

Professor Georg Sverdrup

Biblical and Church-Historical

# **Sketches and Addresses**

Edited by

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With an Introduction by Wilhelm Petersen

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Frikirkens Boghandels Forlag

1909

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The English translations in this volume were generated primarily through artificial intelligence-based language tools operating under detailed scholarly instructions. These translations were subsequently reviewed, evaluated, and corrected through an independent secondary AI process for semantic, theological, and stylistic fidelity to the original Norwegian sources. Editorial responsibility in the present edition is limited to methodological design, critical oversight, and presentation; the original source texts remain authoritative.

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Editorial Sigla.—

Notes marked “—Ed.” originate with Andreas Helland, editor of the 1910 volume.

Notes marked “— Present Ed.” indicate editorial responsibility in the present edition.

## Preface

It is now two years since Professor Georg Sverdrup entered into the joy of his Lord. His day of labor in this land extended over a period of thirty-three years. Throughout all this time he worked diligently and untiringly, with mouth and pen, for the quickening and liberation of mankind. During these years he took part in an exceedingly long series of contributions to the various ecclesiastical and churchly questions that stirred men's minds.

The feeling of the heavy loss and the bitter sense of deprivation gradually found expression among many in this wish: If only he had still had time to review and publish, in collected form, a selection of what he had made public in the course of the years, and likewise to revise and publish his theological lectures! — But for this he had no time. He was worn down by labor, felt himself one day more than ordinarily unwell, and the next morning the flag of mourning waved over the school to which, for a generation, he had devoted his best powers.

When the deceased's son, Professor George Sverdrup, Jr., requested me to take steps to collect and, if possible, publish a collection as complete as might be of the departed teacher's writings, I did not think it right to decline, although I already then felt something of the responsibility connected with it and foresaw the difficulties it would entail.

It already presented its difficulties to find the material. A large part of what Professor Sverdrup wrote appeared in the form of treatises and articles in our religious periodicals. But there are very few who have sufficient interest and forethought to preserve such papers from year to year. There are, however, one or two who have kept these old journals, and it is through them that I have succeeded in finding—so far as I am aware—all that has ever been published from Professor Sverdrup's hand. To all those who in this way have rendered this work such valuable service, I herewith express my heartfelt thanks.

The preliminary result of the material thus collected is presented here as the first volume of a work whose final extent has not yet been determined, but which is at any rate intended to comprise at least five volumes.

As regards the publication, it is proper to call attention to the fact that no changes have been made except those of a purely orthographic and linguistic nature. I have believed it right, as far as possible, to make use of the form of language that was common before the very latest radical changes in our spelling, and which the author himself employed in the last years before his death. Thus all plural verb forms have been removed, etc. As concerns citations from the Old Testament, I have followed the translation that has been in use for many years, the so-called "new translation," whereas the author is seen in his citations to have used what was then the newest translation, namely the so-called "Ryve translation."

On the other hand, I do not consider it advisable that, in a work such as this, principled changes should be undertaken—something for which, moreover, there has been no ground whatsoever in the present volume. There may arise a question as to whether a treatise should be included or not; but there can be no question of altering a man's words when one no longer has any opportunity to ascertain how he himself, in such a case, would have altered them.

As to whether the introductory remarks that accompany each section, and the annotations added as notes beneath the text, are of any value, that will be for the kindly reader to judge. My concern has been, if possible, to make everything clear; and I have sought to avoid any danger of misleading. The notes beneath the text that are not marked “—Ed.” (the Editor) are by the author himself.

To the many—both my colleagues at Augsburg Seminary and others—who by counsel and suggestion, and by the interest they have shown in this work, have rendered me valuable help and encouragement, I herewith express my best thanks. In particular, Professor Wilhelm Petersen deserves thanks for the kindness he has shown in attempting an introduction to the work, as well as Professor J. S. Blegen for the many valuable suggestions he has given me again and again.

The portrait of Professor Sverdrup that accompanies this volume is his last, and was taken a few weeks before his death. His signature is a facsimile of his name as written on one of the diplomas he signed the day before his death.

I can only wish that this collection of Professor Georg Sverdrup’s writings may find so kindly a reception that our highly esteemed and deeply missed teacher, and our people’s and our church’s faithful friend, may through it continue to speak to us and to the generation that comes after us.

In a better way we could perhaps scarcely honor the memory of Professor Georg Sverdrup.

Augsburg Seminary, Minneapolis, Minnesota, May 3, 1909.

Andreas Helland.

# Introduction

By Wilhelm Petersen.

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My first attempt to portray Professor Georg Sverdrup's life<sup>1</sup> was written under the strong influence of the recent loss caused by his sudden death, and without any preparation other than the state of mind into which this naturally placed me, and without any other material to work with than the information I either myself possessed or could easily procure. It was a fluent and imperfect, yet nevertheless sincere and well-intentioned attempt to honor the man whom Augsburg and Kristiania without hesitation place in the foremost rank among the greater spirits and fine, well-formed personalities of the Norwegian Lutheran Church.

