest on His throne—
Jesus the King who is coming,
Jesus, Thy Name alone!"

L. T.

