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1 Samuel 17:32-51 The Victory of the Unarmed Faith

The scene of David's victory has been identified in the present Wady Es-Sunt, which still possesses one of the terebinth-trees which gave it its name of 'Elah.' At that point it is about a quarter of a mile wide, and runs nearly east and west. In the centre is 'a deep trench or gulley, the sides and bed of which are strewn with rounded and water-worn pebbles.' This is the 'valley,' or rather 'ravine' of verse 3 of this chapter, which is described by a different word from that for 'vale' in verse 2 —the one meaning a much broader opening than the other—and from it came the 'five smooth stones.' Notice the minute topographical accuracy, which indicates history, not legend. The pebble-bed may supply a missile to hit the modern 'giant' of sceptical criticism, who boasts much after Goliath's fashion.

The two armies lay looking at each other across the valley, with occasional skirmishes; and for forty days (probably a round number) Goliath paraded on his own, the south, side of the gulley, shouting out his taunts and challenge with a voice like a bull. Many a similar scene in classical and mediaeval warfare confirms the truth of the picture, so unlike modern battles. The story is, for all time, the example of the victory of unarmed faith over the world's utmost might. It is in little the history of the Church and the type of all battles for God. It is a pattern for the young especially. The youthful athlete leaps into the arena, and overcomes, not because of his own strength, but because he trusts in God.

I. Note the glowing youthful enthusiasm which dares the conflict.

When the Spirit of the Lord left Saul, his courage seems to have gone too, and he is cowed, like the rest, by Goliath. His interview with David shows him as timid and unlike his former self, when he dashed at Nahash and any odds. Now he is hardly to be roused, even by David's contagious boldness, and is full of objections and precautions. The temper of the two, as they front each other in Saul's tent, shows that the one has lost, and the other received, the Spirit which strengthens. David has become the encourager, and his cheery words bring some hopefulness to the gloomy, faint-hearted king. The Septuagint has a variant reading in verse 32 , which brings this out and suits the context, 'Let not my lord's heart fail.' But, whether this be adopted or no, David appears as quite unaffected by the terror which had unmanned the army, and as bringing a buoyant disregard of the enemy, like a reviving breeze. It was not merely youthful daring, nor foolish under-estimation of the danger, which prompted his stimulating words. The ring of true faith is in them, and they show us how we may surround ourselves with an atmosphere which will keep prevailing faint-heartedness off us, and make us, like Gideon's fleece, impervious to the chill mists of faithless fear which saturate all around. He who trusts in God should be as a pillar of fire, burning bright in the darkness of terror, and making a rallying point for weaker hearts. When panic has seized others, the Christian soul has the more reason for courage. David conquered the temptation to share in the general cowardice, before he conquered Goliath, and perhaps the former fight was the worse of the two.

While David is the embodiment of the courage of faith, Saul embodies worldly wisdom and calculating prudence. A touch of tenderness blends with his attempt to dissuade the lad from the unequal conflict. He speaks of probabilities, and, like all such

calculation, his results are quite right, only that he has not taken all the forces into account, and the omission vitiates the conclusion. It is quite true that David is but a youth, and Goliath a giant and a veteran; but is that all that is to be said? If it be, then the lad cannot fight the Philistine bully; but if Saul has made the small omission of leaving out God, that makes a difference. The same mistake is constantly made still, and so the victories of faith are a constant surprise to the world and to a worldly Church. David's eager story of his fights with wild beasts is meant both to answer Saul's objection on his own ground, by showing him that, youth as the speaker was, he had proved his power, and still more to supply the lacking element in the calculation. So he tells, first, how 'I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him,' and then at the end brings in the true ground of his confidence: 'The Lord that delivered me … He will deliver.' As Thomas Fuller says, 'He made an experimental syllogism, and from most practical premises (major a lion, minor a bear), inferred the direct conclusion that God would give him victory over Goliath. Faith has the right thus to argue from the past to the future, because it draws from God whose resources and patience are equally inexhaustible. An echo of the words comes from Paul's 'Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that He will yet deliver.' There is infinite pathos in Saul's parting blessing. 'The Lord be with thee!' is spoken as if from the consciousness that the Lord had left him , and that his day for going into battle with the assurance of His help was gone for ever. If that softened mood had lasted, how different his future might have been! If we modestly and boldly show the power of faith in our lives, we may kindle yearnings in some gloomy hearts, that would lead them to peace, if followed out.

II. The equipment of faith.

Saul meant to honour as well as to secure David by dressing him in his own royal attire, and by encumbering him by the help of sword and helmet. And David was willing to be so fitted out, for it is no part of the courage of faith to disdain any outward helps. But he soon found that he could not move freely in the unaccustomed armour, and flung it off, like a wise man. His motive was partly common sense, which told him not to choose weapons that his antagonist could handle better than he; and partly reliance on God, which told him that he was safer with no armour but his shepherd's dress and with only his sling in his hand. So there he stands, drawn for us with wonderful vividness, in one hand his staff, in the other his sling, both familiar and often used, and by his side the simple wallet which had held his frugal meal, and now received the smooth pebbles that he picked up as he passed the gulley to the Philistine side of the valley.

How graphically the contrast is drawn between him and Goliath, as the latter conies forth swelling with his own magnificence, and preceded by his shield-bearer! He was 'brass' all over; note the kind of amused emphasis with which the word is repeated in the half-satirical and marvellously lifelike portrait of him in verses 5-8 ; 'brass' here, 'brass' there, 'brass' everywhere; and, not content with one shield dangling at his back, he has a man to carry another in front of him as he struts. David seems to have crossed the ravine, and to have come close up to Goliath before he was observed; and then, with almost a snort of contempt, the giant resents the insult of sending such a foe to fight him with such weapons. Perhaps he was nearer the truth than he thought, when he asked if he was a dog; and any stick will do, as the proverb says, to beat that animal, especially if God guards the hand that holds it.

The five smooth stones have become the symbol of the insignificant means, in the world's estimate, which God uses in faithful hands to slay the giants of evil. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but they are mighty. Faith unarmed is armed with more than triple steel, and a sling in its hand is more fatal than a sword. Sometimes in kindness and sometimes in malice, the world tempts us to fight evil with its own weapons, and to put on its unfamiliar armour. The Church as a whole, and individual Christians, have often been hampered, and all but smothered, in Saul's harness. The more simply we keep ourselves to the simple methods which the word of God enjoins, and to the simple weapons which ought to be the easiest for a Christian, the more likely shall we be to conquer. Goliath is not to be encountered with sword and armour which is, after all, but a shabby copy of the tons of brass which he wears, but he does not know what to make of the sling, and does not see the stone till it crashes his skull in.

III. Note faith's anticipation of victory.

The dialogue before the battle has many parallels in classical times and among savage peoples. Goliath's bluster is full of contempt of David and truculent self-confidence. Its coarseness is characteristic,—he will make his boyish antagonist food for vultures and jackals. It is exactly what a bully would say. David's answer throbs with buoyant confidence, and stands as a stimulating example of the temper in which God's soldiers should go out to every fight, no matter against what odds. It fully recognizes the formidable armory of the enemy,—sword for close quarters, spear to thrust with, and javelin to fling from a distance, every weapon that ingenuity could fashion and trained skill could wield. Goliath was a walking arsenal, and little David took count of his weapons as they clanked and flashed. It is no part of faith's triumph to ignore the number and sharpness of the enemy's arms. But faith sees them all, and keeps unterrified and unashamed of the poor leathern sling and smooth stones. The unarmed hand which grasps God's hand should never tremble; and he who can say 'I come … in the name of the Lord of hosts,' has no need to be afraid of an army of Goliaths, though each bristled with swords and spears like a porcupine.

The great name on which David's faith rested, 'the Lord of hosts,' appears to have sprung into use in this epoch, and to have been one precious fruit of its frequent wars. Conflict is blessed if it teaches the knowledge of the unseen Commander who marshals not

only men, but all the forces of the universe and the armies of heaven, for the defence of His servants and the victory of His own cause. The fulness of the divine name is learned by degrees, as our needs impress the various aspects of His character; and the revelation contained in this appellation is the gift of that fierce and stormy time, a possession for ever. He who defies the armies of Israel has to reckon with the Lord of these armies, whose name proclaims at once His eternal, self-originated, and self-sustained being, His covenant, His presence with His earthly host, and the infinite ranks of obedient creatures who are His soldiers and their allies. That is 'the Name' in the strength of which we may 'set up our banners' and be sure of victory. Note how David flings back Goliath's taunts in his teeth. He is sure that God will conquer through him, and, though he has no sword, that he will somehow hack the big head off; and that it is the host of the Philistines on whom the vultures and jackals are to feed to-day.

His faith sees the victory before the battle is begun, and trusts, not in his own weak power, but only 'in the name of the Lord.' Note, too, the result which he expects—no glory for himself, though that came unsought, when the shrill songs from the women of Israel met the victors, but to all the world the proof that Israel had a God, and to Israel ('this assembly') the renewed lesson of their true weapons and of their Almighty Helper. Such utter suppression of self is inseparable from trust in God, and without it no soldier of His has a right to expect victory. To fight 'in the name of the Lord' requires hiding our own name. If we are really going to war for Him, and in His strength, we ought to expect to conquer. Believe that you will be beaten, and you will be. Trust to Him to make you 'more than conquerors,' and the trust will bring about its own fulfilment.

IV. Observe the contrast in verse 48 between the slow movements of the heavy-armed Philistine and the quick run of the shepherd, whose 'feet were as hind's feet' (Psalm 18:33).

Agility and confident alacrity were both expressed. His feet were shod with 'the preparedness of faith.' Observe, too, the impetuous brevity of the account in verse 49 , of the actual fall of Goliath. The short clauses, coupled by a series of 'ands,' reproduce the swift succession of events, which ended the fight before it had begun; and one can almost hear the whiz of the stone as it crashes into the thick head, so strangely left unprotected by all the profusion of brass that clattered about him. The vulnerable heel of Achilles and the unarmed forehead of Goliath illustrate the truth, ever forgotten and needing to be repeated, that, after all precautions, some spot is bare, and that 'there is no armour against fate.'

The picture of the huge 'man-mountain' fallen upon his face to the earth, a huddled heap of useless mail, recalls the words of a psalm, 'When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell' (Psalm xxvii. 2). Is it fanciful to hear in that triumphant chant an echo of Goliath's boast about giving his flesh to the fowls and the beasts, and a vision of the braggart as he tottered and lay prostrate? Observe, too, the contemptuous reiteration of 'the Philistine,' which occurs six times in the four verses (48-51). National feeling speaks in that. There is triumph in the sarcastic repetition of the dreaded name in such a connection. This was what one of the brood had got, and his fate was an omen of what would befall the rest. The champion of Israel, the soldier of God, standing over the dead Philistine, all whose brazen armour had been useless and his brazen insolence abased, and sawing off his head with his own sword, was a prophecy for the Israel of that day, and will be a symbol till the end of time of the true equipment, the true temper, and the certain victory, of all who, in the name of the Lord of hosts, go forth in their weakness against the giants of ignorance, vice, and sin. 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.'

