

Maclaren on 2 Samuel

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2 Samuel

Sermons Alexander Maclaren

2 Samuel 2:1-11 The Bright Dawn of a Reign

'And it came to pass after this, that David enquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the Lord said unto him, Go up. And David said, Whither shall I go up? And He said, Unto Hebron. 2. So David went up thither, and his two wives also, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail, Nabal's wife, the Carmelite. 3. And his men that were with him did David bring up, every man with his household: and they dwelt in the cities of Hebron. 4. And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah. And they told David, saying, That the men of Jabesh-gilead were they that buried Saul. 5. And David sent messengers unto the men of Jabesh-gilead, and said unto them, Blessed be ye of the Lord, that ye have shewed this kindness unto your lord, even unto Saul, and have buried him. 6. And now the Lord shew kindness and truth unto you: and I also will requite you this kindness, because ye have done this thing. 7. Therefore now let your hands be strengthened, and be ye valiant: for your master Saul is dead, and also the house of Judah have anointed me king over them. 8. But Abner the son of Ner, captain of Saul's host, took Ishb-osheth the son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim; 9. And he made him king over Gilead, and over the Ashurites, and over Jezreel, and over Ephraim, and over Benjamin, and over all Israel. 10. Ish-bosheth Saul's son was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and reigned two years. But the house of Judah followed David. 11. And the time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months.'— 2 Samuel 2:1-11

The last stage of David's wanderings had brought him to Ziklag, a Philistine city. There he had been for over a year, during which he had won the regard of Achish, the Philistine king of Gath. He had, at Achish's request, accompanied him with his contingent, in the invasion of Israel, which crushed Saul's house at Gilboa; but jealousy on the part of the other Philistine leaders had obliged his patron to send him back to Ziklag. He found it a heap of ashes. An Amalekite raid had carried off all the women and children, and his soldiers were on the point of mutiny. His fortunes seemed desperate, but his courage and faith were high, and he paused not a moment for useless sorrow, but swept after the robbers, swooped down on them like a bolt out of the blue, and scattered them, recovering the captives and spoil. He went back to the ruins which had been Ziklag, and three days after heard of Saul's death.

The lowest point of his fortunes suddenly turned into the highest, for now the path to the throne was open. But the tidings did not move him to joy. His first thought was not for himself, but for Saul and Jonathan, whose old love to him shone out again, glorified by their deaths. Swift vengeance from his hand struck Saul's slayer; the lovely elegy on the great king and his son eased his heart. Then he turned to front his new circumstances, and this passage shows how a God-fearing man will meet the summons to dignity which is duty. It sets forth David's conduct in three aspects-his assumption of his kingdom, his loving regard for Saul's memory, and his demeanour in the face of rebellion.

I. David was now about thirty years old, and had had his character tested and matured by his hard experiences. He 'learned in suffering what he taught in song.'

Exile, poverty, and danger are harsh but effectual teachers, if accepted by a devout spirit, and fronted with brave effort. The fugitive's cave was a good preparation for the king's palace. The throne to which he was called was no soft seat for repose. The Philistine invasion had torn away all the northern territory. He took the helm in a tempest. What was he to do? Ziklag was untenable; where was he to take his men? He could not stop in the Philistine territory, and he saw no way clear.

God's servants generally find that their promotion means harder duties and multiplied perplexities. 'Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.' David did what we shall do, if we are wise—he asked God to guide him. How that guidance was asked and given we are not here told; but the analogy of 1 Samuel 30:7, 8, suggests that it was by the Urim and Thummim, interpreted by the high-priest. The form of inquiry seems to have been that a course of action, suggested by the inquirer, was decided for him by a 'Yes' or a 'No.' So that there was the exercise of common-sense and judgment in formulating the proposed course, as well as that of God's direction in determining it.

That is how we still get divine direction. Bring your own wits to bear on your action, and then do not obstinately stick to what seems right to you, but ask God to negative it if it is wrong, and to confirm you in it if it is right. If we humbly ask Him, 'Am I to go, or not to go?' we shall not be left unanswered. We note the contrast between David's submission to God's guidance and Saul's self-willed taking his own way, in spite of Samuel. He began right, and, in the main, he continued as he began. Self-will is sin and ruin. Submission is joy, and peace, and success. God's kings are viceroys. They have to rule themselves and the world, but they have to be ruled by His will. If they faithfully continue as His servants, they are masters of all besides.

Hebron was a good capital for the new king, for it was a defensible position, in the centre of his own tribe, and sacred by association with the patriarchs. Established there, David was recognised as king by his fellow-tribesmen, and by them only. No doubt, tribal jealousy was partly the cause of this limited recognition, but probably the confusion incident to the Philistine victory contributed to it. The result was that, though David's designation by Samuel to the kingship was universally known, and his candidature had been popular, he had seven years of precarious sway over this mere fraction of the nation. We read of no impatience on his part. He let events shape themselves, or, rather, he let God shape events.

Passiveness is not always indolence. There are two ways of compassing our desires. One is that which David himself tells us is the 'young lions' way, of struggling and fighting, and that often ends in 'lacking and suffering hunger'; the other is that of waiting on the Lord, and that always ends in 'not lacking any good.' If we are sure that God has promised us anything, and if He does not seem to have yet opened the way to obtaining it, our 'strength is to sit still.' If He has given us Hebron, we can be patient till He please to give us Jerusalem.

II. Another side of David's character comes beautifully out in his treatment of the men of Jabesh-gilead.

That town owed much to Saul (1 Samuel 11), and its gratitude lasted, and dared much for him. It was a brave dash that they made across Jordan to carry off Saul's corpse from its ignominious exposure; for it both defied the Philistines, and might be construed as hostile to David. But his heart was too true to ancient friendship to do anything but glow with admiring sympathy at that exhibition of affectionate remembrance. Reconciling death had swept away all memories of Saul's insane jealousy, and he owned a brother in every one who showed kindness to the unfortunate king.

If the Jabesh-Gileadites are a pattern of long-remembered gratitude, David's commendation of them is a model of love which survives injuries, and of forgivingness which forgets them. It was as politic as it was generous. Nothing could have been better calculated to attach Saul's most devoted partisans to him than showing that he honoured their faithful attachment to Saul, and nothing could have more clearly defined his own position during his wanderings as being no rebel. The dictates of true policy and those of devout generosity always coincide. It is ever a blunder to be unforgiving, and mercifulness is always expedient.

But David did not hide his claim to the allegiance of these true hearts. He called on them to transfer their loyalty to himself, and he asserted, not his anointing by Samuel, but his recognition by Judah, the premier tribe, as the motive. No doubt the divine appointment is implied, as it was generally known, but Judah's action is put forward as showing the beginning of the realisation of the divine designation. The men of Jabesh needed to 'be valiant' if they were to acknowledge him; for it was a far cry to Hebron, and the forces of the rival son of Saul were overrunning the northern districts.

We have to take our sides in the age-long and worldwide warfare between God's King and the pretenders to His throne, and it often wants much courage to do so when surrounded by antagonists. It seems a long way off to the true monarch, and Abner's army is a very solid reality, and very near. But it is safest to take the side of the distant, rightful king.

III. David's bearing in the face of opposition and rebellion comes out in 2 Samuel 2:8-11

Abner, Saul's cousin, who had been in high position when the stripling from Bethlehem fought Goliath, was not capable of the self-effacement involved in acquiescing in David's accession, though he knew that the Lord had 'sworn to David.' So he set up a 'King Do-nothing' in the person of a weak lad, the only survivor of Saul's sons. A strange state of mind that, which struggles against a recognised divine appointment!

But is it only Abner who knew that he was trying to thwart God's will? Thousands of us are doing the same, and the attempt answers as well as it did in his case.

The puppet king is named Ishbosheth in the lesson, but 1 Chronicles 8:33 and 9:39 show that his real name was Esh-baal. The former word means 'The man of shame'; the latter, 'The man of Baal.' The existence of Baal as an element in names seems to indicate the incompleteness of the emancipation from idolatry in Saul's time, and the change will then indicate the keener monotheistic conscience of later days. Another explanation is that Baal ('Lord') was in these cases used as a name for Jehovah, and was 'changed at a later period for the purpose of avoiding what was interpreted then as a compound of the name of the Phoenician deity Baal' (Driver, Notes on Hebrew Text of the Books of Samuel).

Abner set up his tool in Mahanaim, sacred for its associations with Jacob, but, no doubt, recommended to him rather by its position on the east side of Jordan, safe from the attacks of the victorious Philistines. From that fastness he made raids to recover the territory which the victory at Gilboa had won for them. First Gilead, on the same side of the river as Mahanaim; then the territory of the 'Ashurites'—probably a scribe's error for 'Asherites,' the most northern tribe; and then, coming southward, the great plain, with its cities, Ephraim and Benjamin,—in fact, all Israel except Judah's country was reconquered for Saul's house.

The account of the distribution of territory between the two monarchies is broken by the parenthesis in verse 10, which, both by its awkward interposition in the middle of a sentence and by its difficult chronological statements, looks like a late addition.

For seven and a half years David reigned in Hebron, but was rather shut up there than ruling thence. The most noteworthy fact is that he, soldier as he was, took no steps to put down Abner's rebellion. He defended himself when attacked, but that was all. The three figures of David, Ishbosheth, and Abner point lessons. Silent, still, trustful, and therefore patient, David shows us how faith in God can lead to possessing one's soul in patience till 'the vision' comes. We may have to wait for it, but 'it will surely come,' and what is time enough for God should be time enough for us. Saul's son was a poor, weak creature, who would never have thought of resisting David but for the stronger will behind him. To be weak is, in this world full of tempters, to drift into being wicked. We have to learn betimes to say 'No,' and to stick to it. Moral weakness attracts tempters as surely as a camel fallen by the caravan track draws vultures from every corner of the sky. The fierce soldier who fought for his own hand while professing to be moved by loyalty to the dead king, may stand as a type of the self-deception with which we gloss over our ugliest selfishness with fine names, and for an instance of the madness which leads men to set themselves against God's plans, and therefore to be dashed in pieces, as some slim barrier reared across the track of a train would be. To 'rush against the thick bosses of the Almighty's buckler' does no harm to the buckler, but kills the insane assailant.

2 Samuel 5:1-12

One Fold and One Shepherd

'Then came all the tribes of Israel to David unto Hebron, and spake, saying, Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh. 2. Also in time past, when Saul was king over us, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel: and the Lord said to thee, Thou shalt feed My people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel. 3. So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and king David made a league with them in Hebron before the Lord: and they anointed David king over Israel. 4. David was thirty years old when he began to reign; and he reigned forty years. 5. In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months; and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three years over all Israel and Judah, 6. And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land; which spake unto David, saying, Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither: thinking, David cannot come in hither. 7. Nevertheless, David took the strong hold of Zion: the same is the city of David. 8. And David said on that day, Whosoever getteth up to the gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites, and the lame and the blind, that are hated of David's soul, he shall be chief and captain. Wherefore they said, The blind and the lame shall not come into the house. 9. So David dwelt in the fort, and called it the city of David. And David built round about from Millo and inward. 10. And David went on, and grew great, and the Lord God of hosts was with him. 11. And Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and carpenters, and masons: and they built David an house. 12. And David perceived that the Lord had established him king over Israel, and that He had exalted his kingdom for His people Israel's sake.'— 2 Samuel 5:1-12

The dark day on Gilboa put the Philistines in possession of most of Saul's kingdom. Only in the south David held his ground, and Abner had to cross Jordan to find a place of security for the remnants of the royal house. The completeness of the Philistine conquest is marked, not only by Abner's flight to Mahanaim, but by the reckoning that David reigned for seven and a half years and Ishbosheth two; for these periods must be supposed to have ended very nearly at the same time, and thus there would be about five years before the invaders were so far got rid of that Ishbosheth exercised sovereignty over his part of Israel. It is singular that David should have been left unattacked by the Philistines, and it is probably to be explained by the friendly relations which had sprung up between Achish, king of Gath, and him (1 Samuel 29). However that may be, his power was continually increasing during his reign

at Hebron over Judah, and at last Abner's death and the assassination of the poor phantom king, Ishbosheth, brought about the total collapse of opposition.