A worker of the Church—indeed, a man of the country who is deeply loved—whatever position he may occupy, provided he accomplishes something of real worth, has in his lifetime two difficulties to contend with. The first is that his person, his character, his gifts, his spiritual orientation, and his view of life are, and by the nature of the matter must be, misunderstood and misinterpreted, distorted and unjustly judged by those who happen to be his opponents. Certain traits in an opponent can of course always be acknowledged; but it is almost always the purely formal or phenomenal aspects, that which appears on the surface, such as courage and bravery, aggressiveness and fearlessness in the struggle itself, skill and perseverance in conducting it, strong will and energy, and whatever else belongs to all that which outwardly gives the struggle its purely phenomenal character. To the same category of one-sided and inadequate judgment belongs, naturally, also the overestimation by admirers, supporters, and devotees of the person and his distinctive gifts. There are always fundamental features in a struggle, and it often brings forth certain powerful traits in those who fight. There is always more or less spiritual agitation, which causes the conflict to be viewed from a distance and the judgment to become unjust.

The second difficulty is that what in reality is the significant, the essential, and the characteristic element in a person is concealed or pushed into the background by that which the person in question happens, at the moment, to need most. Professor Sverdrup stood, to a high degree, like many of the Lutheran Church's contending men, under both of these difficulties—despite a sober historical sense and a sound and just judgment of his person built upon it.

The remarkably brief introduction to Professor Sverdrup's Selected Collected Writings is an answer to a request that I write such an introduction, made to me by the publisher of the work, Professor Andreas Høiland, who himself, in his introductory remarks to the individual sections, has touched upon several points that properly belong to a biography, and whose clear and perceptive view of Professor Sverdrup's person and work will, to a considerable degree, help the untrained reader toward a more distant and comprehensive understanding of his life and the work to which he devoted it.

The publication of the work will moreover serve a twofold purpose: first, to refresh the

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<sup>1</sup>Professor Georg Sverdrup. A biographical sketch

memory of the man to whom the Lutheran Church in America owes so much; and second, to preserve for the congregation, in a more accessible and familiar form, the writings in which he set down the fundamental views upon which his entire ecclesiastical and popular work rested.

For the reasons mentioned in my first biographical attempt, it is still too early to write a biography of Professor Sverdrup that can place his life and his work in their proper historical context and apply the correct historical measure.

The purpose of this brief introduction is therefore only to emphasize what is essential in Professor Sverdrup's work, especially as it emerges over time in his posthumous writings, which in themselves form the most beautiful and enduring memorial of him.

A historical personality may be viewed from different sides. It may be seen in the light of the conditions and surroundings that outwardly condition its appearance in history. Or it may be seen in the light of the aptitude for a particular life calling, recognized through abilities and education. Finally, it may also be seen in the light of the efforts undertaken to attain a certain goal, to solve a particular task.

Taken together, these three elements constitute the complete and full presentation of the personality from a historical point of view, while at the same time casting light upon the complex of spiritual currents and labors upon which the life in question has exerted both transient and lasting influence.

If we then look—if only at the titles—at the written works that are here before us from Professor Sverdrup's hand and mind, we immediately gain the impression that we are standing face to face with a man who occupies himself exclusively with solid questions and tasks, both principled and practical. His spirit pressed downward and inward to that which acts as a driving force in the life of the Church and the congregation; or else to that which, as a historical result, revealed itself to his spiritual clarity of vision as a determining factor in the development of life, and from the recognition of which he never shrank back; or again to that which stood before his spirit as an ideal—radiant and full of promise, yet bearing within it the full content of prudence.

In this way I believe I have indicated what constituted the essential distinguishing mark of his rich intellect. He could never rest in the mere outward fact; rather, from that—which served as the given material for thought—he sought to return to the very essence, to the principle. And in this tireless search to find not only the true interconnection of things, but also their logical development from a principle firmly grounded in life, his entire scholarly orientation was revealed—one that was in all essential respects dialectical, that is, the method of Socrates as presented in Plato's writings. How he admired the sharp, incisive, ironic quality of Socratic thinking—the truth-content recognized by its own keen observation, built upon an uncompromising and prejudice-free gaze!

Richly endowed by nature and developed through the study of Greek philosophy—which he had assimilated in an entirely original way—he was thereby fitted, as few are, to untie historical knots and to cast light upon historical life, which his spirit sympathetically lived through and absorbed in the fullest measure. Thus his presentation gained life and color, in that he himself lived along with everything he depicted. It would be difficult to find a more

intimate balance between subjective and objective understanding and presentation.

But although he was scientific in his pursuit of truth, and although he possessed a rare power of exposition, he was nevertheless far too much of a fighting nature to settle into a purely formal recognition of truth or into a barren, dogmatic comprehension of results already attained. He did not merely work with the truth; the truth worked within him. And thus, in accordance with his entire temperament, he ranged beyond forms and formulas until he stood freely above the whole spiritual battlefield, where, like a field commander, he brought his heaviest artillery forward at the point where he saw the position most urgently required it. People easily misunderstand such a man. And if he is placed within what are commonly called “small” circumstances—where one must struggle against ingrained prejudices, where people’s narrower influences and self-interests render both friends and enemies, both supporters and opponents, cowardly, malicious, and wavering—then a rare strength of character is demanded, an almost unceasing vigilance, in order not to turn aside from the path once perceived as the one true way. Professor Sverdrup suffered under the difficulty of such a position to the same degree as many others who are endowed by nature with rare gifts and are called by God to wage the struggle of personality for truth and justice against complacency and class hatred, against indifference and self-interest.

