

SCRIPTURE SKETCHES

FROM

THE OLD TESTAMENT.

By L. T.

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Peter and Paul," etc., etc.*

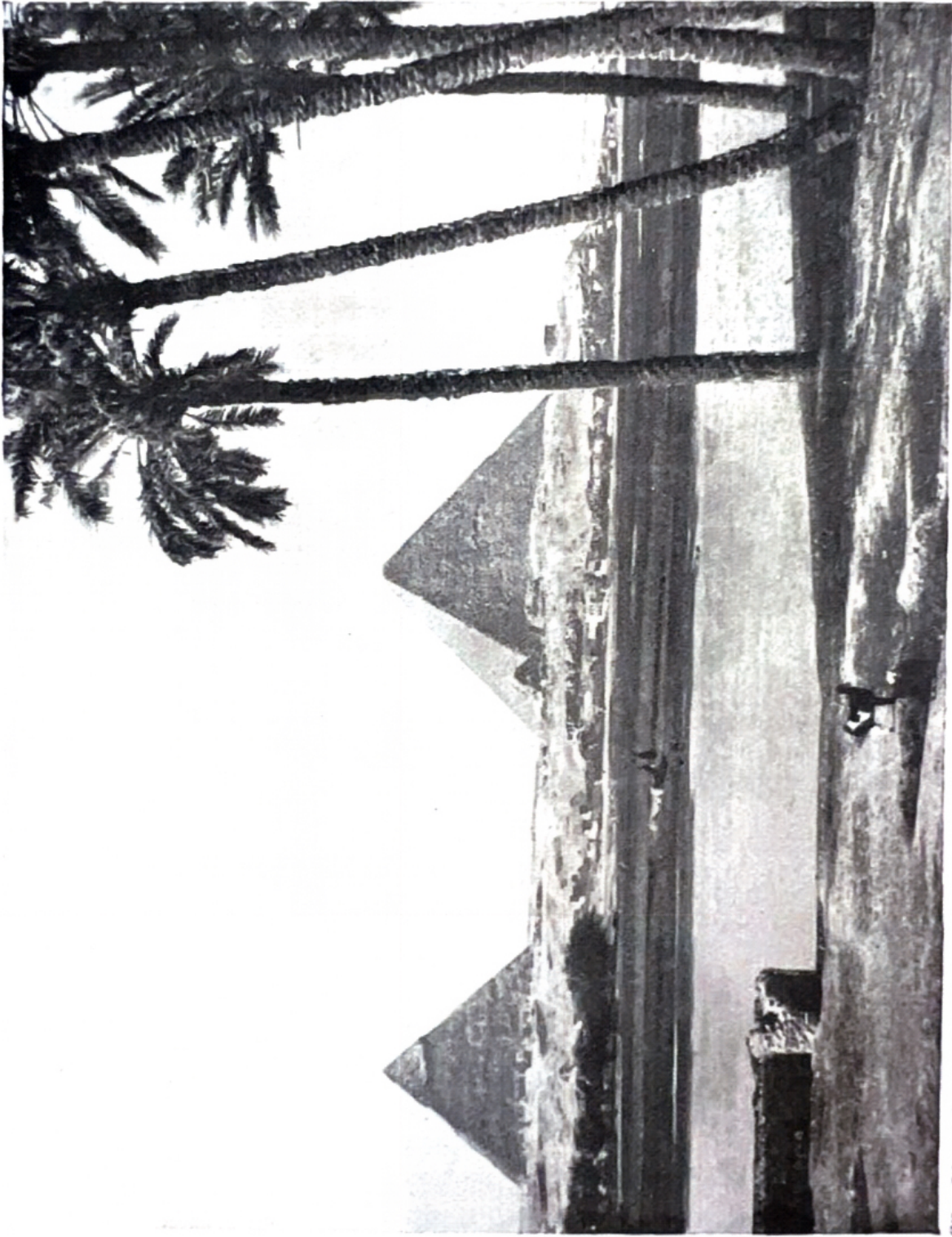
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EGYPT.

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SCRIPTURE SKETCHES.

MOSES, THE MAN OF GOD.

By faith he forsook Egypt . . . he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.—*Heb.* xi, 27.

By faith he forsook them—royal honours and pleasures,
Of Egypt's proud kingdom awaiting his call :
And esteemed the reproach of Jehovah as treasures
Far richer, and greater, and better than all.

MANY of us have often stood and looked up at the starry sky on a winter evening, and noticed how some of the flashing stars stood out, as it were, from among the rest because of the peculiar lustre and brilliancy with which they shone ; and we saw for ourselves how true was the word of the Apostle Paul when he said, “ star differeth from star in glory.”

When we come to the beautiful Bible stories that God in His grace has given us, we see the same thing ; some have a place of special prominence ; and most of us would agree that amongst these the history of Moses is a star of the first magnitude, having a peculiar lustre of its own from the way in which it tells out the infinite love, as well as the infinite power, of the God of Israel—the God of the whole earth.

When speaking of His almighty power, the sweet Psalmist of Israel tells us that Jehovah "telleteth the number of the stars, he calleth them all by their names"; and nothing but infinite power could do this. The mightiest intellects of men, aided by the most powerful telescopes invented, have only been able to reveal that far beyond all human ken lie starry regions of space that no mortal eye can penetrate, yet all those countless millions of lights are fully known to Him. The greatest astronomers are the first to own that, spite of all research, "yet have they barely touched creation's head-lands, where God is King." The One who telleteth the number of the stars in infinite power, is the same One who in infinite mercy "healeth the broken in heart and bindeth up their wounds" (Psalm cxlvii. 3, 4.)

In the story of Moses both these come out. Hearts are the same all the wide world over, and hard must that heart be that has never been touched when hearing of the little infant, whose own parents were compelled to lay him in the brink of the river because of the cruel decree of the tyrannical Pharaoh, whose own daughter was to be God's instrument for rescuing him from that place of death, and for thus healing the broken hearts of the Hebrew parents, who in faith had hidden and nourished him up in their own home for three months, till they could do so no longer. The power of God compelled the compassion in the heart of the kindly princess who

drew Moses out of the river, and the mercy of God restored him to his parents for a few years, that they might train him in the knowledge of Jehovah.

Then he became the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, and grew up in the royal household as one of the king's family, "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and mighty in words and deeds," tenderly cared for by the princess, who we are told "nourished him for her own son," as before he had been "nourished up in his father's house." (see Acts vii.) He had love and tender care in both parts of his life.

Until he was forty years of age Moses remained in the palace of Egypt, and then God spoke to him, though he may not have been conscious of it at the time. It came into his heart to visit his brethren; but this really meant giving up his place in the household of the king, for he could only remain there as the son of the compassionate princess who had saved him from the river.

To acknowledge the enslaved Hebrews as his brethren, and yet retain his princely place in Pharaoh's court, was impossible. So we read, "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God" (Heb. xi. 24, 25). That was his side of things, and we know from all scripture how highly God values the faith that identifies itself with Him, and with those who are His.

There was another side which is very encouraging to see, and that is more God's side, for at the time when Moses was born, and still more when he was grown up, the days for the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham drew nigh, and His people were to be redeemed from the bondage of Egypt. So it was in the heart of Moses that God first began to work ; and all unconscious of it as he may have been, yet it was because of this that he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt. Because of this also he was able to renounce, and forsake, all the pleasures and honours of his position as one of the royal family, and cast in his lot with the children of Israel, because of his faith in God—the God of his fathers. Very precious was this faith in the sight of God, for it was the result of His own work.

The long years in the palace of Egypt were all part of the training which fitted Moses to become a "ruler and deliverer" of his people ; but the forsaking them—the leaving them behind him—was part of that training also. Now he has to pass into another school—he has the pain of finding his own brethren reject him, though before this in anger he slays an Egyptian who oppresses them—and in the end he has to flee from the country, from the anger of Pharaoh at his rash act.

The one who is to be a leader and shepherd of the people of God has now to spend the next forty years of his life in obscurity as a shepherd, in a strange

land, before he is fitted for his great life-work. All the wisdom and learning gained in the colleges of Egypt were of little use, it might seem, to the man whose days were now spent in the desert with a flock of sheep; but God was using all in the wonderful way in which He was educating His servant for Himself. All was working together for this end, and Moses seems to have bowed in quiet submission to this, and waited year after year in patience for the call to action which should send him again to the midst of his brethren, whom he loved in such a way that not all their ingratitude or unkind treatment could change or dim that love.

The day at last came when the God of Israel appeared to His servant, and conferred upon him the glorious commission of being His own chosen instrument for leading the Israelites out of the land of their bondage. While keeping the sheep of Jethro his father-in-law—for in His goodness God had given to Moses the love of wife and sons—he came to Horeb, the mountain of God, and there a marvellous sight arrested him, a frail desert shrub or bush in the midst of a flame of fire, but not burnt or consumed. The strange sight caused him to approach nearer to see the cause of it, little thinking at first that the angel of Jehovah was there, but so it was.

When Moses turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush—called him by name—Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I.

How it reminds us of others whom the same glorious One called! We think of the lonely tabernacle in Shiloh when the Lord called, Samuel, Samuel; of the road to Damascus, when with the light above the brightness of the sun, He said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me"; and down to this day in which we live does it remain true, that "He calleth his own sheep by name and leadeth them out."

After calling His servant, God now said to him, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. . . . I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham. . . . And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God." Then he is told that Jehovah has seen the affliction of His people, and heard their cry, and has come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them into His own land of Canaan. And then he hears the command—"Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt."

Forty years before, Moses had thought that his brethren would understand how that God by his hand would deliver them; but the right time had not then come, and he had the sorrow of finding that his own people would not receive him, nor trust in his love, for he had not then received the divine commission. Now that Jehovah would really have him return to Egypt and lead His people out, he hesitates and fears, but in tender pity God deigns

to reason with him, and gives him signs to prove that his is a work specially committed to him by the God of Israel.

Moses himself has to learn that to put difficulties in the way when sent of God is not humility, but unbelief; and so, as he continues to plead his unfitness, the anger of Jehovah is aroused, and instead of Moses being the only one to whom He confides the honour of being His representative to Pharaoh and Israel, Aaron his brother is joined with him, to be his spokesman unto the people, and when before the king of Egypt, to whom they were to say, "Thus saith Jehovah, Israel is my son, even my first-born. And I say unto thee, Let my son go that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy first-born."

In the forty years that had passed since he left Egypt we do not know that he had ever seen his family, but now the Lord tells Moses that Aaron will come to meet him, and when he sees him *he* will be *glad in his heart*. Does not that show us the tender care of God? When Moses forsook his princely place and rank in Egypt, his brethren may have thought he was throwing away great opportunities of helping them, and that he might have been able to lighten their burdens if he had only stayed there. We know they rejected him and cast him from them, so that it would greatly reassure Moses to be told that his elder brother would be

glad to see him again ; and Jehovah in His goodness had thought even of this.

The Pharaoh who had reigned when he left Egypt was now dead, and probably only few would remember Moses as he once more returned—for a short time only—to begin the work of leading the hosts of Israel through the great wilderness. Much must the long-separated brothers have had to tell each other as they travelled back together, and when Aaron had heard of the flame of fire encircling the desert shrub, and of the voice of Jehovah speaking from the midst of the fire, and revealing Himself to Moses as the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob—the God of their fathers—deep must have been his sense of the solemnity of the divine commission with which they were invested.

The first thing to be done when they reached the land of Goshen was to gather together the elders and chiefs of the various tribes of Israel, and speak to them all the words commanded by Jehovah, and to perform the signs given to Moses as credentials of his mission. This was done, and we can well understand that when they heard that Jehovah had noticed their affliction and visited His people, they believed, and bowed their heads and worshipped.

The next thing was to go before the king and give him the first message, for there were several sent by Jehovah to Pharaoh. So Moses and Aaron go to the court, and when they are taken into the presence

of the king they say to him, "Thus saith Jehovah, God of Israel, Let my people go that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness." God knew beforehand all that Pharaoh would do and say, but in His grace He gives him the opportunity of obeying if he will, and works signs to show him that it is the Almighty God who has sent this message to him. But the mere mention of allowing the people who had been so treacherously enslaved in Egypt, to go out into the desert, was sufficient to arouse the anger of the king, and he proudly says, "Who is Jehovah, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not Jehovah, neither will I let Israel go."

In vain does Moses plead to be allowed to go to sacrifice to God lest pestilence or sword should come upon the people. The only reply they get is a taunting one of hindering them from their work, and, including Moses and Aaron amongst his slaves, he dares to say to the chosen messengers of God, "Get *you* unto *your* burdens." Vexed and irritated by their demand, the king now orders that no straw shall be given to the Israelites in making the bricks which formed their usual employment. They were to perform their daily tasks as usual, but in addition to this they were themselves to find the straw which was needful.

This meant an enormous increase of their labour; and failing to carry out the daily task, they were ill-used and beaten, till in desperation they go to Pharaoh and seek for redress. Useless was it to

seek for pity from the tyrant, and they hear him say, "Ye are idle, ye are idle; therefore ye say, Let us go and do sacrifice to Jehovah. Go now therefore and work; for there shall no straw be given you, yet shall ye deliver the tale of bricks." Little wonder was it that they groaned under this increase of rigorous treatment, nor that it caused Moses to go to the Lord and cry to Him about it, saying, "Lord, wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people? Why is it that thou hast sent me?"

In His answer to the cry of His servant, Jehovah tells Moses that he shall see what He will do to Pharaoh, and also gives him a special message to His people, which he goes to tell them, "but they hearkened not . . . for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage." Spite of this, Jehovah encourages His servant, and sends him again to Pharaoh as he went out to the river, with the now more absolute demand, "Let my people go that they may serve me." There is nothing now about a temporary leave of absence—they are to be taken out of Egypt altogether, and as a sign of still more severe judgment, if Jehovah's claim upon His people is still denied, Moses is told to warn the king that he is about to smite the waters of Egypt, so that they shall become blood in the rivers and streams and pools throughout the land.

It was great grace thus to warn the haughty Pharaoh, and not send the terrible plagues until one last opportunity of submission had been given; and so we find that in every case, except that of the

darkness that might be felt, Moses told the king what he was about to do—as commanded of Jehovah—so that at the very last moment he might have averted the judgments if he would. But the grace was despised and the warning unregarded, and so blow upon blow falls upon the idolatrous land, and all was so ordered that the false gods of Egypt were stricken even in the estimation of its people.

The river and fish were sacred, and even worshipped by them; frogs and flies were sacred too; and bulls had divine honours paid them; while the sun was their chief god. All these were proved powerless; and some, by the swarms that infested the land, became objects of horror and loathing instead of veneration. All was in vain as far as the king and people of Egypt were concerned; they hardened their hearts till there was no remedy, and then—but *not* till then—do we read that Jehovah hardened their hearts.

So the last blow must fall, and the first-born throughout all Egypt be smitten, but not till they had been again warned that Jehovah would pass through the land at midnight and all the firstborn should die. As a Judge God would be there; and the Israelites must slay the lamb which had been set apart for this, and the blood must be put upon their houses so that the destroyer should not enter, for Jehovah said, “When I see the blood I will pass over you.”

The blood was for God, for His people were guilty ; but the lamb was their substitute, and they were sheltered by that blood. The flesh of the lamb was roast with fire, and all the children of Israel were to eat of it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs ; so the passover lamb became their food, and thus their strength and stay. Jehovah had said, “ The blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are,” for it was the sign that the judgment which lay upon them had been met, and so in perfect peace they could feed upon the flesh of the lamb—ready for the journey out of Egypt, and waiting for the word from Moses that should start them on their journey through the desert on their way to the promised land.

Most of you will remember the immense importance attached to the passover in scripture. Whenever there was a time that Israel turned afresh to God, as in the days of Hezekiah and Josiah, then the passover again became prominent ; and even in the coming day of glory, when Jehovah shall be King over the whole earth, then, too, shall the passover be kept—never to be forgotten (Ezekiel xlv. 21).

We know now that the Lord Jesus Christ is “ the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world ” (John i. 29). And the Apostle Paul says to the Corinthian believers, “ Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.” Peter also reminds us that we were not redeemed with corruptible things—silver and gold—“ but with the precious blood of Christ

as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter i. 19), clearly looking back to the passover lamb, which was to be “without blemish.”

Nor do we wonder that the Apostle Peter speaks of the *precious* blood of Christ, for, as many of you know, it is the basis of all our blessing. Before we go on with our story I want you all to lay down this book and ask yourselves—Is that blood of Christ precious to *me*? Do I know it as that which has put away *my* sins? If you cannot say “yes” to these questions do not let your mind pass over them, but think of them, and go to God in prayer and ask Him to make it precious to you, and do not be satisfied until you can say from your heart that it is so.

While in the land where Israel dwelt, there was peace and safety inside the houses sheltered by the blood of the passover lamb, there was terror indeed in the homes of the Egyptians, both in palace and cottage, for in all the cherished firstborn was stricken down, and lay dying or dead throughout the whole domain of Pharaoh. Sorrow and death filled the land, and there was a great cry of bitterness and distress, as the people realised that they had brought this awful judgment upon themselves by refusing to obey the voice of Jehovah, God of Israel.

Now they send to Moses, and the king tells him: “Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel, and go, serve Jehovah, as ye have said. Also take your flocks and your herds . . . and be gone, and bless

me also." At last the moment had come, and that same night saw the whole multitude of the people of God follow Moses from the city of Rameses on the first stage of their journey out of Egypt as God's freed-men.

From Rameses to Succoth was a short journey most likely, for the vast number of the Israelites, with their flocks and herds, would be unable to take a long one at first, and the night after they left Egypt was probably spent there. Their next encampment was at Etham, supposed to be the place now known to us as Suez, on the borders of the desert. They were not left to find their own way, for now we read, "Jehovah went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud to lead them the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light; to go by day and night." Our very familiarity with the scripture history may make us overlook the wonderful grace of God in thus going before His people all through their journeyings, for though they very soon began to murmur, and sometimes to rebel, yet He never for a moment took from them this beautiful proof of His tender care for them.

From Etham they were directed to turn and go to Pi-hahiroth, and encamp there, with the sea in front of them, the mountainous regions on either side, and the road from Egypt behind them. Here a terrible alarm comes upon them, for all at once they become conscious that Pharaoh and his army are pursuing them, and they were in great distress.

Reproaching Moses for having brought them out of the land of their slavery, and forgetting everything else in the present danger, they cry out to Jehovah, and His command comes to Moses to lift up his rod over the sea, and the waters should divide, and the people were to go forward on the dry ground through the midst of the sea. This was not all, for in that marvellous care for His redeemed ones the pillar of cloud which was leading the way now removed and went behind them, entirely screening them from the host of Egypt, to whom it was an impenetrable wall of darkness, but a cloud of light to the Israelites all that night, quieting their alarm and giving them the sense that Jehovah was with them and acting for them.

Thus sheltered even from the sight of the enemy, the people pass through the bed of the Red Sea with the waters congealed into walls of crystal on either side of them. It was a safe and easy path for them, but one wonders at the mad daring of the Egyptians in venturing to rush into the same track in defiance of God.

The moment came when the last of the children of Israel left the pathway through the sea and were standing on the shore the other side; and then Jehovah said to Moses, "Stretch out thine hand over the sea"; and he did so, and the sea returned to its strength, and covered the chariots and horsemen and all the host of Pharaoh: there remained not so much as one of them. Thus the Lord saved Israel

that day out of the hand of the Egyptians ; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore. 'The waters of the Red Sea rolled between them and the land of their bitter bondage, and we do not wonder that Moses led the people in a beautiful song of triumph, saying, "Jehovah is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation" ; but you must study this song for yourselves, for there is much in it that is of the deepest interest.