1 Samuel 18:5-16 A Soul's Tragedy

> **'And David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely: and Saul set him over the men of war; and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants. 6. And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of musick. 7. And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands. 8. And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom? 9. And Saul eyed David from that day and forward. 10. And it came to pass on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house: and David played with his hand, as at other times: and there was a javelin in Saul's hand. 11. And Saul cast the javelin; for he said, I will smite David even to the wall with it. And David avoided out of his presence twice. 12. And Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him, and was departed from Saul. 13. Therefore Saul removed him from him, and made him his captain over a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people. 14. And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the Lord was with him. 15. Wherefore, when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him. 16. But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them.**'— 1 Samuel 18:5-16

1 Samuel 18:5 anticipates 1 Samuel 18:13-16 . It is the last verse of a section which interrupts the even flow of the story, and which is absent from the Septuagint. Verse 6 follows immediately on 17:54 in that version. Taking that verse as our starting-point,

we have three stages in Saul's growing hatred and awe of the young champion, and of David's growing influence and reputation. It is deeply tragic to watch the gradual darkening of the once bright light, side by side with the irresistible increase in brilliance of the new star. 'He must increase, but I must decrease,' became Saul's bitter conviction; but instead of meekly accepting the necessity, his gloomy spirit struggled against it, like stormy waves against a breakwater, and, like them, was shivered into foam in the vain effort.

I. The first stage was Saul's jealousy of David's fame as a warrior.

The returning victorious army was met, in Oriental fashion, by a triumphal chorus of women, with their shrill songs, accompanied by the dissonant noises which do duty for music to Eastern ears. The words of their chant were startlingly and ominously plain-spoken, and became more emphatic and insulting in Saul's ears, because they were sung by two answering bands, one of which rang out, 'Saul hath slain his thousands,' while the other overtopped them by pealing out still more loudly and exultantly, 'And David his ten thousands.' To be brought into comparison with this unknown stripling was bitter enough, but to be used as a foil to set off his superiority was too much to be borne. There are few men, holding high places in any walk of life, who could have stood such a comparison without wincing. Suppose a great soldier in our day, coming home from a successful campaign, and having his prowess dimmed in every newspaper by the praises lavished on a young lieutenant who had done some brave feat that caught the public fancy— would he be likely to be in a very amiable mood towards either the singers or the object of their triumphal songs? Do great authors rejoice in the rising of young reputations that dim theirs? or do great orators smile when some 'boy' takes the public ear more than they do? Poor Saul had to drink the bitter cup, which all who love the sweet draught of popular applause have sooner or later to taste; and we need not think him a monster of badness because he found it bitter.

It will be more to the purpose that we take care lest we do the very same thing in our little lives and humble spheres; for envy and jealousy of those who threaten to out-shine, or in any way to out-do, us is not confined to people in high places or with great reputations. The roots of them are in us all, and the only way to keep them from growing up rank is to think less of our reputation and more of our duty, to count it a very small matter what men think of us, and the all-important matter what God thinks.

Saul was moved, too, by the consciousness that he had been really deposed by Jehovah, and was only a phantom king, and, as his angry soliloquy shows, what troubled him most in the women's song was that it pointed to David as likely to come in and rob him, not only of glory, but of the kingdom. Ever since Samuel had pronounced his rejection, his uneasy eyes had been furtively scanning men for his possible supplanter, and no wonder that his gloomy suspicions focused themselves on the gallant youth, who conquered men's hearts and made women's tongues eloquent in his praise. Stormy and dark as Saul's nature had become, and grave as had been his failure to be worthy of the monarchy, one cannot but feel the infinite pathos and pity of his life.

II. The second stage was the attempt on David's life.

1 Samuel 18:10, 11, which record it, are not in the Septuagint, and the narrative does run more smoothly without them. But if they are retained, they show how the moody suspicion with which Saul 'eyed David' came to a swift, murderous climax. He stands as a terrible example of how suspicion and jealousy, working in a nature utterly without self-control, transport it into the wildest excesses. In the strange phraseology of verse 9 , 'an evil spirit from God' laid hold of him, dominating his personality. The writer of this book felt that God was the ultimate cause of all things, and that all beings were under His control; and his devout recognition of that fact led him to the apparent paradox of tracing an 'evil spirit' to God. But we must not be so startled as to overlook the truth that Saul had prepared the fit abode for that evil spirit by his own indulgence in a whirl of sinful passions and acts, and that these were punished by their 'natural' consequence. Any man who lets his own baser nature have full fling invites the devil. Saul had what would now be called a paroxysm of insanity. But perhaps the modern medical phrase is not to be preferred to the old scriptural one. The former is innocent of any explanation of the fact which it designates, and it may possibly be that insanity is sometimes, even now, 'possession.' At all events, since science gives no explanation of it, and a great dim region of consciousness is now being recognised,—'subliminal,' to speak in the new phraseology,—he is a bold man who ventures to deny that possibility.

But be that as it may, what a striking picture is given of Saul, worn with passion and swept away by ungovernable impulses, 'prophesying' or 'raving' with wild gestures and uttering wilder sounds; and of David, young, calm, giving forth melodies on his harp and songs from his lips, that sought to soothe the paroxysms of fury. Browning has drawn the picture in immortal words, which all who can should read. It has been suggested that Saul did not 'cast' his spear, but only brandished it in his fierce threat to pin David to the wall. But the youthful harper would scarcely have 'avoided out of his presence' for a mere threat and the flourish of a lance; and a man, raging mad and madly hostile, would not be likely to waste breath in mere threats. The attempt was more probably a serious one, and the spear, flung by an arm made stronger than ever by insane hatred, quivered in the wall very near the lithe athlete who had agilely escaped it. Envy, allowed to have its way, becomes murderous. Let us suppress its beginning. A tiger pup can be held in and its claws cut, but a full-grown tiger cannot.

III. The third stage is Saul's getting rid of David.

The growing awe of him is marked in verses 12 and 15 , and the word in the latter verse is stronger than that in the former. It is a pathetic picture of the gradual creeping over a strong man of a nameless terror. Ever-thickening folds of cold dread, like a wet mist, wrap a soul once bright and energetic. And the reason is twofold: first, that God had left that tempestuous, rebellious soul because it had left Him; and second, that, in its desolate solitude, in which there was no trace of softening or penitence, that lightning-riven soul knew that the sunshine, which it had repelled, was now pouring on David. Saul's suspicions were hardened into certainties. He was sure now that what his jealousy had whispered, when the women chanted their chorus, was grim fact. And he could but helplessly watch his supplanter's steady advance in favour with men and God. The two processes of growing darkness and growing light go on side by side in the two men, and each makes the other more striking by contrast. Twice is it repeated that Saul was in awe of David. Twice is it repeated that Jehovah was with David, and that he 'behaved himself wisely,' which last statement includes in the Hebrew word both the idea of prudence and that of success. So, on the one hand, there is a steady growth in all good, godly, and happy qualities and experiences; and on the other, a tragical increase of darkness and gloom, godlessness and despair. And yet Saul had begun so well! And Saul might have been what David was,— companioned by God, prosperous, and the idol of his people. Two souls stand side by side for a moment on the same platform, with the same divine goodness and love encircling them, and the one steadily rises, while the other steadily sinks. How awful are the endless possibilities of progress in either direction that lie open for every soul of man!

1 Samuel 20:1-13 Jonathan, The Pattern of Friendship

> **'And David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and came and said before Jonathan, What have I done? what is mine iniquity? and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life? 2. And he said unto him, God forbid; thou shalt not die: behold, my father will do nothing either great or small, but that he will shew it me: and why should my father hide this thing from me? it is not so. 3. And David sware moreover, and said, Thy father certainly knoweth that I have found grace in thine eyes; and he saith, Let not Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved: but truly, as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death. 4. Then said Jonathan unto David, Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee. 5. And David said unto Jonathan, Behold, to-morrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king at meat: but let me go, that I may hide myself in the field unto the third day at even. 6. If thy father at all miss me, then say, David earnestly asked leave of me that he might run to Beth-lehem his city: for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family. 7. If he say thus, it is well; thy servant shall have peace: but if he be very wroth, then be sure that evil is determined by him. 8. Therefore thou shalt deal kindly with thy servant; for thou hast brought thy servant into a covenant of the Lord with thee: notwithstanding, if there be in me iniquity, slay me thyself; for why shouldest thou bring me to thy father? 9. And Jonathan said, Far be it from thee: for if I knew certainly that evil were determined by my father to come upon thee, then would not I tell it thee? 10. Then said David to Jonathan, Who shall tell me? or what if thy father answer thee roughly? 11. And Jonathan said unto David, Come, and let us go out into the field. And they went out both of them into the field. 12. And Jonathan said unto David, O Lord God of Israel when I have sounded my father about to-morrow any time, or the third day, and, behold, if there be good toward David, and I then send not unto thee, and shew it thee; 13. The Lord do so and much more to Jonathan: but if it please my father to do thee evil, then I will shew it thee, and send thee away, that thou mayest go in peace: and the Lord be with thee, as He hath been with my father.'**— 1 Samuel 20:1-13

The friendship of Jonathan for David comes like a breath of pure air in the midst of the heavy-laden atmosphere of hate and mad fury, or like some clear fountain sparkling up among the sulphurous slag and barren scoriae of a volcano. There is no more beautiful page in history or poetry than the story of the passionate love of the heir to the throne for the young champion, whom he had so much cause to regard as a rival. What a proof of the victory of love over self is his saying, 'Thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee'! (1 Samuel 23:17). Truly did David sing in his elegy, 'Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women'; for in that old world, in which the relations between the sexes had not yet received the hallowing and refinement of Christian times, much of what is now chiefly found in these was manifested in friendship, such as that of these two young men. Jonathan is the foremost figure in it, and the nobility and self-oblivion of his love are beautifully brought out, while David's part is rather that of the loved than of the lover. The scene is laid in Gibeah, where Saul kept his court, and to which all the persons of the story seem to have come back from Samuel's house at Kamah. Saul's strange subjugation to the hallowing influences of the prophet's presence had been but momentary and superficial; and it had been followed by a renewed outburst of the old hate, obvious to David's sharpened sight, though not to Jonathan. In the interview between them, David is pardonably but obviously absorbed in self, while Jonathan bends all his soul to cheer and reassure his friend.

There are four turns in the conversation, in each of which David speaks and Jonathan answers. David's first question presupposes that his friend knows that his death is determined, and is privy to Saul's thoughts. If he had been less harassed, he would have done Jonathan more justice than to suppose him capable of knowing everything without telling him anything; but fear is suspicious. He should have remembered that, when Saul first harboured murderous purposes, Jonathan had not waited to be asked, but had

disclosed the plot to him, and periled his own life by his remonstrances with his father. He should have trusted his friend. His question breathes consciousness of innocence of any hostility to Saul, but unconsciously betrays some defect in his confidence in Jonathan. The answer is magnanimous in its silence as to that aspect of the question, though the subsequent story seems to imply that Jonathan felt it. He tries to hearten David by strong assurances that his life is safe. He does not directly contradict David's implication that he knew more than he had told, but, without asserting his ignorance, takes it for granted, and quietly argues from it the incorrectness of David's suspicions. Incidentally he gives us, in the picture of the perfect confidence between Saul and himself, an inkling of how much he had to sacrifice to his friendship. Wild as was Saul's fury when aroused, and narrow as had been his escape from it at an earlier time (1 Samuel 14:44), there was yet love between them, and the king made a confidant of his gallant eldest son. They 'were lovely and pleasant in their lives.' However gloomy and savage in his paroxysms Saul was, the relations between them were sweet. The most self-introverted and solitary soul needs some heart to pour itself out to, and this poor king found one in Jonathan. All the harder, then, was the trial of friendship when the trusted son had to take the part of the friend whom his father deemed an enemy, and had the pain of breaking such close ties. How his heart must have been torn asunder! On the one side was the lonely father who clung to him: on the other, the hunted friend to whom he clung. It is a sore wrench when kindred are on one side, and congeniality and the voice of the heart on the other. But there are ties more sacred than those of flesh and blood; and the putting of them second, which is sometimes needful in obedience to earthly love or duty, is always needful if we would rightly entertain our heavenly Friend.

