

Bible Class Primers.

EDITED BY

PRINCIPAL SALMOND, D.D., ABERDEEN.

ELI, SAMUEL AND SAUL

A TRANSITION CHAPTER
IN ISRAELITISH HISTORY

BY THE

REV CHARLES A. SALMOND, D.D.

SOUTH MORNINGSIDE, EDINBURGH

AUTHOR OF "OUR CHRISTIAN PASSOVER," ETC.

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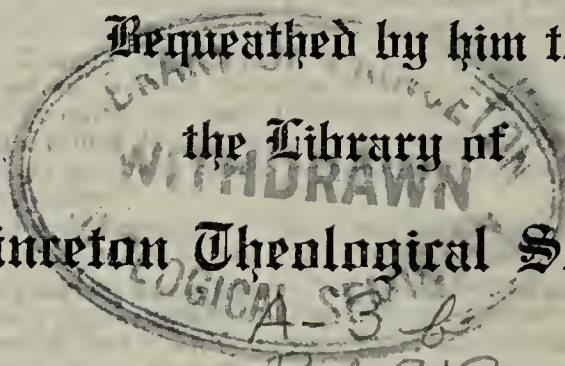
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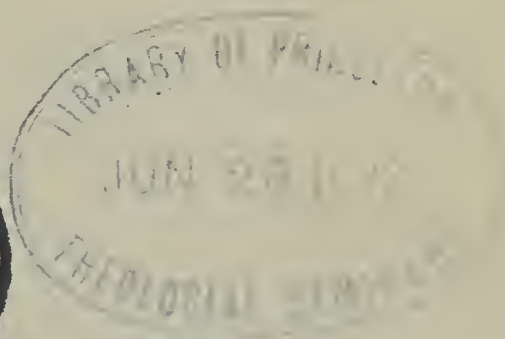
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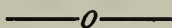
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CONTENTS

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.—THE NATION AND THE TIME	7
1. The era to be considered—2. Eli as introduced to us—3. Israel's condition, political and religious—4. Eli's fatal weakness.	
CHAPTER II.—ELI: AS PRIEST, AS PARENT, AND AS PATRIOT	14
5. Eli and Hannah—6. Eli's blameworthiness as priest—7. Eli as parent, and his wicked sons—8. Parental idolatry and its consequences—9. Eli as patriot—10. Capture of the Ark, when idolatrously used—11. Israel's outlook at Eli's death.	
CHAPTER III.—THE NATION'S NEED	25
12. Disunited state of Israel—13. The one remaining bond of union destroyed—14. God's provision, in Samuel, for Israel's need—15. The unique place and function of Samuel.	
CHAPTER IV.—SAMUEL THE CHILD	30
16. Samuel's birth and parentage—17. Samuel given in answer to prayer—18. Samuel's early dedication—19. Hannah's heroism—20. A lovely boyhood—21. A little minister—22. A striking call—23. Old Eli at his best.	
CHAPTER V.—SAMUEL, AND ISRAEL, AFTER TWENTY YEARS	43
24. The fortunes of the Ark after Eli's time—25. After twenty years—26. Samuel's growth in national influence—27. Samuel as prophet—28. The salutary change on Israel.	

	PAGE
CHAPTER VI.—THE GREAT REVIVAL UNDER SAMUEL THE REFORMER	52
29. Providential education for revival—30. Probation in revival—31. Salvation through revival—32. Samuel as priest—33. Samuel as judge.	
CHAPTER VII.—SAMUEL'S OLD AGE	62
34. A small platform for a great life—35. The approach of Samuel's age—36. The trials of Samuel's age— 37. Disappointment in his sons—38. Slighted by an un- grateful people—39. The nobility of Samuel's age— 40. Concession to the popular demand—41. Samuel's part in the appointment of a king—42. Samuel's after- relations with Saul—43. Samuel and religious education.	
CHAPTER VIII.—SAUL: ON THE UP-GRADE	80
44. A missing name—45. Samuel and Saul contrasted —46. The choice young man—47. One thing lacking in Saul's character—48. The promising young king— 49. Saul's courage and success in war.	
CHAPTER IX.—SAUL: ON THE DOWN-GRADE	89
50. Divergence from Samuel and the secret of it— 51. The king's proper place in the Theocracy—52. Saul's first public act of sinful self-assertion—53. Saul and Jonathan at Michmash—54. Further disobedience, in sparing Agag—55. Complete severance between Samuel and Saul—56. The anointing of Saul's successor— 57. A swift decline—58. Saul betakes himself to witch- craft—59. Death of Saul—60. Samuel's ideals fulfilled in David.	

ELI, SAMUEL, AND SAUL.



CHAPTER I.

THE NATION AND THE TIME.

I. THE ERA TO BE CONSIDERED. The period of Israelitish history to be brought under review in these pages—belonging partly to the twelfth and partly to the eleventh century before the Christian era—was a time of transition. It saw the rule of the Judges, which had lasted from the days immediately subsequent to Joshua, pass into a monarchy. The events of the period group themselves round three outstanding figures, each of whom had to do with the change thus effected. The first of these is ELI, under whose lax rule the nation of Israel fell into a deplorable state of both moral and material decay. The second is SAMUEL, the last and greatest of the Judges, and one of the noblest characters in Old Testament story: the reformer and restorer of the commonwealth, and the forerunner and, in a sense, the founder of the monarchy. The third is SAUL, in whom the experiment of kingship was first tried, but who, with all his bright early promise, turned out in the end nothing better than a splendid failure, and had to

make way for a truer king. A study of these three notable agents, and the part they took in the unfolding drama of Israelitish history, will bring into relief the leading features of an era that was full of events and fruitful of important issues.

2. **ELI AS INTRODUCED TO US** (1 Sam. i.). When first we make the acquaintance of Eli, he is already an old man. It is only in the last few years of his long history that we have any mention of him, and we know that when death overtook him he had accomplished nearly a century of life (1 Sam. iv. 15). A long and more or less eventful career must, therefore, have preceded the time at which we find him in the exercise of his double office of priest and judge—assisted by his two prodigal sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who were then apparently the acting priests (1 Sam. i. 3), though very unworthy of the position (ch. ii. 12). But so little is known for certain about his antecedents, that we are left very much to conjecture in seeking to determine how he came to be invested with the twofold function.

Eli's position as high priest is unusual. He was not descended from Eleazar (the elder of Aaron's sons who survived the untimely end of Nadab and Abihu, Levit. x. 5), but from Ithamar, the younger son. Hence historians are puzzled to understand how the office had come to be transferred to Eli, since the more legitimate line of Eleazar was certainly not extinct. There is no ground for thinking that Eli had forcibly thrust himself into the high priest's place. The most likely supposition is, that the natural heir to the high priesthood had been too young to assume its responsibilities when his pre-

decessor died, and that Eli, without any usurpation or unseemly intrusion on his part, had been appointed to the duties of that high, essential office. And, before passing from this, it may be noticed that the transference from the one line to the other was only temporary. We find that Ahiah, or Ahijah, the son of Ahitub, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli (1 Sam. xiv. 3)—*i.e.* the great-grandson of Eli—was high priest in Saul's time ; and that he was succeeded by Abiathar, his nephew (1 Sam. xxii. 20), and the great-great-grandson of Eli. But in Solomon's time the high priesthood was restored to the elder branch of Aaron's family, in the person of Zadok, who, after apparently acting as his colleague for a while (2 Sam. xv. 24, 29), replaced the rebellious and disgraced Abiathar (1 Kings ii. 27, 35).

How Eli came to be judge is equally unknown. But it is more than probable that military ardour and success, in younger days, had conspired with his honourable descent and social position in attracting to him the admiration and securing for him the confidence and obedience of the people. The judgeship, unlike the priesthood, was a matter of popular choice. The judges were usually men of martial prowess and renown, "impromptu warriors raised up from time to time by the Divine Providence to maintain Israel's independence, and subsequently called to the helm of the State by the popular voice." Eli's priestly character would not, on the one hand, have secured for him the judgeship ; but neither would it, on the other hand, have prevented him from attaining that dignity on the grounds for which it was usually conferred. Priest as he was,

Eli may have taken the field, when occasion summoned, against his country's foe, and have played the man in battle, to the discomfiture of the enemy and the deliverance of the nation. Politics and religion may at ordinary times seem far enough apart, but there are times when political duty rises into the sphere of religion. The warrior-priest was not unknown in the early days of Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, or in the stirring later times of the Maccabees. And even as the great Swiss reformer Zuingli shouldered his musket and died in the field for the cause he espoused, Eli, feeble as we find him in his old age, may in youth, though a priest, have marshalled the hosts of Israel and led them on to victory. Possibly he deserves the credit of having organised an army that for long kept the Philistines at bay, and was evidently not accustomed to defeat (1 Sam. iv. 1-3).

However all that may be, the possession of the two offices by one man was something quite unexampled. It ought to have given a peculiar authority and influence to Eli, as at once the political and the religious head of the nation; and, though Eli certainly did not make so much of his opportunity as he might have done, this centralising of power in him was itself significant. It pointed to the new turn affairs were beginning to take in Israel. Even the bad use Eli made of the enlarged powers centring in him tended to hasten, rather than retard, the coming era.

3. ISRAEL'S CONDITION: POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS. The political aspect of Israel was not hopeful by Eli's time. Barak, and Gideon, and

Jephthah had left behind them some substantial results, it is true, besides bright traditions of the past. They had repulsed the Midianites and Ammonites from the east, and quelled the tribes of Canaan from the north. But there was a people rich and powerful, if not numerically very strong, entrenched on the south-western border of the land, a people who had continued to assert, not only their independence, but a growingly aggressive dominion, until at length they held Israel in practical vassaldom.

These were the inhabitants of Philistia—a race believed to have come across from Crete—who, with a fine seaboard and rich plains sloping to the sea, had the additional advantage of commanding the highways between the storehouses of Egypt and the cities of the north. Samson, as we know, had made gallant, if fitful, efforts to break the Philistine yoke. But the burly “sunny” giant, who had put to flight, single-handed, whole armies of the aliens, at length fell a prey to Delilah’s wiles, and had to end his own wrecked life in the last tragic blow he dealt at these most powerful and persistent of Israel’s foes (Judges xvi. 30). So far from the domination of the Philistines being shaken off by Samson’s wild endeavours, it seems to have riveted itself, after his day, only the more firmly on the nation’s neck. If things had not quite reached the pass they afterwards reached in Saul’s time—when the Israelites were disarmed, and had to go down to the Philistines to have even their coulters, axes, and mattocks sharpened (1 Sam. xiii. 19, 20)—the situation in Eli’s days was bad enough. The heart of

the people was burdened by a constant menace from the audacious and grasping neighbours on the west.

Nor was the internal religious condition of the country any brighter than its political aspect. While there were doubtless, here and there, scattered throughout the land, God-fearing families like that of Elkanah in Mount Ephraim, religion by Eli's time seems to have been sadly languishing, and, even at its core in Shiloh, not a little corrupt. No doubt Eli had his own share of direct responsibility for the extraordinary state of matters prevailing there ; and the conduct of his wicked sons was utterly evil. But it is evident that, to make the atrocious doings of Hophni and Phinehas possible, there must have been a miserably low tone of morality, not to say of religion, throughout the land. And in their idolatrous treatment of the Ark, as we shall see, there was significant evidence of how far and fatally the religious sentiment of the Israel of that time had been perverted.

In short, both the political and the religious affairs of the country had reached a crisis. To whom could the nation look to guide them through it, to rouse and deliver them from it? To whom so readily as to God's high priest, who, in addition to the sanctions of religion, was invested with the authority of the civil power? Might not he do something even yet to stem the tide of evil? Might not he do much to raise the moral and religious spirit of the people, and give such a tone to their patriotism thereby as would make them arise in the consecrated might of the ancient days to thrust out the foreign oppressor?

4. ELI'S FATAL WEAKNESS. A strong arm was needed—to be exerted under the impulse of a lofty and ardent nature, and under the direction no less of a cool and sagacious head. Were the requisite qualifications, then, to be found in Eli? Unhappily, they were not.

Advantages of position, hereditary or otherwise, are of little avail when they have to be wielded by a man of feeble character. Eli was no doubt pious as a priest, and well-meaning as a judge. But there was a fatal weakness in his disposition that damaged everything, and brought sorrow both on himself and on his people. There were instincts of good about him. He keenly felt, doubtless, that the times were out of joint. But it was more and more apparent, as the years passed, that he was not the man to set them right. The nation was left to sigh—as the nation and the Church in other lands and other days has had to do—for one to arise who should be, in truth, the man of God's right hand.

Such an one would yet be provided: a man of abundant resource and resolute will, whom God would make strong for Himself: a man evidently raised up for a particular end by the Almighty, and not to be accounted for on any ordinary principles of extraction and development. His time, however, was not yet. As we now proceed to consider Eli, as he is represented to us in the sacred narrative, we shall view him as priest, as parent, and as patriot. In each of these aspects, we shall find much that is estimable about him. Yet in all of them we shall see how the working of one un-

fortunate, or, rather, sinful trait of character may ruin what else had been a worthy and beautiful life.

CHAPTER II.

ELI : AS PRIEST, AS PARENT, AND AS PATRIOT.

5. **ELI AND HANNAH** (1 Sam. i. 9-17). It is as priest that Eli first comes before us. He is seated, probably in the cool of the evening, on his own special "throne" or seat, by a post of the tabernacle of the Lord [called a "temple" (ver. 9) or a "house," because of the appearance given to it by the buildings that surrounded it]. Perhaps his heart is filled with pious meditation ; for, whatever his defects, Eli was a good man. In the midst of his reverie, his eye lights upon the figure of a country woman, prostrate in what looks like an attitude of devotion. Her lips are moving, but no voice is heard. It is notable as the first instance on record of silent prayer (ver. 12). The old man's soul is stirred within him at what he counts the melancholy sight, and with a measure of righteous indignation he cries—"How long wilt thou be drunken? Put away thy wine from thee" (ver. 14).

Strange first meeting of the high priest of the Lord with her who was to be the mother of God's chosen servant ! Hannah makes her explanation, and forthwith she receives the benign answer, which seems to flow more naturally from Eli's lips than the previous rebuke—"Go in peace : and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked

of Him" (ver. 17). The high priest is evidently sorry for having unwittingly caused the suppliant pain. But a time is coming when he will make ample amends for that, in the tender care of one who is to be an object of love and solicitude both to Hannah and to himself.

Now, the circumstance that Eli so promptly jumped to the conclusion expressed in his rebuke to Hannah lets us see to what a depth public morality must then have sunk. The sight of a drunken woman anywhere is as miserable and sickening a spectacle as one could witness. That such could be seen about the tabernacle door without awakening any very great surprise was unspeakably deplorable. What wonder that Eli's wrath was stirred—so far as it was possible to stir that emotion in his breast.

6. ELI'S BLAMEWORTHINESS AS PRIEST.

But something more is indicated by the scene, and that is the slackness of Eli himself. If drunkenness, either among men or among women, had come to be tolerated at Shiloh, it is evident that the high priest must have had his share of the blame. And, unhappily, there are other indications that the yearly gatherings at the religious centre of Israel had degenerated by Eli's time into occasions of loose feasting little better than the licentious orgies of the heathen.

It says little of the moral courage and spiritual earnestness of the high priest that such things could take place beneath his eyes and under the very shadow of the tabernacle. Even in Eli's words to Hannah there is little of the emphasis of conscious

and recognised authority. It is an appeal that we hear rather than a command, an entreating rather than a menacing voice. Had the woman been in the lamentable condition he supposed, the high priest might fittingly have resorted to something more stringent than argument surely in order to effect her removal from that sacred place. But there is here an unmistakable tone of peevish feebleness : "How long wilt thou be drunken? Put away thy wine from thee."

