

# WILLIAM BLAIKIE

THE EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE:  
THE SECOND BOOK OF  
SAMUEL

**William Blaikie**  
**The Expositor's Bible: The**  
**Second Book of Samuel**

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The Expositor's Bible: The Second Book of Samuel:*

# Содержание

CHAPTER I.	4
CHAPTER II.	18
CHAPTER III.	32
CHAPTER IV.	45
CHAPTER V.	58
CHAPTER VI.	71
CHAPTER VII.	83
CHAPTER VIII.	96
CHAPTER IX.	109
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	110

# **The Expositor's Bible: The Second Book of Samuel**

## **CHAPTER I. *DAVID'S LAMENT FOR SAUL AND JONATHAN***

### **2 Samuel i**

David had returned to Ziklag from the slaughter of the Amalekites only two days before he heard of the death of Saul. He had returned weary enough, we may believe, in body, though refreshed in spirit by the recovery of all that had been taken away, and by the possession of a vast store of booty besides. But in the midst of his success, it was discouraging to see nothing but ruin and confusion where the homes of himself and his people had recently been; and it must have needed no small effort even to plan, and much more to execute, the reconstruction of the city. But besides this, a still heavier feeling must have oppressed him. What had been the issue of that great battle at Mount Gilboa?

Which army had conquered? If the Israelites were defeated, what would be the fate of Saul and Jonathan? Would they be prisoners now in the hands of the Philistines? And if so, what would be his duty in regard to them? And what course would it be best for him to take for the welfare of his ruined and distracted country?

He was not kept long in suspense. An Amalekite from the camp of Israel, accustomed, like the Bedouin generally, to long and rapid runs, arrived at Ziklag, bearing on his body all the tokens of a disaster, and did obeisance to David, as now the legitimate occupant of the throne. David must have surmised at a glance how matters stood. His questions to the Amalekite elicited an account of the death of Saul materially different from that given in a former part of the history, "As I happened by chance upon Mount Gilboa, behold Saul leaned upon his spear; and lo, the chariots and the horsemen followed hard after him. And when he looked behind him, he saw me and called unto me. And I answered, Here am I. And he said unto me, Who art thou? And I answered him, I am an Amalekite. And he said unto me, Stand, I pray thee, beside me, and slay me, for anguish hath taken hold of me: because my life is yet whole in me. So I stood beside him and slew him, because I was sure that he could not live after that he was fallen; and I took the crown that was upon his head, and the bracelet that was upon his arm, and have brought them hither to my lord." There is no reason to suppose that this narrative of Saul's death, in so far as it differs from the previous one, is correct. That this Amalekite was somehow near

the place where Saul fell, and that he witnessed all that took place at his death, there is no cause to doubt. That when he saw that both Saul and his armour-bearer were dead he removed the crown and the bracelet from the person of the fallen king, and stowed them away among his own accoutrements, may likewise be accepted without any difficulty. Then, managing to escape, and considering what he would do with the ensigns of royalty, he decided to carry them to David. To David he accordingly brought them, and no doubt it was to ingratiate himself the more with him, and to establish the stronger claim to a splendid recompense, that he invented the story of Saul asking him to kill him, and of his complying with the king's order, and thus putting an end to a life which already was obviously doomed.

In his belief that his pretended despatching of the king would gratify David, the Amalekite undoubtedly reckoned without his host; but such things were so common, so universal in the East, that we can hardly divest ourselves of a certain amount of compassion for him. Probably there was no other kingdom, round and round, where this Amalekite would not have found that he had done a wise thing in so far as his own interests were concerned. For helping to despatch a rival, and to open the way to a throne, he would probably have received cordial thanks and ample gifts from one and all of the neighbouring potentates. To David, the matter appeared in a quite different light. He had none of that eagerness to occupy the throne on which the Amalekite reckoned as a universal instinct of human

nature. And he had a view of the sanctity of Saul's life which the Amalekite could not understand. His being the Lord's anointed ought to have withheld this man from hurting a hair of his head. Sadly though Saul had fallen back, the divinity that doth hedge a king still encompassed him. "Touch not mine anointed" was still God's word concerning him. This miserable Amalekite, a member of a doomed race, appeared to David by his own confession not only a murderer, but a murderer of the deepest dye. He had destroyed the life of one who in an eminent sense was "the Lord's anointed." He had done what once and again David had himself shrunk from doing. It is no wonder that David was at once horrified and provoked, – horrified at the unblushing criminality of the man; provoked at his effrontery, at his doing without the slightest compunction what, at an immense sacrifice, he had twice restrained himself from doing. No doubt he was irritated, too, at the bare supposition on which the Amalekite reckoned so securely, that such a black deed could be gratifying to David himself. So without a moment's hesitation, and without allowing the astonished youth a moment's preparation, he caused an attendant to fall upon him and kill him. His sentence was short and clear, "Thy blood be upon thy head; for thy mouth hath testified against thee saying, I have slain the Lord's anointed."

In this incident we find David in a position in which good men are often placed, who profess to have regard to higher principles than the men of the world in regulating their lives, and especially in the estimate which they form of their worldly interests and

considerations. That such men are sincere in the estimate they thus profess to follow is what the world is very slow to believe. Faith in any moral virtue that rises higher than the ordinary worldly level is extremely rare among men. The world fancies that every man has his price – sometimes that every woman has her price. Virtue of the heroic quality that will face death itself rather than do wrong is what it is most unwilling to believe in. Was it not this that gave rise to the memorable trial of Job? Did not the great enemy, representing here the spirit of the world, scorn the notion that at bottom Job was in any way better than his neighbours, although the wonderful prosperity with which he had been gifted made him appear more ready to pay honour to God? It is all a matter of selfishness, was Satan's plea; take away his prosperity, and lay a painful malady on his body, his religion will vanish, he will curse Thee to Thy face. He would not give Job credit for anything like disinterested virtue – anything like genuine reverence for God. And was it not on the same principle the tempter acted when he brought his threefold temptation to our Lord in the wilderness? He did not believe in the superhuman virtue of Jesus; he did not believe in His unswerving loyalty to truth and duty. He did not believe that He was proof at once against the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. At least he did not believe till he tried, and had to retreat defeated. When the end of His life drew near Jesus could say, "The prince of this world cometh, but hath nothing in Me." There was no weakness in Jesus to which he could fasten his cord – no

trace of that worldliness by which he had so often been able to entangle and secure his victims.

So likewise Simon the sorcerer fancied that he only needed to offer money to the Apostles to secure from them the gift of the Holy Ghost. "Thy money perish with thee!" was the indignant rebuke of Peter. It is the same refusal to believe in the reality of high principle that has made so many a persecutor fancy that he could bend the obstinacy of the heretic by the terrors of suffering and torture. And on the other hand, no nobler sight has ever been presented than when this incredulous scorn of the world has been rebuked by the firmness and triumphant faith of the noble martyr. What could Nebuchadnezzar have thought when the three Hebrew children were willing to enter the fiery furnace? What did Darius think of Daniel when he shrank not from the lions' den? How many a rebuke and surprise was furnished to the rulers of this world in the early persecutions of the Christians, and to the champions of the Church of Rome in the splendid defiance hurled against them by the Protestant martyrs! The men who formed the Free Church of Scotland were utterly discredited when they affirmed that rather than surrender the liberties of their Church they would part with every temporal privilege which they had enjoyed from connection with the State. Such is the spirit of the world; if it will not rise to the apparent level of the saints, it delights to pull down the saints to its own. These pretences to superior virtue are hypocrisy and pharisaism; test their professions by their worldly interests, and you will find them

soon enough on a level with yourselves.

The Amalekite that thought to gratify David by pretending that he had slain his rival had no idea that he was wronging him; in his blind innocence he seems to have assumed as a matter of course that David would be pleased. It is not likely the Amalekite had ever heard of David's noble magnanimity in twice sparing Saul's life when he had an excellent pretext for taking it, if his conscience had allowed him. He just assumed that David would feel as he would have felt himself. He simply judged of him by his own standard. His object was to show how great a service he had rendered him, and thus establish a claim to a great reward. Never did heartless selfishness more completely overreach itself. Instead of a reward, this impious murderer had earned a fearful punishment. An Israelite might have had a chance of mercy, but an Amalekite had none – the man was condemned to instant death. One can hardly fancy his bewilderment, – what a strange man was this David! What a marvellous reverence he had for God! To place him on a throne was no favor, if it involved doing anything against "the Lord's anointed!" And yet who shall say that in his estimate of this proceeding David did more than recognize the obligation of the first commandment? To him God's will was all in all.