And should one seek a clear, unmistakable testimony to the intensity with which he perceived this position of struggle, and at the same time to the clarity and sharpness of thought with which he was able to present his view, one could scarcely find anything better than the following brief piece, discovered among his papers and which was either a draft for a speech or an outline for a longer article. Any commentary is entirely superfluous. It is, however, fairly likely that he wrote this at a relatively young age. Both style and handwriting bear witness to that.

**All hands on deck; draw the sword from the scabbard; let the cannon flash in the sun; strike upon the souls, that the sound of arms may be heard far across the land. The time is come; the air is heavy with thunder; let the thunder roll in the cloud and the lightnings strike with flash upon flash in the murk of night. The powers of the world are stirred; let the powers of heaven be stirred within us. God’s Church is in peril; let men girded with weapons guard her. Against the Lie we use sharp swords; against the Lie we bear shining helmets; against the Lie we take up bright shields. But the Lie is not outside God’s Church, but within her walls. Therefore awake, thou Christian Church, wherever thou art found; therefore awake, thou watchman of Zion, and sound the trumpet, that it may give a clear sound.**

**The Lie is this, that Christ is dead; for behold, He lives. The Lie is this, that Christianity is pure doctrine and the understanding of intellects and the clarity of thought; for behold, it is the life of love and the foolishness of love. The Lie is this, that the Church is an institution to rule over men; for behold, it is the home of freedom and the fellowship of the freed. The Lie is this, that the Church must employ the world’s falsehood and deceit in order to be cunning as the serpent; for behold,**



she is the holy witness of truth and simplicity. The Lie is this, that the world is the Church's most dangerous enemy; for behold, it is the object of God's love. The Lie is this, that the Church is pure; for behold, she is full of rottenness and stench. The Lie is this, that Christianity is the world's hatred; for behold, it is the world's love. The Lie is this, that the Church must fear the world; for behold, the world is overcome. The Lie is this, that the Church must go outward to find her life; for behold, her enemy is in her midst. Let us find him where his work is among us; let us know him for what he is. Let us meet him as Christ once did: I am He whom ye seek.

"The truth in love" was perhaps as much as anything an expression of the whole direction of Professor Sverdrup's spirit.<sup>2</sup>

For such a man there was scarcely room in Norway in the seventies. But with the elasticity of spirit that was his own, he soon made himself at home with the thought of working among his people outside Norway. It is not the intention here to portray the profoundly world-embracing character of Sverdrup's understanding of Christianity and church work in contrast to that which prevailed in Norway at the time. He himself has portrayed this in masterly fashion in *Memories from Norway*, a work that must always form the point of departure for a fuller historical account of the reasons that brought Oftedal and Sverdrup to America. The justification of this understanding, and the correctness of these reasons, are testified to clearly enough by the subsequent ecclesiastical development in Norway.

All that remains is, in brief outline, to characterize the position into which Professor Sverdrup necessarily came when he thus tore himself away from the mother soil and "chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God" than to hold a comfortable position in a state church in which, according to his ecclesiastical convictions, he could not feel at home.

This position was essentially the same for the two men whose names in Norwegian-American church history are so closely bound together that it is possible to separate them only in a purely formal sense. Confronted with the emerging church life in the new land, these two men stood searching for a way to move beyond the old-fashioned, purely institutional conceptions. And both of them, with the burning zeal and driving force of youth, threw themselves into the work of building—indeed, we may just as well say founding—the Church upon the congregation.

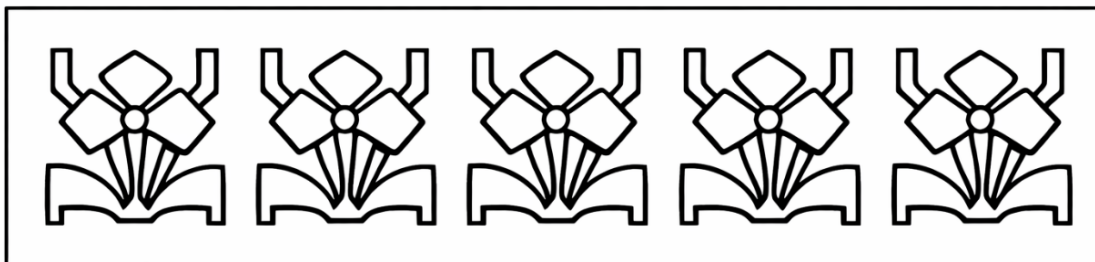
This word, which together with freedom and spirit has been so terribly abused, casts light upon all the work that constitutes the key to understanding all the views that bear the name Augsburg Seminary. It was a struggle on all sides that these two men undertook and carried on. That they should be regarded as disturbers of the peace, as dangerous men, was something anyone familiar with similar historical phenomena must have expected. Nor did they in any way attempt to seek shelter from the attacks that were directed against them

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<sup>2</sup>In this introduction, the editor's narrative voice has been rendered in contemporary English for clarity, while quoted material originating with Professor Sverdrup has been translated in a more elevated register. This reflects the contrast of tone present in the Norwegian original between historical exposition and exhortative prose.

from so many and varied quarters. That, moreover, only served to focus attention upon them all the more sharply. But it is neither too early nor too hasty—nor yet too late—to say here that these two men, whatever else may be said of them, represented an ecclesiastical vision and an ecclesiastical work that history has sanctioned.