The people were sheltered in Egypt by the blood of the lamb ; now they are separated from it by the waters of the sea, and all their enemies are destroyed ; so Moses can sing of salvation now, and he says, "Jehovah is become my salvation."

Do you remember what the Lord Jesus said to the man who climbed up into the sycamore tree to see Him ? The Lord said to Zaccheus, "This day is *salvation* come to this house." So, whether it was to Moses or Zaccheus, the same beautiful word came home to them—the Lord Himself is salvation to His people. We may feel that we know very little about this ; some of us have been content perhaps with knowing our sins were forgiven, and that we should be in heaven when we leave this world ; but the grace of God does not stop there. He would have us know *now* the One who died for us, and who is now in glory, and wants our hearts to be there with Him. You may feel you have everything to learn, but that need not discourage you. There is a lovely word in Luke xi. 9 : the

Lord Himself says, "Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." So that you may have your desire of heart for Christ Himself perfectly satisfied.

The song of Moses was in answer, as it were, to what Jehovah had done for them, and he could triumph in that ; but then they have to begin the weary marches in the wilderness, and the people soon seem to have lost heart. First, they could find no water, and when, after three days, they came to the pools of Marah, they could not drink of them, for they were bitter. This only brought out the care of God for them, and He tells Moses to cast a tree, which He Himself shows him, into the bitter waters, and they become sweet.

God allowed them to thirst, to show them how He could either make bitter waters sweet, or bring streams out of the very rock for them. Then He suffers them to hunger, only to let them see that He can "rain bread from heaven" for them at His word ; to prove to them, as Moses told them, "that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of Jehovah doth man live."

The wonderful manna was the answer to their murmurings of hunger, and this miracle—for it was that—was a daily one in the sight of all the people for the whole forty years of their desert wanderings. Day by day that manna fell, and it tells us now of the daily grace for daily need, which we may always get from Him if we will but seek it.

The children of Israel had been so little used to grace, that they seemed unable to take in the blessedness of having Jehovah as their one resource ; so when they again have no water, they murmur at Moses and blame him for bringing them out of Egypt. Very difficult must it have been for him not to feel distressed at their murmurings, but he knew what it was to turn to God and find enough—more than enough—there, for any and every emergency. He cries to Jehovah, and in doing so lets us see how his heart felt the ingratitude of his brethren ; for he says, “ What shall I do unto this people ? They be almost ready to stone me.” The answer in grace is the water from the smitten rock, and all their need is supplied, and then, as refreshed and rested, they are able to go out and fight with Amalek, the cruel and cowardly foe who came upon them when they were weak and weary and smote the hindmost of them ; and this was never forgotten by Jehovah, who gave them the victory in answer to the intercession of Moses, who, with hands uplifted in the attitude of prayer, remained on the hill-top till Amalek and his host were defeated and driven back to their desert homes.

After this we get a lovely picture of the way in which Moses cared for his people—as a shepherd for his sheep ; all day long from morning till night, during part of the time of their encampment at Horeb, does he sit amongst them to teach them the laws and statutes of God, and to settle the various

complaints and differences that were so frequently arising in their midst. Unwearied by the toil, and accessible to all, it was enough for Moses if he could teach his brethren to know and obey the God who had borne them as on eagles' wings and brought them to Himself; and if, also, he could be the peace-maker of the people, and prevent quarrels and strife. During this little resting-time for them from the toilsome marches of the desert, Moses once again gets his wife and sons with him; and when Jethro, his father-in-law, brings them back, he rejoices over the goodness of Jehovah to Israel, and to Moses, to whom it must have been a joy to see his family once more around him, though the only home he had for them was a tent in the wilderness. It was enough for him to be able to say, as he did, "Jehovah, *thou* hast been our dwelling-place in all generations" (Psalm xc. 1), and little did it matter to him then that he must be always on the move in leading the Israelites through a desert land, when in his heart he had the rest of Jehovah Himself as his only home.

Now we must pass over a good deal that happened to Moses, and go on to the day when from Mount Sinai Jehovah called him to go up to Him to receive the commandments for Israel—the law which they had promised to obey—and also the directions for making the wonderful ark of the covenant, and the tabernacle in which it was to be enshrined. For forty days and forty nights was Moses there with

Jehovah, raised for the moment, above all the needs and weakness of human nature, and absorbed in receiving those wonderful revelations which, in type, were to show out the infinite love of a Saviour God, right on to the time of glory which will yet come for this poor sin-stained world.

Jehovah could, of course, have provided everything needed for making the tabernacle and all that was to be put in it; but in His grace He allows all the people to have a share in it, and so He tells Moses that all who offer willingly with their heart may bring offerings of the various materials required (Ex. xxv.). The first thing named to be made is the beautiful ark of the covenant, overlaid with pure gold throughout, and covered in by the golden mercy-seat with the cherubims of glory whose wings shadowed it, and whose faces looked toward that mercy-seat, which was typical of Him "whom God hath set forth a propitiation (mercy seat) through faith in his blood to declare his righteousness" (Romans iii. 25); in which, too, is shown the infinite love of God, which we are so slow to take in, but which is ever there for us in all its boundless depth and volume.

When we see that this beautiful golden ark was a picture of what has fully come out now in Christ, we do not wonder that the faces of the cherubims looked always towards it—toward that mercy-seat which tells us of the One who delighteth in mercy, and whose throne it was, and who, spite of all that

His people were, would devise means by which He could dwell among them. When telling Moses of all he was to make, the Lord said, "Thou shalt put the mercy-seat above upon the ark; and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee." Does not this remind us of the words, "I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart" (Psalm xl. 8)? Jehovah also said, speaking of the ark, "There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat, from between the two cherubims," and we know that their wings shadowed it.

This may have been in the mind of Boaz (long after) when in speaking to Ruth he said to her, "Jehovah recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of Jehovah, God of Israel, *under whose wings* thou art come to trust" (Ruth ii. 12). And in Ps. xci. 4 we read, "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust."

At any rate, the ark of the covenant became the chief thing in all God had to do with His people, from the time the tabernacle was finished and set up. It led the people through the wilderness, and went down into Jordan and remained there until every one of the vast host of Israel had passed safely over into the land of promise; and when the first stronghold of the enemy was to be taken, it accompanied the army in that strange silent march around Jericho day after day, until the hour when, at the word of Jehovah, those mighty walls fell prostrate

and opened the way into the city. In looking at all the scripture tells us of the ark, we can but see what a beautiful type of Christ it was ; yet, after all, it was but “ a shadow of good things to come.” We have the “ good things ” now in our Lord Jesus Christ—all is in Himself, and in Him for us.

But it will take us too long now to look at all the things Moses was instructed to make—the golden candlestick with its seven lamps, the altar of incense, and table of shewbread, all covered with gold, and the various vessels needed in connection with them. Then there was the tabernacle itself, with the beautiful curtains of fine twined linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, all telling out different glories of the One who was hidden then, but which are revealed to us now in Christ. The various coverings over these curtains all have a voice of their own, and a very wonderful one, too. When all the boards (covered with gold) were set up, and the curtains and coverings were stretched across, and thus the tabernacle formed, the priests who were in the first part of it would see only the gleaming golden walls around them, the blue and purple and scarlet, and snowy-white linen above them—all speaking of what did not belong to this world at all, but was heavenly and of God ; and yet if they looked down there were only the bare sands of the desert beneath their feet ; they still had to tread the wilderness path, but they could do so in the presence of what was wholly divine. I think this is a great cheer



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and encouragement to us. We may find our daily path sometimes a weary and painful one, but if we are amongst those who have been redeemed and brought to God we never have to tread it alone, for He has said, "Lo, I am with you all the days" (Matt. xxviii. 20).

" In the desert God shall teach thee,
What the God that thou hast found ;
Patient, gracious, powerful, holy,
All His grace shall there abound."

While Moses was alone with God receiving all these instructions and revelations as to His will for the people, they were turning away in heart from Him, and actually making a golden idol and bowing down to it; so that Jehovah warns His servant of this, and sends him down into the camp with the two tables of stone in his hands upon which the commandments were written by the finger of God. We can hardly understand how terrible it was for Moses to see his people so utterly forgetful of Jehovah as to be rejoicing in the idol that they themselves had made, and we do not wonder that his anger was so aroused that he goes at once and casts down the golden calf, and then grinds it to powder, which he strews upon the water they have to drink, showing them the utter folly and sin of their conduct. Nor was this all. Those who had been the leaders in this crime against Jehovah must meet stern, unflinching judgment, lest the whole assembly be utterly corrupted, so that "there fell of the people that day about three thousand men."

Then Moses goes again to the Lord and pleads for forgiveness even for this horrible evil, saying, "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and, if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written." Wonderful pleading was this, but Jehovah answered him by saying, "Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book." Then he is told to go and lead the people to the land, for Jehovah will not go with them.

Now Moses takes his own tent, probably—for the tabernacle was not then made—and pitches it outside the camp, afar from it, for it was defiled by the idolatry of which they had been guilty, and he separates himself from it, and called the tent the Tabernacle of the congregation; thus anticipating the time when the real tabernacle should become the place where Jehovah dwelt; and then all who sought Jehovah went out unto this separated place. Grandly was the faith of Moses rewarded, for the cloudy pillar descended and stood at the door of the tent, and there the Lord spoke unto His servant, "face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend."

Moses uses this greater nearness to Jehovah to plead still more for guilty Israel, reminding Him that they are His people, and putting himself with them, he says, "Wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? Is it not in that *thou goest* with us? So shall we

be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth."

The One "who delighteth in mercy" could not refuse to own this faith in His servant, and, granting his request, He says, "I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken, for thou hast found grace in my sight." This brings out a still deeper desire from the heart of Moses, and he says in reply to the wonderful favour shown to him, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory." Not there, and not then, could this prayer of Moses be granted; he must wait till that time of which the Apostle John wrote, when he said, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory)" (John i. 14). Then the Jehovah of Israel, full of grace and truth, allowed Moses to stand with Him on the holy mount, surrounded by that same bright cloud which shadowed the desert tabernacle, and there be an eye-witness of His majesty, "For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (2 Peter i. 17).

What could not be fully shown to Moses then when he said, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory," may be seen by us now by the Spirit given to us, for we read, "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, . . . the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. iv. 6). So

that now we may behold the glory of the Lord, and learn its transforming power. We may only see a ray of it at first; but if our hearts are set for it, if we say with true earnest desire "I beseech thee, show me thy glory," then He will fulfil that desire.

When Moses came down from the mount and first saw the golden calf the people had made, he had cast down the two tables of stone which he had in his hands, and they were dashed to pieces. Vain was it to take them into the camp where the first commandment written on them was already broken! Now Jehovah tells him to hew two more tablets like the first, and take them up Mount Sinai and present himself there. "And he was there with Jehovah forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments." Besides this the Lord made a special revelation of His ways to His servant, proclaiming His name and goodness in a way He had never done before, so that the reflection of that light in which he dwelt for those forty days and nights was seen upon the face of the mediator as he came down from the mountain, and "the skin of his face shone," making the people afraid to go near him, and causing him to put a veil upon his face when he talked to them.

For some months after this the children of Israel were busily employed in making the tabernacle and all connected with it, and during that time we hear

of no murmurings. All was finished by the end of the year, and on the first day of the second year the "tent of the congregation" was set up, and everything put in its place as ordered by Jehovah. All had been well and faithfully done, and when at last the outer court with its pure white linen hangings had been set up, and the curtain for the gate put in its place, then Moses had the holy joy of seeing Jehovah take possession, as it were, for the cloud of glory descended and covered the tabernacle, and the glory of the Lord filled it.

Well might Moses say, "Let *thy* work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children, and let the beauty of Jehovah our God be upon us; and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it" (Psalm xc. 16, 17).

From this time the tabernacle led the way through all the desert marches, for the bright cloud was upon it by day, and the pillar of fire by night, in the sight of all the congregation until they entered the promised land, and the long years of their wilderness wanderings were over.

When the work connected with making the tabernacle was completed, the Lord commanded Moses to number the people—to take the census; and beautiful is it to see how every individual of that vast host was thought of by God. All were precious to Jehovah, all remembered by Him; and He is the same to-day for all who belong to Him:

He takes the deepest interest in our everyday life, and watches over it all. When the taking of the census was finished, the position of each tribe when they pitched their tents was ordered by the same divine care that took account of each individual. The tribes were arranged with reference to the tabernacle, and each tribe was to have its own standard, with the ensign of their fathers set up in the forefront of their ranks. The standards were to be always set up when the tents were pitched—they were to be displayed; and there is a word that applies to us to-day that may be taken from this command of Jehovah—"Thou hast given a banner—a standard—to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth" (Psalm lx. 4). Do we all remember and act upon this?

After Moses had thus obeyed these commands, and the multitude of Egypt's slaves had been transformed into a well-ordered nation, ranged according to tribal distinctions around Jehovah's presence between the wings of the cherubims; then, before they again began their marches, the passover was kept, to remind them of what was the foundation of their every blessing. Then we read that they left the mount where they had so long been encamped, "and the ark of the covenant of Jehovah went before them . . . to search out a resting place for them." Spite of all this grace, the murmurings of the people soon became a source of trial to Moses; and, finding that they were despising the

manna and looking back to the food they got in Egypt, he becomes so discouraged that he says to the Lord, "I am not able to bear all this people alone," forgetting for the moment that all the power of Jehovah was with him.

Seventy of the elders of Israel are now appointed to share the burden of government with Moses, but the Lord said, "I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them," so that Moses now shared with them the dignity God had given him alone. The longing of the people for flesh is also granted, but the rebuke it drew out was one of judgment for the contempt of the goodness of the Lord, who had sent them the wonderful "bread from heaven," the "angels' food" they had despised. Hard as it was for Moses to patiently bear the complaints of Israel, one thinks it was keener pain still to hear Miriam and Aaron rise against him because of his having married an alien to Israel. He did not apparently, in any way justify himself, but Jehovah at once takes up the cause of His servant, and suddenly His voice is heard saying, "Come out ye three unto the tabernacle of the congregation," and they three came out. And Jehovah came down in the pillar of the cloud and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam; and they both came forth. Then Jehovah tells them that Moses is faithful in all His house, and says, "With him will I speak mouth to mouth . . . and not in dark speeches, and the similitude

of Jehovah shall he behold ; wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses ! And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them, and he departed.”

If Moses had justified himself, the Lord might not have done so, but he left it all in faith to Him, and it must have been great reward to hear himself so spoken of by the One whom he served. Sorrowful was it for Aaron and his sister, for when the cloud departed Miriam was seen to be leprous—as white as snow. This brings out from Aaron the confession of their sin, and he beseeches Moses not to lay it upon them, and with instant forgiveness he responds, and cries to Jehovah to heal her. It was quite true that “ the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth ” (Num. xii. 3), but Jehovah will have them know that he is also “ very great ” (Ex. xi. 3). So, though Miriam is healed in response to the prayer of Moses for her, she has to be shut out of the camp for seven days, so that all knew of the way in which she and Aaron had been rebuked.

Still deeper trials were before Moses as the days passed on, and they came within sight of the promised land, and then he said to all the people, “ Jehovah thy God hath set the land before thee : go up and possess it . . . fear not, neither be discouraged ” (Deut. i. 21). Instead of going as he commanded, they come to Moses and say they will send men to search out the land, and bring them word again

what way they must go, as if the guidance of the ark of the covenant and the cloud were not enough. Now Jehovah takes up their own words—lets them have their desire—and commands Moses, “Send thou men that they may search the land of Canaan, . . . of every tribe . . . shall ye send a man, every one a ruler among them” (Num. xiii. 2).

Out of the whole twelve who were thus sent, only two were faithful and gave a true report. Caleb and Joshua returned with the others, bringing the fruit of the land which proved that it was indeed a good one; but though they said “Let us go up at once and possess it,” and “If Jehovah delight in us then he will bring us into this land, a land which floweth with milk and honey,” spite of this the others speak only of the sons of Anak, and the walled cities; forgetting that the power of Jehovah was almighty, and thinking only of themselves and their fears, they say, It is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and when Joshua and Caleb seek to still these unbelieving fears, the whole congregation are so enraged that they talk of stoning them.

Then with a startling brilliancy which penetrated to every part of the camp, so that all the people were conscious of it, the glory of Jehovah appeared in the tabernacle, and His voice speaks to Moses, saying, “How long will this people provoke me, and how long will it be ere they believe me? I will smite them with the pestilence, . . . and will

make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they." Then His servant again pleads for the people, reminding Jehovah of His own words, that He was longsuffering and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and prays for pardon for them even now ; and it is once more granted, but the men who brought back the false report are smitten with the plague and die before Jehovah. The people had refused to enter Canaan, and now they are to wander in the wilderness till all that generation has passed away, and their children are to inherit the land that their parents despised.

The secret of all the rebellion seems to have been that Egypt was still in their hearts—the Egypt of "bitter bondage"—and so the land of Canaan was valueless to them. We are not outside the danger of this. Christ died "that he might deliver us from this present evil world," but we need to keep the sense of this in our hearts, and also to cherish constantly the thought of His love for us, which has not only redeemed us, but has given us His Spirit, so that we may lay hold of the heavenly things that are really ours. Never forget that He *has* given us the Spirit of power, so that we are without excuse if we are not enjoying His things and His land—the glory where He is—even now.

There is very much that has deepest interest for us all, if we really want to learn the lessons God would teach us in this history of His people from Egypt to Canaan, which we must pass over, and go

on to the day when, after Miriam's death, the children of Israel again murmur for want of water. Jehovah now tells Moses to take Aaron's rod—the rod of priestly grace—and *speak* to the rock of Meribah, and water should flow forth. Very painful is it now to see the one recorded fault of His servant; for Moses takes the rod indeed, but has his own also, and, forgetful of the command, he speaks in anger to the people, "Hear now, ye rebels! must we fetch you water out of this rock," and, instead of speaking to the rock, he lifts up his own rod—the rod of government—and strikes the rock twice. Alas now for the servant of Jehovah!

It was in pure grace that Jehovah would have acted, but Moses fails to enter into this, and though *he* fails thus and acts in anger, yet the water is not withheld, but abundant streams flow out to satisfy every need. Yet the failure in the mediator and high priest could not be overlooked, and they are told that because of it they are not to lead the people into the land, which they are now nearing. Soon Aaron goes to Mount Hor, and there passes out of the wilderness, dies there, and Eleazar his son succeeds him as high priest. Now the desert difficulties become more and more disheartening, and again the people murmur, and fiery serpents are sent in chastisement. This brings out the type of the serpent of brass, upon which, when the bitten Israelites looked, they were not only healed, but it is said they "lived."

When the Lord Jesus was here He said to

Nicodemus, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John iii. 14, 15). I earnestly hope the time will come, if it has not yet, when you will desire to know the blessedness of having your own part in eternal life, and for this you must know Christ Himself: for it is in Him, the Son of God, we can alone have eternal life. So I give you a word to ponder over and act upon, "*Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face continually*" (1 Chron. xvi. 11). And also I would again remind you that "he that seeketh findeth."

Moses greatly desired to go over the Jordan and enter the land of promise, but instead of that, Jehovah in His love for His servant, takes him up to the top of Pisgah, and Himself points out to him all the land according as He had given it to the different tribes; so that he saw it in all its perfectness, and as it will yet be, and was spared the pain of seeing the way in which the people failed to carry out the mind of God concerning it all. Moses saw it in all its beauty, for he saw all as in the heart of Jehovah for them, and not as in their failure; and then, satisfied and rejoicing in Him, he fell asleep and died there, and Jehovah buried him in a valley in the land of Moab "And there arose not a prophet since . . . like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face."



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RIVER JORDAN.

SCRIPTURE SKETCHES.