Jonathan's soothing assurances did not satisfy David, and he 'sware' in the earnestness of his conviction. David gives a very good reason for his friend's ignorance, which he has at once believed, in the suggestion that Saul had not taken him into his confidence, out of tenderness to his feelings. Their friendship, then, was notorious, and, indeed, was an element in Saul's dread of David, who seemed to have some charm to steal hearts, and had bewitched both Saul's son and his daughter, thus making a painful rift in the family unity. It does not appear how David came to be so sure of Saul's designs. The incident at Ramah might have seemed to augur some improvement in his mood; and certainly there could have been no overt acts, or Jonathan could not have disputed the suspicions. Possibly some whispers may have reached David through his wife Michal, Saul's daughter, or in the course of his attendance on the king, which he had now resumed, his quick eye may have noticed ominous signs. At all events, he is so sure, that he makes solemn attestation to his friend, and convinces him that, in the picturesque phrase which has become so familiar, 'There is but a step between me and death.' Such temper was scarcely in accordance with 'the prophecies which went before on' him. If he had been walking by faith, he would have called Samuel's anointing to mind, and have drawn arguments from the victory over Goliath, for trust in victory over Saul, as he had done for the former from that over the lion and the bear. But faith does not always keep high-water mark, and we can only too easily sympathise with this momentary ebb of its waters.

None the less is it true that David's terror was unworthy, and showed that the strain of his anxious position was telling on his spirit, and making him not only suspect his earthly friend, but half forget his heavenly One. There was but a step between him and death; but, if he had been living in the serenity of trust, he would have known that the narrow space was as good as a thousand miles, and that Saul could not force him across it, for all his hatred and power.

Jonathan does not attempt to alter his conviction and probably is obliged to admit the justice of the explanation of his own ignorance and the truth of the impression of Saul's purposes. But he does what is more to the purpose; he pledges himself to do whatever David desires. It is an unconditional desertion of his father and alliance with David; it is the true voice of friendship or love, which ever has its delight in knowing and doing the will of the beloved. It answers David's thoughts rather than his words. He will not discuss any more whether he or David is right; but, in any event, he is his friend's.

The touchstone of friendship is practical help and readiness to do what the friend wishes. It is so in our friendships here, which are best cemented so. It is so in the highest degree in our friendship with the true Friend and Lover of us all, the sweetness and power of our friendship with whom we do not know until we say, 'Whatsoever thou desirest, I will do it,' and so lose the burden of self-will, and find that He does for us what we desire when we make His desires our law of conduct.

Secure of Jonathan's help, David proposed the stratagem for finding out Saul's disposition, which had probably been in his mind all along. It says more for his subtlety than for his truthfulness. With all his nobility, he had a streak of true Oriental craft and stood on the moral level of his times and country, in his readiness to eke out the lion's skin with the fox's tail. It was a shrewd idea to make Saul betray himself by the way in which he took David's absence; but a lie is a lie, and cannot be justified, though it may be palliated, by the straits of the liar. At the same time it is fair to remember the extremity of David's danger and the morality of his age, in estimating, not the nature of his action, but the extent of his guilt in doing it. The same relaxation of the vigour of his faith which left him a prey to fear, led him to walk in crooked paths, and the impartial narrative tells of them without a word of comment. We have to form our own estimate of the fitness of a lie to form the armour of a saint. The proposal informs us of two facts,—the custom of having a feast for three days at the new moon, and that of having an annual family feast and sacrifice, neither of which is prescribed in the law. I do not here deal with the grave question as to the date of the ceremonial law, as affected by these and similar phenomena; but I may be allowed the passing remark that the irregularities do not prove the non-existence of the law, but may be accounted for by supposing that, in such unsettled times, it had been loosely observed, and that many accretions and

omissions, some of them inevitable in the absence of a recognised centre of worship, had crept in. That is a much less brilliant and much more old-fashioned explanation than the new one, but perhaps it is none the worse for that. This generation is fond of making 'originality' and 'brilliancy' the tests of truth.

David's words in 1 Samuel 20:8 have a touch of suspicion in them, in their very appeal for kind treatment, in their reminder of the 'covenant' of friendship, as if Jonathan needed either, and still more in the bitter request to slay him himself instead of delivering him to Saul. He almost thinks that Jonathan is in the plot, and means to carry him off a prisoner. Note, too, that he does not say, 'We made a covenant,' but 'Thou hast brought me into' it, as if it had been the other's wish rather than his. All this was beneath true friendship, and it hurt Jonathan, who next speaks with unusual emotion, beseeching David to clear all this fog out of his heart, and to believe in the genuineness and depth of his love, and in the frankness of his speech. True love 'is not easily provoked,' is not soon angry, and his was true in spite of many obstacles which might have made him as jealous as his father, and in the face of misconstruction and suspicion. May we not think of a yet higher love, which bears with our suspicions and faithless doubts, and ever answers our incredulity by its gentle 'If it were not so, I would have told you'?

David is not yet at the end of his difficulties, and next suggests, how is he to know Saul's mind? Jonathan takes him out into the privacy of the open country (they had apparently been in Gibeah), and there solemnly calls God to witness that he will disclose his father's purposes, whatever they are. The language is obscure and broken, whether owing to corruption in the text, or to the emotion of the speaker. In half-shaped sentences, which betray how much he felt his friend's doubts, and how sincere he was, he invokes evil on himself if he fails to tell all. He then unfolds his ingenious scheme for conveying the information, on which we do not touch. But note the final words of Jonathan,—that prayer, so pathetic, so unselfish in its recognition of David as the inheritor of the kingdom that had dropped from his own grasp, so sad in its clear-eyed assurance of his father's abandonment, so deeply imbued with faith in the divine word, and so resigned to its behests. Both in the purity of his friendship and in the strength of his faith and submission, Jonathan stands here above David, and is far surer than the latter himself is of his high destiny and final triumph. It was hard for him to believe in the victory which was to displace his own house, harder still to rejoice in it, without one trace of bitterness mingling in the sweetness of his love, hardest of all actively to help it and to take sides against his father; but all these difficulties his unselfish heart overcame, and he stands for all time as the noblest example of human friendship, and as not unworthy to remind us, as from afar off and dimly, of the perfect love of the Firstborn Son of the true King, who has loved us all with a yet deeper, more patient, more self-sacrificing love. If men can love one another as Jonathan loved David, how should they love the Christ who has loved them so much! And what sacrilege it is to pour such treasures of affection at the feet of dear ones here, and to give so grudgingly such miserable doles of heart's love to Him!

1 Samuel 24:4-17 Love For Hate, The True Quid Pro Quo

> **'And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the Lord said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee. Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily. 5. And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had out off Saul's skirt. 6. And he said unto his men, The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord. 7. So David stayed his servants with these words, and suffered them not to rise against Saul. But Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on his way. 8. David also arose afterward, and went out of the cave, and cried after Saul, saying, My Lord the king. And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed himself, 9. And David said to Saul, Wherefore hearest thou men's words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt? 10. Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how that the Lord had delivered thee to-day into mine hand in the cave: and some bade me kill thee: but mine eye spared thee; and I said, I will not put forth mine hand against my lord; for he is the Lord's anointed. 11. Moreover, my father, see, yea, see the skirt of thy robe in my hand: for in that I cut off the skirt of thy robe, and killed thee not, know thou and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in mine hand, and I have not sinned against thee; yet thou huntest my soul to take it. 12. The Lord judge between me and thee, and the Lord avenge me Of thee; but mine hand shall not be upon thee. 13. As saith the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked: but mine hand shall not be upon thee. 14. After whom is the king of Israel come out? after whom dost thou pursue? after a dead dog, after a flea. 15. The Lord therefore be judge, and judge between me and thee, and see, and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thine hand. 16. And it came to pass, when David had made an end of speaking these words unto Saul, that Saul said, Is this thy voice, my son David? And Saul lifted up his voice, and wept. 17. And he said to David, Thou art more righteous than I; for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil.'**— 1 Samuel 24:4-17

A sudden Philistine invasion had saved David, when hard pressed by Saul, and had given him the opportunity of flight to the wild country on the west of the Dead Sea, near the place where En-Gedi ('the Fountain of the Wild Goat') sparkles into light on the hill above the weird lake. In these savage gorges Saul's three thousand men would be of little use against the light-footed outlaw and his troop. The whole district is seamed with ravines, and these are honeycombed with great caverns, where dangerous outcasts

still lurk and defy capture. Travelers go into raptures over the beauty of some of these ‘fairy grottoes’ draped with maiden-hair fern, cool and moist, and blessedly dark after the fierce light outside. In some one of these the beautiful story which makes our lesson occurred.

I. We have the scene in the cave.

The interior would be black as night to one looking inward with eyes fresh from the blinding glare of such sunlight upon limestone, but it would hold a glimmering twilight for one looking outward, with eyes accustomed to the gloom. David and his men, keeping close to the walls and hiding behind angles, might well be unobserved by Saul at the mouth, and probably never looking in at all. How vividly the whispered eagerness of the outcasts round David is reproduced! They think it would be ‘tempting Providence’ to let such a chance slip. They put a religious varnish on their advice. It would be almost impious not to kill Saul, for here was the hand of God evidently fulfilling a prophecy! There may have been some unrecorded prediction of the sort which they seem to quote; but more probably they are only referring to David’s designation to the crown, which they had come to know. It never struck them as possible that it could ‘seem good’ to a wise man not to cut his enemy’s throat when he could do it without danger to himself. So they would watch David stealing down quietly to the place where the unconscious king was crouching, and getting close behind him, knife in hand. How disgusted they must have been when the blade, that flashed for a moment in the light at the cave’s mouth, was not buried in Saul’s great back, but only hacked off the end of his robe spread out behind him! No personal animosity was in David. However he had been driven to consort with outlaws, and to live a kind of freebooter’s life, his natural sweetness was unspoiled, and was reinforced by solemn veneration for the sanctity of the Lord’s anointing, which he reverenced all the more because himself had received it. He clambered back to his disappointed men, and, as soon as he was up in the dark again, his chivalry and his religion made him ashamed of his coarse practical jest. The humour of the thing had tempted him to do it; but it was a rude insult, which lowered him more than it did Saul, and, like a true man, he blushes there in the gloom at what he has done. Then he has to defend himself to his men for not coming up to their expectations, and he does it by insisting on the sacredness which still surrounded Saul as ‘the Lord’s anointed.’ David knew that the unhappy king had been rejected and forsaken by ‘the Spirit of the Lord,’ and that he himself was the true bearer of the regal unction; but he will not take the law into his own hands, and still regards Saul as his ‘lord.’ He sets the example, much needed by us all, of leaving God to carry out His purposes at His own time, and patiently waiting till that time comes. He had hard work to keep his men from rushing down on the king; but, having commanded himself, is able to restrain them. How many virtues may be in exercise in one action! Here we have generosity, clemency, sensitiveness of conscience, reverence, self-abnegation, patience, loyalty, firmness, sway over lower natures for high ends,—a whole constellation shining star-like in the dark cavern.