I. This passage deals first with the submission of the tribes and the reunion of the divided kingdom.

A comparison of verse 1 with verse 3 shows that a formal delegation of elders from all the tribes which had held by Ishbosheth, came to Hebron with their submission. The account in I Chronicles is a verbatim copy of this one, with the addition of a glowing picture of the accompanying feasting and joy. It also places much emphasis on the sincerity of David's new subjects, which needed some endorsement; for loyalty which has been disloyal as long as it durst, may be suspected. The elders have their mouths full of excellent reasons for recognising David's kingship,—he is their brother; he was their true leader in war, even in Saul's time; he has been appointed by God to be king and commander. Unfortunately, it had taken the elders seven and a half years to feel the force of these reasons, and probably their perceptions would still have remained dull if Abner and Ishbosheth had lived. But David is both magnanimous and politic, and neither bloodshed nor reproaches mar the close of the strife. Seldom has so formidable a civil war been ended with so complete an amnesty. Observe the expression that David 'made a league with them... before the Lord.' The Israelitish monarch was no despot, but, in modern language, a constitutional king, between whom and his subjects there was a compact, which he as well as they had to observe. In what sense was it made 'before the Lord'? The ark was not at Hebron, though the priests were; and the phrase is at once a testimony to the religious character of the 'league' and to the consciousness of God's presence, apart from the symbol of His presence. It points to a higher conception than that which brought the ark to Ebenezer, and dreamed that the ark had brought God to the army. Modern theories of the religious development of the Old Testament ask us to recognise these two conceptions as successive. The fact is that they were contemporaneous, and that the difference between them is not one of time, but of spiritual susceptibility. Who anointed David for this third time? Apparently the elders, for priests are not mentioned. Samuel had anointed him, as token of the divine choice and symbol of the divine gifts for his office. The men of Judah had anointed him, and finally the elders did so, in token of the popular confirmation of God's choice.

So David has reached the throne at last. Schooled by suffering, and in the full maturity of his powers, enriched by the singularly varied experiences of his changeful life, tempered by the swift alternations of heat and cold, polished by friction, consolidated by heavy blows, he has been welded into a fitting instrument for God's purposes. Thus does He ever prepare for larger service. Thus does He ever reward patient trust. Through trials to a throne is the law for all noble lives in regard to their earthly progress, as well as in regard to the relation between earth and heaven. But David is not only a pattern instance of how God trains His servants, but he is a prophetic person; and in his progress to his kingdom we have dimly, but really, shadowed the path by which his Son and Lord attains to His,—a path thickly strewn with thorns, and plunging into 'valleys of the shadow of death' compared with which David's darkest hour was sunny. The psalms of the persecuted exile have sounding through them a deeper sorrow; for they 'testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ.' 'No cross, no crown,' is the lesson of David's earlier life.

II. We have, next, the first victory of the reunited nation. Hebron was too far south for the capital of the whole kingdom.

Jerusalem was more central, and, from its position, surrounded on three sides with steep ravines, was a strong military post. David's soldier's eye saw its advantages; and he, no doubt, desired to weld the monarchy together by participation in danger and triumph. The new glow of national unity would seek some great exploit, and would resent as an insult the presence of the Jebusites in their stronghold. The attack on it immediately follows the recognition of David's kingship. It is not necessary here to discuss the difficulties in verses 6-8 ; but we note that they give, first, the insolent boast of the besieged, then the twofold answer to it in fact and in word, and last, the memorial of the victory in a proverb. Apparently the Jebusites' taunt is best understood as in the margin of the Revised Version, 'Thou shalt not come in hither, but the blind and the lame shall turn thee away,' They were so sure that their ravines made them safe, that they either actually manned their walls with blind men and cripples, or jeeringly shouted to the enemy across the valley that these would do for a garrison. The other possible meaning of the words as they stand in the Authorised Version would make 'the blind and lame' refer to David's men, and the taunt would mean, 'You will have to weed out your men. It will take sharper eyes and more agile limbs than theirs to clamber up here'; but the former explanation is the more probable. Such braggart speeches were quite in the manner of ancient warfare.

2 Samuel 5:7 tells what the answer to this mocking shout from the ramparts was, David did the impossible, and took the city. Courage built on faith has a way of making the world's predictions of what it cannot do look rather ridiculous. David wastes no words in answering the taunt; but it stirs him to fierce anger, and nerves him and his men for their desperate charge. The obscure words in 2 Samuel 5:8 , which he speaks to his soldiers, do not need the supplement given in the Authorized Version. The king's quick eye had seen a practical path for scaling the cliffs up some watercourse, where there might be projections or vegetation to pull oneself up by, or shelter which would hide the assailants from the defenders; and he bids any one who would smite the Jebusites take that road up, and, when he is up, 'smite.' He heartens his men for the assault by his description of the enemy. They had talked about 'blind and lame'; that is what they really are, or as unable to stand against the Israelites' fierce and sudden burst as if they were: and furthermore, they are 'hated of David's soul.' It is a flash of the rage of battle which shows us David in a new light. He was a born captain as well as king; and here he exhibits the general's power to see, as by instinct, the weak point and to hurl his men on it. His

swift decision and fiery eloquence stir his men's blood like the sound of a trumpet. The proverb that rose from the capture is best read as in the Revised Version: 'There are the blind and the lame; he cannot come into the house.'

The point of it seems to be that, notwithstanding the bragging Jebusites, he did 'come into the house'; and so its use would be to ridicule boasting confidence that was falsified by events, as the Jebusites' had been. It was worth while to record the boast and its end; for they teach the always seasonable lesson of the folly of over-confidence in apparently impregnable defences. It is a lesson of worldly prudence, but still more of religion. There is always some 'watercourse' overlooked by us, up which the enemy may make his way. Overestimate of our own strength and its companion folly, flippant underestimate of the enemy's power, are, in all worldly affairs, the sure precursors of disaster; and in the Christian life the only safe temper is that of the man who 'feareth always,' as knowing his own weakness and the strength of his foe, and thereby is driven to that trust which casts out fear.

On the other hand, David's exploit reads us anew the lesson that to the Christian soldier there is nothing impossible, with Jesus Christ for our Captain. There are many unconquered fortresses of evil still to be carried by assault, and they look steep and inaccessible enough; but there is some way up, and He will show it us. For our own personal struggle with sin, and for the Church's conflict with social evils, this story is an encouragement and a prophecy.

Jerusalem was captured by a reunited nation with its king at its head. As long as our miserable divisions weaken and disgrace us, the Church fights at a disadvantage; and the hoary fortresses of the foe will not be won till Judah ceases to vex Ephraim, and Ephraim no more envies Judah, but all Christ's servants in one host, with the King known by each to be with them, make the assault.

III. We have, lastly, the growth of the kingdom.

I pass over topographical questions, which need not concern us here. The points recorded are David's establishment in the stronghold, his additions to the city, his increasing greatness and its reason in the presence and favour of 'the God of hosts,' the special instance of this in the friendly intercourse with Hiram of Tyre and the employment of Tyrian workmen, and the recognition of the source and the purpose of his prosperity by the devout king. We see here the conditions of true success,—'The Lord, the God of hosts, was with him.' We see also the right use of it,—'David perceived that the Lord had established him king.' He was not puffed up into self-importance by his elevation, but devoutly and clearly saw who had set him in his lofty place. And, as he traced his royalty to God, so he recognised that he had received it, not for himself, but as a trust to be used, not in self-indulgence, but for the national good,—'and that He had exalted his kingdom for His people Israel's sake.' Whosoever holds firmly by these two thoughts, and lives them, will adorn his position, whatever it may be, and will be one of God's crowned kings, however obscure his lot and small his duties. He who lacks them will misuse his gifts and mar his life, and the more splendid his endowments and the higher his position, the more conspicuous will be his ruin and the heavier his guilt.

2 Samuel 6:1-12

Death and Life From the Ark

'Again, David gathered together all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. 2. And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God, whose name is called by the name of the Lord of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubims. 3. And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the new cart. 4. And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab which was at Gibeah, accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark. 5. And David and all the house of Israel played before the Lord on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals. 6. And when they came to Nachon's thrashing-floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. 7. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God. 8. And David was displeased, because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzzah: and he called the name of the place Perez-uzzah to this day. 9. And David was afraid of the Lord that day, and said, How shall the ark of the Lord come to me? 10. So David would not remove the ark of the Lord unto him into the city of David: but David carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. 11. And the ark of the Lord continued in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months: and the Lord blessed Obed-edom, and all his household. 12. And it was told king David, saying, The Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God. So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with gladness.'— 2 Samuel 6:1-12

I. The first section (2 Samuel 6:1-5) describes the joyful reception and procession.

The parallel account in 1 Chronicles states that Baalah, or Baale, was Kirjath-jearim. Probably the former was the more ancient Canaanitish name, and indicates that it had been a Baal sanctuary. If so, the presence of the ark there was at once a symbol and an omen, showing Jehovah's conquest over the obscene and bloody gods of the land, and forecasting His triumph over all the gods of the nations. Every Baale shall one day be a resting-place of the ark of God. The solemn designation of the ark, as 'called by the Name, the name of the Lord of Hosts, that dwelleth between the cherubim,' is significant on this, its reappearance after so long eclipse, and, by emphasising its awful sanctity, prepares for the incidents which are to follow. The manner of the ark's transport was irregular; for the law strictly enjoined its being carried by the Levites by means of bearing-poles resting on their shoulders; and the copying of the Philistines' cart, though a new one was made for the purpose, indicates the desuetude into which the decencies of worship had fallen in seventy years. In 1 Chronicles, the singular words in verse 5, which describe David as playing before the Lord on the very unlikely things for such a purpose, 'all manner of instruments of fir wood,' become 'with all their might: even with songs' which seems much more reasonable. A slight alteration in three letters and the transposition of two would bring our text into conformity with 1 Chronicles, and the conjectural emendation is tempting. Who ever heard of fir-wood musical instruments? The specified ones which follow were certainly not made of it, and songs could scarcely fail to be mentioned.

At all events, we see the glad procession streaming out of the little city buried among its woods; the cart drawn by meek oxen, and loaded with the unadorned wooden chest, in the midst; the two sons or descendants of its faithful custodian honoured to be the teamsters; the king with the harp which had cheered him in many a sad hour of exile; and the crowd 'making a joyful noise before the Lord,' which might sound discord in our ears, as some lifted up shrill songs, some touched stringed instruments, some beat on timbrels, some rattled metal rods with movable rings, and some clashed cymbals together. It was a wild scene, in which there was a dangerous resemblance to the frantic jubilations of idolatrous worship. No doubt there were true hearts in that crowd, and none truer than David's. No doubt we have to beware of applying our Christian standards to these early times, and must let a good deal that is sensuous and turbid pass, as, no doubt, God let it pass. But confession of sin in leaving the ark so long forgotten would have been better than this tumultuous joy; and if there had been more trembling in it, it would not have passed so soon into wild terror. Still, on the other hand, that rejoicing crowd does represent, though in crude form, the effect which the consciousness of God's presence should ever have. His felt nearness should be, as the Psalmist says, 'the gladness of my joy.' Much of our modern religion is far too gloomy, and it is thought to be a sign of devotion and spiritual-mindedness to be sad and of a mortified countenance. Unquestionably, Christianity brings men into the continual presence of very solemn truths about themselves and the world which may well sober them, and make what the world calls mirth incongruous.

**'There is no music in the life
That rings with idiot laughter solely.'**

But the Man of Sorrows said that His purpose for us was that 'His joy might remain in us, and that our joy might be full'; and we but imperfectly apprehend the gospel if we do not feel that its joys 'much more abound' than its sorrows, and that they even burn brightest, like the lights on safety-buoys, when drenched by stormy seas.

II. The second section contains the dread vindication of the sanctity of the ark, which changed joy into terror, and silenced the songs.

At some bad place in the rocky and steep track, the oxen stumbled or were restive. The spot is called in Samuel 'the threshing-floor of Nachon,' but in Chronicles the owner is named 'Chidon.' As the former word means 'a stroke' and the latter 'destruction,' they are probably not to be taken as proper names, but as applied to the place after this event. The name given by David, however—Perez-uzzah—proved the more permanent 'to this day.' Uzzah, who was driving while his brother went in front to pilot the way, naturally stretched out his hand to steady his freight, just as if it had been a sack of corn; and, as if he had touched an electric wire, fell dead, as the story graphically says, 'by the ark of God.' What confusion and panic would agitate the joyous singers, and how their songs would die on their lips!

What harm was there in Uzzah's action? It was most natural, and, in one point of view, commendable. Any careful waggoner would have done the same with any valuable article he had in charge. Yes; that was just the point of his error and sin, that he saw no difference between the ark and any other valuable article. His intention to help was right enough; but there was profound insensibility to the awful sacredness of the ark, on which even its Levitical bearers were forbidden to lay hands. All his life Uzzah had been accustomed to its presence. It had been one of the familiar pieces of furniture in Abinadab's house, and, no doubt, familiarity had had its usual effect. Do none of us ministers, teachers, and others, to whom the gospel and the worship and ordinances of the Church have been familiar from infancy, treat them in the same fashion? Many a hand is laid on the ark, sometimes to keep it from falling, with more criminal carelessness of its sacredness than Uzzah showed. Note, too, how swiftly an irreverent habit of treating holy things grows. The first error was in breaking the commanded order for removal of the ark by the Levites. Once in the cart, the rest follows. The smallest breach in the feeling of awe and reverence will soon lead to more complete profanation. There is nothing more delicate than the sense of awe. Trifled with ever so little, it speedily disappears. There is far too little of it in our modern religion. Perfect love casts out fear and deepens awe which hath not torment.