JOSHUA THE SON OF NUN.

“Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”—ii *Tim.* 2, 3.

“Lead on, Almighty Lord, lead on to Victory.”

IN the scripture histories of the servants of God, we constantly find a second person closely linked with them, either in affection or service, or in both combined. In thinking of David we are almost sure to remember Jonathan; the Apostle Paul had his Timothy; and the name of Joshua is inseparably linked with Moses the servant of God.

The first mention we get of Joshua is as a soldier; for when the powerful band of Amalek came to attack the children of Israel, it was to him that Moses gave the command of their army, saying to him: “Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek.” (*Ex.* xvii. 9.)

This commission was successfully carried out, and it may be that from this time Joshua became the chosen attendant of Moses, a friend and companion also; for he was one of the chief men of his tribe, a prince of the house of Ephraim, and his simple faith and devotedness might well endear him to Moses, though we see later on in his history that he could, when occasion required, act with terrible energy.

We know that he was with Moses when that great servant of Jehovah came down from Mount Sinai with the tables of stone in his hand; and with him too when the report was taken to him of Eldad and Medad who prophesied in the camp, thus arousing the jealousy of Joshua for his commander, as his words plainly show: "My lord Moses, forbid them. And Moses said to him, Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that Jehovah would put his spirit upon them" (Num. xi. 27) We see too that when Moses separated himself from the camp—defiled by the golden calf—and pitched the tent (possibly his own) far off from it, and called it the Tent of the congregation, where the God of Israel might be sought by those who were true to Him—then we find that Joshua remained there in the tent when the pillar of cloud descended to the entrance and proclaimed that Jehovah's presence sanctified it.

When the twelve men—each a chief or prince of his tribe—were chosen to search out the promised land, Joshua was one of them, and only to him and one other was it given to have proved by actual experience the "bitter bondage" of Egypt, the forty years wanderings of desert discipline, and victorious possession of Canaan.

In looking at the character of Joshua, one thing must remind us of Moses, and that is his beautiful self-forgetfulness, which was the fruit of faith. He never seems to think of himself or desire any supremacy, and

was content to remain without his inheritance in the land until each of the tribes had received theirs. His unswerving fidelity also to the law of Jehovah—the law given by Moses—well fitted him to become the commander-in-chief of the “armies of Israel,” as his long wilderness experience had been educating him for the years of conflict with the enemies who sought to keep possession of the land of Israel; and his devoted love to Moses, which had led him to serve in every possible way, all marked him out as the one man to be chosen of Jehovah to lead His people across the Jordan into Canaan.

“And Jehovah said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua, the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him; and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation, and give him a charge in their sight. And thou shalt put of thine honour upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. . . . And Moses did as the Lord commanded him; and he took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation. And he laid his hands upon him, and gave him a charge, as Jehovah commanded by the hand of Moses” (Numbers xxvii. 18–23).

Thus was Joshua publicly and solemnly set apart for his great work of leading the host of Israel into the promised land; and after Moses had gone up to Mount Nebo to see that land which his failure at the waters of Meribah prevented his entering, and

when the days of mourning for him were ended, Jehovah spoke unto Joshua, saying, "Moses my servant is dead: now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them."

The land itself was a pure gift of the grace of Jehovah to them, but all the same, they had to fight to get possession, for the enemy was there before them, and it was "every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon" that was to be given them, so energy was needed; and if they were idle and did not drive out the enemy they would not enjoy it. It is wonderful to read the words of Jehovah to Joshua, and see how he is encouraged and cheered by them. The boundaries of Canaan are told him, and three times over does Jehovah say to him, "Be strong and of good courage." And then the promise comes, "I will be with thee, I will not fail thee nor forsake thee."

Then the secret of his being prosperous and successful is revealed to him, and that is that the law of Jehovah is to be in his heart and mind, so that day and night his thoughts shall be occupied with it, and his life moulded by it, and then all that he did would prosper, and then once more he hears the words, "Be strong and of a good courage, be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed, for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest" (Joshua i. 9).

And now comes the first command of their new leader to the people. They are told that in three

days they are to cross the river Jordan, whose waters lay between them and the fair land of promise; and ever thoughtful of them, the vast host of Israel is told to prepare themselves food beforehand, so as to be unhindered when the order to march is given. The next thing Joshua does is to send two men secretly to spy out the land nearest to the camp—Jericho—the city of palm trees, which lay partly hidden and shaded by its wealth of green and feathery date palms exactly opposite the camp of the children of Israel.

It was—and is—a wonderful land, this land of Canaan, that Joshua is leading Jehovah's people to take possession of! Even now, after centuries of neglect, the soil is so rich and fertile that any tillage is rewarded by the most luxuriant crops. It combines in itself nearly all the climates of the world, from its mountain region with perpetual snow, to the Jordan valley, almost rivalling the tropics with its profusion of fruits and flowers; so that the people could supply themselves with all necessary food in their own land, while other nations must rely upon foreign countries for their supplies, so that the figure used to express its richness was not an exaggerated one—"A land that floweth with milk and honey." Yet very little more than a tenth part of the regions promised by Jehovah did the children of Israel take actual possession of until David came, and then his conquests extended his domain nearer the limits given by God; but it still remains for

Israel in the future to have full and entire possession of *all* the land of promise, when David's Son and David's Lord shall not only "sway the royal sceptre" over the regions of earth, but also in the hearts of His people Israel, now scattered over the whole world—without a king and without a prince—but then to be restored to their own land under the blessed rule of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

The two men sent by Joshua to spy out the land returned to him saying, "Truly Jehovah hath delivered into our hands all the land: for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us." And then we read that Joshua arose early, and the order for their last march in the wilderness was given, for it would bring them to the river side, and the next thing was their passage across it, and then they would be at home in Canaan. One night is spent by the river side, and then in the early dawn probably, the Lord said unto Joshua, "This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know, that as I was with Moses so I will be with thee."

And now Joshua calls the people to him, and tells them that the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth, that has led the way for all the long wilderness years with the glory cloud, is about to pass over Jordan, and they are to follow it—but at a certain distance from it—and as soon as the feet of the priests who bare the ark should touch the brink of the river, the waters should be cut off

from the waters that came down from above, and should stand upon an heap, leaving the bed of the river dry, so that the host of Israel might cross over into Canaan.

Then all was motion. The tents were quickly taken down, the priests set forward bearing the ark of the covenant, and the twelve tribes all ranged under their different standards with the prince of each at their head, prepare to follow ; and then, at the moment that the feet of the priests feel the cool touch of the water on the brink of the overflowing river, the waters that came down from the north stood and rose up upon an heap very far by Adam, the city that is beside Zaretan, probably twenty miles above Jericho, while those that flowed down towards the Dead Sea were completely cut off, leaving the bed of the river bare and dry, where even little children could walk in perfect safety. The ark was taken down, and remained stationary in the midst of Jordan till all the mighty multitude of the people of Israel had reached the other side of the river, and at last they were in the land. Then Jehovah speaks again to Joshua, and tells him to take twelve stones from the place where the ark had rested in the midst of the river while the people passed over ; and when the twelve men—one from every tribe—who were chosen to perform this work, had each taken a stone and borne it to the Canaan side, then Joshua speaks to the priests saying, “Come ye up out of Jordan.” And as soon as the

feet of those that bare the ark rest upon the dry land of the plains of Jericho, the waters of the Jordan returned to their place, and the rapid river rushed on as it did before, overflowing all its banks.

The twelve stones taken out of the bed of the river were to be for a memorial for the people and their children in the time to come, to remind them of the way in which Jehovah had dried up the waters of the Jordan to make a path for His ransomed ones to pass over into His land, by the ark of the covenant going down before them and remaining there till all His people were safe on the other side. How it reminds us of the true Ark of the Covenant—the Lord Jesus Christ—who went down into the darker waves of death bowing under all the power of the enemy, and then passed out of it, and rose in glorious resurrection life on the other side, having by that wondrous death destroyed all its power over every one of His own ; for death now becomes the path of life to the “redeemed of the Lord.”

If we could now stand by the side of the Jordan, on the place where the children of Israel encamped that first night in Canaan, we could get little idea from what we saw around us of the Jericho of Joshua's time. Then it was a powerful city, walled and defended, and of great natural beauty, probably from its being in an oasis of lovely date palms, one of the most graceful of the palm trees ; and though now the reputed site of Jericho is only a little miserable village called Riha, whose inhabitants

seem not only poverty stricken, but degraded and wicked, yet the most beautiful date palms are still found in the neighbourhood.

The Jordan of to-day, too, must—as far as its banks at least are concerned—be very unlike what it was then ; for in many places now wide jungles impenetrable to the ordinary traveller prevent access to the river itself, which however still flows on as rapidly as then from the immense descent it makes. If we could trace the course of “The Descender,” as its name really means, we should have to start from the Lebanon with its then wealth of cedars, where one of the largest fountains in the world bursts out at the base of the mountain, and becomes almost a lake and then a rushing river, which is soon joined by several other streams flowing also from natural fountains, and together forming the river Jordan, over which we have seen Joshua leading his people into Canaan.

It was harvest time when they crossed, but the people of Jericho had scarcely begun the work of gathering in their corn, for they had seen the thousands of Israel approaching, and their time and thoughts had been probably taken up by vain attempts to garrison their city against the enemy. So that the ripened fields of wheat were left for the people of Jehovah, and the fruits of the land were theirs too. Very beautiful it must have seemed to the wilderness wanderers, we think, to find themselves surrounded by fertile plains and cornfields

and green trees, instead of the long wide wastes of brown and barren sand in the desert ; and to Joshua at least it must have been a time of the deepest thanksgiving to Jehovah, that His promises were, so far, fulfilled, though at present they were not in the actual possession of Canaan. For that there must be energy and conflict, and readiness of heart too—and also obedience to the word of Jehovah.

Now that the people are brought into the place so long promised to them, God will remind them that they are to be separate from all the nations around them, hence the rite of circumcision is insisted on (though it had been neglected in the wilderness), reminding them of God's covenant with Abraham, and also that all their hopes must be in God—not in their own power or ability—for in themselves they had been proved utterly incapable of pleasing Him.

There is a very beautiful and wonderful word in Romans xv. 3, "Even Christ pleased not himself," and yet He was the only one in this world who had the right to please Himself. We are called—we, who have been redeemed by His precious blood—to follow His steps, and if our hearts are set for this, to refuse ourselves as well as our natural desires and habits ; then we shall know a little of what circumcision means. We are not to live to ourselves now ; we shall not know what it is to be really happy if we do, even though we are Christians, but we are to live to Him who died for us, and rose again ; and even though we fail, this may be the bent of our lives.

And this is illustrated in the story of the entrance into Canaan. Then the passover was kept very soon after they were in the land, but there were no blood-sprinkled lintels and door-posts here to keep the destroyer out of their houses—all that was once for all in Egypt—now it was only the remembrance of judgment upon the Egyptians and deliverance for themselves ; and the one chief thing in it was the lamb roast with fire upon which they fed—appropriating it thus, it became strength and sustenance to them—reminding them that they had been “redeemed by blood,” and their lives were to be in accord with this.

I am sure some of you will see how strongly all this bears upon us, and you will perhaps remember the words of the apostle, that “all these things happened unto them for types, and are written for *our* admonition” (1 Cor. x. ii). Some will say, possibly, What answers now to the Israelites being in the land ? All the tribes did *not* go in to find homes there. They chose the other side, and were the first to be taken captive when the enemy was allowed of Jehovah to conquer His people, because they had forsaken Him ; but if you and I know what it is to have *left ourselves* for the Lord, to have Christ *instead* of ourselves, and know that we live by Him, then we know something in a spiritual sense of what “the land” is ; we are laying hold of eternal life.

Well, the passover was ended, the manna ceased,

and the people had been able to eat the old corn of the land, and the fruits of the country too, and then came the beginning of conflict. Jericho was closely shut up behind its high strong walls, really in a state of siege, and none were allowed to go in or out because of the near approach of the army of Israel.

Like a careful general, Joshua had gone to look closely at the city they were soon to enter, when suddenly he sees One with a sword drawn in his hand, and without any hesitancy apparently, he at once goes to the stranger and asks, "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?"

Joshua knew there was no neutral ground in the conflict they were to wage—it was for, or against—and deep must have been his joy and reverence when he hears the words, "Nay: but as captain of the host of Jehovah am I now come," and then Joshua found that he was in the very presence of the Jehovah of Israel, the One who had said to him, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee"; and now this is being fulfilled to him.

Joshua has first to learn that whether it is in the pillar of cloud, or as captain of the host of His people, the presence of Jehovah always demands the deepest reverence, and the command comes to him, as to Moses at the burning bush: "Loose thy shoe from off thy foot, for the place whereon thou standest is holy." And Joshua did so. Then "What saith my lord unto his servant," were the words that came from his lips as he fell on his face to the

earth and worshipped. And then Jehovah speaks to him, and says "See, I have given into thine hand Jericho and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour." And He gives the most minute directions as to what is to be done, and Joshua knows that the victory is certain.

As soon as the captain of the Lord's host departs from him, Joshua returns at once to the camp at Gilgal, and calling the priests he said unto them, "Take up the ark of the covenant of the Lord," and to the people, "Pass on and compass the city." At once seven priests with seven trumpets passed on before those who bore the ark, while the armed soldiers went before in perfect silence. No sound was to be heard but the voice of the seven trumpets blown by the priests as they passed on in front of the ark with its covering of blue. Great must have been the wonderment of the people of Jericho as day after day this same ark was carried once in solemn stillness, except for the trumpets blown by the priests, completely round their city for six days in succession; and if any of them had desired to do so, they had ample time to submit to Jehovah, and go out and ask for mercy; but not one of all that doomed city turned to God except Rahab, who had sheltered the spies sent by Joshua, and who had owned that Jehovah was God not only in the heaven above her, but in the earth on which she lived and the city where she found her home; and so Rahab and her family alone were saved.

Six days passed ; the seventh day dawned ; and as the sun rose over the hills of Moab, the priests and soldiers were already pursuing their march around the walls of Jericho ; but now it was not once only that they did this, but seven times did the ark of the covenant pass on before them. Then when the seventh circuit had been accomplished came the command from Joshua, "Shout, for Jehovah hath given you the city." And they did shout ! Can we not imagine what a shout of victory it was, and almost fancy we can see those high walls of the city tottering to their very base, and then falling flat as the shouts of the immense multitude echoed from one side of the city to the other !

What mattered it now whether those walls were high or low, strong or weak ? Jehovah had spoken, and they are cast to the ground at His word, and the armed men can go straight up into the strongest place, for all is laid open to them by the "Captain of the host of the Lord."

So the first city that opposed the people of Israel was taken, and burned with fire, after all the inhabitants had been destroyed ; and only a heap of smouldering ruins marked the place whose people had defied the God of the whole earth, for Canaan was Jehovah's land, and Joshua seems always to have kept this in mind.

Faithful servant and soldier as he was, Joshua in his next step seems to have forgotten that, though unseen, Jehovah Himself was to be "Captain of the

host," for His presence was not sought nor His counsel asked before sending spies to the little city of Ai, who when they returned said to Joshua, "Let not all the people go up, . . . for they are but few." So about three thousand men are sent; and terrible must it have been to Joshua to see them fleeing back to the camp at Gilgal, a crowd of frightened fugitives unable to face the enemy for a moment, their strength all gone, for their great Leader Jehovah was not going before them.

Terror and dismay soon spread all through the camp, "The hearts of the people melted and became as water," as the men who had fled from before Ai, told of the way in which they had been smitten and overcome. For Joshua there was but one resource, the ark of Jehovah! And in anguish of spirit he takes the elders of Israel with him, and together they fall prostrate on their faces before that holy mercy-seat where God deigned to speak to His people. Sorrowful words are Joshua's now, and he hardly seems the same man, as we hear his petition, "Alas, O Lord Jehovah, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us? . . . O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies!"

One hardly likes to speak of failure in the case of a devoted servant of God like Joshua, who makes us feel how immeasurably beyond us he was in faith, and yet his whole bearing now makes us remember

the word of the Lord to him before the Jordan was crossed: "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you." . . . And also, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night . . . then thou shalt have good success." The victory at the city of Jericho was wholly given to the people by Jehovah, but they seem to have forgotten this, so only a few men were sent to Ai, and Joshua did not go at all. The sole of his foot did not tread upon its soil, neither did he enquire of Jehovah as to what he should do before sending the men, for had he done so it would soon have been made known to him that Jehovah was no longer with them as Leader.

All this was however, hidden from him and till the evening of that sad day of defeat and death did Joshua lie on his face before the ark of the Lord in depths of distress and dismay. Then Jehovah once more speaks to him, but now in words of reproof: "Get thee up, wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant . . . for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff."

Before Jericho was taken, Joshua had commanded the people to burn with fire everything in the city except the gold, silver, iron and brass—all of which was to be put into the treasury of the Lord—nothing

was to be taken as spoil, for the city was under a curse, and they were to touch nothing of the accursed thing, lest they themselves should come under the same ban. Now Joshua finds that there were those who had disobeyed the command of the Lord, and until the evil was judged and put away from them, the whole camp of Israel would be utterly powerless, for Jehovah would not be with them any more; the camp was defiled by the presence of the things stolen from Jericho.

In His mercy Jehovah now directs Joshua what to do, and in the morning he assembles all the tribes before the ark of the covenant; and the royal tribe, the tribe of Judah, is taken; then house by house, and man by man are they taken, until Achan the son of Carmi stands before them as the guilty traitor, and is brought to confess his sin. And what was the first thing he owned to have taken? A goodly Babylonish garment! Think of it! For a garment which pleased his foolish vanity, he had brought the whole multitude of Israel under the wrath of Jehovah! A wedge of gold also he had coveted and stolen, and some silver pieces, and hidden them all in his tent, as if the eyes of Jehovah did not see everything everywhere.

As soon as he had confessed his guilt Joshua sends messengers to his tent, and they bring the stolen things and lay them out before Jehovah—the things which were under the curse—and then the guilty troubler of Israel, the man who had despised and

defied the law of the God of Israel, was taken with the vain things he had stolen, and utterly destroyed before Jehovah, and thus only could the whole host of the people be cleansed from the defilement brought into their midst by the sin of Achan.

We seldom think of the effect our own wrongdoing may have upon others, and yet all who have been redeemed by the precious blood of "The Lamb of God"—as the children of Israel had been by the blood of the passover lamb—are so bound up together before God, that if one sins it affects all. We may think we would not have acted as this man did at Jericho, but let us take care. You and I are not outside the danger of becoming an Achan even though we are really Christians, for if we give up our dependence upon God, if we are not looking to Him alone to preserve us, that very moment we may fall into sin, and then the sad consequences may be felt for a very long time, though in His mercy and grace the Lord not only forgives us when we confess our sin, but He cleanses us too, so that once more we can go on with Him, chastened and subdued in spirit by His pardoning love.

It was so with Israel. When all trace of the sin of Achan, except the memory of it, had been put away from the camp, then the grace of Jehovah comes out in His encouraging words to Joshua as He says, "Fear not, neither be thou dismayed; take all the people of war with thee, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into thy hand the

king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land.
. . . Lay thee an ambush for the city behind it.”
Now once more the Captain of the Lord’s host is going before them, but He will show them that if Ai is a little city, and they had trusted in their own strength to take it when they went up before, now they must act as if it were a very large one and they themselves very small. They are not to be allowed to boast in their own valour or prowess, but they are to have a good deal of trouble even with this little city, to keep them in remembrance of their only power being in Jehovah being with them, and fighting for them.