Here it suffices to point to the writings of Professor Sverdrup that lie before us, which as clearly as any human presentation can express it contain two things: dissatisfaction with, and the inadequacy of, the old modes of thought and inherited forms; and the advocacy of a free and living congregation as the only foundation—both biblically and historically sound—for the building of a true kingdom of God on earth. For this Professor Sverdrup labored and fought; for this he suffered and died; and no one shall deprive him of the honor of having kindled a light in the Church upon which, even to this very day, many still look with joy and gratitude.



## 1 First Section

The three following biblical sketches will give, though doubtless only a faint impression, of why Professor Gederdrup's lectures on the Old Testament so powerfully captivated his hearers. The noble, poetic language, the thoroughly biblical tone, the holy reverence for the Lord's testimony as it came to His people through His preacher, were such prominent characteristics of this branch of his teaching that it seized the listeners in a peculiar manner and held them fast. When, with his clear gaze sharpened by the Spirit of God, he opened the Scriptures for his students and looked into the hidden depths of God's counsel, many a heart was made to burn. — Ed.

### 1.1 David and Jonathan

[Source: Svartal-Skrift for the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America. Edited by Prof. Gederdrup and Oftedal. Third Year. 1877. Pages 44–48. — Ed.]

This section appears on pages 1–5 of the original volume. — Present Ed.

And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

The time seems to have come in which this word is being fulfilled. At a deep and fundamental level there stirs the unrighteousness of self-love, and it appears as though petty vanity and rending envy have become dominant, not only in the politics of this world, but also among those who call themselves by His name, who went into death for His friends.<sup>3</sup> Even in the Church of God it seems that the gentle south wind does not blow, that wind which causes the flowers to give forth their fragrance in God's garden, but rather a cold, cutting winter snow, which causes the fairest plants to wither and the noblest shoots to die.

Therefore we will bring forth the loveliest image of the love of friends that we can find, and by it we will warm our own hearts. For though thou shouldest take the coldest thing thou knowest—though thou shouldest take death's cold mist<sup>4</sup>, wherein human hearts grow stiff

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<sup>3</sup>Sverdrup's prose is woven like fabric held under tension and is best understood when read aloud. — Present Ed.

<sup>4</sup>The original text uses "Dødens kolde Taarning" While Taarning resembles the word for "tower" in this 19th-century context it functions as an archaic variant of taage/taaning (mist/fog). "Mist" better captures the intended metaphor of a chilling, numbing atmosphere that stiffens the heart. — Present Ed

and the blood congeals—yet love is strong as death. And where the fire of love burns, there it is of no avail that the wind blows and the waters stream over it; for every cold gust shall only cause the flame to blaze the more freshly upon the hearth, and the many waters cannot quench love. In tribulation it grows, in darkness it shines, in cold it is the warmer; the greater the conflict, the greater the courage; the more hindrances, the more glorious the outcome.

A young man, ruddy of countenance, comely of form and fair to behold, was David, the son of Jesse, from Bethlehem. Scarcely more than a youth among bleating sheep upon the pastures of Judah; over its hills and through its valleys he led his flock; his playing and his song sounded over the green meadows and by the murmuring brooks. His harp he had learned to tune by the rushing of the rivers and in the stillness of the forests, and the praise of the Lord he had learned to sing while he walked alone upon the field where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had pitched their tents with their flocks, in faith and expectation of the Lord's promise, that the land should be given unto them and to their children for ever.

The glorious inheritance of promise which had been given to the tribe of Judah had become the shepherd boy's inheritance, and by it he had been assured that Goliath of the Philistines was not to be feared by the people of God, but that the Lord would give His people victory over all their enemies, if they boldly trusted in Him.

Then came a day when the prophet Samuel went down, by the command of the Lord, to anoint one of the sons of Jesse to be king over His people; for Saul was rejected from before the face of the Lord. And Jesse brought forth his sons, one by one, before the prophet of the Lord. And the prophet said, when he saw Eliab: "Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him." But the Lord said: "Look not on his countenance, nor on the height of his stature; for I have rejected him: for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."

And Jesse brought forth his seven sons, but none of them was chosen of God. Then David was lacking; he who kept the little flock had yet to come. And the Lord said unto Samuel: "Arise, anoint him; for this is he." And Samuel anointed him, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day.

But over Saul there was an evil spirit; and David was brought to Saul, and his pleasant playing was a refreshment and a restoring of life for the sick and torn heart of the man, and the evil spirit departed from him at David's playing. But Saul was rejected of the Lord, and David was chosen in his stead.

At this time the Philistines went up against Israel, and Saul summoned the host against them. And Saul had a son whose name was Jonathan, and he was a hero in war, and victory followed him against the Philistines, for he also had set his heart upon the LORD, and in the name of Israel's God he smote the enemies of Israel. Among Israel's heroes Jonathan was the flower, an ornament unto Israel, a joy and delight to the people of God. He was the king's son, and the people rejoiced in hope of the day when he should sit upon his father's throne.

Then came the great champion of the Philistines, the mighty Goliath, and set himself forth to single combat. And he reviled the armies of Israel, and he mocked their God, and there was none who dared to meet him. Fear and dread lay upon the whole host of Israel; but

David was not among them, for he went about upon the fields of Bethlehem and kept his father's flock. Yet he also would behold the Philistine champion, and he went to the camp; and the Spirit of the LORD came upon him. With a sling in his hand and smooth stones from the brook in his shepherd's pouch, he went against the champion in the name of God. And against the champion with sword and spear he set the LORD as his shield and defender, and the Philistine fell before the despised shepherd-boy of Israel.