Was not the punishment in excess of the sin? We must remember the times, the long neglect of the ark, the decay of religion in Saul's reign, the critical character of the moment as the beginning of a new era, when it was all-important to print deep the impression of sanctity, and the rude material which had to be dealt with; and we must not forget that God, in His punishments, does not adopt men's ideas of death as such a very dreadful thing. Many since have followed in David's wake, and been 'displeased, because the Lord broke forth upon Uzzah'; but he and they have been wrong. He ought to have known better, and to have understood the lesson of the solemn corpse that lay there by the ark; instead of which he gives way to mere terror, and was 'afraid of the Lord.' David afraid of the Lord! What had become of the rapturous love and strong trust which ring clear through his psalms? Is this the man who called God his rock and fortress and deliverer, his buckler and the horn of his salvation and his high tower, and poured out his soul in burning words, which glow yet through all the centuries and the darkness of earth? It was ill for David to fall thus below himself, but well for us that the eclipse of his faith and love should be recorded, to hearten us, when the like emotions fall asleep in our souls. His consciousness of impurity was wholesome and sound, but his cowering before the ark, as if it were the seat of arbitrary anger, which might flame out destruction for no discernible reason, was a woful darkening of his loving insight into the heart of God.

III. The last section (2 Samuel 6:10-12) gives us the blessings on the house of Obed-edom and the glad removal of the ark to Jerusalem.

Obed-edom is called a 'Gittite,' or man of Gath; but he does not appear to have been a Philistine immigrant, but a native of another Gath, a Levitical city, and himself a Levite. There is an Obededom in the lists of David's Levites in Chronicles who is probably the same man. He did not fear to receive the ark, and, worthily received, the presence which had been a source of disaster and death to idolaters, to profanely curious pryvers into its secret, and to presumptuous irreverence, became a fountain of unbroken blessing. This twofold effect of the same presence is but a symbol of a solemn law which runs through all life, and is especially manifest in the effects of Christ's work upon men. Everything has two handles, and it depends on ourselves by which of them we lay hold of it, and whether we shall receive a shock that kills, or blessings. The same circumstances of poverty, or wealth, or sorrow, or temptation, make one man better and another worse. The same presence of God will be to one man a joy; to another, a terror. 'What maketh heaven, that maketh hell.' The same gospel received is the fountain of life, purity, peace; and, rejected or neglected, is the source of harm and death. Jesus Christ is 'set for the fall and rising again of many.' Either He is the savour of life unto life, the rock on which we build, or He is the savour of death unto death, the stone on which we stumble and break our limbs.

2 Samuel 6:11

The Ark of the House of Obed-Edom

'The ark of the Lord continued in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months; and the Lord blessed Obed-edom, and all his household.'— 2 Samuel 6:11

Nearly seventy years had elapsed since the capture of the ark by the Philistines on the fatal field of Aphek. They had carried it and set it in insolent triumph in the Temple of Dagon, as if to proclaim that the Jehovah of Israel was the conquered prisoner of the Philistine god. But the morning showed Dagon's stump prone on the threshold. And so the terrified priests got rid of their dangerous trophy as swiftly as they could. From one Philistine city to another it passed, and everywhere its presence was marked by disease and calamity. So at last they huddled it into some rude cart, leaving the draught-oxen to drag it whither they would. They made straight for the Judaeian hills, and in the first little village were welcomed by the inhabitants at their harvest, as they saw them coming across the plain. But again death attended the Presence, and curiosity, which was profanity, was punished. So the villagers were as eager to get rid of the ark as they had been to welcome it, and they passed it on to the little city of Kirjath-jearim, 'the city of the woods,' as the name means, or, as we might say, 'Woodville.' And there it lay, neglected and all but forgotten, for nearly seventy years. But as soon as David was established in his newly-won capital he set himself to reorganize the national worship, which had fallen into neglect and almost into disuse. The first step was to bring the ark. And so he passed with a joyful company to Kirjath. But again swift death overtakes Uzzah with his irreverent hand. And David shrinks, in the consciousness of his impurity, and bestows the symbol of the awful Presence in the house of Obed-edom. As we have already noted, he was probably not a Philistine, as the name 'Gittite' at first sight suggests. There is an Obed-edom in the lists of David's Levites, who was an inhabitant of another Gath, and himself of the tribe of Levi.

He was not afraid to receive the ark. There were no idols, no irreverent curiosity, no rash presumption in his house. He feared and served the God of the ark, and so the Presence, which had been a source of disaster to the unworthy, was a source of unbroken blessing to him and to his household.

I have been the more particular in this enumeration of the wanderings of the ark and the opposite effects which its presence produced according to the manner of its reception, because these effects are symbols of a great truth which runs all through human life, and is most especially manifested in the message and the mission of Jesus Christ.

Let us, then, just trace out two or three of the spheres in which we may see the application of this great principle, which makes life so solemn and so awful, which may make it so sad or so glad, so base or so noble.

I. First, then, note the twofold operation of all God's outward dealings.

Everything that befalls us, every object with which we come in contact, all the variety of condition, all the variations of our experience, have one distinct and specific purpose. They are all meant to tell upon character, to make us better in sundry ways, to bring us closer to God, and to fill us more full of Him. And that one effect may be produced by the most opposite incidents, just as in some great machine you may have two wheels turning in opposite ways, and yet contributing to one resulting motion; or, just as the summer and the winter, with all their antitheses, have a single result in the abundant harvest. One force attracts the planet to the sun, one force tends to drive it out into the fields of space; but the two, working together, make it circle in its orbit around its centre. And so, by sorrow and by joy, by light and by dark, by giving and withholding, by granting and refusing, by all the varieties of our circumstances, and by everything that lies around us, God works to prepare us for Himself and to polish His instruments, sometimes plunging the iron into 'baths of hissing tears,' and sometimes heating it 'hot with hopes and fears,' and sometimes 'battering' it 'with the shocks of doom,' but all for the one purpose—that it may be a polished shaft in His quiver.

And whilst, thus, the most opposite things may produce the same effect, the same thing will produce opposite effects according to the way in which we take it. There is nothing that can be relied upon to do a man only good; there is nothing about which we need fear that its mission is only to do evil. For all depends on the recipient, who can make everything to fulfil the purpose for which God has sent him everything.

Here are two men tried by the same poverty. It beats the one down, makes him squalid, querulous, faithless, irreligious, drives him to drink, crushes him; and the other man it steadies and quiets and hardens, and teaches him to look beyond the things seen and temporal to the exceeding riches at God's right hand.

Here are two men tried by wealth; the gold gets into the one man's veins and makes him yellow as with jaundice, and kills him, destroying all that is noble, generous, impulsive, quenching his early dreams and enthusiasms, closing his heart to sweet charity, puffing him up with a false sense of Importance, and laying upon him the dreadful responsibility of misused and selfishly employed possessions. And the other man, tried in the same fashion, out of his wealth makes for himself friends that welcome him into everlasting habitations, and lays up for himself treasures in heaven. The one man is damned and the other man is saved by their use of the same thing.

Here are two men subjected to the same sorrows; the one is absorbed by his selfish regard to his own misery, blinded to all the blessings that still remain, made negligent of tasks and oblivious of the plainest duty. And he goes about saying, 'Oh, if thou hadst been here!' or if, if something else had happened, then this would not have happened. And the other man, passing through the same circumstances, finds that, when his props are taken away, he flings himself on God's breast, and, when the world becomes dark and all the paths dim about him, he looks up to a heaven that fills fuller of meek and swiftly gathering stars as the night falls, and he says, 'It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good.'

Here are two men tried by the same temptation; it leads the one man away captive 'with a dart through his liver'; the other man by God's grace overcomes it, and is the stronger and the sweeter and the gentler and the humbler because of the dreadful fight. And so you might go the whole round of diverse circumstances, and about each of them find the same double result. Nothing is sure to do a man good; nothing necessarily does him hurt. All depends upon the man himself, and the use he makes of what God in His mercy sends. Two plants may grow in the same soil, be fed by the same dews and benediction from the heavens, be shone upon by the same sunshine, and the one of them will elaborate from all, sweet juices and fragrance, and the other will elaborate a deadly poison. So, my brother, life is what you and I will to make it, and the events which befall us are for our rising or our falling according as we determine they shall be, and according as we use them.

Think, then, how solemn, how awful, how great a thing it is to stand here a free agent, able to determine my character and my condition, surrounded by all these circumstances and the subject of all these wise and manifold divine dealings, in each of which there lie dormant, to be evoked by me, tremendous possibilities of elevation even to the very presence of God, or of sinking into the depths of separation from Him. The ark of God, that overthrew Dagon and smote Uzzah, was nothing but a fountain of blessing in the household of Obed-edom.

II. Secondly, note the twofold operation of God's character and presence.

The ark was the symbol of a present God, and His presence is meant to be the life and joy of all creatures, and the revelation of Him

is meant to be only for our good, giving strength, righteousness, and peace. But the same double possibility which I have been pointing out as inherent in all externals belongs here too, and a man can determine to which aspect of the many-sided infinitude of the divine nature he shall stand in relation. The glass in stained windows is so coloured as that parts of it cut off, and prevent from passing through, different rays of the pure white light. And men's moral natures, the inclination of their hearts, and the set of their wills and energies, cut off, if I may say so, parts of the infinite, white light of the many-sided divine character, and put them into relations only with some part and aspect of that great whole which we call God. The man that loves the world, the man that is living for self, still more the man that is embruted in the pig-sty of sensuality and vice, cannot see the God whom the pure heart, which loves Him and is purified by its faith, discerns at the centre of all things. But the lower man sees either some very far-off Awfulness, in which he hopes vaguely that there is a kind of good nature that will let him off; or, if he has been shaken out of that superficial creed, which is only a creed for men whose consciences have not been touched, then he can see only a God whose love darkens into retribution, and who is the Judge and the Avenger. And no man can say that such a conception is not part of the truth; but, alas! he on whom the form of such a God glares has incapacitated himself, by his misuse of his powers and of God's world, from seeing the beauty of the love of the Father of us all, the righteous Father who in Christ loves every man.

And thus the thought of God, the consciousness of His Presence, may be like the ark which was its symbol, either dreadful and to be put away, or to be welcomed and blessing to be drawn from it. To many of us I am sure—though I do not know anything about many of you—that thought, 'Thou God seest me,' breeds feelings like the uneasy discomfort of a prisoner when he knows that somewhere in the wall there is a spy-hole at which at any moment a warder's eye may be. And to some of us, blessed be His name, that same thought, 'Thou art near me,' seems to bathe the heart in a sea of sweet rest, and to bring the assurance of a divine Companion that cheers all the solitude. And why is the difference? There are two people sitting in one pew; to the one man the thought of God is his ghastliest doubt, to the other it is his deepest joy. Wherefore? And which is it to me?

Then, again, this same duality of aspect attaches to the character and presence of God in another way. Because, according to the variety of men's characters, God is obliged to treat them as standing in different relations. He must manifest His judgment, His justice, His punitive justice. There is a solemn verse in one of the Psalms which I may quote in lieu of all words of my own of this matter. 'With the merciful Thou wilt show Thyself merciful, with the pure Thou wilt show Thyself pure, with the froward Thou wilt show Thyself froward.' The present God has to modify His dealings according to the characters of men.

And so, dear friends, for the present life, and, as I believe, for the next life in a far more emphatic and awful way, the same thing makes blessedness and misery, the same thing makes life and death. The sunshine will kill and wither the slimy plants that grow in the dark recesses of some dripping cave; and if you take a fish out of the water, the air clogs its gills and it dies. Bring a man, such as some of you are, into a close, constant contact with the consciousness of the divine righteousness and presence, and you want nothing else to make a hell. The ark of the Lord will flash out its lightnings and Uzzah will die. That great Infinite Being, before whom we stand, holds in His right hand blessings beyond count or price, even the gift of Himself, and in His left His lightnings and His arrows. On which hand are you standing?

III. Lastly, note the twofold operation of God's gospel.

His dealings, His character and presence, and, most markedly and eminently of all, the gospel that is treasured in Jesus Christ and proclaimed amongst us, have this twofold operation. God sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world. It was meant that His mission and message should only be for life, and that with ever-increasing abundance. But God cannot save men by magic, nor by indiscriminate bestowment of spiritual blessings. It is not in His power to force His salvation upon any one, and whether the Gospel shall turn out to be a man's salvation or his ruin depends on the man himself. The preaching of the gospel and your contact with it, if you have ever come into contact with it really and not by mere outward hearing, leaves no man as it found him. My poor words—and God knows how poor I feel them to be—leave none of you as they find you; and that is what makes our meeting together so solemn and awful, and sometimes weighs one down as with a sense of insufficiency for these things.