And that is our only power to-day ; for as the Lord Jesus said to His disciples when He was with them, so He says now to us, “ Without me ye can do nothing ” (John xv. 5). There is no need to be discouraged as to this, for the Lord also says to His own, “ Behold, I am with you all the days,” whatever the days are—filled with toil, and care, or sorrow—or anything else that may come, that word of His remains true for you and for me, and if we are going on in the strength of it we shall find something of what Paul knew when he said, “ I can do all things through him who gives me strength ” (Phil. iv. 13).

Ai is at last completely conquered, but not till great toil and fighting had been gone through, when even Joshua himself had to pretend to flee before the enemy with half his army, and though it was

but a stratagem to lead the people of Ai out of their city, yet there was certainly not the dignity of victory about it. However, God in His mercy helps His people even when they are suffering for their own folly and neglect of His word, and at last every one of the opposers is destroyed, and the second place that had resisted the people of Jehovah is burnt to ashes, and made a desolation for ever ; and not till then does Joshua return to the camp at Gilgal where the ark of the covenant and the priests were.

Now while resting there for a little it would seem as if Joshua remembered a command given by Moses to *all* the people while he was yet with them, but which as the commander-in-chief of the host of Israel, he might have been expected to be first in carrying out. Moses had commanded the people to build an altar unto the Lord their God the day that they went over Jordan, and on the stones of this altar to write all the words of the law very plainly. There also were they then to offer burnt offerings and peace offerings to Jehovah their God, and to eat there and *rejoice* before Jehovah.

Now Joshua is reminded of this, and of how the law was to be read before the whole assembled host of Israel, so that all, even down to the youngest children, might have part in what was really a touching proof of the love of God for His people, in gathering them around Himself to worship in offering the burnt offerings, and to rejoice in all He was to them, and this too when first they entered the

land. Now all is carried out in accord with the directions given by Moses. The altar was built unto the Lord God of Israel, the offerings were offered, upon the stones of the altar the copy of the law was written, and then with all the thousands of the vast camp of the people around the ark of the covenant and the priests that bare it, Joshua read aloud all the words of the law of Jehovah their God. "There was not a word of all that Moses commanded which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women and the little ones and the strangers that were conversant among them."

It must have been a very wonderful sight: the many thousands of Israel gathered together in the valley between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, the ark of the covenant surrounded by the priests and Levites, and the elders and princes of the people next, while every tribe had its own specially appointed place; six tribes on one side of the valley and six on the other; the standard of every tribe floating high above the heads of the people and showing plainly where each tribe held its place. It must have been toward evening before all were gathered to listen to the words of the law, to be read aloud, and in that still clear air the voice of Joshua would ring out clearly in the deep silence of the multitude below him. We are told that "he read all the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the book of the law," and the people said, Amen to those

fearful curses, the last of which was, as quoted in Gal. iii. 10—"Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." How happy to know that "we are not under the law, but under grace." (Rom. vi. 15.)

Seldom, if ever, in the history of the world has the sun shone upon such a scene as that! Probably about two millions of people all gathered together before the Lord God of Israel, all listening to His law, owned as His own people; and yet that is small indeed compared with what shall be seen when "The Lord shall be king over the whole earth."

By erecting the altar as Moses commanded—with the words of the law plainly inscribed upon it for all to see—Joshua publicly took possession of the whole land of Canaan as Jehovah's land. This was probably known by the people of whom we are told next, the inhabitants of Gibeon, who feared to make war against Jehovah, and instead of that planned a scheme of deception which succeeded only too well, as they came not in the garb of foes, but as desiring to be friends.

If we did not know something of how easily we are turned away from simple dependence upon God, we should be inclined to wonder why Joshua and the princes of the people did not ask counsel of Jehovah, when the caravan of apparently travel-worn strangers came into the camp of Israel representing them-

selves as ambassadors from a far country, sent to enter into a league with the people of Jehovah.

Joshua and all the people had had to learn that they had in themselves no power or might against the enemies; and now they have to find that they have no wisdom apart from God. They look at these people with their old and tattered garments, their worn-out shoes, and mouldy provisions, and all the marks of weeks of travel through a difficult desert journey, and they are deceived by the sight of their eyes, and though they have, apparently, some misgivings, for they say to the strangers: "Peradventure ye dwell among us, and how shall we make a league with you?" yet they trust to what they see, and ask no guidance of God. And so Joshua and the princes make terms of peace with the enemies of Jehovah, and all the princes confirm the league with a solemn oath.

Three days afterwards it is found that the pretended ambassadors came only from the great city of Gibeon in the midst of Canaan! A terrible discovery it must have been for Joshua, to find that he had entered into a covenant of peace with those whom Jehovah had commanded to be utterly destroyed, and one can hardly doubt that he now sought the Lord to know what to do in this perplexing case. At any rate the first thing was to go to Gibeon, and there make known to them that though they had saved their lives by their crafty conduct, yet they had lost their liberty, for they were to be made slaves

for ever to Israel to perform their most menial and toilsome work ; and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of God were the Gibeonites to remain all their days. Though God could and did turn this sad mistake and failure into means of rapid conquest of many of the chiefs or kings of the Canaanites, yet it at once involved Joshua in severe conflict, needing all the faith and fiery energy which he now displayed.

Strengthened by the encouraging word from Jehovah, "Fear them not, for I have delivered them into thine hand," Joshua now makes a rapid night march from Gilgal to the place where five kings are assembled with their armies to make war upon Gibeon, and falling suddenly upon the hostile camps gains a great victory, for Jehovah fought with Israel. Though the victory was certain, yet the day was passing, and there were many enemies still left. And then with wonderful faith Joshua speaks to the Lord, and though we are not told what his prayer was, yet we gather it from his words after: "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon, and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon." Will the sun and the moon obey his words ; can it be possible that the daylight shall be prolonged so that the Israelites may complete the victory ? Listen ! "And the sun stood still and the moon stayed until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. . . . So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day

like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened to the voice of a man: for the Lord fought for Israel.”

This victory was the beginning of some five years of warfare in casting the Canaanites out of the land, and then we read of the meeting of Caleb and Joshua in Gilgal. Though his name is not mentioned, we can but think that Caleb had continued faithful to Jehovah, and probably had been one of the most trusted helpers of Joshua. Now he comes to remind the commander-in-chief of the armies of Israel, of what Moses had said forty-five years before when the twelve spies had been sent from Kadesh-Barnea to search out the land, and of them all only Joshua and Caleb brought a true report. Moses had then said to Caleb, “Surely the land whereon thy feet have trodden shall be thine inheritance and thy children’s for ever, because thou hast wholly followed the Lord my God.”

Remembering this, he now says to Joshua, “Give me this mountain whereof Jehovah spake in that day. . . . And Joshua blessed him, and gave unto Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, Hebron for an inheritance.” And Hebron thus became the inheritance of Caleb, because he wholly followed Jehovah, God of Israel.

All this time the tabernacle of the congregation had not been set up; but when a large part of the land had been subdued, all the people assembled at Shiloh, and there once more was the tabernacle erected, the

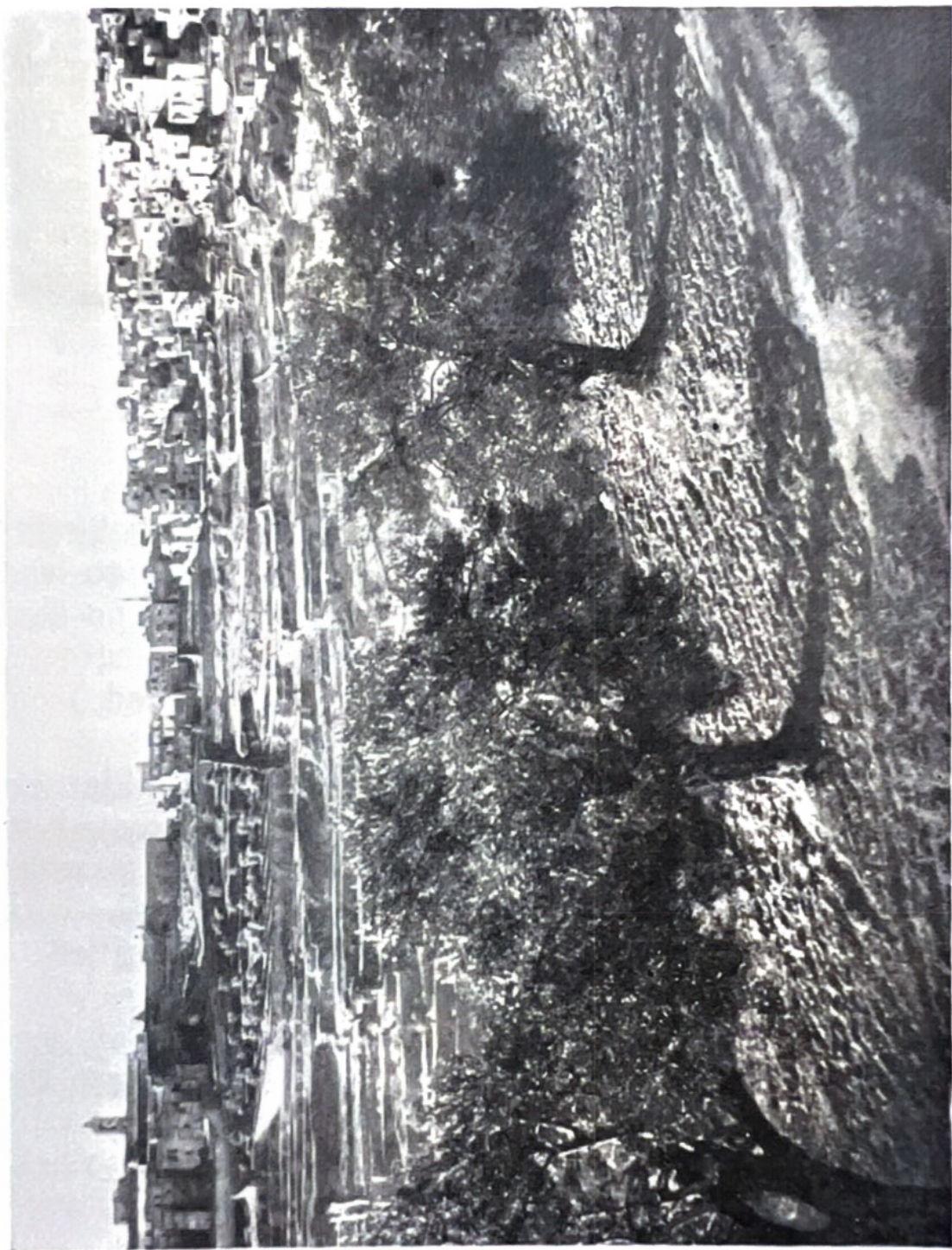
brazen altar set in its place, and the laver also. The pillars for the court round the tabernacle were reared up, and the white linen hangings and the court gate set in their places, and then once again was there a meeting-place between Jehovah and His people, and there Joshua cast lots for them before Jehovah as to the division of the land amongst the various tribes.

Till the whole of the country had thus been divided, Joshua had not even the smallest part of it for himself, and though in the land of promise, was content to be as homeless as when in the desert. When all the tribes had received their portion, and perhaps he began to feel the need of some quieter resting-place than the camp, he asked for an obscure little city, in an obscure part of the country, and there the great captain and leader found his simple home, Timnath-serah, in Mount Ephraim, near to the Gilgal where for so long the camp had been his only resting-place.

Though Joshua no longer led the armies of Israel to victory over the enemies, yet from his home in Mount Ephraim he still cheered and encouraged them to go on and take further possession of the whole land, keeping them in mind also of the blessings they would have in cleaving to Jehovah, and the bitter sorrow and anguish if they forsook Him. In thinking over the story of Joshua, we can hardly help seeing how exactly we get what answers to it in the life of those who belong to the Lord Jesus now.

Joshua was given to His people by Jehovah as the one who, after the death of Moses, was to bring them into the land of promise; he was to *guide* them there; and when the Lord Jesus was going away from this world, from His disciples to the Father, He told them that He would give them another Comforter who should guide them, *not* into a Canaan on earth, but into *all truth*, the heavenly spiritual things which He desires us to enter upon even now, and while here; and which are so much greater and richer that we can hardly compare them to the good things of the land Joshua knew; for "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit" (1 Cor. ii. 9, 10).

When Joshua was old and feeble, Jehovah said unto him "There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed." They had not taken the trouble to enter upon it, it required energy for that, and so they stopped short of the desire of Jehovah for them. You and I may do the same now, but not if we are really in earnest, for then the Holy Spirit will guide us into all that salvation means, and that, in this day of the grace of God is nothing short of living in the life of Christ Himself. No room for doubts or fears there, but we shall be able to say as Joshua did in his last words to his people: "Not one thing hath failed of all the good things which Jehovah your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass."



BETHLEHEM.

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SCRIPTURE SKETCHES.

SAMUEL THE SEER.

“The glory is departed from Israel.”—1 *Sam.* iv. 22.

“Low burned the light in the Temple of God ;
But darker the night where the Israelites trod,
Both people and priest, from Jehovah afar ;
Ever lower and lower sank Israel’s star.”

SOME 300 years had passed away in the history of Israel between the day when Joshua spoke his last words to the people of Jehovah, seeking to lead them to continue in obedient allegiance to the God of their fathers, and the day when the sorrowful words were spoken, “The glory is departed from Israel.”

The tabernacle made by Moses in the wilderness still stood at Shiloh where Joshua had erected it, and the ark of the covenant was there also when the man of Mount Ephraim, named Elkanah, with his wife Hannah, came up to Shiloh to sacrifice to Jehovah of hosts and to worship Him there.

Now only a mass of shapeless ruins, Shiloh was for some centuries an important place amongst the tribes of Israel, on account of its being chosen by Joshua for the resting-place of the tabernacle where the ark of the covenant was, and where Jehovah might be enquired of through His priests, who

carried on the service of God as long as Joshua lived, and also all the days of those elders who had known and followed him in his faithfulness to the Lord God of Israel. But the day came when Joshua died, and as the years passed on, one after another of the true-hearted men who had known and loved him as their leader died also, and their children who had been born in the land filled the places of their fathers, and they gradually neglected and forgot the law of Moses until they even turned away from Jehovah Himself.

Instead of following up the victories gained over the enemies, the people allowed them to remain in their midst, and fell into their ways, even worshipping their idols, and only a few remained true to the God of Abraham, or sought Him at the temple or tabernacle at Shiloh, where the very priests themselves dishonoured the laws they should have kept and taught. All this had been foreseen by Moses, and he had warned the people of it, and of the way in which Jehovah would suffer the greatest calamities to come upon them if they forsook Him.

So it was that the very nations who had been utterly defeated at the time when the children of Israel entered the promised land, now came against them and easily overcame them, for their defence was departed, and they became servants to the very Amalekites whom Joshua had defeated even in the wilderness. While allowing all this to come upon His people, Jehovah in His grace often raised up

special men, called judges, whose hearts turned to Him in seeking His help against the oppressors, and then for a while their misery was lightened, but only to witness again and again that as soon as their judges were taken from them by death, the idols of the heathen were chosen instead of the true God.

Spite of all this, the tribes of Israel increased in number, and the tribe of Ephraim, to which Joshua belonged, became powerful above many. The birthright was Joseph's (*see* 1 Chron. v. 2), and Ephraim, though younger than Manasseh, had the first-born place in the blessing of Jacob. Its territory was in the most fertile and fruitful part of all the land of promise, and to this tribe the family of Joshua belonged, also the tabernacle was set up within its limits; so that Mount Ephraim, extending for some miles, became one of the best known districts, and the tribe to whom it belonged was a haughty rival to the royal people of Judah for many years, and this rivalry culminated at last in their becoming two kingdoms, when the name of Ephraim was often used for the ten tribes who had separated from Judah and set up their own king.

At the time when Elkanah, an Ephraimite, came yearly to Shiloh to worship Jehovah it was still "the days when the judges ruled," and Eli, the priest of the house of Aaron, and his two sons were there. Sorrowful to say, Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, used their position to transgress

the laws given by Moses, so that "men abhorred the offering of the Lord."

At this time of darkness in the souls of His chosen people Jehovah once more appeared in grace and pity, and the coming of Elkanah and his wife Hannah to Shiloh was the dawn of a brighter day, and heralded the coming of one who was to be faithful to Jehovah and walk before Him all his days. Though called an Ephraimite, Elkanah was of the tribe of Levi, to which tribe many cities had been given by command of Jehovah; and his home was in the midst of Ephraim, and he was called by the name of the tribe where he dwelt.

From his yearly visits to Shiloh we see he was one of those who still clung to the law of Jehovah spite of all that might have hindered him, but there was sorrow in his house, for his wife Hannah had no children, and to a woman of Israel this was a great calamity, and spite of the love her husband had for her, she mourned continually because of it. The annual journeys to Shiloh seemed to specially remind Hannah that she was childless, "therefore she wept and did not eat." This drew forth a very touching remonstrance from her husband, and he said, "Hannah, why weepest thou, and why eatest thou not, and why is thy heart grieved; am not I better to thee than ten sons?"

This seems to have made Hannah feel that she must take her sorrow to Jehovah Himself, and this was the very best thing she could do. With only

the aged priest Eli near her, Hannah poured out all her grief in the ears of One who listens to the feeblest cry of His people—as much to-day as then—and she prayed that Jehovah of hosts would look upon her affliction, and give her a son, adding, “Then I will give him unto Jehovah all the days of his life.”

As Eli the priest sat near the place where she was praying, and noticed her lips move, but heard no voice, he misunderstood her, for Hannah prayed in her heart, and not aloud; and so he said to her, “How long wilt thou be drunken: put away thy wine from thee”; but Hannah answered meekly and quietly to the unjust suspicion, saying, “No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord.”

“Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition,” was the beautiful answer she now got from the priest of Jehovah, and she at once took it as a proof that her request would be granted, and in the faith of that she went away with her sorrow turned into joyful trust in the loving-kindness of the Lord; and we are told that “her countenance was no more sad.” And so when she and her husband returned home it was with a very different spirit that she entered upon the year that lay before her at Ramah ere Shiloh would once more be visited by them. When that year had passed, and the usual preparations were being made for the journey

to the tabernacle of God and the ark of the covenant, Hannah was not amongst those who were looking forward to it, for God had granted her sorrowful prayer, and she was the happy, loving mother of a son whom she had named Samuel (asked of God), saying, "Because I have asked him of the Lord."

So while her little son was an infant Hannah went no more to Shiloh, for as soon as he was old enough she meant to take him to present him to Jehovah there, and to *leave* him there, too, for his whole life. Dark as the days were in which Hannah lived, she had learned of the Lord Himself, as we see in her act when the time came for her to take her son to the tabernacle at Shiloh. While true to her words when praying there in her anguish of spirit, she fully owns that she can only bring her child to Jehovah as connected with a sacrifice, with death; and so before taking Samuel to the priest a bullock is slain—the sin-offering is presented—and Hannah confesses thus that only in this way can she bring her child to God—by the blood of expiation, of cleansing—"for it is the blood that maketh atonement for the soul," and nothing else can, either in that day when Hannah offered it, or in ours now; only, as you all know, for us there is a "better sacrifice" (Heb. ix. 23), even "the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God." So that all who put their trust in Him can serve the living God,

not as Hannah desired for her son, in any earthly tabernacle, but in all their daily lives.

When the bullock was killed, Hannah went to Eli with her young son and told him that she was the once sad woman who had stood by him a few years before praying unto Jehovah and asking for this child. But her own words tell us best—"For this child I prayed; and Jehovah hath given me my petition which I asked of him. Therefore, also, I have lent him to Jehovah; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to Jehovah" (1 Sam. i. 28). And then from the fulness of her rejoicing—as before from her sorrow—once again she pours out her heart before God, but in praise now, and we do not wonder that she says, "I rejoice in thy salvation."