Dismissing this painful episode, we now turn to contemplate David's conduct after the intelligence reached him that Saul was dead. David was now just thirty (2 Sam. v. 4); and never did man at that age, or at any age, act a finer part. The death, and

especially the sudden death, of a relative or a friend has usually a remarkable effect on the tender heart, and especially in the case of the young. It blots out all remembrance of little injuries done by the departed; it fills one with regret for any unkind words one may have spoken, or any unkind deeds one may ever have done to him. It makes one very forgiving. But it must have been a far more generous heart than the common that could so soon rid itself of every shred of bitter feeling toward Saul – that could blot out, in one great act of forgiveness, the remembrance of many long years of injustice, oppression, and toil, and leave no feelings but those of kindness, admiration, and regret, called forth by the contemplation of what was favourable in Saul's character. How beautiful does the spirit of forgiveness appear in such a light! Yet how hard do many feel it to be to exercise this spirit in any case, far less in all cases! How terrible a snare the unforgiving spirit is liable to be to us, and how terrible an obstacle to peaceful communion with God! "For if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

The feelings of David toward Saul and Jonathan were permanently embodied in a song which he composed for the occasion. It seems to have been called "The Song of the Bow," so that the rendering of the Revised Version – "he taught them the Song of the Bow," gives a much better sense than the old – "he taught them the use of the bow." The song was first written in the book of Jasher; and it was ordered by David to be taught

to the people as a permanent memorial of their king and his eldest son. The writing of such a song, the spirit of admiration and eulogy which pervades it, and the unusual enactment that it should be taught to the people, show how far superior David was to the ordinary feelings of jealousy, how full his heart was of true generosity. There was, indeed, a political end which it might advance; it might conciliate the supporters of Saul, and smooth David's way to the throne. But there is in it such depth and fulness of feeling that one can think of it only as a genuine cardiphonia – a true voice of the heart. The song dwells on all that could be commended in Saul, and makes no allusion to his faults. His courage and energy in war, his happy co-operation with Jonathan, his advancement of the kingdom in elegance and comfort, are all duly celebrated. David appears to have had a real affection for Saul, if only it had been allowed to bloom and flourish. His martial energy had probably awakened his admiration before he knew him personally; and when he became his minstrel, his distressed countenance would excite his pity, while his occasional gleams of generous feeling would thrill his heart with sympathy. The terrible effort of Saul to crush David was now at an end, and like a lily released from a heavy stone, the old attachment bloomed out speedily and sweetly. There would be more true love in families and in the world, more of expansive, responsive affection, if it were not so often stunted by reserve on the one hand, and crushed by persecution on the other.

The song embalms very tenderly the love of Jonathan for

David. Years had probably elapsed since the two friends met, but time had not impaired the affection and admiration of David. And now that Jonathan's light was extinguished, a sense of desolation fell on David's heart, and the very throne that invited his occupation seemed dark and dull under the shadow cast on it by the death of Jonathan. As a prize of earthly ambition it would be poor indeed; and if ever it had seemed to David a proud distinction to look forward to, such a feeling would appear very detestable when the same act that opened it up to him had deprived him for ever of his dearest friend, his sweetest source of earthly joy. The only way in which it was possible for David to enjoy his new position was by losing sight of himself; by identifying himself more closely than ever with the people; by regarding the throne as only a position for more self-denying labours for the good of others. And in the song there is evidence of the great strength and activity of this feeling. The sentiment of patriotism burns with a noble ardour; the national disgrace is most keenly felt; the thought of personal gain from the death of Saul and Jonathan is entirely swallowed up by grief for the public loss. "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph!" In David's view, it is no ordinary calamity that has fallen on Israel. It is no common men that have fallen, but "the beauty of Israel," her ornament and her glory, men that were never known to flinch or to flee from battle, men that were "swifter than eagles, and stronger than lions." It is not

in any obscure corner that they have fallen, but "on her high places," on Mount Gilboa, at the head of a most conspicuous and momentous enterprise. Such a national loss was unprecedented in the history of Israel, and it seems to have affected David and the nation generally as the slaughter at Flodden affected the Scots, when it seemed as if all that was great and beautiful in the nation perished – "the flowers o' the forest were a' weed awa'."

A word on the general structure of this song. It is not a song that can be classed with the Psalms. Nor can it be said that in any marked degree it resembles the tone or spirit of the Psalms. Yet this need not surprise us, nor need it throw any doubt either as to the authorship of the song or the authorship of the Psalms. The Psalms, we must remember, were avowedly composed and designed for use in the worship of God. If the Greek term *psalmoi* denotes their character, they were songs designed for use in public worship, to be accompanied with the lyre, or harp, or other musical instruments suitable for them. The special sphere of such songs was – the relation of the human soul to God. These songs might be of various kinds – historical, lyrical, dramatical; but in all cases the paramount subject was, the dealings of God with man, or the dealings of man with God. It was in this class of composition that David excelled, and became the organ of the Holy Ghost for the highest instruction and edification of the Church in all ages. But it does not by any means follow that the poetical compositions of David were restricted to this one class of subject. His muse may sometimes have taken a different

course. His poems were not always directly religious. In the case of this song, whose original place in the book of Jasher indicated its special character, there is no mention of the relation of Saul and Jonathan to God. The theme is, their services to the nation, and the national loss involved in their death. The soul of the poet is profoundly thrilled by their death, occurring in such circumstances of national disaster. No form of words could have conveyed more vividly the idea of unprecedented loss, or thrilled the nation with such a sense of calamity. There is not a line of the song but is full of life, and hardly one that is not full of beauty. What could more touchingly indicate the fatal nature of the calamity than that plaintive entreaty – "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon"? How could the hills be more impressively summoned to show their sympathy than in that invocation of everlasting sterility – "Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain upon you, or fields of offerings"? What gentler veil could be drawn over the horrors of their bloody death and mutilated bodies than in the tender words, "Saul and Jonathan were loving and pleasant in their lives, and in their deaths they were not divided"? And what more fitting theme for tears could have been furnished to the daughters of Israel, considering what was probably the prevalent taste, than that Saul had "clothed them with scarlet and other delights, and put on ornaments of gold upon their apparel"? Up to this point Saul and Jonathan are joined together; but the poet cannot close without a special lamentation for himself over him whom he loved as his

own soul. And in one line he touches the very kernel of his own loss, as he touches the very core of Jonathan's heart – "thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women." Such is the Song of the Bow. It hardly seems suitable to attempt to draw spiritual lessons out of a song, which, on purpose, was placed in a different category. Surely it is enough to point out the exceeding beauty and generosity of spirit which sought in this way to embalm the memory and perpetuate the virtues of Saul and Jonathan; which blended together in such melodious words a deadly enemy and a beloved friend; which transfigured one of the lives so that it shone with the lustre and the beauty of the other; which sought to bury every painful association, and gave full and unlimited scope to the charity that thinketh no evil. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*, was a heathen maxim, – "Say nothing but what is good of the dead." Surely no finer exemplification of the maxim was ever given than in this "Song of the Bow."

To "thoughts that breathe and words that burn," like those of this song, David could not have given expression without having his whole soul stirred with the desire to repair the national disaster, and by God's help bring back prosperity and honour to Israel. Thus, both by the afflictions that saddened his heart and the stroke of prosperity that raised him to the throne, he was impelled to that course of action which is the best safeguard under God against the hurtful influences both of adversity and prosperity. Affliction might have driven him into his shell, to think only of his own comfort; prosperity might have swollen

him with a sense of his importance, and tempted him to expect universal admiration; – both would have made him unfit to rule; by the grace of God he was preserved from both. He was induced to gird himself for a course of high exertion for the good of his country; the spirit of trust in God, after its long discipline, had a new field opened for its exercise; and the self-government acquired in the wilderness was to prove its usefulness in a higher sphere. Thus the providence of his heavenly Father was gradually unfolding His purposes concerning him; the clouds were clearing off his horizon; and the "all things" that once seemed to be "against him" were now plainly "working together for his good."