That twofold operation is seen first in the permanent effects of the Gospel upon character. If it has been offered to me, and if I accept it, then blessings beyond all enumeration, and which none but they who have them fully know, follow in its wake. Received by simple faith in Jesus Christ, God's sacrifice for a world's sin, it brings to us the clear consciousness of pardon, the calm sense of communion, the joyful spirit of adoption, righteousness rooted in our hearts and to be manifested day by day in our lives; it brings all elevation and strengthening and ennobling for the whole nature, and is the one power that makes us really men as God would have us all to be.

Rejected or neglected or passed by apparently without our having done anything in regard to it, what are the issues? What does it do? Well, it does this for one thing, it turns unconscious worldliness into conscious worldliness. If the offer has been clearly before your minds, 'Christ or the world?' and you have said 'I take the world!' you know that you have made the choice, and the act will tell on your character.

Rejection strengthens all the evil motives for rejection, and adds to the insensibility of the man who has rejected. The ice on our

pavements in the winter time, that melts on the surface in the day and freezes again at night, becomes dense and slippery beyond all other. And a heart, like that which beats in some of our bosoms, that has been melted and then has frozen again, is harder than ever it was before. Hammering that does not break solidifies and makes tougher the thing that is struck. There are no men so hard to get at as men and women, like multitudes of you, that have been hammered at by preaching ever since they were children, and have not yielded their hearts to God. The ark has done you hurt if it has not done you good.

I do not dwell upon the other solemn thought, of the harmful results of contact with a gospel which we do not accept, as exemplified in the increase of responsibility and the consequent increase of condemnation. I only quote Christ's words, 'The servant that knew his Lord's will, and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.'

My brother, Christ's gospel is never inert, one thing or other it does for every soul that it reaches. Either it softens or it hardens. Either it saves or it condemns. 'This Child is set for the rise or for the fall of many.' Jesus Christ may be for me and for you the Rock on which we build. If He is not, He is the Stone against which we stumble and break our limbs. Jesus Christ may be for you and for me the Pillar that gives light by night to those on the one side; He either is that, or He is the Pillar that sheds darkness and dismay on those on the other. Jesus Christ and His Gospel may be to each of us 'the savour of life unto life'; He either is that, or He is 'the savour of death unto death.' Oh! dear friends, if you have neglected, turned away, delayed to receive Him or have forgotten impressions in the midst of the whirl of daily life, do not do so any longer. Take Him for yours, your Brother, Friend, Sacrifice, Inspirer, Lord, Aim, End, Reward, and very Heaven of Heaven. Take Him for your own by simple trusting; and say to Him, 'Arise! O Lord, into Thy rest, Thou and the Ark of Thy strength.' So He will come into your hearts and smile His gladness as He whispers: 'Here will I dwell for ever; this is My rest, for I have desired it.'

2 Samuel 7:4-16

The Promised King and Temple-Builder

'And it came to pass that night, that the word of the Lord came unto Nathan, saying, 5. Go and tell My servant David, Thus saith the Lord, Shalt thou build Me an house for Me to dwell in! 6. Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. 7. In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed My people Israel, saying, Why build ye not Me an house of cedar! 8. Now therefore so shalt thou say unto My servant David, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel: 9. And I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth. 10. Moreover I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime, 11. And as since the time that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the Lord telleth thee that He will make thee an house. 12. And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish His kingdom. 13. He shall build an house for My name; and I will establish the throne of His kingdom for ever. 14. I will be his father, and He shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten Him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: 16. But My mercy shall not depart away from Him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. 16. And thine home and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.'— 2 Samuel 7:4-16

The removal of the ark to Jerusalem was but the first step in a process which was intended to end in the erection of a permanent Temple. The time for the next step appeared to David to have come when he had no longer to fight for his throne. Rest from enemies should lead to larger work for God, else repose will be our worst enemy, and peace will degenerate into self-indulgent sloth. A devout heart will not be content with personal comfort and dwelling in a house of cedar, while the ark has but a tent for its abode. There should be a proportion between expenditure on self and on religious objects. How many professing Christians might go to school to David! Luxury at home and niggardliness in God's work make an ugly pair, but, alas! a common one.

Nathan approved, as was natural. But he knew the difference between his own thoughts and 'the word of the Lord' that came to him, and, like a true man, he went in the morning and contradicted, by God's authority, his own precipitate sanction of the king's proposal. Clearly, divine communications were unmistakably distinguishable from the recipient's own thoughts.

The divine message first negatives the intention to build a house. In 1 Chronicles a positive prohibition takes the place of the question in verse 5, but that is only a difference of form, for the question implies a negative answer. From David's last words (1 Chron. 28:3) we learn that a reason for the prohibition was 'because thou art a man of war, and hast shed blood.' His wars were

necessary, and tended to establish the kingdom, but their existence showed that the time for building the Temple had not come, and there was a certain incongruity in a warrior king rearing a house for the God whose kingdom was in its essence peace.

The prohibition rests on a deep insight into the nature of Jehovah's reign, and draws a broad distinction between His worship and the surrounding paganism. But the reason given in the text is very remarkable. God did not desire a permanent Temple. If we may so say, He preferred the less solid Tabernacle, as corresponding better to the simplicity and spirituality of His worship. A gorgeous stone Temple might easily become the sepulchre, rather than the shrine, of true devotion. The movable tent answered to the temporary character of the 'dispensation.' The more fixed and elaborate the externals of worship, the more danger of the spirit being stifled by them. The Old Testament worship was necessarily ceremonial, but here is a caveat against the stiffening of ceremonial into stereotyped formalism.

The prohibition was accompanied by gracious and far-reaching promises, designed to assure David of God's approbation of his motive, and to open up to him the vision of the future and the wonders that should be. We need say little about the retrospective part of the message (verses 8, 9 a). God had been the agent in all David's past, had lifted him from the quiet following of his sheep, had given him rule, which was but a delegated authority. Israel was 'My people,' and therefore he was but an instrument in God's hand, and was not to govern by his own fancies or for his own advantage.

Every devout man's life is the realisation of a plan of God's, and we sin against ourselves as well as Him if we do not often let thankful thoughts retrace all the way by which the Lord our God has led us.

With verse 9 b the prophecy turns to the future. David personally is promised the continuance of God's help; then a permanent, peaceful possession of the land is promised to the nation, and finally the perpetuity of the kingdom in the Davidic line is promised. The prophecy as to the nation, like all such prophecies, is contingent on national obedience. The future of the kingdom will stand in blessed contrast with the wild times of the Judges, if—and only if—Israel behaves as 'My people' should.

But the main point of the prophecy is the promise to David's 'seed.' In form it attaches itself very significantly to David's intention to build a house for Jehovah. That would invert the true order, for Jehovah was about to build a house, that is, a permanent posterity, for David. God must first give before man can requite. All our relations to Him begin with His free mercy to us. And our building for Him should ever be the result of His building for us, and will, in some humble way, resemble the divine beneficence by which it has been quickened into action. The very foundation principles of Christian service are expressed here, in guise fitted to the then epoch of revelation.

But the relation of the two things, God's building and Solomon's, is not exhausted by such considerations. The consolidation of the monarchy in David's family was an essential preliminary to the rearing of the Temple. That work needed tranquil times, abundant resources, leisure, and assured dominion. So the prophet goes on to promise that David shall be succeeded by his 'seed,' who shall build the Temple.

Further, three great promises are given in reference to David's seed,— a perpetual kingdom, a personal relation of sonship to Jehovah, and paternal chastisement, if necessary, but no such departure of Jehovah's mercy as had darkened the close of Saul's sad reign. Then, finally, the assurance is reiterated of the perpetuity of David's house and throne. The remarkable expression in verse 16 , 'established before thee' (that is, David), if it is the true reading, suggests a hint of the life after death, and conceives of the long-dead king as in some manner cognizant of the fortunes of his descendants. But the Septuagint reads 'before Me,' and that reading is confirmed by verses 26 and 29 , and by Psalm lxxxix. 36 b .

Now it is clear that these promises were in part directed to, and fulfilled in, Solomon. But it is as clear that the great promise of an eternal dominion, which is emphatically repeated thrice, goes far beyond him. We are obliged to recognise a second meaning in the prophecy, in accordance with Old Testament usage, which often means by 'seed' a line of successive generations of descendants. But no succession of mortal men can reach to eternal duration.

Apart from the fact that the kingdom, in the form in which David's descendants ruled over it, has long since crumbled away, the large words of the promise must be regarded as inflated and exaggerated, if by 'for ever' is only meant 'for long generations.' A 'seed,' or line of perishable men, can only last for ever if it closes in a Person who is not subject to the law of mortality. Unless we can with our hearts rejoicingly confess, 'Thou art the King of glory, O Christ! Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,' we do not pierce to the full understanding of Nathan's prophecy.

All the glorious prerogatives shadowed in it were but partially fulfilled in Israel's monarchs. Their failures and their successes, their sins and their virtues, equally declared them to be but shadowy forerunners of Him in whom all that they at the best imperfectly aimed at and possessed is completely and for ever fulfilled. They were prophetic persons by their office, and pointed on to Him.

He has built the true Temple, in that His body is the seat of sacrifice and of revelation, and the meeting-place of God and man, and inasmuch as through Him we are built up into a spiritual house for an habitation of God. In Him is fulfilled the great prophecy of 'My

Servant the Branch,' who 'shall build the Temple of the Lord' and 'be a Priest upon His throne.' In Him, too, is fulfilled in highest truth the filial relationship. The Israelitish kings were by office sons of God. He is the Son in ineffable derivation and eternal unity of life with the Father, and their communion is in closest oneness of will and mutual interchange of love. In that filial relation lies the assurance of Christ's everlasting kingdom, for 'the Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand.'

The prophecy is echoed in many places of Scripture, and is ever taken to refer to a single person. The angel of the annunciation molded his salutation to the meek Virgin on it, when he declared that her Son 'shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end.'

2 Samuel 7:18-29

David's Gratitude

Then went king David in, and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me hitherto? 19. And this was yet a small thing in Thy sight, O Lord God; but Thou hast spoken also of Thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God? 20. And what can David say more unto Thee? for Thou, Lord God, knowest Thy servant. 21. For Thy word's sake, and according to Thine own heart, hast Thou done all these great things, to make Thy servant know them. 22. Wherefore Thou art great, O Lord God: for there is none like Thee, neither is there any God besides Thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears. 23. And what one nation in the earth is like Thy people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to Himself, and to make Him a name, and to do for you great things and terrible, for Thy land, before Thy people, which Thou redeemedst to Thee from Egypt, from the nations and their gods? 24. For Thou hast confirmed to Thyself Thy people Israel to be a people unto Thee for ever: and Thou, Lord, art become their God. 25. And now, O Lord God, the word that Thou hast spoken concerning Thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and do as Thou hast said. 26. And let Thy name be magnified for ever, saying, The Lord of hosts is the God over Israel; and let the house of Thy servant David be established before Thee. 27. For Thou, O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to Thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house: therefore hath Thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto Thee. 28. And now, O Lord God, Thou art that God, and Thy words be true, and Thou hast promised this goodness unto Thy servant: 29. Therefore now let it please Thee to bless the house of Thy servant, that it may continue for ever before Thee: for Thou, O Lord God, hast spoken it: and with Thy blessing let the house of Thy servant be blessed for ever.'— 2 Samuel 7:18-29

God's promise by Nathan of the perpetuity of the kingdom in David's house made an era in the progress of revelation. A new element was thereby added to devout hope, and a new object presented to faith. The prophecy of the Messiah entered upon a new stage, bearing a relation, as its successive stages always did, to the history which supplies a framework for it. Now, for the first time, He can be set forth as the king of Israel; now the width of the promise, which at first embraced the seed of the woman, and then was limited to the seed of Abraham, and thereafter to the tribe of Judah, is still further limited to the house of David. The beam is narrowed as it is focused into greater brilliance, and the personal Messiah begins to be faintly discerned in words which are to have a partial, preparatory fulfilment, in itself prophetic, in the collective Davidic monarchs whose office is itself a prophecy. This passage is the wonderful burst of praise which sprang from David's heart in answer to Nathan's words. In many of the Psalms later than this prophecy we find clear traces of that expectation of the personal Messiah, which gradually shaped itself, under divine inspiration, in David, as contained in Nathan's message. But this thanksgiving prayer, which was the immediate reflection of the astounding new message, has not yet penetrated its depth nor discovered its rich contents, but sees in it only the promise of the continuance of kingship in his descendants. We do not learn the fulness of God's gracious promises on first hearing them. Life and experience and the teaching of His Spirit are needed to enable us to count our treasure, and we are richer than we know.

