
a *Grace Notes* course

Old Testament History

by Alfred Edersheim

History 510

Grace Notes

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IV_06 Saul Chosen King at Mizpeh - His Comparative Privacy - Incursion of Nahash - Relief of Jabesh-gilead - Popular Assembly at Gilgal - Address of Samuel

1 Samuel 10:17 to 12:25

In answer to the people's demand, Saul had been selected as their king. The motives and views which underlay their application for a king were manifest. They had been clearly set before the representatives of Israel by Samuel; and they had not gainsaid the correctness of his statement. They wanted not only a king, but royalty like that of the nations around, and for the purpose of outward deliverance; thus forgetting God's dealings in the past, disclaiming simple trust in Him, and disbelieving the sufficiency of His leadership. In fact, what they really wanted was a king who would reflect and embody their idea of royalty, not the ideal which God had set before them. And no better representative of Israel could have been found than Saul, alike in appearance and in military qualification; nor yet a truer reflex of the people than that which his character and religious bearing offered. He was the typical Israelite of his period, and this neither as regarded the evil-disposed or "sons of Belial," nor yet, of course, the minority of the truly enlightened, but the great body of the well-disposed people. If David was the king "after God's own heart," Saul was the king after the people's own heart. What they had asked, they obtained; and what they obtained, must fail; and what failed would prepare for what God had intended.

But as yet the choice of Saul had been a secret between the messenger of the Lord and the new king. As in every other case, so in this, ¹ God would give the person called to most difficult work every opportunity of knowing His will, and every encouragement to do it. For this purpose Samuel had first called up great thoughts in Saul; then "communed" with him long and earnestly; then given him undoubted evidence that the message he bore was God's; and, finally, embodied in one significant direction alike a warning of his danger and guidance for his safety.

¹ Thus, for example, in the case of Balaam, and even of Pharaoh.

All this had passed secretly between the two, that, undisturbed by influences from without, Saul might consider his calling and future course, and this in circumstances most favorable to a happy issue, while the transaction was still, as it were, between God and himself, and before he could be led astray by the intoxicating effect of success or by popular flattery.

And now this brief period of preparation was past, and what had been done in secret must be confirmed in public. ² Accordingly Samuel summoned the people - no doubt by their representatives - to a solemn assembly "before Jehovah" in Mizpeh. Here the first great victory over the Philistines had been obtained by prayer (7:5), and here there was an "altar unto Jehovah" (ver. 9). As so often before, the lot was solemnly cast to indicate the will of God. But before so doing, Samuel once more presented to the people what the leadership of the Lord had been in the past, and what their choice of another leadership implied. This not with the view of annulling the proposed establishment of royalty, but with that of leading the people to repentance of their sin in connection with it. But the people remained unmoved. And now the lot was drawn. ³

It fell on Saul, the son of Kish. But although he had come to Mizpeh, he could not be found in the assembly. It was a supreme moment in the history of Israel when God had indicated to His people, gathered before Him, their king by name. In circumstances so urgent, inquiry by the Urim and Thummim seemed appropriate. The answer indicated that Saul had concealed himself among

² Thenius and other writers regard this account of the election of Saul as incompatible with that of the previous interview between him and Samuel. They accordingly speak of two different accounts here incorporated into one narrative. But the thoughtful reader will agree with Ewald that closer consideration will convince us that Saul's appointment would have been incomplete without the public selection at Mizpeh.

³ We note that the lot was, in this instance, not cast but drawn, evidently out of an urn. This is implied in the expression "taken," or rather "taken out," vers. 20, 21 (comp. Leviticus 16:8; Numbers 33:54; Joshua 7:14). The election was evidently first of tribes, then of clans, (here that of Matri), then of families, and lastly of individuals in the family selected. As the name of Matri does not otherwise occur, Ewald suggests that it is a copyist's error for Bichri, 2 Samuel 20:1.

the baggage on the outskirts of the encampment. Even this seems characteristic of Saul. It could have been neither from humility nor modesty - both of which would, to say the least, have been here misplaced. It is indeed true that this was a moment in which the heart of the bravest might fail, and that thoughts of what was before him might well fill him with anxiety.

Saul must have known what would be expected of him as king. Would he succeed in it? He knew the tribal and personal jealousies which his election would call forth. Would he be strong enough to stand against them? Such questions were natural. The only true answer would have been a spiritual one. Unable to give it, Saul withdrew from the assembly. Did he wonder whether after all it would come to pass or what would happen, and wait till a decision was forced upon him? The people, at any rate, saw nothing in his conduct that seemed to them strange; and so we may take it that it was just up to the level of their own conceptions, though to us it appears very different from what a hero of God would have done.⁴

And so the newly-found king was brought back to the assembly. And when Samuel pointed to him as he stood there, "from his shoulders upward" overtopping every one around, the people burst into a shout: "Let the king live!" For thus far Saul seemed the very embodiment of their ideal of a king. The transaction was closed by Samuel explaining to the people, this time not "the right of the king" (1 Samuel 8:9, 11), as claimed among other heathen nations whom they wished to imitate, but "the right of the kingdom"⁵ (10:25), as it should exist in Israel in accordance with the principles laid down in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. This was put in writing, and the document solemnly deposited in the tabernacle.

⁴ The reluctance of Moses and of Jeremiah in similar circumstances afford no parallel, although that of the former, at least, was the result of weakness in faith. But their hesitation was before God, not before men.

⁵ Our Authorised Version translates, both here and 1 Samuel 8:9, 11, "the manner;" but the word can only mean "right," in the sense of right belonging to, or claimed by, any one. Thenius speaks of this as the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. But if "constitution" there was, it was God-given, not man-made.

For the moment, however, the establishment of the new monarchy seemed to bring no change. Saul returned to his home in Gibeah, attended indeed on his journey, by way of honor, by "a band whom Elohim had touched in their hearts," and who no doubt "brought him presents" as their king. But he also returned to his former humble avocations. On the other hand, "the sons of Belial" not only withheld such marks of homage, but openly derided the new king as wanting in tribal influence and military means for his office. When we bear in mind that these represented a party, possibly belonging to the great tribes of Judah and Ephraim, so strong as openly to express their opposition (1 Samuel 11:12), and sufficiently numerous not to be resisted by those who thought otherwise, the movement must have been formidable enough to dictate as a prudential measure the retirement of Saul till the time when events would vindicate his election. And so complete was that privacy, that even the Philistine garrison in Gibeah remained in ignorance of the fact of Saul's new office, and of what it implied; and that in the east, across the Jordan, the Ammonite king who waged war with Israel was apparently wholly unaware of any combined national movement on the part of the people, or of any new center of union and resistance against a common enemy.

This expedition on the part of Nahash, king of the Ammonites, to which we have just referred, is otherwise also of interest, as showing that the desire of Israel after a king must have sprung from other and deeper motives than merely the age of Samuel, or even the conduct of his sons. From 1 Samuel 12:12 it appears that the invasion by Nahash commenced before Israel's demand for a king, and was, indeed, the cause of it; thus proving that, as Samuel charged them, distrust of their heavenly Leader was the real motive of their movement. The expedition of Nahash had no doubt been undertaken to renew the claims which his predecessor had made, and to avenge the defeat which Jephthah had inflicted upon him (Judges 11:13, 33). But Nahash had penetrated much farther into Israelitish territory than his predecessor. His hordes had swarmed up the lovely rich valley of the Jabesh, laying bare its barley-fields and olive plantations, and wasting its

villages; and they were now besieging the capital of Gilead - Jabesh-gilead - which occupied a commanding position on the top of an isolated hill overhanging the southern crest of the valley. In their despair, the people of Jabesh offered to surrender, but Nahash, in his insolence, insisted that he would thrust out their right eyes, avowedly to "lay it as a shame upon all Israel." Terrible as these conditions were, the "elders" of Jabesh saw no means of resisting, and only begged seven days' respite, to see whether any were left in Israel able and willing to save them. In the foolhardiness of his swagger, Nahash consented, well assured that if Israel were, as he fully believed, incapable of a combined movement for the relief of Jabesh, the whole land would henceforth be at his mercy, and between Philistia in the west and Ammon in the east, Israel - their land and their God - would lie helpless before the heathen powers.

It is, to say the least, a curious coincidence that Jabesh was the only town in Israel which had not taken part in the exterminating warfare against the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 21:9). But it was not on that ground, but because tidings had no doubt reached them of the new royal office in Israel, ⁶ It was evening when Saul returned home "behind the oxen," with which he had been working, ⁷ to find Gibeah strangely moved.

The tidings which the men of Jabesh had brought had filled the place with impotent lamentation, not roused the people to action. So low had Israel sunk! But now, as he heard it, once more "the Spirit of Elohim seized upon Saul." He hewed in pieces the "yoke of oxen" with which he had just returned, and sent - probably by the messengers from Jabesh - these pieces throughout the land, bidding those know who had no higher thoughts than self, that thus it would be done to their oxen

⁶ Most critics seem to imagine that they had first gone all round Israel, and only ultimately arrived at Gibeah, where they addressed themselves to the people, and not to Saul. But this account is in no way borne out by the text, nor would it leave sufficient time for the measures taken by Saul (ver. 7). The statement of the elders of Jabesh (ver.3) was evidently intended to mislead Nahash.

⁷ This is evidently the meaning, and not that conveyed in our Authorised Version.

who followed not after Saul and Samuel in the general war against Ammon.

This, if ever, was the time when the Divine appointment of Saul must be vindicated; and to indicate this he conjoined with himself Samuel, the venerated prophet of God, so long the judge of Israel. It is said that "the terror of Jehovah" fell upon the people. ⁸ From all parts of the land armed men trooped to the trysting-place at Bezek, within the territory of Issachar, near to Bethshan, and almost in a straight line to Jabesh. Three hundred thousand from Israel, and thirty thousand from Judah, ⁹ (for that territory was in part held by the Philistines), had obeyed the summons of Saul. It was not an army, but a ban - a landsturm - an armed rising of the people.

From the brow of the hill on which Bethshan lay, in the plain of Jezreel, you might look across Jordan and see Jabesh-gilead on its eminence. A very few hours would bring relief to the beleaguered city, and so they bade them know and expect. A feigned promise of subjection on the morrow made Nahash and his army even more confident than before. And what, indeed, had they to fear when all Israel lay so helplessly prostrate?

It was night when Saul and the armed multitude which followed him broke up from Bezek. Little did he know how well the brave men of Jabesh would requite the service; how, when on that disastrous day on Mount Gilboa he and his sons would fall in battle, and the victorious Philistines fasten their dead bodies to the walls of Bethshan, these brave men of Jabesh would march all night and rescue the fallen heroes from exposure (1 Samuel 31:8-13). Strange that Saul's first march should have been by night from Bethshan to Jabesh, the same route by which at the last they carried his dead body at night.

⁸ Curiously enough, Keil seems to have overlooked that the Hebrew word here used is that for "terror," or "awe," not fear. The sacred text ascribes the origin of this terror to the agency of Jehovah - not in the sense of a miracle, but because it always traces up effects to Him as their first cause.

⁹ It almost appears as if we here met the first traces of a separation of the people into Israel and Judah. Similarly 17:52; 18:16; 2 Samuel 2:9; 3:10; 5:1-5; 19:41, etc.; 20:2, 4.

But no such thoughts disturbed the host as they crossed the fords of the Jordan, and swarmed up the other bank. A few hours more, and they had reached the valley of the Jabesh. Following the example of Gideon (Judges 7:16), Saul divided the people "into three companies." From the rear and from either flank they fell upon the unsuspecting Ammonites when most secure - "in the morning watch," between three and six o'clock. A general panic ensued; and before the rout was ended not two of the enemy were left together. The revulsion of popular feeling toward Saul was complete. They would even have killed those who had formerly derided the new monarchy. But Saul refused such counsel. Rather did Samuel make different use of the new state of feeling. On his proposal the people followed him and Saul to Gilgal, to which place so many sacred memories clung. Here they offered thank and peace-offerings, and greatly rejoiced as they renewed "the kingdom," and, in the sense of real and universal acknowledgment, "made Saul king before Jehovah."

Although all his lifetime Samuel never ceased to judge Israel, yet his official work in that capacity had now come to an end. Accordingly he gave a solemn and public account of his administration, calling alike the Lord and His anointed to witness of what passed between him and the people. Leaving his sons to bear the responsibility ¹⁰ of their own doings, he challenged any charge against himself. But, as a faithful servant of the Lord, and ruler in Israel, he went further. Fain would he bring them to repentance for their great sin in the manner wherein they had demanded a king. ¹¹ One by one he recalled to them the "righteous doings" of Jehovah in the fulfillment of His covenant-promises in the past.

In contrast to this never-failing help, he pointed to their unbelief, when, unmindful of what God had

done and distrustful of what He would do, they had, on the approach of serious danger, virtually said concerning His leadership, "Nay, but a king shall reign over us." And God had granted their desire. But upon their and their king's bearing towards the Lord, not upon the fact that they had now a king, would the future of Israel depend. And this truth, so difficult for them to learn, God would now, as it were, prove before them in a symbol. Did they think it unlikely, nay, well-nigh impossible, to fail in their present circumstances? God would bring the unlikely and seemingly incredible to pass in a manner patent to all. Was it not the time of wheat-harvest, when in the east not a cloud darkens the clear sky? God would send thunder and rain to convince them, by making the unlikely real, of the folly and sin of their thoughts in demanding a king. ¹²

So manifest a proof of the truth of what Samuel had said, and of the nearness of God and of His personal interposition, struck terror into the hearts of the people, and led to at least outward repentance. In reply to their confession and entreaty for his continued intercession, Samuel assured them, that he would not fail in his duty of prayer for them, nor yet God, either in His faithfulness to His covenant and promises, or in His justice and holiness if they did wickedly.

And so the assembly parted - Israel to their tents, Saul to the work of the kingdom which lay to his hands, and Samuel to the far more trying and difficult duty of faithfully representing and executing the will of God as His appointed messenger in the land.

¹⁰ It is thus that I understand 1 Samuel 12:2: "And, behold, my sons, they are with you."

¹¹ That Samuel did not blame Israel for wishing a king, but for the views and motives which underlay their application, appears (as Hengstenberg has shown) from the circumstance that when the people are repentant (ver. 19), he does not labor to make them recall what had been done, but only to turn unto the Lord (vers. 20-25).

¹² We have ventured to suggest this explanation of the miraculous occurrence, because it meets all the requirements of the case, and because, even during the preparatory dispensation of the Old Testament, miracles were not mere exhibitions of power without moral purpose or meaning. At the same time, we fully and frankly accept the fact that in Biblical times, and till after the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, personal interposition on the part of God - miracle and prophetic inspiration - was the rule, not the exception, in God's dealings with His people.

IV_07 Saul Marches against the Philistines - Position of the two Camps - Jonathan's Feat of Arms - Saul Retreats to Gilgal - Terror among the People - Saul's Disobedience to the Divine Command, and Rejection of his Kingdom

1 Samuel 13

AT Gilgal Saul had been accepted by the whole people as their king,¹³ and it now behooved him to show himself such by immediately taking in hand as his great work the liberation of the land from Israel's hereditary enemy the Philistines.

For this purpose he selected from the armed multitude at Gilgal three thousand men, of whom two thousand under his own command were posted in Michmash and in Mount Bethel, while the other thousand advanced under Jonathan to Gibeah of Benjamin (or Gibeah of Saul). Close to this, a little to the north, at Geba, the Philistines had pushed forward an advanced post, perhaps from Gibeah, to a position more favorable than the latter. Unable, with the forces at his disposal, to make a regular attack, it seems to have been Saul's purpose to form the nucleus of an army, and meanwhile to blockade and watch the Philistines in Geba. So far as we can judge, it does not appear to have lain within his plan to attack that garrison, or else the enterprise would have been undertaken

¹³ Accordingly the commencement of Saul's reign was dated from Gilgal. Hence 1 Samuel 13:1 had opened, as the history of all other kings (comp. 2 Samuel 2:10; 5:4; 1 Kings 14:21; 22:42; 2 Kings 8:26; etc.), with the statistical data of his age at the commencement, and the duration of his reign. But unfortunately the numeral letters have wholly fallen out of the first, and partially out of the second clause of ver. 1, which, as they stand in our present Hebrew text, may be thus represented: "Saul was... years old when he was made king, and he reigned two... years over Israel." All other attempts at explanation of this verse - notably that of our Authorised Version - are incompatible with the Hebrew and with history. According to Jewish tradition (Jos., Antiq., 6. 14, 9), Saul reigned for forty years. This is also the time mentioned by St. Paul (Acts 13:21). There is no sufficient reason for the view of certain critics that the "original narrative" is here resumed from 10:16. In fact, if such were the case, we would require some explanation of the phrase: "Saul chose him three thousand men of Israel" (13:2). Whence and where did he choose them, if not from the assembly at Gilgal? Certainly, more unlikely circumstances for this could not be found than those in which Saul is left in 10:16, when, so far from selecting three thousand men, he ventures not to confide the secret of his elevation even to his uncle!

by himself, nor would it have caused the surprise afterwards excited by Jonathan's success.