Then there was jubilation in Israel, then the daughters of the people sang with gladness the praise of David. But a dark and hellish thought crept into the heart of Saul; envy seized him, and bitter hatred toward David, because the LORD had chosen him and given him the strength of faith, which was the true kingly adornment among the people of the LORD. But the heart of Jonathan opened itself toward the unknown shepherd-boy; his heroic spirit rejoiced in the heroic deed, his faith was strengthened by David's boldness of faith; he recognized the LORD's Chosen and loved him. And as brooks that meet in the valley, gently and silently glide together and cast themselves into one another's embrace, unable to do otherwise, so heart was bound to heart and soul to soul, when Jonathan and David found one another on the day of victory.

Saul's hatred and persecution brought, from that day onward, tribulation and distress upon David. It was the Lord's school of love, wherein the chosen king was to be prepared to become a true ruler of people and land. Thus, driven from the king's court, threatened with death, hunted from place to place like a wild beast, he no longer had any home, any resting place, save in the Lord's faithfulness and in Jonathan's friendship.

Jonathan sheltered him from danger; Jonathan warned him against his father's cruelty; Jonathan went to him in the forest and strengthened his hand in God. Jonathan defended him before his father, so that Saul, even in his fury, hurled his spear at his own son.

Was there anything for Jonathan to gain by such faithfulness to his persecuted friend? On the contrary, it seemed as though there was everything to lose. There were many bonds that surged against this love and would have quenched it, yes, even turned it into bondage to Saul. Temptation lay on every side for Jonathan to give way; yet in all things he was found faithful.

Saul, his father, was rejected by the Lord, and David was chosen in his stead. David was to receive Jonathan's inheritance; the son was to lose all because of the father's sin. Envy and wounded vanity might well have gathered bitterness in Jonathan's heart; yet his friendly mind remained at peace with this thought: David shall be the first in the kingdom, and I shall stand at his side.

Jonathan was the pride of Israel; now a shepherd boy was to go before him. He who had gone foremost in Israel's wars was to give way to one who had gone behind the bleating sheep. It seemed a bitter thought, but Jonathan found rest in the confidence that the Lord chooses whom He will to prepare His people.

Daily Saul's kingdom declined; daily Jonathan had to see faithfulness to Saul give way to the growing sympathy for David. David's nobility cast a heavy shadow over Saul's faithless course. Jonathan felt how it cut through the heart to see his father overwhelmed with shame; yet in all this he prevailed.

And David, who was hunted and persecuted, who was not deemed worthy to have even a cave in the land where Saul had his throne—his soul too was surely tempted to hate both father and son. He must have feared what Jonathan would do when Saul was dead. He might well have thought it better that the whole house of Saul were destroyed, if he were to have peace upon Israel's throne. There was temptation when he saw Jonathan alone and himself despised; there was temptation when he met him alone in the field, alone in the forest. Might he not think: "This is the heir; if he is gone, then the struggle is ended at Saul's death"? Yet in all this David prevailed.

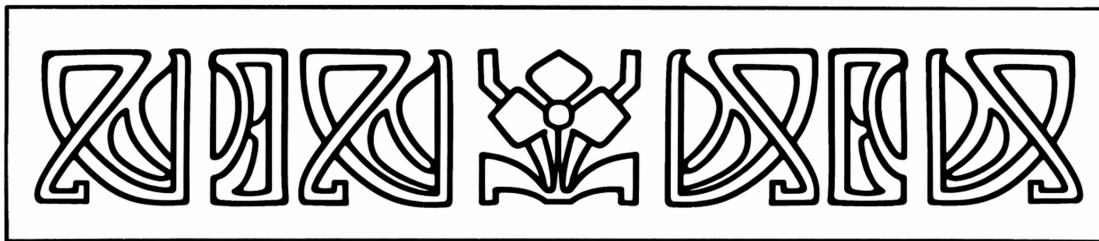
Then came the final battle. The Philistines attacked Israel; Saul and Jonathan went out against them. Alone the friend went with his blinded father. He fought for the rejected one; he himself had nothing to gain thereby. For David's land fought Saul's son; for Saul's victory fought David's friend. But David was not at his side. The tumult of slaughter increased, and the struggle grew fierce; Jonathan fell in the unequal fight. But David's lament has borne Jonathan's name unto this day:

I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me; thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.

Why did Jonathan fight, why did David suffer?

For Israel's hope, which was greater to them than their own honor.

Thus the Lord bound hearts together in unbreakable friendship and rock-fast faith for His people and its hope.



## 1.2 The Prophet Samuel

[Source: Quarterly Journal. 7th Year. 1881. Pages 142–174. Separate offprint. “Vinggaardsmanden” Publishing House. 1903. — Ed.]

This section appears on pages 6–35 of the original volume. — Present Ed.

God’s people are, in one respect, distinguished above all other peoples upon the earth. They are an elect people, a people for God’s own possession. In other respects there is no difference between Israel and the other nations. There is the same human nature, the same lust toward sin, the same needs, the same struggle for existence and for life among all peoples, Israel not excepted. “The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people” (Deut. 7:7), says Moses, through whom the LORD had also said: “Understand therefore, that the LORD thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiffnecked people” (Deut. 9:6).