This prayer is a prose psalm outside the Psalter. It consists of two parts,—a burst of astonished thanksgiving and a stream of earnest petition, grasping the divine promise and turning it into a prayer.

I. Note the burst of thanksgiving (2 Samuel 7:18-24)

The ark dwelt 'in curtains,' and into the temporary sanctuary went the king with his full heart. The somewhat peculiar attitude of sitting, while he poured it out to God, has offended some punctilious commentators, who will have it that we should translate 'remained,' and not 'sat'; but there is no need for the change. The decencies of public worship may require a posture which expresses devotion; but individual communion is free from such externals, and absorbed contemplation naturally disposes of the body so as least to hinder the spirit. The tone of almost bewildered surprise at the greatness of the gift is strong all through the prayer. The man's breath is almost taken away, and his words are sometimes broken, and throughout palpitating with emotion. Yet

there is a plain progress of feeling and thought in them, and they may serve as a pattern of thanksgiving. Note the abrupt beginning, as if pent-up feeling forced its way, regardless of forms of devotion. The first emotion excited by God's great goodness is the sense of unworthiness. 'I do not deserve it,' is the instinctive answer of the heart to any lavish human kindness, and how much more to God's! 'I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies,' springs to the devout lips most swiftly, when gazing on His miracles of bestowing love. He must know little of himself, and less of God, who is not most surely melted down to contrition, which has no bitterness or pain in it, by the coals of loving fire heaped by God on his head.

The consciousness of unworthiness passes, in verse 19, to adoring contemplation of God's astounding mercy, and especially of the new element in Nathan's prophecy,—the perpetuity of the Davidic sovereignty in the dim, far-off future. Thankfulness delights to praise the Giver for the greatness of His gift. Faith strengthens its hold of its blessings by telling them over, as a miser does his treasure. To recount them to God is the way to possess them more fully.

The difficult close of the verse cannot be discussed here. 'The law for man' is nearer the literal meaning of the words than 'the manner of men' (Rev. Ver.); and, unfortunately, man's manner is not the same as man's law. But the usual explanations are unsatisfactory. We would hazard the suggestion that 'this' means that which God has spoken 'of thy servant's house,' and that to call it 'the law for man' is equivalent to an expression of absolute confidence in the authority, universality, and certain fulfilment of the promise. The speech of God is ever the law for man, and this new utterance stands on a level with the older law, and shall rule all mankind. The king's faith not only gazes on the great words of promise, but sees them triumphant on earth.

Then in 2 Samuel 7:20 comes another bend of the stream of praise. The more full the heart, the more is it conscious of the weakness of all words. The deepest praise, like the truest love, speaks best in silence. It is blessed when, in earthly relations, we can trust our dear ones' knowledge of us to interpret our poor words. It is more blessed when, in our speech to God, we can feel that our love and faith are deeper than our word, and that He does not judge them by it, but it by them.

'Silence is His least injurious praise.'

Here, too, we may note the two instances, in this verse, of what runs through the whole prayer,—David's avoidance of using 'I.' Except in the lowly 'What am I?' at the beginning, it never occurs; but he calls himself 'David' twice and 'Thy servant' ten times,—a striking, because unconscious, proof of his lowly sense of unworthiness.

But he can say more; and what he does further say goes yet deeper than his former words. The personal aspect of the promise retreats into the background, and the ground of all God's mercy in His 'own heart' fills the thoughts. Some previous promise, perhaps that through Samuel, is referred to; but the great truth that God is His own motive, and that His love is not drawn forth by our deserts, but wells up by its own energy, like a perennial fountain, is the main thought of the verse. God is self-moved to bless, and He blesses that we may know Him through His gifts. The one thought is the central truth, level to our apprehension, concerning His nature; the other is the key to the meaning of all His workings. All comes to pass because He loves with a self-originated love, and in order that we may know the motive and principle of His acts. We can get no farther into the secret of God than that. We need nothing more for peaceful acceptance of His providences for ourselves and our brethren. All is from love; all is for the manifestation of love. He who has learned these truths sits at the centre and lives in light.

2 Samuel 7:22 strikes a new note. The effect of God's dealing with David is to magnify His name, to teach His incomparable greatness, and to confirm by experience ancient words which celebrate it. The thankful heart rejoices in hearsay being changed into personal knowledge. 'As we have heard, so have we seen.' Old truths flash up into new meaning, and only he who tastes and sees that God is good to him to-day really enters into the sweetness of His recorded past goodness.

Note the widening of David's horizon in 2 Samuel 7:23 and 24 to embrace all Israel. His blessings are theirs. He feels his own relation to them as the culmination of the long series of past deliverances, and at the same time loses self in joy over Israel's confirmation as God's people by his kingship. True thankfulness regards personal blessings in their bearing on others, and shrinks from selfish use of them. Note, too, the parallel, if we may call it so, between Israel and Israel's God, in that 'there is none like Thee,' and by reason of its choice by this incomparable Jehovah, no nation on earth is like 'Thy people, even like Israel.'

Thus steadily does this model of thanksgiving climb up from a sense of unworthiness, through adoration and gazing on its treasures, to God's unmotivated love as His impulse, and men's knowledge of that love as His aim, and pauses at last, rapt and hushed, before the solitary loftiness of the incomparable God, and the mystery of the love, which has intertwined the personal blessings which it celebrates, with its great designs for the welfare of the people, whose unique position corresponds to the unapproachable elevation of its God.

II. 2 Samuel 7:25 to 29 are prayer built on promise and winged by thankfulness.

The whole of these verses are but the expansion of 'do as Thou hast said.' But they are not vain repetitions. Rather they are the outpourings of wondering thankfulness and faith, that cannot turn away from dwelling on the miracle of mercy revealed to it

unworthy. God delights in the sweet monotony and persistence of such reiterated prayers, each of which represents a fresh throb of desire and a renewed bliss in thinking of His goodness. Observe the frequency and variety of the divine names in these verses,—in each, one, at least: Jehovah God (v. 25); Jehovah of hosts (v. 26); Jehovah of hosts, God of Israel (v. 27); Lord Jehovah (vs. 28, 29). Strong love delights to speak the beloved name. Each fresh utterance of it is a fresh appeal to His revealed nature, and betokens another wave of blessedness passing over David's spirit as he thinks of God. Observe, also, the other repetition of 'Thy servant,' which occurs in every verse, and twice in two of them. The king is never tired of realising his absolute subjection, and feels that it is dignity, and a blessed bond with God, that he should be His servant. The true purpose of honour and office bestowed by God is the service of God, and the name of 'servant' is a plea with Him which He cannot but regard. Observe, too, how echoes of the promise ring all through these verses, especially the phrases 'establish the house' and 'for ever.' They show how profoundly David had been moved, and how he is labouring, as it were, to make himself familiar with the astonishing vista that has begun to open before his believing eyes. Well is it for us if we, in like manner, seek to fix our thoughts on the yet grander 'for ever' disclosed to us, and if it colours all our look ahead, and makes the refrain of all our hopes and prayers.

But the main lesson of the prayer is that God's promise should ever be the basis and measure of prayer. The mould into which our petitions should run is, 'Do as Thou hast said.' Because God's promise had come to David, 'therefore hath Thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto Thee.' There is no presumption in taking God at His word. True prayer catches up the promises that have fallen from heaven, and sends them back again, as feathers to the arrows of its petitions. Nor does the promise make the prayer needless. We know that 'if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us'; and we know that we shall not receive the promised blessings, which are according to His will, unless we do ask. Let us seek to stretch our desires to the width of God's promises, and to confine our wishes within their bounds.

2 Samuel 9:1-13

David and Jonathan's Son

'And David said, is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake? 2. And there was of the house of Saul a servant whose name was Ziba. And when they had called him unto David, the king said unto him, Art thou Ziba? And he said, Thy servant is he. 3. And the king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may shew the kindness of God unto him? And Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet. 4. And the king said unto him, Where is he? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lo-debar. 5. Then king David sent, and fetched him out of the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, from Lo-debar., 6. Now when Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence. And David said, Mephibosheth. And he answered, Behold thy servant! 7. And David said unto him. Fear not; for I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father: and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually. 8. And he bowed himself, and said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am? 9. Then the king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said unto him, I have given unto thy master's son all that pertained to Saul and to all his house. 10. Thou therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants, shall till the land for him, and thou shalt bring in the fruits, that thy master's son may have food to eat: but Mephibosheth thy master's son shall eat bread always at my table. Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. 11. Then said Ziba unto the king, According to all that my lord the king hath commanded his servant, so shall thy servant do. As for Mephibosheth, said the king, he shall eat at my table, as one of the king's sons. 12. And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Micha: and all that dwelt in the house of Ziba were servants unto Mephibosheth. 13. So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem: for he did eat continually at the king's table; and was lame on both his feet.'— 2 Samuel 9:1-13

This charming idyl of faithful love to a dead friend and generous kindness comes in amid stories of battle like a green oasis in a wilderness of wild rocks and sand. The natural sweetness and chivalry of David's disposition, which fascinated all who had to do with him, comes beautifully out in it, and it may well stand as an object lesson of the great Christian duty of practical mercifulness.

I. So regarded, the narrative brings out first the motives of true kindness.

Saul and three of his four sons had fallen on the fatal field of Gilboa; the fourth, the weak Ishbosheth, had been murdered after his abortive attempt at setting up a rival kingdom had come to nothing. There were only left Saul's daughters and some sons by a concubine. So low had the proud house sunk, while David was consolidating his kingdom, and gaining victory wherever he went.

But neither his own prosperity, nor the absence of any trace of Saul's legitimate male descendants, made him forget his ancient oath to Jonathan. Years had not weakened his love, his sufferings at Saul's hands had not embittered it. His elevation had not lifted him

too high to see the old days of lowliness, and the dear memory of the self-forgetting friend whose love had once been an honour to the shepherd lad. Jonathan's name had been written on his heart when it was impressionable, and the lettering was as if 'graven on the rock for ever.' A heart so faithful to its old love needed no prompting either from men or circumstances. Hence the inquiry after 'any that is left of the house of Saul' was occasioned by nothing external, but came welling up from the depth of the king's own soul.

That is the highest type of kindness which is spontaneous and self-motived. It is well to be easily moved to beneficence either by the sight of need or by the appeals of others, but it is best to kindle our own fire, and be our own impulse to gracious thoughts and acts. We may humbly say that human mercy then shows likest God's, when, in such imitation as is possible, it springs in us, as His does in Him, from the depths of our own being. He loves and is kind because He is God. He is His own motive and law. So, in our measure, should we aim at becoming.

But David's remarkable language in his questions to Ziba goes still deeper in unfolding his motives. For he speaks of showing 'the kindness of God' to any remaining of Saul's house. Now that expression is no mere synonym for kindness exceeding great, but it unfolds what was at once David's deepest motive and his bright ideal. No doubt, it may include a reminiscence of the sacred obligation of the oath to Jonathan, but it hallows David's purposed 'mercy' as the echo of God's to him, and so anticipates the Christian teaching, 'Be ye merciful, even as your Father is merciful.' We must receive mercy from Him before our hearts are softened, so as to give it to others, just as the wire must be charged from the electric source before it can communicate the tingle and the light.

The best basis for the beneficent service of man is experience of the mercy of God. Philanthropy has no roots unless it is planted in religion. That is a lesson which this age needs. And the other side of the thought is as true and needful; namely, that our 'religion' is not 'pure and undefiled' unless it manifests itself in the service of man. How serene and lofty, then, the ideal! How impossible ever to be too forgiving or too beneficent! 'As your heavenly Father is,'—that is our pattern. We have not shown our brother all the kindness which we owe him unless we have shown him 'the kindness of God.'

II. The progress of the story brings out next the characteristics of David's kindness, and these may be patterns for us.

Ziba does not seem to be very communicative, and appears a rather unwilling witness, who needs to have the truth extracted bit by bit. He evidently had nothing to do with Mephibosheth, and was quite content that he should be left obscurely stowed away across Jordan in the house of the rich Machir (2 Sa 17:27-29). Lo-debar was near Mahanaim, on the eastern side of the river, where Ishbosheth's short-lived kingdom had been planted, and probably the population there still clung to Saul's solitary representative. There he lived so privately that none of David's people knew whether he was alive or dead. Perhaps the savage practice of Eastern monarchs, who are wont to get rid of rivals by killing them, led the cripple son of Jonathan to 'lie low,' and Ziba's reticence may have been loyalty to him. It is noteworthy that Ziba is not said to have been sent to bring him, though that would have been natural.