As it is of considerable importance for the understanding of this history to have a clear idea of the scene where these events took place, we add the most necessary details. Geba, the post of the Philistines, lay on a low conical eminence, on the western end of a ridge which shelves eastwards towards the Jordan. Passing from Geba northwards and westwards we come to a steep descent, leading into what now is called the Wady-es-Suweinit. This, no doubt, represents the ancient "passage of Michmash" (1 Samuel 13:23). On the opposite steep brow, right over against Geba, lies Michmash, at a distance of barely three miles in a north-westerly direction. This Wady-es-Suweinit is also otherwise interesting. Running up in a north-westerly direction towards Bethel, the ridge on either side the wady juts out into two very steep rock-covered eminences - one south-west, towards Geba, the other northwest, towards Michmash. Side wadys, trending from north to south behind these two eminences, render them quite abrupt and isolated. These two peaks, or "teeth," were respectively called Bozez, "the shining," and Seneh, either "the tooth-like," "the pointed," or perhaps "the thorn," afterwards the scene of Jonathan's daring feat of arms (1 Samuel 14:1-13). Bethel itself lies on the ridge, which runs in a north-westerly direction from Michmash. From this brief sketch it will be seen that, small as Saul's army was, the Philistine garrison in Geba was, to use a military term, completely enfiladed by it, since Saul with his two thousand men occupied Michmash and Mount Bethel to the north-east, north, and north-west, threatening their communications through the Wady-es-Suweinit with Philistia, while Jonathan with his thousand men lay at Gibeah to the south of Geba.

But the brave spirit of Jonathan could ill brook enforced idleness in face of the enemy. Apparently without consultation with his father, he attacked and "smote" the Philistine garrison in Geba. The blow was equally unexpected by Philistine and Israelite. In view of the preparations made by the enemy, Saul now retired to Gilgal - probably not

that in which the late assembly had been held, but the other Gilgal near Jericho.¹⁴

Hither "the people were called together after Saul." But the impression left on us is, that from the first the people were depressed rather than elated, frightened rather than encouraged by Jonathan's feat of arms. And no wonder, considering not only the moral unpreparedness of the people, but their unfitness to cope with the Philistines, alike so far as arms and military training were concerned. The hundreds of thousands who had followed Saul to Jabesh were little better than an undisciplined mob that had seized any kind of weapons. Such a multitude would be rather a hindrance than a help in a war against disciplined infantry, horsemen, and war-chariots. In fact, only three thousand of them were fit to form the nucleus of an army, and even they, or what at last remained of them to encounter the Philistines, were so badly equipped that they could be truthfully described as without either "sword or spear" (13:22).¹⁵

The army with which the Philistines now invaded the land was the largest and best appointed,¹⁶ which they had yet brought into the field. Avoiding the former mistake of allowing their opponents to take them in flank by camping in Michmash, the Philistines now occupied that post

¹⁴ I have put this hypothetically, for I feel by no means sure that it was not the other Gilgal. The argument of Keil, that in that case Saul would have had to attack the Philistines at Michmash before reaching Gibeah (ver. 15), is not convincing, since there was a road to the latter place to the west of Michmash. On the other hand, however, the Gilgal near Jericho was no doubt a more safe place of retreat where to collect an army, and the wadys open directly upon it from Geba and Gibeah; while, lastly, the remark, that "Hebrews went over Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead" (ver. 7), seems to point to a camp in the immediate neighborhood of that river.

¹⁵ Of course, the expression must be taken in a general sense, and not absolutely, and refers to the total want of regular armament.

¹⁶ Our Hebrew text has "thirty thousand chariots" - a number not only disproportionate to the horsemen but unheard of in history. The copyist's mistake evidently arose in this manner. Writing, "And the Philistines gathered themselves together to fight with Israel," the copyist by mistake repeated the letter l, which in Hebrew is the numeral sign for 30, and so wrote what reads "thirty thousand chariots," instead of "one thousand chariots," as had been intended.

themselves, their line extending thither from Beth-aven.¹⁷

From their position at Gilgal the Israelites could see that mighty host, and under the influence of terror rapidly melted away. Some passed across the Jordan, the most part hid themselves in the caves and pits and rocks with which the whole district around the position of the Philistines abounds. The situation was indeed becoming critical in the extreme. Day by day the number of deserters increased, and even those who yet remained "behind him," "were terrified."

And still Saul waited from day to day for that without which he had been told he must not move out of Gilgal, and which now was so unaccountably and, as it would seem to a commander, so fatally delayed! It will be remembered that on parting from Saul, immediately after his anointing, Samuel had spoken these somewhat mysterious words (1 Samuel 10:7, 8): "And it shall be when these signs shall come unto thee, do for thyself as thine hand shall find, for Elohim is with thee. And when thou goest down before me to Gilgal, - and behold I am going down to thee,¹⁸ - to offer burnt-offerings and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace-offerings, seven days shalt thou tarry till I come to thee, and shew thee what thou shalt do."

The first part of Samuel's injunction - to do as his hand should find - Saul had followed when making war against Nahash. It is the second part which sounds so mysterious. It will be

¹⁷ This Beth-aven is mentioned in Joshua 7:2, and must not be confounded with Bethel, east of which it evidently lay, between Bethel and Michmash. At the same time the word rendered "eastward from Beth-aven" (ver. 5) does not necessarily mean "eastwards," but might also be rendered "in front of," or "over against."

¹⁸ I have so punctuated in accordance with most critics, to indicate that the offering of sacrifices refers to Saul's purpose in going to Gilgal, and that the sentence about Samuel's coming down is intercalated. But on this point I do not feel sure. It would make no difference, however, so far as regards the meaning of Samuel, whose injunction was intended to warn Saul not to interfere with the functions of the priestly office. I have, of course, translated the passage literally. The rendering of our Authorised Version, "and thou shalt go down," is impossible. We have our choice between the imperative and the conditional mood, and the balance of argument is strongly in favor of the latter.

remembered that, immediately after the defeat of Nahash, Saul and the people had, on the suggestion of Samuel, gone to Gilgal, there to "renew the kingdom." Manifestly that visit to Gilgal could not have been meant, since, so far from having to wait seven days for the arrival of Samuel, the prophet had accompanied Saul thither. It can, therefore, only have been intended to apply to this retreat of Saul upon Gilgal in preparation for his first great campaign against the Philistines.

¹⁹

And what to us sounds so mysterious in the language of Samuel may not have been so at the time to Saul. During that communing on the roof of Samuel's house, or afterwards, the two may have spoken of a great war against the Philistines, and of the necessity of gathering all Israel in preparation for it to Gilgal, not only for obvious military reasons, but as the place where the "reproach of Israel had first been rolled away (Joshua 5:9), and whence appropriately the reconquest of the land should commence by sacrifices and seeking the direction of the Lord.

But even if at the time when first uttered by Samuel it had seemed mysterious to Saul, there could be no doubt that the injunction applied to the circumstances in which the king and his followers now found themselves. What should he do? Day by day passed without tidings of Samuel, and still his followers decreased, and the hearts of those who remained waxed more feeble. Yet Saul did wait the full seven days which Samuel had appointed. But when the seventh day was drawing to a close ²⁰ he forbore no longer; and although, as

he said, most reluctantly, he had the sacrifices offered, no doubt by the regular priesthood (comp. 2 Samuel 24:5; 1 Kings 3:4; 8:63).

No sooner had the sacrifices been offered, than on a sudden Samuel himself appeared - as we understand it, before the full term which he had set for his arrival had actually been passed. Whether simply to brave it, or, as seems to us more likely, from real ignorance of the import of what he had done, Saul went to meet and salute Samuel. But the prophet came as God's messenger. He denounced the folly of Saul, and his sin in disobeying the express command of the Lord, and intimated that, had he stood the test, his kingdom, or royal line, would have been established, whereas now his throne would pass to a worthier successor. Not, therefore, his personal rejection, nor even that of his title to the throne, but only that of his "kingdom," or line, as unfit to be "captains" over "Jehovah's people" - such was the sentence which Samuel had to announce on that day.

The "folly" of Saul's conduct must, indeed, have been evident to all. He had not waited long enough, and yet too long, so far as his following was concerned, which, after the sacrifice, amounted to only about six hundred men (1 Samuel 13:15). On the other hand, the only motive which, even politically speaking, could have brought numbers to his ranks or fired them with courage, was a religious belief in the help of Jehovah, of which Saul's breach of the Divine command and the defection of Samuel would threaten to deprive Israel. But still there are questions involved in the Divine punishment of Saul which require most earnest attention, not only for the vindication, but even for the proper understanding of this history. To the first question which arises, why Samuel thus unduly delayed his journey to Gilgal, apparently without necessary reason, we can, in fairness, only return the answer, that his delay seems to have been intentional, quite as much as that of our blessed Lord, after He had heard of the sickness of Lazarus, and when He knew of his death (John 11:6, 14, 15). But if intentional, its object can only have been to test the character of Saul's kingdom. Upon this, of course, the permanency of that kingdom would depend. We have already seen that Saul

¹⁹ Of course, two other theories are possible. The one, a suggestion that the verse 1 Samuel 10:8 may be displaced in our Hebrew text, and should stand somewhere else, is a wild and vague hypothesis. The other suggestion, that all between 10:17 and 13:2 is intercalated from another narrative will not bear investigation. If the reader tries to piece ch. 10:16 to 13:3, he will at once perceive that there would be a felt gap in the narrative. Besides, how are we to account for the selection of three thousand men, and the going to war against the Philistines on the part of a man who is made the target of wit in his own place, and who dares not tell even his own uncle of his secret elevation to the royal office?

²⁰ The context seems to imply that Saul offered his sacrifice and Samuel came before the actual termination of the seven days.

represented the kind of monarchy which Israel wished to have established. Saul's going down to Gilgal to offer sacrifices, and yet not offering them properly; his unwillingness to enter on the campaign without having entreated the face of Jehovah, and yet offending Him by disobedience; his waiting so long, and not long enough; his trust in the help of Jehovah, and yet his distrust when his followers left him; his evident belief in the absolute efficacy of sacrifices as an outward ordinance irrespective of the inward sacrifice of heart and will - are all exactly representative of the religious state of Israel. But although Israel had sought, and in Saul obtained a monarchy "after their own heart," yet, as Samuel had intimated in Gilgal (12:14, 20- 22, 24), the Lord, in His infinite mercy, was willing to forgive and to turn all for good, if Israel would only "fear the Lord and serve Him in truth." Upon this conversion, so to speak, of Israel's royalty into the kingdom of God the whole question turned. For, either Israel must cease to be the people of the Lord, or else the principle on which its monarchy was founded must become spiritual and Divine; and consequently any government that contravened this must be swept away to give place to another. If it be asked, what this Divine principle of monarchy was to be, we have no hesitation in answering, that it was intended to constitute a kingdom in which the will of the earthly should be in avowed subjection to that of the heavenly King. This was right in itself; it was expressive of the covenant-relationship by which Jehovah became the God of Israel, and Israel the people of Jehovah; and it embodied the typical idea of the kingdom of God, to be fully realized in the King of the Jews, Who came not to do His own will, but that of His Father in heaven, even to the bitter agony of the cup in Gethsemane and the sufferings of Golgotha. Saul was the king after Israel's own heart (1 Samuel 12:13); David the king after God's own heart, not because of his greater piety or goodness, but because, despite his failings and his sins, he fully embodied the Divine idea of Israel's kingdom; and for this reason also he and his kingdom were the type of our Lord Jesus Christ and of His kingdom.

In what has been said the second great difficulty, which almost instinctively rises in our minds on

reading this history, has in part been anticipated. It will easily be understood that this great question had, if ever, to be tested and decided at the very commencement of Saul's reign, and before he engaged in any great operations, the success or failure of which might divert the mind. If to be tried at all, it must be on its own merits, and irrespective of results. Still, it must be admitted, that the first feeling with most of us is that, considering the difficulties of Saul's position, the punishment awarded to him seems excessive. Yet it only seems, but is not such. Putting aside the idea of his personal rejection and dethronement, neither of which was implied in the words of Samuel, the sentence upon Saul only embodied this principle, that no monarchy could be enduring in Israel which did not own the supreme authority of God. As Adam's obedience was tested in a seemingly small matter, and his failure involved that of his race, so also in the case of Saul. His partial obedience and his anxiety to offer the sacrifices as, in his mind, in themselves efficacious, only rendered it the more necessary to bring to the foreground the great question of absolute, unquestioning, and believing submission to the will of the Heavenly King. Saul's kingdom had shown itself not to be God's kingdom, and its continuance was henceforth impossible. However different their circumstances, Saul was as unfit for the inheritance of the kingdom, with the promises which this implied and the typical meaning it bore, as Esau had been for the inheritance of the first-born, with all that it conveyed in the present, in the near, and in the distant future.

IV_08 Camps of Israel and of the Philistines - Jonathan and his Armor-bearer - Panic Among the Philistines, and Flight - Saul's Rash Vow - The "Lot" cast at Ajalon - Cessation of the War 1 Samuel 13:15 to 14:46

WHEN, after Samuel's departure, Saul with his six hundred men marched out of Gilgal, he found the Philistines occupying the range at Michmash which he had formerly held. With such weak following as he could command, it was wise on his part to take up a position in the "uttermost part of Gibeah" (14:2), that is, as we gather from the context, to the north of the town itself, and on the outskirts of Geba and its district (13:16). Geba is

only about an hour and a quarter north of Gibeah. We may therefore suppose Saul's camp to have been about two miles to the north of the latter city, and to have extended towards Geba. His headquarters were under a pomegranate tree at a place called Migron - probably a "land-slip;" and there, besides his principal men, he had the then occupant of the high-priesthood, Ahiah,²¹ the son of Ahitub, an elder brother of Ichabod, "wearing an ephod," or discharging the priestly functions.

From Geba itself Michmash, which lay on the opposite ridge, was only divided by the intervening Wady-es-Suweinit. How long the Israelites had lain in that position we are not informed. But we are told that "the spoilers," or rather "the destroyers," "went out of the camp of the Philistines in three bands" (13:17), - one "facing" in a north-easterly direction by Ophrah towards the district of Shual, the "fox-country," the other "facing" westwards towards Bethhoron, and the third south-eastwards, "the way to the district that overlooks the valley of Zeboim" ("raveners," viz., wild beasts) "toward the wilderness" (of Judah).

Thus the only direction left untouched was south and south-west, where Saul and Jonathan held the strong position of Gibeah-Geba. If the intention had been to draw them thence into the open, it failed. But immense damage must have been inflicted upon the country, while a systematic raid was made upon all smithies, so as to render it impossible not only to prepare weapons, but so much as to have the means of sharpening the necessary tools of husbandry.

In these circumstances it is once more the noble figure of Jonathan which comes to the foreground. Whatever fitness he might have shown for "the kingdom," had he been called to it, a more unselfish, warm-hearted, genuine, or noble character is not presented to us in Scripture than that of Jonathan. Weary of the long and apparently hopeless inactivity, trustful in Jehovah, and fired

by the thought that with Him there was "no hindrance to save, by much or by little," he planned single-handed an expedition against the Philistine outpost at Michmash. As he put it, it was emphatically a deed of faith, in which he would not take counsel either with his father or with any of the people, only with God, of Whom he would seek a sign of approbation before actually entering on the undertaking. The sole companion whom he took was, as in the case of Gideon (Judges 7:9, 10), his armor-bearer, who seems to have been not only entirely devoted to his master, but like-minded. In the Wady-es-Suweinit, which, as we have seen, forms "the passage" between the ridge of Geba, where Jonathan was, and that of Michmash, now occupied by the Philistines, were the two conical heights, or "teeth of rock," called Bozez and Seneh. One of these, as we gather from the text, faced Jonathan and his armor-bearer toward the north over against Michmash. This we suppose to have been Bozez, "the shining one," probably so called from its rocky sides and top. It is figuratively described in the text as cast like metal. Here, on the top of a sharp, very narrow ledge of rock, was the Philistine outpost. The "tooth of rock" opposite, on which Jonathan and his armor-bearer "discovered" themselves to their enemies, was Seneh, "the thornlike," or "pointed," or else "the tooth."