Inside the tabernacle matters were, alas ! worse instead of better. The high priest permitted his subordinates most wantonly to abuse their office (1 Sam. ii. 12-17). We cannot suppose that he would directly benefit by the grasping selfishness which, in the matter of meats, defrauded both Jehovah and His people. But he must have winked at it ; and if men came at length to abhor the offering of the Lord, Eli, the high priest, shared the guilt and merited a share of the punishment. To be partaker of other men's sins by merely winking hard where there is not only an opportunity but a call to interpose, is scarcely less hateful to the Most High than to be one of the actual perpetrators of the evil.

So much for Eli as a priest. He was a good, pious man. He had a sincere faith in God and a real interest in His worship. He might, perhaps, have filled a subordinate office in the tabernacle very well, and have discharged its duties commendably under a strict superior. But a place of pre-eminence was no place for Eli. He had not the faculty for rule ; he had no capacity for wise

administration. Some men make admirable servants who would make miserably incompetent masters; and he was one of these. Good, religious, well-meaning man as he was—connected with the sanctuary for three-quarters of a century or more—he allowed everything to go to wreck around him, while he sat on his “seat by a post of the temple of the Lord,” no doubt deploring the degeneracy of the times, but never bestirring himself in a manful, God-fearing way to check or to reverse it.

7. **ELI AS PARENT: AND HIS WICKED SONS** (1 Sam. ii. 12-17, 23-25). Blameworthy as a priest, Eli as a parent was no less culpable. Many a good man has had wicked sons, who, in spite of assiduous and prayerful training, have refused to walk in their father's ways, and have at length brought down his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. That may happen without any special blame attaching to the parent; for there is a perversity of evil in the human heart sometimes which breaks through all rules and laughs at all restraints, as it hurries down the broad and easy way that leads to destruction. But the wise man's maxim, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it,” generally holds. The exceptions go to prove the rule. When a good man has profligate sons there is usually ground for himself to fear, as well as for others to surmise, that without at all freeing them from blame, some fault of mismanagement at least may lie with him.

Eli was too obviously blameworthy in relation to his children, and his reprehensible ease bore in

his own lifetime the bitterest fruit. By a short-sighted indulgence, as we gather from what we know of Eli otherwise, he had encouraged his sons to licence ; and as he sowed, so did he reap. He may have taken credit to himself for good nature in earlier days when he yielded to their wishes. He may have found it convenient then to spare his children and himself the pain of collisions which might anywise be shunned ; to command, and then to yield if they were obstinate ; to tide over by soothing deeds and flattering words their fits of petulance and passion ; to bribe where he should have ordered, and to coax where he should have punished. All this he may have fondly regarded as only a tribute to his good-humoured affection for the little ones, from whom he was prepared to bear so much that he never would have brooked from any other. Blind affection ! Ill-fated good-humour ! There is a kindness that may prove a curse, an ease of disposition that is but another name for selfishness—and in his case, as in others, it had its appropriate reward.

8. PARENTAL IDOLATRY: AND ITS CONSEQUENCE (1 Sam. ii. 29-36). The truth is, that there was idolatry as well as self-indulgence in the attitude maintained by Eli toward his children ; and this, on the part of any parent, can produce nothing but the worst results. “Thou honourest thy sons above Me” is Jehovah’s accusation, brought home to this fond but unfaithful father through an unnamed prophet (ver. 29). This is how God regards the conduct of a parent who disobeys the divine will in allowing his children to have their way.

Whatever be the name he himself gives to it, it is in God's view *idolatry*, preferring the creature to the Creator, honouring those who ought to be in subjection, more than Him who is Lord of all, and whose will should certainly be law in every household of His people.

It was but natural that, permitted to follow their own bias to evil, Eli's sons should have developed into "sons of Belial" (1 Sam. ii. 12). The more trivial faults of childhood made way for the arrant selfishness and shameful abandonment of maturer years. And the misery ensued which is the penalty of sin. Instead of the comfort, Eli's sons became the curse of his old age—a cross to their father, instead of a crown. Ere Eli died he knew himself to be the ancestor, not of a line of high priests, but of a race of wretched ecclesiastical beggars, who should be found pleading for some menial churchly office in order to obtain a piece of bread (ver. 36).

9. ELI AS PATRIOT (1 Sam. iv. 1-22). As a patriot—the remaining aspect in which we have to view him—Eli was far from being a success. Here, as elsewhere, his constitutional weakness of will, intensified by long habits of purposeless timidity and easy-going indulgence, utterly frustrated the good intentions which he no doubt cherished toward his people. He held the reins long with a slack hand ; and, for a while, that may have brought him a kind of popularity. But in course of time it brought a fearful retribution.

Mention has already been made of the frightful disorders of the time. If Eli as a ruler had always

been weak, he latterly became altogether helpless. His last act was to permit a war which seems to have been unprovoked (ver. 1), and which, like other unprovoked wars in more recent times, brought serious disaster in its train.

Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside Ebenezer—as the spot was on a subsequent occasion (ch. vii. 12) to be called, from very different associations from those which were to gather about it now. Israel at this time would have been better employed in correcting certain crying evils at home than in attempting foreign conquest. God was not to help them, for the heart of the people was not right with Him. And, when they joined battle, “Israel was smitten before the Philistines” (ver. 2). It was a necessary discipline: the best thing, indeed, that could have happened to them in the circumstances, to fail in a godless war.

The elders recognise the fact that it is the Lord who has smitten them, and, in order to bring back victory, they resolve to fetch the Ark—variously called the Ark of Jehovah (ver. 6), of God (ver. 11), of the Covenant of Jehovah (ver. 3), of the Covenant of God (ver. 4), of the Covenant of Jehovah of Hosts (ver. 4)—out of Shiloh. It is their hope that this will infallibly secure success (ver. 3). But it is evident that this expedient is, after all, resorted to in quite a heathenish spirit. Israel goes forth to battle the second time, not in intelligent faith in God, but in a spirit of blind idolatrous trust in the Ark of God. They probably expected one of two things. They may have imagined, as they recalled historic incidents at Jordan and at Jericho, that the

Ark, by the very virtue of its presence, would act like a charm, unmanning their foes, and nerving the hosts of Israel to the fight. Or they may have thought that, by reason of the Ark's exceeding preciousness, they would, by carrying it with them, concuss God, in a manner, to send deliverance rather than allow "the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of Hosts which dwelleth between the Cherubim" (ver. 4) to fall into the hands of the enemy.

Either of these notions was extremely unworthy of God's professed people, and specially of their elders. Things had reached a strange pass in Israel when men were found transferring their confidence from the God of the Ark to the Ark of God, and saying, "*It* may save us out of the hand of our enemies" (ver. 3). The Philistines might be excused for saying, "God is come into the camp," when the sounds of rejoicing fell upon their ears; for they were accustomed to such use of their images on the battlefield (2 Sam. v. 21). But Israel ought to have known that not one or all of the belongings of religion can for a moment take the place of Him who is the only centre and support of a well-founded religious hope. And Israel had to be taught that, apart from God, the Ark was as powerless for good among them as any other wooden chest would be. They had to be taught that God would rather relinquish *it* from its place between the cherubim, than confirm them in false opinions and evil courses by granting them anything like magical success in connection with it. They were not to be permitted thus to force Jehovah's hand. Their fate was to

illustrate the truth, that a misdirected religious enthusiasm like theirs can come to little good. It may rend the air with shouts for a brief moment ; but the notes of anticipated triumph will soon die out, or pass into the fiercer notes of failing struggle and darkening despair.

10. CAPTURE OF THE ARK, WHEN IDOLATROUSLY USED (1 Sam. iv. 4-18). To do old Eli justice, it was with severe misgivings that he consented to the removal for such a purpose of the Ark, which had stood for three centuries in Shiloh, and which he himself for so long a time had tended. He weakly yielded to the design ; but he had not favoured it, and his heart trembled to see the sacred symbol of the presence of the Lord carried away by such hands and in such a spirit. It trembled, as well it might. For he knew too well that his impious sons were no fit keepers of the Ark of God ; and strongly did he fear that neither did the occasion warrant the expedient, nor the mood in which it was adopted show any honour to Jehovah.

It is one of the most touching pictures in Old Testament history, this of Eli—with dim eyes and trembling heart, sitting by the wayside watching—desiring tidings, yet fearing to receive them—wishing relief from his suspense, yet shrinking from its arrival. We seem to see the man of Benjamin, whom some suppose to have been Saul, running up at length with the fatal news. And Eli says, “What is there done, my son?” And the messenger, in a single sentence, short and sharp as a military despatch and at the same time as beauti-

ful an example of climax as is anywhere to be found, tells the old man, in a gradually ascending scale, the tale of utter woe. We seem to hear his panting utterance, as his half-choking voice swells into an ever louder wail of sorrow—"Israel is fled before the Philistines; and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people; and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead; and—*the Ark of God is taken!*" (ver. 17). At the first words the aged priest starts back with hands uplifted—each successive clause strikes a heavier blow than that which goes before—till, at the mention of the Ark, hope dies; the balance of the old man's life is gone; faint and heavy as a stone he sinks to earth, and, with neck and heart both broken, he yields his spirit up to God, who gave it nigh a century before (vers. 15, 18). It was a deplorable ending to a life which rose to some degree of brilliancy and power, but which too soon waned into commonplace and weakness, till thus it set in the darkest gloom.

II. ISRAEL'S OUTLOOK AT ELI'S DEATH (I Sam. iv. 21, 22). Eli had so many amiable qualities that we can hardly but love him. He had so few strong qualities that we cannot possibly admire him. While we pity the man, we must condemn his frailty as no mere pardonable weakness, but a grievous fault. It was a sin against God, to whose honour he ought to have been more strictly faithful; against his children, whom he ought not only to have taught and besought, but to have disciplined and restrained; against his country, which he should have governed with a firmer hand within, and held back from

foolish and impious projects without. In presence of the severe rebuke which overtook Eli from the God of righteousness, let us not speak harshly of him. But, in spite of his good intentions, we cannot conceal from ourselves that his passive drifting life was an ignoble thing ; that, in spite of his complacent ways, he was a mischievous person for a place of trust ; that he was too anxious to stand well with all, to strike out a course which would bring deep or lasting benefit to any.

If no better successor were to be found to take the lead in Israel, no more appropriate expression for the country's future could be found than the expiring groan of the mother of Eli's grandson, in which she named the child of her sorrow "I-chabod" —*no glory*—because "the glory was departed from Israel."

The Ark was taken ; the lamp had gone out in the sanctuary ; God Himself seemed to have departed. But there was a young life rising in Israel, and glory would rise with it again. To Samuel, as he grew into the instrument of God's designs, Jehovah would more and more reveal Himself. And it would be his to teach — not, like Eli, as a beacon, but as a bright example—the consistency, the blessedness, the fruitfulness, the honour of a fully consecrated life.

CHAPTER III.

THE NATION'S NEED.

12. DISUNITED STATE OF ISRAEL. The affairs of Israel, as we have seen, were allowed to drift into a lamentable condition under the good and well-meaning but mischievously weak Eli. The disuniting process of centuries seemed then to have done its worst. The tribes had been falling more and more apart; and now at length, instead of forming one nation, they were more like a group of petty states, each taken up with its own individual interests, and little concerned to maintain oneness with the rest.

The spectacle presented was very similar to what the world would by-and-by have seen had the seceding States in America succeeded—under the plausible plea of maintaining “State rights”—in breaking up the Union into a number of small independent republics. The great body of our American kinsmen well knew that such a severance would be fatal to their country, and they fought for the principle of a united nationality as against a loose alliance of petty, self-assertive States. They regarded the organic unity of the great American Republic as so essential to the well-being of all the parts, that they engaged in a death-struggle in order to secure it.

In Israel, by Eli's time, the idea of nationality had been largely lost sight of. It was not counted worth caring for, much less fighting for; and the

policy of selfishness and drift was everywhere in favour. This state of things, deplorable enough in the case of any country, was peculiarly melancholy in the case of God's favoured people, who, in addition to the ordinary ties of brotherhood, ought to have been welded together by their common loyalty to Jehovah, who offered Himself as His people's portion, and was pleased to regard them as His own inheritance.

13. THE ONE REMAINING BOND OF UNION DESTROYED. The one outward bond that subsisted longest between the tribes was the religious ceremonial observed at Shiloh. Even that, no doubt, had sunk into a piece of ritual, and in too many cases a piece of mere routine. Still, it *was* a bond, however slight and feeble, between the tribes, as they assembled together at stated seasons at Shiloh, professedly to worship the one Jehovah. But Shiloh itself, alas! instead of being a healthy religious centre, a throbbing heart of national piety, a "Place of Rest," as its name means, became in course of time, as we have seen, a centre of corruption. And then came the catastrophe, for which Israel was fully ripe.

An unprovoked war, waged in a heathenish spirit, could have but one appropriate result; and when poor old Eli—the object at once of pity and of blame—crushed under the accumulation of disaster, fell back dead in the day of woe, and passed from the midst of a nation and a time with whose necessities he had been far too feeble to cope, it was at least evident that Israelitish affairs had sunk to their very lowest. * There was the grim

comfort at any rate now for any patriot, that things could not become worse than they were, and might possibly improve.

The symbol of God's presence was gone. Shiloh, its home for three centuries, was but a shadow of what it had been ; for neither Jehovah nor His Ark was there (Ps. lxxviii. 60-62), and its oracles were dumb. The once holy centre of religious life might almost even then have been taken as a picture of utter desolation—"Go ye now to My place, which is in Shiloh, where I set My name at the first, and see what I did to it, for the wickedness of My people Israel" (Jer. vii. 12). And for the next twenty years the condition of Israel was of the most ignoble description. The chosen people were permitted to realise the full misery of their irreligion and consequent disunion—without a head and without a heart—with no one to guide to action or to stimulate in it. All this was a preparation for the day of better things. It was a bitter but salutary time of discipline. And, happily, there were symptoms at length that the dear but valuable lessons of experience had not been taught in vain. At last, and at least, there was one thing in which all Israel had been brought to co-operate again, and it was a blessed token for good. When it could be recorded—as in 1 Sam. vii. 2—that "the time was long, for it was twenty years ; and *all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord,*" there was a rift in the clouds, the blue of heaven was beginning to be seen again—an era of worthier aspirations and of fresh possibilities was evidently setting in.

14. GOD'S PROVISION IN SAMUEL FOR

ISRAEL'S NEED. What the nation now needed was a man capable of leading it back to the ways of God, and keeping it in them—a man stern to correct the corruptions of the past, and wise to guide the impulses of the opening time. And such an one God Himself provided in Samuel the Prophet, whose distinction it was to be the second founder of the Theocracy—not only a reformer, but the great reformer and restorer of Israel to the principles and the accompanying prosperity of Mosaic institutions. In days long after, these two—Moses and Samuel—are significantly classed together by God as the most influential representatives of true Israelitish interests—"Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, My mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth" (Jer. xv. 1).

15. THE UNIQUE PLACE AND FUNCTION OF SAMUEL. The place and service of Samuel were certainly unique in Israel's history. He was a living link between two distinct eras, in the second of which he was unquestionably, to a large extent, the formative influence. Without Samuel—under God—much, if not most, that Moses had effected would have gone for nothing; and it is equally certain that, without Samuel in his less conspicuous but not less fruitful activity, the brilliant era under David and Solomon would not have been possible. On him devolved the difficult task, as the last of the Judges, not only of reawakening the national life, but of guiding it in new channels; not merely of conserving valuable traditions—which he did—but of accommodating

himself and them to the conditions of an advancing age. That Samuel succeeded in both respects is the more remarkable when we remember how evidently conservative he was in his bent of mind ; how uncompromising he was in all matters that touched the honour of God ; how unyieldingly attached he was to everything that appeared to him essential in the nation's historical code. Samuel's was unquestionably a great, if sometimes rather a thankless task. Men called to take a middle part, like him, are liable to be assailed from two sides. They are apt, as has been said, to be "charged with going too far or not far enough. Yet they may be the silent healers who bind up the wounds of their age in spite of itself ; and they have ultimately their reward in the glories of a new age, to be ushered in peacefully and happily after they have been laid in the grave."