# CHAPTER II.

## *BEGINNING OF DAVID'S REIGN AT HEBRON*

### **2 Samuel ii. 1-7**

The death of Saul did not end David's troubles, nor was it for a good many years that he became free to employ his whole energies for the good of the kingdom. It appears that his chastisement for his unbelieving spirit, and for the alliance with Achish to which it led, was not yet completed. The more remote consequences of that step were only beginning to emerge, and years elapsed before its evil influence ceased altogether to be felt. For in allying himself with Achish, and accompanying his army to the plain of Esdraelon, David had gone as near to the position of a traitor to his country as he could have gone without actually fighting against it. That he should have acted as he did is one of the greatest mysteries of his life; and the reason why it has not attracted more notice is simply because the worst consequences of it were averted by his dismissal from the Philistine army through the jealousy and suspicion of their lords. But for that step David must have been guilty of gross

treachery either in one direction or another; either to his own countrymen, by fighting against them in the Philistine army; or to King Achish, by suddenly turning against him in the heat of the battle, and creating a diversion which might have given a new chance to his countrymen. In either case the proceeding would have been most reprehensible.

But to his own countrymen he would have made himself especially obnoxious if he had lent himself to Achish in the battle. Whether he contemplated treachery to Achish is a secret that seems never to have gone beyond his own bosom. All the appearances favoured the supposition that he would fight against his country, and we cannot wonder if, for a long time, this made him an object of distrust and suspicion. If we would understand how the men of Israel must have looked on him, we have only to fancy how we should have viewed a British soldier if, with a troop of his countrymen, he had followed Napoleon to the field of Waterloo, and had been sent away from the French army only through the suspicion of Napoleon's generals. In David's case, all his former achievements against the Philistines, all that injustice from Saul which had driven him in despair to Achish, his services against the Amalekites, his generous use of the spoil, as well as his high personal character, did not suffice to counteract the bad impression of his having followed Achish to battle. For after a great disaster the public mind is exasperated; it is eager to find a scapegoat on whom to throw the blame, and it is unmeasured in its denunciations of any one who can be plausibly assailed.

Beyond all doubt, angry and perplexed as the nation was, David would come in for a large share of the blame; his alliance with Achish would be denounced with unmeasured bitterness; and, probably enough, he would have to bear the brunt of many a bitter calumny in addition, as if he had instigated Achish, and given him information which had helped him to conquer.

His own tribe, the tribe of Judah, was far the friendliest, and the most likely to make allowance for the position in which he had been placed. They were his own flesh and blood; they knew the fierce and cruel malignity with which Saul had hunted him down, and they knew that, as far as appearances went, his chances of getting the better of Saul's efforts were extremely small, and the temptation to throw himself into the hands of Achish correspondingly great. Evidently, therefore, the most expedient course he could now take was to establish himself in some of the cities of Judah. But in that frame of recovered loyalty to God in which he now was, he declined to take this step, indispensable though it seemed, until he had got Divine direction regarding it. "It came to pass, after this, that David inquired of the Lord saying, Shall I go up to any of the cities of Judah? And the Lord said unto him, Go up. And David said, Whither shall I go up? And He said, Unto Hebron." The form in which he made the inquiry shows that to his mind it was very clear that he ought to go up to one or another of the cities of Judah; his advisers and companions had probably the same conviction; but notwithstanding, it was right and fitting that no such step

should be taken without his asking direction from God. And let us observe that, on this occasion, prayer was not the last resort of one whom all other refuge had failed, but the first resort of one who regarded the Divine approval as the most essential element for determining the propriety of the undertaking.

It is interesting and instructive to ponder this fact. The first thing done by David, after virtually acquiring a royal position, was to ask counsel of God. His royal administration was begun by prayer. And there was a singular appropriateness in this act. For the great characteristic of David, brought out especially in his Psalms, is the reality and the nearness of his fellowship with God. We may find other men who equalled him in every other feature of character – who were as full of human sympathy, as reverential, as self-denying, as earnest in their efforts to please God and to benefit men; but we shall find no one who lived so closely under God's shadow, whose heart and life were so influenced by regard to God, to whom God was so much of a personal Friend, so blended, we may say, with his very existence. David therefore is eminently himself when asking counsel of the Lord. And would not all do well to follow him in this? True, he had supernatural methods of doing this, and you have only natural; he had the Urim and Thummim, you have only the voice of prayer; but this makes no real difference, for it was only in great national matters that he made use of the supernatural method; in all that concerned his personal relations to God it was the other that he employed. And so may you. But the great matter

is to resemble David in his profound sense of the infinite value and reality of Divine direction. Without this your prayers will always be more or less matters of formality. And being formal, you will not feel that you get any good of them. Is it really a profound conviction of yours that in every step of your life God's direction is of supreme value? That you dare not even change your residence with safety without being directed by Him? That you dare not enter on new relations in life, – new business, new connections, new recreations – without seeking the Divine countenance? That endless difficulties, troubles, complications, are liable to arise, when you simply follow your own notions or inclinations without consulting the Lord? And under the influence of that conviction do you try to follow the rule, "In all thy ways acknowledge Him"? And do you endeavour to get from prayer a trustful rest in God, an assurance that He will not forsake you, a calm confidence that He will keep His word? Then, indeed, you are treading in David's footsteps, and you may expect to share his privilege – Divine direction in your times of need.

The city of Hebron, situated about eighteen miles to the south of Jerusalem, was the place to which David was directed to go. It was a place abounding in venerable and elevating associations. It was among the first, if not the very first, of the haunts of civilised men in the land – so ancient that it is said to have been built seven years before Zoan in Egypt (Numb. xiii. 22). The father of the faithful had often pitched his tent under its spreading

oaks, and among its olive groves and vine-clad hills the gentle Isaac had meditated at eventide. There Abraham had watched the last breath of his beloved Sarah, the partner of his faith and the faithful companion of his wanderings; and there from the sons of Heth he had purchased the sepulchre of Machpelah, where first Sarah's body, then his own, then that of Isaac were laid to rest. There Joseph and his brethren had brought up the body of Jacob, in fulfilment of his dying command, laying it beside the bones of Leah. It had been a halting-place of the twelve spies when they went up to search the land; and the cluster of grapes which they carried back was cut from the neighbouring valley, where the finest grapes of the country are found to this day. The sight of its venerable cave had doubtless served to raise the faith and courage of Joshua and Caleb, when the other spies became so feeble and so faithless. In the division of the land it had been assigned to Caleb, one of the best and noblest spirits the nation ever produced; afterwards it was made one of the Levitical cities of refuge. More recently, it had been one of the places selected by David to receive a portion of the Amalekite spoil. No place could have recalled more vividly the lessons of departed worth and the victories of early faith, or abounded more in tokens of the blessedness of fully following the Lord. It was a token of God's kindness to David that He directed him to make this city his headquarters. It was equivalent to a new promise that the God of Abraham and of Isaac and Jacob would be the God of David, and that his public career would prepare the way for the mercies

in the prospect of which they rejoiced, and sustain the hope to which they looked forward, though they did not in their time see the promise realised.

It was a further token of God's goodness that no sooner had David gone up to Hebron than "the men of Judah came and anointed him king over the house of Judah." Judah was the imperial or premier tribe, and though this was not all that God had promised to David, it was a large instalment. The occasion might well awaken mingled emotions in his breast – gratitude for mercies given and solicitude for the responsibility of a royal position. With his strong sense of duty, his love of righteousness and hatred of wickedness, we should expect to find him strengthening himself in the purpose to rule only in the fear of God. It is just such views and purposes as these we find expressed in the hundred and first Psalm, which internal evidence would lead us to assign to this period of his life: —

"I will sing of mercy and of judgment:  
Unto Thee, O Lord, will I sing.  
I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way.  
O when wilt Thou come unto me?  
I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.  
I will set no base thing before mine eyes:  
I hate the work of them that turn aside;  
It shall not cleave to me.  
A froward heart shall depart from me:  
I will know no evil thing.

Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I destroy;  
Him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer.  
Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land that they may  
dwell with me:

He that walketh in a perfect way, he shall minister unto me.  
He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house;  
He that speaketh falsehood shall not be established before  
mine eyes.