Can we *all* say that. Do *you* rejoice in God's salvation? *Christ* is God's salvation, and unless you have *Him* you are poor and needy indeed; but if you have you can go on and claim another word out of the beautiful praise-song of Hannah, "He will keep the feet of his saints." That is, the Lord will preserve those who believe on His Son: they are "His saints," for they are sanctified by the blood of Christ and by the Holy Spirit of God.

Eli must have been greatly pleased to find that his word to Hannah had been fulfilled, and that the young Samuel was to be left in his charge, to minister to the Lord there, and to be to him as a younger son; and he blessed Elkanah and his wife, and asked for other children for them in the place of

Samuel, "the loan which is lent to Jehovah," as he said. Though true himself to the God of his fathers, and faithful in his own service, the poor old priest was sorrowful on account of his two wicked sons, who, though priests, "knew not Jehovah," and did not wish to know Him, and were openly defiant of Jehovah's laws. As the judge of Israel, as well as being their father, he ought to have restrained them from evil, and even punished them for their sins.

We can imagine what a pleasure it was to him to have the bright young boy Samuel always with him in the tabernacle, and to find him obedient and ever ready to carry out his wishes, and at any time to answer his call; we are not surprised that "the child Samuel grew on and was in favour both with Jehovah and also with men" (1 Sam. ii. 26). Year by year his mother and father went up to Shiloh, and each year his mother made Samuel a little coat which she took with her to give him, and the record of this not only tells of *her* love, but speaks to us of the way in which the Lord takes notice of all that His people do.

The years passed on, and Eli the priest had grown very old, and all around him in Israel was a scene of neglect or rejection of Jehovah, and his own sons were leaders in evil. Samuel was his one comfort, but as yet he knew not Jehovah, and the word of the Lord seldom was heard by any—there was no open vision. God had hidden himself as it were, and no longer spoke to His people as in the days

of Moses and Aaron, though He had sent a man of God to Eli to tell him that because he had not restrained his sons, but allowed them to lead Israel into sin, therefore the priesthood should be given to others, and his sons should both die in one day.

Then came a night which Samuel must ever have remembered. The service of the sanctuary was over, and both Eli and Samuel had laid down to sleep; the lamp had not yet gone out in the tabernacle, when a voice called Samuel, and he at once arose and ran to Eli, saying, Here I am, for thou didst call me. But Eli said, I called not, lie down again; and Samuel did so, only to hear the call repeated—Samuel, Samuel. Running to Eli, once more he is told he was not called. And as the child knew not the Lord, nor had the word of Jehovah been revealed to him, his only thought was of Eli, and very beautiful it is to see his ready response when for the third time he hears the voice and goes to Eli, saying, “Here I am, for thou didst call me.”

Now at last Eli perceives that the voice of God has again been heard in His tabernacle, and so he tells Samuel this, and also says, “Go, lie down, and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, Jehovah, for thy servant heareth.” Lying down in his place again, Samuel soon hears the voice that had roused him before, and in reply to the call, Samuel, Samuel, he answered, “Speak, for thy servant heareth.” We may wonder why the young boy did not say exactly what Eli had told him, for

he left out the divine name, Jehovah, in his answer, and I think it shows that Samuel was conscious of his own unfitness naturally to appear in the presence of God, and so he does not venture to pronounce that holy name first revealed to Moses at the burning bush in the desert, and ever held in the very deepest reverence by all those Israelites who had remained true to the law of Moses, so that Samuel would have been taught that the name of Jehovah was a sacred word and spoke of belonging to Him as one of His chosen people ; and as yet he knew not the Lord. It is beautiful to see this sense of what was suitable in a young lad, and tells us that he felt the holiness needed by all who approach God, and this was a part of his fitness to receive divine communications.

His words, "Speak, for thy servant heareth," were answered by Jehovah revealing to him the judgment that was about to come upon Eli and his sons—upon Eli "because his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not"; he had honoured his sons more than Jehovah. We are not told of anything else spoken to Samuel at this time, but we can well believe that the young son of Hannah now learnt enough of the grace of God to bind his heart for ever to the Holy One whose voice had called him that night in the tabernacle of Shiloh, where, with the gleaming golden walls around him, and the beautiful tent of blue and purple and scarlet, and fine twined linen over his head, in the hush and

silence of the sanctuary, he first became conscious of what it was to be in the very presence of the great "I am," the Lord God of Israel.

Not till the morning light dawned did Samuel rise from his resting place, dreading probably to tell Eli what had been revealed to him, and not till he had opened the doors, or curtains, of the tabernacle—the house of God—does he go to the priest, and then in response to his call he tells Eli everything of what is to come upon him, bringing out the true submission to the will of God which was really in the heart of the aged man, for he says, "It is Jehovah, let him do what seemeth him good."

This night was the beginning of a new life for Samuel, for Jehovah was now with him and he was being taught of God, trained for his life-work as a prophet who was the one link between Jehovah and His people. As he grew up to manhood it became plain to all around him that he was no ordinary Levite, but one whose heart was given to the Lord, who had marked him out and taken possession of him for His own, and gave him the words he should speak to recall His people to Himself, for none of his words were allowed to fall to the ground or be spoken in vain. It began to be known also that the God of their fathers was again visiting His house and revealing Himself to His young servant, appearing to him at Shiloh; and as in all the tribes of Israel there must have been some who rejoiced at this, though they may have been but few, the glad tidings

of God having raised up a prophet for Himself, passed from one place to another till from the north to the south of all the promised land, "from Dan even to Beersheba," it was known that Samuel was established as a prophet of Jehovah.

For a little time then there was a gleam of brightness in Israel, but soon deeper darkness than ever came upon them, for there was no real repentance in the souls of the people as a nation, and this was clearly proved when they went out in their own strength against their enemies the Philistines. The very fact that Jehovah had appeared again in Shiloh seems to have led them to a false confidence in what *they* were, instead of humbling them in a sense of their sin, and without any reference to His will, or consulting His prophet, they rushed into battle with the enemy and were at once defeated. Even this did not awaken them to see their guilty neglect, and they say, "*Wherefore* hath Jehovah smitten us to-day before the Philistines?" showing that their long course of rebellion had so hardened their consciences that they did not even see their guilt, a terrible state to be in.

You may remember a word of the Apostle Paul, which shows us that you and I to-day may not be outside the danger of being like them, for he tells the Hebrews to take heed "lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. iii. 12, 13). And this is a good word for us to think over.

Jehovah in His law given by Moses had specially told His people that if they were driven back before their enemies, and repented and turned to Him, He would help them ; but this word was rejected, and instead of that they dare to try and use the holy ark of the covenant as a charm to subdue the Philistines, not seeing that it was the presence of God which gave that ark its power and preciousness, and they were still forsaking Him.

So the quiet of Shiloh was broken by the rough entrance of armed men from the camp, and the symbol of the divine glory was rudely taken from the tabernacle of Jehovah and borne by the wicked priests, Hophni and Phinehas, to the battlefield, where they looked their last upon the things of this world, for before the day had passed they were left lifeless by the side of the ark they had borne, and that was captured by the victorious enemy and taken into the house of their idol. How sad this day was to Samuel and Eli—left at the deserted tabernacle at Shiloh—for they both knew that nothing but disaster could result from the daring impiety of Israel.

Old and feeble as Eli was, his anxiety for the ark of God made him too restless to remain quiet, so he goes to the wayside where the road led to the camp, hoping to get the first tidings that came from it, and sitting there he waited—waited, watching—for his heart trembled for the ark. For Eli, too, the last day on earth had come, and in mercy for

him, for how could he live on when through the sin of his own sons they were both slain in one day, and the enemies of God had the very mercy-seat of Jehovah in their possession? So it was that the news of what had taken place was a death-blow to the poor old priest, and sad indeed must it have been for Samuel to find himself left alone in the "tent of the congregation," with all Israel defeated and the ark of God taken. "The glory is departed from Israel," might well be said at this sad time.

Though these sorrowful words were true of the people as a nation, Jehovah was still with those who individually remained faithful to Him, and though we hear no more of Samuel for more than twenty years after the victory of the Philistines, yet he was probably no longer at Shiloh, where he had lived for so long, but where he would feel it was useless for him to remain, for it was vain to seek to carry on the service of the sanctuary when the golden ark of the covenant with the cherubims of glory overshadowing the mercy-seat—symbol of the divine presence which gave that tabernacle all its value—was in the hands of aliens and enemies.

Like a beautiful casket robbed of the priceless jewel it had once enshrined, the empty "tent of the congregation" was no longer the house of God, and Samuel may have gone back to his father's home at Ramah, where still walking before Jehovah he was learning of Him how to act when the day came that called him to the public place of a prophet of God,

and judge of His people. And so he watched and waited and prayed, and we cannot doubt but that he used every influence he possessed to seek to turn the hearts of his people back to the Lord God of their fathers.

Though taken captive, the ark of the covenant was not long allowed to remain in the hands of the Philistines; and even while it was there they were made to feel and own that they were powerless before what was simply the symbol of the Almighty God, the Maker of heaven and earth. Terrified by the power, and smitten by the judgment inflicted upon them they at last carry the ark back to the land of Israel, and there in the house of one of the few faithful ones it remained till the Lord worked in the souls of the people, so that at last "all the house of Israel lamented after Jehovah" (1 Sam. vii. 2).

Thus had twenty years and more passed away before we again read of the son of Hannah being before the nation as the prophet of Jehovah; the one who had grown up in the midst of them, and who had won their respect and confidence by his faithful life of devotion to the will of God, and who was ready at once to take his place with them as soon as there was any sign of repentance. Now that he finds the hearts of the people lamenting after Jehovah, he goes to them and tells them that if they really are turning again to Him, the first thing they have to do is to put away their idols, the

idols of the degraded heathen around them, for till that is done there can be no approach to the holy God of Israel; but that if they cast away these idols, and prepare their hearts to serve Him only, He will deliver them from the Philistines.

Impressed by his words, the people do put away the false gods they had sunk so low as to worship, and not till that was done does the prophet tell them to gather all Israel to Mizpeh, where he would pray for them unto Jehovah. All hangs now upon the prophet; he does not attempt to replace the ark in the deserted tabernacle, nor to resume the service at Shiloh; that link between the God of Abraham and His people has been violently broken by them, and Samuel owns all this, and only seeks to be with them as humbling themselves in confession before Him. On the day appointed the tribes gathered together to Mizpeh, and it is very striking to see the way Samuel takes to lead them to a deeper sense of what they *were*, not only of what they *had done*.

By his directions they draw water and pour it out before the Lord, and the day is one of fasting and of confession, and they own "We have sinned against Jehovah." Why did Samuel lead them to pour out water thus before the Lord; what did the act signify? It involved repentance doubtless, but it seems to be the full and complete owning that they themselves were *nothing*—it was taking their true place of absolute nothingness before God—for what is water spilt on the ground? It is not only useless,

valueless, but it very soon disappears, it sinks into the earth, it becomes nothing. Samuel took this lowly place for the nation, leads them into it, for they had left the only One who had made them of any value, for apart from Him—and they had gone apart from Him—they were verily only like water spilt upon the ground, they were *nothing*.

You and I must learn this too if we want to be with God. We must learn not only that we are sinful and lost, but that even when we have taken that place before God, and know ourselves forgiven and free, yet even then *in ourselves* we are nothing. It is not saying in the lines of a poem :—

“ Oh, to be nothing, nothing ! ”

We *are* that. And the sooner we believe our own nothingness the better it will be for us, for then we find and prove that Christ is the reverse of this ; He is *everything*, and everything for us, so that we need only Himself.

This submission to the mind of God made known through Samuel, put the people of Israel in their true place, even though it was only the prophet who really fully entered into it ; but though as yet Jehovah took no notice, as it were, of their act of public repentance, it was enough to rouse the enemy to hostility. The Philistines who were always on the alert to prevent any return of the Israelites to their dependance upon God, because that meant power over their foes, hear of the gathering of the

whole of the tribes to Mizpeh, and at once the chiefs of their army go up against them in battle array, causing terror and dismay amongst the people. Happily, the fact of their having drawn near to Jehovah, even outwardly, has had an effect upon them for good, so they do not attempt to meet the ranks of armed men as they approach Mizpeh, but they turn to Samuel and say, "Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines."

Never did a real cry from the heart of His people go up to God in vain, when linked with faith in His Son, and this is what we here see in type. The people were not near enough to God to know His mind, but Samuel acts for them, and though before this he had offered no sin offering or trespass-offering, for the tribes were not then owned as His people, now that they were in their true place Samuel takes a lamb, and offers it as a burnt-offering before the God of Israel, and cries to Him for Israel, and is at once heard, for the burnt-offering ever speaks to God of all the infinite perfection and devotedness of His beloved Son. In the fragrance of this God now sees His people, in Him, "accepted in the beloved," *hidden* in all His beauty and excellency; they nothing, but Christ everything, and everything for them in the eyes of God.

In Samuel's act of presenting the burnt-offering, which was wholly for Jehovah, there was that energy of faith to which God ever responds, so that though

the Philistines now made a rapid march upon the assembled tribes, most likely hoping to take them by surprise, they were at once met, not by an armed host, but by thunder from heaven ; for in answer to the prayer of Samuel the God of hosts fought for His people. The Philistines were prepared to meet the Hebrews, as they called them, but were little prepared to encounter the Hebrews' God ; and they fled in such dismay and disorder before the thunder from heaven that the people of Israel had only to pursue a defeated foe and drive them back to their own districts so utterly disheartened that years passed before they again invaded that part of Canaan held by the Israelites.

In this victory Samuel saw once again that Jehovah was only waiting for the least sign of repentance on their part to be gracious to His people. He owns this by setting up a monument of stone at the place where the enemy fled in terror, and he called the name of it Ebenezer, saying "Hitherto hath Jehovah helped u." He wanted this day of special mercy to be kept in the hearts and minds of his brethren, and the great stone was to remind them of it. This was the beginning of a few years of brighter times, for the faith and energy of Samuel were imparted in a measure to some of the people, so that not only were the Philistines subdued, but they had to give back to Israel the cities and lands they had taken from them, and all the days of Samuel they were not allowed to make war upon them, for

Jehovah was against them, these Philistine foes of His people.

Then for a time did the son of Hannah have the joy of going from place to place in the midst of a peaceful nation, going on circuit as a judge amongst them, and teaching them also as only a prophet of Jehovah could, and seeking to turn the hearts of all to the God of their fathers. His home was at Ramah ; Shiloh was deserted, there were no priests there, and we are not told what had become of the tabernacle. It is possible that the loving mother who had lent her son to Jehovah, had the privilege of seeing him thus become the one link, as it were, between Israel and the Holy One who had called him by name on that long remembered night when first the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel, and it was growing up in that knowledge of Jehovah that had made Samuel what he was—a faithful prophet and servant of God.

It is the knowledge of God which gives power to His people now, and the one thing for us all to seek is, "That I may know him." Paul said he counted everything loss for this, "The excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. iii. 8). Some may be tempted to think that this knowledge is too great and wonderful and holy for them ever to reach. There is a word of great beauty and comfort, which puts all in its true place, and tells us how the love of God has given the power to lay hold of this greatest of all blessings and which includes every other. In John's first epistle we read: "The

Son of God is come, and hath *given us an understanding* that we may know him." . . . (1 John v. 20.)
There is a very mine of wealth laid open to us in this precious word.

Well, the years passed on in the life of Samuel, and he grew old. His sons did not follow in the steps of their father, and after he had taken them to help him in his work as judge, they perverted the justice which he had always shown to the people, to the poor as much as to the rich. As long as he had been their only judge Israel had gone on outwardly obedient to his teaching and guidance, but when evil began to appear by his sons taking bribes, and injustice was done to some through this, it roused them to rebellion against the very one whose faith had been the means of restoring the peace they had now enjoyed for some years.

The elders of Israel—the very men who ought to have supported him—come to Samuel and demand a king to be set over them, that they might be like the nations who were around them; thus casting off their peculiar honour of being a holy nation to Jehovah alone, separated from other peoples, instead of being like them.

Grieved and displeased the prophet finds his refuge in Jehovah, and prays, getting thus the divine word of guidance. "Hearken unto the voice of the people. . . . for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that *I* should not reign over them. . . . Hearken unto their

voice and make them a king." They were to be allowed to take their own way, but Samuel was to warn them that their king would make slaves of them and be a source of great trouble. Everything was told them as Jehovah had said, but in vain; they still urged "we will have a king over us."

The immensity of the grace of God comes out in a very wonderful way now, for as the nation are bent upon doing their own will in this He so orders that their king should be one of the choicest among them, and one who at first listened to the voice of the prophet, who though he was himself set aside by the coming of a king, yet as Jehovah's servant he seeks the good of that king in all his intercourse with him, though after all he was *not* the chosen of God, but of the people. All at first seems to go well. Saul is led to the prophet, who tells him of the place he is soon to fill, and anoints him captain over the inheritance of Jehovah. This having been done Samuel once more assembles all the tribes at Mizpeh, and after telling them that they were rejecting their God by determining to have a king, he solemnly cast lots before them to decide the choice. Saul the son of Kish was taken, and then Samuel presents him to the whole assembly, and at the sight of his commanding appearance the people shouted and said "God save the king."

Very soon after this the Ammonites come up against part of the people, and going to their help Saul gains a great victory, and all Israel is gathered together.

Samuel takes this opportunity to call the people to Gilgal; "And there they made Saul king before Jehovah in Gilgal. . . . and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly." We are not told that Samuel rejoiced, nor does it seem likely that he did, for after calling the people to bear witness that he had walked faithfully and blamelessly before them, he speaks to them of their rejection of God, closing by saying, "I will call unto Jehovah and he shall send thunder and rain, that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of Jehovah, in asking you a king."

It was harvest time when they were at Gilgal, and rain and thunder were never heard of at that season of the year in Palestine; so that when the sky became black with clouds, and heavy torrents of rain fell, and thunder pealed loudly over their heads, the people saw in it an expression of the displeasure of Jehovah and feared greatly, crying to Samuel to pray for them, specially for their sin in asking the king. Samuel tells them to fear not, adding, after once more encouraging them to walk in the law of their God, "Fear Jehovah and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king."

Now we must pass over some years during which Samuel appears but seldom before Israel, nor does

he seem to have been with Saul, who soon proved that he was unworthy of his exalted place as king. At last Samuel goes to him with the command from Jehovah, "Go and smite Amalek and utterly destroy all; spare them not, slay both man and woman. . . ox and sheep." Nothing could be plainer than this. Saul and the people went as they were told and smote the Amalekites. "But Saul . . . spared Agag, and the best of the sheep and of the oxen . . . and the lambs . . . and would not utterly destroy them." This act of gross disobedience of the king and people is told to Samuel by the Lord Himself, and greatly it grieved the prophet, for he seems to have had a real affection for the wilful man whom the people had chosen as ruler, and he cried unto the Lord all that night about it.

Early the next day he goes to meet Saul, who at once said to him, in utter disregard of his sin, "Blessed be thou of the Lord. I have performed the commandment of the Lord." The bold audacity of this speech must have been hard for the faithful prophet to hear, and he replies "What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear." Now Saul casts the blame on the people and says *they* have brought them from the Amalekites, and that *they* spared the best of the oxen and sheep to offer in sacrifice to Jehovah. This leads Samuel to repeat to him the command of Jehovah as to the utter destruction not of the Amalekites only, but of all their flocks and

herds and all they possessed, and then he asks the king why he had not obeyed this command.

His reply proves how far he must have gone in evil before being so blinded "by the deceitfulness of sin," for he says to Samuel, "Yea, I *have* obeyed the voice of Jehovah." And as he stubbornly persists in this, and vindicates bringing the oxen and sheep to sacrifice, Samuel tells him that "to obey is better than sacrifice," and warns him that this act of wilful rebellion against the express command of God will be the cause of the kingdom being taken from him and given to another, saying, "Jehovah hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, better than thou."