Samuel's own utmost ambition probably was to be a true successor to Moses, with whom in Scripture he is so expressly coupled. But Jehovah, whom he served with all his heart, so directed and upheld him in this endeavour as to make him more than a schoolmaster to bring men back to Moses. The Lord made him the true forerunner of David as well, and the herald of Israel's golden age. Like Luther, and every man whom God raises up for a great reforming work, he was led on step by step, and enabled to grapple with each emergency as it arose, achieving an ultimate success which far exceeded his own original expectation.

But now, having obtained some idea of the

condition of the Israel into which Samuel was born, and some notion of the work he had to do, let us turn to his life-story to mark the stages in his own early development—the steps, in other words, in God's preparation of him for his task.

A brief consideration of Samuel's childhood will bring into view four things — a remarkable birth, an early dedication, a lovely boyhood, a striking call.

CHAPTER IV.

SAMUEL THE CHILD.

16. SAMUEL'S BIRTH AND PARENTAGE (1 Sam. i. 1-28). The birth of Samuel was remarkable, inasmuch as it was a direct and manifest answer to prayer. Some of the circumstances connected with it have already been noticed in connection with our first introduction to Eli, and need not be further commented on here.

As regards Samuel's parentage, he was born—about 1165 B.C. according to our popular chronology, but according to some rather later—into one of the pious families of Israel, which one would fain think of as not quite rare even in that apostate time. It was a Levitical family of Ramathaim-Zophim, in the hill-country of Ephraim—more shortly known as Ramah. This hill-country was part of the Ephraimite ridge that extended down into Benjamin. And in that Highland district

Samuel was not only born, but for the most part lived ; and there ultimately he was gathered to his fathers. That he was of Levite stock is proved from the 6th chapter of 1st Chronicles. His genealogy is there, it will be seen, traced down (vers. 1-28) from Levi ; and again, a few verses further on (vers. 33-47), it is traced back to Levi—beginning with the name of Heman, the grandson of Samuel, who is called by distinction “a singer,” one of the leading choristers of the temple service. Samuel’s father, Elkanah, of the family of Kohath, is called an Ephrathite or Ephraimite (1 Sam. i. 1), that family having originally had their lot among the tribe of Ephraim (Josh. xxi. 20). Elkanah, though a bigamist, as was not thought wonderful in those times, seems to have been a devout Israelite (1 Sam. i. 21), and at the same time a kindly complacent type of man. He is found perfectly ready to fall in with Hannah’s purpose about Samuel, as we shall see ; as, indeed, she quite assumes he will be. In Hannah, Samuel had what many other notable men have had, and what is one of the greatest blessings any man can have, whether notable or obscure. He had in her a truly good and pious and high-minded mother : a mother who prayed for him, and worked for him, and centred all her life’s hopes and endeavours in training him for God.

17. SAMUEL GIVEN IN ANSWER TO PRAYER (1 Sam. i. 11). The very name of the boy, “Heard of God,” was, as the narrative explains, a reminder of the fact that he had been given in answer to prayer. He was himself, and all through life as well as at the first, a witness of the existence and

working of the Most High God. And, in the eleventh verse of the first chapter of the first book of Samuel, we perceive the kind of prayer to which he was the answer.

It is a prayer *full of confidence in God*. Hannah addresses Him as "the Lord of Hosts" (Jehovah-Sabaoth)—the first time this afterwards familiar name is found on the Scripture page. She calls on Him, that is to say, as the Lord who rules in heaven and earth; who leads out the hosts of heaven, the stars, by number; who sends the hosts who dwell in heaven, the angels, upon His errands; who, as the Lord of Sabaoth among men too, can do His will, as in heaven, so also among the inhabitants of earth. If such a God as this will but speak the word, Hannah knows that all things are possible with Him. She has every confidence that He can grant her the desire of her heart.

It is a prayer, further, that is *full of fervour yet of submission*. "Look," she urges, "look on the affliction of Thine handmaid, and remember me, and do not forget Thine handmaid." In this intense reiteration the suppliant is pouring out her very soul before God, if, haply, He may condescend to regard her plaint and to remember her petition. But, while fervent, the prayer is no less submissive in its tone. "If thou wilt," Hannah begins, and as her supplication proceeds, it breathes, even in its importunity, the spirit of one who desires to submit her own will and judgment to the wisdom and goodness of her God.

And it is, the while, an expectant prayer—a prayer *full of expectancy*. Hannah feels that she has come

with her trouble to the right quarter. Her Maker and God, to whom she has now unburdened her heart so completely, will not turn away her prayer from Him unheeded, or withhold His mercy from her. In some wise, beneficent way, she is sure the Lord will deal with her petition. She expects, she knows that. She can leave it all with Him. Through the confidence of her faith her bitterness of heart is soothed away, and when she rises from her knees "her countenance is no more sad" (ver. 18).

Such was the spirit of this prayer. It is the kind of prayer God loves to hear—confident, fervent, submissive, expectant supplication. And in Hannah's case He very manifestly heard and answered it. "The Lord remembered her"; so that this true-hearted daughter of Israel bethought her to signalise the loving-kindness of the Lord in the very name she put upon the child He gave her. She called him "Samuel," *Heard of God*, because she had "asked him of the Lord" (ver. 20).

18. SAMUEL'S EARLY DEDICATION (1 Sam. i. 24-28). The dedication of Samuel may well be described as early. He was consecrated to God, not only from his birth, but even before it. The fervency of Hannah's prayer had uttered itself in an earnest vow to Jehovah that, if a child were granted her, she would give him to the Lord "all the days of his life." And, as God had remembered her petition, she was not forgetful of her vow. Levites were not usually set apart to their sacred service till the age of twenty-five or thirty, and, as a rule, they ceased their tabernacle work at fifty (Numb. iv. 3; viii. 24, 25). But though her heart

might naturally have favoured the postponement, Hannah did not wait for the lapse of years before giving effect to her sacred resolution. She yielded Samuel to the Lord from life's beginning to life's close. Probably when he was at the age of three, or, at most, of seven years, when children were weaned "from the nursery," she brought the child, "as soon as he was weaned," to the House of the Lord in Shiloh; and there she freely, fully, and finally surrendered him, as a youthful Nazirite, to God.

It is a beautiful scene this, where the devout and thankful mother leads her darling boy to the venerable priest, in fulfilment of the vow registered at that same Shiloh a few short years before. A great day it is for these pious parents—for Elkanah does not dissociate himself from her vow (Numb. xxx. 6-8), but heartily agrees to his wife's proposal: a great day, too, for the whole land of Israel, when that little one, lent to the Ramah household by the Lord, is rendered back to Him again—"lent to the Lord as long as he liveth." Blessed loan! It would bring large returns yet, in the fruitful coming years. But what it must have cost the pious Hannah that day to give it, a mother's heart only can fully tell. That Samuel's parents were in opulent, or at least in easy, circumstances, may be argued from the ample present they brought along with him, which was more than was required at the setting apart even of a priest. But the occasion no doubt called forth a special effort, quite out of proportion to their ordinary expenditure. In any case, the giving of the child was to Hannah the real surrender, a living sacrifice, compared with which

the rest she gave would be as nothing in her sight.

19. HANNAH'S HEROISM (1 Sam. i. 24 to ii. 10). Is it not a noble spectacle this mother in Israel presents, as, pointing to her boy, she reminds the high priest of her former appearance there, and with seeming calmness, though with deep emotion and hidden struggle, commits her treasure to the old man's hands, binding to the horns of the altar of her faith all the affections of her motherly heart? "For this child"—think how much "this child" by this time was to Hannah!—"for this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me my asking which I asked of Him; therefore also I, in my turn, have caused the Lord to ask him: as long as he liveth, he shall be asked to the Lord" (vers. 27, 28). And then, not in weeping, but in a kind of devout transport, she breaks into a hymn of sacred joy (ch. ii. 1-11), which another mother of a yet more lovely child heard ringing in her ears long centuries after, while in her Magnificat her soul "magnified the Lord, and her spirit rejoiced in God her Saviour" (Luke i. 46-55). Joy in the Lord, praise of His excellent majesty, adoration of His sovereignty and the glory of His perfections, lofty anticipations of the unfolding of His power and grace in the coming kingdom and priesthood of His Anointed—these, and not the pain of her own sacrifice, are Hannah's theme in this song of thanksgiving and of prophecy, in which she speaks her heart out by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. And then, mother and son are parted, no doubt at the last with many a tear, Hannah carrying back to Ramah his image in

her heart, and fondly dreaming of his future good. But was it not a good thing for the little lad to have his thoughts and ambitions so early directed to the service of God, and not merely to the gaining of worldly success and happiness? And when sons are given so freely to the army, or to commerce abroad, with all the risks and disadvantages the foreign service in these implies, why should parents shrink, as they sometimes do, from the surrender of them to that greatest of all enterprises, the winning of the world for Christ?

20. A LOVELY BOYHOOD (1 Sam. ii. 26). That such a surrender as Hannah made will be amply repaid is fully borne out in the case of Samuel, by what we learn of his boyhood after he was transferred from the bosom of his mother to the bosom of the Church. The transference, in the state of Shiloh then, seemed a sufficiently perilous one. But, in committing her child to the care and company of old Eli, Hannah was committing him also to the care and company of God Himself, who would watch over that young dedicated life and preserve it from corruption.

The child was placed in circumstances, certainly, where he needed a mother's prayers, and nothing less tenderly watchful than the Heavenly Father's guardianship. The corrupting influence of Eli's vicious sons might very easily have brought a blight on the fair young life, which, in its contrasted purity, seemed to spring like a heavenly flower from a dank putrefying soil. Yet the child was mercifully shielded from their evil contagion. For one thing, the sons of Eli were probably too old—and not old

enough—to make a companion of Samuel, happily for him : nor were they after all so wicked, let us charitably believe, as to set themselves deliberately to corrupt his boyish innocence. Then, there is abundant evidence to show that, as sometimes happens, old Eli and young Samuel drew very close together—the old man pleased with the child's simple ways, the boy attracted by the kind-hearted gentleness and sincere piety, and perhaps by the old-world stories, of the aged priest. In this companionship lay the solace of the one, and, under God, the safety of the other.

“And the child Samuel grew on”—in how black a setting is this bright sentence found (1 Sam. ii. 26)!—“grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord and also with men.” Here was an upward progress in every sense, in striking contrast to the downward course of Eli's sons. The Lord was manifestly shielding little Samuel amid the risks around him, and turning his young heart more and more fully to Himself. This brief description of his early life is suggestive of the yet more beautiful boyhood of the Holy Child of Nazareth (Luke ii. 51, 52).

21. A LITTLE MINISTER (1 Sam. ii. 18, 19). Nor was Samuel's a growth of idleness. He was but a child ; and it was not much he could do. Yet, as we read, “Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child, girded with a linen ephod.” He could trim the lamps at least, and open the doors of the sanctuary, and perform little offices of help for aged Eli, and show in a thousand childlike ways his love for the Lord, and his earnest desire

to please and honour Him. Nor did the Lord despise the service of this little minister. He, looking down from Heaven, sees what the children are doing, and observes full well the spirit in which they are living. How well is it, when, like little Samuel, they are found seeking not merely to please themselves, but to please God and to manifest their love to Him.

The value which the Lord places on service rendered to Him, we must remember, is not to be measured by the mere amount of it, and does not depend upon how largely it bulks in the world's eye. In the great day of account, the powerful and the clever and the brilliant may have to stand aside, while some humble follower of His, who was quite unnoticed by the world, is being honoured by the Lord of all. As Henry Ward Beecher once said—"When God measures men in the next world, He will not put the tape about their head ; He will put it about their heart." The question then will be, not how great a service did you render, but out of how great a love did it proceed? Wordsworth wrote in a child's album these beautiful lines—

" Small service is true service while it lasts :
Of friends, however humble, scorn not one.
The daisy, by the shadow that it casts,
Protects the lingering dewdrop from the sun."

And, certainly, the Lord does not despise any of His friends, however humble. He noted, and greatly valued, the love and service of little Samuel.

And what a joy it must have been to Hannah every year, at the annual meeting with her boy, to learn from the old high priest about the progress of

her little Levite, and to see him perhaps, in his tiny linen ephod, performing his light but sacred tasks. As she fitted upon him, to be worn beneath the ephod, the new coat or frock, larger every year, which her own hands had been making for him when they were absent from each other, it would make her heart right glad to know that her child was growing, not only bigger, but better and wiser and more useful with the years. It pleased her, no doubt, to think that ephod and tunic together would remind him "of God and his mother." We can picture Hannah going home to Ramah again, from time to time, with a tranquil and grateful heart, both to pray and to work on for Samuel. That devoted mother would be filled with unspeakable thankfulness to know, that, though her boy was separated from her, he was steadily growing up to be a good and faithful servant of the Lord.

22. A STRIKING CALL (1 Sam. iii. 1-18). It is noticeable that the divine call came to Samuel, not as to Moses when he was well advanced in years, but in days of childhood. It will also be observed that it was in the ordinary discharge of his simple boyish duties that the next remarkable thing we are to mention happened to the little Samuel. This was the call, direct from God, which set him at once in a new relation to his venerable guardian, and, in the long-run, in a new and important relation to the whole people of Israel. It was a call which showed that, if "the lamp was going out in the temple" there was one within God's summons who could keep it alive, or rekindle it if it went out altogether.

Like the turning-point in many a life, it came most unexpectedly. The duties of the day were over ; the seven-branched candlestick had been lit for the night in the sanctuary ; old Eli had retired to rest ; and Samuel, too, had lain down in his place. The lamp of God, we are told, had not gone out, so that morning was still at some distance—when, suddenly, a voice was heard calling, “Samuel !” The child, accustomed apparently even in the night time to run at the old man’s call, imagined that it was Eli’s voice he heard, and hastened to his side. But Eli said, “I called not : lie down again.” Again the summons comes ; and again Samuel similarly responds with a similar result. “For as yet,” it is said, “he did not know the Lord”—did not know Him, that is to say, by any revelation such as this. A third time the silence is broken by that mysterious voice : and once more, with comely alacrity, the boy runs to Eli’s side. Once more, too, with a comely patience, which does not chide the blundering interruption, the high priest bids him go and lie down again. But, on this third occasion, Eli’s religious perception is aroused to the fact that it is no human voice, but Jehovah’s own—so long silent, alas ! to him—that has spoken in the young child’s ear. Therefore said Eli unto Samuel : “Go, lie down : and it shall be, if He call thee, that thou shalt say, ‘Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth’ ” (ver. 9).

We need not pursue in detail the familiar narrative. In simple obedience Samuel does as he is bidden ; hears in awe God’s terrible message ; lies until the morning with palpitating heart ; rises as

usual to open the door of the tabernacle, resolved—like the young hero that he was—for the old man's sake to shut the awful secret in his breast. When Eli, however, with evident agitation, explicitly demands—"What is the thing that the Lord hath said unto thee?" and adjures him to tell the worst, Samuel's open frankness is equal to his former considerate silence. In awe and sorrow he relates everything that has occurred, with that absolute fidelity to truth which characterised him all through his life. With childlike directness—exaggerating nothing, toning nothing down—"he told him every whit, and hid nothing from him" (ver. 18).

23. OLD ELI AT HIS BEST (1 Sam. iii. 15-18). One knows not whether to admire more the humble child or the chastened saint on this singularly trying occasion. Here we see Eli at his best. Thus evidently superseded by the little boy whom he himself had fostered, thus pungently rebuked through the lips he had trained to join in the praises of the sanctuary, the aged priest accepts the chastening without a word of repining or a shadow of resentment. "It is the Lord," he meekly says; "let Him do what seemeth Him good" (ver. 18). The prophet child, to whom unwonted responsibility has come so early, is only an instrument in Jehovah's hands. Eli will love him and rear him as tenderly as before. If his own life has been a conscious failure, if his sons' lives threaten to be a positive curse to all connected with them, here is one through whom the oracles of God again are vocal, and in whom, as the chosen ambassador of God, hope for Israel may still revive. It will be

in devoting himself to the nurture of little Samuel that Eli, as he feels, can best serve his country now ; and, instead of being cooled toward the youth by the painful incidents of that eventful night, he seems to have bound him all the closer to his heart.