Morning by morning will I destroy all the wicked of the land;  
To cut off all the workers of iniquity from the city of the  
Lord."<sup>1</sup>

By a singular coincidence, the first place to which the attention of David was called, after his taking possession of the royal position, was the same as that to which Saul had been directed in the same circumstances – namely, Jabesh-gilead. It was far away from Hebron, on the other side of Jordan, and quite out of the scope of David's former activities; but he recognised a duty to its people, and he hastened to perform it. In the first place, he sent them a gracious and grateful message of thanks for the kindness shown to Saul, the mark of respect they had paid

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<sup>1</sup> From the use of the expression "city of the Lord," it has been inferred by some critics that this Psalm must have been written after the capture and consecration of Jerusalem. But there is no reason why Hebron might not have been called at that time "the city of the Lord." The Lord had specially designated it as the abode of David; and that alone entitled it to be so called. Those who have regarded this Psalm as a picture of a model household or family have never weighed the force of the last line, which marks the position of a king, not a father. The Psalm is a true statement of the principles usually followed by David in public rule, but not in domestic administration.

him in burying his body. Every action of David's in reference to his great rival evinces the superiority of his spirit to that which was wont to prevail in similar circumstances. Within the Scriptures themselves we have instances of the dishonour that was often put on the body of a conquered rival. The body of Jehoram, cast ignominiously by Jehu, in mockery of his royal state, into the vineyard of Naboth, which his father Ahaz had unrighteously seized, and the body of Jezebel, flung out of the window, trodden under foot, and devoured by dogs are instances readily remembered. The shocking fate of the dead body of Hector, dragged thrice round the walls of Troy after Achilles' chariot, was regarded as only such a calamity as might be looked for amid the changing fortunes of war. Mark Antony is said to have broken out into laughter at the sight of the hands and head of Cicero, which he had caused to be severed from his body. The respect of David for the person of Saul was evidently a sincere and genuine feeling; and it was a sincere pleasure to him to find that this feeling had been shared by the Jabeshites, and manifested in their rescuing Saul's body and consigning it to honourable burial.

In the next place, he invokes on these people a glowing benediction from the Lord: "The Lord show kindness and truth to you;" and he expresses his purpose also to requite their kindness himself. "Kindness and truth." There is something instructive in the combination of these two words. It is the Hebrew way of expressing "true kindness," but even in that form, the words

suggest that kindness is not always true kindness, and mere kindness cannot be a real blessing unless it rest on a solid basis. There is in many men an amiable spirit which takes pleasure in gratifying the feelings of others. Some manifest it to children by loading them with toys and sweetmeats, or taking them to amusements which they know they like. But it does not follow that such kindness is always true kindness. To please one is not always the kindest thing you can do for one, for sometimes it is a far kinder thing to withhold what will please. True kindness must be tested by its ultimate effects. The kindness that loves best to improve our hearts, to elevate our tastes, to straighten our habits, to give a higher tone to our lives, to place us on a pedestal from which we may look down on conquered spiritual foes, and on the possession of what is best and highest in human attainment, – the kindness that bears on the future, and especially the eternal future, is surely far more true than that which, by gratifying our present feelings, perhaps confirms us in many a hurtful lust. David's prayer for the men of Jabesh was an enlightened benediction: "God show you kindness and truth." And so far as he may have opportunity, he promises that he will show them the same kindness too.

We need not surely dwell on the lesson which this suggests. Are you kindly disposed to any one? You wish sincerely to promote his happiness, and you try to do so. But see well to it that your kindness is true. See that the day shall never come when that which you meant so kindly will turn out to have been a

snare, and perhaps a curse. Think of your friend as an immortal being, with either heaven or hell before him, and consider what genuine kindness requires of you in such a case. And in every instance beware of the kindness which shakes the stability of his principles, which increases the force of his temptations, and makes the narrow way more distasteful and difficult to him than ever.

There can be no doubt that David was moved by considerations of policy as well as by more disinterested motives in sending this message and offering this prayer for the men of Jabesh-gilead. Indeed, in the close of his message he invites them to declare for him, and follow the example of the men of Judah, who have made him king. The kindly proceeding of David was calculated to have a wider influence than over the men of Jabesh, and to have a conciliating effect on all the friends of the former king. It would have been natural enough for them to fear, considering the ordinary ways of conquerors and the ordinary fate of the friends of the conquered, that David would adopt very rigid steps against the friends of his persecutors. By this message sent across the whole country and across the Jordan, he showed that he was animated by the very opposite spirit: that, instead of wishing to punish those who had served with Saul, he was quite disposed to show them favour. Divine grace, acting on his kindly nature, made him forgiving to Saul and all his comrades, and presented to the world the spectacle of an eminent religious profession in harmony with a noble generosity.

But the spirit in which David acted towards the friends of Saul did not receive the fitting return. The men of Jabesh-gilead appear to have made no response to his appeal. His peaceable purpose was defeated through Abner, Saul's cousin and captain-general of his army, who set up Ishbosheth, one of Saul's sons, as king in opposition to David. Ishbosheth himself was but a tool in Abner's hands, evidently a man of no spirit or activity; and in setting him up as a claimant for the kingdom, Abner very probably had an eye to the interests of himself and his family. It is plain that he acted in this matter in that spirit of ungodliness and wilfulness of which his royal cousin had given so many proofs; he knew that God had given the kingdom to David, and afterwards taunted Ishbosheth with the fact (iii. 9); perhaps he looked for the reversion of the throne if Ishbosheth should die, for it needed more than an ordinary motive to go right in opposition to the known decree of God. The world's annals contain too many instances of wars springing from no higher motive than the ambition of some Diotrephes to have the pre-eminence. You cry shame on such a spirit; but while you do so take heed lest you share it yourselves. To many a soldier war is welcome because it is the pathway to promotion, to many a civilian because it gives for the moment an impulse to the business with which he is connected. How subtle and dangerous is the feeling that secretly welcomes what may spread numberless woes through a community if only it is likely to bring some advantage to ourselves! O God, drive selfishness from the throne

of our hearts, and write on them in deepest letters Thine own holy law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

The place chosen for the residence of Ishbosheth was Mahanaim, in the half-tribe of Manasseh, on the east side of the Jordan. It is a proof how much the Philistines must have dominated the central part of the country that no city in the tribe of Benjamin and no place even on the western side of the Jordan could be obtained as a royal seat for the son of Saul. Surely this was an evil omen. Ishbosheth's reign, if reign it might be called, lasted but two short years. No single event took place to give it lustre. No city was taken from the Philistines, no garrison put to flight, as at Michmash. No deed was ever done by him or done by his adherents of which they might be proud, and to which they might point in justification of their resistance to David. Ishbosheth was not the wicked man in great power, spreading himself like the green bay-tree, but a short-lived, shrivelled plant, that never rose above the humiliating circumstances of its origin. Men who have defied the purpose of the Almighty have often grown and prospered, like the little horn of the Apocalypse; but in this case of Ishbosheth little more than one breath of the Almighty sufficed to wither him up. Yes, indeed, whatever may be the immediate fortunes of those who unfurl their own banner against the clear purpose of the Almighty, there is but one fate for them all in the end – utter humiliation and defeat. Well may the Psalm counsel all, "Kiss ye the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, if once His wrath is kindled but a little.

Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him."

# CHAPTER III.

## *BEGINNING OF CIVIL WAR*

### **2 Samuel ii. 12-32**

The well-meant and earnest efforts of David to ward off strife and bring the people together in recognising him as king were frustrated, as we have seen, through the efforts of Abner. Unmoved by the solemn testimony of God, uttered again and again through Samuel, that He had rejected Saul and found as king a man after His own heart; unmoved by the sad proceedings at Endor, where, under such awful circumstances, the same announcement of the purpose of the Almighty had been repeated; unmoved by the doom of Saul and his three sons on Mount Gilboa, where such a striking proof of the reality of God's judgment on his house had been given; unmoved by the miserable state of the kingdom, overrun and humiliated by the Philistines and in the worst possible condition to bear the strain of a civil war, – this Abner insisted on setting up Ishbosheth and endeavouring to make good his claims by the sword. It was never seen more clearly how "one sinner destroyeth much good."

As to the immediate occasion of the war, David was quite innocent, and Abner alone was responsible; but to a feeling and

patriotic heart like David's, the war itself must have been the occasion of bitter distress Did it ever occur to him to think that in a sense he was now brought, against his will, into the position which he had professed to King Achish to be willing to occupy, or that, placed as he now was in an attitude of opposition to a large section of his countrymen, he was undergoing a chastisement for what he was rash enough to say and to do then?