At any rate, Mephibosheth came, apparently dreading whether his summons to court was not his death-warrant. But he is quickly reassured. David again recalls the dear memory of Jonathan, which was, no doubt, stirred to deeper tenderness by the sight of his helpless son; but he swiftly passes to practical arrangements, full of common-sense and grasp of the case. The restoration of Saul's landed estate implies that it was in David's power. It had probably been 'forfeited to the crown,' as we in England say, or perhaps had been 'squatted on' by people who had no right to it. David, at any rate, will see that it reverts to its owner.

But what is a lame man to do with it? and will it be wise to let a representative of the former dynasty loose in the territory of Benjamin, where Saul's memory was still cherished? Apparently, David's disposition of affairs was prompted partly by consideration for Mephibosheth, partly by affection for Jonathan, and partly by policy. So Ziba, who had not been present, is sent for, and installed as overseer of the estate, to work it for his new master's benefit, while the owner is to remain at Jerusalem in David's establishment. It was prudent to keep Mephibosheth at hand. The best way to weaken a pretender's claims was to make a pensioner of him, and the best way to hinder his doing mischief was to keep him in sight.

But we need not suppose that this was David's only motive. He gratified his heart by retaining the poor young man beside himself, and, no doubt, sought to win his confidence and love. The recipient of his kindness receives it in characteristic Eastern fashion, with exaggerated words of self-depreciation, which sound almost too humble to be quite sincere. A little gratitude is better than whining professions of un worthiness.

And how did Ziba like his task? The singular remark that he had 'fifteen sons and twenty servants' perhaps suggests that he was a person of some importance; and the subsequent one that 'all in his house were servants to Mephibosheth' may imply that neither they nor he quite liked their being handed over thus cavalierly.

But, however that may be, we may note that common-sense and practical sagacity should guide our mercifulness. Kindly impulses are good, but they need cool heads to direct them, or they do more harm than good. It is useless to set lame men to work an estate, even if they get a gift of it. And it is wise not to put untried ones in positions where they may plot against their benefactor. Mercifulness does not mean rash trust in its objects. They will often have to be watched very closely to keep them from going wrong.

How many most charitable impulses have been so unwisely worked out that they have injured their objects and disappointed their subjects! We may note, too, in David's kindness, that it was prompt to make sacrifice, if, as is probable, he had become owner of the estate. The pattern of all mercy, who is God, has not loved us with a love which cost Him nothing. Sacrifice is the life-blood of service.

III. The subsequent history of Mephibosheth and Ziba is somewhat enigmatical.

Usually the former is supposed to have been slandered by the latter, and to have been truly attached to David. But it is at least questionable whether Ziba was such a villain, and Mephibosheth such an injured innocent, as is supposed. This, at least, is plain, that Ziba demonstrated attachment to David at the time when self-love would have kept him silent. It took some courage to come with gifts to a disrowned king (2 Sa 16:1-4); and his allegation about his master has at least this support, that the latter did not come with the rest of David's court to share his fortunes, and that the dream that he might fish to advantage in troubled waters is extremely likely to have occurred to him. Nor does it appear clear that, if Ziba's motive was to get hold of the estate, his adherence to David would have seemed, at that moment, the best way of effecting it.

If we look at the sequel (19:24-30) Mephibosheth's excuse for not joining David seems almost as lame as himself. He says that Ziba 'deceived him,' and did not bring him the ass for riding on, and therefore he could not come. Was there only one ass available in Jerusalem? and, when all David's entourage were streaming out to Olivet after him, could not he easily have got there too if he had wished? His demonstration of mourning looks very like a blind, and his language to David has a disagreeable ring of untruthfulness, in its extreme professions of humility and loyalty. 'Me thinks the cripple doth protest too much. David evidently did not feel sure about him, and stopped his voluble utterances somewhat brusquely: 'Why speakest thou any more of thy matters?' That is as much as to say, 'Hold your tongue.' And the final disposition of the property, while it gives Mephibosheth the benefit of the doubt, yet looks as if there was a considerable doubt in the king's mind.

We may take up the same somewhat doubting position. If he requited David's kindness thus unworthily, is it not the too common experience that one way of making enemies is to load with benefits? But no cynical wisdom of that sort should interfere with our showing mercy; and if we are to take 'the kindness of God' for our pattern, we must let our sunshine and rain fall, as His do, on 'the unthankful and the evil.'

2 Samuel 10:8-19

More Than Conquerors Through Him

'And the children of Ammon came out, and put the battle in array at the entering in of the gate: and the Syrians of Zoba, and of Rehob, and Ish-tob, and Maacah, were by themselves in the field. 9. When Joab saw that the front of the battle was against him before and behind, he chose of all the choice men of Israel, and put them in array against the Syrians: 10. And the rest of the people he delivered into the hand of Abishai his brother, that he might put them in array against the children of Ammon. 11. And he said, if the Syrians be too strong for me, then thou shalt help me: but if the children of Ammon be too strong for thee, then I will come and help thee. 12. Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God: and the Lord do that which seemeth Him good. 13. And Joab drew nigh, and the people that were with him, unto the battle against the Syrians: and they fled before him. 14. And when the children of Ammon saw that the Syrians were fled, then fled they also before Abishai, and entered into the city. So Joab returned from the children of Ammon, and came to Jerusalem. 15. And when the Syrians saw that they were smitten before Israel, they gathered themselves together. 16. And Hadarezer sent, and brought out the Syrians that were beyond the river: and they came to Helam: and Shobach the captain of the host of Hadarezer went before them. 17. And when it was told David, he gathered all Israel together, and passed over Jordan, and came to Helam. And the Syrians set themselves in array against David, and fought with him. 18. And the Syrians fled before Israel; and David slew the men of seven hundred chariots of the Syrians, and forty thousand horsemen, and smote Shobach the captain of their host, who died there. 19. And when all the kings that were servants to Hadarezer saw that they were smitten before Israel, they made peace with Israel, and served them. So the Syrians feared to help the children of Ammon any more.'— 2 Samuel 10:8-19

David's growing power would naturally be regarded by neighbouring states as a menace. Success provokes envy, and in this selfish world strength usually encroaches on weakness, and weakness dreads strength. So it was quite according to the way of the world that David's friendly embassy to the king of Ammon should be suspected of covering hostile intentions. Those who have no kindness in their own hearts are slow to believe in kindness in others. 'What does he want to get by it?' is the question put by cynical 'shrewd men,' when they see a good man doing a gracious, self-forgetting act.

But the Ammonite courtiers need not have rejected David's overtures so insolently as by shaving half his ambassadors' beards and docking their robes. The insult meant war to the knife. Probably it was deliberately intended as a declaration of hostilities, as it was immediately followed by the preparation of a formidable coalition against Israel. Possibly, indeed, the coalition preceded and occasioned the rejection of David's conciliatory message. But, in any case, the Ammonite king summoned his Syrian allies from a number of small states of which we barely know the names, the chief of which was Zobah.

That state had apparently started into prominence under its king Hadar-ezer, as he is called in this chapter, which is obviously a clerical error for Hadad-ezer, as in 2 Samuel viii. 3, etc. The name Hadad occurs again in Ben-hadad, and belonged to a Syrian god; so that the king of Zobah's name, meaning 'Hadad [is] help,' may be taken as the banner flaunted in the face of the army of Israel, and as making the war a struggle of the false against the true God.

The war with the same enemies narrated in 2 Samuel viii. 3-13 is now generally supposed to be the same as that recorded in the latter part of this passage. It certainly seems more probable that there has been some dislocation of the text, than that so crushing a defeat as that retold in chapter viii. should have been followed by a revival of the same coalition within a short time. If, however, there was such a revival, it may remind us of the conditions of all warfare for God and goodness, either in our own lives or in the world. Sins and vicious institutions, once defeated, have a terrible power of swift recovery. The thorns cut down sprout fast again. Let no man say, 'I have extirpated that sin from my nature,' for, if he does, it will surprise him when he is lulled in false security. Hadad-ezer is not so easily got rid of. He does not know when he is beaten.

David took the bull by the horns, and did not wait to be attacked. It was good policy to carry the war into the enemies' country, as it generally is. God's soldiers have to be aggressive, and there is no better way of losing what they have won than by being contented with it. We must advance if we are not to retrograde. From I Chronicles we learn that the Ammonites had begun the campaign by besieging Medeba, a trans-Jordanic Israelitish city. The answer of Joab was to lay siege to Rabbath, the capital of Ammon, an almost impregnable fastness, perched on a cliff, and surrounded on all sides but one by steep ravines.

Apparently his bold strategy led to the abandonment of the attack on Medeba, and to the hurried march of its besiegers to relieve Rabbath. Probably the Syrian allies had been before Medeba, and suddenly appeared in Joab's rear. Their advance led the besieged to attempt a sortie, so that Joab was between two fires. It was a difficult position. Whichever foe he attacked, his retreat was cut off, and another enemy was ready to hurl itself on his rear. There was no time for manoeuvring, and nothing for it but to face both assailants. So, without hesitation he made his dispositions. The new-comers, the Syrians, were evidently the more formidable, and Joab picked the best men to deal with them under his own command, while his brother Abishai was to give account of the Ammonites, who were pouring out of Rabbath. There is sometimes advantage in being 'Mr. Facing-both-ways.' We are often surrounded by allied evils or sins; for all our vices are kindred, and help each other, and all public or social iniquities are in league against the army of righteousness. We have to be many-sided in our attacks on what is wrong, as well as in our development of what is right.

Danger woke the best in Joab, Fierce and truculent as he often was, he had a hero's mettle in him, and in that dark hour he flamed like a pillar of light. His ringing words to his brother as they parted, not knowing if they would ever meet again, are like a clarion call. They extract encouragement out of the separation of forces, which might have depressed, and cheerily pledge the two divisions to mutual help. What was to happen, Joab, if the Syrians were too strong for thee, and the Ammonites for Abishai? That very possible contingency is not contemplated in his words. Rash confidence is unwise, but God's soldiers have a right to go into battle not anticipating utter defeat. Such expectation is apt to fulfil itself, and, on the other hand, to believe that we shall conquer goes a long way towards making us conquerors.

Does not Joab's pledge of mutual help carry in it a lesson applicable to all the divisions of God's great army? In the presence of the coalition of evil, is not the separation of the friends of good, madness? When bad men unite, should not good men hold together? The defeat or victory of one is the defeat or victory of all. We serve under the same banner, and, instead of shutting up our sympathies within the narrow limits of our own regiment, and even having a certain satisfaction at the difficulties into which another has got, we should feel that, if 'one member suffer, all the members suffer with it,' and should be ready to help all our fellow-soldiers who need help. Self-preservation as well as comradeship, and, above all, loyalty to Him for whom we fight, should lead to that; for, if Abishai is crushed, Joab will be in sorer peril.

His other word is equally pregnant. 'Be of good courage' is an exhortation always in season for Christ's soldiers, for, whatever are their foes, 'He that is with them is more than they that are with' their enemies. One man with Christ to back him may always be sure of victory. Calculations of probabilities and of resources may often yield occasion for despondency if we calculate only what appears to sense, but if we bring Christ into the calculation we shall be of good cheer. 'The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?'

We may note, too, the stimulating motive drawn from the thought of what Israel's army fought for,—'Our people, and the cities of our

God.' Patriotism and devotion coalesced, and, like two contiguous flames in some duplex lamp, each made the other burn the brighter. So we may feel that we have the highest good of 'our people,' our brethren, in view, and that, in helping them and warring against evil, we are fighting for what belongs to God.

High courage, the effort to do their very best, and not to spare blood or life in the fight, blended nobly in Joab and his brother with recognition of God's supreme determination of the event. Nothing can stand before men who live and fight in such a temper as that. The early conquests of Mohammedanism were secured by just such a blending of courage and submission. These were vulgar and poor, compared with the victories that would attend a Church which was animated by these principles in the higher form in which Christianity presents them.

The account of the victory is remarkable. It is surely not by accident that no word is said about fighting. Note that it was as Joab 'drew nigh unto the battle' that the Syrians fled as if in sudden panic, and infected the Ammonites with their terror. We hear nothing of men slain, or of any actual crossing of swords. Contrast verse 18, which tells of a real fight. It is, perhaps, not pressing omissions too far to suggest that the narrative favours the supposition of a bloodless victory. The dangers that often appal Christ's servants have a way of often disappearing when they are marched boldly up to. Like ghosts, they vanish when accosted.