“And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him” —literally, “had been with him”—“and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord” (1 Sam. iii. 19, 20). It is evident that other divine communications followed upon the first, and that already in early youth Samuel had become a national influence : “And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh : for the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord” (ver. 21). This expression, “revealed Himself,” is a very striking one. It means, literally, “uncovered the ear,” as one in the East might brush back the flowing hair of an intimate friend and pour into his ear confidences meant for none beside. Already was Hannah reaping abundant interest for her precious loan. For the pain of the early severance she had in her own soul double now. She had no hard dealer to transact with in Jehovah. She had only given to Him what was all the while His own ; and yet how rich was the recompense He brought to the Israelitish mother’s heart.

“Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him.” We cannot fail to be struck with the contrast between the bright, progressive, gracious development of Samuel and the fast downward course of Eli’s sons, who, madly grasping at base present

gratification, lent none of their powers to God, but, forfeiting all the happiness of the future in time and eternity for the sake of short-lived sensual pleasure went down quickly to dishonoured graves. Samuel's was a good motto, surely, for youth or age, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." And for any young life it is an enviable record, this—"And he grew—in knowledge, in power, in wisdom, in favour, in influence; he grew, and the Lord was with him."

CHAPTER V.

SAMUEL, AND ISRAEL, AFTER TWENTY YEARS.

24. THE FORTUNES OF THE ARK AFTER ELI'S TIME (1 Sam. v.-vii. 1). When the curtain next rises on Samuel twenty years have passed, and the verses which reintroduce him in the sacred narrative show that the interval has been a fruitful time both for Israel and for him. In chapters v. and vi. of the First Book of Samuel we have an account given of the fortunes of the Ark of the Covenant of Jehovah after it fell into the hands of the Philistines at the time of Eli's death. The fate of Shiloh, where the sanctuary had been stationed since Joshua's days (Josh. xviii. 1), is not recorded. It was still to rank as one of the sacred places, along with Gilgal, Shechem, Bethel, Mizpeh, and the like, where we read of national assemblies being some-

times held. But it would appear that, Shiloh having been sacked by the Philistines, the tabernacle, though sadly despoiled, was conveyed elsewhere by the vigilant Levites, with Samuel, then probably about twenty years old, among them. They took it, apparently, first to Nob, and then, when Nob was destroyed by Saul, in his rage at the shelter given to David (1 Sam. xxii. 19), to Gibeon (1 Chr. xvi. 39 and xxi. 29). It is what befell the Ark, however—the sacred box of acacia wood, measuring six feet by three, and covered with pure gold—whose associations with the Shechinah presence of Jehovah over its lid, called the mercy-seat, were so hallowed, that the narrative now deals.

Never before had the Ark been captured, and the Philistines were doubtless much elated as they bore the trophy home with them to Ashdod (ch. v. 2) and set it in the house of Dagon (the Fish-god) there. But it proved to be a troublesome and costly prize, alike in Ashdod, and in Gath, and in Ekron, to which it was subsequently sent, because of the Divine judgments that came on its captors while they retained it (ch. v.); and after seven months the Philistines were fain to be rid of their trophy again (ch. vi. 1). It was accordingly despatched, with a propitiatory offering to the God of Israel, on a new cart drawn by two milch cows, never before under the yoke, back to the land of Israel. The kine, leaving their calves behind them, though they kept “lowing as they went,” in token that they had not forgotten them, made straight for Beth-shemesh—a circumstance taken by the Philistines as a proof that their recent troubles had been really visitations

from Jehovah (1 Sam. vi. 7-12). At Beth-shemesh, a Levitical city (Josh. xxi. 16), the Ark was received by resident Levites with burnt-offerings and sacrifices (ver. 15), rendered perhaps by a priest from Shiloh ; but many of the inhabitants having been shortly afterwards smitten because of their irreverent treatment of it, the men of Kirjath-jearim, the "City of Woods," a Gibeonite city, whose inhabitants were under call for Temple service (Josh. x. 17, 23), were required to come and take the Ark, with all its risks, in charge. This they accordingly did, placing it in "the house of Abinadab in the hill," where Eleazar, his son, was sanctified to keep it (1 Sam. vii. 1). And there the Ark, most important of all the sacred symbols of the Israelitish people, remained apart from the Tabernacle till the time of King David, who had it brought from Kirjath-jearim (1 Chr. xiii. 6, *cf.* Ps. cxxxii. 6, "the field of the wood"), by way of the house of Obed-edom, where it was left in terror for three months (1 Chr. xiii. 14), to its resting-place in Jerusalem (1 Chr. xv. 25-xvi. 1).

25. AFTER TWENTY YEARS (1 Sam. vii. 2, 3). We turn, however, to the consideration of the new epoch marked by these words—"And it came to pass, while the Ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long ; for it was twenty years : and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord. And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, ' If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve Him only ; and He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.' "

“The time was long ; for it was twenty years”—a considerable period in any human life, that cannot pass without working very evident change. Those of us who can look back so far cannot fail to be impressed by the thought of the alterations the past twenty years have wrought in the Church, in the community, in the circle of our friends. The children of twenty years ago are grown men and women now, grappling with the problems of life, rejoicing in its triumphs, and saddened by its reverses. Heads then black as the raven are silvered now or something more, and many then familiar figures are missing, because the call has come that summoned them into the silent, unseen land. What changes are sure to be made likewise, both around us and upon us, in the next twenty years ! And, as regards this law of change on both individuals and nations, Samuel and Israel were no exceptions to the general rule, in respect of the twenty years mentioned in the verses before us.

26. SAMUEL'S GROWTH IN NATIONAL INFLUENCE. Though we are told nothing expressly of his progress, Samuel has been growing in the interval. He is no longer the child ministering, as we saw him, by the side of aged Eli. The descending sun of the venerable priest has long since set under a heavy earthly cloud, to rise, we may fondly believe, in greater brightness on the other side, “where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.” The old man, with his virtues and his foibles, is now a memory of the past ; and Samuel is himself a man, in the prime of his full-grown life. The changes within—least heeded often by the world

—are the most important ; and God's young servant has been growing, not in stature only, but in wisdom and in favour both with God and with men. He has been ripening in all his powers for the great task Jehovah has in store for him. The events of the time have not escaped his keen observation, nor has he failed to grasp their meaning. His religious convictions have been deepening the while, and he has been, above all, a man in living communion with the Holy One, and under the teaching of God's own Spirit. He has been much in prayer for his beloved nation, and his breast has been fired by many a lofty impulse to seek Israel's restoration to the liberty which consists in loyal dependence on Jehovah. His voice, too, has evidently given repeated and emphatic utterance to the thoughts of his heart, and has not failed to gain the nation's ear. An influence such as Samuel wields at the epoch here described is not the growth of a day. His progress in popular regard, though unchronicled, has evidently been steadily advancing all these years, till now he is by far the most influential man within the borders of Israel. Samuel's path, in short, has been that of the just, which is "as the shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day."

27. SAMUEL AS PROPHET. Even while Samuel was still young, as we have seen, all Israel had come to recognise in him one "established to be a prophet of the Lord" (1 Sam. iii. 20). It had meant the rising of a new era of hope, when heavenly communication was established again between Jehovah and His people through His youthful servant nurtured by Eli's side. The word of the

Lord was precious in those days ; there was no open vision, and for the lack of it the people were like to perish. The channels of communication seemed practically to be closed, if not for ever sealed. There was but little earnest seeking after God on Israel's part, and there was a corresponding dearth of revelation from Him. But it bespoke brighter days when it could be said of the tabernacle child : "And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh : for the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord. And the word of Samuel came to all Israel" (1 Sam. iii. 21 ; iv. 1). This meant that at length there had been one raised up, through whom Jehovah would speak, and to whom Israel was impelled to listen as one speaking to them in the name and with the authority of God.

The distinguishing title for Samuel most commonly on our lips is, "Samuel the Prophet." He may be fairly regarded, indeed, as, in one important respect, "the first of the prophets." There were no doubt prophets before his time. Moses, great on almost every side, was a prophet mighty in words and in deeds : in some respects a unique type of the Greater One like unto him, who was to come (Deut. xviii. 15 ; Acts vii. 37). And to various men of God, and women too—such as Deborah (Judges iv. 4)—particular messages had been entrusted at different times by Jehovah. But Samuel, to Israel as a second Moses, was the first of that long, unbroken line of heaven-sent teachers, men of divinely-inspired insight and foresight, who from his time to the time of Malachi had so important a part to play alongside of the kingship—to guide, to restrain,

and sometimes to oppose the throne, and to touch at many points the national life—rousing the listless from their apathy, denouncing the profane, ministering comfort to the depressed, awakening hope, and especially Messianic hope, among the faithful in Israel.

We shall afterwards have occasion to notice the important and abiding service Samuel rendered in founding what are commonly called the “schools of the prophets,” which come into such prominence in later Israelitish history. The point for us to remark just now, however, is that if he was recognised even in childhood as “established to be a prophet of Jehovah,” he is much more securely established in universal regard in that capacity when, after the interval of twenty years, he comes forward with such an authoritative message both of rebuke and of hope “unto all the house of Israel” (1 Sam. vii. 3).

28. THE SALUTARY CHANGE ON ISRAEL (1 Sam. vii. 4). It is evident from what is recorded that the period in question has made its impress on the people as well as on the prophet. Do twenty years, then, really make a noticeable change in a nation's life? Yes, always, if we had eyes to perceive it : and sometimes so plainly that, if we have eyes at all, we can hardly miss it. History marches more quickly at some eras, no doubt, than at others. Men still in the mid-time of their years have seen a marvellous alteration on the face of Europe, for example, since the days when the Imperial flag floated on the Tuileries in Paris, and the soldiers of Victor Emmanuel had not yet knocked at the gates

of Rome, or Berlin welcomed back its heroes, to join with Italy in pæans of thankfulness over the unity achieved, though by a bloodier carnage, among the divided sections of the Fatherland. What a change, too, have twenty or even ten years made on the map of Africa, or of the Far East!

But, in the case of nations as of individuals, it is the inner changes that are really the most important: and from these the most peaceful peoples are by no means free. Although our own country, for example, did not undergo the outward shocks to which, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, some of the continental nations were subjected, it needs no special insight to discover manifest changes in public sentiment, tone, ambition, which have made their way during recent decades, and which are certain to be fruitful, partly of good and partly of evil, in the social life of the coming generation. Let us be thankful that the God of nations sits upon the throne: and let us pray, that He to whom belong the issues of life, our fathers' God, may be their children's God as well, and guide our national spirit and our national history in such a way as shall be glorifying to Him and beneficial to all the world!

As regards Israel at the time now under consideration, the change that had been wrought was mainly an inner one—a change in respect of the moral tone and spiritual attitude of the people. Israel too, as well as Samuel, has been gaining valuable lessons in the school of experience, so that it is, in important respects, a different people from

what it was at the beginning of the long twenty years. The nation's heart has been growing sadder, but also wiser ; and if, in the interval, the gloom has apparently deepened, the dawn is by so much the nearer. Socially disunited, morally corrupt, spiritually apostate—the state of Israel when we last viewed it was sufficiently deplorable. What the nation had to be taught was, a sense of its own sin, as well as wretchedness. It had to be brought to realise the height of privilege from which in its perversity it had fallen, and the depth of miserable moral and spiritual abandonment to which it had sunk. A yearning after Jehovah as the chief good had to be awakened in the nation's heart. And this, under God, as we shall see, these twenty years of bitter but healthful discipline have accomplished. With a oneness of feeling and of purpose, which, in outwardly more prosperous days they had too long failed to exhibit, “all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.” Plainly, they have been learning and unlearning much. They have been weaned from the curse of religious formalism. Their idolatrous trust in the Ark is now at an end. God is a reality to them : so is their sin : so is their need of God. Misery has been urging them—Samuel has been drawing them—to sue for pardoning grace. The dew of penitence has fallen on the nation's spirit—formerly so cold, and hard, and unsubdued. A springtime of fresh hope is at hand : the darkest day is past : a new epoch is here. All the house of Israel is lamenting after the Lord. The arms of its helplessness are stretched out after Him. And, as the nation is groping in

its darkness and distress if haply it may find the Lord, there steps forward one to take it, Christlike, by the hand and bring it to God. For Samuel is here—a prepared prophet for a prepared people. The hour has not arrived without the man.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GREAT REVIVAL UNDER SAMUEL THE REFORMER.

29. PROVIDENTIAL EDUCATION FOR REVIVAL (I Sam. vii. 2). The view given us of Israel, as a recreant but repentant people lamenting after Jehovah, is a very instructive one. *Education, probation, salvation*: such is the order of God's dealing with Israel at this time. And, whether we look at the way in which they were brought to a better mind, or at the way in which God, through Samuel, dealt with them in it, or at the sequel to their time of confession and covenant, we may find lessons that are of value still for men.

As regards God's way of *educating* Israel here, we may notice, for one thing, how *He made the school of misery their school of virtue*. This He often finds necessary still. If His people have been misplacing, in part, their reliance, if they have been sinking into formalism and forgetting Him, He may constrain them, by dealings sharp but salutary, to remember Him and seek Him again with the whole

heart, and to find in Him their only but sufficient help. Thus temporal hardship and loss are often turned to spiritual gain. Amid the perishing of earthly ambitions, the tottering of earthly props, the crumbling into ruin of earthly foundations, the soul sometimes finds a securer stay in God ; and, amid the withered leaves of human disappointment, there springs the fair undying flower of a hope that will never make ashamed. Men have often, like these old Israelites, to thank God for the kindness of His severity.

Another noteworthy thing was the *gradual* way in which Jehovah brought the nation's heart to seek Him. Before it could be said that "all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord," there was a long, hidden process of moral and spiritual preparation. So is it often with men still. The God of patience has to mete out a lengthened inward discipline to many a wayward, prodigal soul, of which only the result appears to other eyes—the process being very partially known even to the soul that is the subject of it. A conversion sometimes seems a very sudden thing ; but when the secrets of all hearts are revealed, it will be seen in most cases, that there has been a gracious work of preparation before it. The Lord in His own way has been loosening the ties that bind to earth ; creating a distaste for sin ; revealing the realities of the unseen world, in its terrors or in its glories ; disclosing to the longing heart the satisfying beauty of Incarnate Holiness, and the blessed possibility of being conformed both to the sufferings and to the risen life of the Holy Love that gave Himself to die

for sinful men. And even to the soul that has long resisted and rebelled, but is now prepared to turn, in weariness of earth and sin, to seek the Lord, the gracious promise still comes, as it came to Israel, of a welcome back.

30. PROBATION IN REVIVAL (1 Sam. vii. 3, 4). It was a significant and promising feature of this old Israelitish revival, that it was distinguished by manifestations of real sorrow for sin. Not much that is of lasting value need be looked for from any religious movement of the kind from which this feature is plainly absent. Such a movement may be extensive, after its sort, and may fill the eye, and also the ear, for a season ; but if it is not intensive too, deep as well as wide in its influence, it is sure, in the outcome, to be sadly disappointing.