No real sorrow for his sin was shown by Saul, but only chagrin at not being honoured by the prophet before the people, though he did say "I have sinned," but had there even then been true repentance the prophet would have seen and responded to it. Instead of this Samuel leaves him there surrounded by the spoil of the enemy, and sad at heart the prophet returns to his home at Ramah, and never again does he go to see the man who had thus dared to lead his whole army to disobey the voice of God. Though this day was the last time he ever went to meet Saul, yet Samuel mourned for him, and we are told "Jehovah repented that he had made Saul king over Israel."

We know that the Lord sees and cares for all the

sorrows that His people pass through, and He saw how the heart of His servant was grieved about Saul, so He comes to him in His tender grace, and, tells him that though the wilful king is to be rejected, yet He has Himself chosen one who shall rule over His people, and this time the prophet will see that the choice is in no way dependent upon poor guilty Israel, but God has provided a man after His own heart.

This must have been a comfort to Samuel, for he could but feel the blessedness of being taken into the confidence of Jehovah, as it were, and entrusted with the commission of going to the house of Jesse at Bethlehem to anoint there one of his sons. Reaching the city, he takes some of the elders with him to the house of Jesse, and calls them all, the father and sons, to the sacrifice. And when he sees Eliab, probably the eldest son, he said "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him." But now the prophet is taught that the one thing Jehovah looks at is *the heart*, for He speaks to His servant and says, "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature, because I have refused him. . . man looketh on the outward appearance, but Jehovah looketh on the heart," and we all must learn his.

Seven of the sons of Jesse are now passed before Samuel, and none was chosen, so that he said to the father, Are all thy sons here? And he replied, "There remaineth yet the youngest, and behold he keepeth the sheep." So this youngest son is sent for,

and when he comes Jehovah said, "Arise, anoint him, for this is he." Now he was of a beautiful countenance and goodly to look to. And Samuel took the anointing oil and anointed him king in the midst of his brethren, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day. So Samuel returned to Ramah, comforted by seeing the one who was to be a faithful ruler over the people of God, and less sad than before he came to Jesse and his young son David, the future king, and sweet psalmist of Israel.

Months and years passed on, great events took place in the land where Saul still outwardly ruled, but he began to hate and persecute David who had been brought before him, so that at last the son of Jesse fled from the court and took refuge with the now aged Samuel at Ramah ; and we can but think that though he had to leave everything he loved behind, yet David must have spent some happy times there with the prophet who had been so called and chosen of Jehovah, and who would help the future king of His people to seek to know God more and more.

Even though with Samuel, David was not safe from the envious enmity of Saul, who sent messengers time after time to take him prisoner, but here Jehovah Himself came in and made them powerless to carry out the royal orders. Vexed at being thwarted in his cruel plans the king then dared to go himself, but only to share the same weakness and utter defeat as to his revengeful plans. The Spirit

of God came upon him in such a way that he was forced to utter words of prophesying even against his own convictions ; he was utterly weak in the presence of a power greater far than all other, so that though he ventured into the presence of the prophet of Jehovah it was only to show out his own feebleness and imbecility ; and great must have been the contrast Samuel saw between the king chosen by man, and the one chosen and anointed and fitted by God Himself—God's king rejected and persecuted then, but one day to rule over a happy and prosperous people.

As far as we know this was the last time that Samuel saw either David or Saul. He may have been something like the aged Simeon in a later day, able to say, "Lord now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace. . . for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared" (Luke ii. 29, 30). He knew that David was chosen of Jehovah to save His people from their enemies, and as Simeon rejoiced to see that One who called Himself "the root and the offspring of David" (Rev. xxii. 16), so could Samuel rejoice in the young persecuted king who was to be typical of Him who though also rejected and persecuted and slain, is yet "King of kings, and Lord of lords."

And now the prophet passes away. His work is finished. He has seen and anointed Jehovah's king ; he can do nothing greater or happier than that, so he dies, and is lamented by all Israel, for

though they did not always follow him they must have loved and respected the man who ever sought their good, the son of Hannah, given in answer to her prayer, and who as long as he lived was verily "lent to Jehovah."



THE CEDARS OF LEBANON.

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SCRIPTURE SKETCHES.

DANIEL THE PROPHET.

EXILE AND CAPTIVE IN BABYLON.

“ Daniel went into his house ; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem . . . he prayed.” — *Dan.* vi. 10.

“ His heart turns back to the far-off land,
Where the Jordan river flows ;
Where the cedars wave on Lebanon's height,
The land that Jehovah chose.”

MOST of us know what a strong love of home and country seems implanted in the heart of man generally. With the Swiss, for instance, there is a passionate devotion to their native mountains and valleys ; and we find it in a less degree in nearly every place. With a godly Jew there was far more than the usual natural tie, for Palestine was the country chosen of Jehovah, His land, and therefore it was in very truth the holy land. We can understand the yearning of heart the faithful Jews in exile must have felt at the very name of Jerusalem or Mount Zion, for Jerusalem was the place of God's chief interest on earth, and we read that He loved the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob ; therefore it was a great sorrow to them that it was laid waste, while they were captives in Babylon.

Like Joshua and Caleb in the wilderness, the faithful ones had to suffer for the sins of the nation, though individually they were still true to Jehovah, and He sustained and kept them in faith in Him, and sheltered them too in many ways.

So it was with Daniel and the three who are specially named as his companions. These youths of royal or noble birth, taken from amongst the captives whom the great king of Babylon had carried away from Judæa, were suffering for the national rejection of Jehovah, and the nation was no longer owned by Him. Spite of that, where there was real faith in God and clinging to His word, even in the land of their captivity where it was impossible to fully keep His law, there also did the love and care of Jehovah for these true ones shine out.

In a very marked way do we see this in the story we are now looking at. The great conqueror of the Gentile world had been permitted of God to invade the promised land and take captive whom he chose, and carry them as slaves to Babylon. Not even the fidelity of the pious, godly ones, could save them from this. They shared in the sorrows and judgments of the whole people, and so we find Daniel and his three friends in the Chaldean court, though they themselves were still true to the God of Israel.

The king had specially commanded that from among the royal family of Judah, and from the princes and nobles, certain youths should be taken who from their pleasing appearance, and skill in the

learning and education of that day, as well as a natural fitness for courtly life, should be suited to train up as counsellors of the mighty chief of the kingdom of Chaldea.

How little could he know that there was a hidden power compelling the master of his eunuchs, or chamberlains, to choose those whom God had already set apart for this ; but so it was. All was watched over and ordered by the One who loves His people with a love that never changes nor dies, though He may have to hide it from them if they reject Him, as Israel did.

It must have been the sense of this love that caused Daniel to form the steadfast, settled resolution of being true to Jehovah, though in his day the light as to the love of God for His people, was only as the dim twilight compared to the full blaze of the most brilliant noonday sun, as we know that love now in the unspeakable gift of His own Son, to die for us, the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God.

If any of you have never bowed to the mighty love of a Saviour God, do remember that it is there for you. It is not a question now of whether you are good or bad, but whether you will be subdued by this life-giving love, so as to leave all to trust in Him, to receive Him.

One of the first things Ashpenaz did was to bestow new names upon the four young captives, and Daniel must have been pained to be called by one derived from the name of the chief idol of Babylon,

Bel or Belus, for he was called Belteshazzar. They must have keenly felt it, but they submitted to it in quiet patience, meekly owning the right of the conqueror to bestow new names upon his captives, bowing to the will of God in it.

A kind generous man as long as his imperious will was not opposed, the king had thought even of the daily food of the young exiles of the royal tribe of Judah, so he had commanded that they should share in the delicate meats of his own table, and the wine that he drank, and to refuse this special favour from their royal master would naturally anger him, and place them in peril. To Daniel, to partake of the daily food from the table of an idolater would be to render him defiled or unclean, for the God of Israel had forbidden the use of much that was greatly valued by the Gentiles.

Many of us, had we been in their position, would have felt that it was impossible to carry out the law of the God of Israel in a country where idolatry ruled, and where they themselves were not free to order their daily lives, but were slaves to the king. Faith does not, however, take account of obstacles, so Daniel looked at what was pleasing to God, and determined to seek that, leaving results to Him. He "purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself." How was this purpose to be carried out; how could he venture to disobey the royal command? There is no doubt that he knew the peril the refusal to eat the food provided for them would place him

in, and this test of faith was allowed at the very beginning of their lives in Chaldea to strengthen their faith by the abundant answer given to it of God.

We see in this place how all was being ordered by divine power, for we are told that God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the chief steward or chamberlain set over the Judean captives, and this paved the way for the request now made to him. It needed all Daniel's purpose of heart to persevere in his petition when he found that to change the king's provision for them would not only be at the risk of his own life, but that of Melzar, the steward, also. His quiet trust in God is very beautiful here, for when Melzar tells him in reply to his request to have pulse instead of the royal dainties, that *his* life would also be in danger if the health of the captive youths under his charge should suffer, he replies, "Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat and water to drink. Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenances of the youths that eat . . . of the king's meat: and as thou seest deal with thy servants."

Fearful as Melzar was, his favour for the young earnest Jewish captive prevailed over his fears, and he at last consented to try this proposal. So instead of the tempting food hitherto given, Daniel and his friends eat only the dry and despised pulse or vegetable seeds, the delicious wine of the king's

table is replaced by cold water, and the exiles from Jehovah's land voluntarily enter upon a life of fasting before God, owning that this was their true place before Him.

Most signally is their obedient faith rewarded. At the end of the ten days' trial their faces are fairer and fuller in flesh than all the other captives who had eaten of the king's meat. This was enough, and Melzar willingly consented for them to go on with the pulse as their only nourishment. Daniel probably knew, and had the comfort of it, that Moses had said "Man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of Jehovah doth man live" (Deut. viii. 3).

This was verily proved by Daniel and his friends to be an abiding truth, for the word of God which they had sought to obey had been indeed life to them, and the confidence which they had in Him was proved to all to be well founded. Not only did God give them vigour of body, but he also bestowed upon them such skill and ability in learning that they became men of the greatest wisdom and knowledge. And to Daniel was added also the understanding of visions and dreams.

The three years of their training passed away, and the day came at last when they were to appear before the powerful monarch whose kingdom was the most mighty the world has ever seen, and his city is spoken of by the prophet Isaiah as "Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency."

The discerning eye of Nebuchadnezzar soon saw that our four friends were in advance of all the others who had been trained at the same time. None were like Daniel and the three who were his constant companions, and shared his devotion to the God of Israel. And when the king had communed with them, talking to them in a friendly manner, he chose them to be his own personal advisers and helpers in the vast state business that was necessary in such an immense extent of empire; they stood before the king, and God so enabled them to answer all the monarch's questions, and gave them such wisdom, that he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers throughout his realm.

It was in answer to their faithfulness that this wisdom was bestowed upon them, and reminds us of the words of the Lord Jesus when He was on earth. "If any man serve me, him will my Father honour" (John xii. 26). Daniel and his three companions took a place of entire separation from the idolatrous world all around them, for nothing so separates people living in the same place as refusing to eat of their food. Are we all prepared to take and keep a place of utter separation *to* God, and *from* the world that cast out and crucified His Son? We shall never get wisdom and understanding in divine things unless we are, in some degree, like the young exile in Babylon in his purpose of heart not to defile himself with the delicacies of the idolatrous court he lived in.

If there is one thing more than another that takes away a Christian's real power it is being conformed to this world, reading its books and newspapers, joining in its pleasures and amusements, and being on friendly terms with those who have never owned the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. Paul knew this when he said "Be not conformed to this world"; or, in other words, do not be like the world, do not copy their fashions and ways, let it be plainly seen by all that you belong to One who has so loved you and given you to *know* His love that you are more than satisfied without the best things the world could give you; and the sense of His approval will far more than compensate you for any little self-denial this may cause you. Besides this you will have the blessedness of *pleasing* God. Think of that! It is most wonderful, that down here in this life we may be like Enoch, we may walk with God, and we may please God—give Him pleasure—is not that worth a good deal?

After reading of the favour shown by the king to Daniel and his friends it proves how little that favour could be trusted in, when the next thing we are told of them is, "they sought Daniel and his fellows to be slain." Why was this change? Again we can only own that it was God working on behalf of His own faithful ones. In the second year of the king's reign; that is the second year after he reigned alone in succession to his father—for he was given the royal title and power some years before,

and shared it with his parent—Nebuchadnezzar had a dream which caused him great trouble of spirit, so the astrologers and sorcerers and wise men of Chaldea were called before him to explain it.

Great must have been their consternation when they find that they are not only required to interpret a dream, which they could falsely do, but also to recall to the mind of the king what the dream had been. At once they all feel and are compelled to own that they are utterly powerless here. They say again and again to their royal master “Tell thy servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation”; but when he says the dream has gone from him, and if they will not recall it to him they all shall be put to death, then in great fear, they replied, “There is not a man upon the earth that can show the king’s matter . . . there is none other that can show it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.”

Nothing could be more explicit than this confession of their own inability to do what the king required, and the falseness of their own pretensions as astrologers, who professed to predict and interpret events from the aspects of the stars; and also of the sorcerers or magicians, who were supposed to be able to draw information from the spirits of another world, though trickery was probably their chief support. All failed them now, and the truth of their weakness is exposed before the command to tell what the dream had been.

It would seem as if Daniel and his friends had been overlooked by Nebuchadnezzar when giving his order to call the wise men before him, but not so when his wrathful decree went out that they all should be put to death. Then the captain of the king's guard seeks them amongst the other counsellors of the king, and in answer to Daniel's question as to why the command was so urgent, Arioch, the captain, tells him about the dream and the failure of the astrologers and magicians to recall it to the mind of their royal master. It is very beautiful to see the simple yet strong faith in God which comes out in the way Daniel meets this fresh trial. He does not depend upon the learning or wisdom gained in the colleges of Chaldea, but simply relies upon God to reveal this secret to him, and in the confidence of this—even before praying about it—he says he will show the king the interpretation if time is given him.

When this is granted he goes at once to his three companions. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, and tells them all, and seeks their prayers too, for he values them, knowing that God hears and answers prayer. What a sight it must have been in the eyes of the holy God of Israel, to see these four exiles from the land of promise in the midst of the luxury and wealth of Babylon, yet all separated to Himself and relying only upon Him to save them from the sword of the executioner! Earnest were the prayers that were heard in Daniel's room where the friends

were gathered together; but there was rest too, for he fully trusted in God, and so went quietly on, "taking it for granted that God would be with him. This is faith."

Very quickly was the answer to their prayers given, for in the same night the secret was revealed to Daniel, calling forth a beautiful burst of praise from him, as his first thought was to bless God, so we hear him saying, "Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his . . . he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: he revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness and the light dwelleth with him. I thank thee and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers . . . for thou hast made known unto us the king's matter."

Now Daniel goes at once to the captain of the king's guard and tells him not to destroy the wise men of Babylon, but to obtain for him an immediate audience of the king, as he would give the interpretation of the dream. Very glad, as it appears, to be spared the terrible task of slaying so many for such a cause, Arioch goes in great haste, taking with him the young Jewish captive to the royal presence-chamber, and announcing at once, "I have found a man of the captives of Judah, that will make known unto the king the interpretation."

Taken by surprise, it may be, that such a thing was really possible, and distrustful of his own magicians, as he well might be, the king enquires

“ Art *thou* able to *make known* unto me the dream which I have seen, and the interpretation thereof ? ” Not for one moment does Daniel take to himself the credit of any ability above the other wise men, but while he quietly reminds Nebuchadnezzar of their utter failure, he at once turns to the true source of all wisdom, and tells him that there is a God in heaven who not only revealeth secrets, but who is by this dream showing the king that wonderful history of the kingdoms of the world which began with himself, and goes on to the very end of all when the great Son of David shall be manifested as King of kings and Lord of lords.

He tells the king that in his dream he saw a great image : the head was of fine gold, the breast and arms of silver, while the rest of the body was of brass, and the legs of iron, and the feet a mixture of iron and clay. There was also a stone seen which smote this great image so that it fell and was broken to pieces, and was swept away like chaff, and the stone became so great that the world was filled by it. This was the dream that had passed before him in the night.

Then Daniel tells the king that *he* is the head of gold, for the God of heaven, and not his own power or wisdom, had made him the one great ruler in the world to whom all were subject wherever the children of men dwelt. This vast kingdom would not continue ; little by little its power would decay, and other kingdoms would arise, becoming gradually

inferior till at the last God Himself would set up a Kingly power which should never be destroyed; and this was symbolised by the stone that smote the golden headed image, and by which the earth was filled.

Very wonderful must it have been to that heathen monarch to have the history of the Gentile world right on to the end thus pictured before him, and to be shown by this that the God of heaven took an interest in him, and had sent the dream to reveal to him this interest. And we hardly wonder at the powerful impression made upon him, so that he falls down on his face before the man who is captive to him, but who has proved that he is indeed servant of the One who is the God of gods and Supreme Ruler over the kings of the earth.

Very fully does the monarch own this, and we can but feel that at least a ray of light entered the soul of the imperious Chaldean that day as he exclaimed "Of a truth it is that your God is a God of gods . . . and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret."

Honour and riches were now lavished upon the Judean captive, and power also, for he was made ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over the wise men; and faithfully and heartily would he seek to serve his royal master, but his heart turned to his three friends, and he seems to have felt the need of their help in his administration of the laws of the great province he

was set over. Before long they too were promoted at the request of Daniel to share the work of chief magistrates ; and so the four exiles from the land of Judah were thus filling most important state offices in the very land of their exile, and Daniel himself was one of the king's most honoured councillors, and his post was near the royal presence ; “ Daniel sat in the gate of the king,” that is, the palace.

As long as the four friends were unknown to the idolatrous world around them it was comparatively easy to keep to their path of entire separation from it, but when they were placed in exalted positions as chosen servants of the imperial power it was quite another matter. That they had enemies in Babylon is soon made plain, for to the self-indulgent luxurious citizens of the proudest city in the world, it must have been galling to the extreme that these Jews should refuse all their overtures of friendship, and seem to have no need of their pleasures, or interest in their plans ; but simply sought to do the royal business to the very best of their ability, checking all dishonesty or injustice most rigorously, and never in the smallest way seeking to enrich themselves.

Opportunity to get rid of these troublesome officials was probably eagerly sought, and unhappily the monarch himself soon gave a way for their hatred to show itself. The dream of the golden-headed image most likely made Nebuchadnezzar first think of making the immense statue that he

had set up in the plain of Dura, and his sagacity as a ruler of many nations made him desirous of uniting all his subjects in one common worship. To his heathen mind the false gods of Babylon were very little, if anything, greater than the lifeless image of gold made by the skilful goldsmiths of his city as a master-piece of art, and though he had been compelled to own the supreme power of the God of Daniel it had made no lasting impression upon him ; he was still ignorant of the only living God, still filled with the sense of his own glory and power, and forgetting that it was all bestowed upon him by God.

So the huge image of gold, at least ninety feet high, and supposed by some to represent the king, was set up in the level plains of Dura where the glittering form would be visible for miles around as it towered high into the clear air tall as a church steeple. Some time before, the command or royal invitation had been sent out to the furthest parts of his vast kingdom, so as to give the needful time for the journey of the princes and nobles from the various countries, and the day at last came when the special ceremony of the dedication of the golden image was to take place.