All around there was thick wood, or rather forest (14:25), which stretched all the way towards Bethel (2 Kings 2:23, 24). Standing on the extreme point of Seneh, the Philistines would probably only see Jonathan, with, at most, his armor-bearer; but they would be ignorant what forces might lurk under cover of the trees. And this was to be the sign by which Jonathan and his companion were to discern whether or not God favored their enterprise. If, when they "discovered" themselves to the Philistines, these would challenge them to stay and await their coming over to fight, then Jonathan and his companion would forbear, while, if the challenge were the other way, they would infer that Jehovah had delivered them into their hand. The one, of course, would argue courage on the part of the Philistines, the other the want of it. What followed is graphically sketched in the sacred text. From the point of "the thorn," or "tooth of the rock," Jonathan "discovered" himself

²¹ This Ahiah, or rather Achijah ("brother," "friend of Jehovah"), is supposed to be the same as Achimelech ("brother," "friend of the King," viz., Jehovah), 1 Samuel 22:9, etc. Ewald (Gesch., 2., 585, Note 3) regards the two names as interchangeable, like Elimelech and Elijahah. Keil suggests that Achimelech may have been a brother of Achijah.

to the Philistines. This open appearance of the Hebrews was as startling as unexpected, nor could the Philistines have imagined that two men alone would challenge a post. Manifestly the Philistine post had no inclination to fight an unknown enemy; and so with genuine Eastern boastfulness they heaped abuse on them, uttering the challenge to come up. This had been the preconcerted signal; and, choosing the steepest ascent, where their approach would least be looked for, Jonathan and his armor-bearer crept up the ledge of the rock on their hands and feet. Up on the top it was so narrow that only one could stand abreast. This we infer not only from the language of the text, but from the description of what ensued. As Jonathan reached the top, he threw down his foremost opponent, and the armor-bearer, coming up behind, killed him. There was not room for two to attack or defend in line. And so twenty men fell, as the text expresses it, within "half a furrow of a yoke of field," - that is, as we understand it, within the length commonly ploughed by a yoke of oxen, and the width of about half a furrow, or more probably half the width that would be occupied in plowing a furrow.

All this time it would be impossible, from the nature of the terrain, to know how many assailants were supporting Jonathan and his armor-bearer. This difficulty would be still more felt in the camp and by those at a little farther distance, since it would be manifestly impossible for them to examine the steep sides of Bozez, or the neighboring woods. The terror, probably communicated by fugitives, who would naturally magnify the danger, perhaps into a general assault, soon became a panic, or, as the text expresses it, a "terror of Elohim." Presently the host became an armed rabble, melting away before their imaginary enemy, and each man's sword in the confusion turned against his neighbor. At the same time the Hebrew auxiliaries, whom cowardice or force had brought into the camp of the Philistines, turned against them, and the noise and confusion became indescribable.

From the topmost height of Gibeah the outlook, which Saul had there posted, descried the growing confusion in the Philistine camp. Only one cause could suggest itself for this. When Saul mustered

his small army, he found that only Jonathan and his armor-bearer were missing. But the king sufficiently knew the spirit of his son not to regard as impossible any undertaking on his part, however seemingly desperate. What was he to do? One thing alone suggested itself to him. He would take counsel of the Lord by the well-known means of the Urim and Thummim.²²

But while preparations were making for it, the necessity of its employment had evidently ceased. It was not a sudden commotion, but an increasing panic among the Philistines that was observed. Presently Saul and his men, as they came to battle, found that the enemy himself had been doing their work. And now it became a rout. The Hebrews from the Philistine camp had joined the pursuers, and, as the well-known notes of the trumpet wakened the echoes of Mount Ephraim, the men who were in hiding crept out of their concealment and followed in the chase. And so the tide of battle rolled as far as Beth-aven.

But, though the battle was chiefly pursuit of the fleeing foe, already "the men of Israel were distressed," or rather "pressed," by weariness and faintness. For quite early in the day, and in the absence of Jonathan, Saul had yielded to one of his characteristic impulses. When he ascertained the real state of matters as regarded the Philistines, he put the people under a vow - to which, either by an "Amen," or else by their silence they gave assent - not to taste food until the evening, till he had avenged himself of his enemies. It need scarcely be said, that in this Saul acted without Divine direction. More than that, it is difficult to discern in it any religious motive, unless it were, that the enemies on whom Saul wished personally to be avenged were also the hereditary foes of Israel. And yet in the mind of Saul there was no

²² Our present textus receptus has, in 1 Samuel 14:18, two copyist's errors. The one is emendated in our Authorised Version, which reads, "with the children of Israel," instead of, as in the textus receptus, "and the children of Israel," which would give no meaning. The second error is emendated in the LXX., who seem to have had the correct text, according to which the word "Ephod" should be substituted for "ark." The letters of these two words in the Hebrew are somewhat like each other, whence the error of the copyist. The ark was at Kirjath Jearim, nor was it "brought hither" to ascertain the will of God.

doubt something religious about this rash vow. At any rate the form in which his impetuous Eastern resolve was cast, was such, and that of a kind which would peculiarly commend itself to an Israelite like Saul. Foolish and wrong as such a vow had been, still, as Israel had at least by their silence given consent, it lay as a heavy obligation upon the people. However faint, none dared break the fast during that long and weary day, when they followed the enemy as far as the western passes of Ajalon that led down into the Philistine plains. But Jonathan had not known it, till one told him of his father's vow after he had paused in the forest to dip his staff into honey that had dropped from the combs of wild bees. For such an offense Jonathan was certainly not morally responsible. Considering how small an amount of nourishment had helped him in his weariness, he could only deplore the rashness of his father, whose vow had, through the faintness which it entailed on the people, defeated the very object he had sought.

At last the weary day closed in Ajalon, and with it ended the obligation upon the people. The pursuit was stopped; and the people, ravenous for food, slew the animals "on the ground," felling them down, and eating the meat without being careful to remove the blood. It is true that, when Saul heard of it, he reproved the people for the sin which this involved, and took immediate steps to provide a proper slaughtering-place. Still this breach of an express Divine command (Leviticus 19:26) must in fairness be laid to the charge of Saul's rash vow. Nor could the building of a memorial-altar on the spot be regarded as altering the character of what had taken place that day.

Night was closing around Ajalon. The place, the circumstances, nay, his very vow, could not but recall to Saul the story of Joshua, and of his pursuit of the enemies of Israel (Joshua 10:12, 13). His proposal to follow up the Philistines was willingly taken up by the people, who had meanwhile refreshed themselves and were eager for the fray. Only the priests would first ask counsel of God. But no answer came, though sought by Urim and Thummim. Some burden must lie upon Israel, and Saul with his usual rashness would bring it to the test with whom lay the guilt, at the same time swearing by Jehovah that it

should be avenged by death, even though it rested on Jonathan, the victor of that day, who had "wrought this great salvation in Israel," nay, who "had wrought with God" that day. But the people, who well knew what Jonathan had done, listened in dull silence. It must have been a weird scene as they gathered around the camp fire, and the torches cast their fitful glare on those whose fate the lot was to decide. First it was to be between all the people on the one side, and Saul and Jonathan on the other. A brief, solemn invocation, and the lot fell upon Saul and his son. A second time it was cast, and now it pointed to Jonathan.

Questioned by his father, he told what he had done in ignorance. Still Saul persisted that his vow must be fulfilled. But now the people interposed. He whom God had owned, and who had saved Israel, must not die. But the pursuit of the Philistines was given up, and the campaign abruptly closed. And so ended in sorrow and disappointment what had been begun in self-willed disobedience to God and distrustfulness of Him.

IV_09 The War Against Amalek - Saul's Disobedience, and its Motives - Samuel Commissioned to announce Saul's Rejection - Agag Hewn in Pieces

1 Samuel 14:47-52; 15

THE successful war against the Philistines had secured Saul in possession of the throne.²³ Henceforth his reign was marked by wars against the various enemies of Israel, in all of which he proved victorious.²⁴

These expeditions are only indicated, not described, in the sacred text, as not forming constituent elements in the history of the kingdom of God, however they may have contributed to the prosperity of the Jewish state. The war against Amalek alone is separately told (ch. 15), alike from its character and from its bearing on the kingdom which God would establish in Israel. Along with these outward successes the sacred text

²³ We take this to be the meaning of the expression: "So Saul took the kingdom" (14:47).

²⁴ The sacred text has it (vers. 47, 48): "and whithersoever he turned himself, he vexed them" - the latter word being used of sentences pronounced by a judge, - "and he wrought might," that is, he displayed power.

also indicates the seeming prosperity of Saul, as regarded his family-life.²⁵ It almost appears as if it had been intended to place before us, side by side in sharp contrast, these two facts: Saul's prosperity both at home and abroad, and his sudden fall and rejection, to show forth that grand truth which all history is evolving: Jehovah reigneth!

Israel's oldest and hereditary enemies were the Amalekites. Descended from Esau (Genesis 36:12, 16; 1 Chronicles 1:36; comp. Josephus' *Antiq.* 2., 1, 2), they occupied the territory to the south and south-west of Palestine. They had been the first wantonly to attack Israel in the wilderness, (Exodus 17:8, etc.), and "war against Amalek from generation to generation," had been the Divine sentence upon them.

Besides that first attack we know that they had combined with the Canaanites (Numbers 14:43-45), the Moabites (Judges 3:22, 13), and the Midianites (Judges 7:12) against Israel. What other more direct warfare they may have carried on, is not expressly mentioned in Scripture, because, as frequently observed, it is not a record of the national history of Israel. But from 1 Samuel 15:33 we infer that, at the time of which we write, they were not only in open hostility against Israel, but behaved with extreme and wanton cruelty. Against this unrelenting hereditary foe of the kingdom of God the ban had long been pronounced (Deuteronomy 25:17-19). The time had now arrived for its execution, and Samuel summoned Saul in the most solemn manner to this work. It was in itself a difficult expedition. To be carried out in its full sweep as a "ban," it would, in Saul's then state of mind, have required peculiar self-abnegation and devotion. Looking back upon it from another stage of moral development and

religious dispensation, and in circumstances so different that such questions and duties can never arise,²⁶ and that they seem immeasurably far behind, as the dark valley to the traveler who has climbed the sunlit height, or as perhaps events and phases in our own early history, many things connected with the "ban" may appear mysterious to us. But the history before us is so far helpful as showing that, besides its direct meaning as a judgment, it had also another and a moral aspect, implying, as in the case of Saul, self-abnegation and real devotedness to God.

Thus viewed, the command to execute the "ban" upon Amalek was the second and final test of Saul's fitness for being king over God's people. The character of this kingdom had been clearly explained by Samuel at Gilgal in his address to king and people (1 Samuel 12:14, 20, 21, 24). There is evidently an internal connection between the first (1 Samuel 13:8-14) and this second and final trial of Saul. The former had brought to light his want of faith, and even of simple obedience, and it had been a test of his moral qualification for the kingdom; this second was the test of his moral qualification for being king. As the first trial, so to speak, developed into the second, so Saul's want of moral qualification had ripened into absolute disqualification - and as the former trial determined the fate of his line, so this second decided his own as king. After the first trial his line was rejected; after the second his own standing as theocratic king ceased. As God-appointed king he was henceforth rejected; Jehovah withdrew the sanction which He had

²⁵ Only those three sons are mentioned whose story is identified with that of Saul himself, and who fell with him in the fatal battle of Gilboa (31:2). "Ishui" is evidently the same as Abinadab. We will not venture on any conjecture of the reason of the interchange of these two names (comp. 1 Chronicles 8:33; 9:39). In the genealogies in Chronicles, a fourth son, Esh-baal, is mentioned, who was evidently the same as Ishbosheth. Merab and Michal are introduced with a view to their after-story. Ewald says: "With ch. 14 Saul ceases to be the true king, in the prophetic meaning of that term. Hence the history of his reign is here closed with the usual general remarks."

²⁶ This accommodation of the law to each stage of man's moral state, together with the continuous moral advancement which the law as a schoolmaster was intended to bring about, and which in turn was met by progressive revelation, renders it impossible to judge of a Divine command by trying to put it as to our own times, and as applicable to us. If we put forward the finger-hand on the dial of time, and the clock still strikes the old hour, we must not infer that the clock is out of order, but rather that we have unskillfully meddled with it. The principle for which we have here contended is clearly laid down in the teaching of our blessed Lord about divorce (Matthew 19:8), and also implied in what St. Paul saith about the law (Galatians 3:24). The whole of this subject is most admirably and exhaustively treated by Canon Mozley in his *Ruling Ideas in Early Ages, and their Relation to Old Testament Faith*. See especially Lecture 8, on "The Law of Retaliation," and Lecture 10, "The End the Test of a Progressive Revelation."

formerly given to his reign by the aid of His power and the Presence of His Spirit. Henceforth "the Spirit of Jehovah departed from Saul" (1 Samuel 16:14), and he was left, in the judgment of God, to the influence of that evil spirit to whom his natural disposition and the circumstances of his position laid him specially open (comp. Matthew 12:43-45).

In view of the great moral trial which this expedition against Amalek would involve, Samuel had been careful to make it clear that the call to it came by Divine authority, reminding the king that he had been similarly sent to anoint him (1 Samuel 15:1). From the circumstance that Saul seems to have marched against Amalek, not with a chosen host, but to have summoned the people as a whole ²⁷ to execute the "ban," we infer that he had understood the character of his commission. Moving from Telaim ("the place of lambs" ²⁸), probably in the eastern part of the south country, he came to "the city of Amalek," which is not named, where he "laid an ambush in the valley."

Before proceeding farther, he found means to communicate with that branch of the tribe of the Kenites who, from ancient times, had been on terms of friendship with Israel ²⁹ (Numbers 10:29; Judges 1:16).

In consequence they removed from among the Amalekites. Then a general slaughter began, which is described as "from Havilah," in the south-east, on the boundaries of Arabia, to the wilderness of Shur "over against," or eastward of Egypt. Every Amalekite who fell into their hands was destroyed, ³⁰ with the notable exception, however, of Agag, ³¹ their king. And as they

spared him, so also "the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of those of the second sort, ³² and the (wilderness-) fed lambs, and all that was good."

The motives for the latter are, of course, easily understood; not so that for sparing Agag. Did they wish to have in his person a sort of material guarantee for the future conduct of Amalek, - or did it flatter the national as well as the royal vanity to carry with them such a captive as Agag, - or did they really wish a sort of alliance and fraternity with what remained of Amalek? All these motives may have operated. But of the character of the act as one of rebellion and disobedience there could be no doubt, in view of the direct Divine command (15:3).

If in the case of Saul's first failure it was difficult to withhold sympathy, however clearly his sin and unfitness for the theocratic kingdom appeared, it is not easy even to frame an excuse for his utterly causeless disregard of so solemn a command as that of "the ban." All Jewish history, from Achan downwards, rose in testimony against him; nay, remembering his proposal to kill even Jonathan, when he had unwittingly infringed his father's rash vow, Saul stood convicted out of his own mouth! Nor was there any tangible motive for his conduct, nor anything noble or generous either about it, or about his after-bearing towards Samuel. Rather, quite the contrary. What now follows in the sacred narrative is tragic, grand, and even awful. The first scene is laid at night in Samuel's house at Ramah. It is God Who speaketh to the aged seer. "It repenteth Me that I have made Saul king, for he has returned from after Me, and My Word he has not executed" (literally, set up). "And it kindled in Samuel" (intense feeling, wrath), "and he cried unto Jehovah the whole night."

It is one of the most solemn, even awful thoughts - that of the Divine repentance, which we should approach with worshipful reverence. God's repentance is not like ours, for, "the Strength of Israel will not lie, nor repent; for He is not a man

²⁷ So we understand the figures (1 Samuel 15:4), which otherwise would be disproportionately large.

²⁸ Perhaps the same as Telem (Joshua 15:24). Rashi has it, that Saul numbered the people by making each pick out a lamb, since it was unlawful to number the people directly.

²⁹ Another branch of that tribe was hostile to Israel: comp. Numbers 24:21, etc.

³⁰ Of course, not literally all the Amalekites, but all who fell into their hands: comp. 27:8; 30:1; 2 Samuel 8:12; 1 Chronicles 4:43.