II. We have, next, David’s pathetic remonstrance.

Saul was alone, and David could easily escape among the cliffs, if the king summoned his men; but he risks capture, in the gush of ancient friendship. His words are full of nobleness, and his silence is no less so. He has no reproaches, no anger nor hate. He will not even suppose that Saul has followed his own impulses in his persecution, but assumes that he has been led astray by calumnies. He points to the fragment of Saul’s robe in his hand as the disproof of the lie that he had designs against him, and passionately asserts his innocence now and in all the past. He compares himself to some timid wild thing, like one of the goats among the cliffs, and Saul to a hunter. He solemnly calls God to judge between them, and appeals from the slanders and misjudgings of men to the perfect tribunal of God, to whom he commits his cause. He abjures all intention of striking at Saul in his own defence. He quotes, in true Eastern manner, a scrap of proverbial wisdom, which contains the homely truth that character determines action; for it needs a wicked man to do a wicked thing, and he implies that he is not wicked, and that Saul knows that well enough,—by what has just happened, if by nothing else. Then he puts his own insignificance and the disproportion between him and his ragged band and the imposing force of Saul in vivid light by his half-humorous and wholly humble description of himself as a ‘dead dog,’ and a ‘flea’; as harmless as the one, as hard to catch as the other, as little important as either. Finally, he reiterates his devout reference of the whole cause to God, and his fixed resolution to take no steps to right himself, but to leave all to Him.

So ought we to deal with slanders and enmity. The eternal law for us in all opposition and hostility is enshrined in David’s noble words and deeds. To repay evil with benefits, to abstain from retaliation when it is in our power, to keep our tongues from bitter and wounding words, to appeal to the adversary’s better self, even at the cost of our own ‘dignity,’—all that is not easy nor usual among professing Christians. But it ought to be. David’s Lord, ‘when He suffered, threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously.’ We are poor followers of Him, if David surpasses us in patience and magnanimity. It has taken nineteen hundred years to teach us that passive endurance is more heroic than fighting for our own hand, and that repaying scorn and hate with their like is less noble than meeting them with endless forgiveness.

Psalm 7 is all but universally regarded as David’s, and as belonging to this period. In it we find a clause, ‘I have delivered him that without cause was mine enemy,’ which may fairly he supposed to refer to the scene in the cave, and we read the same vehement protestations of innocence, the same figure of himself as a hunted wild animal, the same appeal to God’s judgment, as in his remonstrance with Saul. The psalm is the poetic echo of our lesson.

III. We have the momentary melting of Saul's heart.

He breaks into passionate weeping. With that sudden flashing out into vehement emotion, so characteristic of him throughout, and, in these latter days of his life, so significant of enfeebled self-control, he recognizes David's generous forbearance in its contrast to his own hate, which, for the moment, he feels to be causeless. There is a piteous remembrance of the days when David soothed him by song, in his mention of the sweet 'voice,' and some rekindling of ancient love in his calling him 'My son.' Then follow the sad words which confess the hopelessness of his struggle against the divine purpose, and his appeal for mercy to his house. The picture may well move solemn thoughts and pity for that scathed and solitary soul, seeing for a moment, as by a lightning flash, the madness of his course, and yet held so fast in the grip of his dark passions that he cannot shake off their tyranny.

Two great lessons are taught by that tragic figure of the weeping and yet unchanged king. One is of the power of forbearing gentleness to exorcise hate. The true way to 'overcome evil' is to melt it by fiery coals of gentleness. That is God's way. An iceberg may be crushed to powder, but every fragment is still ice. Only sunshine that melts it will turn it into sweet water. Love is conqueror, and the only conqueror, and its conquest is to transform hate into love. The other lesson is the worthlessness of mere feeling, which by its very nature passes away, and, like unstored rain, leaves the rock in its obstinate hardness more exposed. Saul only increased his guilt by reason of the fleeting glimpse of his folly which he did not follow up; and our gleams of insight into some sin and madness of ours but add to our responsibility. Emotion which does not lead to action hardens the heart, and adds to our guilt and condemnation.

1 Samuel 26:5-12; 21-25 Love and Remorse

> **'And David arose, and came to the place where Saul had pitched: and David beheld the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Xer, the captain of his host: and Saul lay in the trench, and the people pitched round about him. 6. Then answered David and said to Ahimelech the Hittite, and to Abishai the son of Zeruiah, brother to Joab, saying, Who will go down with me to Saul to the camp? And Abishai said, I will go down with thee. 7. So David and Abishai came to the people by night: and, behold, Saul lay sleeping within the trench, and his spear stuck in the ground at his bolster: but Abner and the people lay round about him. 8. Then said Abishai to David, God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day: now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear even to the earth at once, and I will not smite him the second time. 9. And David said to Abishai, Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless? 10. David said furthermore, As the Lord liveth, the Lord shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle, and perish. 11. The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the Lord's anointed: but, I pray thee, take thou now the spear that is at his bolster, and the cruse of water, and let us go. 12. So David took the spear and the cruse of water from Saul's bolster; and they gat them away, and no man saw it, nor knew it, neither awaked: for they were all asleep; because a deep sleep from the Lord was fallen upon them … 21. Then said Saul, I have sinned: return, my son David: for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day: behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly. 22. And David answered and said, Behold the king's spear! and let one of the young men come over and fetch it. 23. The Lord render to every man his righteousness and his faithfulness; for the Lord delivered thee into my hand today, but I would not stretch forth mine hand against the Lord's anointed. 24. And, behold, as thy life was much set by this day in mine eyes, so let my life be much set by in the eyes of the Lord, and let Him deliver me out of all tribulation. 25. Then Saul said to David, Blessed be thou, my son David: thou shalt both do great things, and also shalt still prevail. So David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place.'**— 1 Samuel 26:5-12; 21-25 .

It is fashionable at present to regard this incident and the other instance of David's sparing Saul, when in his power, as two versions of one event. But it if not improbable that the hunted outlaw should twice have taken refuge in the same place, or that his hiding-place should have been twice betrayed. He had but a small choice of safe retreats, and the Ziphites had motive for a second betrayal in the fact of the first, and of its failure to secure David's capture. The whole cast of the two incidents is so different that it is impossible to see how the one could have been evolved from the other, and either they are both true, or they are both unhistorical, or, at best, are both the product of fancy working on, and arbitrarily filling up, a very meager skeleton of fact. Many of the advocates of the identity of the incident at the bottom of the two accounts would accept the latter explanation; we take the former.

Saul had three thousand men with him; David had left his little troop 'in the wilderness,' and seems to have come with only his two companions, Ahimelech and his own nephew, Abishai, to reconnoiter. He sees, from some height, the camp, with the transport wagons making a kind of barricade in the centre—just as camps are still arranged in South Africa and elsewhere,—and Saul established therein as in a rude fortification. A bold thought flashes into his mind as he looks. Perhaps he remembered Gideon's daring visit to the camp of Midian. He will go down, and not only into the camp, but 'to Saul,' through the ranks and over the barrier. What to do he does not say, but the two fierce fighters beside him think of only one thing as sufficient motive for such an adventure. Abishai volunteers to go with him; no doubt Ahimelech would have been ready also, but two were enough, and three would only

have increased risk. So they lay close hid till night fell, and then stole down through the sleeping ranks with silent movements, like a couple of Indians on the war-trail, climbed the barricade, and stood at last where Saul lay, with his spear, as the emblem of kingship, stuck upright at his head, and a cruse of water for slaking thirst, if he awoke, beside him. Those who should have been his guards lay sleeping round him, for a 'deep sleep from Jehovah was fallen upon them.' What a vivid, strange picture it is, and how characteristic of the careless discipline of unscientific Eastern warfare!

The tigerish lust for blood awoke in Abishai. Whatever sad, pitying, half-tender thoughts stirred in David as he looked at the mighty form of Saul, with limbs relaxed in slumber, and perhaps some of the gloom and evil passions charmed out of his face, his nephew's only thought was,' What a fair mark! what an easy blow!' He was brutally eager to strike once, and truculently sure that his arm would make sure that once would be enough. He was religious too, after a strange fierce fashion. God-significantly he does not say 'Jehovah'; his religion was only the vague belief in a deity-had delivered Saul into David's hands, and it would be a kind of sin not to kill him. How many bloody tragedies that same unnatural alliance of religion and murderous hate has varnished over! Very beautifully does David's spirit contrast with this. Abishai represents the natural impulse of us all—to strike at our enemies when we can, to meet hate with hate, and do to another the evil that he would do to us.

David here, though he could be fierce and cruel enough sometimes, and had plenty of the devil in him, listens to his nobler self, which listens to God, and, at a time when everything tempted him to avenge himself, resists and overcomes. He is here a saint after the New Testament pattern. Abishai had, in effect, said, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.' David's finely-tuned ear heard, long before they were spoken on earth, the great Christian words, 11 say unto you, Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you.' He knew that Saul had been 'rejected,' but he was 'Jehovah's anointed,' and the unction which had rested on that sleeping head lingered still. It was not for David to be the executor of God's retribution. He left himself and his cause in Jehovah's hands, and no doubt it was with sorrow and pitying love, not altogether quenched by Saul's mad hate, that he foresaw that the life which he spared now was certain one day to be smitten. We may well learn the lesson of this story, and apply it to the small antagonisms and comparatively harmless enmities which may beset our more quiet lives. David in Saul's 'laager,' Stephen outside the wall, alike lead up our thoughts to Jesus' prayer,' Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.'

The carrying off of the spear and the cruse was a couch of almost humour, and it, with the ironical taunt flung across the valley to Abner, gives relief to the strain of emotion in the story. Saul's burst of passionate remorse is morbid, paroxysmal, like his fits of fury, and is sure to foam itself away. The man had no self-control. He had let wild, ungoverned moods master him, and was truly 'possessed.' One passion indulged had pushed him over the precipice into insanity, or something like it. Let us take care not to let any passion, emotion, or mood get the upper hand. 'That way madness lies.' 'He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, without walls.'

And let us not confound remorse with repentance 'The sorrow of the world worketh death.' Saul groveled in agony that day, but tomorrow he was raging again with more than the old frenzy of hate. Many a man says, 'I have played the fool,' and yet goes on playing it again when the paroxysm of remorse has stormed itself out. David's answer was by no means effusive, for he had learned how little Saul's regrets were to be trusted. He takes no notice of the honeyed words of invitation to return, and will not this time venture to take back the spear and cruse, as he had done, on the previous occasion, the skirt of Saul's robe. He solemnly appeals to Jehovah's righteous judgment to determine his and Saul's respective 'righteousness and faithfulness.' He is silent as to what that judgment may have in reserve for Saul, but for himself he is calmly conscious that, in the matter of sparing Saul's life, he has done right, and expects that God will deliver him 'out of all tribulation.' That is not self-righteous boasting, although it does not exactly smack of the Christian spirit; but it is faith clinging to the confidence that God is 'not unrighteous to forget' his servant's obedience, and that the innocent will not always be the oppressor's victim.