Samuel clearly recognised the importance of a repentance deep as well as demonstrative, and he proceeds to deal with the revival movement of his time just as we should expect a man of his thorough-going, downright character to do. Indications on Israel's part of a desire to return to Jehovah are truly welcome to him. The sound of lamentation after the Lord which greets his ear from various quarters is to him, in the nation's circumstances, the sweetest music. It is the prelude, he believes, to another and higher strain. But he will test the feeling. Neither Jehovah nor the prophet of Jehovah will be content with mere emotionalism. Sobs of lamentation — or shouts of praise—are an easy thing to utter. They are not in themselves a sure evidence of anything deeper than the merest surface

work. And if there was one thing that Samuel hated, it was this—surface work : he, for one, would be no party to it. The lessons of Eli's weak and blameworthy amiability were too deeply burned into his memory for that. And, like a man of God, a true reformer, full of a love to his country that does not hide her sins, but yearns to have them put away, he says—"If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you ; and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve Him only ; and He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines" (ver. 3).

The prophet here, it will be observed, begins with an "if," a supposition, to which he couples a very express command, with whose fulfilment again he joins a very explicit promise. Obedience to the command will prove the truth of the supposition ; and the fulfilment of the promise will be the sure reward of obedience to the command.

That there may be true reformation and restoration, Samuel insists, in the first place, on the necessity of Israel making real and thorough work of their return to God. He does not believe in tinkering from the outside. This movement, he says, must have its springs within the heart, and the whole heart must be engaged in it. But, he adds, if this is so, there will be outward and manifest tokens of this sincerity and thoroughness—tokens which he not only expects, but, in Jehovah's name, demands. "Put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you." That on the negative side. Have done with everything displeasing to God ; put decisively from you whatever would divide your loyalty

to Him. Show that you loathe the idols that drew your trust and love away from God, to your undoing ; show it by taking them, without demur and without delay, and dashing them in pieces. "And prepare your hearts unto Jehovah, and serve Him only." This, on the other, the positive side. Let your life without prove the reality of your conversion within—as a life of steadfastness, animated by a heart "prepared, or fixed, unto the Lord," and as a life of devotedness—of single-hearted devotion—to a single Master. "Fix your hearts unto the Lord, and serve Him only."

Samuel is wisely founding here on the principle afterwards so plainly announced by that Greater Prophet of whom he was a type—"By their fruits ye shall know them." He was placing before these Israelites tests to which, whether conscious of it or not, all professing converts are in the sight of God subjected still. "The doctrine of repentance," it has been well said, "is the appendix to every enunciation of the Ten Commandments and the preface to every offer of the Gospel." That is, every man who is sincerely and intelligently confronted with the ideal of human duty in God's law has a call to self-abasement in view of his own sad and guilty departure from it ; and the offer of the Gospel, the call to faith, comes with appropriateness and, by the blessing of God's Spirit, with effect, to a soul that is thus bowed in penitence under a sense of sin, and filled with a longing to turn from it to God.

Happily in the case of these Israelites the repentance was real, as was shown by its fruits ; and

the twin grace of Faith was found, as is her wont, beside her sister Penitence. Their sorrow for sin was accompanied by a humble trust in God, and both were evidenced by a prompt and hearty obedience to Jehovah's call. "Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the Lord only" (ver. 4).

31. SALVATION THROUGH REVIVAL (1 Sam. vii. 5-12). Let us inquire now as to the fulfilment of the promise with which Samuel had coupled his command—the cheering promise to a repentant Israel, of salvation from their enemies. The prophet did not trust in his own arm to realise it. But he did not doubt that He for whom he spoke would be found both able and ready to make His promise good. And Samuel betook himself to prayer. Summoning all the people to Mizpeh ("Watch-tower"; perhaps to be identified with the striking hill about five miles north of Jerusalem, now known as Neby-Samwil) in a grand national convention, he engaged with them in a solemn religious service, which has had no better parallel in modern times than in the great and solemn assemblies of the Scottish Covenanters.

It was a time of confession, and of consecration too. The pouring out of the water before the Lord (ver. 6) betokened, not only that the people's hearts were poured out in repentant sorrow, but that the vows of that solemn day were never to be revoked, but were "like water spilt upon the ground which cannot be gathered up again." It was Israel's way of saying that there was nothing kept back in their covenant with God; that theirs was a full

and final surrender to Him ; that they had burnt their bridges, and cherished no thought of keeping open a retreat to the far country of apostasy, from which they had come back again to God.

Then came a moment of extremity, which was God's opportunity of fulfilling, very strikingly, His promise of deliverance. The enemy is never very far from a covenanted people, nor from a covenanted soul. And Israel's hereditary foes at this time were peculiarly on the alert. The Philistines, hearing of the gathering at Mizpeh, resolve to strike a blow at this new national organisation before it can be properly knit together. It was, of course, the disunion of Israel that had enabled this small nation of the coast to dominate Palestine ; and they determine, by pursuing their usually successful policy of massing their troops promptly at the point required, to scatter the Israelites as heretofore. It was an unarmed religious meeting against which they moved. Their advance struck terror into the hearts of the children of Israel. But the Philistines were met this time by a power greater than their own ; for the apparently helpless people fell back upon a weapon which they had long dishonoured and disused, but which was mighty to the defeat of their foes—the weapon of believing prayer.

Israel turned in their distress to Samuel, as their chosen and trusted intercessor, beseeching him—"Cease not to cry unto the Lord *our* God for us" (ver. 8). And at their call, he who as prophet had spoken to them for God pleads with all earnestness to God for them. Samuel's is a prayer that rests

on the plea of sacrifice, and it is not uttered in vain. No numerous or costly offerings are made: only a little lamb is slain. But Jehovah hears and answers. With a voice of thunder He dismays the Philistines. They turn and flee. And the Israelites, so weak and craven in their godless, prayerless days, are heroes now. The foes who trampled on them are smitten before the covenanted nation, on whom now rests the power of a covenant-keeping God. "They pursued the Philistines, and smote them until under Beth-car" (ver. 11).

It was an instance of the victory which overcometh the world through faith. Thus is the old place of defeat made sometimes still the place of triumph, and Stones of Help (ver. 12) become both monuments of thanksgiving and monitors of continued faith and hope toward God.

32. SAMUEL AS PRIEST (1 Sam. vii. 9). In this episode Samuel is found exercising the priestly as well as the prophetic office. But this was not out of keeping with his position as "a faithful priest," whom God had said to Eli (1 Sam. ii. 35) He would raise up, to do according to the divine will. He does, in all deliberation, what he afterwards denounces as presumption in Saul (1 Sam. xiii. 9-13): he acts as a sacrificing priest. The "whole burnt-offering" was an Aaronic oblation; and, as with Aaron when he offered sacrifice for the first time, Samuel's offering here, being probably his first, was a very youthful victim—"a sucking lamb." It is evident that his action was not resented but approved by Jehovah; for "the Lord heard him," and, in accordance with

the prediction of Hannah's song (1 Sam. ii. 10), thundered out of heaven upon Israel's adversaries. It would appear that after this time Samuel repeatedly, if not habitually, acted as a priest, though he did not belong to the family of Aaron. He had an altar at Ramah (1 Sam. vii. 17), and we find him again and again performing sacrificial acts (ch. ix. 14; xi. 15; xvi. 5). We also find him remembered long after in this connection (2 Chron. xxxv. 18). He did not set himself in opposition to the Aaronic priests, but acted by way of emergency and under a special call to the priesthood (1 Sam. ii. 35), which has been likened to the special call that summoned Paul to the apostleship, though he was not one of the Twelve. Moses and Aaron and Samuel are named together (Ps. xcix. 6) for their power in intercession, and the record of Samuel's life continually reminds us that he was by character and habit a man of prayer.

33. SAMUEL AS JUDGE (1 Sam. vii. 6, 15, 16). The prophet who acted with unquestioned title as priest is here seen invested in the further important office of judge, though the three offices were usually kept rather jealously apart. "He gave them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years," says Paul at Antioch in Pisidia, "until Samuel the prophet" (Acts xiii. 20). The judgeship may have been conferred on him originally in connection with this Ebenezer victory, "his first and, so far as we know, his only direct military achievement"; but he continued to judge Israel, we are told, "all the days of his life" (ver. 15), and it is indicated, just in one brief sentence (ver. 16), how patiently and faith-

fully, "from year to year" and from place to place, he did his judge's work.

These quiet unrecorded years of his, though outwardly uneventful, were years, nevertheless, of untold usefulness, most honourable to him and most beneficial to Israel. They were spent in the needed work of confirming the national life after the victory over the Philistines (1 Sam vii. 13, 14). Amid the peace without, and the rising prosperity within the Israelitish borders, it was given to Samuel to be no mere figurehead, but under Jehovah a living centre of the national unity and a living guide to the national aspiration after better things. The tribes had still what we would call "local government," but Samuel's was a truly national influence. Not content with one earnest appeal to the national conscience, or one grand dramatic acknowledgment of national obligation, he cheerfully and consistently strove, with whatever influence God gave him, to keep the people mindful of the secret of true national prosperity—unbroken loyalty to Jehovah. As prophet, he spoke to Israel for Jehovah; as intercessor, he spoke to Jehovah for them; as judge, he administered Jehovah's law among them. And all was done so quietly that a whole period of such threefold service—typical of that of the Prophet, Priest, and Ruler who was yet to come—may be summed up in a verse! There was no fanfare, no blare of trumpets with Samuel. He was not of the type of statesman who is fond of political fireworks. Though some of the situations of his life were singularly sublime, he never strove after effect or thrust him-

self needlessly into public view. Rather was he of those who are well pleased to work on in retirement ; content, if God wills, to be counted among the nameless forces of the moral universe, while rendering to their generation solid service little heard of, it may be, in their own day, but greatly felt both then and afterwards. It was no flash fire which shone from Ramah upon Israel, but a clear, steady flame. Both there and in his circuit to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpeh (where he began and ended his administration, 1 Sam. vii. 5-7 and x. 17), Samuel let his light so shine before men that not he but the God he served might be glorified among them.

CHAPTER VI.

SAMUEL'S OLD AGE.

34. A SMALL PLATFORM FOR A GREAT LIFE (1 Sam. vii. 17). We have already treated of the childhood and the manhood of Samuel, and now we have to view him in old age. If his childhood was lovely and his manhood powerful, his age, no less, was gracious ; and even when he was far past the zenith of his earthly life Samuel, as we shall see, was a mighty influence in Israel—not in virtue of mere position, but in virtue of character—upon the side of God.

It is very striking to notice how great a life may be lived on a comparatively narrow outward plat-

form. It would seem that Samuel was never many miles away from his native place, Ramathaim-zophim in the hill country of Ephraim. In Ramah he was born, "and his return was to Ramah ; for there was his house : and there he judged Israel ; and there he built an altar unto the Lord" (1 Sam. vii. 17). And there at length he died and was buried (ch. xxv. 1). His birthplace, his hearth, his judgment-seat, his altar, and his grave were all in that little mountain town of Palestine. An outwardly restricted life, one would say ; but Samuel's was a life which had free communication upward—toward heaven and from it—and, by God's grace within him, Samuel's life was one of the most morally-influential lives on record in the Word of God. In God's Providence it was passed at a spot where the Israelitish people could be easily assembled, and at a centre from which his influence could readily extend to every corner of the land, as an influence ever on the side of Jehovah. His birthplace, we have reason to believe, was the place of his birth into God's spiritual kingdom ; his hearth, his family life, was pervaded by God's presence ; his judgment-seat, his daily sphere of duty, was filled under an abiding sense of responsibility to God ; his altar was an altar where, with outward offerings, he yielded first the offering of the heart ; his very grave, as the grave of a good man and true, had a sacredness for Israel. Thus great Samuel made little Ramah great, because he made it the scene of a noble, God-fearing life, and taught men there, in face of all contrary influence, what it is to be leal, utterly true, to God.

35. THE APPROACH OF SAMUEL'S AGE (1 Sam. viii. 1). It is, however, of old Samuel that we are to speak now, and the first thought suggested in this connection is the stealthy, but sure and swift, approach of Samuel's age.

It makes one almost sad to find it put on record almost immediately after the story of his heroic appearance, in the very prime of his manhood, at Mizpeh—"And it came to pass, when Samuel *was old*" (1 Sam. viii. 1). But it must be remembered that a great deal is covered by the last two verses of the preceding chapter. There was a long period of steady work, of quiet, pervasive influence, of steadfast witness-bearing represented by these words: "And he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places" (1 Sam. vii. 16, 17). While Samuel's work as a judge was carried on chiefly at Ramah, he held a circuit court at these three separate centres year by year. And, though doubtless there were then, as there are still nearer home, occasional cases that made a special stir in the commonwealth, and marked a kind of epoch in the judge's life, the course of justice as administered by Samuel flowed for the most part smoothly on: so that, perhaps even before he himself was more than half aware of it, Samuel (who might be spoken of, just a chapter or two back, as "little Samuel") could be fitly approached and addressed by the elders of Israel, saying: "Behold, thou art old" (1 Sam. viii. 5). He had called in, it is true, by this time, the help of his sons; but probably he persuaded himself that,

in so doing, he was looking to the future, rather than to the past and the effects that it had wrought upon him. It was not that he needed assistance in his work—not at all ! There were many good years of hard work in him yet ; but it might be good for the young men themselves to be gradually accustomed to offices of trust, and certainly it might be well, in case anything *should* happen to him, that the nation should have men like them to turn to, as trained and tried administrators of the law. Thus, almost unnoticed perhaps, the years had glided past, and Samuel, like others once rich in time, had to realise that he was growing old. The lisping, open-hearted child whom we first learned to know by Eli's side, is more like Eli himself now—an old man, leaning on the top of his staff. Only, he had a better right to be old ; for he had done vastly more and better work than ever Eli did.

36. THE TRIALS OF SAMUEL'S AGE (1 Sam. viii. 1-6). When old age had not only approached but come, Samuel found, as many do, that it brought its own peculiar trials with it. Trouble had been preparing for him in two quarters, where, apparently, he had not looked for it : and the evening of his life was not to be so serene as one would naturally have expected, as well as hoped, that it would be.

37. DISAPPOINTMENT IN HIS SONS (1 Sam. viii. 1-3, 5). First, there was his family. Samuel had sad trial and disappointment in his two sons. He had given them good names at their birth—Joel, “Jehovah is God,” and Abiah, “Jehovah is my Father.” But they were little deserving of their

names and their opportunities. There are few sights more pitiful than to see a good man surrounded by children that are not worthy of him—to see him going down to death, with a wistfulness in his eye that bespeaks the uneasiness at his heart, about those who should have been the greatest comfort of his age, but are rather its chief concern. Sometimes, as in Eli's case, such a harvest may be traceable to a sowing of remissness and fatal ease, the thought of which may lessen sympathy. In other cases, domestic trouble of the kind cannot be attributed to such a cause, but can only be assigned to the perversity that ignores example, and despises correction, and seizes on the chances of wrong doing, which every child who wishes them can find, but which are specially open to the children of those who are largely occupied with public affairs. Samuel had unhappily but little comfort or satisfaction in his sons, though he desired, no doubt, and hoped the very best things for them. But, after what he had seen of the household at Shiloh—besides that he was himself a very different type of man from Eli—we may be assured that it was in spite of, rather than because of, their early training, that the sons of Samuel went astray.

It is especially to be observed, that their particular offence was one most clearly and utterly inexcusable in the sons of such a father. Samuel was the very soul of uprightness—well entitled to the name of “the Jewish Aristides”—a man “whose eye, even turned on empty space, beamed keen with honour.” And when we read that “his sons walked not in his

ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment," we see how manifestly theirs was an offence against clear light, and directly in the face of a holy example. Hence, while we are angry with Eli, when we read of what his sons did, almost under his eye, and of how feebly he remonstrated with them—we are sorry, rather, for Samuel, when we read of how his paternal hopes were dashed by the mean-spirited selfishness and falsity of his sons, in the positions of trust for which he had sought to train them.

For other than personal or family reasons, it was undoubtedly a sore trial to Samuel that these sons of his should have turned out so ill. To do him justice, his aim in having them appointed to judge-ships at Beersheba, in the south, was not the perpetuation of family influence and name, but the advancement of his country's good. And the patriot as well as the father in him was sorely wounded, when the young men betrayed their trust.