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³² The word must be rendered either so, or else, according to some of the Rabbis, "animals of the second birth" (*animalia secundo partu edita*), which are supposed to be better than the first-born.

that He should repent." Man's repentance implies a change of mind, God's a change of circumstances and relations. He has not changed, but is ever the same; it is man who has changed in his position relatively to God. The Saul whom God had made king was not the same Saul whom God repented to have thus exalted; the essential conditions of their relationship were changed. God's repentance is the unmovedness of Himself, while others move and change. The Divine finger ever points to the same spot; but man has moved from it to the opposite pole. But as in all repentance there is sorrow, so, reverently be it said, in that of God. It is God's sorrow of love, as, Himself unchanged and unchanging, He looks at the sinner who has turned from Him. But, although not wholly unexpected, the announcement of this change on the part of Saul, and of his consequent rejection, swept like a terrible tempest over Samuel, shaking him in his innermost being. The greatness of the sin, the terribleness of the judgment, its publicity in the sight of all Israel, who knew of his Divine call, and in whose presence Samuel, acting as Divine messenger, had appointed him, - all these thoughts "kindled within him" feelings which it would be difficult to analyze, but which led to a "cry" all that long night, if perchance the Lord would open a way of deliverance or of pardon. With the morning light came calm resolve and the terrible duty of going in search of Saul on this errand of God. Nor did the stern Nazarite now shrink from aught which this might imply, however bitterly he might have to suffer in consequence. Saul had returned to Gilgal, as if in his infatuation he had intended to present himself in that place of so many sacred memories before the God Whose express command he had just daringly set aside. By the way he had tarried at Carmel, ³³ where he "had set him up a monument" ³⁴ of his triumph over Agag. And now as Samuel met him, he anticipated his questions by claiming to have executed Jehovah's behest.

³³ The modern Kurmul, three hours south of Hebron, the place of Nabal's possessions (25:2, 5, 7, 40).

³⁴ Ver. 12, erroneously rendered in our Authorised Version: "he set him up a place." The word literally means "a hand," and is again used for "monument" in 2 Samuel 18:18. Phoenician monuments have been found with hands on them.

But the very bleating of the sheep and lowing of the oxen betrayed his failure, and the excuse which he offered was so glaringly untrue, ³⁵ that Samuel interrupted him ³⁶ to put the matter plainly and straightforwardly in its real bearing: "Was it not when thou wast small in thine own eyes thou becamest head of the tribes of Israel?" - implying this as its counterpart: Now that thou art great in thine own eyes, thou art rejected, for it was God Who appointed thee, and against Him thou hast rebelled.

Once more Saul sought to cloak his conduct by pretense of greater religiousness, when Samuel, in language which shows how deeply the spiritual meaning of ritual worship was understood even in early Old Testament times, ³⁷ laid open the mingled folly and presumption of the king, and announced the judgment which the Lord had that night pronounced in his hearing.

And now the painful interest of the scene still deepens. If there had been folly, hypocrisy, and meanness in Saul's excuses, there was almost incredible weakness also about his attempt to cast the blame upon the people. Evidently Saul's main anxiety was not about his sin, but about its consequences, or rather about the effect which might be produced upon the people if Samuel were openly to disown him. He entreated him to go with him, and when Samuel refused, and turned to leave, he laid such hold on the corner of his mantle that he rent it. Not terrified by the violence of the king, Samuel only bade him consider this as a sign of how Jehovah had that day rent the kingdom from him. At last the painful scene ended. Saul

³⁵ Besides its obvious falsehood, Saul must, of course, have known that all that was "banned" by that very fact belonged unto God (Leviticus 27:29), and could not, therefore, be again offered unto Him (Deuteronomy 13:16).

³⁶ "Stay" (ver. 16), that is, "Stop! cease!"

³⁷ It is scarcely necessary to indicate, that the words of Samuel (vers. 22, 23) do not imply that sacrifices were not of primary importance. This would have run counter not only to his own practice, but to the whole Old Testament economy. But sacrifices, irrespective of a corresponding state of mind, and in actual rebelliousness against God, - religiousness without religion, - were not only a mere opus operatum, but a gross caricature, essentially heathen, not Jewish. Comp. Psalm 50:8-14; 51:17, 19; Isaiah 1:11; Jeremiah 6:20; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8.

gave up the pretense of wishing Samuel's presence from religious motives, and pleaded for it on the ground of honoring him before the elders of his people. And to this Samuel yielded. Throughout it had not been a personal question, nor had Samuel received directions about Saul's successor, nor would he, under any circumstances, have fomented discord or rebellion among the people. Besides, he had other and even more terrible work to do ere that day of trial closed. And now the brief service was past, and Samuel prepared for what personally must have been the hardest duty ever laid upon him. By his direction Agag was brought to him. The unhappy man, believing that the bitterness of death, its danger and pang were past, and that probably he was now to be introduced to the prophet as before he had been brought to the king, came "with gladness."³⁸ So far as Agag himself was concerned, these words of Samuel must have recalled his guilt and spoken its doom: "As thy sword has made women childless, so be thy mother childless above (ordinary) women."³⁹

But for Israel and its king, who had transgressed the "ban" by sparing Agag, there was yet another lesson, whatever it might cost Samuel. Rebellious, disobedient king and people on the one side, and on the other Samuel the prophet and Nazarite alone for God - such, we take it, was the meaning of Samuel having to hew Agag in pieces before Jehovah in Gilgal.

From that day forward Samuel came no more to see Saul. God's ambassador was no longer accredited to him; for he was no longer king of Israel in the true sense of the term. The Spirit of Jehovah departed from him. Henceforth there was nothing about him royal even in the eyes of men - except his death. But still Samuel mourned for him and over him; mourned as for one cut off in the midst of life, dead while living, a king rejected of God. And still "Jehovah repented that He had made Saul king over Israel."

³⁸ This, and not "delicately," as in our Authorised Version, is the meaning of the Hebrew word (comp. Proverbs 29:21).

³⁹ More than ordinary women, or rather most of women, since her son was king of his people.

IV_10 Samuel Mourns for Saul - He is directed to the house of Jesse - Anointing of David - Preparation of David for the Royal Office - The "Evil Spirit from the Lord" upon Saul - David is sent to Court - War with the Philistines - Combat between David and Goliath - Friendship of David and Jonathan

1 Samuel 16:1 to 18:4

If the tragic events just recorded, and the share which Samuel had in them, had left on the mind a lingering feeling as of harshness or imperiousness on the part of the old prophet, the narrative which follows must remove all such erroneous impressions. So far from feeling calm or satisfied under the new state of things which it had been his duty to bring about, Samuel seems almost wholly absorbed by sorrow for Saul personally, and for what had happened; not unmixed, we may suppose, with concern for the possible consequences of his rejection.⁴⁰

It needed the voice of God to recall the mind of the prophet to the wider interests of the theocracy, and to calm him into complete submission by showing how the difficulties which he anticipated had been provided for. A new king had already been fixed upon, and the duty was laid on Samuel to designate him for that office. Accordingly Samuel was now sent to anoint one of the sons of Jesse to be Saul's successor. From the first, and increasingly, Samuel's public career had been difficult and trying. But never before had his faith been so severely tested as by this commission. He who had never feared the face of man, and who so lately had boldly confronted Saul at Gilgal, now spake as if afraid for his life, in case Saul, who no doubt was already under the influence of the "evil spirit," or rather the spirit of evil, should hear of what might seem an attempt to dethrone him. But, as always in such circumstances, the fears, which weakness suggested, proved groundless. As in the case of Saul, so in that of David, it was not intended that the anointing should be followed by

⁴⁰ Calvin remarks: "We see here the prophet affected as other men. As Samuel beholds the vessel which God's own hand had made, more than broken and minished, he is deeply moved. In this he showed pious and holy affection. But he was not wholly free from sin in the matter - not that the feeling itself was wrong, but that it exceeded the proper measure, and that he too much indulged in personal grief."

immediate outward consequences. Hence there was no need for publicity; on the contrary, privacy served important purposes. The chief present object seems to have been a solemn call to David to prepare himself, as having been set apart for some great work.

Besides, in view of the meaning of this symbol, and of its results in Saul and David (1 Samuel 16:13), the anointing may be regarded as an ordinance in connection with the gift of the Spirit of God, Who alone qualified for the work. In view of all this, God directed Samuel to combine the anointing of Jesse's son with a sacrificial service at Bethlehem, the home of Jesse. Only the latter, or public service, required to be made generally known. Many reasons will suggest themselves why the other part of Samuel's commission should have remained secret, probably not fully understood by Jesse, or even by David himself. ⁴¹

The narrative also affords some interesting glimpses into the history of the time. Thus we infer that Samuel had been in the habit of visiting various places in the land for the purpose of sacrifice and instruction. The former was quite lawful, so long as the ark was not in its central sanctuary. On the other hand, it needs no comment to show the importance of such periodical visits of the prophet at a time when religious knowledge was necessarily so scanty, and the means of grace so scarce. It helps us to understand how religion was kept alive in the land. Again, the narrative implies that the family of Jesse must have occupied a leading place in Bethlehem, and been known as devoted to the service of the Lord. Nor do we wonder at this, remembering that they were the immediate descendants of Boaz and Ruth.

As we follow Samuel to Bethlehem, we seem to mark the same primitive simplicity and life of piety as of old. When the "elders" hear of Samuel's coming, they go to meet him, yet with fear lest the unexpected visit betoken some unknown sin resting on their quiet village. This apprehension is removed by Samuel's explanation, and they are invited to attend the "sacrifice." But

⁴¹ There is not a trace of attempted prevarication in the narrative. Calvin and others have given too much attention to a cavil which is best refuted by an attentive study of the history.

the sacrificial meal which usually followed was to be confined to Jesse and his family, in whose house, as we infer, Samuel was a welcome guest. It would appear that Samuel himself was not acquainted with all that was to happen, the Lord reserving it for the proper moment to point out to His servant who was to be Israel's future king. And this, as we judge, partly because the aged prophet had himself a lesson to learn in the matter, or rather to unlearn what of the ideas of his time and people unconsciously clung to him.

All this appears from the narrative. One by one the sons of Jesse were introduced to Samuel. The manly beauty of Eliab, the eldest, and his rank in the family, suggested to the prophet that he might be "Jehovah's anointed." But Samuel was to learn that Jehovah's judgment was, "not as what man seeth" (looketh to), "for man looketh to the eyes but Jehovah looketh to the heart."

And so the others followed in turn, with a like result. Evidently, Samuel must have expressed it to Jesse that on that day one of his family was to be chosen by Jehovah, but for what purpose seems not to have been known to them. Nor did Jesse himself, nor even David, apparently understand what was implied in the rite of anointing. No words of solemn designation were uttered by the prophet, such as Samuel had spoken when he anointed Saul (1 Samuel 10:1). Besides, as Saul was the first king anointed, and as none had been present when it took place, we may reasonably suppose that alike the ceremony and its meaning were unknown to the people. Both Jesse and David may have regarded it as somehow connected with admission to the schools of the prophets, or more probably as connected with some work for God in the future, which at the proper time would be pointed out to them. ⁴² And thus was David in this respect also a type of our Lord, Whose human consciousness of His calling and work appears to have been, in a sense,

⁴² A full knowledge of his being anointed to the kingdom is incompatible alike with his after position in his father's house, and the bearing of his brothers towards him. In general, we infer that each of the brothers only passed before Samuel, or was introduced to him, and then left his presence when no further direction in regard to him was given to the prophet.

progressive; being gradually manifested in the course of His history.

But to return. The seven sons of Jesse had successively passed before Samuel, yet he was not among them whom the prophet had been sent to anoint. But for all that his mission had not failed: he had only learned to own the sovereignty of God, the failure of his own judgment, and the fact that he was simply a passive instrument to carry out, not his own views, but the will of the Lord. For, the youngest of the family still remained. So unlikely did it seem to his father that he could be called to any great work, that he had been left in the field to tend the sheep. But when, at the bidding of Samuel, he came, his very bearing and appearance seemed to speak in his favor. In the language of the text, "he was reddish,"⁴³ and fair of eyes, and goodly to look at." And now the command to anoint him was given, and immediately and unquestioningly obeyed by Samuel.⁴⁴

The sacrifice past, and the sacrificial meal over, Samuel returned to Ramah, and David to his humble avocation in his father's household. And here also we love to mark the print of our Lord's footsteps, and to see in the history of David the same humble submission to a lowly calling, and faithful discharge of menial toil, and the same subjectness to his parents, as we adoringly trace in the life of Him Who humbled Himself to become David's son. But there was henceforth one difference in the life of the son of Jesse. From the day of his anointing forward, "the Spirit of Jehovah seized upon David," as formerly upon Saul, to qualify him by might and by power for the work of "God's anointed." But from Saul, who was no longer the king of God's appointment, had the Spirit of Jehovah departed, not only as the source of "might and of power," but even as "the Spirit of a sound mind." At his anointing, the Spirit then given him had made him "another man" (1 Samuel

10:6, 10). But Saul had resisted and rebelled, nor had he ever turned from his pride and disobedience in repentance to the Lord. And now the Spirit of God not only departed from him, but in judgment God sent an "evil spirit," or rather "a spirit of evil," to "terrify" Saul. Not that God ever sends a spirit who is evil. The angels whom God sends are all good, though their commission may be in judgment to bring evil upon us.

As one has rightly remarked, "God sends good angels to punish evil men, while to chastise good men, evil angels claim the power." The "evil spirit" sent from God was the messenger of that evil which in the Divine judgment was to come upon Saul, visions of which now affrighted the king, filled him with melancholy, and brought him to the verge of madness - but not to repentance. It is thus also that we can understand how the music of David's harp soothed the spirit of Saul, while those hymns which it accompanied - perhaps some of his earliest Psalms - brought words of heaven, thoughts of mercy, strains of another world, to the troubled soul of the king.

Had he but listened to them, and yielded himself not temporarily but really to their influence! But he was now the old Saul, only sensibly destitute of the Divine help, presence, and Spirit, and with all the evil in him terribly intensified by the circumstances. He had all the feelings of a man cast down from his high estate through his own sin, disappointed in his hopes and ambition, and apprehensive that at any moment the sentence of rejection, pronounced against him, might be executed, and that "better" one appear to whom his kingdom was to be given. And now an angel of evil from the Lord affrighted him with thoughts and visions of what would come to pass. For man can never withdraw himself from higher influences. As one of the fathers has it, "When the Spirit of the Lord departs, an evil spirit takes His place. And this should teach us to pray with David: 'Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.'"

Yet, in the wonder-working providence of God, this very circumstance led David onwards towards his destination. The quiet retirement of the shepherd's life was evidently of deepest importance to him immediately after his anointing. We can understand what dangers - inward and

⁴³ So ver. 12, literally. The expression, "reddish," or perhaps rather, "auburn," refers to the color of the hair, which is rare in Palestine.

⁴⁴ The Authorised Version renders ver. 13: "And Samuel anointed him in the midst of his brethren." But the word may mean either "in the midst" or "among," in the sense of "from among." The latter is evidently the meaning in this instance.

outward - would have beset a sudden introduction to publicity or rush into fame. On the other hand, humble avocations, retirement, thought, and lonely fellowship with God would best develop his inner life in constant dependence upon God, and even call out those energies and that self-reliance which, in conjunction with the higher spiritual qualifications, were so necessary in his after-calling. Nor was it time lost even so far as his outward influence was concerned. It was then that the Spirit-helped youth acquired in the neighboring country, and far as Eastern story would carry it, the reputation of "a mighty, valiant man, and a man of war," when, all unaided and unarmed, he would slay "both the lion and the bear" that had attacked the flock which he tended. But, above all, it is to this period of inward and spiritual preparation in solitary communion with God that we trace the first of those Psalms which have forever made "the sweet singer," in a sense, the "shepherd" of all spiritual Israel. And here also we love to connect the plains and the shepherds of Bethlehem, who heard angels hymning the birth of our dear Lord, with His great ancestor and type, and to think how in those very plains the shepherd-king may have watched his flock in the quiet of the starlit night, and poured forth in accents of praise what is the faith and hope of the Church in all times. No doubt this talent of David also, though probably only viewed as a worldly gift, became known in the neighborhood. And so, when the courtiers ⁴⁵ of Saul suggested music as the well-known remedy in antiquity for mental disturbances, such as those from which the king suffered through the "evil spirit," one of the servant-men in attendance, probably a native of the district around Bethlehem, could from personal knowledge recommend David as "cunning in playing,... knowing of speech, and Jehovah is with him."

The words, seemingly casually spoken, were acted upon, and David was sent for to court. He came, bringing such gifts as the primitive habits of those

times suggested to Jesse as fitting for a loyal subject to offer to his monarch. And as he stood before Saul in all the freshness of youth, with conscience clear, and in the Spirit-holpen vigor of a new life - so like the ideal of what Saul might have become, like him even in stature - the king's past and better self seems to have come back to him, "the king loved David greatly," and took him into his service. ⁴⁶ And God's blessing rested on it: for, when the king heard, as it were, the sound of the rushing wings of the spirit of evil, and almost felt the darkness as he spread them over him, then, as David's hands swept the harp of praise, and it poured forth its melody of faith and hope, it seemed as if heaven's light fell on those wings, and the evil spirit departed from Saul. And thus we learn once more the precious lesson, how "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform."