What a strange, bewildered, self-contradictory chaos of belief and intention is revealed in poor, miserable Saul's parting words! He blesses the man whom he is hunting to slay. He knows that all his wild efforts to destroy him are foredoomed to failure, and that David 'shall surely prevail'; and yet he cannot give up fighting against the inevitable,—that is, against God. How many of us are doing the very same thing—rushing on in a course of life which we know, when we are sane, to be dead against God's will, and therefore doomed to utter collapse some day!

1 Samuel 28:15 Saul

> **'And Saul answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me.'**— 1 Samuel 28:15

Among all the persons of Scripture who are represented as having fallen away from God and wrecked their lives, perhaps there is none so impressive as the giant form of the first king of Israel. Huge and black, seamed and scarred with lightning marks of passions, moody and suspicious, devil-ridden and lonely, doubting his truest friends, and even his son, striking blindly in his fury at the gracious, sunny poet-warrior who shows so bright, so full of resource, so nimble, so generous, by contrast with the heavy

strength of the moody giant, and ever escapes the javelin that quivers harmlessly in the wall, with an inevitable destiny hanging over his head, and at last creeping to 'wizards that peep and mutter,' and dying a suicide, with his army in full flight and his son dead at his feet—what a course and what an end for the chosen of the Lord, on whom the Spirit of the Lord came with the anointing oil, and gave him a new heart for his kingly office.

I know not anywhere a sadder story: and I know not where human lips ever poured out a more awful wail—like a Titan in his rage of pain— than these words of our text. Bright hopes and fair promise, and much that was good and true in performance—all came to this. A few hours more and the 'battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him, and he was greatly distressed by reason of the archers.' Madness, despair, defeat, death, all were the sequel of, 'Because thou hast rejected the commandment of the Lord, the Lord hath also rejected thee from being king.' A true soul's tragedy! Let us look together at its course, and gather the lessons that lie on the surface. We have neither space nor wish here to enter upon the many points of minute interest and curiosity which are in the story. We have to be contented with large outlines.

Look then

I. At the bright dawn.

The early story gives us many traits of beauty in Saul's character. Not only physical strength but a winning personality are apparent. His modesty and humility when Samuel salutes him are made plain. And we are distinctly told that as he turned away from Samuel, 'God gave him another heart,' by which we are to understand not 'regeneration' but an inspiration, that equipped him for his office.

How many a man finds that sudden elevation ruins him! But often it evokes what is good, brings an entire change of disposition, as with 'Harry of Mon-mouth.' But it was not only his new responsibility which brought into action powers that had previously been dormant. New circumstances, no doubt, did something, but Saul's 'new' heart was God's gift.

The story of the beginning of his reign reveals a very noble and lovable character. We can but mention his modesty in hiding among the stuff, his disregard of the murmurs of those who would not do homage ('made as though he had been deaf'), his return, as it would seem, to his home-life and farm-work, his chivalrous boldness and warlike energy, which sprung at once to activity on the call of a great exigency in Jabesh-Gilead, his humane and sweet repression of the people's desire, in their first flush of pride in their soldier king, to slay his enemies, and his devout acknowledgment that not he but God has wrought this salvation.

So for the first year of his reign all went well.

How much of divine influence a man may have and yet fling it all away! How unreliable a thing mere natural goodness is! How much apparent goodness may coexist with deep-seated evil! How bright a beginning may darken into a tempestuous day! How seeds of evil may lurk in the fairest character! How little one can be judged by part of his life! How it is not the possession, but the retention, of goodness and devout impressions that makes a man good.

II. The gathering clouds.

The acts recorded as darkening the fair dawn of Saul's reign may seem too trivial to deserve the stern retribution that followed them, but small acts may be great sins. The first of them was his offering sacrifices without authority, an act which Samuel stigmatised as wanton, deliberate disobedience to 'the commandment of the Lord thy God.' Next came his rash and absurd laying of a curse on any soldier who should eat food before evening, and his consequent mad determination to kill Jonathan, for 'taking a little honey' on the end of his rod. Next came his flagrant disobedience to the divine command transmitted to him through Samuel, to 'smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not,' We shudder at such ferocious extermination, but we are to remember that Saul was moved by no pity, but by mere lust for loot, and tried to deceive God, in the person of His representative Samuel, by the lie that the people had coerced him, and that the motive for preserving the best of the cattle was to sacrifice them to the Lord. Samuel's blaze of indignation gave the world the great word: 'Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice.'

Putting all these acts together, we have the sad picture of a character steadily deteriorating. He is growing daily more self-willed and impatient of the restraint of God's commanding will. He is chafing at his position as a viceroy, not an absolute sovereign. He is becoming tyrannical, careless of his subjects' lives, intolerant of opposition, remonstrance, or advice. The tragedy of his decadence is summed up in Samuel's stern word:

> 'Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee from being king.'

Trivial acts may show great and deep-seated evil. A small swelling under the arm-pit is the sign of the plague and the precursor of swift death.

The master-sin is disobedience, self-willed departure from God. That disobedience may be as virulently active in a trifle as in a

deed that men call great. Self-will is the tap root of all sin, however labyrinthine the outgrowth from it.

Disobedience honeycombs a soul.

The attractive early traits in Saul's character slowly perhaps but steadily, disappeared. The fair morning sky was heavy with thunder-clouds by midday, and they all began with a light fleecy film that none noticed at first.

III. The long eclipse.

'An evil spirit from the Lord troubled him, and the Spirit of God departed from him.'

Modern psychologists would call Saul's case an instance of insanity brought about by indulgence in passion and self-will. Is there any reason why the deeper, more religious explanation should not be united with the scientific one? Does not God work in the working of 'natural' phenomena?

What we nowadays call insanity is not very far off from a man who habitually indulges in passionate self will, and spurns God from any authority over his life. What were Saul's characteristics now? The story tells of bursts of ungovernable fury, of unslumbering and universal suspicions, of utter misery, seeing enemies everywhere and complaining, 'None of you hath pity upon me,' of ferocious cruelty and gloomy despair, of paroxysms of agonising but transient remorse.

It is an awful picture, and it grimly teaches lessons that we shall be wise to write deeply on our hearts.

What a ruin a man makes of himself!

How hideous a godless soul is!

What unhappiness is certain if we dismiss God from ruling our lives!

How useless remorse is unless it leads to repentance!

IV. The stormy sunset.

The scene at Endor makes one's flesh creep. No more tragic picture of failure and despair was ever painted. The greatest dramatists, whose creations move the terror and pity of the world, have imagined no more heart-touching figure.

It matters very little—nothing at all in fact—either for the dramatic force or for the religious impressiveness of the scene, whether the woman 'brought up' Samuel, or whether she was as much awed as Saul was, by the coming up of 'an old man' covered with the well-known 'mantle.' The boding prophecy of to-morrow's defeat and death filled yet fuller the cup that had seemed to be already full of all misery. And that collapse of strength in the huddled figure, prostrate in the witch's den, may well stand for a prophecy of what will be the upshot at the last of a self-will that boasts of its own power, and tries to shake off dependence on God.

1 Samuel 29:3 What Doest Thou Here?

'Then said the princes of the Philistines, What do these Hebrews here!'— 1 Samuel 29:3 .

'The word of the Lord came to him, and He said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?'— 1 Kings 19:9

I have put these two verses together, not only because of their identity in form, though that is striking, but because they bear upon one and the same subject, as will appear, if, in a word or two, I set each of them in its setting. David was almost at the lowest point of his fortunes when he fled into foreign territory, and for awhile took service under one of the kings of the Philistines. He served him faithfully, and so, when the last great fight, in which Saul lost his life, was about to be waged between Philistia and Israel, David and his men came as a contingent to the army of the former. The Philistine commanders, very naturally, were suspicious of these allies, just as Englishmen would have been if, on the night before Waterloo, a brigade of Frenchmen had deserted and offered their help to fight Napoleon. So the question 'What do these Hebrews here?'—amongst our ranks—was an extremely natural one, and it was answered in the only possible way, by the subsequent departure of David and his men from the unnatural and ill-omened alliance.

Now, that suggests to us that Christian people are out of their places, even in the eyes of worldly people, when they are fighting shoulder to shoulder with them in certain causes; and it suggests the propriety of keeping apart. 'Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord' 'What do these Hebrews here?' is a question that Philistia often asks. But now turn to the other question. Elijah had fallen into the mood of depression which so often follows great nervous tension. He had just offered the sacrifice on Carmel, and brought all Israel back to the Lord, and Jezebel had flamed out and threatened his life. The usually undaunted prophet, in the reaction after his great effort, was fearful for his life and deserted his work, flung himself into solitude and shook the dust off his feet against Israel. Was that not just doing what I have been saying that Christian people ought to do—

separating himself from the world? In a sense, yes, but the voice came, ‘What dost thou here, Elijah?’ ‘Go back to your work; to Ahab, to Jezebel. Go back to death if need be. Do not shirk your duty on the pretence of separating yourself from the world.’

So we put the two questions together. They limit one another, and they suggest the via media, the course between, and lead me to say one or two plain things about that duty of Christian separation from an evil world.

I. The first thing that I would suggest to you is the inevitable intermingling, which is the law of God, and therefore can never be broken with impunity.

Christ’s parable about the Kingdom of Heaven in the world being like a man that sowed good seed in his field, which sprung up intermingled with tares, contains the lesson, not so much of the purity or nonpurity of the Church as of the inseparable intertwining in the world of Christian people with others. The roots are matted together, and you cannot pull up a tare without danger of pulling up a wheat-stalk that has got interlaced with it. That is but to say that Society at present, and the earthly form of the Kingdom of God, are not organised on the basis of religious affinity, but upon a great many other things, such as family, kindred, business, a thousand ties of all sorts which mat men together, and make it undesirable, impossible, contrary to God’s intention, that the good people should club themselves together, and leave the bad ones to rot and stink. The two are meant to be in close contact. ‘Let both grow together till the harvest.’ If any Christian man were to do as the monks of old did, fly into solitude to look after his own soul, then the question which came to Elijah would be suitable to him, ‘What doest thou here?’ Is there not work enough for you out there, in that wicked world? Is that not the place for you? Where is the place for the ‘salt’? Where the meat is in danger of putrefaction. Rub it in! That is what it was meant for. ‘Ye are the light of the world.’ That suggests the picture of a lamp upon a pedestal that it may send out its rays, but itself remains apart. But the companion metaphor suggests the closest possible contact, and such contact is duty for us Christian people. Elijah ran away from his work. There are types of Christian life to-day unwholesomely self-engrossed, and too much occupied with their own spiritual condition, to realise and discharge the duty of witnessing in the world. Wherever you find a Christian man —whether he is a monk with bare foot, and a rope round his brown robe, and shaven head, or whether he is in the garb of modern Protestantism— that tries more to keep himself apart, in the enjoyment and cultivation of his own religious life, than to fling himself into the midst of the world’s worst evil, in order to fight and to cure it, you get a man who is sharing in Elijah’s transgression, and needs Elijah’s rebuke. The intermingling is inevitable in the present state of things; and family, kindred, business, social and political movements, all require that Christian people should work side by side with men who are not possessors of ‘like precious faith.’ If ever there have been individuals or communities that have tried to traverse that law, they have developed narrowness and bitterness and stunted growth, and a hundred evils that we all know.