38. SLIGHTED BY AN UNGRATEFUL PEOPLE (1 Sam. viii. 4-6). It is proverbial that trials never come singly, and in this case one vexation prepared the way for another. The people next, taking occasion from the character and conduct of Samuel's shameless sons, added further trial to the old man's age. One day a deputation of the elders of Israel waited upon him at Ramah, and said: "Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations" (ver. 5). There was no room for Samuel to mistake his relative position now. He was indeed an old man, surely, when a deputation of the elders

could come and call him so to his face, and tell him that it was time for him to make way for a successor, other than those sons whom he had been expecting gradually to prepare for assuming the full duties of the judgeship in his room.

Yes, it was just the oft-repeated story : a long life of humble, patient public service, rewarded by him who had rendered it being coolly elbowed aside, to make way for another who might be expected to serve the public better than he now could do. There is no word, and apparently little thought, of how much Samuel had been to Israel. The minds of the elders and of the people are too full of their own projects and ambitions to concern themselves about an old man's feelings and ideas of what is right. They give him a heedless stab, in passing, about his worthless sons, and press their demands with a ruthless eagerness for the appointment of "*a king*" to rule and judge them in his room.

Now, this was a trial to Samuel. We are all called upon, sooner or later, to regard our own work as but a preparation for some other man's—the scaffolding, and no more, by the help of which the man of the future is to rear his greater monument. And this, even if the successor is likely to be all that we could wish, is not a welcome suggestion to flesh and blood. But to Samuel the trial was made keener by the kind of successor it was proposed by the elders to appoint. They did not merely request that the prophet should consult God in the matter, but came as those whose minds were made up, and who had a very definite demand to make. "A king," they wished, "a king to judge us

like all the nations"—and it was here, and not in the mere slight implied to himself, that the bitterness of Samuel's disappointment lay. For he felt that it was not only he that was being pushed aside, but those principles also for which, in Jehovah's name, he had lived and laboured so long among the people. "A king"—was not Jehovah Himself the King of Israel? And what was this project to Samuel's view but an unworthy falling in with the fashions and maxims of a godless world; what was it but the senseless upturning of the political forms which, following in the wake of Moses, he had given his life to restore, revivify, and perfect: what was it but a slight, not on him only, but on the Jehovah for whom and to whom he had so often spoken in the hearing of the people?

Samuel could readily read the motives that were operating in the minds of the people at this time: their desire for change, their disposition to put their trust in an arm of flesh, their love of show, their ambition, as they themselves confessed, for a spirited foreign policy—"that our king may go out before us and fight our battles." And the more he saw of their spirit, the less he liked their plan. It was a great trial to him in his old age, this proposal that the elders urged upon him—a great trial, both in itself and in the way they pressed it. But—"Samuel prayed unto the Lord" (ver. 6).

39. THE NOBILITY OF SAMUEL'S AGE (1 Sam. viii. 6). It is said to be an attainment of the greatest difficulty to grow old gracefully. But Samuel did something higher and better than this

—he grew old graciously. Never does his true nobility shine forth more brightly than in the closing stage of his great career. The good man did not begin to fret or repine, and charge the elders with ingratitude, when they proposed his prompt and summary abdication of place and power among the people. He felt that there was a far more serious element in the case than that which concerned him and the position he might have expected to retain for a few more years. Personal honours meant little to Samuel; but the honour of Jehovah and the true good of Israel were everything to him. “And Samuel prayed unto the Lord.” What have we here in the venerable saint, but the same spirit of open-hearted trust and single-hearted obedience which were seen in Samuel the child? Not less beautiful, surely, is it in the experienced, chastened, mellowed believer, turning for counsel to his God, than it was in the inexperienced boy—“Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth.”

40. CONCESSION TO THE POPULAR DEMAND (1 Sam. viii. 7-22). It is evident that Samuel's own judgment was clearly against the introduction of a monarchy, at least in that era of his nation's history. No doubt provision had been made in the law of Moses for its possible introduction one day, and regulations had been laid down which would conserve, in that event, important national interests and rights. But in Samuel's eyes the time was not ripe for such a change. The appointment of a king—and such a king, and a king sought in such a spirit—at that

time would not be, to his view, an evolution so much as a revolution. The popular mood, as he read it, was to get rid, if possible, of some of the direct religious responsibilities involved in Israel's very direct and close relation to Jehovah; and he saw an obvious risk of the nation sinking very much to the level of any ordinary eastern despotism, with an irreligious, irresponsible, tyrannical monarch at its head. Hence Samuel, with the light he had, was distinctly opposed to the people's wishes. "The thing was evil in the eyes of Samuel." But, before taking any public stand against it, he took counsel in the quarter whence he drew his guidance and inspiration—he went with the case to God.

The result of the interview with Jehovah is, that Samuel's view of the sinfulness and folly of the motive and method of Israel's demand is confirmed by God. The demand for a king, at the time and in the spirit in which it was made, was nothing else than a revolt from Jehovah Himself—in keeping with the long, weary history of Israel's rebelliousness since the day when He brought them out of Egypt (ver. 8). Nevertheless, God charges Samuel to grant their request, while faithfully remonstrating with them as to the nature of the step they proposed to take, and the consequences which would ensue. "They have not rejected thee," says Jehovah, "but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. . . . Now, therefore, hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them" (1 Sam. viii. 7, 9). This, accordingly, Samuel pro-

ceeds to do, indicating with faithful candour the risk they incur of drifting into an ordinary oriental despotism. He gives them a vivid picture of the exactions that will be needed to support the glories of the monarchy to which they are looking forward with such eagerness (vers. 11-18). But to the prophet's warnings they only answer with impatient persistency: "Nay; but we will have a king over us; that we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles" (vers. 19, 20).

And so God granted the popular request. As He says afterwards in Hosea, "I gave thee a king in Mine anger." And Israel, as Samuel had foretold, had occasion to repent at leisure by-and-by the headlong urgency of their demand. They were neither the first nor the last to reap the unwelcome consequences of self-willed and petulant prayer.

41. SAMUEL'S PART IN THE APPOINTMENT OF A KING (1 Sam. ix. 15-27; x. 1, 17-25; xi. 14, 15; xii. 1-25). It is evident that Samuel had now a very difficult part to perform, as a man of influence in Israel, during the years of life still given to him after the appointment of a king. He might have been personally content to die just then, as the last of the judges—to lie down and close his eyes to the troubles of an epoch full of unrest and unwelcome change. But God has work for him yet to do; and bravely the old man sets himself to its accomplishment. Though he has not sympathised with or encouraged the new movement, he gives himself loyally to make the best of it, now that a monarchy is decided upon. The popular current could not be

stemmed ; he will try, then, in self-forgetful dignity to guide it well.

God reveals to Samuel who the first King of Israel is to be, and brings the two providentially together at Ramah, where at a feast Samuel honours Saul with the royal portion, and afterwards anoints him with a vial of oil, emblem of the anointing Spirit, and gives to him the kiss of respectful loyalty (ch. x. 1). Saul's own mind is reassured through certain signs that are given him (ch. x. 2-13). Then, in the use of the lot, since the matter of choosing the Divine representative was one for God, and not merely for the people, to determine, Samuel makes it publicly evident at Mizpeh (1 Sam. x. 17-24), in the sight of the assembled tribes, that it is the son of Kish, a man of Benjamin, who is divinely designated as the first to sit on Israel's throne. With great heartiness, the prophet seeks to exalt Saul, thus chosen, in the eyes of all the people. These, with some exceptions, are ready with their acclamations: "See ye whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people?" And all the people shouted, with a new shout that was destined to become very familiar in after generations, "Long live the king" (ch. x. 24). Then, with a wise forethought—not likely to have occurred to the populace on a day of enthusiasm like that—Samuel proceeds, in the hearing of the king-elect and of all Israel, to define "the manner of the kingdom." Not only so, but he writes it in a book (ver. 25) to be laid up before the Lord, as a witness to the type of limited monarchy which was that day set up, with suitable safeguards, over Israel and under God.

After Saul's triumphant rescue of Jabesh-gilead from Nahash the Ammonite, the kingdom is solemnly renewed at Gilgal amid great rejoicings (ch. xi. 14, 15); and, with dignified goodwill, Samuel publicly hands over the civil authority, that had formerly been vested in him, to the king from whom the people now hoped so much. He intimates the while, after a noble address (ch. xii. 1-15), which has been compared to that of Moses at Mount Sinai (Exod. xix. 3-8), and that of Joshua at Shechem (Josh. xxiv. 1-28), that his interest in the wellbeing of his country and his desire to serve it in any capacity are to be as deep and strong as ever. Though no longer their judge, he is still to be their intercessor, and still God's prophet and monitor to them. It is the true patriot as well as saint that speaks in these words, which Samuel addresses to the people as descriptive of his future relationship to Israel:—"As for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way. Only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things He hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king" (ch. xii. 23-25).

42. **SAMUEL'S AFTER-RELATIONS WITH SAUL.** There is nothing more interesting or inspiring in the prophet's life than the story of his relationship to Saul, which will come out more fully in our consideration of the latter's unhappy reign. It was a noble challenge which Samuel meanwhile was able to utter to Israel in the young king's

hearing, at the close of his own civil administration: "And now, behold, the king walketh before you: and I am old and grey-headed; and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day. Behold, here I am: witness against me before the Lord, and before His anointed" (1 Sam. xii. 2, 3). And when the people, with one voice, declared that Samuel's record had been clean, it was itself a most practical reminder to his young successor of the high ideal to be kept before him in his reign, if he would worthily follow up the period when the Lord their God was king (ver. 12), and Samuel was their judge.

We know how Saul, after a bright beginning, made a miserable failure of his kingship and of his life. He became a very heartbreak to the aged prophet, and a curse instead of a blessing to his people. Yet, with the patience of an undying love as well as the persistence of an unshrinking fidelity, Samuel, while he lived, yearned over Saul, and sought to be not merely a kind of conscience to the faithless king, but a good angel to lead him back into the ways of God. "Speaking the truth in love" was a function which the old prophet had lamentably often to discharge in dealing with the erring son of Kish, whom he mourned after, even when God had rejected him from being king. It was a thankless task; but nobly Samuel did his part, in the lowlier place assigned to him, as in the higher, even to the end. Character, not position, was what gave grandeur to this man. Well might all Israel lament after him when he died: for they never lost a truer friend. Upon his tomb in Ramah

(1 Sam. xxv. 1) where they buried him, probably about the age of eighty, in the court or garden of his house, they might have inscribed this by way of epitaph — "We thank God for every remembrance of thee. An Israelite, indeed, in whom there was no guile!"

43. SAMUEL AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (1 Sam. xix. 20; x. 5, 6). Before we pass from Samuel's life to some consideration of the life of Saul, there is one aspect of that great man's usefulness which we must not leave unnoticed. This is the service he rendered, from early days to the very close of his life, to the cause of religious education in Israel. His "Welfare of Youth" scheme is sometimes overlooked, from the exclusive attention given to the part he was called to take in the political affairs of the nation; but the work he did in that connection was a very genuine work, and most fruitful and abiding in its results.

We have had occasion to regard Samuel as a great prophet (paragraph 27). This he was distinctively from first to last of his life, as the narrative brings out under the various titles applied to him. He was in the special sense a "man of God" (*cf.* 1 Sam. ii. 27 and ix. 8, 10). He was also a "seer," as he is repeatedly called (1 Sam. ix. 9, 11, 18, 19; *cf.* 2 Sam. xxiv. 11; 1 Chr. ix. 22; xxix. 29): for God's representatives had to be "to the people as eyes," the intelligence department of the commonwealth. But not only was Samuel *Ish-Jahweh*, a "man of God," and *Roëh*, a "seer," or *Hoseh*, a "gazer." He was in the highest and largest sense *Nabi*, a "prophet," a speaker for Jehovah, the bearer

of a message from God, an interpreter of the divine will in its practical bearing on national duty and national expectation. We find Paul signalling him as "Samuel the prophet" (Acts xiii. 20); and Peter, in his address in Solomon's porch, referring to the mission of Jesus and His death and rising again as the appropriate fulfilment of ancient prophecy, declares—"Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days" (Acts iii. 24).

This expression, "Samuel and those that follow after," is a significant one. It reminds us that in him we have not only a prophet, who was a close student of the law of Moses, and "the literary executor" in all probability of Joshua and the Judges, but the head of a prophetic line whose preparation for their recognised function in the national life owed much to certain educational methods set on foot in Samuel's day. "The schools of the prophets," as they are called, came into great prominence at a later date, as in the days of Elijah and Elisha, when we find companies of them numbering fifty (2 Kings ii. 7), and even four hundred (1 Kings xxii. 6); and though they are little spoken of in Samuel's age there is reason to believe that they had their origin under him. With a statesman's eye to the future—which Saul never had—he looked to education, and especially religious education, as an important defensive aid to Mosaic institutions, and a fruitful means of spreading right ideas regarding God's government of the nation; and so the schools were instituted for "sons"

or "children" (which really stands, without reference to age, for "pupils" or "scholars") of the prophets. It is interesting to be told that "long before Plato had gathered his disciples around him in the olive grove, or Zeno in the portico, these institutions had sprung up under Samuel in Judea."

It is evident that Samuel had taken a practical interest in this training work early in his life. Already at the time when he first meets the son of Kish, he is able to tell Saul that he will encounter not far from Bethel a company or "chain" of prophets, an ordered band, trained in orchestral music, and filled with a spirit of prophecy whose power Saul himself will feel (1 Sam. x. 5, 10). And far on in his history we find Samuel, after his final break with Saul, spending the evening of his life at Naioth (the "pastures" or "dwellings") in Ramah, as president of a company or "congregation" of prophets, among whom David, having by the help of Michal escaped Saul's murderous fury, finds a refuge. It is told of the messengers of the king that, "when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, *and Samuel standing as appointed over them*" (1 Sam. xix. 20), they also were seized with the divine influence and prophesied, as was subsequently the case with Saul himself.

There would appear to have been schools at such centres as Gilgal, Gibeah, Bethel, and by-and-by Jerusalem, as well as at Naioth in Ramah, which has been likened, as the earliest of them, to Oxford in its beginnings. There is no evidence that David was brought up as a "son" of the prophets, though it is likely enough that he may have been a day

scholar with Samuel, and that it was by no means his first visit to Naioth when he sought shelter there from Saul. It is thought that Nathan and Gad (1 Chron. xxix. 29), who figured so prominently in the prophetic capacity in David's and in Solomon's reign, may have been among David's school-fellows in early days. It is recorded that at a later time, under the presidency of Elisha, one of the schools grew so numerous that the "sons of the prophets" asked leave of their president or "father" (*Abba* : cf. Abbot, the head or father of a monastery), to build, in the simple style of the time, a New College on the banks of the Jordan (2 Kings vi. 1-2).

As regards the subjects taught in the prophetic schools, besides reading, writing, the study of the law, and lessons in the history of the nation and in the principles of the Jewish religion, it is evident that, from the first, music and poetry had an important place (1 Sam. x. 5). Samuel himself came of a musical stock, and apparently gave greater prominence to music in religious service than it had before. If it be true, as is alleged, that the musical gift usually descends through the mother, we know what a soul for song his mother Hannah had. Then we find that in King David's time it was Samuel's grandson, Heman, who was set over the orchestra (1 Chron. xv. 16-19 ; xxv. 1-8), for the service of the house of God.

The influence wielded through Samuel's schools, through David and others, cannot be measured. It is no doubt felt still in many of the Psalms, and other Old Testament books. For the Bible as we have it—viewing it on its human side and in its

literary form—we are greatly indebted to the schools of the prophets. It is claimed that in the Old Testament Scriptures “we have the eternal results of that culture which, starting from the wise forethought of Samuel, ended in making the Jews one of the most highly cultured peoples of ancient times.” So that, “Samuel’s schools wrought first for the mental and moral cultivation of the people of Israel, and finally for the teaching of the whole world.”