In the commencement of the war, the first step was taken by Abner. He went out from Mahanaim, descended the Jordan valley, and came to Gibeon, in the tribe of Benjamin, a place but a few miles distant from Gibeah, where Saul had reigned. His immediate object probably was to gain such an advantage over David in that quarter as would enable him to establish Ishbosheth at Gibeah, and thus bring to him all the prestige due to the son and successor of Saul. We must not forget that the Philistines had still great influence in the land, and very likely they were in possession of Gibeah, after having rifled Saul's palace and appropriated all his private property. With this powerful enemy to be dealt with ultimately, it was the interest of Abner to avoid a collision of the whole forces on either side, and spare the slaughter which such a contest would have involved. There is some obscurity in the narrative now before us, both at this point and at other places. But it would appear that, when the two armies were ranged on opposite sides of the "pool" or reservoir at Gibeon, Abner made the proposal to Joab that the contest should be decided by a limited number of young men on either

side, whose encounter would form a sort of play or spectacle, that their brethren might look on, and, in a sense, enjoy. In the circumstances, it was a wise and humane proposal, although we get something of a shock from the frivolous spirit that could speak of such a deadly encounter as "play."

David was not present with his troops on this occasion, the management of them being entrusted to Joab, his sister's son. Here was another of the difficulties of David – a difficulty which embarrassed him for forty years. He was led to commit the management of his army to his warlike nephew, although he appears to have been a man very unlike himself. Joab is much more of the type of Saul than of David. He is rough, impetuous, worldly, manifesting no faith, no prayerfulness, no habit or spirit of communion with God. Yet from the beginning he threw in his lot with David; he remained faithful to him in the insurrection of Absalom; and sometimes he gave him advice which was more worthy to be followed than his own devices. But though Joab was a difficulty to David, he did not master him. The course of David's life and the character of his reign were determined mainly by those spiritual feelings with which Joab appears to have had no sympathy. It was unfortunate that the first stage of the war should have been in the hands of Joab; he conducted it in a way that must have been painful to David; he stained it with a crime that gave him bitter pain.

The practice of deciding public contests by a small and equal number of champions on either side, if not a common one in

ancient times, was, at any rate, not very rare. Roman history furnishes some memorable instances of it: that of Romulus and Aruns, and that of the Horatii and the Curiatii; while the challenge of Goliath and the proposal to settle the strife between the Philistines and the Hebrews according to the result of the duel with him had taken place not many years before. The young men were accordingly chosen, twelve on either side; but they rushed against each other with such impetuosity that the whole of them fell together, and the contest remained undecided as before. Excited probably by what they had witnessed, the main forces on either side now rushed against each other; and when the shock of battle came, the victory fell to the side of David, and Abner and his troops were signally defeated. On David's side, there was not a very serious loss, the number of the slain amounting to twenty; but on the side of Abner the loss was three hundred and sixty. To account for so great an inequality we must remember that in Eastern warfare it was in the pursuit that by far the greatest amount of slaughter took place. That obstinate maintenance of their ground which is characteristic of modern armies seems to have been unknown in those times. The superiority of one of the hosts over the other appears usually to have made itself felt at the beginning of the engagement; the opposite force, seized with panic, fled in confusion, followed close by the conquerors, whose weapons, directed against the backs of the fugitive, were neither caught on shields, nor met by counter-volleys. Thus it was that Joab's loss was little more than the twelve who had fallen at first,

while that of Abner was many times more.

Among those who had to save themselves by flight after the battle was Abner, the captain of the host. Hard in pursuit of him, and of him only, hastened Asahel, the brother of Joab. It is not easy to understand all the circumstances of this pursuit. We cannot but believe that Asahel was bent on killing Abner, but probably his hope was that he would get near enough to him to discharge an arrow at him, and that in doing so he would incur no personal danger. But Abner appears to have remarked him, and to have stopped his flight and faced round to meet him. Abner seems to have carried sword and spear; Asahel had probably nothing heavier than a bow. It was fair enough in Abner to propose that if they were to be opponents, Asahel should borrow armour, that they might fight on equal terms. But this was not Asahel's thought. He seems to have been determined to follow Abner, and take his opportunity for attacking him in his own way. This Abner would not permit; and, as Asahel would not desist from his pursuit, Abner, rushing at him, struck him with such violence with the hinder end of his spear that the weapon came out behind him. "And Asahel fell down there, and died in the same place; and it came to pass that as many as came to the place where Asahel fell down and died stood still." Asahel was a man of consequence, being brother of the commander of the army and nephew of the king. The death of such a man counted for much, and went far to restore the balance of loss between the two contending armies. It seems to have struck

a horror into the hearts of his fellow-soldiers; it was an awful incident of the war. It was strange enough to see one who an hour ago was so young, so fresh and full of life, stretched on the ground a helpless lump of clay; but it was more appalling to remember his relation to the two greatest men of the nation – David and Joab. Certainly war is most indiscriminate in the selection of its victims; commanders and their brothers, kings and their nephews, being as open to its catastrophes as any one else. Surely it must have sent a thrill through Abner to see among the first victims of the strife which he had kindled one whose family stood so high, and whose death would exasperate against him so important a person as his brother Joab.

The pursuit of the defeated army was by-and-bye interrupted by nightfall. In the course of the evening the fugitives somewhat rallied, and concentrated on the top of a hill, in the wilderness of Gibeon. And here the two chiefs held parley together. The proceedings were begun by Abner, and begun by a question that was almost insolent. "Abner called to Joab and said, Shall the sword devour for ever? knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end? how long shall it be ere thou bid the people return from following their brethren?" It was an audacious attempt to throw on Joab and Joab's master the responsibility of the war. We get a new glimpse of Abner's character here. If there was a fact that might be held to be beyond the possibility of question, it was that Abner had begun the contest. Had not he, in opposition to the Divine King of the nation, set up Ishbosheth

against the man called by Jehovah? Had not he gathered the army at Mahanaim, and moved towards Gibeon, on express purpose to exclude David, and secure for his nominee what might be counted in reality, and not in name only, the kingdom of Israel? Yet he insolently demanded of Joab, "Shall the sword devour for ever?" He audaciously applies to Joab a maxim that he had not thought of applying to himself in the morning – "Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end?" This is a war that can be terminated only by the destruction of one half of the nation; it will be a bitter enough consummation, which half soever it may be. Have you no regard for your "brethren," against whom you are fighting, that you are holding on in this remorseless way?

It may be a marvellously clever thing, in this audacious manner, to throw upon an opponent all the blame which is obviously one's own. But no good man will do so. The audacity that ascribes its own sins to an opponent is surely the token of a very evil nature. We have no reason to form a very high opinion of Joab, but of his opponent in this strife our judgment must be far worse. An insincere man, Abner could have no high end before him. If David was not happy in his general, still less was Ishbosheth in his.

Joab's answer betrayed a measure of indignation. "As God liveth, unless thou hadst spoken, surely then in the morning the people had gone up every one from following his brother." There is some ambiguity in these words. The Revised Version renders,

"If thou hadst not spoken, surely then in the morning the people had gone away, nor followed every one his brother." The meaning of Joab seems to be that, apart from any such ill-tempered appeal as Abner's, it was his full intention in the morning to recall his men from the pursuit, and let Abner and his people go home without further harm. Joab shows the indignation of one credited with a purpose he never had, and with an inhumanity and unbrotherliness of which he was innocent. Why Joab had resolved to give up further hostilities at that time, we are not told. One might have thought that had he struck another blow at Abner he might have so harassed his force as to ruin his cause, and thus secure at once the triumph of David. But Joab probably felt very keenly what Abner accused him of not feeling: that it was a miserable thing to destroy the lives of so many brethren. The idea of building up David's throne on the dead bodies of his subjects he must have known to be extremely distasteful to David himself. Civil war is such a horrible thing, that a general may well be excused who accepts any reason for stopping it. If Joab had known what was to follow, he might have taken a different course. If he had foreseen the "long war" that was to be between the house of Saul and the house of David, he might have tried on this occasion to strike a decisive blow, and pursued Abner's men until they were utterly broken. But that day's work had probably sickened him, as he knew it would sicken David; and leaving Abner and his people to make their way across the Jordan, he returned to bury his brother, and to report his proceedings to

David at Hebron.