So ended one campaign. But Hadad-ezer, the soul of the coalition, was not crushed, and the latter part of the passage tells of his renewed attempt. Partial defeat stirs up our foes to stronger struggles. The league was extended to include Syrian states farther east, and a still more formidable expedition was fitted out to attack this dangerous upstart king of Israel, who was casting his shadow so far. Such is always the case. We are never in more danger of fresh assailants than when we have won some victory over evil in ourselves or around us. David repeated his former tactics. Not waiting to be attacked, and to have the soil of Israel profaned and wasted by enemies, he crossed Jordan to meet the would-be invader, and, when he met him, struck hard, and crushed him and his host, slew the commander, and dispersed the thunder-cloud. The coalition broke down. Hadad-ezer's tributaries were glad to shake off his yoke and transfer their allegiance to David.

'Nothing succeeds like success.' The alliances between worldly men banded against God's soldiers are held together by self-interest, and, when that can be best secured by deserting a man when he is down, away go all the allies, tumbling over each other in their haste to be the first to desert and bring feigned submission to the conqueror. The jackals leave the sick lion. The Syrians had had enough of helping Ammon, and Rabbath might fall without their lifting a finger. So hollow are the world's coalitions against God and His anointed!

2 Samuel 12:5-7

Thou Art the Man

And David said to Nathan, As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die; because he did this thing, and because he had no pity. And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man.— 2 Samuel 12:5-7

Nathan's apologue, so tenderly beautiful, takes the poet-king on the most susceptible side of his character. All his history shows him as a man of wonderfully sweet, chivalrous, generous, swiftly compassionate nature. And so, when he hears the story of a mean, heartless selfishness, all that is best in him kindles into a generous indignation, and flames out into instinctive condemnation. 'The man that did this thing shall die because he had no pity.'

And then, on to that hot fervour of righteous wrath, comes this dash of cold water, 'And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man.' Like some keen spear-point, sharpened almost to invisibility, this short sentence (two words in the original) driven by a strong hand, goes right through the armour to the very heart. What a collapse there would be in the king when the pointed forefinger of the prophet emphasized and drove home the application!

I. This dramatic scene before us may be taken as suggesting first that we are all strangely blind to our own faults.

If a man's own sin is held up before him a little disguised, he says, 'How ugly it is!' And if only for a moment he can be persuaded that it is not his own conduct but some other sinner's that he is judging, the instinctive condemnation comes. We have two sets of names for vices: one set which rather mitigates and excuses them, and another set which puts them in their real hideousness. We keep the palliative set for home consumption, and liberally distribute the plain-spoken, ugly set amongst the vices and faults of our friends. The same thing which I call in myself prudence I call in you meanness. The same thing which you call in yourselves generous living, you call in your friend filthy sensualism. That which, to the doer of it, is only righteous indignation, to the onlooker is passionate anger. That which, in the practiser of it, is no more than a due regard for the interests of his own family and himself in the future, is, to the envious lookers-on, shabbiness and meanness in money matters. That which, to the liar, is only prudent diplomatic

reticence, to the listener is falsehood. That which, in the man that judges his own conduct, is but 'a choleric word,' is, in his friend, when he judges him, 'flat blasphemy.'

And so we go all round the circle, and condemn our own vices, when we see them in other people. So the king who had never thought, when he stole away Uriah's one ewe lamb, and did him to death by traitorous commands, setting him in the front of the battle, that he was wanting in compassion, blazes up at once, and righteously sentences the other 'man' to death, 'because he had no pity.' He had never thought of himself or of his crime as cruel, as mean, as selfish, as heartless. But when he sees a partially disguised picture of it he knows it for the devil's child that it is.

**'O wad some Power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us!
It wad frae mony a blunder free us,'**

and so it would, to see ourselves as we see others. We judge our brother and ourselves by two different standards.

And that is only one phase of a more general principle, one case that comes under a yet wider law, viz. that we are all blind, strangely blind, to our own faults. Why that is so I do not need to spend time in inquiring, except for a distinctly practical purpose. Let me just remind you how a strong wish for a thing that seems desirable always tends to confuse to a man the plain distinction between right and wrong; and how passions once excited, or the animal lusts and desires once kindled in a man, go straight to their object without the smallest regard to whether that object is to be reached by the breach of all laws, human and divine, or not. Excite any passion, and the passion is but a blind propensity towards certain good, and takes no question or consideration of whether right or wrong is involved at all.

And further, habit familiarizes with evil and diminishes our sense of it as evil. A man that has been for half a day in some ill-ventilated room does not notice the poisonous atmosphere; if you go into it you are half suffocated at first, and breathe more easily as you get used to it. A man can live amidst the foulest poison of evil; and, as the Styrian peasants get fat upon arsenic, his whole nature may seem to thrive by the poison that it absorbs. They tell us that the breed of fish that live in the lightless caverns in the bowels of some mountains, by long disuse have had their eyes atrophied out of them, and are blind because they have lived out of the light. And so men that live in the love of evil lose the capacity of discerning the evil, and 'he that walketh in darkness' becomes blind, blind to his sin, and blind to all the realities of life.

Then is it not true, too, that many of us systematically and of set purpose, continually avoid all questions as to the moral nature of our conduct? How many a man and woman who reads these words never sits down to think whether what they have been doing is right or wrong, because they have deep down in their consciences an uneasy suspicion as to what the answer would be. So, by reason of fostering passion, by reason of listening to wishes, by reason of the habit of wrongdoing, by reason of the systematic avoidance of all careful investigation of our character and of our conduct, we lose the power of fairly deciding upon the nature of our own acts.

Then self-love comes in, and still another thing tends to blind us. We are all ready to acquiesce in the general indictment, and so to shirk the particular application of it. That is what people do about all great moral principles that ought to affect conduct,—they admit them in words, as general truths applying to mankind, and then hide themselves in the crowd, and think that they escape the incidence and particular application of the truths. No one of us would, I suppose, venture in plain words to stand up and say: 'I am an exception to your general confessions of sin,' and most of us would be ready to unite in the acknowledgment: 'We have all come short of the glory of God,' though in our consciences there has never stirred the faintest movement of self-condemnation even whilst our lips have been uttering the confession. Do not shrink away in the crowd, my brother! Come out to the front, and stand by yourself as God sees you, isolated. Look at your own actions; never mind about other men's. Do not content yourselves with saying, 'We have sinned'; say, 'I have sinned against Thee.' God and you are as if alone in the universe. 'Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned.' There are no crowds in God's eyes; He deals with single souls. Every one of us,—thou, and thou, and thou,—must give account of himself to God.

II. In the next place, let me ask you to think how this story suggests that the true work of God's message is to tear down the veil and to show the ugly thing.

'Nathan said unto David, Thou art the man.' It needed a prophet to do that, with divine authority. Nothing less would suffice to get through the thick bosses of the buckler of self-conceit and ignorance which he had to penetrate. As God's messenger, he gathered up, as I said, into one sharp-pointed, keen-edged, steel-bright sentence, the very spirit of the whole ancient Law, which seeks to individualize the sinner, and to drive home to the conscience the consciousness of wrong-doing.

The remarks that I have been making, in the former part of this sermon, imperfect as they must necessarily be, may at least serve one or two purposes in reference to this part of my discourse.

It seems to me that if what I have been saying as to a man's blindness to his own true moral character be at all correct, there flows from that thought a strong presumption in favour of a divine revelation. We need another than our own voice to lay down the law of conduct, and to accuse and condemn the breaches of it. Conscience is not a wholly reliable guide, and is neither an impartial nor an all-knowing judge. Unconsciousness of evil is not innocence. It is not the purest of women who 'wipes her mouth and says, I have done no harm.' My conscience says to me, 'It is wrong to do wrong'; but when I say to my conscience, 'Yes, and pray what is wrong?' a large variety of answers is possible. A man may sophisticate his conscience, or bribe his conscience, or throttle his conscience, or sear his conscience. And so the man who is worst, who, therefore, ought to be most chastised by his conscience, has most immunity from it, and where, if it is to be of use, it ought to be most powerful, there it is weakest.

What then? Why this, then—a standard that varies is not a standard; we are left with a leaden rule. My conscience, your conscience, is like the standard measures which we at present possess, which by their very names—foot, handbreadth, nail, and the like, tell us that they were originally but the length of one man's limb. And so your measure of right and wrong, and another man's measure, though they may substantially correspond, yet differ according to your differences of education, character, and a thousand other things. So that the individual man's standard needs to be rectified. You have to send all the weights and measures up to the Tower now and then, to get them stamped and certified. And, as I believe, this fluctuation of our moral judgments shows the need for a fixed pattern and firm unchangeable standard, external to our mutable selves. A light on deck which pitches with the pitching ship is no guide. It must flash from a white pillar founded on a rock and immovable amid the restless waves. Our need of such a standard raises a strong presumption that a good God will give us what we need, if He can. Such a standard He has given, as I believe, in the revelation of Himself which lies in this book, and culminates in the life and character of Jesus Christ our Lord. There, and by that, we can set our watches. There we can read the law of morality, and by our deflections from it we can measure the amount of our guilt.

But beyond that, the remarks which I have already made in the former part of my sermon may suggest to us, along with this utterance of the prophet's, that one indispensable characteristic and certain criterion of a true message and gospel from God is that it pierces the conscience and kindles the sense of sin. My dear brethren, there is a great deal of so-called Christian teaching, both from pulpits and books in this day, which, to my mind, is altogether defective by reason of its underestimate of the cardinal fact of sin, and its consequent failure to represent the fundamental characteristic of the gospel as being deliverance and redemption. I am quite sure that the root of nine-tenths of all the heresies that have ever afflicted the Christian Church, and of the weakness of so much popular Christianity, is none other than this failure adequately to recognise the universality and the gravity of the fact of transgression. If a word comes to you, calls itself God's message, and does not start with man's sin, nor put in the forefront of its utterances the way by which the dominion of that sin in your own heart can be broken, and the penalties of that sin in your present and future life can be swept away, it is condemned, ipso facto, as not a gospel from God, or fit for man. O my brother! it sounds harsh; but it is the truest kindness, when Nathan stands before the king, and with his flashing eye and stern, calm voice says, 'Thou art the man.' Was not that nobler, truer, tenderer, worthier of God, than if he had smoothed David down with soft speeches that would not have roused his conscience? Is it not the truest benevolence that keeps the surgeon's hand steady whilst his heart is touched by the pain that he inflicts, as he thrusts his gleaming instrument of tender cruelty into the poisonous sore? And are not God's mercy and love manifest for us in this, that He begins all His work on us with the grave, solemn indictment of each soul by itself, 'Thou art the man'?

**'He showed me all the mercy,
For He taught me all the sin.'**

III. Lastly, let me say that God accuses us and condemns us one by one that He may save us one by one.

The meaning of Nathan's sharp sentence was speedily disclosed when the broken-down king exclaimed, 'I have sinned against the Lord,' and when, with laconic force as great as that which barbed the condemnation, the prophet stanchd the wound with the brief words, 'And the Lord hath made to pass the iniquity of thy sin.' The intention of the accusation is the extension of the mercy and forgiveness. God, as the Apostle puts it, 'hath concluded all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all.'

And now, mark, for the carrying out of that divine purpose in regard to us, and for our possession of the proffered mercy, the same individualizing and isolating process is needful as was needful for the conviction of the sin. God desires to save the world, but God can only save men one at a time. There must be an individual access to Him for the reception of forgiveness, as there must be in regard to the conviction of sin, just as if He and I were the only two beings in the whole universe. There is no wholesale entrance into God's Church or into God's kingdom. God's mercy is not given to crowds, except as composed of individuals who have individually received it. There must be the personal act of faith; there must be my solitary coming to Him. As the old mystics used to define prayer, so I might define the whole process by which men are saved from their sins, 'the flight of the lonely soul to the lonely God.' My brother, it is not enough for you to say, 'We have sinned'; say, 'I have sinned.' It is not enough that from a gathered congregation there should go up the united litany, 'Lord, have mercy upon us! Christ, have mercy upon us! Lord, have mercy upon us!' You must make the prayer your own: 'Lord, have mercy upon me!' It is not enough that you should believe, as I suppose most of you fancy that you believe, that Christ has died for the sins of the whole world. That belief will give you no share in His

forgiveness. You must come to closer grips with Him than that; and you must be able to say, 'Who loved me, and gave Himself for me.' Let us have no running away into the crowd. Come out, and stand by yourselves, and for yourselves stretch out your own band, and take Christ for yourselves.

A man may die of starvation in a granary. You may be lost in the midst of this abundance which Christ has provided for you. And the difference between really possessing salvation and not possessing it, lies very largely in the difference between saying 'us' and 'me.' 'Thou art the man' in regard to the general accusation of sin; 'Thou art the man' in regard to the solemn law which proclaims that 'the soul that sinneth it shall die'; and, blessed be God, 'Thou art the man' in regard to the great promise that says, 'If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink.' Christ gives you a blank cheque in His word: 'Whoso cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out.' Write thine own name in, and by thy personal faith in the Lamb of God that died for thee, thy sins shall pass away; and all the fulness of God shall be thy very own for ever. 'If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself, and if thou scornest, thou alone shall bear it.'