II. And now let me say a word about the second thing, and that is—the imperative separation.

‘What do these Israelites here?’ is the question. Much of all our lives lies outside these necessary connections with the world, of which I have been speaking. And the question for each of us is, What do we do when we are left to do as we like? Where do we go? When the iron weight fastened by the bit of string is taken off the sapling, it starts back to its original uprightness. Is that what your Christianity does for you? When you are left to yourself, when you have done all the work that is required, and you are free, where do you turn naturally? It is of no use to lay down special regulations. There has been far too much regulation and red-tape in our Christianity all along. Do not let us put so much stress upon individual acts. Let us look at the spirit. Whither do I turn? What do I like to do? Who are my chosen companions? What are my recreations? Is my life of such a sort as that the world will point to me, and say, ‘What! you here I a professing Christian; what are you doing here?’

I remember that in the autobiography of Mr. Spurgeon, there is a story told about what he did when a child, and living with his grandfather, the pastor of a little country church. There was a very prominent member of that church who was in the habit of going into the public-house occasionally; and the small boy stepped into the sanded parlour where this inconsistent man was sitting, walked up to him, and said, ‘What doest thou here, Elijah?’ It was the turning-point of the man’s life. That is the question that I desire us all to ask ourselves—where do we go, and what sort of lives do we live in the moments when our own voluntary choice determines our action?

‘A man is known by the company he keeps,’ says an old Latin proverb, and I am bound to say that I do not think that it is a good sign of the depth of a Christian professor’s religion if he feels himself more at home in the company of people who do not share his religion than in the company of those that do. I do not wish to be strait-laced and narrow, but I do not wish, either, to be so broad as to obliterate altogether the distinction between Christian people and others. The fact of the case is this, dear friends; if we are Christ’s servants we have more in common with the most uncongenial Christians than we have with the most congenial man who is not a Christian. And if we were nearer our Master we should feel that it was so. ‘Being let go they went to their own company.’ Where do you go when you can make your choice?

I am not going to speak in detail about occupations or recreations. I can quite believe that the theatre might be made an instrument of morality. I can quite believe that a race-course might be a perfectly innocent place. I can quite believe that there may be no harm in a dance. All that I say is that there are two questions which every Christian professor ought to ask himself about such subjects.

One is, Can I ask God to bless this thing, and my doing it? And the other is, Does this help or hinder my religion? If we will take these two questions with us as tests of conduct and companionship, I do not think that we shall go far wrong, either in the choice of our companions, or in the choice of our surroundings of any kind, or in the choice of our recreations and our occupations. But if we do not, then I am quite sure that we shall go wrong in them all. 'What communion hath light with darkness?' 'What agreement hath the temple of God with idols? Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord.'

The main question is, do I grasp the aim of life with clearness and decision as being to make myself by God's help such a character as God has pleasure in? If I do I shall regulate all these things thereby.

III. Now there is one last suggestion that I wish to make, and that is the double questioning that we shall have to stand.

The lords of the Philistines said, 'What do these Hebrews here?' They saw the inconsistency, if David and his men did not. They were sharp to detect it, and David and his band did not rise in their opinion, but decidedly went down, when they saw them marching there, in such an unnatural place as 'behind Achish,' and ready to flesh their swords in the blood of their brethren. So let me tell you, you will neither recommend your religion nor yourselves to men of the world, by inconsistently trying to identify yourselves with them. There are a great many professing Christians nowadays whose mouths are full of the word 'liberality,' and who seem to try to show how absolutely identical with a godless man's a God-fearing one's life may be made. Do you think that the world respects that type of Christian, or regards his religion as the kind of thing to be admired? No; the question that they fling at such people is the question which David was humiliated by having pitched at his head—'What do these Hebrews here?' 'Let them go back to their mountains. This is no place for them .' The world respects an out-and-out Christian; but neither God nor the world respects an inconsistent one.

But there is another question, and another Questioner—'What doest thou here, Elijah?' God did not ask Elijah the question because he did not know the answer; but because he wished to make Elijah put his mood into words, since then Elijah would understand it a little better, and, when he found the tremendous difficulty of making a decent excuse, would begin to suspect that the conduct that wanted so much glozing was not exactly the conduct fit for a prophet. And so let us think that God is looking down upon us, in all our occupation of our free time, and that He is wishing us to put into words what we are about, and why we are where we are.

What do you think you would say if, in some of these moments of unnecessary intermingling with questionable things and doubtful people, you were brought suddenly to this, that you had to formulate into some kind of plausibility your reason for being there? I am afraid it would be a very lame and ragged set of reasons that many of us would have to give. Well! better that we should now have to answer the question 'What doest thou here?' than that we should have to fail in answering the future question, after we have done with the world: 'What didst thou there?'

Dear brethren, let us cleave to Christ, and that will separate us from the world. If we cleave to the world, that will separate us from Christ. I do not insist on details of conduct, but I do beseech you, professing Christians, to recognise that you are set in the world in order to grow like your Master, and that their tendency to help you to that likeness is the one test of all occupations, recreations, and companionships, by which we may know whether we are in or out of the place that pleases Him. And if we are in it, that blessed hope which is held forth in the parable to which I have already referred, will come full of sweetness and of strength to us, that, yonder, men will be grouped according to their moral and religious character; that the tares will be taken away from the wheat, and, that as Christ says, 'Then shall the righteous flame as the sun in their heavenly Father's Kingdom.'

1 Samuel 30:6 The Secret of Courage

'But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.'— 1 Samuel 30:6

David was at perhaps the very lowest ebb of his fortunes. He had long been a wandering outlaw, and had finally been driven, by Saul's persistent hostility, to take refuge in the Philistines' country. He had gathered around himself a band of desperate men, and was living very much like a freebooter. He had found refuge in a little city of the Philistines, far down in the South, from which he and his men had marched as a contingent in the Philistine army, which was preparing an attack upon Saul. But, naturally, the Philistine soldiers doubted their ally, and he was obliged to take himself and his troops back again to their temporary home.

When he came there it was a heap of smoking ruins. Everything was gone; property, cattle, wives, children—and all was desolation. His turbulent followers rose against him, a mutiny broke out—a dangerous thing amongst such a crew—and they were ready to stone him. And at that moment what did he do? Nothing. Was he cast down? No. Was he agitated? No. 'But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.'

Now the first thing I notice is

I. The grand assurance which this man gripped fast at such a time.

It is not by accident, nor is it a mere piece of tautology, that we read ‘the Lord his God.’ For, if you will remember, the very keynote of the psalms which are ascribed to David is just that expression, ‘My God,’ ‘My God.’ So far as the very fragmentary records of Jewish literature go, it would appear as if David was the very first of all the ancient singers to grapple that thought that he stood in a personal, individual relation to God, and God to him. And so it was his God that he laid hold of at that dark hour.

Now I am not putting too much into a little word when I insist upon it that the very essence and nerve of what strengthened David, at that supreme moment of desolation, was the conviction that welled up in his heart that, in spite of it all, he had a grip of God’s hand as his very own, and God had hold of him. Just think of the difference between the attitude of mind and heart expressed in the names that were more familiar to the Israelitish people, and this name for Jehovah. ‘The God of Israel’—that is wide, general; and a man might use it and yet fail to feel that it implied that each individual of the community stood by himself in a personal relation to God. But David penetrated through the broad, general thought, and got into the heart of the matter. It was not enough for him, in his time of need, to stay himself upon a vague universal goodness, but he had to clasp to his burdened heart the individualising thought, ‘the God of Israel is my God.’

Think, too, of the contrast of the thoughts and emotions suggested by ‘My God,’ and by ‘the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob.’ Great as that name is, it carries the mind away back into the past, and speaks of a historical relation in former days, which may or may not continue in all its tenderness and sweetness and power into the prosaic present. But when a man feels, not only ‘the God of Jacob is our Refuge,’ but, ‘the God of Jacob is my God,’ then the whole thing flashes up into new power. ‘My sun’—will one man claim property in that great luminary that pours its light down on the whole world? Yes.

‘The sun whose beams most glorious are,
Disdaineth no beholder,’

as the old song has it. Each man’s eye receives the straight impact of its universal beams. It is my sun, though it be the light that lightens all men that come into the world. ‘My atmosphere’—will one man claim the free, unappropriated winds of heaven as his? Yes, for they will pour into his lungs; and yet his brother will be none the poorer.

I would not go the length of saying that the living realisation, in heart and mind, of this personal possession of God is the difference between a traditional and vague profession of religion and a vital possession of religion, but if it is not the difference, it goes a long way towards explaining the difference. The man who contents himself with the generality of a Gospel for the world, and who can say no more than that Jesus Christ died for all, has yet to learn the most intimate sweetness, and the most quickening and transforming power, of that Gospel, and he only learns it when he says, ‘Who loved me , and gave Himself for me .’

So do not let us be content with saying, ‘the God of Israel,’ and its many thousands, or ‘the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob,’ who filled the past with His luster, but let us bring the general good into our own houses, as men might draw the waters of Niagara into their homes through pipes, and let us cry: ‘My Lord and my God!’ ‘David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.’

II. Now note, secondly, the sufficiency of this one conviction and assurance.

Here is one of the many eloquent ‘buts’ of the Bible. On the one hand is piled up a black heap of calamities, loss, treachery and peril; and opposed to them is only that one clause: ‘But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.’ There was only one possession in all the world, except his body and the clothes that he stood in, that he could call his own at that moment. Everything else was gone; his property was carried off by raiders, his home was smoldering embers. But the Amalekites had not stolen God from him. Though he could no longer say, ‘My house, my city, my possessions,’ he could say, ‘My God.’ Whatever else we lose, as long as we have Him we are rich; and whatever else we possess, we are poor as long as we have not Him. God is enough; whatever else may go. The Lord his God was the sufficient portion for this man when he stood a homeless pauper. He had lost everything that his heart clung to; wives, children; Abigail and Abinoam were captives in the arms of some Amalekites; his house was left to him desolate; his heart was bleeding. ‘But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God’ and the bleeding heart was stanched, and the yearning for some one to love and be loved by was satisfied, when he turned himself from the desolation of earth to the riches in the heavens. He was standing on the edge of possible death, for his followers were ready to stone him. He had come through many perils in the past, but he had never been nearer a fatal end than he was at that moment. But the thought of the undying Friend lifted him buoyantly above the dread of death, and he could look with an unwinking eye right into the fleshless eye-sockets of the skeleton, and say, ‘I fear no evil, for Thou art with me.’

So for poverty, loss, the blasting of earthly hopes, the crushing of earthly affections, the extremity of danger, and the utmost threatening of death, here is the sufficient remedy—that one mighty assurance: ‘The Lord is my God.’ For if He is ‘the strength of my heart,’ He will be my portion for ever.’ He is not poor who has God for his, nor does he wander with a hungry heart who can rest his heart on God’s; nor need he fear death who possesses God, and in Him eternal life.