And David must have grieved exceedingly when he heard what had taken place. The slaughter of nearly four hundred of God's nation was a terrible thought; still more terrible it was to think that in a sense he had been the occasion of it – it was done to prevent him from occupying the throne. No doubt he had reason to be thankful that when fighting had to be done, the issue was eminently favourable to him and his cause. But he must have been grieved that there should be fighting at all. He must have felt somewhat as the Duke of Wellington felt when he made the observation that next to the calamity of losing a battle was that of gaining a victory. Was this what Samuel had meant when he came that morning to Bethlehem and anointed him in presence of his family? Was this what God designed when He was pleased to put him in the place of Saul? If this was a sample of what David was to bring to his beloved people, would it not have been better had he never been born? Very strange must God's ways have appeared to him. How different were his desires, how different his dreams of what should be done when he got the kingdom, from this day's work! Often he had thought how he would drive out the enemies of his people; how he would secure tranquillity and prosperity to every Hebrew homestead; how he would aim at their all living under their vine and under their fig-tree, none making them afraid. But now his reign had begun with bloodshed, and already desolation had been carried to hundreds of his people's homes. Was this the work, O God, for which Thou

didst call me from the sheep-folds? Should I not have been better employed "following the ewes great with young," and protecting my flock from the lion and the bear, rather than sending forth men to stain the soil of the land with the blood of the people and carry to their habitations the voice of mourning and woe?

If David's mind was exercised in this way by the proceedings near the pool of Gibeon, all his trust and patience would be needed to wait for the time when God would vindicate His way. After all, was not his experience somewhat like that of Moses when he first set about the deliverance of his people? Did he not appear to do more harm than good? Instead of lightening the burdens of his people, did he not cause an increase of their weight? But has it not been the experience of most men who have girded themselves for great undertakings in the interest of their brethren? Nay, was it not the experience of our blessed Lord Himself? At His birth the angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace; goodwill to men!" And almost the next event was the massacre at Bethlehem, and Jesus Himself even in His lifetime found cause to say, "Think not that I am come to send peace on the earth; I am not come to send peace, but a sword." What a sad evidence of the moral disorder of the world! The very messengers of the God of peace are not allowed to deliver their messages in peace, but even as they advance toward men with smiles and benedictions, are fiercely assailed, and compelled to defend themselves by violence. Nevertheless the angels' song is true. Jesus did come to bless the world with

peace. "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you." The resistance of His enemies was essentially a feeble resistance, and that stronger spirit of peace which Jesus brought in due time prevailed mightily in the earth. So with the bloodshed in David's reign. It did not hinder David from being a great benefactor to his kingdom in the end. It did not annul the promise of God. It did not neutralise the efficacy of the holy oil. This was just one of the many ways in which his faith and his patience were tried. It must have shown him even more impressively than anything that had yet happened the absolute necessity of Divine direction in all his ways. For it is far easier for a good man to bear suffering brought on himself by his actions, than to see suffering and death entailed on his brethren in connection with a course which has been taken by him.

In that audacious speech which Abner addressed to Joab, there occurs an expression worthy of being taken out of the connection in which it was used and of being viewed with wider reference. "Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end?" Things are to be viewed by rational beings not merely in their present or immediate result, but in their final outcome, in their ultimate fruits. A very commonplace truth, I grant you, this is, but most wholesome, most necessary to be cherished. For how many of the miseries and how many of the worst sins of men come of forgetting the "bitterness in the latter end" which evil beginnings give rise to! It is one of the most wholesome rules of

life never to do to-day what you shall repent of to-morrow. Yet how constantly is the rule disregarded! Youthful child of fortune, who are revelling to-day in wealth which is counted by hundreds of thousands, and which seems as if it could never be exhausted, remember how dangerous those gambling habits are into which you are falling; remember that the gambler's biography is usually a short, and often a tragic, one; and when you hear the sound of the pistol with which one like yourself has ended his miserable existence, remember it all began by disregarding the motto, written over the gambler's path, "Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end?" You merry-hearted and amusing companion, to whom the flowing bowl, and the jovial company, and the merry jest and lively song are so attractive, the more you are tempted to go where they are found remember that rags and dishonour, dirt and degradation, form the last stage of the journey, – "the latter end bitterness" of the course you are now following. You who are wasting in idleness the hours of the morning, remember how you will repent of it when you have to make up your leeway by hard toil at night. I have said that things are to be viewed by rational beings in their relations to the future as well as the present. It is not the part of a rational being to accumulate disaster, distress, and shame for the future. Men that are rational will far rather suffer for the present if they may be free from suffering hereafter. Benefit societies, life insurance, annuity schemes – what are they all but the devices of sensible men desirous to ward off even the possibility of temporal

"bitterness in the latter end"? And may not this wisdom, this good sense, be applied with far more purpose to the things that are unseen and eternal? Think of the "bitterness in the end" that must come of neglecting Christ, disregarding conscience, turning away from the Bible, the church, the Sabbath, grieving the Spirit, neglecting prayer! Will not many a foretaste of this bitterness visit you even while yet you are well, and all things are prospering with you? Will it not come on you with overpowering force while you lie on your death-bed? Will it not wrap your soul in indescribable anguish through all eternity?

Think then of this "bitterness in the latter end"! Now is the accepted time. In the deep consciousness of your weakness, let your prayer be that God would restrain you from the folly to which your hearts are so prone, that, by His Holy Spirit, He would work in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

# CHAPTER IV.

## *CONCLUSION OF THE CIVIL WAR*

### **2 Samuel iii. 1-21**

The victory at the pool of Gibeon was far from ending the opposition to David. In vain, for many a day, weary eyes looked out for the dove with the olive leaf. "There was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David." The war does not seem to have been carried on by pitched battles, but rather by a long series of those fretting and worrying little skirmishes which a state of civil war breeds, even when the volcano is comparatively quiet. But the drift of things was manifest. "David waxed stronger and stronger; but the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker." The cause of the house of Saul was weak in its invisible support because God was against it; it was weak in its champion Ishbosheth, a feeble man, with little or no power to attract people to his standard; its only element of strength was Abner, and even he could not make head against such odds. Good and evil so often seem to balance each other, existing side by side in a kind of feeble stagnation, and giving rise to such a dull feeling on the part of onlookers, that we cannot but think with something like envy of the followers of David even under the

pain of a civil war, cheered as they were by constant proofs that their cause was advancing to victory.

And now we get a glimpse of David's domestic mode of life, which, indeed, is far from satisfactory. His wives were now six in number; of some of them we know nothing; of the rest what we do know is not always in their favour. The earliest of all was "Ahinoam, the Jezreelitess." Her native place, or the home of her family, was Jezreel, that part of the plain of Esdraelon where the Philistines encamped before Saul was defeated (1 Sam. xxix. 12), and afterwards, in the days of Ahab, a royal residence of the kings of Israel (1 Kings xviii. 46) and the abode of Naboth, who refused to part with his vineyard in Jezreel to the king (1 Kings xxi.). Of Ahinoam we find absolutely no mention in the history; if her son Amnon, the oldest of David's family, reflected her character, we have no reason to regret the silence (2 Sam. xiii.). The next of his wives was Abigail, the widow of Nabal the Carmelite, of whose smartness and excellent management we have a full account in a former part of the history. Her son is called Chileab, but in the parallel passage in Chronicles Daniel; we can only guess the reason of the change; but whether it was another name for the same son, or the name of another son, the history is silent concerning him, and the most probable conjecture is that he died early. His third wife was Maachah, the daughter of Talmai the Geshurite. This was not, as some have rather foolishly supposed, a member of those Geshurites in the south against whom David led his troop (1 Sam. xxvii. 8),

for it is expressly stated that of that tribe "he left neither man nor woman alive." It was of Geshur in Syria that Talmai was king (2 Sam. xv. 8); it formed one of several little principalities lying between Mount Hermon and Damascus: but we cannot commend the alliance; for these kingdoms were idolatrous, and unless Maachah was an exception, she must have introduced idolatrous practices into David's house. Of the other three wives we have no information. And in regard to the household which he thus established at Hebron, we can only regret that the king of Israel did not imitate the example that had been set there by Abraham, and followed in the same neighbourhood by Isaac. What a different complexion would have been given to David's character and history if he had shown the self-control in this matter that he showed in his treatment of Saul! Of how many grievous sins and sorrows did he sow the seed when he thus multiplied wives to himself! How many a man, from his own day down to the days of Mormonism, did he silently encourage in licentious conduct, and furnish with a respectable example and a plausible excuse for it! How difficult did he make it for many who cannot but acknowledge the bright aspect of his spiritual life to believe that even in that it was all good and genuine! We do not hesitate to ascribe to the life of David an influence on successive generations on the whole pure and elevating; but it is impossible not to own that by many, a justification of relaxed principle and unchaste living has been drawn from his example.