2 SAMUEL 12:13

David and Nathan

'And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin.'— 2 SAMUEL 12:13

We ought to be very thankful that Scripture never conceals the faults of its noblest men. High among the highest of them stands the poet-king. Whoever, for nearly three thousand years, has wished to express the emotions of trust in God, longing after purity, aspiration, and rapture of devotion, has found that his words have been before him.

And this man sins; black, inexcusable, aggravated transgression. You know the shameful story; I need not tell it over again. The Bible gives it us in all its naked ugliness, and there are precious lessons to be got out of it; such, for instance, as that it is not innocence that makes men good. 'This is the man after God's own heart!' people sneer. Yes! Not because saints have a peculiar morality, and atone for adultery and murder by making or singing psalms, but because, having fallen into foul sin, he learned to abhor it, and with many tears, with unconquerable resolution, with deepened trust in God, set his face once more to press toward the mark. That is a lesson worth learning.

And, again, David was not a hypocrite because he thus fell. All sin is inconsistent with devotion; but, thank God, we cannot say how much or how dark the sin must be which is incompatible with devotion, nor how much evil there may still lurk and linger in a heart of which the main set and aspiration are towards purity and God.

And, again, the worst transgressions are not the passionate outbursts contradictory of the main direction of a life which sometimes come; but the habitual, though they be far smaller, evils which are honey-combing the moral nature. White ants will pick a carcass clean sooner than a lion. And many a man who calls himself a Christian, and thinks himself one, is in far more danger, from little pieces of chronic meanness in his daily life, or sharp practice in his business, than ever David was in his blackest evil.

But the main lesson of all is that great and blessed one of the possibility of any evil and sin like this black one, being annihilated and caused to pass away through repentance and confession. It is to that aspect of our text that I turn, and ask you to look with me at the three things that come out of it: David's penitence; David's pardon consequent upon his penitence; and David's punishment, notwithstanding his penitence and pardon.

I. First, then, the penitence.

What a divine simplicity there is in the words of our text: 'David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord.' That is all. In the original, two words are enough to revolutionize the man's whole life, and to alter all his relations to the divine justice and the divine Friend. 'I have sinned against the Lord.' Not an easy thing to say; and as the story shows us, a thing that David took a long time to mount up to.

Remember the narrative. A year has passed since his transgression. What sort of a year has it been? One of the Psalms tells us, 'When I kept silence my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long; for day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture was turned into the drought of summer.' There were long months of sullen silence, in which a clear apprehension and a torturing experience of divine disapprobation, like a serpent's fang, struck poison into his veins. His very physical frame seems to have suffered. His heart was as dry as the parched grass upon the steppes. That was what he got by his sin. A moment of turbid animal delight, and long days of agony; dumb suffering in which the sense of evil had not yet broken him down into a rain of sweet

tears, but lay, like a burning consciousness, within his heart.

And then came the prophet with his parable, so tender, so ingenious, so powerful. And the quick flash of generous indignation, which showed how noble the man was after all, with which he responded to the picture, unknowing that it was a picture of his own dastardly conduct, led on to the solemn words in which Nathan tore away the veil; and with a threefold lever, if I may so say, overthrew the toppling structure of his impenitence.

First of all, and most chiefly, he seeks to win him to repentance by a picture of God's great love and goodness. 'I have done this and that and the other thing for thee. What hast thou done for Me?' Ah, that is the true beginning. You cannot frighten men into penitence, you may frighten them into remorse; and the remorse may or may not lead on to repentance. But bring to bear upon a man's heart the thought of the infinite and perfect love of God, and that is the solvent of all his obstinate impenitence, and melts him to cry, 'I have sinned.' And along with that element there is the other, the plain striking away of all disguises from the ugly fact of the sin. The prophet gives it its hideous name, and that is one element in the process which leads to true repentance. For so strange and subtle are the veils which we cast over our own evils, that it comes sometimes to us with a shock and a start when some word, that we know to connote wickedness of the deepest dye, is applied to them. David had very likely so sophisticated his conscience that, though he had been writhing under the sense that he was a wrongdoer, it came to him with a kind of ugly surprise when the naked words 'adultery' and 'murder' were pressed up against his consciousness.

And the third element that brought him to his senses, and to his knees, was the threatening of punishment, which is salutary when it follows these other two, the revelation of a divine love and the unveiling of the essential nature of my own act; but which without these is but 'the hangman's whip' to which only inferior natures will respond. And these three, the appeal to God's love, the revelation of his own sin, the solemn warning of its consequences—these three brought to bear upon David's heart, broke him down into a passion of penitence in which he has only the two words to say, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' That is all. That is enough.

And what is it? It is the recognition—which is essential to all real penitence—that I have not merely broken some impersonal law, or done something that hurts my fellows, but that I have broken the relations which I ought to sustain to a living, loving Person, who is God. We commit crimes against society, we commit faults against one another, we commit sins against God, and the very notion of sin involves, as its correlative, the thought of the divine Lawgiver.

So, dear brethren, penitence goes deeper than a recognition of demerit and unworthiness. It is more than an acknowledgment of imperfection and breach of morality. It is something different altogether from the acknowledgment that I have committed a fault against my fellow. David had done Bathsheba and Uriah, and in them his whole kingdom, foul wrong, but, as he says in Psalm 51, 'Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned.' His account with these is of a less grave character, but 'against Thee I sinned.'

And in like manner, this penitence contains in it the recognition of transgression against a loving Friend and Father, which had been brought home to his mind by all the words of the rebuking prophet, who was a kind of incarnate conscience for him now. And it contains, still further, confession to God against whom he had sinned. The first impulse of a man when he dimly discerns how far he has departed from God's law, is that which the old story represents was the first impulse of the first sinners—to hide himself in the trees of the garden. The second impulse is to go to Him against whom we have sinned, and who only therefore can deal with the sin in the way of forgiveness, and to pour it all out before Him. Once an Apostle, when he caught a partial glimpse of his own demerit and transgression, said to the Master with a natural impulse, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!' But Peter had a deeper sense of his own sin, and a happier knowledge of what Christ could do for his sin, when his brother Apostle whispering to him in the boat, 'It is the Lord,' the traitor Apostle cast himself into the shallow water and floundered through it anyhow, to get as close as he could to the Master's feet.

Do not go away from God because you feel that you have sinned against Him. Where should you go but to your mother's bosom, and hide your face there, if you have committed faults against her? Where should you go but to God if against Him you have transgressed? Look, my brother, at your own character and conduct; measure the deficiencies and imperfections, the transgressions and faults; ay! perhaps with some of you, the crimes against men and society and human laws; but see beneath all these a deeper thought; and stifle not the words that would come to your lips as a relief, like a surgeon's lancet struck into some foul gathering, 'I have sinned against the Lord.'

II. And now, secondly, notice with me David's pardon consequent upon his repentance.

Can there be anything more striking—I do not say dramatic, for the circumstances are far too serious for terms of art—can there be anything more in the nature of a gospel to us all than that brief dialogue? David said unto Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' And Nathan said unto David, 'The Lord also hath put away thy sin.'

Immediate forgiveness, that is the first lesson that I would press upon you. Dear brethren, it is an experience which you may each repeat in your own history at this moment. It needs but the confession in order that the forgiveness should come. At this end of the telephone whisper your confession, and before it has well passed your lips there comes back the voice sweet as that of angels, 'The

Lord hath forgiven thy sin.' One word, one motion of a heart aware of, and hating, and desiring to escape from, its evil, brings with a rush the whole fulness of fatherly and forgiving love into any heart. And that one confession may be the turning-point of a man's life, and may obliterate all the sinful past, and may bring him into loving, reconciled, harmonious relations with the Almighty Judge.

Learn, too, not only the immediacy of the answer and the simplicity of the means, but learn how thorough and complete God's dealing with your sin may be. The original language of my text might be rendered, 'The Lord hath caused thy sin to pass away'; the thought being substantially that of some impediment or veil between man and Him which, with a touch of His hand, He dissolves as it were into vapour, and so leaves all the sky clear for His warmth and sunshine to pour down upon the heart. We do not need to enter upon theological language in talking about this great gift of forgiveness. It means substantially that howsoever you and I have piled up mountain upon mountain, Alp upon Alp, of our evils and transgressions, all pass away and become non-existent. Another word of the Old Testament expresses the same idea when it speaks about sin being 'covered.' Another word expresses the same idea when it speaks about God as 'casting' men's sins 'into the depths of the sea'—all meaning this one thing, that they no longer stand as barriers between the free flow of His love and our poor hearts. He takes away the sense of guilt, touches the wounded conscience, and there is healing in His hand. As, according to the old belief, the sovereign, by laying his hand upon sufferers from 'the King's evil' healed them and cleansed them, so the touch of His forgiving love takes away the sense of guilt and heals the spirit. He removes all the impediments between His love and us. His love can now come undisturbed. His deepest and solemnest judgments do not need to come; and no more does there stand frowning between us and Him the spectre of our past.

People tell us that forgiveness is impossible, 'that whatsoever a man soweth, that must he also reap'; that law is law, and that the consequences cannot be averted. That is all quite true if there is not a God. It is not true if there is; and if there is no God, there is no sin. So if there is a God, there is forgiveness.

Consequences, as I shall have to show you in a moment, may still remain, but pardon may be ours all the same. When you forgive your child, does it mean that you do not thrash it, or does it mean that you take it to your heart? And when God pardons, does it mean that He waives His laws, or does it mean that He lets us come into the whole warmth and sunshine of His love? Will you go there?

Forgiveness was to Jews a thing difficult to apprehend. It was hard for them to understand the harmony of it with the rigid retribution on which their whole system of religion reposed. But you and I have come further into the light than Nathan and David had. And I have to preach a modification of the words of my text which is not a limitation of them, but the unveiling of their basis and the surest confirmation of them, when I say 'In Him'—Jesus Christ—'we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins.'

The New Testament teaches us that the Cross of Christ threw its power back upon former transgressions as well as forward upon future ones; and that in Him past ages, though they knew Him not, received remission. Christ is the Medium of the divine forgiveness; Christ's Cross is the ground of the divine pardon; Christ's sacrifice is the guarantee for us that the sin which He has borne He has borne away. 'By His stripes we are healed.' 'Wherefore, men and brethren, be it known unto you, that through this Man is preached unto us the forgiveness of our sins.'

III. Third and lastly, look at the punishment which follows—shall I say notwithstanding or because of ?—the penitence and the pardon.

In David's life there came the immediate retribution in kind, which was signaled as such by the divine message—the death of the child 'who was conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity.' But beyond that, look at David's life after his great fall. There was no more brightness in it. His own sin and example of lust loosed the bonds of morality in his household, and his son followed his example and improved upon it. And from that came Absalom's murder of his brother, and from that Absalom's exile, and from that Absalom's rebellion, and from that Absalom's death, which nearly killed his poor old father. And for all the rest of his days his home was troubled, and his last years ended with the turmoil of a disputed succession before his eyes were closed, all traceable to this one foul crime.

Joab was the torment of David's later days, and Joab's power over him depended upon his having been the instrument of Uriah's murder; and so the master of the king, whose bidding he had done. Ahithophel was the brain of Absalom's conspiracy. His defection struck a sharp arrow into David's heart—'mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted.' He evidently hated the king with fierce hatred. He was Bathsheba's grandfather; and we are not going wrong, I think, in tracing his passionate hatred, and the peculiar form of insult which he counseled Absalom to adopt, to the sense of foul wrong which had been done to his house by David's crime.

And so all through his days this poor old king had to do what you and I have to do—to bear the temporal results of sin. 'Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.'

So 'of our pleasant vices the gods make whips to scourge us.' And it is in mercy that we have to drink as we have brewed, that we have to lie upon the beds that we have made; that in regard to outward consequences, and in regard to our own hearts and inward

history, we are the architects of our own fortunes, and cannot escape the penalties of our sins and of our faults. Better to have it so than be cursed with impunity!

Some of you young men are sowing diseases in your bones that will either make you invalids or will kill you before your time. All of us are bearing about with us, in some measure and sense, the issues, which are the punishments, of our evil. Let us thank Him and take up the praise of the old psalm, 'Thou wast a God that forgivest them, though Thou tookest vengeance of their inventions.' There is either merciful chastisement here, that we may be parted from our sins, or there is judgment hereafter.

O my brother! let me beseech you, do not commit the suicide of impenitence, but go to Christ, in whom all our sins are taken away, and lay your hands on the head of that great Sacrifice, and 'the Lord shall cause to pass the iniquity of your sin.'