The fact that all the people of Babylon as well as the foreign guests were to be present would make the day a public holiday, and the usual state offices would be closed for the occasion so that none might be kept away. This at once made the absence of the three Jewish captives very noticeable, and their

enemies quickly take advantage of it. Surrounded by all the gorgeous grandeur of his kingdom, and by the many thousands of his subjects, with the princes and nobles in a glittering circle around him, Nebuchadnezzar was little prepared to have his absolute control over them all quietly set aside and denied by three of his own servants.

Yet this was done by our three friends at the time when the imperial herald proclaimed that the first strains of the massed bands of music were to be the signal for that immense concourse of people of all nations and languages to fall down and worship the lifeless image of gold; and whosoever did not fall down would be cast at once into a fiery furnace which had been prepared.

Now the enmity of some of the Chaldeans comes out, as they approach the king and tell him that there are certain Jews who disobey the decree and fall not down nor worship. At once all the fiery pride of their master is aroused, and they are ordered to appear before him. It would seem as if at first the sight of these friends of Daniel made the king wish not to destroy them, for he deigns to reason with them for a few moments, but their steadfast refusal to bow to the idol angers him still more, as they reply "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king." "But if not"—what then? Will the fear of the awful torture of the fire prevail over their devotion

to the Lord God of Israel? Listen to the calm dignity of their words: "But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." What, at that moment, was all the magnificence of Babylon worth to its monarch? The golden image was forgotten in the overwhelming interest of this contest between the mighty ruler of the world and his three poor Jewish captives, before whom he was powerless, and proved his weakness by the rage that uttered vain threats and even distorted his countenance.

Worst of all was it to be so defied in the presence of the august assemblage of princes and nobles from the countries subject to him, whom he probably hoped to over-awe with the sight of all the greatness of his majesty. So the fiery furnace is heated seven times more than usual, and slays even the mightiest men of his army by its intensity as they cast the three captives into it. And then all was over as most of those present, who could not see the furnace, would think.

Was all over then; had death put an end to the sufferings of the Jews? No, the king himself now calls the attention of all around him, as he exclaims "Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." No wonder that they were loosed from their bonds;

no wonder that fire and death had no power over them, for they were preserved by the power of God, there present with them!

Does it not remind us of the words of the Lord by his servant Isaiah: "Fear not . . . I will be with thee: . . . when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." On the plain of Dura that day, in the sight of all the great ones of the earth, this promise of Jehovah, the only true God, had been literally fulfilled.

Nebuchadnezzar had dared to say to his faithful Jewish captives "Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?" It was then no longer a question between himself and the three companions, but between the living God and a mere man who only existed at His will and held his kingly estate from Him.

His question was answered in a way that proved to all there the Almighty power of Jehovah; and now the king—his rage all gone—subdued and humbled—confesses this before all the great multitude around him. Going to the mouth of the fiery furnace in which the friends were walking, and which must have been the most blessed moment of their lives on earth, Nebuchadnezzar calls them by the names he had himself given them, and says "Ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither."

Still obedient to him, spite of his cruelty, they at once obey and go to him, and then it is found that

not only are they unhurt by the fire, but that it has had no power to singe even a hair of their heads or a thread of their light flowing garments. Unscathed they stand before all as witnesses of the Almighty power of the One whom they served, and who had come down and walked in the fiery furnace with them.

What a revolution has been wrought in the mind of the Chaldean despot! Instead of his Jewish captives bowing down to the image of gold, we really see him bowing before the God he had been reckless enough to defy, for now we hear him saying before the assembled princes and nobles, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies that they might not serve nor worship any God except their own God."

Then to fully show his entire change of mind, he issues a decree that forbids any of his subjects to speak against the God of the Jews, and secures their safety from all envious enemies for as long as he lived. After this the three friends are promoted to still more exalted positions in the royal service, where we can be sure they still maintained their fidelity to the God who had so tenderly sustained and comforted them in their time of trouble. And all who trust in Him have the same resource to-day, for "Jesus Christ is the same"—"yesterday" on the plain of Dura, or "to-day" in which we live, and He will be the same "for ever."

Some of us may wonder why Daniel is not named in the story of the image of gold, and we know at least that he was not one of those who bowed down to it. His nearness to the king and the special favour shown to him may have made the foes afraid to venture on accusing him, but why it was he should be entirely un-noticed we do not know.

Years passed on, and Daniel was no longer young when once more he was called to interpret a dream that God in His long-suffering grace had sent to give the proud and wilful king a final warning. From the king's own words we can hardly fail to see that though he had outwardly owned the wisdom and power of God, been convinced of it in his mind at the moment, yet his heart was unchanged, he still gloried in his own might and magnificence, and used them to exalt himself. It is most beautiful and encouraging to see how, spite of all this, the goodness of God waited to bring this heathen monarch to a knowledge of Himself that should really humble all his pride and bow his heart before Him.

Nebuchadnezzar tells us that he was at rest in his house and flourishing in his palace—self-satisfied—when a dream that made him afraid came to him. None of the wise men were able to interpret this dream, but at last Daniel was sent for, and with confidence in his power to explain it his master relates it to him. He had seen a great and beautiful tree, reaching throughout the earth and being shelter and food for all, but this was to be hewn down and

only the stump left in the grass of the field. Then he adds: "All the wise men . . . are not able to make known unto me the interpretation, but thou art able."

Much more detail did the king relate to Daniel, who heard it with astonishment and sorrow, so that for a whole hour he was unable to speak to him. Seeing this Nebuchadnezzar seeks to re-assure him, and says "Belteshazzar, let not the dream nor the interpretation thereof, trouble thee." Then he replies, "My lord, the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies," for Daniel was not amongst them, but "the secret of the Lord" was known to him, and it was real pain to tell the one before him what was coming upon him, even though the end would result in blessing.

Not seeking to hide from the king the pain it caused him, Daniel now said, "The tree that thou sawest, which grew and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth; whose leaves were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all: . . . it is thou, O king, that art grown and become strong: for thy greatness is grown and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth." Then he goes on to tell the king that as the stump of the tree was to be left in the earth, and wet with the dew of heaven . . . and his portion with the beasts of the field; the interpretation was this. "This is the decree of the most High, which is come upon my

lord the king; that they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen . . . till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men and giveth it to whomsoever he will."

We can imagine the sorrow it was to Daniel to have thus to speak, yet he would hope that the warning might not be in vain, and so he says "Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity."

Well had it been for his listener had he heeded these words of counsel, but strong in the sense of his own greatness they were un-regarded, and so the inevitable end came. At the end of twelve months the king was walking in the magnificent palace he had built, where he saw the vast city and river spread out before him in all its grandeur, and attributing it to himself he said, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?"

"While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee." . . . That same hour he was driven from his palace and people, and he became as a beast of the field, and his body was wet with the dew of

heaven till seven years had passed away—the time foretold by the prophet Daniel. Then God came to him in delivering power, and his reason was restored to him, and better than all he was given to see and own from his heart his own sense of what Divine power had done.

Let us hear his words, for now they do not tell of his wisdom, nor are they occupied with decrees for others, but he says, “ I thought it good to show the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me. How great are his signs! and how mighty are his wonders! ” Then he goes on to relate the dream, and the fulfilment of it also, and ends with “ And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, . . . and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me. Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment; and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.”

Such were the last recorded words of the king who had been so highly exalted, and so terribly debased ; but who had been brought by it to at least know something of the living God, and to praise and honour Him the few years he lived after he was restored to reason. That Daniel was trusted and honoured to the close of his reign seems certain, but we are not told anything more of the king whom he had faithfully served for about forty years.

Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded by his son, and after his death, Belshazzar, a grandson of the great monarch was reigning while quite a lad in conjunction with his father. This young prince knew nothing of Daniel, and spent his time in folly and wickedness, spite of the city of Babylon being besieged by the Persian Cyrus, with his army, for the whole of the last two years of his life.

“ Great Babylon ” was probably the only city that could have dared to give itself up to festivity when in a state of siege, yet this was possible from its immense strength and size. The city was built in a perfect square, each side measuring fourteen miles, and was surrounded by an outer wall so high that the tallest buildings were sheltered by it, and so broad that several chariots could drive abreast on the top of it. The wonderful fertility of the soil in its fields and orchards produced food enough for the people, and herds and flocks fed in its meadows—all inside the city wall—while the broad deep river Euphrates was an inexhaustible supply of water.

So it came to pass that at the very time when we read "Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords," on that same night Cyrus had completed the wonderful work of turning the waters of the Euphrates into the bed of a lake outside the walls, so as to take his army into the city through the dried channel, and he chose the night of this great festival when the people were given up to their mad pleasures.

In his impious daring Belshazzar ordered the golden and silver vessels from the temple at Jerusalem, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried to Babylon, to be brought before him that he and his guests might drink from them in honour of their idols. Never in his most reckless moments had his grandfather ever been guilty of such terrible profanity. Even before the bright close of his life when throughout all his wide kingdom he had confessed his own sin and the glory of the King of heaven, he had owned Daniel's God to be a God of gods, and Lord of kings; and he had bowed before the Most High who had delivered his captives from the fiery furnace, so that Belshazzar might well have trembled to commit such a crime as this against the living God.

But the judgment was instant and final. That same hour the fingers of a hand wrote words on the wall of the palace, and the king saw them being written. Well might he be seized with death-like terror, and tremble before this vision, for he must have known then that there was a power before whom

he was stricken down. The words were Chaldean, but none of his wise men could tell him what they meant, and all is consternation in that gorgeous palace hall.

Hearing of the alarm of the king and his guests, the queen-mother now comes in and tells her son that there is one man who can solve the difficulty, and she reminds him how Nebuchadnezzar his grandfather had honoured him, and tells him to have Daniel called. This was done, and the now aged prophet appears before the glittering throng. As a perfect stranger the king speaks to him, and tells him of the great rewards he will bestow if this mystic writing is revealed, but only to hear the scathing reply, "Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another."

Not from such a man would Daniel accept gifts or honour, but he would read the writing, when he had spoken a few heart-searching words of rebuke at the contempt of Belshazzar for the One before whom even Nebuchadnezzar had been so utterly humbled. He tells him that the hand was sent from the God of heaven as a warning to show him that his kingdom was finished, he himself weighed in the balances and found wanting, and his kingdom given to the Medes and Persians. Still keeping up a show of royal state the king commands that Daniel shall be proclaimed third ruler of the kingdom ; that is, next to himself and his father, and that state garments shall be put upon him.

A few hours later and the Persian army is pouring into the city like an overwhelming torrent; nothing can stand before them. The royal palace is taken, Belshazzar is slain, and Babylon the proud is captive at the feet of the conqueror, never again to rise to its imperial Chaldean power. And thus the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled (Ch. xlv. 1, 2, 3), and Cyrus places Darius the Median, his ally and friend, on the throne of the kingdom of Babylon.

Daniel doubtless knew well how Cyrus had been specially ordained of God as His instrument for the liberation of the Jews from their captivity, and deep must have been his interest in all that now took place. His exalted position under Nebuchadnezzar must have been known to both Cyrus and Darius, and recognising his unswerving fidelity Darius now raises him to the highest post in the government of the conquered kingdom. This arouses the jealousy of those princes and nobles of the realm who are below him in office, and by a crafty device they induce the king to sign a decree that no one shall pray to any God or man for thirty days, save to Darius himself.

Knowing nothing of the value of prayer to the living God, and blinded by the specious flattery, the king falls into the snare little thinking of the trouble he was bringing upon himself. The princes and presidents had sought in vain to find any fault in Daniel concerning the kingdom, but they knew of his fidelity to the God of Israel, and evidently knew

also of his daily habit of praying towards Jerusalem, and they see in this an opportunity of getting rid of him.

How little they understood either Daniel or the God of Daniel! They assemble together after the decree is signed and find the prophet on his knees before his God, for though he was fully aware of what was passing it made no difference in his life. So when he knew the king's decree was signed, and had become law, he went to his room as usual and with his windows open towards the beloved city of Jerusalem, he knelt down and prayed three times a day as before. The steadfast "purpose of heart" with which Daniel began his life in Babylon some fifty years or more previous to this day, was unchanged, and unchanged also his prayerful dependence upon God, and this was the secret of his power, and may be *ours* also.

Great was the sorrow of Darius when the princes go to him and accuse his trusted servant of praying to God, saying "Hast thou not signed a decree: that every man that shall ask a petition of any God or man within thirty days, save of thee, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?" Then they tell him that Daniel has not regarded the decree but makes his petition three times a day as before.

Now the poor king sees the snare into which he has fallen. We can see that it was a terrible thing to allow himself to be put into a place which belonged to the living God only, but it was really the act of

the princes, and when he realises what he has done, we are told "he was sore displeased with *himself*." When we do wrong we are often inclined to try and cast the blame upon someone else, and we get angry with others. Darius may well be an example to us, for he was sore displeased with the right person—himself—and set his whole heart on saving Daniel. King though he was, he has to learn that his folly has led him into a path where he can do nothing to escape the consequences of it.

The law of the Medes and Persians was irrevocable, and Darius had to give up the man whom he trusted and respected to the hands of his enemies. Daniel is brought and cast into the den of lions, but not till the king has said to him, "Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee." There was very feeble faith in his own words possibly. Yet there may have been hope, and the royal Median felt that *his* place was one of repentance for his guilt in giving up the innocent to be condemned; so he goes to the palace and passes the night in watching and fasting. Long before the usual hour for rising in the morning the anxious king was at the mouth of the den of lions, and with only a faint hope it may be he calls to Daniel saying, "Servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?"

Great must have been his relief and thankfulness to hear the voice that now replied from the depths of that horrible den, "O king, live for ever. My

God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me : forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me ; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt." Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and very soon his faithful counsellor was drawn up out of the den, perfectly safe and unharmed. And we can imagine how joyfully he was received by Darius who had felt his own folly so deeply in placing Daniel in such danger.

His accusers are now cast into the very place to which their hatred had consigned the innocent, but no power is there to save them. Belus and Nebo, their idol gods, are all powerless to preserve them, and they die the death they had meant for Daniel. Now the monarch sends out a decree calling upon all his subjects to acknowledge the power of the living God, and to fear Him, the Almighty One who had delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.

Though Darius was many years younger than the Jewish exile, he did not live long after his accession to the kingly throne of Babylon, and at his death Cyrus became sole monarch of the Medo-Persian empire. By him also the aged prophet was most kindly treated, and he had the joy of knowing that his Jewish brethren were set free from their seventy years captivity, and allowed to return to Jerusalem.

Too aged to go the long and toilsome journey himself Daniel was doubtless of the greatest assistance to those Jews who did go, and it must have been

with a deepening sense of the faithfulness of God that he heard the reports of the returned captives, once again in their own land, Jehovah's land.

Many and wonderful were the visions seen by him, and his prophecies are of the deepest interest; but it is striking to see how in his prayers he takes the place of his nation and confesses their sins as his own, though he himself was holy and separated to God. May his meek and lowly spirit be ours too, while ever seeking to follow his purpose of heart and prayerfulness. We see from the whole history how highly God values such faith, and it is very beautiful to read in the latter part of it, when speaking to the angel messengers from heaven, that three times over he is called "a man greatly beloved." And also he is told "from the first day that thou did set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard."

Though the answer was delayed it was not because his prayer was disregarded—it had been heard from the very first—for he was "greatly beloved." Yet Daniel could not then know what all God's redeemed ones may know to-day, for not then had the marvellous tale been told of that great love that was stronger than death which has been so fully shown out now in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, God's beloved Son, so that every one of those who have put their trust in Him may now be able to take up the precious words of the Apostle Paul and say, "Who loved me, and gave himself for me."

How long Daniel lived after the Persian king, Cyrus, took the kingdom we are not told, but we can well believe that his faith burned brighter and brighter as he neared the end, for it was sustained and cheered by God Himself, the One whose tender care had so unweariedly watched over the long and faithful career of His prophet—the “man greatly beloved.”

“My Lord—let the bands of that infinite love
That went into death for me,
Entwine round my heart from Thyself above
Till I'm there Lord, for ever with thee.
Let that deathless love be my life's bright light
Till thou takest me out of this world's dark night.”



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QUEEN ESTHER, AND MORDECAI.

“The man whom the king delighteth to honour.”

Esther vi. 6.

WHEN looking at the various scenes in the life of the prophet Daniel and of his three companions, which are so vividly portrayed in the scripture history, we can hardly help seeing how manifestly God intervened in their behalf, so that even the powerful king of the realm of Babylon was compelled publicly to own the supreme rule of the God of heaven. It was then the beginning of the seventy years of captivity which had been permitted to come upon the guilty nation of Israel, because of their rejection of Jehovah, and while disowning them as a people, God still showed His gracious pity and love for those among them who were individually faithful to Him.

In the story of Mordecai and Esther all is changed. The long exile of the nation as ordered of Jehovah had come to an end. The decree of Cyrus, the Persian king had been carried out, and those Jews who still loved Jerusalem as the city of the great King, and thought of the promised land as Jehovah's land, had returned there spite of all the many difficulties they had to encounter in doing so.

There still remained a large number of the people of Israel in the countries through which they had been dispersed, especially in the kingdom of Persia, where they had been very kindly treated, and in many cases they had settled down there and become as citizens of the place. Both Mordecai and Esther had probably been born in Persia, and though secretly cherishing the fact of their being descendants of the people whom Jehovah of Israel had led in triumph out of Egypt and across the Red Sea, they appear not to have made it publicly known. Though this was so, yet we see from the events that followed that there was faith in the God of their fathers, and we see His care for His people though only in a hidden or providential way.

Mordecai, who was older probably than his fair young cousin, had brought her up as his own daughter, and appears to have loved her as a father, while in return she gave the willing obedience as of an affectionate child to a parent, so that to be separated—even though it was for Esther to become the wife of the monarch of the wide Persian empire—must have been a great sorrow to both. Mordecai does not seem to have had any relatives in Shushan, and Esther had neither father nor mother, so their quiet happy home was entirely broken up, when Esther—or to call her by her Jewish name, Hadassah—was taken from it. Her Persian name of Esther—a star—was given her probably because of her

great beauty, and she is always called by it in the story of her life in scripture.

We see a little of the beautiful character of Esther in the fact that "she did the commandment of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up with him," and this after she had been crowned as queen. It had been his wish that she should not tell those by whom she was surrounded that she was of Jewish birth, and so carefully did she obey this charge that not even her royal husband appears to have known it. We see, I think, from this that Esther must have been trained up in the knowledge of the law of Jehovah, who had said, "Honour thy father and thy mother," for she honoured Mordecai as though he were her father, not only when she was as his own daughter in his house, but also when she became queen, and had a good deal of power in her hands.

The Apostle Paul reminds young people of this command of God and binds it still upon them, as it were, telling the children not only to obey their parents, but also to honour them, which as you all know is a further thing, and as long as any of you have parents—not simply while you are young—you are to *honour* them. God looks for this, and the neglect of it may cause bitter sorrow at last.

What place Mordecai held in the royal household we are not told, but he is said to have "sat in the king's gate," and as this was generally only possible for those in some high position he must have been

in a place of trust ; for by some means he found that two of the palace officials were plotting against the life of Ahasuerus the king, and making this known to the queen she was enabled to warn him, and thus the plot was discovered and the life of her husband saved. Though no notice was then taken of the service rendered by Mordecai, the whole account of what he had done and of the conspiracy for killing the king was all written down and the record of it put amongst the state chronicles, and very valuable they proved to be, when later on God used them in a wonderful way.

In all ages probably the monarchs of such kingdoms as Persia have had favourites amongst their princes whom they have raised to great power and dignity, and who were often dreaded and disliked by those beneath them from the tyrannical way in which they used their transient power. At the time when Mordecai was in the palace—or king's gate—the chief favourite of the luxurious Persian monarch was Haman an Amalekite, or Agagite, a descendant of that Amalek who first of all the nations dared to attack the people of the God of Israel in the wilderness—dared first to defy Jehovah. This was never to be forgotten, and in his farewell words to his people Moses tells them what they are to do when they reach and have possession of Canaan, they were to blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven, Deut. xxv. 17, and till that was done there was to be “war with Amalek from generation to generation.”