What, if the result alone had been announced, would have seemed impossible, and hence miraculous in its accomplishment, was brought about by a chain of events, each linked to the other by natural causation. It is this naturalness, in many cases, of the supernatural which most shows that "Jehovah reigneth." What He has promised in His grace that He bringeth about in His providence. Next to inward humility and strength in dependence on the Lord, perhaps the most important lessons which David could learn for his future guidance would be those which at the court of Saul, and yet not of the court, he would derive from daily observation of all that passed in the government, standing in so near and confidential relationship to the king as to know all - the good and the evil, the danger and the difficulty - and yet being so wholly independent as to remain unbiased in his estimate of persons and judgment of things.

So time passed. But in the intervals of calmness, when Saul needed not the ministry of David, the young Bethlehemite was wont to return to his father's home and to his humble avocations, - to find in quiet retirement that rest and strength

⁴⁵ Our Authorised Version renders the word used in 1 Samuel 16:15, 16, 17, and that in ver. 18 alike by "servants." But the original marks that the former were the courtiers and officials around Saul, while in ver. 18 it is "one of the lads" - belonging to the class of man-servants.

⁴⁶ The text has it, that David was made "armor-bearer" to Saul. Probably the rank was little more than nominal. We know that in military monarchies, such as in Russia, every civil official has also a nominal military rank.

which he needed (1 Samuel 17:15). And now once more had the dark cloud of war gathered over the land. It was again Israel's hereditary enemy the Philistines, who, probably encouraged by their knowledge of Saul's state, had advanced as far into Judah as the neighborhood of Bethlehem. About ten miles to the south-west of that city lay Shochoh (or Sochoh), the modern Shuweikeh. Here a broad wady, or valley, marking a water-course, runs north for about an hour's distance. This is the modern Wady-es-Sumt, the valley of the acacias, the ancient valley of Elah, or of the terebinth. At the modern village of Sakarieh, the ancient Shaarim, the wady divides, turning westwards towards Gath, and northwards by the Wady Surar towards Ekron. Shochoh and Ephes-Dammim, the modern Damum, about three miles north-east of Shochoh, between which two points the Philistine camp was pitched, lay on the southern slope of the wady, while the host of Israel was camped on the northern slope, the two being separated by the deep part of the wady. But no longer did the former God-inspired courage fire Israel. The Spirit of God had departed from their leader, and his followers seemed to share in the depression which this consciousness brought. In such a warfare, especially among Easterns, all depended on decision and boldness. But unbelief makes cowards; and Saul and his army were content with a merely defensive position, without venturing to attack their enemies. Day by day the two armies gathered on the opposite slopes, only to witness what was for Israel more than humiliation, even an open defiance of their ability to resist the power of Philistia - by implication, a defiance of the covenant-people as such, and of Jehovah, the covenant-God, and a challenge to a fight between might in the flesh and power in the Spirit. And truly Israel, under the leadership of a Saul, was ill prepared for such a contest. But herein also lay the significance of the Philistine challenge, and of the manner in which it was taken up by David, as well as of his victory. It is not too much to assert that this event was a turning-point in the history of the theocracy, and marked David as the true king of Israel, ready to take up the Philistine challenge of God and of His people, to kindle in Israel a new spirit, and, in the might of the living God, to bring the contest to victory.

Forty days successively, as the opposing armies had stood marshaled in battle-array, Goliath of Gath - a descendant of those giants that had been left at the time of Joshua (Joshua 11:21, 22) - had stepped out of the ranks of the Philistines to challenge a champion of Israel to single combat, which should decide the fate of the campaign, and the subjection of either Israel or the Philistines. Such challenges were common enough in antiquity. But it indicated a terrible state of things when it could be thrown down and not taken up, - a fearful "reproach" when an "uncircumcised Philistine" could so "defy the armies of the living God" (1 Samuel 17:8-10, 26, 36). And yet as Goliath left the ranks of his camp, and "came down" (ver. 8) into the valley that separated the two hosts, and, as it were, shook his hand in scorn of high heaven and of Israel, not a man dared answer; till at last the Philistine, rendered more and more bold, began to cross the wady, and "came up" the slopes towards where Israel stood (ver. 25), when at sight of him they "fled," and "were sore afraid."

For, where the realizing sense of God's presence was wanting, the contest would only seem one of strength against strength. In that case, the appearance and bearing of the Philistine must have been sufficiently terrifying to Orientals. Measuring about nine feet nine inches,⁴⁷ he was covered front and back by a coat of mail of brass, consisting of scales overlapping each other, such as we know were used in ancient times,⁴⁸ but weighing not less than about one hundred and fifty-seven pounds.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ This measurement is of course approximative, as we are not quite sure of the exact equivalent of Hebrew measures and weights. Pliny mentions an Arab giant who measured exactly the same as Goliath, and a man and a woman in the time of Augustus who were even an inch taller (Hist. Nat., 7. 16). Josephus speaks of a Jew who was even taller (Ant., 18. 4, 5); and Keil refers to a giant of nearly the same proportions who visited Berlin in 1859. The LXX. however, characteristically change the measurement from six to four cubits.

⁴⁸ A corselet of this kind, belonging to Rameses III., is in the British Museum.

⁴⁹ A mediaeval corselet preserved in Dresden weighs more than a third of that of Goliath, which seems proportionate to his size.

That armor, no doubt, descended to his legs, which were cased in "greaves of brass," while a helmet of the same material defended his head. As weapons of offense he carried, besides the sword with which he was girded (ver. 51; 21:9), an enormous javelin⁵⁰ of brass, which, after the manner of the ancient soldiers, was slung on his back, and a spear, the metal head of which weighed about seventeen or eighteen pounds.

Such was the sight which David beheld, when sent by his father to the army to inquire after the welfare of his three elder brothers,⁵¹ who had followed Saul into the war, and at the same time, in true Oriental fashion, to carry certain provisions to them, and to bring a present from the dairy produce⁵² to their commanding officer. The description of what follows is so vivid that we can almost see the scene. All is truly Oriental in its cast, and truly Scriptural in its spirit.

David, who had never been permanently in Saul's service, had, on the outbreak of the war, returned to his home.⁵³ When he now arrived at the

"trench" which ran round the camp, to trace and defend it, the army of Israel was being put in battle-array against that of the Philistines on the opposite hill.

In true Oriental fashion, they were raising a shout of defiance while not venturing on an attack. David left his baggage with the keeper of the baggage, and ran forward to the foremost ranks, where, as he knew, the position of Judah, and therefore of his brothers, must be (Numbers 2:3; 10:14). While conversing with them, the scene previously described was re-enacted. As Goliath approached nearer and nearer, the order of battle was dissolved before him. It is quite characteristic that these fear-stricken Israelites should have tried to excite one another by dwelling on the insult offered to Israel, and the rewards which Saul had promised to the victorious champion of his people. Quite characteristic also, from what we know of him, was the bearing of David. We need not attempt to eliminate from the narrative the personal element, as we may call it, in the conduct of David. God appeals to outward motives, even in what is highest - such as the loss or gain of our souls, - and the tale of what was "to be done" to him who wrought such deliverance in Israel might well fire a spirit less ardent than that of David to realize Israel's great need. But what was so distinctive in David - who probably knew Saul too well confidently to expect the literal fulfillment of his promises - was the spiritual response to the challenge of the Philistine which sprung unbidden to his lips (ver. 26), and which, when the hour for personal action came, was felt to be a deep reality to which his faith could confidently appeal (vers. 36, 37). Truly we seem to breathe another atmosphere than that hitherto in the camp of Israel; nor could his public career be more appropriately begun, who was to pasture Israel according to the integrity of his heart, and to lead them "by the skillfulness of his hands" (Psalm 78:70-72).

⁵⁰ This is the meaning of the word, and not "target," as in our Authorised Version.

⁵¹ The expression, ver. 18, "take a pledge of them," need not, as by most commentators, be taken literally, but may be a figurative expression for bringing back an assurance of their welfare.

⁵² "Ten cheeses," or rather, "cuts of curdled milk;" possibly resembling our so-called cream-cheese.

⁵³ There is considerable difficulty about the text as it now stands. That the narrative is strictly historical cannot be doubted. But, on the other hand, vers. 12-14, and still more vers. 55-58, read as if the writer had inserted this part of his narrative from some other source, perhaps from a special chronicle of the event. The LXX. solve the difficulty by simply leaving out vers. 12-31, and again vers. 55-58; that is, they boldly treat that part as an interpolation; and it must be confessed that the narrative reads easier without it. And yet, on the other hand, if these verses are interpolated, the work has been clumsily done; and it is not easy to see how any interpolator would not have at once seen the difficulties which he created, especially by the addition of vers. 55-58. Besides, the account, vers. 12-31, not only fits in very well with the rest of the narrative - bating some of the expressions in vers. 12-14 - but also bears the evident impress of truthfulness. The drastic method in which the LXX. dealt with the text, so early as about two centuries before Christ, at least proves that, even at that time, there were strong doubts about the genuineness of the text. All this leads to the suggestion, that somehow the text may have become corrupted, and that later copyists may have tried

emendations and additions, by way of removing difficulties, which, as might be expected in such a case, would only tend to increase them. On the whole, therefore, we are inclined to the opinion that, while the narrative itself is strictly authentic, the text, as we possess it, is seriously corrupted in some of the expressions, especially in the concluding verses of the chapter. At the same time it should be added, that its correctness has been defended by very able critics.

And here we have another instance of the prefigurative character of the history of David. As "the brothers" and near kinsfolk of our blessed Lord misunderstood His motives, and could not enter into the spirit of His work, so Eliab, when he imputed to David a dissatisfied ambition that could not rest contented with humble avocations, and when he characterized his God-inspired courage and confidence as carnal, and a delight in war and bloodshed for its own sake (ver. 28). But it was too late to arrest David by such objections. Putting them aside, as making a man an offender for a word, but without retaliating by convicting Eliab of his own uncharitableness, worldliness, and unbelief, David turned away to repeat his inquiries. Tidings of the young champion, who had displayed quite another banner against the Philistine than that of Saul, were soon brought to the king. In the interview which followed, the king bade the shepherd think of his youth and inexperience in a contest with such a warrior as Goliath. Yet he seems to speak like one who was half convinced by the bearing and language of this strange champion, and easily allowed himself to be persuaded; not so much, we take it, by the account of his prowess and success in the past as by the tone of spiritual assurance and confidence in the God of Israel with which he spoke.

Once more thoughts of the past must have crowded in upon Saul. There was that in the language of this youth which recalled the strength of Israel, which seemed like the dawn of another morning, like a voice from another world. But if he went to the combat, let it be at least in what seemed to Saul the most fitting and promising manner - arrayed in the king's own armor - as if the whole meaning of David's conduct - nay, of the combat itself and of the victory - had not lain in the very opposite direction: in the confessed inadequacy of all merely human means forever such contest, and in the fact that the victory over Goliath must appear as the Lord's deliverance, achieved through the faith of a personal, realizing, conscious dependence on Him. And so Saul's armor must be put aside as that which had "not been proved" in such a contest, of which the champion of the Lord had never made trial in such encounters - and of which he never could make trial. A deep-reaching lesson this to the Church

and to believers individually, and one which bears manifold application, not only spiritually, but even intellectually. The first demand upon us is to be spiritual; the next to be genuine and true, without seeking to clothe ourselves in the armor of another.

A few rapid sketches, and the narrative closes. Goliath had evidently retired within the ranks of the Philistines, satisfied that, as before, his challenge had remained unanswered. And now tidings that a champion of Israel was ready for the fray once more called him forth. As he advanced, David waited not till he had crossed the wady and ascended the slope where Israel's camp lay, but hastened forward, and picked him five stones from the dry river-bed in the valley. And now the Philistine had time to take, as he thought, the full measure of his opponent. Only a fair-looking, stout, unarmed shepherd-youth, coming against him with his shepherd's gear, as if he were a dog! Was this, then, the champion of Israel? In true Eastern fashion, he advanced, boasting of his speedy and easy victory; in true heathen spirit the while cursing and blaspheming the God in Whose Name David was about to fight. But David also must speak. To the carnal confidence in his own strength which Goliath expressed, David opposed the Name - that is, the manifestation - of Jehovah Zevaoth, the God of heaven's hosts, the God also of the armies of Israel. That God, Whom Goliath had blasphemed and defied, would presently take up the challenge. He would fight, and deliver the giant into the hand of one even so unequal to such contest as an unarmed shepherd. Thus would "all the earth" - all Gentile nations - see that there was a God in Israel; thus also would "all this assembly" (the kahal, the called) - all Israel - learn that too long forgotten lesson which must underlie all their history, that "not by sword or spear, saith Jehovah: for Jehovah's is the war, and He gives you into our hands."

Words ceased. Slowly the Philistine giant advanced to what seemed easy victory. He had not even drawn the sword, nor apparently let down the visor of his helmet, - for was not his opponent unarmed? and a well-directed thrust of his spear would lay him bleeding at his feet. Swiftly the shepherd ran to the encounter. A well-aimed stone

from his sling - and the gigantic form of the Philistine, encased in its unwieldy armor, mortally stricken, fell heavily to the ground, and lay helpless in sight of his dismayed countrymen, while the unarmed David, drawing the sword from the sheath of his fallen opponent, cut off his head, and returned to the king with the gory trophy. All this probably within less time than it has taken to write it down. And now a sudden dismay seized on the Philistines. Their champion and pride so suddenly swept down, they fled in wild disorder. It was true, then, that there was a God in Israel! It was true that the war was Jehovah's, and that He had given them into Israel's hand! Israel and Judah raised a shout, and pursued the Philistines up that ravine, through that wady, to Shaarim, and beyond it to the gates of Gath, and up that other wady to Ekron. But while the people returned to take the spoil of the Philistine tents, David had given a modest account of himself to the jealous king and his chief general; had won the generous heart of Jonathan; and had gone to lay up the armor of the Philistine as his part of the spoil in his home. But the head of the Philistine he nailed on the gates of Jerusalem, right over in sight of the fort which the heathen Jebusites still held in the heart of the land.

IV_11 Saul's Jealousy, and Attempts upon David's Life - David marries Michal - Ripening of Saul's Purpose of Murder - David's Flight to Samuel - Saul among the Prophets - David Finally leaves the Court of Saul

1 Samuel 18:4 to 20:42

THE friendship between Jonathan and David, which dated from the victory over Goliath, and the modest, genuine bearing of the young conqueror, is the one point of light in a history which grows darker and darker as it proceeds. We can imagine how a spirit so generous as that of Jonathan would be drawn towards that unaffected, brave youth, so free from all self-consciousness or self-seeking, who would seem the very embodiment of Israelitish valor and piety. And we can equally perceive how gratitude and admiration of such real nobleness would kindle in the heart of David an affection almost womanly in its tenderness. Ancient history records not a few instances of such love between heroes, ratified like this by a "covenant," and betokened by such gifts as when

Jonathan put on David his "mantle," his "armor-coat," ⁵⁴ and even his arms, - but none more pure and elevated, or penetrated, as in this instance, by the highest and best feelings of true piety.

There can be no doubt that this friendship was among the means which helped David to preserve that loyalty to Saul which was the grand characteristic of his conduct in the very trying period which now ensued. How these trials called out his faith, and consequently his patience; how they drew him closer to God, ripened his inner life, and so prepared him for his ultimate calling, will best appear from a comparison of the Psalms which date from this time. The events, as recorded in the sacred text, are not given in strict chronological order, but rather in that of their internal connection. As we understand it, after David's victory over Goliath, he was taken into the permanent employ of Saul. This and his general success ⁵⁵ in all undertakings, as well as his prudence and modesty, which, at least during the first period, disarmed even the jealousy of Saul's courtiers, are indicated in general terms in 1 Samuel 18:5. But matters could not long progress peacefully. On the return of the army from the pursuit of the Philistines, the conquerors had, after the custom of the times, been met in every city through which they passed by choruses of women, who, with mimic dances, sung antiphonally ⁵⁶ the praise of the heroes, ascribing the victory over thousands to Saul, and over ten thousands to David.

It was quite characteristic of the people, and it implied not even conscious preference for David, least of all danger to Saul's throne. But it sufficed to kindle in Saul deep and revengeful envy. Following upon what the spirit of evil from the

⁵⁴ The same term is used in 1 Samuel 17:38, 39; Judges 3:16; 2 Samuel 20:8. But I cannot see how (as in The Speaker's Commentary, vol. 2, p. 325) it can be supposed to comprise "the sword, bow, and girdle." These three are expressly connected with it by a threefold repetition of the expression, "even to."

⁵⁵ The expression in our Authorised Version, "behaved himself wisely," includes both skillfulness and success.

⁵⁶ In ver. 6 we have it, that they went to meet Saul "with hand-drums, with joy (that is, with paeans of joy), and with triangles." The picture is vivid, and true to the custom of the times.