By nature Israel is like the heathen; but by election it is lifted up out of the multitude of the nations, and it became true what Balaam said when he saw the camp of Israel spread out before him: “Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations” (Num. 23:9).

Election made Israel unique among the peoples, and its life and history are unique in the history of the world. For election gave Israel a particular calling in the world and a particular trust from God. Israel alone received the special calling to become a blessing to all nations, and Israel alone received the special calling that the Word of God should be entrusted to it.

While all the other peoples desired the world and its goods, and sought to tear them to themselves and to rob one another, Israel, by the election, was called to love the world; and so far from robbing anything from the world or snatching anything from the poor race of mankind, the people of Israel were rather, in love and compassion and sorrow, to bear within themselves a promised treasure, which they should always be willing to share with all: the Word of God. With a rich gift for the world Israel went its heavy way and suffered for the peoples, while the peoples tumbled themselves in the lust of the world and reaped perdition from their sin.

But in the light of the Word of God Israel was, under its heavy pilgrimage, to see the goal clearly and shining before it; and while the heathen groped in the darkness, ever fearing

the uncertain future, while they sought soothsayers and diviners and casters of lots and interpreters of dreams and oracles, in order to gain some clarity concerning the things to come, Israel was to have the light of prophecy burning and shining in a dark place. As Balaam had said: “— in thy time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, what God doeth.” (Num. 23:23).

It is the glory of the election that Israel may walk in the light of the Word. And herein the history of Israel, and of all God’s people, becomes different from all other history: that it not only has its goal—for all history has that—but that the goal is clearly and distinctly set before the people, so that the ancient people may lift up its gaze with certainty and courage toward the eternal kingdom which the Lord will prepare, and that by the light of prophecy the way to the goal is clearly marked out, so that it need not go astray.

But against the light of the Word rises the doubt and cleverness of the understanding, and against the heavy duty of the calling rises the lust of the flesh. And the whole history of Israel becomes filled with an unceasing struggle between flesh and Spirit, between prescription and faith, so that scarcely is there given on earth a more torn and storm-filled history than that of God’s people. God has set the calling and the destiny, and he continually raises up men and women in Israel who lift its glory and its responsibility high before a corrupt and perverse people; and again and again the great multitude in Israel spares itself and says: We will not walk in the way of the Lord! And thus there arise violent upheavals and heart-rending struggles between God’s glorious calling and the fleshly nature of the people.

There are great men in Israel, as in every other people; there are chieftains and standard-bearers; there are leaders of the people and speakers for the people. But in truth great in God’s people is only the man or the woman who follows the Spirit’s calling and gives himself wholly over to the goal which God has appointed for His people. “A man in whom is the Spirit” (Num. 27:18) is the only one who is fitted to be leader and shepherd in Israel; he alone is the man “who may go out before their face and go in before their face, and who may lead them out and bring them in” (Num. 27:17). It is the Lord’s man whose calling it is to behold the Lord’s goal and follow its summons; and only he who himself has walked in the way of the Spirit can go before the people on their way toward the goal set by God.

Great abilities and glorious gifts do indeed make a man eminent in Israel, as among all peoples, even when the gifts are taken into the service of the flesh and of the world; but great in truth is only he who laid the great and glorious gifts down before the Lord and said, “Here am I; send me,” and who thereafter went forth in the Spirit’s power and the Spirit’s light before God’s people, and showed them where the Lord’s way was.

Such a Spirit-borne leader in God’s people is Samuel. He is one of the few men in history who have been an instrument for the renewal of an entire people, and who, without bloodshed and deeds of violence, were able to gather what was scattered and unite what was divided. At his death Israel stood moved and established; for his own time he saw the people united and strong as never since the death of Joshua. Yea, though such great things had been accomplished and so much had been changed, Samuel could nonetheless step forward and receive from his people a full and complete testimony to righteousness and innocence in his entire public course.



It would be more than worthwhile to follow the struggle and labor of his life for his precious people. The Spirit of God has preserved the chief features of the great man's life as a testimony for the latest generations.

### **1.2.1 Israel in the Time of the Judges**

In a people that grows in a sound and vigorous manner, there are two powers which often seem to draw each its own way, yet which only when they are united become a true blessing for the people; these are freedom and unity. Israel had been driven together in need and oppression under the Egyptians' harsh bondage. Moses had led the wretched people out into freedom, and his strong hand and superior might had preserved the people, corrupted by slavery and oppression, from again being split and scattered and thus perishing. Joshua had taken the governance over Israel with dauntless courage and had led it through struggle and distress, through victory and triumph, into the promised land.

But the two mighty leaders whom God had raised up for Israel were gone. There was none to take their place. Israel had to try to walk without the guidance which in its childhood had been so sorely needed, and which the Lord had given it in such abundant measure. Israel, which had been held together by the superior spirit of strong rulers and by the distress and peril amid which it was born, now entered a season of freedom and cohesion. It had been as a child under its mighty leaders, freely protected, yet in many ways still immature. After the death of the great men, Israel was to try to stand upon its own feet; and with the Law and the worship of God as constraining bonds, the people were to preserve in freedom what they had received as an unmerited gift.

Israel had strength enough to preserve its independence, if only it had faith enough. Israel's strength lay in its election, and that election could become a living power only through faith. If faith failed, then election became merely a threatening responsibility instead of a saving force.