We have already said that polygamy was not imputed to David

as a sin in the sense that it deprived him of the favour of God. But we cannot allow that this permission was of the nature of a boon. We cannot but feel how much better it would have been if the seventh commandment had been read by David with the same absolute, unbending limitation with which it is read by us. It would have been better for him and better for his house. Puritan strictness of morals is, after all, a right wholesome and most blessed thing. Who shall say that the sum of a man's enjoyment is not far greatest in the end of life when he has kept with unflinching steadfastness his early vow of faithfulness, and, as his reward, has never lost the freshness and the flavour of his first love, nor ceased to find in his ever-faithful partner that which fills and satisfies his heart? Compared to this, the life of him who has flitted from one attachment to another, heedless of the soured feelings or, it may be, the broken hearts he has left behind, and whose children, instead of breathing the sweet spirit of brotherly and sisterly love, scowl at one another with the bitter feelings of envy, jealousy, and hatred, is like an existence of wild fever compared to the pure tranquil life of a child.

In such a household as David's, occasions of estrangement must have been perpetually arising among the various branches, and it would require all his wisdom and gentleness to keep these quarrels within moderate bounds. In his own breast, that sense of delicacy, that instinct of purity, which exercises such an influence on a godly family, could not have existed; the necessity of reining in his inclinations in that respect was not acknowledged; and it

is remarkable that in the confessions of the fifty-first Psalm, while he specifies the sins of blood-guiltiness and seems to have been overwhelmed by a sense of his meanness, injustice, and selfishness, there is no special allusion to the sin of adultery, and no indication of that sin pressing very heavily upon his conscience.

Whether it be by design or not, it is an instructive circumstance that it is immediately after this glimpse of David's domestic life that we meet with a sample of the kind of evils which the system of royal harems is ever apt to produce. Saul too had had his harem; and it was a rule of succession in the East that the harem went with the throne. To take possession of the one was regarded as equivalent to setting up a claim to the other. When therefore Ishbosheth heard that Abner had taken one of his father's concubines, he looked on it as a proof that Abner had an eye to the throne for himself. He accordingly demanded an explanation from Abner, but instead of explanation or apology, he received a volley of rudeness and defiance. Abner knew well that without him Ishbosheth was but a figure-head, and he was enraged by treatment that seemed to overlook all the service he had rendered him and to treat him as if he were some second or third-rate officer of a firm and settled kingdom. Perhaps Abner had begun to see that the cause of Ishbosheth was hopeless, and was even glad in his secret heart of an excuse for abandoning an undertaking which could bring neither success nor honour. "Am I a dog's head, which against Judah do show kindness this

day unto the house of Saul thy father, to his brethren, and to his friends, and have not delivered thee into the hand of David, that thou chargest me to-day with a fault concerning this woman? So do God to Abner, and more also, except, as the Lord hath sworn to David, even so I do to him, to translate the kingdom from the house of Saul, and to set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah from Dan even to Beersheba."

The proverb says, "When rogues fall out, honest men get their own." How utterly unprincipled the effort of Abner and Ishbosheth was is evident from the confession of the former that God had sworn to David to establish his throne over the whole land. Their enterprise therefore bore impiety on its very face; and we can only account for their setting their hands to it on the principle that keen thirst for worldly advantage will drive ungodly men into virtual atheism, as if God were no factor in the affairs of men, as if it mattered not that He was against them, and that it is only when their schemes show signs of coming to ruin that they awake to the consciousness that there is a God after all! And how often we see that godless men banded together have no firm bond of union; the very passions which they are united to gratify begin to rage against one another; they fall into the pit which they digged for others; they are hanged on the gallows which they erected for their foes.

The next step in the narrative brings us to Abner's offer to David to make a league with him for the undisputed possession of the throne. Things had changed now very materially from that

day when, in the wilderness of Judah, David reproached Abner for his careless custody of the king's person (1 Sam. xxvi. 14). What a picture of feebleness David had seemed then, while Saul commanded the whole resources of the kingdom! Yet in that day of weakness David had done a noble deed, a deed made nobler by his very weakness, and he had thereby shown to any that had eyes to see which party it was that had God on its side. And now this truth concerning him, against which Abner had kicked and struggled in vain, was asserting itself in a way not to be resisted. Yet even now there is no trace of humility in the language of Abner. He plays the great man still. "Behold, my hand shall be with thee, to bring about all Israel to thee." He approaches King David, not as one who has done him a great wrong, but as one who offers to do him a great favour. There is no word of regret for his having opposed what he knew to be God's purpose and promise, no apology for the disturbance he had wrought in Israel, no excuse for all the distress which he had caused to David by keeping the kingdom and the people at war. He does not come as a rebel to his sovereign, but as one independent man to another. Make a league with me. Secure me from punishment; promise me a reward. For this he simply offers to place at David's disposal that powerful hand of his that had been so mighty for evil. If he expected that David would leap into his arms at the mention of such an offer, he was mistaken. This was not the way for a rebel to come to his king. David was too much dissatisfied with his past conduct, and saw too

clearly that it was only stress of weather that was driving him into harbour now, to show any great enthusiasm about his offer. On the contrary, he laid down a stiff preliminary condition; and with the air of one who knew his place and his power, he let Abner know that if that condition were not complied with, he should not see his face. We cannot but admire the firmness shown in this mode of meeting Abner's advances; but we are somewhat disappointed when we find what the condition was – that Michal, Saul's daughter, whom he had espoused for a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, should be restored to him as his wife. The demand was no doubt a righteous one, and it was reasonable that David should be vindicated from the great slur cast on him when his wife was given to another; moreover, it was fitted to test the genuineness of Abner's advances, to show whether he really meant to acknowledge the royal rights of David; but we wonder that, with six wives already about him, he should be so eager for another, and we shrink from the reason given for the restoration – not that the marriage tie was inviolable, but that he had paid for her a very extraordinary dowry. And most readers, too, will feel some sympathy with the second husband, who seems to have had a strong affection for Michal, and who followed her weeping, until the stern military voice of Abner compelled him to return. All we can say about him is, that his sin lay in receiving another man's wife and treating her as his own; the beginning of the connection was unlawful, although the manner of its ending on his part was creditable. Connections formed in sin must sooner

or later end in suffering; and the tears of Phaltiel would not have flowed now if that unfortunate man had acted firmly and honourably when Michal was taken from David.

But it is not likely that in this demand for the restoration of Michal David acted on purely personal considerations. He does not seem to have been above the prevalent feeling of the East which measured the authority and dignity of the monarch by the rank and connections of his wives. Moreover, as David laid stress on the way in which he got Michal as his wife, it is likely that he desired to recall attention to his early exploits against the Philistines. He had probably found that his recent alliance with King Achish had brought him into suspicion; he wished to remind the people therefore of his ancient services against those bitter and implacable enemies of Israel, and to encourage the expectation of similar exploits in the future. The purpose which he thus seems to have had in view was successful. For when Abner soon after made a representation to the elders of Israel in favour of King David and reminded them of the promise which God had made regarding him, it was to this effect: "By the hand of My servant David I will save My people Israel out of the hand of the Philistines and out of the hand of all their enemies." It seems to have been a great step towards David's recognition by the whole nation that they came to have confidence in him in leading them against the Philistines. Thus he received a fresh proof of the folly of his distrustful conclusion, "There is nothing better for me than that I should escape into the land of the

Philistines." It became more and more apparent that nothing could have been worse.