So, brethren, in all our changing circumstances, there is more than enough for us in that sweet, simple, strong thought. The end of sorrow (that is to say, the purpose thereof) is to breed in us the conviction that God is ours, to drive us to Him by lack of all beside; and the end of sorrow (that is to say, the termination thereof) is the kindling in our hearts of the light of that blessed assurance, for with Him we shall fear no evil. You never know the good of the breakwater until the storm is rolling the waves against its outer side. Light a little candle in a room, and you will not see the lightning when it flashes outside, however stormy the sky, and seamed with the fiery darts. If we have God in our hearts, we have enough for courage and for strength.

I need not remind you, I suppose, how this darkest moment of David's fortunes was the moment at which the darkness broke. Three days after this emeute of his turbulent followers, there came a fugitive into the camp with news that Saul was dead and David was king. So it was not in vain that he had 'strengthened himself in the Lord his God.' Our 'light affliction which is but for a moment' leads on to a manifestation of the true power of God our Friend, and to the breaking of the day.

III. And now the last thing to be noted is the effort by which this assurance is attained and sustained.

The words of the original convey even more forcibly than those of our translation the thought of David's own action in securing him the hold of God as his. He 'strengthened himself in the Lord his God.' The Hebrew conveys the notion of effort, persistent and continuous; and it tells us this, that when things are as black as they were round David at that hour—it is not a matter of course, even for a good man, that there shall well up in his heart this tranquillizing and victorious conviction; but he has to set himself to reach and to keep it. God will give it, but He will not give it unless the man strains after it. David 'strengthened himself in the Lord,' and if he had not doggedly set about resisting the pressure of circumstances, and flinging himself as it were, by an effort, into the arms of God, circumstances would have been too strong for him, and despair would have shrouded his soul. In the darkest moment it is possible for a man to surround himself with God's light, but even in the brightest it is not possible to do so unless he makes a serious effort.

That effort must consist mainly in two things. One is that we shall honestly try to occupy our minds, as well as our hearts, with the truth which certifies to us that God is, in very deed, ours. If we never think, or think languidly and rarely, about what God has revealed to us, by the word and life and death and intercession of Jesus Christ, concerning Himself, His heart of love towards us, and His relations to us, then we shall not have, either in the time of disaster or of joy, the blessed sense that He is indeed ours. If a man will not think about Christian truth he will not have the blessedness of Christian possession of God. There is no mystery about the road to the sweetness and holiness and power that may belong to a Christian. The only way to win them is to be occupied, far more than most of us are, with the plain truths of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. If you never think about them they cannot affect you, and they will not make you sure that God is yours.

But we cannot occupy ourselves with these truths unless we have a distinct and resolute purpose running through our lives, of averting our eyes from the things that might make us lose sight of them and of Him. David had his choice. He could either, as a great many of us do, stand there and look, and look, and look, and see nothing but his disasters, or he could look past them; and see beyond them God. Peter had his choice whether he would look at the water, or whether he would look at Jesus Christ. He chose to look at the water; 'and when he saw the wind boisterous he began to sink'—of course, and when he looked at Christ and cried: 'Lord, save me!' he was held up—equally of course. Make the effort not to let the sorrowful things, or the difficult things, or the fearful things, or the joyous things, in your life, absorb you, but turn away, and, as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, in another connection, 'look off unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith.' David had to put constraint upon himself, to admit any other thoughts into his mind than those that were pressed into it by the facts before his eyes; but he put on the constraint, and so he was encouraged because he encouraged himself.

There is another thing which we have to make an effort to do, if we would have the blessedness of this conviction filling and flooding our hearts. For the possession is reciprocal; we say, 'My God,' and He says, 'My people.' Unless we yield ourselves to Him and say, 'I am Thine,' we shall never be able to say, 'Thou art mine.' We must recognise His possession of us; we must yield ourselves; we must obey; we must elect Him as our chief good, we must feel that we are not our own, but bought with a price. And then when we look up into the heavens thus submissive, thus obedient, thus owning His authority and His rights, as well as claiming His love and His tenderness, and cry: 'My Father,' He will bend down and whisper into our hearts: 'Thou art My beloved son.' Then we shall be 'strong, and of a good courage,' however weak and timid, and we shall be rich, though, like David, we have lost all things.

1 Samuel 30:24 At The Front or the Base

'As his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff.'— 1 Samuel 30:24

David's city of Ziklag had been captured by the Amalekites, while he and all his men who could carry arms were absent, serving in the army of Achish, the Philistine king of Gath. On their return they found ruin, their homes harried, their wives, children, and

property carried off. Wearied already with their long march, they set off at once in pursuit of the spoilers, who had had a long start of them. When they reached the brook Besor, two hundred of them were too weary and footsore to ford it, and so had to be left behind. But these were not useless, for the heavy baggage was left in their charge, and the other four hundred were thus enabled to march more lightly, and therefore more swiftly. They picked up a sick slave, whom his Amalekite master had heartlessly abandoned to die on the 'veldt.' He was almost dead, so they fed him, and when he was able to answer, questioned him. He undertook to guide David and his band, and thus, as twilight was beginning to fall and the Amalekites were 'spread abroad over all the ground, eating and drinking and feasting because of all the great spoil that they had taken.' the four hundred burst on them, routed them utterly, and won back all their goods and much more.

Then came a quarrel. The four hundred who had gone to the fight insisted that the booty was theirs, and that the two hundred who had had no hand in winning it should have no share in the distribution. But David over-ruled this and laid down a principle of distribution which was adopted as the standing law of Israel—that the soldiers who were actually in the fight and those who stayed behind guarding the baggage, looking after 'the base of operations,' should share alike. It was fair that they should do so, for the two hundred would willingly have been in the thick of battle, and, further, though they did not fight, they helped the fighters, and by guarding the heavy baggage contributed to the victory as really as if they had been in the fray and come out of it with swords dripping with Amalekite blood.

I. God's battle requires two forms of service.

In David's raid, as in every campaign, some of the available strength has to be taken to guard the camp, the place where the supplies are, the base of operations, and pickets and detachments have to be left behind all the way, to keep open the communication. The sword is not more needful than the long train of baggage carts, and the forwarding of supplies to the front is as indispensable to the conduct of the war as the headlong charge.

In every great work there is the same distinction of parts and functions, all co-operating to produce the effect which seems to be entirely due to that cause which happens to come last in the series. Organization of labour associates many hands in the different stages of the one result. There are very few things in this world which are the product of one simple cause alone. You cannot grow a grain of corn without the seed with its vital germ, the soil with its mysterious influences, the sunshine and the rain, the sower's hand and basket, the plougher's plough, and all these, except the blessed sunshine, are the results of a series of other causes which lie forgotten, but are really represented in the issue. If one of them were struck out, all the rest would be ineffectual. In a great machine all its parts are equally necessary, and a defect in a cog on a wheel would be as fatal as a flaw in the cylinder or a crack in the mighty shaft. What would become of a ship if the pintle that the rudder works on were away? The effect of a whole orchestra may depend on the coming in of the flute at the right place.

So in the work which God has given to the Church to do, there are the two forms of service, the direct and the indirect. There are the fighters and the guards of the baggage. And these two are equally necessary. That without which a great work could not have been done is great. When Luther came out from the Diet of Worms, and a knight clapped him on the shoulder, and said, 'Well done! little monk,' he had a share in the memorable deed of that day. The man who gave Luther a flagon of beer when his lips were dry with speaking there before emperor and cardinals, was included in the promise to the giver 'of a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple.'

We have brethren in Christ who have gone to the front, hazarding their lives on the high places of the field. Their hands will droop if they do not feel that a chain of sympathy stretches between them and us, for they in their solitude need all the strength which the confidence of a multitude at home feeling with them can give. They are powerfully influenced by the tone of feeling among us. When devotion languishes and faith droops here, these will generally pass through the same phases among them. When we are strong and bold, their hearts will be quickened by the pulsations of ours, and their courage heightened by thoughts of those from whom they come. Our disorders, our heresies, our struggles are all reproduced on the mission field. An epidemic here travels thither before long, and the spiritual condition of the Church at home is one of the most powerful means of determining that of the churches abroad. A blight among our vines soon shows itself in the little gardens just reclaimed from the waste.

The fighters need material helps and appliances for their work. The days in which the law for apostles and missionaries was, 'Go forth without purse or scrip,' ended before Jesus said, 'Go ye into all the world.' That condition was solemnly revoked by our Lord Himself, when He said, 'When I sent you forth without purse and scrip and shoes, lacked ye anything? But now he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip.' The fighters' material wants are now to be met by Christ's administration of natural means, even as before they had been met by Christ's administration of supernatural ones. His messengers cannot live, do their work, or extend the kingdom, but by the help of material appliances. Those who 'abide by the stuff' are to organise the commissariat department, and to see that those who are far ahead, among the ranks of the foe, do not want for either food or weapons, and are not left isolated, hemmed in by the enemy, and languishing because they feel that they are forgotten by those who 'live at home at ease.'

There has always been that division of labour. Our Lord Himself 'had need of' many humble instruments as helpers. There were the woman who ministered to His wants, the faithful few whose presence and sympathy were joyful to Him even on the Mount of Transfiguration, and longed for even in the awful solitude of the agony in Gethsemane, the sisters of Bethany whose humble home was His last shelter before the Cross, the owner of the Upper Room, the sad women who prepared sweet spices, the ruler who consecrated his new sepulchre in a garden by His body. Even He, treading the wine-press alone, needed helpers in the background, and, while conquering for us in the awful duel with our enemy, had humble friends who 'tarried by the stuff.' Similarly Paul had his helpers, on whose names he lovingly lingers and has made immortal, a 'Gaius, mine host, and of the whole church,' an 'Epaphroditus, my fellow soldier, who ministered to my wants,' and therefore was a soldier, though he did not fight, an 'Onesiphorus, who oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain.'

But let us remember that these two forms of service which are equally necessary are equally binding on us all, in the measure of our opportunity and capacity. Our performing the indirect is no excuse for our neglecting the direct. The conversion of the world is our business and not to be handed over to any society or missionary. No Christian can be only and always a non-combatant, without sin and loss. He is bound to take some share in the actual conflict in one or other of its many parts.

II. Service may be different in kind and one in essence.

The determining element in our actions is their motive. Not what we work in, but what we work for, gives the principle of classification. Not the spots on the skin or the colour of the feathers, but the bony skeleton, is the basis of zoological classification. It is not the size or binding of a book, be it quarto or folio or octavo, be it in leather or cloth or paper covers, but its subject, that settles its place in a catalogue. The Christian motives of love to Christ, self-sacrifice, devotion, love to men, make all deeds the same which have these in them in like strength. It matters not whether the copy of a great picture be in oils or an engraving or a photograph, so long as it is a copy. The smallest piece of indirect Christian service may be thus elevated to the same plane as the greatest.