Lord had set before him as his own fate, sealed as it was by his solemn rejection from the kingdom and the conscious departure of the Spirit of God, the popular praise seemed to point out David as his rival. And every fresh success of David, betokening the manifest help of God, and every failure of his own attempts to rid himself of this rival, would only deepen and embitter this feeling, and lead him onwards, from step to step, until the murderous passion became all engrossing, and made the king not only forgetful of Jehovah, and of what evidently was His purpose, but also wholly regardless of the means which he used. Thus Saul's dark passions were ultimately concentrated in the one thought of murder. Yet in reality it was against Jehovah that he contended rather than against David. So true is it that all sin is ultimately against the Lord; so bitter is the root of self; and so terrible the power of evil in its constantly growing strength, till it casts out all fear of God or care for man. So true also is it that "he that hateth his brother is a murderer," in heart and principle. On the other hand, these constant unprovoked attempts upon the life of David, regardless of the means employed, till at last the whole forces of the kingdom were used for no other purpose than to hunt down an innocent fugitive, whose only crime was that God was with him, and that he had successfully fought the cause of Israel, must have had a very detrimental effect upon the people. They must have convinced all that he who now occupied the throne was unfit for the post, while at the same time they could not but demoralize the people in regard to their real enemies, thus bringing about the very results which Saul so much dreaded.

It deserves special notice, that Saul's attempts against the life of David are in the sacred text never attributed to the influence of the spirit of evil from the Lord, although they were no doubt made when that spirit was upon him. For God never tempts man to sin; but he sinneth when he is drawn away by his own passion, and enticed by it. If proof were needed that the spirit whom God sent was not evil in himself, it would be found in this, that while formerly David's music could soothe the king, that power was lost when Saul had given way to sin. On the first occasion of this

kind, Saul, in a maniacal ⁵⁷ fit, twice poised ⁵⁸ against David the javelin, which, as the symbol of royalty, he had by him (like the modern scepter); and twice "David turned (bent) aside from before him." ⁵⁹

The failure of his purpose only strengthened the king's conviction that, while God had forsaken him, He was with David. The result, however, was not repentance, but a feeling of fear, under which he removed David from his own presence, either to free himself of the temptation to murder, or in the hope, which he scarcely yet confessed to himself, that, promoted to the command over a thousand men, David might fall in an engagement with the Philistines. How this also failed, or rather led to results the opposite of those which Saul had wished, is briefly marked in the text.

With truest insight into the working of such a mind, the narrative traces the further progress of this history. Perhaps to test whether he really cherished ambitious designs, but with the conscious wish to rid himself of his dreaded rival, Saul now proposed to carry out his original promise to the conqueror of Goliath, by giving David his eldest daughter Merab to wife, at the same time professing only anxiety that his future son-in-law should fight "the battles of Jehovah." The reply given might have convinced him, that David had no exaggerated views of his position in life. ⁶⁰ It is idle to ask why Saul upon this so rapidly transferred Merab to one who is not otherwise known in history.

The affection of Michal, Saul's younger daughter, for David, promised to afford Saul the means of

⁵⁷ Our Authorised Version renders ver. 10, "and he prophesied in the midst of the house;" and the word undoubtedly means this. But in the present instance it refers not to "prophecy," but to the ecstatic state which often accompanied it, even in false prophets: comp. 1 Kings 22:22; Acts 16:16; 19:15. Saul was in a state of maniacal ecstasy.

⁵⁸ Apparently Saul did not actually throw the javelin, as in 19:10.

⁵⁹ So literally. Our Authorised Version gives the impression that David had left the presence of Saul.

⁶⁰ The expression in ver. 18, "my life," probably means my status in life. The rendering proposed by some, "my people," is linguistically unsupported, and implies a needless repetition.

still further proving David's views, and of bringing him to certain destruction. The plan was cleverly devised. Taught by experience, David took no further notice of the king's personal suggestion of such an alliance.⁶¹

At this the courtiers were instructed secretly to try the effect of holding out a prospect so dazzling as that of being the king's son-in-law. But the bait was too clumsily put, - or rather it failed to take, from the thorough integrity of David. Next came not the suggestion merely, but a definite proposal through the courtiers, to give the king as dowry within a certain specified time a pledge that not less than a hundred heathen had fallen in "the Lord's battles." If the former merely general admonition to fight had not led to David's destruction, a more definite demand like this might necessitate personal contests, in which, as Saul imagined, every chance would be against David's escape. But once more the king was foiled. David, who readily entered on a proposal so much in harmony with his life-work, executed within less than the appointed time double the king's requirements, and Michal became his wife.

And still the story becomes darker and darker. We have marked the progress of murderous thought in the king's mind, from the sudden attack of frenzy to the scarcely self-confessed wish for the death of his victim, to designed exposure of his life, and lastly to a deliberate plan for his destruction. But now all restraints were broken through. Do what he might, David prospered, and all that Saul had attempted had only turned out to the advantage of the son of Jesse. Already he was the king's son-in-law; Michal had given her whole heart to him; constant success had attended those expeditions against the heathen which were to have been his ruin; nay, as might be expected in the circumstances, he had reached the pinnacle of popularity. One dark resolve now settled in the heart of the king, and cast its shadow over every other consideration. David must be murdered. Saul could no longer disguise his purpose from himself, nor keep it from others. He spoke of it openly -

even to Jonathan, and to all around him. So alarming had it become, that Jonathan felt it necessary to warn David, who, in his conscious integrity, seemed still unsuspecting of real danger. Yet Jonathan himself would fain have believed that his father's mood was only the outcome of that dreadful disease of which he was the victim. Accordingly, almost within hearing of David, who had secreted himself near by, he appealed to his father, and that in language so telling and frank, that the king himself was for the moment won. So it had been only frenzy - the outburst of the moment, but not the king's real heart-purpose - and David returned to court!

The hope was vain. The next success against the Philistines rekindled all the evil passions of the king. Once more, as he yielded to sin, the spirit of evil was sent in judgment - this time from Jehovah. As Saul heard the rushing of his dark pinions around him, it was not sudden frenzy which seized him, but he attempted deliberate murder. What a contrast: David with the harp in his hand, and Saul with his spear; David sweeping the chords to waken Divine melody in the king's soul, and the king sending the javelin with all his might, so that, as it missed its aim, it stuck in the wall close by where David had but lately sat. Meanwhile David escaped to his own house, apparently unwilling even now to believe in the king's deliberate purpose of murder. It was Saul's own daughter who had to urge upon her husband the terrible fact of her father's planned crime and the need of immediate flight, and with womanly love and wit to render it possible. How great the danger had been; how its meshes had been laid all around and well nigh snared him - but chiefly what had been David's own feelings, and what his hope in that hour of supreme danger: all this, and much more for the teaching of the Church of all ages, we gather from what he himself tells us in the fifty-ninth Psalm.⁶²

⁶¹ Ver. 21 had probably best be rendered: "Thou shalt this day be my son-in-law in a second (another) manner;" or else, become such "a second time."

⁶² Our space prevents not only an analysis but even a literal translation of this Psalm. The reader should compare it with this history. Those who are able to avail themselves of it, will find much help in Professor Delitzsch's Commentary on the Psalms (German Ed., vol. 1, pp. 441-448); translated in Clark's Foreign Theological Library.

The peril was past; and while the cowardly menials of Saul - though nominally of Israel, yet in heart and purpose, as in their final requital, "heathens" (Psalm 59:6, 8) - prowled about the city and its walls on their terrible watch of murder, "growling" like dogs that dare not bark to betray their presence, and waiting till the dawn would bring their victim, lured to safety, within reach of their teeth, Michal compassed the escape of her husband through a window - probably on the city-wall. In so doing she betrayed, however, alike the spirit of her home and that of her times. The daughter of Saul, like Rachel of old (Genesis 31:19), seems to have had Teraphim - the old Aramaean or Chaldean household gods, which were probably associated with fertility. For, despite the explicit Divine prohibition and the zeal of Samuel against all idolatry, this most ancient form of Jewish superstition appears to have continued in Israelitish households (comp. Judges 17:5; 18:14; 1 Samuel 15:23; Hosea 3:4; Zechariah 10:2). The Teraphim must have borne the form of a man; and Michal now placed this image in David's bed, arranging about the head "the plait of camel's hair,"⁶³ and covering the whole "with the upper garment" (as coverlet), to represent David lying sick.

The device succeeded in gaining time for the fugitive, and was only discovered when Saul sent his messengers a second time, with the peremptory order to bring David in the bed. Challenged by her father for her deceit, she excused her conduct by another falsehood, alleging that she had been obliged by David to do so on peril of her life.

Although we are in no wise concerned to defend Michal, and in general utterly repudiate, as derogatory to Holy Scripture, all attempts to explain away the apparent wrong-doing of Biblical personages, this instance requires a few words of plain statement. First, it is most important to observe, that Holy Scripture, with a truthfulness which is one of its best evidences, simply relates events, whoever were the actors, and whatever their moral character. We are somehow prone to

imagine that Holy Scripture approves all that it records, at least in the case of its worthies - unless, indeed, the opposite be expressly stated. Nothing could be more fallacious than such an inference. Much is told in the Bible, even in connection with Old Testament saints, on which no comment is made, save that of the retribution which, in the course of God's providence, surely follows all wrong-doing. And here we challenge any instance of sin which is not followed by failure, sorrow, and punishment. It had been so in the case of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob; and it was so in that of David, whose every attempt to screen himself by untruthfulness ended in failure and sorrow. Holy Scripture never conceals wrong-doing - least of all seeks to palliate it. In this respect there is the most significant contrast between the Bible and its earliest (even pre-Christian) comments. Those only who are acquainted with this literature know with what marvelous ingenuity Rabbinical commentaries uniformly try, not only to palliate wrong on the part of Biblical heroes, but by some turn or alteration in the expression, or suggestion of motives, to present it as actually right. But we must go a step further. He who fails to recognize the gradual development of God's teaching, and regards the earlier periods in the history of God's kingdom as on exactly the same level as the New Testament, not only most seriously mistakes fundamental facts and principles, but misses the entire meaning of the preparatory dispensation. The Old Testament never places truth, right, or duty on any lower basis than the New. But while it does not lower, it does not unfold in all their fullness the principles which it lays down. Rather does it adapt the application of truths, the exposition of rights, and the unfolding of duties, to the varying capacities of each age and stage. And this from the necessity of the case, in highest wisdom, in greatest mercy, and in the interest of the truth itself. The principle: "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child," applies to the relation between the Old and the New Testament standpoint, as well as to all spiritual and even intellectual progress. The child is ignorant of all the bearings of what he learns; the beginner of the full meaning and application of the axioms and propositions which

⁶³ The Hebrew expression is somewhat difficult, and may imply that Michal used it to cover David's face, or that she put it about the Teraphim to appear like hair. I have translated the words literally.

he is taught. Had it been otherwise in spiritual knowledge, its acquisition would have been simply impossible.

Here also we have to distinguish between what God sanctioned and that with which He bore on account of the hardness of the heart of those who had not yet been spiritually trained in that "time of ignorance," which "God overlooked." To come to the particular question in hand. Nothing could be more clear in the Old Testament than the Divine insistence on truthfulness. He Himself condescends to be His people's example in this. The command not to lie one to another (Leviticus 19:11) is enforced by the consideration, "I am Jehovah," and springs as a necessary sequence from the principle: "Be ye holy, for I Jehovah your God am holy." It is scarcely requisite to add, that in no other part of Holy Scripture is this more fully or frequently enforced than in the Book of Psalms. And yet, when occasion arose, David himself seems not to have scrupled to seek safety through falsehood, though with what little success appears in his history. It appears as if to his mind untruth had seemed only that which was false in the intention or in its object, not that which was simply untrue in itself, however good the intention might be, or however desirable the object thereby sought.⁶⁴ And in this connection it deserves notice, how among the few express moral precepts which the New Testament gives - for it deals in principles rather than in details; it gives life, not law, - this about lying recurs with emphatic distinctness and frequency.⁶⁵

As might almost have been anticipated, David's destination in his flight was Ramah. To tell Samuel, who had anointed him, all that had happened; to ask his guidance, and seek refreshment in his company, would obviously suggest itself first to his mind. For greater safety, the two withdrew from the city, to "Naioth," "the dwellings," which seems to have been a block of

dwellings within a compound, occupied by an order of prophets, of which Samuel was the "president,"⁶⁶ and, we may add, the founder. Not that "prophetism" (if the term may be used) commenced with Samuel.

In the sense of being the bearers of God's message, the patriarchs are called "prophets" (Genesis 20:7; Psalm 105:15). But in its strict sense the term first applied to Moses (Numbers 11:25; Deuteronomy 34:10; Hosea 12:13). Miriam was a prophetess (Exodus 15:20; comp. Numbers 12:2). In the days of the Judges there were prophets (Judges 4:4; 6:8). At the time of Eli, prophetic warning came through a "man of God" (1 Samuel 2:27); and although "the word of God" (or prophecy) "was rare" in those days (1 Samuel 3:1), yet it came not upon the people as a strange and unknown manifestation (comp. also 1 Samuel 9:9). Here, however, we must make distinction between the prophetic gift and the prophetic office. The latter, so far as appears, began with Samuel. A further stage is marked in the days of Elijah and Elisha. Then they were no longer designated "prophets," as at the time of Samuel, but "sons of the prophets," or "disciples" (1 Kings 20:35; 2 Kings 4:38; 6:1). Lastly, whereas we read of only one prophetic community, Naioth, in the time of Samuel, and that close to his residence at Ramah, there were several such in the days of Elisha, in different parts of the country - as at Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho. Whether there was a continuous succession in this from Samuel to Elijah can scarcely be determined, though the probability seems in its favor (comp. 1 Kings 18:13).

It is of more importance to understand the difference between "prophets" and "sons of the prophets," the circumstances under which these orders or unions originated, and the peculiar meaning attached to this prophetic calling. The first point seems sufficiently clear. The "sons of the prophets" were those who of set purpose devoted themselves to this work, and were, on the one hand, disciples of prophets, and on the other, the messengers or ministers to carry out their

⁶⁴ The Germans speak of "lies of necessity" (Nothluge), which to me seems a contradiction of terms, since no one duty (or moral necessity) can ever contravene another.

⁶⁵ I am bound to add that even Talmudical writings insist on the need of absolute truthfulness, though in terms far other than the New Testament.

⁶⁶ In the Authorised Version, 1 Samuel 19:20, "Samuel standing as appointed over them;" in the original, "Standing as president over them."

behests. Dedication and separation to the work (symbolized even by a common abode, and by a distinctive appearance and dress), religious instruction, and, above all, implicit obedience, are the historical features of those "sons of the prophets." Quite other was the "union," "company," or rather "congregation"⁶⁷ of prophets" (1 Samuel 19:20) near Ramah.

There is no evidence of their having all permanently dedicated themselves to the office; the contrary seems rather implied. No doubt from among them sprung those who were afterwards "seers," such as Gad, Nathan, and Iddo; but the majority seem to have joined the union under a temporary constraining influence of the mighty Spirit of God. And although, as we gather from many passages of Holy Scripture (as 1 Samuel 22:5; 1 Chronicles 29:29, and other passages in the Books of Kings), they were occupied with the composition and the study of sacred history, and no doubt with that of the law also, as well as with the cultivation of hymnology, it would be a great mistake to regard them as a class of students of theology, or to represent them as a monastic order.

In point of fact, the time of Samuel, and that of Elijah and Elisha, were great turning-points, periods of crisis, in the history of the kingdom of God. In the first, the tabernacle, the priesthood, and the God-appointed services had fallen into decay, and, for a time, may be said to have been almost in abeyance. Then it was that God provided other means of grace, by raising up faithful, devoted men, who gathered into a living sanctuary, filled not by the Shechinah, but by the mighty Spirit of God. Under the direction of a Samuel, and the influence of a "spiritual gift," - like those of apostolic days - their presence and activity served most important purposes. And, as in apostolic days, the spiritual influence under which they were seems at times to have communicated itself even to those who were merely brought into contact with them. This, no doubt, to prove its reality and power, since even those who were strangers to its spiritual purpose,

and unaffected by it, could not resist its might, and thus involuntarily bore witness to it. And something analogous to this we also witness now in the irresistible influence which a spiritual movement sometimes exercises even on those who are and remain strangers to its real meaning.⁶⁸

Thus far as regards "the congregation of prophets" in the days of Samuel. In the time of Elijah, Israel - as distinct from Judah - was entirely cut off from the sanctuary, and under a rule which threatened wholly to extinguish the service of God, and to replace it by the vile and demoralizing rites of Baal. Already the country swarmed with its priests, when God raised up Elijah to be the breaker-up of the way, and Elisha to be the restorer of ancient paths. The very circumstances of the time, and the state of the people, pointed out the necessity of the revival of the ancient "order," but now as "sons of the prophets" rather than as prophets. Nor did this change of designation imply a retrogression. What on superficial inquiry seems such, is, on more careful consideration, often found to mark real progress. In earliest patriarchal, and even in Mosaic times, the communications between Jehovah and His people were chiefly by Theophanies, or Personal apparitions of God; in the case of the prophets, by inspiration; in the New Testament Church, by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. It were a grievous mistake to regard this progress in the spiritual history of the kingdom of God as a retrogression. The opposite is rather the case. And somewhat similarly we may mark, in some respects, an advance in the succession of "sons of the prophets" to the order of "prophetics," or "prophesiers," as we may perhaps designate them by way of distinction. "But all these things worketh one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man" (and to every period in the Church's history) "severally as He will," and adapting the agencies which He uses to the varying necessities and spiritual stages of His people.