By some means Haman, the descendant of this foe of Israel, had contrived to ingratiate himself with the pleasure-loving Persian king, who raised him to the highest dignity, and commanded that royal honours should be paid to him, he was to be saluted with reverence by all the servants of the palace. Now what was Mordecai to do? Did the fact that he was one of those of whom Jehovah had said "Lo ammi—not my people," absolve him from obedience to the word of God given by His servant Moses? Not for a moment did he think of this. He would rather lose his life than bow to an Amalekite, and this tells us of the faith in the one living God, the God of Israel, that dwelt in the heart of Mordecai and compelled him to risk even life itself rather than disobey the command of Moses by paying homage to Haman.

It was impossible but that this refusal to bow down to the favourite of the king should be noticed, and he was soon asked the reason of it by the officials who were with him in the palace. To explain why he did not do so Mordecai tells them that he is a Jew, and only obeying the law of Jehovah. And as in no country in the world were his people more kindly treated than in Persia, it was evidently not from ill will to him because of his nationality, that they tell Haman of his persistent refusal to carry out the royal order.

All the inveterate hatred of his race for Jehovah's people seems to have been aroused in the Amalekite

when he heard this, but with merciless revenge he determines to wait till he can form a plan for destroying not only Mordecai but all the Jews throughout the immense realm of Persia. Haman little knew that though the Israelites had been cast off for a time, the unchanging God of Israel was watching over them, and that in seeking to destroy them he was challenging the Almighty power before which he was utterly impotent. That His chosen people were scattered over the whole earth was the fulfilment of His word ; as to this day the prophecy of Amos is still being carried out. When we read "I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth" (Amos ix. 9) we can see in this, a faithful picture of the way in which even now the Jewish race is dispersed in every quarter of the globe. Still, not the least amongst them is now overlooked, nor were they less cared for in the days of Haman.

All great events in the court of Persia were decided by lot, so before divulging his cruel plot, the crafty Amalekite has the officials whose business it was to carry out this work, brought before him to cast lots as to when the destruction of the hated Jews was to take place. Long years before, a Jewish monarch had written, "The lot is cast into the lap : but the whole disposing thereof is of Jehovah" (Prov. xvi. 33). So though Haman had lots cast before him in the very first month of the year, the Divine power

which ordered it so ordained that the date fixed was on the *last* month of the year, so that his horrible designs could not be carried out for at least eleven months. In his blind hatred however, he determines to get the consent of the king at once, and waiting only for a moment when Ahasuerus could be easily influenced, the heartless plotter tells him there are certain people scattered throughout his realm who do not obey his laws and are a source of trouble, and if the king will decree that they shall be destroyed he will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the royal exchequer to defray the expenses of so doing.

Never once does Haman tell the king that the Jews are the people whom he is bent upon exterminating, for weak and cruel as the monarch was, he would probably have seen at once that such a reversal of the whole policy of Persia's treatment of the Jewish nation would be at least unwise and hazardous. The special favour shown them by Cyrus was still fresh in the mind of the nation, and the faithful service of Daniel to Darius could not be forgotten, so that Haman was compelled to hide from his royal master the nationality of these rebel strangers as he pictured them. Bearing sway as he did over such an immense tract of country as from India to Ethiopia, comprising over a hundred provinces, with many different languages, it was little wonder that the king should grant the wish of the man he probably trusted as a faithful and clever counsellor, especially when we remember that the name and

number of this people were carefully hidden from him.

Great was the exultation of the Amalekite, when Ahasuerus took off his royal signet ring with which all the royal decrees were sealed, and gave it to him, saying, "The silver is given unto thee, the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee." Not a moment does Haman lose. The royal secretaries are sent for, and the decree which he had probably prepared beforehand given to them to copy out in the name of the king, and sealed with the imperial signet, ordering the destruction of the whole of the Jewish race in every part of the realm of Persia, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month of that year. This decree was to be at once published in the city of Shushan, and sent out to the farthest parts of the kingdom as speedily as possible, and then with savage cruelty Haman could sit down to drink with the king, whom he had entrapped into committing a terrible crime as he thought, but which a power higher than all would frustrate. No wonder that the city Shushan—the lily city—"was perplexed."

Nor do we wonder that when Mordecai heard of the terrible revenge that Haman had taken, he put on sackcloth and ashes and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and bitter cry, going even before the front of the palace, though he could not enter there in this garb of deepest sorrow, for that was forbidden.

While all this was taking place in the court and

city, the queen in the seclusion of the royal apartments was ignorant of it all. Greatly beloved as she was by her royal husband, she had so treated all those around her that we are told she found favour in the sight of all who looked upon her, and this could only be from her gentle unselfish life, and also her wisdom which was so shown out when the hour of peril came, and her first thought was to supplicate that God who though He had veiled Himself from them was yet accessible to the feeblest believing heart among His people.

The attendants and maids of the young queen soon heard the sad story that had caused Mordecai to utter such a loud and bitter cry of anguish, and before long they tell her of it, little knowing when they did so that their royal mistress was one of the proscribed race. Exceedingly grieved and in anguish of spirit at what she heard, the queen seeks to get her cousin to put off the sackcloth and ashes, and sends her servants with other raiment for him to put on, but in vain. How could he do anything else than appear in the deepest garb of mourning while such a fate hung over the whole nation of his people? Finding these efforts to comfort Mordecai were useless, Esther now sends a confidential chamberlain of the king's whom he had specially appointed to attend upon her, to enquire the cause of the calamity that had fallen upon them.

Now Mordecai tells Hatach the whole story of the merciless revenge Haman is taking, and gives

him a copy of the royal decree that has been issued, and also commands him to charge the queen that she shall go to the king and supplicate him for her nation. To most wives this would have been easy enough, but in the royal court of Persia no one—not even the nearest relative—was allowed to go into the presence of the monarch unbidden, on pain of death, excepting seven princes chosen specially by the king and given this peculiar place of honour as the royal counsellors. After listening to the sorrowful story Hatach has to tell her, Esther sends him once more to Mordecai to remind him that whoever enters into the inner court of the palace—the presence of the king—uncalled for, would be put to death, unless the king should hold out the golden sceptre to them in token of pardon for their intrusion into the forbidden precincts.

Strong and true as was his fatherly love for his adopted daughter, the thought of the terrible danger of the whole Jewish race triumphed over all personal feelings, so he replies to Esther, “Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king’s house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed; and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this.”

Esther hesitates no longer. She will do as Mordecai desires, but not till all the Jews in Shushan

have sought the God of Israel by humbling themselves before Him in three days of fasting, for this is what her answer implies, as she sends her last message to Mordecai to say that she and her maidens will fast for that time, and Mordecai is to gather all his people together that are in the city to fast also, and then at the end of the time she will go in to the king, adding, "and if I perish, I perish."

Who can doubt that they not only fasted but prayed also to God, who though they knew He had cast them off because of their unbelief, they had yet some faith in, feeble though it might be. The very magnitude of the peril would recall to their hearts and minds the memory of the Infinite power that had been displayed many a time on their behalf, and the devotion of the young queen in thus risking her own life for the Jews would touch every heart, so that many and earnest would be the pleadings for her, as well as for themselves.

The third day dawns, and when the king has taken his place upon the throne in that magnificent hall of the palace where the many beautiful marble columns each sprang from an exquisitely sculptured lily, to remind all beholders that they were in the lily city—the name Susiania, or Shushan meaning lily—then at last the fair young queen in the royal robes that the king had been pleased for her to assume, timidly enters that hall where the fate of thousands will be decided by the reception she should meet with.

Capricious and cruel as he was, Ahasuerus was at once touched and pleased by Esther's appearance there, and his affection for her made him overlook, if he were not even gratified by, her disregard of the usual law, for he immediately holds out to her the golden sceptre in token of his approval, and when she approaches him and touches the outstretched sceptre, he speaks to her in a way that removes any fear she may have had—must have had—one would feel, save for her faith in Jehovah. "What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom," are the first words she hears, and then she knows that she is safe, she will not perish.

Her reply seems a strange one at first sight, for she says "If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him." but we can see after the wisdom of what she had done. Pleasure loving and fond of novelty as he was, the king was probably deeply gratified that his beautiful young queen should take the trouble to provide a banquet for him, so he at once grants her request as to this, and with Haman is soon in the banqueting hall, where all is ready for them, and where they are received by Esther.

Accustomed to read faces, Ahasuerus sees there is something Esther desires, but hesitates to ask for, and again he says, "What is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee; and what is thy request?"

even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed.” Still not a word does his queen say of what is so upon her heart, and we see how wonderfully she was guided as to this, for much was to take place—ordered most unmistakably by Divine power—before she could utter her real request. So she asks that again the king and Haman will go to-morrow to another banquet, and then she will make known her petition.

And now we see how wonderfully the God of Israel came in to the help of His people, and we do well to let the thought of it sink deep into our hearts for it tells us that spite of all the sin and failure of His own, the grace and tender pity of Jehovah never ceased to care for them as long as there was any turning of heart to Him; for He is the unchanging One, “The Same” for His people to-day as He was then. Some of you may feel that things are not with you now as they were when you first knew the joy of being saved and belonging to Christ. Little by little the joy has dimmed, the things of the world are more to you than they were. old tastes have revived, and you have yielded to them; and prayer and the study of the scriptures are often wearisome to you instead of being delightful though at the bottom of your heart you long for the happiness you once enjoyed.

Now this history of Esther and Mordecai may well be an encouragement to you to seek afresh the face of God. Do not keep away from Him, have

confidence in His love for you, that cannot manifest itself to you as it did when you sought Him only, but which is still the same, and is, even it may be, by these words, calling you back to Himself.

On the night after the first time that the king had gone to Esther's banquet, he could not sleep. He was not allowed to sleep, we may say, for it was needful that Mordecai should be made known to him as one who had rendered him a very great service—had probably saved his life—and this was to be brought to pass even before he saw Esther again, so sleep fled from his eyes that night, and at last, to wile away the long hours as he may have thought, but really to carry out the work that God intended, he orders the state records to be brought and read before him.

There were many other pages that might have been chosen by the secretary whose duty it was to thus read to his royal master, and at least four years had passed since Mordecai had discovered the plot against the king's life and had told Esther of it, yet the reader was guided by an Almighty invisible hand to that one part of the chronicles where all that his Jewish servant had done for him was related. For the first time, apparently, Ahasuerus hears the name of Mordecai, and sees the greatness of the service rendered by him. He then enquires what honour or dignity had been conferred upon him, and finds that nothing had been done, and this he sees speaks of great neglect if not injustice, and he determines to do all he can to remedy it.

When Haman had left the presence of the king and queen to go to his own home the day before, he was greatly elated at the unusual favour shown to him, but having to pass Mordecai as he left the palace, who as usual neither bowed nor did reverence to him, he was full of indignation, and longed to get rid of the man who was so hateful to him. When he reaches his house he gathers his friends together and tells them of all the dignities that have been conferred upon him by Ahasuerus, of his having been the only guest invited to the royal banquet, and of his second invitation; of his riches also he tells them and of his family, but ends by saying that all this greatness was as nothing to him as long as he saw Mordecai the Jew sitting in the gate of the king.

His wife and friends then advise him to have a gallows made of fifty cubits high, and on the morrow to go to the king and get his permission to hang Mordecai thereon, feeling that his place in the royal favour was so assured that nothing would be refused him. This cruel advice was very pleasing to Haman, and on that same night workmen were sent for and the gallows made. Little did he think when carrying these merciless plans into execution through the hours of that night, that in the palace itself there was a silent but irresistible power working that would utterly defeat them all.

Still bent upon getting rid of the man who refused to bow before him, the favourite prince was early

in attendance at the court, though could he have known what was passing in the mind of Ahasuerus it would have been the last place he would have gone to. The service rendered by Mordecai and the neglect to reward him, was the one thing that still occupied the mind of the king, and speaking to his servants he asks who is in attendance in the court. Being told that Haman stands there, he says, "Let him come in," and the first words that the Amalekite hears as he enters are, "What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour?"

Blinded by vanity and selfishness, Haman thought to himself, to whom would more honour be shown than to me? So he answers according to his own desire of being publicly exhibited as the chief prince of the Persian court, and replies to the monarch, "For the man whom the king delighteth to honour, let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head: and let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour."

What a terrible revulsion of feeling must have swept over Haman as he heard the next words

from the lips of his royal master! "Make haste, take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate; let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken".

No explanation is given him of the reason of this, and speechless with consternation, not daring to say a word against it, Haman is compelled to obey the command of Ahasuerus in all its exactness, and instead of leading the hated Jew to execution on the gallows he had prepared for him, he is forced to proclaim before all the surprised citizens, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour, and this man is Mordecai, whom he brings again to the palace, and leaving him there in triumph a triumph unsought by him, Haman hastens to hide himself in his own house from the shame and dishonour he accounts to have come upon him.

With his head covered in token of mourning, he returns to his wife and friends, and instead of bringing back the news they hoped for, he tells them of all that had befallen him, only to hear them say that he will surely fall before the power of Mordecai if he is of the Jewish race before whom his influence is already waning.

Little time has the guilty Haman for this last interview with his family, for the palace chamberlains soon come to hasten his appearance at the banquet to which he had thought to go under such different

circumstances, and from which he dared not stay away, as he would now have gladly done.

Esther had probably heard of the honour done to Mordecai, and this may have emboldened her to reply as she did when again the king says, "What is thy petition queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee; and what is thy request? and it shall be performed even to the half of the kingdom." Now Esther at once tells him, "If it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request; for we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage."

Probably taken by surprise, and never thinking of what Haman had persuaded him to do not many weeks before, the king asks, "Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?" and then Esther at once replies "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman." The end for the cruel Amalekite had come. Not one word of excuse can he offer, and the wrath of the king at such a deadly attempt against the young wife who had so won his affections, and against her people, was soon seen by the attendants in waiting, none of whom would speak a word in Haman's defence. Instead of that, Harbonah, one of the chamberlains, tells the king of the gallows that had been made to hang Mordecai on, and which stood in Haman's house.

Forgetting all his favour for Haman, and yielding to the rage that his base deception had caused, the king in fury commands that these same gallows shall be used to hang him upon and this command is at once obeyed and not till then was the wrath of the king pacified. Now Esther tells him what Mordecai is to her, and thus reveals her own nationality, and Mordecai is brought before Ahasuerus and received with honour and kindness, the monarch seeing at once he has a very different man in him from his former favourite, one who would be a faithful adviser and ruler if he could attach him to himself. So Ahasuerus took off his signet ring, which he had taken from the Amalekite, and gave it unto Mordecai, thus bestowing upon him the place of second to himself in power.

The terrible decree for the massacre of all of Jewish birth, was, however, still causing dismay and terror throughout the whole kingdom. How was this to be rendered powerless? for revoked it could not be. The law of the Medes and Persians being unchangeable, not even the monarch himself could alter it. So Esther, once more unbidden, enters the court where the king was sitting, and again he holds out the golden sceptre to her, touched by the tears with which she besought him to put away the impending slaughter of her people, as she said, "How can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?"

Now the king grants to her, and to Mordecai as her adviser, full power to do as they think best for the Jews, and to call the king's secretaries and write their commands to every part of the kingdom where the first decree had gone ; but now the writings are sent to the Jews themselves, and they are granted by royal permission to gather themselves together on the day appointed, and to stand for their lives, resisting every power that would seek to destroy them. These letters are sent also to the governors and rulers of all the many provinces under Persian rule, to every people in their own language, and with all the speed possible the royal couriers are despatched to make known the good tidings.

The day of Mordecai's rejection was over, and the time of his exaltation had come, and this meant blessing for his people. The royal apparel, which Haman had coveted to wear for even a few passing moments, was now to be his ordinary garb as a near relative of the queen and chief minister of the king, so he went out from the royal presence in princely garments of purple and fine linen, and with a coronet of gold on his head, that all the citizens of the lily city might see the position he now filled, and we are told that "the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad." It knew Mordecai well enough to be sure that he would be no tyrannical oppressor to its citizens, but that kindness and justice would be meted out faithfully to them and not only to the Jews, though specially was it to

them the dawn of a brighter day, and instead of the shadow of death that had hung over them since Haman's decree was published, they now "had light, and gladness, and joy, and honour."

Though not once is the name of the God of Israel openly mentioned in the book of Esther—though Hebrew students tell us it is there hidden in some of the initial letters in a way that proves it to be intentionally done—yet who can fail to see that His divine power was the alone cause of the deliverance of His people at this time. Esther had been the first to feel the need of humiliation and fasting before God, and we can be sure that the fervency of her thanksgiving and praise would be in proportion to the anguish and distress she had suffered then.

No longer was there any need to conceal her Jewish birth, for a Jew now held the highest place in the kingdom next to the monarch, and while still maintaining the path of separation from the idolatrous Persians, so bore himself that he won the respect and love of all who came under his influence. When the last month of the year came, and the day when the first decree—Haman's decree—was to be put into execution, the Jews were gathered together in military order to do battle with any enemies who should seek to destroy them, and spite of the king's word, there were some hardy enough to still seek their destruction, but they sought it in vain, for Jehovah, unseen by any, was the defence of His people, "and no man could withstand them; for the fear of them fell upon all people."

Nor was this all, for the governors and officers of the king helped the Jewish people, so great was the influence of Mordecai with them, so that the victory in every place was given to them, and all the foes were utterly defeated. Behind the fact, however, of the power of Mordecai, we see that the safety of the Jews lay in the hidden but yet very real care of God for them, who, though they were almost lost to sight amongst the Gentile nations of the world, still thought of them, and did not allow the absolute triumph of their enemies, though He could no longer manifest Himself openly to them. So that the story of Esther may teach us much of the long-suffering goodness of God to His earthly people, and we can trace His care for them in such minute details as even the sleepless night of a heathen monarch.

After the success of the people in resisting all who ventured to oppose them a day of rejoicing was kept, when they sent presents one to another, and gave gifts to the poor Jews amongst them, that to such also it might be a time of gladness. That this great deliverance might ever be kept in memory by the Jews everywhere; Esther and Mordecai after these things sent out a command to all the provinces that in every year they should keep the fourteenth and fifteenth day of the last month—the month Adar—as a public festival, the days which were turned unto them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day.

The Persian name for casting the lot is Pur, so these festivals were called the days of Purim, the days when they recalled not only their victory, but also their fastings, and their cry, the days when they cried to Jehovah and were heard, when they fasted before Him, and obtained mercy.

This feast of Purim is still kept by many of the Jewish people, when they assemble together and recall the events of those days. More guilty now than then, the Jews still reject their own Messiah, and are still cast off, though the days may now be very near when the One of whom we see a type in Mordecai will appear for their deliverance, and they will be refined as silver is refined, and tried as gold is tried, the time of which the Lord says, "They shall call on my name, and I will hear them; I will say, It is my people; and they shall say, Jehovah my God" (Zech. xiii. 9).

The last picture we get of Mordecai is a bright one, as we saw him at first in rejection, then as the one whom the king delighteth to honour, so at the close we read, "Mordecai the Jew was next unto king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed." Few could read these words and not see in them something typical of a greater than Mordecai, that is few of those who know Him to whom Mordecai points. The creation still waits for the One who is the only Prince of Peace, though the adversary,

like Haman, does all he can to blot out the name of Christ from the earth, but all in vain. Many are waiting for what has been called "The first wave of His power," when He will call His own up to meet Him in the air, before He comes forth as "The Sun of righteousness," with healing in His wings. Are we all ready and waiting for His coming?

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