'Mere money-giving' may have in it all these qualities, as truly and in as great a degree, as the deeds of Apostles and martyrs. Remember how Peter puts in one category these two forms of service, as equally flowing from 'the manifold grace of God,' and equally to be exercised as 'good stewards' thereof—'If any man speaketh, speaking as it were the oracles of God; if any man ministereth, ministering as of the strength which God supplieth.' Remember how Paul classes all varieties of service as equally 'gifts according to the grace given to us,' and to be exercised in the same spirit whatever are the difference in their forms: 'or ministry, let us give ourselves to our ministry; or he that teacheth, to his teaching: he that giveth, let him do it with liberality … he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.'

Let us learn, then, how we ought to help Christian fighters for Christ —as associating ourselves with them and their work by sympathy and sharing in their spirit and motives.

Let us learn how loftily we ought to think of the possible sacredness of the most secular forms of help, and to try thus to consecrate our indirect service.

III. All work done from the same motive will receive the same reward.

None need be startled by the thought that Christian work is rewarded. Essentially, it is not deeds but character that is rewarded. The 'reward' is the possession of God of which such a character is capable, and the consequent blessedness which fills such a soul, and cannot but fill it, and which can be enjoyed by no other. The faithful servant enters into the joy of the Lord; the faithful administrator of his Lord's talents enters on the rule over cities in number the same as the talents. Capacity for service is the result of stewardship rightly administered here, and new opportunities yonder are sure to be provided for new capacities.

God's judgment takes little note of that which men's judgment all but exclusively notes. The conspicuousness or success of a man's deeds is nothing to Him. Differences of power are of no account. It is faithfulness that is required in a steward, and it is all the same whether the stewardship is of millions or of farthings. The saints nearest the glory in heaven will not always be the men whose words or deeds fill the pages of Church history and resound through the ages. There will be astounding new principles of nearness and comparative remoteness then.

Christ was repeating what David made a law in Israel, when He said: 'He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward.' Therein He recognises the identity in spiritual stature and motive for service, of the prophet and of his dumb helper, and assures us that those who, in widely different ways but under the guidance of the same spirit and motives, have contributed their respective shares to the one triumphant result shall be associated and equalised in the immortal reward.

So remember that what is necessary in our indirect work, if it is to be thus honoured, is that it should have our devotion, and our love to Jesus and to men, throbbing in it, and that it should be accompanied by direct work, in so far as we have opportunities for that. Moneygiving may be made sacred, and by it, exercised in the right spirit, we may 'lay up in store for ourselves a good

foundation' and may 'lay hold upon eternal life.'

1 Samuel 31:1-13 The End of Self-Will

'**Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa. 2. And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Melchi-shua, Saul's sons. 3. And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him; and he was sore wounded of the archers. 4. Then said Saul unto his armour bearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me. But his armour bearer would not; for he was sore afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword, and fell upon it 5. And when his armou bearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise upon his sword, and died with him. 6. So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armour bearer, and all his men, that same day together. 7. And when the men of Israel that were on the other side of the valley, and they that were on the other side Jordan, saw that the men of Israel fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook the cities, and fled; and the Philistines came and dwelt in them. 8. And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen in mount Gilboa. 9. And they out off his head, and stripped off his armour, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to publish it in the house of their idols, and among the people. 10. And they put his armour in the house of Ashtaroth: and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan. 11. And when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard of that which the Philistines had done to Saul; 12. All the valiant men arose, and went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there. 19. And they took their bones, and buried them under a tree at Jabesh. and fasted seven days.'**— 1 Samuel 31:1-13

The story of Saul's tragic last days is broken in two by the account, in 1 Samuel 29 and 1 Samuel 30. , of David's fortunate dismissal from the invading army, and his exploits against Amalek. The contrast between the two lives, so closely intertwined and powerful for good and evil on each other, reaches its climax at the end of Saul's. While the one sets in dark thunderclouds, the other is bright with victory. While the fall of Saul lays all northern Israel bleeding at the feet of the enemy, David is sending the spoils of his conquest to the elders of Judah. Saul's headless and dishonored body hangs rotting in the sun on the walk of Beth Shan, while David sits a conqueror in Ziklag. The introduction of the brightness of the two preceding chapters is intended to heighten the darkness that broods over this one, and to deepen the stern teaching of that terrible death. Defeat, desolation, despair, attend to his self-dug grave the unhappy king, whose end teaches us all what comes of self-willed resistance to the law and the Spirit of God. Everything else is subordinated in the narrative to the account of his death. Next to nothing is said about the battle, the very site of which is left obscure. We cannot tell whether it was fought down in the plain by the fountain at Jezreel, where Israel was encamped, according to 1 Samuel 29:1 , or whether both sides maneuvered and changed their ground, and the decisive struggle was on the slope of Gilboa. In any case, the site was almost identical with that of Gideon's victory, but there was no Gideon in command on that dark day. The language of verse 1 seems to imply that the battle was over and the rout begun before the Israelites reached Gilboa. If so, we have to conceive of a short, hopeless struggle on the plain, and then a rush to the hills for safety, in which Saul and his sons and bodyguard were borne along, but held together, closely followed by the 'red pursuing spear' of the conquerors, fierce with ancestral hate and the memories of defeat. There, on the hillside, stands the towering form of Saul with a little ring of his children and retainers round him, the words he had heard last night in the sorceress' tent unnerving his arm, and many a past crime rising before him, and whispering in his ear,

'In the battle think on me,

And fall thy edgeless sword; despair and die.'

There seems to have been a close encounter with some of the pursuers, and a hand-to-hand fight, in which Jonathan and his two brothers fell, and the rest of the bodyguard were slain or scattered. The prophecy of that mantle-swathed shape last night was in part fulfilled—'To-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me.' They lay stark at his feet, and he knew that he would soon join them. The last heart that loved him had ceased to beat in Jonathan's noble breast, and his own crimes had slain his sons. Who can paint the storm of contending passions in that lonely black soul? or were they all frozen into the numbness of despair?

But whatever else was in his soul, repentance was not there. He may have been seared by remorse, but he was not softened by penitence, and was fierce and proud in despair as he had been in prosperity. The Revised Version substitutes 'overtook' for 'hit' in verse 3 ; but Saul's fear 'lest these uncircumcised come' is against that rendering, and the fact that the enemy did not know of his death till next day (v. 8) is a difficulty in the way of accepting it. The word is literally 'found' and possibly means that the archers recognised him, and were making for him, though, as would appear, from some cause they missed him in the confusion. The other change in the Revised Version, that of 'greatly distressed' for 'sore wounded' fits the context; and if it be adopted, we have the picture of the unwounded but desperate man, once brave, but now stricken with a panic which opens his lips for his only word. In grim silence he had met the loss of battle, sons, and kingdom; but the proud sense of personal dignity is strong to the end, and he

fiercely issues his last command, and embraces death to escape insult. The haughty spirit was unchanged, crushed but the same, unsoftened, and therefore roused to madder defiance of God and man. What an awful last saying for 'the anointed of Jehovah,' and how the overweening self-will and vehemence and passionate pride of his whole life are gathered up in it!

His last command is disobeyed by the trembling armour-bearer, whose very awe makes him disobedient, Did Saul, at that last moment, send a thought to an armour-bearer whom he had had in happier days, and who was to inherit his lost kingdom? The enemy are coming nearer. No time is to be lost if he would escape the savage mutilations and torments which ancient warfare made the portion of captive kings. Not another word passes his lips, but, in the same grim silence, he fixes his sword upright in the ground, and flings himself on its point, and dies. All through his reign no hand had injured him but his own; and, as he lived, so he died, his own undoer and his own murderer. Suicide, the refuge of defeated monarchs and praised by heathen moralists as heroic, was rare in Israel. Saul, Ahithophel, and Judas are the instances of it. The most rudimentary recognition of the truths taught by the Old Testament would prevent it. If Saul had had any faith in God, any submission, any repentance, he could not have finished a life of rebellion by a self-inflicted death, which was itself the very desperation of rebellion. We have not to pronounce on his fate, but his act was a sin of the darkest dye.

Yet note how the narrative abstains from all comment. It neither condemns nor pities, though a profound sense of the tragic eclipse is audible in that summing up in verse 6 : 'So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armour-bearer, and all his men (that is, immediate followers or escort), that same day together.'

And there they all lay, bloody corpses in the fellowship of death, on the slopes of Gilboa. Where Scripture Is silent, it is not our part to speak; but we can scarcely turn from that mighty form, prone by his own rash act, without seeking to learn the lesson of his life and fate. Saul had many noble and lovable qualities, such as bravery, promptitude, in his earlier days modesty and generosity. All these he had by nature, but there is no sign that he ever sought to cultivate his moral character, or to win any grace that did not come naturally to him; nor is there any reason to suppose that religion had ever any strong hold on him. His whole character may be summed up in Samuel's words in announcing his rejection: 'Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as idolatry.' Rebellion persisted in, in spite of all remonstrances and checks, till it becomes master of the whole man, is the keynote of his later years. Before that baleful influence, as before some hot poison wind, all the flowers of good dispositions were burned up, and the bad stimulated to growth. His early virtues disappeared, and passed into their opposites. Modesty became arrogance, and a long course of indulgence in self-will developed cruelty, gloomy suspicion, and passionate anger, and left him the victim and slave of his own causeless hate. He who rebels against God mars his own character. The miserable later years of Saul, haunted and hunted as by a demon by his own indulged and swollen rebellion and unsleeping suspicion, are an example of the sorrows that ever dog sin; and, as he lies there on Gilboa, the terrible saying recurs to our memory: 'He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.'

The remainder of the chapter is occupied with three points, bearing on the solemn tragedy just recorded. First, we have the disastrous effects of it in the complete loss of the northern territories. 'The men … that were on the other side of the valley' are the tribes to the north of the great plain; and 'they that were on the other side Jordan' are probably those on the east bank. So thorough was the defeat, especially as Saul and the royal house were slain, that they abandoned their homes, and the Philistines took possession. 'One sinner destroyeth much good.' When Israel's king was madly rebellious, Israel was smitten, and its inheritance diminished.

Next we have the insults to the headless corpses. The Philistines did not know till the following day how complete was their victory. The account in 1 Chronicles x. adds that Saul's head was sent to the temple of Dagon, probably as a kind of effacing of the shame wrought there by the presence of the ark. The false gods had triumphed, as their worshippers thought, and Saul's death was Jehovah's defeat. That apparent victory of the idols and the mocking exultation over the bloody trophy and dinted armour are, to the historian, not the least bitter consequences of the battle.

The last point is the brave midnight march of the men of Jabesh from their home on the eastern uplands beyond Jordan, across the river and up to Beth Shan, perched on its lofty cliff, and overlooking the valley of the Jordan. It was a requital of Saul's deed in his early bright days, when, with his hastily raised levies, he scattered the Ammonites. It is one gleam of light amid the stormy sunset. There were men ready to hazard their lives even then, because of the noblest of Saul's acts, which no tyrannical arbitrariness or fierceness of later days had blotted out. So the little band of grateful heroes carried back their ghastly load to Jabesh, and burned the mutilated bodies there, employing an unfamiliar mode, as we may suppose, by reason of their mutilation and decomposition, and then reverently gathering the white bones from the pyre, and laying them below the well-known tamarisk. Saul's one good deed as king sowed seeds of gratitude which flourished again, when the opportunity came. His many evil ones sowed evil seed which bore fatal fruit; and both were seen in his end.