⁶⁷ The Lahakah, which evidently is only an inversion of the letters of the word Kahalah, which generally designates "the congregation."

⁶⁸ As there is unity in all God's working, we mark a similar law prevailing in the physical and intellectual world. The general influence of physical forces and causes - even atmospheric - is sufficiently known, nor can it be necessary, in these days, to attempt proving that of "the spirit of the times," which intellectually and even morally affects us all more or less, whether consciously or unconsciously, willingly or unwillingly.

What has been stated will help to explain how the three embassies which Saul sent to seize David in the Naioth were in turn themselves seized by the spiritual influence, and how even Saul, when attempting personally to carry out what his messengers had found impossible, came yet more fully and manifestly than they under its all-subduing power.⁶⁹

It proved incontestably that there was a Divine power engaged on behalf of David, against which the king of Israel would vainly contend, which he could not resist, and which would easily lay alike his messengers and himself prostrate and helpless at its feet. If, after this, Saul continued in his murderous designs against David, the contest would manifestly be not between two men, but between the king of Israel and the Lord of Hosts, Who had wrought signs and miracles on Saul and his servants, and that in full view of the whole people. It is this latter consideration which gives such meaning to the circumstances narrated in the sacred text, that the common report, how the spiritual influence had subdued and constrained Saul, when on his murderous errand against David, led to the renewal of the popular saying: "Is Saul also among the prophets?" For all Israel must know it, and speak of it, and wonder as it learns its significance.

Thus at the end, as at the beginning of his course, Saul is under the mighty influence of the Spirit of God - now to warn, and, if possible, to reclaim, as formerly to qualify him for his work. And some result of this kind seems to have been produced. For, although David fled from Naioth on the arrival of Saul, we find him soon again near the royal residence (20:1), where, indeed, he was evidently expected by the king to take part in the festive meal with which the beginning of every month seems to have been celebrated (vers. 5, 25, 27). The notice is historically interesting in

⁶⁹ The difference between the influence on Saul and on his messengers may be thus marked. It seized him before he arrived at Naioth (ver. 23); and it was more powerful and of longer duration (ver. 24). The statement that "he stripped off his clothes," and "lay down naked," refers, of course, only to his upper garments. In the excitement of the ecstasy he would put these away (comp. 2 Samuel 6:14, 16, 20).

connection with Numbers 10:10; 28:11-15,⁷⁰ as also that other one (1 Samuel 20:6, 29), according to which it appears to have been the practice in those days of religious unsettledness for families to have had a yearly "sacrifice" in their own place, especially where, as in Bethlehem, there was an altar (comp. 16:2, etc.).

But, whatever had passed, David felt sure in his own mind that evil was appointed against him, and that there was but a step between him and death. Yet on that moral certainty alone he did not feel warranted to act. Accordingly he applied to Jonathan, whom he could so fully trust, expressly placing his life, in word as in deed, in his hands, if he were really guilty of what the king imputed to him (ver. 8). With characteristic generosity, Jonathan, however, still refused to believe in any settled purpose of murder on the part of his father, attributing all that had passed to the outbursts of temporary madness. His father had never made a secret of his intentions and movements. Why, then, should he now be silent, if David's suspicions were well founded? The suggestion that Jonathan should excuse David's absence from the feast by his attendance on the yearly family-sacrifice at Bethlehem, for which he had asked and obtained Jonathan's leave, was well calculated to bring out the feelings and purposes of the king. If determined to evil against David, he would in his anger at the escape of his victim, and his own son's participation in it, give vent to his feelings in language that could not be mistaken, the more so, if, as might be expected, Jonathan pleaded with characteristic warmth on behalf of his absent friend. But who could be trusted to bring tidings to David as he lay in hiding, "or" tell him "what" Saul would "answer" Jonathan "roughly" - or, in other words, communicate the details of the conversation?

To discuss the matter, unendangered by prying eyes and ears, the two friends betook themselves "to the field." The account of what passed between them - one of the few narratives of this kind given in Scripture - is most pathetic. It was not merely

⁷⁰ The statement that the festive meal took place on two successive days must, of course, not be understood as implying that the religious festival lasted two days.

the outflowing of personal affection between the two, or perhaps it would not have been recorded at all. Rather is it reported in order to show that, though Jonathan had never spoken of it, he was fully aware of David's future destiny; more than that, he had sad presentiment of the fate of his own house. And yet, in full view of it all, he believably submitted to the will of God, and still lovingly clave to his friend! There is a tone of deep faith toward God, and of full trust in David, in what Jonathan said. Far more fully and clearly than his father does he see into the future, alike as regards David and the house of Saul. But there is not a tinge of misunderstanding of David, not a shadow of suspicion, not a trace of jealousy, not a word of murmur or complaint. More touching words, surely, were never uttered than this charge which Jonathan laid on David as his part of their covenant, in view of what was to come upon them both: "And not only if I am still alive - not only shalt thou do with me the mercy of Jehovah" (show towards me Divine mercy) "that I die not; but thou shalt not cut off thy mercy from my house - not even" (at the time) "when Jehovah cutteth off the enemies of David, every one from the face of the earth" (20:14, 15).⁷¹

The signal preconcerted between the friends was, that on the third day David should lie in hiding at the same spot where he had concealed himself "in the day of business" - probably that day when Jonathan had formerly pleaded with his father for his friend (19:2-7) - beside the stone Ezel, perhaps "the stone of demarcation," marking a boundary. Jonathan was to shoot three arrows. If he told the lad in attendance that they lay nearer than he had run to fetch them, David might deem himself safe, and come out of hiding. If, on the contrary, he directed him to go farther, then David should

conclude that his only safety lay in flight. The result proved that David's fears had been too well grounded. Saul had evidently watched for the opportunity which the New Moon's festival would offer to destroy his hated rival. On the first day he noticed David's absence, but, attributing it to some Levitical defilement, made no remark, lest his tone might betray him. But on the following day he inquired its reason in language which too clearly betokened his feelings. It was then that Jonathan repeated the false explanation which David had suggested. Whether or not the king saw through the hollowness of the device, it certainly proved utterly unavailing. Casting aside all restraint, the king turned on his son, and in language the most insulting to an Oriental, bluntly told him that his infatuation for David would cause his own and his family's ruin. To the command to send for him for the avowed purpose of his murder, Jonathan with characteristic frankness and generosity replied by pleading his cause, on which the fury of the king rose to such a pitch, that he poised his javelin against his own son, as formerly against David.

Jonathan had left the feast in moral indignation at the scene which had taken place before the whole court. But deeper far was his grief for the wrong done to his friend. That day of feasting became one of fasting to Jonathan. Next morning he went to give the preconcerted signal of danger. But he could not so part from his friend. Sending back the lad to the city with his bow, quiver, and arrows, the two friends once more met, but for a moment. There was not time for lengthened speech; the danger was urgent. They were not unmanly tears which the two wept, "till David wept loudly."

The parting must be brief - only just sufficient for Jonathan to remind his friend of their covenant of friendship in God, to Whose care he now commended him. Then Jonathan retraced his lonely way to the city, while David hastened on his flight southward to Nob. Only once again, and that in sadly altered circumstances, did these two noblest men in Israel meet.

⁷¹ The original is very difficult in its structure. We have rendered it as literally as the sense would allow. Of the other proposed translations only these two deserve special notice. "And (wilt thou) not if I am still alive, wilt thou not show the kindness of the Lord towards me, that I die not?" Or else, "And mayest thou, if I am still alive - mayest thou show towards me the kindness of the Lord - and (if) not, if I die, not withdraw thy mercy from my house forever." But the first rendering implies, besides other difficulties, a change from a question in ver. 14 to an assertion in ver. 15, while the second necessitates a change in the Hebrew words.

IV_12 David at Nob - Observed by Doeg - Flight to Gath - David feigns Madness - The Cave of Adullam - Shelter in Moab - Return to the land of Israel - Jonathan's Last Visit - Persecutions by Saul

1 Samuel 21 to 23

AMIDST the many doubts which must have beset the mind of David, one outstanding fact, however painful, was at least clear. He must henceforth consider himself an outlaw, whom not even the friendship of a Jonathan could protect. As such he must seek some shelter - best outside the land of Israel, and with the enemies of Saul. But the way was far, and the journey beset by danger. On all accounts - for refreshment of the body, for help, above all, for inward strengthening and guidance - he would first seek the place whither he had so often resorted (1 Samuel 22:15) before starting on some perilous undertaking.

The Tabernacle of the Lord was at that time in Nob, probably the place that at present bears a name which some have rendered "the village of Esau" (or Edom) - reminding us of its fatal celebrity in connection with Doeg the Edomite. The village is on the road from the north to Jerusalem - between Anathoth and the Holy City, and only about one hour north-west from the latter. Here Ahimelech (or Ahiah, 1 Samuel 14:3), the great-grandson of Eli, ministered as high-priest - a man probably advanced in years, with whom his son Abiathar (afterwards appointed high-priest by David, 1 Samuel 30:7) was, either for that day or else permanently,⁷² conjoined in the sacred service.

Nob was only about an hour to the south-east of Gibeah of Saul. Yet it was not immediately on parting with Jonathan that David appeared in the holy place. We can readily understand that flight along that road could not have been risked by day - nor, indeed, anywhere throughout the boundaries of the district where Saul's residence was. We therefore conclude that David lay in hiding all that night. It was the morning of a Sabbath when he

suddenly presented himself, alone, unarmed, weary, and faint with hunger before the high-priest. Never had he thus appeared before Ahimelech; and the high-priest, who must, no doubt, have been aware of dissensions in the past between the king and his son-in-law, was afraid of what this might bode. But David had a specious answer to meet every question and disarm all suspicion. If he had come unarmed, and was faint from hunger, the king's business had been so pressing, and required such secrecy, that he had avoided taking provisions, and had not even had time to arm himself. For the same reasons he had appointed his followers to meet him at a trysting-place, rather than gone forth at the head of them.

In truth, David's wants had become most pressing.⁷³ He needed food to support him till he could reach a place of safety. For he dared not show himself by day, nor ask any man for help. And he needed some weapon with which, in case of absolute necessity, to defend his life. We know that it was the Sabbath, because the shewbread of the previous week, which was removed on that day, had to be eaten during its course.

It affords sad evidence of the decay into which the sanctuary and the priesthood had fallen, that Ahimelech and Abiathar could offer David no other provisions for his journey than this shewbread; which, according to the letter of the law, only the priests might eat, and that within the sanctuary (Leviticus 24:9). But there was the higher law of charity (Leviticus 19:18), which was rightly regarded as overruling every merely Levitical ordinance, however solemn (comp. Matthew 12:5; Mark 2:25). If it was as David pretended, and the royal commission was so important and so urgent, it could not be right to refuse the necessary means of sustenance to those who were engaged on it, provided that they had not contracted any such Levitical defilement as would have barred them from access to the Divine Presence (Leviticus 15:18). For, viewed in its higher bearing, what were the priests but the representatives of Israel, who were all to be a

⁷² It is thus that we explain the notice in Mark 2:26. This would also account for Abiathar's flight on the first tidings of his father's death (1 Samuel 22:20), whereas the other priests would deem themselves safe, and so fall into the hands of their murderer.

⁷³ The whole history tends to show that David was alone, alike in Nob and afterwards in Gath, though from Mark 2:25, 26, we infer that a few faithful friends may have kept about him to watch over his safety till he reached the border of Philistia.

kingdom of priests? This idea seems indeed implied in the remark of David (21:5): "And though the manner" (the use to which it is put) "be not sacred, yet still it will be made" (become) "sacred by the instrument," - either referring to himself as the Divine instrument about to be employed,⁷⁴ or to the "wallet" in which the bread was to be carried, as it were, on God's errand. By a similar pretense, David also obtained from the high-priest the sword of Goliath, which seems to have been kept in the sanctuary wrapped in a cloth, behind the ephod, as a memorial of God's victory over the might of the heathen. Most important of all, David, as we infer from 22:10, 15, appears to have "inquired of the Lord," through the high-priest - whatever the exact terms of that inquiry may have been. In this also there was nothing strange, since David had done so on previous occasions, probably before entering on dangerous expeditions (22:15).

But already David's secret was betrayed. It so happened in the Providence of God, that on this special Sabbath, one of Saul's principal officials, the "chief over the herdsman," was in Nob, "detained before Jehovah." The expression implies that Doeg was obliged to remain in the sanctuary in consequence of some religious ceremony - whether connected with his admission as a proselyte, for he was by birth an Edomite, or with a vow, or with some legal purification. Such a witness could not be excluded, even if David had chosen to betray his secret to the priest. Once committed to the fatal wrong of his falsehood, David had to go on to the bitter end, all the while feeling morally certain that Doeg was his enemy, and would bring report of all to Saul (22:22). His feelings as connected with this are, as we believe, expressed in Psalm 7.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ The passage in the Hebrew is very difficult. The word which we have rendered "instrument" is applied to human instrumentality in Genesis 49:5; Isaiah 13:5; 32:7; Jeremiah 50:25; comp. also Acts 9:15.

⁷⁵ The Psalm evidently refers to the time of Saul's persecutions. On this point critics are almost unanimous. Most of them, however, take the word "Cush" as the name of a person (though it nowhere else occurs), and date his otherwise unknown "report" in the period between 1 Samuel 24 and 27 (comp. 26:19). But I regard the term "Cush" - the Cushite, Ethiopian - as an equivalent for "Edomite," and explain the

At first sight it may seem strange that on his further flight from Nob, David should have sought shelter in Gath, the city of Goliath, whom he had killed in single combat. On the other hand, not only may this have been the place most readily accessible to him, but David may have imagined that in Gath, especially, the defection of such a champion from the hosts of Saul would be hailed as a notable triumph, and that accordingly he would find a welcome in seeking its protection. The result, however, proved otherwise. The courtiers of Achish, the king, - or, to give him his Philistine title, the Abimelech (my father king) of Gath (comp. Genesis 20:2; 26:8) - urged on him the high position which David held in popular estimation in Israel, and his past exploits, as presumably indicating what not only his real feelings but his true policy towards Philistia must be, however differently it might suit his present purpose to bear himself (comp. 1 Samuel 29:3-5). The danger which now threatened David must have been very great. In fact, to judge from Psalm 56:1, the Philistine lords must have actually "taken" him, to bring him before Achish, with a view to his imprisonment, if not his destruction. We are probably warranted in inferring that it was when thus led before the king, and waiting in the court before being admitted to the audience, that he feigned madness by scribbling⁷⁶ on the doors of the gate, and letting his spittle fall upon his beard. The device proved successful. The Philistine lords with true Oriental reverence for

expression "the Benjamite," as referring to Doeg's identification (as a proselyte) with the Benjamites, and his probable settlement among them, as evidenced by 1 Samuel 22:7, 9. The Rabbis have a curious conceit on this point, which, as it has not been told by any previous critic, and is incorrectly alluded to by Delitzsch and Moll, may here find a place. It occurs in Sifre 27 a, where the expression, Numbers 12:1, is applied to Zipporah, it being explained that she is called "a Cushite" (Ethiopian), because, as the Ethiopian differed by his skin from all other men, so Zipporah by her beauty from all women. Similarly the inscription, Psalm 7:1, is applied to Saul, the term Cush, or Ethiopian, being explained by a reference to 1 Samuel 9:2. On the same principle, Amos 9:7 is accounted for, because Israel differed from all others, the Law being given to them only, while, lastly, the Ebed-melech, or servant of the king, in Jeremiah 38:7, is supposed to have been Baruch, because he differed by his deeds from all the other servants.