CHAPTER VIII.

SAUL : ON THE UP-GRADE.

14. A MISSING NAME. “Of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets”—so runs the roll of honour in the great eleventh chapter of the Hebrews. Is there not an omission here? What of Saul? Why do we miss *his* name from among the heroes of the faith? Why, but just because, with all his gifts and opportunities and attractions, true faith in God was precisely what Saul lacked : so that his name would be an intrusion in the noble roll call. Saul’s is one of the saddest stories in the Bible. There was a certain grandeur about his life. He was a man cast in a big mould. He was a great soldier, though perhaps he could never have been a great statesman. There were possibilities of the genuine hero in him. But his heart was

never right with God : and his life was a structure built on shifting sand. In Saul the hope of May became the disappointment of November. His early promise was unfulfilled.

45. **SAMUEL AND SAUL CONTRASTED.** The life of Samuel, which we have just considered, was a singularly consistent and complete life. It rose in beauty, waxed in power, and, though it knew some troubles toward the evening, it set in serene and steady radiance. Saul's, on the other hand, was a life of violent contrasts. The brightness of its beginning was too soon shrouded in a chilly gloom : and the darkness, instead of lifting, grew more dense, till the sun of his life set amid the blackness of despair. Or, to change the figure, his career was like that of the river Jordan ("the descender"), which, bursting fresh and buoyant from its fount beneath the cliffs of Banias, away up on a spur of Hermon, speeds impetuously down and down till it is gulfed in the briny waters of the desolate Dead Sea.

The reason lay within. Whereas Samuel, as we have seen, was a man of lofty faith and deep religious principle, Saul, as we shall see, was a man who, with many natural virtues, was apparently devoid of genuine religious conviction : and, whereas Samuel's was a life consistently lived for God, Saul's was a life devoted mainly to self. The first question with him was not, as with Samuel—*What is right?* but, *What is desirable?* And his secret self-idolatry developed into a self-sufficiency which brought sure disaster in its train. It was character, not position, which made Samuel illustrious. He

was never greater than when shorn of his civil office. But with poor Saul position at length became everything and character nothing. Elevation turned his head: and the thought of coming dethronement fairly maddened him. Hear him address to *Samuel* words like these, grasping at the shadow when the reality of kingliness was gone—"I have sinned: yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me that I may worship the Lord thy God." Could there be anything more pitiable? "The Lord *thy God*." Alas! there was the secret of it all. Samuel's God was not Saul's God. He had been himself his god: and Saul's had been at the heart of it a hollow life.

46. THE CHOICE YOUNG MAN (1 Sam. ix. 1, 2). The successive stages in Saul's strangely fascinating history are only too plainly marked: on the upgrade to begin with, to dignity and renown, and then on the down-grade to ruin and disgrace. His descent, as befits a coming king, is given in detail (1 Sam. ix. 1)—"Now there was a man of Benjamin, whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Bechorath, the son of Aphiah, a Benjamite, a mighty man of power (or substance)." And then Saul himself appears in the character in which we are called to view him first, as "a choice young man"—a name that is not without its apparent fitness.

When he is introduced to us in the Bible story, Saul seems well worthy indeed of the description thus given of him—"a choice young man and a goodly." His name remains a kind of proverb for

splendour of physical endowment—"Saul the son of Kish, who from his shoulders and upward was higher than any of the people"; and he had other qualities which made him a notable youth in his own neighbourhood and beyond it. The handsome, athletic young giant could look down on all the parish: everybody had to look up to him. But he was modest withal, and kindly, and apparently knew how to keep his proper place. As a *son*, he was obliging and considerate. He is on an errand for his father when we meet him first (1 Sam. ix. 3, 4), and he is unwearied in his pursuit of it, till his very devotion to his father prompts him to give up the quest—"lest my father leave caring for the asses" (valuable as the she-asses were to a Hebrew, almost like his steed or his camel to an Arab) "and take thought for us." As a *master*, too, he is genial and friendly, willing to fall in with the suggestion of his servant (whom some suppose to have been Doeg the Edomite, 1 Sam. xxii. 18), regarding one thing more that may be tried before giving up the search as altogether fruitless. Then, as a *man*, there was no stain on his personal purity. Neither in his youth nor afterwards is there the slightest hint of anything like vicious indulgence on the part of Saul. In short, he had many attractive features of disposition as well as of physique. Had he lived now, he would have been immensely popular, just as he was in his own time, both with gentle and simple, with young and old. He was the very idol of his circle: for he was "a choice young man and a goodly."

Saul could not but know how well he was liked,

and how much he was admired ; and if a certain self-satisfaction rested on his handsome face, it was what the world has long been accustomed to see in choice young men like him, and has been willing, with more than its usual geniality, to regard as only natural—as, indeed, a kind of additional charm.

47. ONE THING LACKING IN SAUL'S CHARACTER (1 Sam. x. 10-12). Who, looking upon Saul, and seeing him in his going out and coming in, in those golden days of youth in his father's home, could have suspected the possibilities of a hell in such a heart? Who would have forecast a dark, despairing future for such a life? But there is one thing that must needs be added yet, namely this, that "he was not troubled with much religion." This comes very clearly out as the current estimate of Saul, just a little later in his life. It is on the occasion when, leaving Samuel, he meets a company of prophets, and is himself, in accordance with the seer's prediction, filled with the prophetic fervour, so that he prophesies among them. And it came to pass, it is significantly said, that when "all who knew him beforehand" saw it, they said in astonishment, one to another, "What is this that is come unto the son of Kish? Is Saul, also, among the prophets?" (ver. 11). It was very unlikely company for *him* to be found in, to be sure ; for though he was a hearty, likeable, well-behaved young man, he was "never troubled with much religion," and nobody would have dreamt of ever seeing Saul there—"among the prophets" (see also 1 Sam. xix. 24). Society was so genuinely surprised that it made a merry proverb of it (ver. 12). But it was

a serious thing for Saul ; doubly serious that there was no reason for the popular estimate of his religious character being permanently altered. He was at this time "turned into another man" (1 Sam. x. 6), lifted above himself ; but in no higher sense than Balaam, for instance, was. "God gave him another heart" (ver. 9)—fresh heart, new fire, stronger grasp of kingly purpose ; but there is no evidence, then or afterwards, that there was in him the new heart (Ezek. xxxvi. 26), which comes with the new birth, the product of the regenerating power of the Divine Spirit (John iii. 5). And thus the prophetic fire died away, and left Saul spiritually very much what he was before—somewhat impressed, no doubt, by his strange experience, and more disposed than formerly, perhaps, to give a kind of reverent heed to the observances of religion, but not in the heart of him a religious man, a converted man who, in contrition and faith, had made the great surrender of his soul to God. It has been remarked that in the very names he gave to his children afterwards we may perceive traces of his halting between the true and the false in religion. If one of his sons was called Jonathan, "Gift of Jehovah," another was named Melchi-shua, "Help of Moloch," and another Ish-baal, "Man of Baal."

As with another choice young man, of whom we read in the Gospel history, "one thing" Saul lacked, which proved a fatal lack. Revolving time would show, though it would not all at once appear, that he lacked a right foundation for his life.

48. THE PROMISING YOUNG KING. It is

undeniable, however, that in Saul's earlier history certain kingly traits of character emerge which are full of promise. Thus when Samuel first hints to him of the high honour that awaits him, the sturdy yeoman shrinks back in unfeigned *humility*. We hear in his words the accents of the modesty that often marks and usually accompanies true greatness — "Wherefore speakest thou so to me?" (1 Sam. ix. 2). Again, when Samuel anoints and kisses him (ch. x. 1), there is evidently some word or gesture on Saul's part deprecating such honour, which calls forth the rejoinder from the prophet: "Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over His inheritance?" The same trait appears more strikingly still at Gilgal, when the chosen king, so far from seeking for a throne, is found "hiding among the baggage" (ch. x. 22). This stalwart, humble son of Kish, we are ready to say, though he would evidently prefer the quiet country life with his father on the farm to all the honours that royalty may bring him, is just the man who should have dignity thrust upon him. There lie in him the makings of a king; he needs but the opportunity, to give the best account of himself as the royal leader of a loyal people.

Nor if we follow Saul's history will it seem for a time to belie this expectation. The *self-restraint* which appeared after his anointing by Samuel—which we have already noticed—when he went quietly home and set to work as usual, telling his uncle (probably Ner, the father of Abner, 1 Sam. xiv. 50) all about the asses, but "saying nothing of the matter of the kingdom whereof Samuel spake"

(1 Sam. x. 16)—this power of self-restraint appears even more conspicuously after his public investiture. While the great body of the people hailed him with tumult of acclaim, there were some cynics, “children of Belial,” probably belonging to the greater tribes, who despised him, and brought him no presents. But Saul simply ignored the malcontents (ver. 27). He treated the grumbling regiment just as it always should be treated. He was as one deaf: “he held his peace.”

49. SAUL'S COURAGE AND SUCCESS IN WAR (1 Sam. xi. 1-15). Then, how his *bravery* shone forth, when occasion arose to put it to the proof. Nahash, the Ammonite “Serpent,” as his name means, was lording it over the men of Jabesh-gilead, and threatening to take their city and put out all their right eyes for a reproach to all Israel. All the people in dismay fell awailing in helpless lamentation. But when Saul, coming out of the field behind his oxen—for he had gone back, like a Hebrew Cincinnatus, to his plough—hears the tidings, his righteous anger against Ammon blazes forth in prompt, decided action. Hewing his yoke of oxen in pieces, he sends messengers with them throughout all Israel, saying: “Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel” (note this, in passing, *and after Samuel*; Samuel was by no means one whose influence might be despised yet or afterwards), “so shall it be done unto his oxen” (ver. 7). Then the people flock to his banner, and the men of Jabesh-gilead, a town where many Benjamites had found their wives (Judges xxi. 14), are delivered by the young king before the seven days' respite has

elapsed—a service which was to be touchingly remembered and requited by them after he was dead (1 Sam. xxxi. 11-13).

Saul had now proved that he was no carpet knight—that he could accept the dangers as well as the honours of his position. It was no slight achievement to have vanquished the cruel and rapacious Ammonites, those foes to the east who were as great a menace sometimes (Judges xi. 5) as the Philistines on the seaboard to the west. And the enthusiasm for him rose to fever height among the people. The pride of Benjamin had become the pride of Israel. In the intensity of their zeal for Saul, the people were even proposing to put to death the men of Belial who had grumbled at him. But, with kingly grace and with something of pious reverence in his tone, Saul said, “There shall not a man be put to death this day, for to-day Jehovah hath wrought salvation in Israel,” and soon the grumblers were forgotten, while his kingship was ratified in Gilgal amid thankofferings and feasting. It was what we would now call his public coronation. “And there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly” (vers. 12-15).

Thus far, then, apparently, all had gone well with the young king. Humble, prudent, brave, magnanimous—what a blessing he promised to be to the nation! He was the very sort of monarch the people had wished—one to go before them as an imposing presence and to fight their battles. He had flung himself heartily into the forward movement. He was so thoroughly in sympathy with the populace, and they with him, that probably even at

Gilgal both they and he listened with some impatience to the warnings of the venerable Samuel—as the croakings of an old man who had served his day, but could not be expected to enter into the wants and aspirations of the new time. But it was soon to be discovered that Saul was only too much a king after the people's heart, and too little a king after Jehovah's heart. The national sentiment, the national attitude of heart toward God, in the demand for a monarchy, was only too faithfully focussed and reflected in the first occupant of Israel's throne.

CHAPTER IX.

SAUL : ON THE DOWN-GRADE.

50. DIVERGENCE FROM SAMUEL, AND THE SECRET OF IT. It is noticeable that Saul's first victory was won in association with Samuel. "*After Saul and after Samuel*" was the watchword that rallied the people to his standard (1 Sam. xi. 7). But very soon thereafter Saul and Samuel began to diverge from one another, because Saul began to diverge further and further away from God. The promising young king revealed in himself more and more manifestly the wavering liege.

51. THE KING'S PROPER PLACE IN THE THEOCRACY. To appreciate what this means it is necessary to understand the nature of the function which Saul was called as king to discharge in

Israel. He was not to be by any means an irresponsible despot, like some ordinary eastern monarch, but only an earthly vicegerent, a second in command, a "viceroy," as we would say, acting under Jehovah. It is distinctly laid down in the Pentateuch (Deut. xvii. 19) that, in the event of a monarchy being introduced, the true and ultimate kingship of Jehovah should be conserved. The human, visible king was to be His anointed—consecrated to Him, endowed by Him, and under law to Him. At the time of Saul's appointment, this requirement was very faithfully and solemnly enforced by Samuel, and apparently accepted by Saul in assuming the kingship (1 Sam. xii. 14-25).

In the early years of his reign, while yet the sense of untried responsibility was full upon him, and while his loyalty to the Unseen King was put to no very direct strain, Saul filled his high but subordinate place without rebuke. But when the testing time came, it was seen that Saul had either never really recognised his true position as the visible head merely of what was still a theocracy (a commonwealth directly under law to God), or that, with growing boldness, he was prepared to play fast and loose with his originally just conception of what it was to be the monarch of Jehovah's people.

52. SAUL'S FIRST PUBLIC ACT OF SINFUL SELF-ASSERTION (1 Sam. xiii. 1-14). It is in memorable circumstances that the king's self-will first plainly manifests itself. The question of supremacy between the Philistines and the Israelites has been brought to a direct issue through the attack of the valiant Jonathan on one of their

fortresses, or, as some prefer to translate ver. 3, his destruction of "the pillar of the Philistines on the hill," which was an outward and offensive token of their dominance. Saul sounds the people to arms against the swarming hosts of the invaders, who have assembled in numbers and with appliances intended to strike a crushing blow (ver. 5). Many of the Israelites flee to caves and thickets and rocky fastnesses in craven cowardice; and even those who obey the summons follow Saul trembling (literally, "trembled after him") to Gilgal (ver. 7). There Samuel, as ambassador for Jehovah, had enjoined Saul to wait with his army for seven days before joining battle; then sacrifice would be offered and Jehovah's help invoked against the army of the aliens. The days pass, and they seem long days. While the Philistines are massing their troops at Michmash, Saul's trembling host is melting from him like snow beneath the threatening heat of Philistian indignation. His position is perilous indeed, and every hour's delay seems to make the odds against him all the greater. He is longing to get to work, yet dares not disobey the voice of God through Samuel. At length the seventh day comes, and when the prophet does not appear Saul can restrain himself no longer. He "forces himself therefore," to use his own expression, and offers a burnt-offering, so as to prepare the way for combat while he has yet something of an army left. Perhaps he was not altogether loath to show the people that he too could act the priest sometimes as well as Samuel. But while he is just finishing the impetuous sacrifice Samuel appears, and answers his apologies

with the solemn words : “Thou hast done foolishly : . . . but now thy kingdom shall not continue : the Lord hath sought Him a man after His own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over His people” (vers. 13, 14).

It was the first plain test applied to Saul’s allegiance to the Unseen King. Had there been in him the heart of a Gideon, or even the faith of his own son Jonathan, to say, “There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few,” he would have borne the test. But his heart was faithless, his spirit rash and self-sufficient, and in his profane act that day he showed that, with a show of outward respect for Jehovah, he was prepared to obey Jehovah’s voice only in so far as it suited his notion of what it was safe or advantageous for him to do.