But Israel did not preserve faith; when distress was gone, when the pressure was over, when good days followed upon the heavy times of struggle, then Israel laid itself to rest; it grew fat and wanton, and in its soul, out of its freedom and advantage, it turned away from the Lord who had saved it, and from the God who had borne it upon eagles' wings.

Israel sought freedom, not in God, but in the world. Toward the more vile gods of the Canaanites, and toward their immoral and cruel idolatry, they were drawn with irresistible desire. And as Israel sank down into the vices and idolatry of the Canaanites, it lost the power by which it had been upheld and knit together. The result was bondage and dissolution. The strong, youthfully vigorous people who under Joshua had marched into Canaan were captured and ensnared by the Canaanites' licentiousness and worldliness. It renounced its election; it let its high goal slip out of sight; and thus it lost both its freedom and its unity. The foreign peoples found easy prey, and the individual tribes were severed from one another. The bonds of brotherhood, which were the one spirit, were gone, because the manifoldness of the world scattered the minds which could be united only in God.

But the Lord had not forsaken His people. Though it plunged itself like a prodigal son into

the pleasures of the world, the Lord yet also let it taste the bitterness of the world's bondage; and in need and misery Israel was brought unto the Lord and gained new experience of His faithfulness and grace, when the Lord raised up deliverers for His people who, in the power of the Spirit, led the people to victory and freedom. The judges and their work bear witness that the Lord remained faithful where Israel was unfaithful. The election and the covenant with the fathers stood firm where Israel failed.

But despite the work of the judges and the working of the Spirit of the Lord, Israel declined ever further. And the last judge, Samson, stood entirely alone against the enemies of God's people. Yes, not only that. Seduced and swept away by Philistine heathendom, inflamed by Samson's own intemperance, the men of Judah would even bind their champion themselves and deliver him into the power of the enemies. So low had the people sunk through the lust of the world and its bondage. And Samson himself, so great and richly gifted, fell so deeply that sorrow and shame cleave to his name and to his history forever. Samson, ensnared, sleeping with his head in Delilah's lap while the hair of his head—the sign of his election—was shorn away, so that powerless and helpless he was given into the hands of the Philistines—this is an image of the people of Israel in that time. As Samson renounced his election for the lust of the world and sank strengthless into the hand of his enemies.

But Samson had strength to die for his people; alone, cast off and despised, trampled underfoot and abused, he had not forgotten his people; in the hour of his death his thought and his soul were with the precious, chosen Israel. But there is hope for that people whose sons go into death for it. Thus Israel still had a future before it. Yet it could not attain it except by the hand of the Lord; therefore the Lord sent them the voice of awakening through the mouth of Samuel.

The life of the people in the time of the Judges was in many respects wild and crude. Clearly and solemnly had the Lord admonished His people through the mouth of Moses and of Joshua, that they should not bind themselves to the Canaanite nations. Scarcely is there any people in the world who hastened more swiftly toward destruction through the corruption of morals than precisely the Canaanite peoples. Sodom and Gomorrah fell as the first terrifying example of the Lord's judgment upon moral corruption and unnatural lust. Yet the punitive judgment did not put an end to the corruption of morals. The cruel and cunning Canaanites united the lust of the world with the wisdom of the world, and their cities, which distinguished themselves by wealth and prosperity, became also the homes of vice and excess, unto which ungodliness ascended unto heaven crying for vengeance. The divine mercy was therefore compelled to cry words of warning to young Israel, which entered into so corrupt a land, where even the temples of the idols had become dwellings of indecency.

But the solemn admonitions did not bear the desired fruit. It was not long before we find the sins of Sodom within the cities of Israel. The Israelite and the Canaanite youth took pleasure in one another's company. Although there had stood a separation between the older generations of the two peoples, keeping them apart from one another, this separation no longer had the same meaning or the same effect upon the rising generation. The young men of Israel took Canaanite wives, and Israel's daughters were given in marriage to the Canaanites. The wild, luxuriant life of the world seemed intent on swallowing all and everything.

Yet God had preserved His own. Though the corruption was great and widespread, the spark of faith was not extinguished, nor was the voice of testimony silenced, and the God-fearing life of Israel had not wholly ceased. There were still not only great and chosen instruments of the Lord, but also here and there small and inconspicuous souls who faithfully preserved Israel's faith and lived by the blessed hope of the promises. There was Naomi, whose faith even drew the heathen woman into God's people and the truth of His promises. Ruth left Moab, her land and her people, her kindred and her gods; and there was also a man such as Elkanah and his household, who observed the Lord's commandments and ordinances and year by year went up to the sanctuary to appear before God at Shiloh, where the Tabernacle had stood since the days of Joshua.

Elkanah had two wives; and this unhappy violation of God's order, which was and is so common among the peoples of the East, brought also in Elkanah's house the usual restless consequences. Quarreling and bitterness, sorrow and tears have followed polygamy everywhere, and do so unto this very day. Women often have hard conditions and a burdensome life even among us, who boast that we have lifted them up out of subjection and bondage. When once the voice of the oppressed and tormented shall be heard in righteousness and truth, it will be made manifest that many a sorrowful and broken woman has borne more heart, even among us, than many have been able to imagine. Yet both the one and the other woman suffers among us wherever polygamy rules, and this becomes common and daily. Hannah, the mother of Samuel, was also made to prove this in full measure. She had no children, while the other wife rejoiced in sons and daughters.