⁷⁶ The LXX., by a slight alteration in the Hebrew lettering, have rendered it "beating" or "drumming."

madness as a kind of spiritual possession, dared not harm him any more; while Achish himself, however otherwise previously disposed (comp. 27:2, 3), would not have him in his house, under the apprehension that he might "rave against" ⁷⁷ him, and in a fit of madness endanger his life.

And as Psalm 56 described the feelings of David in the hour of his great danger, so Psalm 34 expresses those on his deliverance therefrom. Accordingly the two should be read in connection. Indeed the eight Psalms which date from the time of the persecutions by Saul (59, 7, 56, 34, 57, 52, 142, 54 ⁷⁸) are closely connected, the servant of the Lord gradually rising to full and triumphant anticipation of deliverance.

They all express the same trustfulness in God, the same absolute committal to Him, and the same sense of undeserved persecution. But what seems of such special interest, regarding, as we do, the history of David in its typical aspect, is that in these Psalms David's view is always enlarging, so that in the judgment of his enemies he beholds a type of that of the heathen who oppose the kingdom of God and its King (comp. for example, Psalm 56:7; 7:9; 59:5); thus showing that David himself must have had some spiritual understanding of the prophetic bearing of his history.

And now David was once more a fugitive - the twofold lesson which he might have learned being, that it needed no subterfuges to ensure his safety, and that his calling for the present was within, not outside the land of Israel. A comparatively short distance - about ten miles - from Gath runs "the valley of the terebinth," the scene of David's great combat with Goliath. The low hills south of this valley are literally burrowed by caves, some of them of very large dimensions. Here lay the ancient city of Adullam (Genesis 38:1; Joshua 12:15; 15:35, and many other passages), which

has, with much probability, been identified with the modern Aid el Mia (Adlem). In the largest of the caves close by, David sought a hiding-place. What his feelings were either at that time, or later, in similar circumstances (1 Samuel 24), we learn from Psalm 57.

It has been well observed, that hitherto David had always remained within easy distance of Bethlehem. This would secure him not only the means of information as to Saul's movements, but also of easy communication with his own family, and with those who would naturally sympathize with him.

Adullam was only a few hours distant from Bethlehem, and David's family, who no longer felt themselves safe in their home, soon joined him in his new refuge. But not only they. Many there must have been in the troublous times of Saul's reign who were "in distress," oppressed and persecuted; many who under such misgovernment would fall "into debt" to unmerciful and violent exactors; many also, who, utterly dissatisfied with the present state of things, would, in the expressive language of the sacred text, "be bitter of soul." Of these the more active and ardent now gathered around David, first to the number of about four hundred, which soon increased to six hundred (23:13). They were not a band in rebellion against Saul. This would not only have been utterly contrary to David's constantly avowed allegiance and oft proved loyalty to Saul, but to the higher purpose of God. The latter, if we may venture to judge, seems to have been spiritually to fit David for his calling, by teaching him constant dependence on God, and by also outwardly training him and his followers for the battles of the Lord - not against Saul, but against Israel's great enemy, the Philistines; in short, to take up the work which the all-absorbing murderous passion of Saul, as well as his desertion by God, prevented him from doing. Thus we see once more how, in the Providence of God, the inward and the outward training of David were the result of circumstances over which he had no control, and which seemed to threaten consequences of an entirely different character. How in those times of persecution outlaws became heroes, and of what deeds of personal bravery they were capable in the

⁷⁷ Instead of, "that ye have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence" (21:15), as in our Authorised Version, translate, "that ye have brought this one to rave against me."

⁷⁸ We have arranged these Psalms in the chronological order of the events to which they refer, although we would not, of course, be understood as implying that they were exactly composed at those very periods.

wars of the Lord, we learn from the record of their names (1 Chronicles 12), and of some of their achievements (2 Samuel 23:13, etc. comp. 1 Chronicles 11:15, etc.).

But there were among them those nearest and dearest to David, his own aged father and mother, whose presence could only impede the movements of his followers, and whose safety he must secure. Besides, as such a band could not long escape Saul's notice, it seemed desirable to find a better retreat than the caves about Adullam. For this twofold object David and his followers now passed to the other side of Jordan. From the account of the war between Saul and Moab in 1 Samuel 14:47, we infer that the latter had advanced beyond their own territory across the border, and were now occupying the southern part of the trans-Jordanic country which belonged to Israel. This was within easy reach of Bethlehem. Accordingly David now went to Mizpeh Moab, the "outlook," mountain-height or "Tor" (as we might call it) of Moab, probably over against Jericho in the "Arboth of Moab" (Numbers 22:1; Deuteronomy 34:1, 8; Joshua 13:32), perhaps, as the name seems to indicate, on the fields of the Zophim (or outlookers), on the top of Pisgah (Numbers 23:14).

To the king of Moab, whose protection he could invoke in virtue of their descent from Ruth the Moabitess, he commended his father and mother, with the expressive remark, till he should know "what Elohim would do" unto him. He himself and his followers meantime entrenched on that "mountain-height,"⁷⁹ associated with the prophecy there delivered by Balaam concerning Israel's future.

It was impossible that such a movement on the part of David could long remain unknown. In two quarters it excited deep feelings, though of a very different character. It seems highly probable that the tidings reached the Naioth, and that it was from thence that Gad (afterwards David's "seer" and spiritual adviser, 2 Samuel 24:11-19.; 1 Chronicles 21:9, and the chronicler of his reign, 1

Chronicles 29:29) went to David by Divine commission.⁸⁰

But the stay in the land of Moab was not in accordance with the purpose of God. David must not flee from the discipline of suffering, and God had some special work for him in the land of Israel which Saul could no longer do. In accordance with this direction, David left his entrenched position, recrossed the Jordan, and sought shelter in "the forest of Hareth," within the boundaries of Judah. But meantime Saul also had heard that "David had become known, and the men that were with him" (22:6).

Being aware of his position, he would secure his prey. A royal court is held at Gibeah. The king sits, as so often before, "under the tamarisk-tree on the height," his spear as scepter in his hand, and surrounded by all his officers of state, among them Doeg, the "chief of the herdsmen."

Characteristically Saul seems now to have surrounded himself exclusively by "Benjamites," either because no others would serve him, or more probably because he no longer trusted any but his own clansmen. Still more characteristic is the mode in which he appeals to their loyalty and seeks to enlist their aid. He seems to recognize no motive on the part of others but that of the most sordid selfishness. Probably some of the words that had passed between Jonathan and David, when they made their covenant of friendship (20:42), had been overheard, and repeated to Saul in a garbled form by one of his many spies. That was enough. As he put it, his son had made a league with David, of which the only object could be to deprive him of his throne. This could only be accomplished by violence. Everyone was aware that David and his men then held a strong position. A conspiracy so fully organized must have been known to his courtiers. If they had no sympathy with a father betrayed by his own son, at least what profit could they as Benjamites hope to derive from such a plot? It was to defend the courtiers from guilty knowledge of such a plot that Doeg now reported what he had seen and heard at

⁷⁹ This is the meaning of what is rendered in our Authorised Version "in the hold" (22:4). We infer that this entrenched mountain-height was Mizpeh of Moab.

⁸⁰ Of course, this is only our inference, but it seems in accordance with the whole narrative. It is impossible to say whether Gad was sent by Samuel, or had received the message from God directly.

Nob. David's was a conspiracy indeed, but one hatched not by the laity but by the priesthood; and of which, as he had had personal evidence, the high-priest himself was the chief abettor.

The suggestion was one which would only too readily approve itself to a mind and conscience like Saul's. There could be nothing in common between Saul and the ministers of that God Who by His prophet had announced his rejection and appointed his successor. A priestly plot against himself, and in favor of David, had every appearance of likelihood. It is only when we thus understand the real import of Doeg's account to the king, that we perceive the extent of his crime, and the meaning of the language in which David characterized it in Psalm 52. A man of that kind was not likely to shrink from any deed. Saul summoned Ahimelech and all his father's house to his presence. In answer to the charge of conspiracy, the priest protested his innocence in language the truth of which could not have been mistaken by any impartial judge.⁸¹

But the case had been decided against the priesthood before it was heard. Yet, callous as Saul's men-at-arms were, not one of them would execute the sentence of death against the priests of Jehovah. It was left to the Edomite to carry out what his reckless malice had instigated. That day no fewer than eighty-five of the priests in actual ministry were murdered in cold blood. Not content with this, the king had "the ban" executed upon Nob. As if the priest-city had been guilty of idolatry and rebellion against Jehovah (Deuteronomy 13:15), every living being, both man and beast, was cut down by the sword. Only one escaped the horrible slaughter of that day. Abiathar, the son of Ahimelech,⁸² had probably received timely warning.

He now fled to David, to whom he reported what had taken place. From him he received such assurance of protection as only one could give who in his strong faith felt absolute safety in the

shelter of Jehovah's wings. But here also the attentive reader will trace a typical parallel between the murder at Nob and that of the children at Bethlehem - all the more striking, that in the latter case also an Edomite was the guilty party, Herod the king having been by descent an Idumaeen.

When Abiathar reached David, he was already on his way from the forest of Hareth to Keilah.⁸³ Tidings had come to David of a Philistine raid against Keilah, close on the border - the modern Kilah, about six miles to the south-east of Adullam.

Keilah was a walled city, and therefore not itself in immediate danger. But there was plenty of plunder to be obtained outside its walls; and henceforth no threshing-floor on the heights above the city was safe from the Philistines. Here was a call for the proper employment of a band like David's. But his followers had not yet learned the lessons of trust which he had been taught. Although the expedition for the relief of Keilah had been undertaken after "inquiry," and by direction of the Lord, his men shrank from provoking an attack by the Philistines at the same time that they were in constant apprehension of what might happen if Saul overtook them. So little did they as yet understand either the source of their safety or the object of their gathering! What happened - as we note once more in the course of ordinary events - was best calculated to teach them all this. A second formal inquiry of the Lord by the Urim and Thummim, and a second direction to go forward, brought them to the relief of the city. The Philistines were driven back with great slaughter, and rich booty was made of their cattle.

But soon the danger which David's men had apprehended seemed really at hand. When Saul heard that David had "shut himself in by coming

⁸¹ Ver. 14 reads thus: "And who among all thy servants is approved like David, and son-in-law to the king, and having access to thy private audience, and honored in all thy house?"

⁸² He may have remained behind in Nob to attend to the Sanctuary during the absence of the other priests.

⁸³ As from the expression, "inquired of Jehovah"(23:2, 4), it is evident that the inquiry was made by the Urim and Thummim, we must conclude that Abiathar had reached David either after he had been preparing his expedition to Keilah, or more probably on his way thither. But, in general, it seems to me that the language in 23:6 must not be too closely pressed. The inquiry mentioned in ver. 4 must have taken place on the road to Keilah, probably near to it, and ver. 6 is manifestly intended only to explain the mode of David's inquiry.

into a town with gates and bars," it seemed to him almost as if judicial blindness had fallen upon him, or, as the king put it: "Elohim has rejected him into my hand." So thinking, Saul rapidly gathered a force to march against Keilah. But, as we learn from the course of this narrative, each side was kept well informed of the movements and plans of the other. Accordingly David knew his danger, and in his extremity once more appealed to the Lord. It was not a needless question which he put through the Urim and Thummim,⁸⁴ but one which was connected with God's faithfulness and the truth of His promises.

With reverence be it said, God could not have given up David into the hands of Saul. Nor did his inquiries of God resemble those by heathen oracles. Their main element seems to have been prayer. In most earnest language David spread his case before the Lord, and entreated His direction. The answer was not withheld, although, significantly, each question had specially and by itself to be brought before the Lord (23:11, 12).

Thus informed of their danger, David and his men escaped from Keilah, henceforth to wander from one hiding-place to another. No other district could offer such facilities for eluding pursuit as that large tract, stretching along the territory of Judah, between the Dead Sea and the mountains of Judah. It bore the general designation of "the wilderness of Judah," but its various parts were distinguished as "the wilderness of Ziph," "of Maon," etc., from the names of neighboring towns. In general it may be said of this period of his wanderings (ver. 14), that during its course David's head-quarters were on "mountain heights,"⁸⁵ whence he could easily observe the approach of an enemy, while "Saul sought him every day," but in vain, since "God gave him not into his hand." The first station in these wanderings was the "wilderness of Ziph," on the outskirts of the town of that name, about an hour and three-quarters to the south-east of Hebron. South of it a solitary mountain-top rises about one hundred feet,

⁸⁴ This is implied in David's direction to Abiathar: "Bring hither the ephod" (23:9).

⁸⁵ This is the correct rendering, and not "in strongholds," as in the Authorised Version.

commanding a full prospect of the surrounding country. On the other hand, anything that passed there could also easily be observed from below. It seems that this was "the mountain" (ver. 14), or, as it is afterwards (ver. 19) more particularly described, "the hill of Hachilah, on the south of the wilderness,"⁸⁶ where David had his principal station, or rather, to be more accurate, in "the thicket," or "brushwood," which covered its sides (vers. 15, 16).

It was thither that in the very height of these first persecutions, Jonathan came once more to see his friend, and, as the sacred text emphatically puts it, "strengthened his hand in God." It is difficult to form an adequate conception of the courage, the spiritual faith, and the moral grandeur of this act. Never did man more completely clear himself from all complicity in guilt, than Jonathan from that of his father. And yet not an undutiful word escaped the lips of this brave man. And how truly human is his fond hope that in days to come, when David would be king, he should stand next to his throne, his trusted adviser, as in the days of sorrow he had been the true and steadfast friend of the outlaw! As we think of what it must have cost Jonathan to speak thus, or again of the sad fate which was so soon to overtake him, there is a deep pathos about this brief interview, almost unequalled in Holy Scripture, to which the ambitious hopes of the sons of Zebedee form not a parallel but a contrast.

But yet another bitter experience had David to make. As so often in the history of the Church, and never more markedly than in the case of Him Who was the great Antitype of David, it appeared that those who should most have rallied around him were his enemies and betrayers. The "citizens"⁸⁷ of Keilah would have given him up from fear of Saul. But the men of Ziph went further.

Like those who hypocritically pretended that they would have no other king but Caesar, they feigned

⁸⁶ Not, as in the Authorised Version, "on the south of Jeshimon" (ver. 19), where the word is left untranslated.

⁸⁷ There is a difference between the "inhabitants" of Keilah (23:5), and the "citizens," burghers, "lords of Keilah" (the Baale Keilah), ver. 12, who were ready to sell David for their own advantage.

a loyalty for which it is impossible to give them credit. Of their own accord, and evidently from hatred of David, they who were his own tribesmen betrayed his hiding-place to Saul, and offered to assist in his capture. It is pitiable to hear Saul in the madness of his passion invoking on such men "the blessing of Jehovah," and characterizing their deed as one of "compassion" on himself (23:21). But the danger which now threatened David was greater than any previously or afterwards. On learning it he marched still further southeast, where "the Jeshimon," or desert, shelves down into the Arabah, or low table-land.⁸⁸ Maon itself is about two hours south-east from Ziph; and amidst the mountains between Maon and the Dead Sea on the west, we must follow the track of David's further flight and adventures. But meantime the plan which Saul had suggested was being only too faithfully carried out. Slowly and surely the men of Saul, guided by the Ziphites, were reaching David, and drawing the net around him closer and closer. Informed of his danger, David hastily "came down the rock,"⁸⁹ - perhaps the round mountain-top near Maon. It was high time, for already Saul and his men had reached and occupied one side of it, while David and his men retreated to the other.

The object of the king now was to surround David, when he must have succumbed to superior numbers. We are told that "David was anxiously endeavoring to go away from before Saul; and Saul and his men were surrounding David and his men to seize them."⁹⁰ Almost had they succeeded - but that "almost," which as so often in the history of God's people, calls out earnest faith and prayer, only proves the real impotence of this world's might as against the Lord. How David in this danger cried unto the Lord, we learn from Psalm 54.⁹¹

⁸⁸ In our Authorised Version (23:24): "the plain on the south of Jeshimon."

⁸⁹ Our Authorised Version has erroneously (ver. 25), "he came down into a rock."

⁹⁰ Such is the correct rendering of the second half of ver. 26.

⁹¹ We suppose that Psalm 54 refers to this rather than to the second betrayal by the Ziphites, recorded in 1 Samuel 26.

How God "delivered him out of all trouble," appears from the sacred narrative. Once more all is in the natural succession of events; but surely it was in the wonder-working Providence of God that, just when David seemed in the power of his enemies, tidings of an incursion by the Philistines reached Saul, which obliged him hastily to turn against them. And ever afterwards, as David or others passed through that "wilderness," and looked up the face of that cliff, they would remember that God is "the Helper" of His people - for to all time it bore the name "Cliff of Escape." And so we also may in our wanderings have our "cliff of escape," to which ever afterwards we attach this precious remembrance, "Behold, God is thine Helper."