53. SAUL AND JONATHAN’ AT MICHMASH (1 Sam. xiii. 15—xiv. 52). Notwithstanding his foreshadowed rejection, Saul is continued, upon trial, as the leader of the Israelitish host, and meets with considerable encouragement in the war. For his success at this time, he is much indebted to Jonathan, that heroic son of his, who, with a courage in his breast equal to that of the Trojan Hector, manifested afterwards in his attachment to David a tenderness of affection “passing the love of women.” It has already been recorded (ch. xiii. 2) that Saul had formed the nucleus of a standing army, part of which (one thousand men out of the three) he had committed to the leadership of Jonathan. But, owing to the circumstances just described, the united forces of the two commanders

have dwindled down to a little army intrenched on a height at Gibeah or Geba (ch. xiii. 16), which is able to do little more than maintain a sullen and ineffectual watch on the movements of the overwhelming forces of the Philistines, encamped across the wady on the opposing height of Michmash. The enemy are evidently arranging in a very systematic manner for overrunning the country, by three companies to be sent in different directions; and the apparent hopelessness of attempting an effectual resistance on Israel's part is pathetically described. But while Saul himself is at a standstill, and can only await events with surly impatience beneath his pomegranate tree, facing Migron ("the precipice"), the patriotic fire so burns in Jonathan's heart that it cannot be longer repressed. With a zeal and courage equal to that of any of the old time judges, he, along with his nameless, but equally valiant armour-bearer, resolves, at whatever risk, to strike a blow for Jehovah and His people. It is in the spirit of one who looks for, and believes he has received, divine encouragement (vers. 9-14), that Jonathan proceeds on his hazardous mission. The attempt is successful beyond all expectation. The two brave men, scaling the heights at early morning, take the too confident and contemptuous foe by surprise. In the first onset, twenty Philistine corpses strew the ground; and the enemy, believing that the two terrible assailants are only the advance scouts of a strong band of like heroes following behind, fall into a panic. The Philistines have probably a good many hired troops in their ranks, and the confusion, added to by

an earthquake (ver. 15), is such that the enemies of Israel fall to beating down one another. Meantime Saul and his host are made aware of what is going on, and take part in the fray. Hebrew deserters or captives, and former fugitives to Mount Ephraim, pluck up courage to join in the pursuit. And so "the Lord saved Israel that day" (ver. 23). It has to be added, that the joys of victory seemed likely to be marred because of the foolish vow Saul had made during the frenzy of battle, announcing death to anyone who should partake of food until the vengeance was complete. Jonathan, having in ignorance partaken of a honeycomb in a moment of faintness, came within the sweep of his father's curse; and Saul, in his highstrung enthusiasm, would have actually put his own son to death. But the people solemnly interposed to save one who had so manifestly "wrought with God that day" (ver. 45): and Saul, ill-balanced as his judgment was, was no doubt thankful to be relieved from what he had felt to be the painful necessity of performing his hot-headed vow. Not only was his victory over the Philistines for that day complete, but the king's military success and reputation continued to grow, among "all his enemies on every side": and "whithersoever he turned himself, he vexed them." In army matters, at least, the king showed some prudence: for "when Saul saw any strong man, or any valiant man, he took him unto him" (ver. 32).

54. **FURTHER DISOBEDIENCE IN SPARING AGAG** (1 Sam. xv. 1-33). Ere long, however, Saul's spirit of disobedience shows itself again at Gilgal, still more heinously than before, in the affair of

Amalek and Agag. Saul seeks, in this case, to excuse rebellion by falsehood. He has achieved a notable victory, but he has not conquered himself. The news comes to Samuel that Saul has "set him up a place" (ver. 12), erected a monument to his own glory at Carmel, and, after marching about in a triumphant fashion, has gone down to Gilgal. Thither Samuel proceeds, to confront him. And when Saul is brought face to face with the prophet, he tries to put on a front of brass, and cries: "Blessed be thou of the Lord, I have performed the commandment of the Lord" (ver. 13). And when the faithful seer exposes his rank hypocrisy, Saul gives the shallow retort, which sadly reveals his thorough estrangement from Jehovah—"The people took of the spoil, to sacrifice unto the Lord *thy God* in Gilgal" (ver. 21). The truth was, that Saul had been consulting his own popularity by winking at the covetous wishes of the populace, and was hoping perhaps to grace his triumphal march home with a live king as trophy. "I feared the people," he says, "and obeyed their voice" (ver. 24). And so this is what the choice young man, the promising young prince, has come to now! He has taken the voice of the people, as too many popular leaders have done—instead of the voice of God: and, a recreant in heart, the once brave and seeming kingly man, stands a shamefaced coward in the presence of that other purer, holier man, who feared God and knew no other fear. The canker of selfishness and pride has been doing its work within: and the self-seeker and time-server stands at length revealed.

55. COMPLETE SEVERANCE BETWEEN SAMUEL AND SAUL (1 Sam. xv. 22-29). The wavering liege has now forfeited his place. In one of the finest sentences prophet ever uttered, Samuel says—"Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Then he tells Saul plainly—"Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee from being king" (ver. 22, 23). Thus for a second time Saul's type of kingship is repudiated in Jehovah's name (ver. 23) in Gilgal, the very place where he had been raised to the throne. As surely as Samuel's mantle, by which the wretched king tries to retain by his side the faithful prophet, rends in twain—so surely will Samuel's path and Saul's henceforth lie apart. And now Saul, with a surface repentance, sinks to the deplorable depth of pleading for the maintenance still of a surface royalty. "Yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people and before Israel" (ver. 30). His godless ambition has to shrink to the limits of a puppet kingship. Reprobate silver shall men call him—weighed in the balances and found wanting. "And Samuel," who was himself the minister of justice upon Agag, "came no more to see Saul until the day of his death" (ver. 35). They were henceforth what the Germans call *verschiedene Leute*, separated persons, never to be on friendly terms again. Yet Samuel mourned for Saul silently and long in Ramah, as he thought of what might have been. And it is equally certain that Saul on his part carried in his heart all his days, feelings of respect, not to say of awe, toward Samuel.

The only other occasion on which (apart from the Endor experience) they met, so far as the record goes, was when the furious king came to Naioth in pursuit of David, who had taken refuge there with Samuel (1 Sam. xix. 18-24). It is possible, though not likely, that Saul might at that time, in his madness, have been including old Samuel with young David in his purposes of vengeance; but, as we have already seen, the atmosphere of Naioth, where Samuel's influence was so pervasive, completely subdued the wrathful monarch to a line of conduct singular enough to give further biting emphasis to the old taunt—"Is Saul also among the prophets?" The king's exhausting excitement, with the stupor that for a day and a night succeeded it, indicated an openness to the influences of music and heroic song rather than of heart religion. It has been justly said of Saul on this remarkable occasion, that he behaved himself "more like a fanatical devotee, some eastern dervish, than as a worshipper of the Holy One of Israel." In any case, the contact with Samuel was only casual and shortlived. Never again was the prophet to appear to Saul save on that eventful night at Endor when, as a messenger from *Sheol*, the world of shades, he would speak to the trembling king the fateful words—"To-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me" (1 Sam. xxviii. 19).

56. THE ANOINTING OF SAUL'S SUCCESSOR (1 Sam. xvi. 1-13). Saul's relations with David, whom Samuel now, at God's bidding, after the severance at Gilgal, anoints at Bethlehem, cast important sidelights on the character of the

king and on the development of his sad, mental trouble. But they fall to be considered in connection with David's rather than with Saul's history. When Samuel, having offered sacrifice, took the horn of oil and anointed, not the stately Eliab or any of the others, but the youngest of Jesse's sons, the ruddy shepherd lad, he set apart to the kingly office one who was to carry the name "the Lord's anointed" better than Saul ever did. The title was to be worn by David better perhaps than any other king ever wore it, till that Other was born in Bethlehem—"another King, one Jesus"—who is to be remembered and trusted in under that name, "Messiah," to all generations. We can only notice in passing the first recorded occasion on which Saul and David met. It is when the young minstrel, so unexpectedly summoned to the court, is seeking to drive the evil spirit out of Saul and soothe away his melancholy by the "medicinal music" of his harp. Here is how the two have been described—"They sit side by side, the likenesses of the old system passing away and of the new system coming into existence. Saul, the warlike chief, his great spear always by his side, reluctant, moody, melancholy—and David, the youthful minstrel, his harp in his hand, fresh from the schools where the spirit of the better times was fostered, pouring forth to soothe the troubled spirit of the king the earliest of those strains which have soothed the troubled spirit of the whole world."

57. A SWIFT DECLINE. But what we have now to look at is the royal apostate, stumbling

upon the dark mountains, with the lamentable end of this strange, eventful history. It is a sorrowful story this—of Saul upon the down-grade ; a story of growing spiritual decay and of the strengthening power of evil. The victim of a morbid melancholy, the unhappy king, as the Lord's rejected, gives way to his worst propensities. It was a sad day for Saul, when it could be said that Samuel departed from him ; but a sadder day still it was, when "the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul" (1 Sam. xvi. 14), when the entreaties of divine love ceased, and the influences of divine grace were withdrawn. "Lord of himself, that heritage of woe," he sinks deeper and deeper into the mire of perversity and sin.

He who had been so loath to assume power is now so bent upon retaining it, that he will defy the purposes of heaven, and thwart them if he can, rather than give it up. Kind and considerate as he had once been, the milk of human kindness is now curdled in him. The love he bore to David in especial—for Saul had "loved him greatly," and continued to love him in his better moments to the last—is turned to bitter hate. The green-eyed monster jealousy takes full possession of him ; and to such a pitch of unrestrained, mad fury does it rouse him, that he is ready to smite not only David (1 Sam. xix. 10), but his own beloved Jonathan, to the wall, on the bare suspicion of his favouring David (ch. xx. 33). He who was once so considerate and large-hearted will even appoint the inhuman slaughter, by the instrumentality of Doeg the Edomite, of a whole city of defenceless priests

(1 Sam. xxii. 16-19), because in their innocence they had given bread and a sword to his fugitive rival. Alas ! how is the mighty fallen. We perceive in the miserable king, to what a depth of wickedness even a nature with some real nobleness in it may sink, if the Spirit of the Lord is grieved away and an evil spirit is admitted in His room. What a commentary is furnished by the life of Saul on the apostle's charge—"Neither give place to the devil !"

There was now and then a gleam of light, no doubt, and a glow of passing feeling, which, even in these later years, suggested earlier days—kingly moments of generous regret and high resolve, such as the hopeless drunkard sometimes knows, when thought and conscience find in the maudlin life a lucid interval, to recall the brighter past and to gild the future, even yet, with some faint, struggling rays of hope. But Saul never rallied. *Forsaken of God* is written over the closing chapter of his dis-tempered, sunken life.

58. SAUL BETAKES HIMSELF TO WITCH-CRAFT (1 Sam. xxviii. 1-25). The Philistines, though it has taken them long to recover from their defeat at Michmash, are again upon Saul ; and he has to deal with them alone. Samuel is dead. David, who might have been his help, as once he was against Goliath, has been driven by Saul's own vengeful fury to seek a shelter among Israel's hereditary foes in Gath. Worst of all, "when Saul inquired of the Lord, Jehovah answered him not—neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets" (ver. 6). The heaven over his head was as brass,

and the earth beneath his feet as iron; and "his heart"—his proud, stubborn, faithless heart—"trembled greatly" (ver. 5). And now behold Israel's king—who had begun so bravely and had put away those that had familiar spirits out of the land—prepared in his rebellion even for the sin of witchcraft (1 Sam. xv. 23), and skulking at dead of night over the shoulder of little Hermon, if haply he may learn, through the Endor witch (whom Jewish tradition identifies with Abner's mother), something of his impending fate. Samuel—ah, if he could only hear the voice of Samuel, too little heeded when he spake on earth! What comfort might it not bring, even in that forlorn hour, to hear the voice of the faithful prophet, who, when most stern, had been his truest friend? And lo! the Lord, though we are left in no possible doubt as to how He regarded Saul's action (1 Chron. x. 13, 14), permits a last short interview between them. Unless we resort to the unsupported supposition that the woman was throughout practising a fraud, or that Saul was merely under an illusion, Samuel does appear and bring a message to the king. But he bears from the unseen realm no word of consolation to the apostate monarch. Crushingly solemn the words fall on the ears of Saul, as the knell of doom—"Wherefore, then, dost thou ask of me, seeing Jehovah is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy?" (ver. 16). Then comes the prophecy of his defeat and death; and "Saul fell straightway all along on the earth, and was sore afraid, because of the words of Samuel; and there was no strength in him" (ver. 20). At length, with

a sadly foreboding heart, but in the moody courage of despair, the king goes forth to meet his doom.

59. **DEATH OF SAUL** (1 Sam. xxxi. 1-6). One scene more, and the curtain falls in deepest gloom. The Philistines are in hot pursuit of the men of Israel on Mount Gilboa, and have already slain Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Melchi-shua, Saul's sons. Then the sad story closes—"And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him ; and he was sore wounded of the archers. Then said Saul unto his armour-bearer, 'Draw thy sword and thrust me through therewith, lest these un-circumcised come and thrust me through and abuse me.' But his armour-bearer would not, for he was sore afraid ; therefore Saul took a sword and fell upon it. And when his armour-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he likewise fell upon his sword, and died with him. So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armour-bearer, and all his men, that same day together."

And this is he of whom it had formerly been said that "whithersoever he turned himself, he conquered": he who had formerly fought victoriously against all his enemies—against Moab, and Ammon, and Edom, and distant Zobah, near Damascus in the north, and against Amalek, and against the Philistines (1 Sam. xiv. 47, 48). There was something kingly about him even in his dying, some lingering token of the regard he felt to be due to him as "the Lord's anointed." And we cannot see without emotion a noble-looking vessel that had left the harbour with pennants flying at the mast, lying as a poor, stranded, upturned

hulk on the sands of time. But it was a despicable as well as tragic ending to what might have been a noble and blessed life. A religion of mere heredity is of little practical worth ; and "the way of transgressors is hard." Such is the warning solemnly echoed from the slopes of dark Gilboa. Saul's life, centring in self, was a spiritually eccentric life : which means, a reeling in darkness on to ruin. The end of these things is death. How different a course from that of the other Saul, also a Benjamite, who met with the Lord face to face on the Damascus road, and yielded himself wholly to Him (Acts ix. 3-8).

The affection which Saul in his better days had inspired came out touchingly even after he was dead. The great Benjamite's body and the bodies of his sons, which the Philistines dishonoured, were bravely rescued in a foray by their kinsmen from across the Jordan, the men of Jabesh-gilead. Their bones were reverently and sadly buried beneath a tree in Jabesh (1 Sam. xxxi. 11-13), from which King David ultimately brought them for burial in the ancestral sepulchre of Kish in the country of Benjamin in Zelah (2 Sam. xxi. 14). Another tribute of affection to the Saul of earlier days was given in the beautiful lament of David, when the news reached him of Saul and Jonathan's decease. It is worthy of being committed to memory, as one of the most touching laments in human speech (2 Sam. i. 17-27).

60. SAMUEL'S IDEALS FULFILLED IN DAVID.

The house of Saul rallied only for a little while, under his son Ish-bosheth, at Mahanaim beyond the

Jordan (2 Sam. ii. 8). Any promise of success the dying cause had was chiefly due to the activity and influence of Saul's astute and strenuous cousin, Abner. But Abner ere long fell a victim to the jealous and vengeful anger of Joab, and Ish-bosheth himself, for whose deposition Abner had already been in parley with David, also fell before the assassin's knife. And the house of Saul, which had been growing weaker and weaker before, had utterly to yield before the waxing power and splendour of the house of David. Then, under a king loyal to Jehovah, and on whom the personal influence of the prophet Samuel made itself felt, Samuel's idea of a theocracy was realised, although the regal form of government was one which he had not been at first prepared to welcome. The fruit of Samuel's faithfulness still appeared, after he himself was dead, in the prosperity and glory of the reign of the son of Jesse. Where Saul, false to Samuel's principles, had been only a splendid failure, David, true to these principles, became under God a splendid success. For before he fell asleep he had proved the truth of the divine forecast concerning him, and had earned the testimony borne to him long centuries after by St Paul (Acts xiii. 36), that "he had served his own generation *by the will of God.*" The Revised Version reads—"in his own generation served the counsel of God." A most desirable epitaph.

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