Hannah's lot was heavy and painful; yet the Lord had made it thus for Hannah, because He would reveal His glory and highly exalt the humbled and bitterly afflicted woman. "The barren woman shall dwell in the house as a joyful mother of children" (Psalm 113:9). And there was to be more blessing in the one son who was given her in her sorrow and prayers than in many sons and daughters over whom there had been jubilation and delight. The heart learns first in distress and sorrow the great mystery of yielding itself wholly to God; and only that life which has been consecrated through sorrow is able to become a full fountain of joy both for itself and for the people of God.

Hannah had learned to find consolation in sorrow and help in distress. To God she went with her affliction, and before Him she poured out her heart in His sanctuary. Israel's high priest, Eli, was witness to her prayer in that hour of endurance. He was a respectable and agreeable man. Calm and without clamor was the stamp of his inner life. Appointed from childhood to be the Lord's high priest and the spiritual leader of God's people, he had doubtless also from childhood been accustomed to the Word of God and the temple of God. It was to Eli so familiar, so everyday, so commonplace. It seemed to follow of itself that he should be God-fearing, at least outwardly. And though he could not entirely avoid many serious thoughts and moving moments, yet earnestness and the struggle of life seemed not to have laid hold of his whole soul.

Thus it goes with many who have become priests and servants of God from outward considerations: for the sake of the family, for the sake of honor and reputation, or even for the sake of livelihood. Their hearts do indeed feel a seriousness and gravity; yet it often passes away with a sigh and a small prick of conscience, and of any share in full surrender to God in

repentance and faith there is often nothing at all. Such priests indeed know the Word of God, but not the Spirit of God; and the inward spiritual movements and the struggle, the death of the soul and the fear of sin, the joy of the Spirit and the gladness of the life of God are things unknown to them. They account it enthusiasm or madness, or at least a peculiarity.

So it went also with Eli. He saw Hanna sunk down in prayer; her bitter affliction pressed her low, and her pain was too great for her to find words for it. But Eli did not understand what was stirring within this neglected heart, and his blunted spiritual sense did not so much as divine the mystery of distress and prayer. Therefore it seemed to him incomprehensible what it was that truly moved the woman, whose bitterly sorrowing and sorely oppressed mind was mirrored in her countenance, and whose lips moved according to the inner longings of her heart, without any audible word passing over them. Eli supposed her to be drunken, much as those who were witnesses of the outpouring of the Spirit upon the Apostles supposed that they were “full of new wine.” It is that spiritual sluggishness, that heartless indifference to the need or the joy of others, that materialistic incapacity to comprehend the nature of the Spirit, which here makes itself known. Eli’s official piety was unacquainted with such soul-rending workings of the Spirit as those Hanna experienced in her soul.

But Hanna had prayed as one who struggles for life, and she had vowed to the Lord the son for whom she had pleaded. There was full earnestness in her soul; and when she prayed for a son, it was not with the selfish desire to have him for herself, but with the true love’s willingness to offer him up to God and to His people. She had won peace in the struggle; she had conquered herself and the turmoil of her agitated mind; she had pressed through to the heart of the Lord and found mercy, and she was able calmly to answer Eli’s harsh and almost mocking words.

She told Eli what had been hidden from him. It was not wine or strong drink that made her so strange and incomprehensible to men; but anguish of heart and soul, which had opened her whole being before God, had made her manner a mystery to men. She had prayed, not as one who prays in order to display an ability before God, but as one who cries out of the depths unto the Lord.

It struck Eli in an instant. For the old man knew well that such was the prayer which breaks through all hindrances and presses its way up to the living God, Israel’s mighty Father. Thus had Jacob wrestled in the night by the Jabbok. Thus had Moses striven upon the mountain for the faithless people and for those chosen from among them. Eli understood that he stood face to face with one of the Lord’s elect, and his words were heart-comforting for Hannah: “Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him” (1 Sam. 1:17).

Comforted and relieved, Hannah went to her home. The encounter with the Lord in the sanctuary had given her new courage to take hold of life’s daily round of quiet struggles and the toil, burden, and weariness of household labor. In the great conflict and the bitter sorrow, her heart had been strengthened for the lesser sorrows and cares through which she yet must pass.

The Lord fulfilled Hannah’s prayer. She received a son and called his name Samuel; it means, “Heard of God”; for, said she, of the Lord have I asked him.

This time the son's name is full truth. By prayer he was given; and in prayer the strength of his life was to abide. This is the secret of the life of God's people, that God hears prayers. It is the expression of God's fatherly heart toward His children. And it is faith's proper victory over all unbelief and materialism, that it prays to the living, personal God and is heard. Around this stood the great conflict in the days of Samuel, as it repeats itself also now, after three thousand years have passed away.

God's living personality and the conquering power of faith lie most simply and most clearly expressed in the word: God hears prayers. And around this all in Samuel's life was to turn—to bear witness for Israel to the living, almighty God, the merciful and gracious Father, whom Israel was in danger of exchanging for dead idols, and to that distinctive power of faith which was to be Israel's mark and the world-overcoming strength.

Samuel, therefore, is the name that designates the champion of God over against the seductive powers of idolatry and materialism. Samuel is the name that designates the giant of faith over against the coldness of unbelief and the darkness of superstition.