One is tempted to wonder if David ever sat down to consider what would probably have happened if, instead of going over to the Philistines, he had continued to abide in the wilderness of Judah, braving the dangers of the place and trusting in the protection of his God. Some sixteen months after, the terrible invasion of the Philistines took place, and Saul, overwhelmed with terror and despair, was at his wits' end for help. How natural it would have been for him in that hour of despair to send for David if he had been still in the country and ask his aid! How much more in his own place would David have appeared bravely fronting the Philistines in battle, than hovering in the rear of Achish and pretending to feel himself treated ill because the Philistine lords had required him to be sent away! Might he not have been the instrument of saving his country from defeat and disgrace? And if Saul and Jonathan had fallen in the battle, would not the whole nation have turned as one man to him, and would not that long and cruel civil war have been entirely averted? It is needless to go back on the past and think how much better we could have acted if unavailing regret is to be the only result of the process; but it is a salutary and blessed exercise if it tends to fix in our minds – what we doubt not it fixed in David's – how infinitely better for us it is to follow the course marked out for us by our heavenly Father, with all its difficulties and dangers, than to walk in the light of our own fire and in the sparks of our

own kindling.

It appears that Abner set himself with great vigour to fulfil the promise made by him in his league with David. First, he held communication with the representatives of the whole nation, "the elders of Israel," and showed to them, as we have seen – no doubt to his own confusion and self-condemnation – how God had designated David as the king through whom deliverance would be granted to Israel from the Philistines and all their other enemies. Next, remembering that Saul was a member of the tribe of Benjamin, and believing that the feeling in favour of his family would be eminently strong in that tribe, he took special pains to attach them to David, and as he was himself likewise a Benjamite, he must have been eminently useful in this service. Thirdly, he went in person to Hebron, David's seat, "to speak in the ears of David all that seemed good to Israel and to the whole house of Benjamin." Finally, after being entertained by David at a great feast, he set out to bring about a meeting of the whole congregation of Israel, that they might solemnly ratify the appointment of David as king, in the same way as, in the early days of Saul, Samuel had convened the representatives of the nation at Gilgal (1 Sam. xi. 15). That in all this Abner was rendering a great service both to David and the nation cannot be doubted. He was doing what no other man in Israel could have done at the time for establishing the throne of David and ending the civil war. Having once made overtures to David, he showed an honourable promptitude in fulfilling the promise under which

he had come. No man can atone for past sin by doing his duty at a future time; but if anything could have blotted out from David's memory the remembrance of Abner's great injury to him and to the nation, it was the zeal with which he exerted himself now to establish David's claims over all the country, and especially where his cause was feeblest – in the tribe of Benjamin.

It must have been a happy day in David's history when Abner set out from Hebron to convene the assembly of the tribes that was to call him with one voice to the throne. It was the day long looked for come at last. The dove had at length come with the olive leaf, and peace would now reign among all the tribes of Israel. And we may readily conceive him, with this prospect so near, expressing his feelings, if not in the very words of the thirty-seventh Psalm, at any rate in language of similar import: —

"Fret not thyself because of evil-doers,  
Neither be thou envious against them that work  
unrighteousness  
For they shall soon be cut down like the grass,  
And wither as the green herb.  
Trust in the Lord and do good;  
Dwell in the land, and follow after faithfulness.  
Delight thyself also in the Lord,  
And He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.  
Commit thy way unto the Lord,  
Trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.  
And He shall make thy righteousness to go forth as the light,

And thy judgment as the noonday.  
Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him;  
Fret not thyself because of him that prospereth in his way,  
Because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.  
For evil-doers shall be cut off;  
But those that wait on the Lord, they shall inherit the land."

But a crime was now on the eve of being perpetrated destined for the time to scatter all King David's pleasing expectations and plunge him anew into the depths of distress.

# **CHAPTER V.**

## ***ASSASSINATION OF ABNER AND ISHBOSHETH***

**2 Samuel iii. 22-39; iv**

It is quite possible that, in treating with Abner, David showed too complacent a temper, that he treated too lightly his appearance in arms against him at the pool of Gibeon, and that he neglected to demand an apology for the death of Asahel. Certainly it would have been wise had some measures been taken to soothe the ruffled temper of Joab and reconcile him to the new arrangement. This, however, was not done. David was so happy in the thought that the civil war was to cease, and that all Israel were about to recognise him as their king, that he would not go back on the past, or make reprisals even for the death of Asahel. He was willing to let bygones be bygones. Perhaps, too, he thought that if Asahel met his death at the hand of Abner, it was his own rashness that was to blame for it. Anyhow he was greatly impressed with the value of Abner's service on his behalf, and much interested in the project to which he was now going forth – gathering all Israel to the king, to make a league with him

and bind themselves to his allegiance.

In these measures Joab had not been consulted. When Abner was at Hebron, Joab was absent on a military enterprise. In that enterprise he had been very successful, and he was able to appear at Hebron with the most popular evidence of success that a general could bring – a large amount of spoil. No doubt Joab was elated with his success, and was in that very temper when a man is most disposed to resent his being overlooked and to take more upon him than is meet. When he heard of David's agreement with Abner, he was highly displeased. First he went to the king, and scolded him for his simplicity in believing Abner. It was but a stratagem of Abner's to allow him to come to Hebron, ascertain the state of David's affairs, and take his own steps more effectively in the interest of his opponent. Suspicion reigned in Joab's heart; the generosity of David's nature was not only not shared by him, but seemed silliness itself. His rudeness to David is highly offensive. He speaks to him in the tone of a master to a servant, or in the tone of those servants who rule their master. "What hast thou done? Behold, Abner came unto thee; why is it that thou hast sent him away, and he is quite gone? Thou knowest Abner the son of Ner, that he came to deceive thee, and to know thy going out and thy coming in, and to know all that thou doest." David is spoken to like one guilty of inexcusable folly, as if he were accountable to Joab, and not Joab to him. Of the king's answer to Joab, nothing is recorded; but from David's confession (ver. 39) that the sons of

Zeruah were too strong for him, we may infer that it was not very firm or decided, and that Joab set it utterly at nought. For the very first thing that Joab did after seeing the king was to send a message to Abner, most likely in David's name, but without David's knowledge, asking him to return. Joab was at the gate ready for his treacherous business, and taking Abner aside as if for private conversation, he plunged his dagger in his breast, ostensibly in revenge for the death of his brother Asahel. There was something eminently mean and dastardly in the deed. Abner was now on the best of terms with Joab's master, and he could not have apprehended danger from the servant. If assassination be mean among civilians, it is eminently mean among soldiers. The laws of hospitality were outraged when one who had just been David's guest was assassinated in David's city. The outrage was all the greater, as was also the injury to King David and to the whole kingdom, that the crime was committed when Abner was on the eve of an important and delicate negotiation with the other tribes of Israel, since the arrangement which he hoped to bring about was likely to be broken off by the news of his shameful death. At no moment are the feelings of men less to be trifled with than when, after long and fierce alienation, they are on the point of coming together. Abner had brought the tribes of Israel to that point, but now, like a flock of birds frightened by a shot, they were certain to fly asunder. All this danger Joab set at nought, the one thought of taking revenge for the death of his brother absorbing every other, and making him, like so many

other men when excited by a guilty passion, utterly regardless of every consequence provided only his revenge was satisfied.

How did David act toward Joab? Most kings would at once have put him to death, and David's subsequent action towards the murderers of Ishbosheth shows that, even in his judgment, this would have been the proper retribution on Joab for his bloody deed. But David did not feel himself strong enough to deal with Joab according to his deserts. It might have been better for him during the rest of his life if he had acted with more vigour now. But instead of making an example of Joab, he contented himself with pouring out on him a vial of indignation, publicly washing his hands of the nefarious transaction, and pronouncing on its author and his family a terrible malediction. We cannot but shrink from the way in which David brought in Joab's family to share his curse: "Let there not fail from the house of Joab one that hath an issue, or that is a leper, or that leaneth on a staff, or that falleth on the sword, or that lacketh bread." Yet we must remember that according to the sentiment of those times a man and his house were so identified that the punishment due to the head was regarded as due to the whole. In our day we see a law in constant operation which visits iniquities of the parents upon the children with a terrible retribution. The drunkard's children are woeful sufferers for their parent's sin; the family of the felon carries a stigma for ever. We recognise this as a law of Providence; but we do not act on it ourselves in inflicting punishment. In David's time, however, and throughout the whole

Old Testament period, punishments due to the fathers were formally shared by their families. When Joshua sentenced Achan to die for his crime in stealing from the spoils of Jericho a wedge of gold and a Babylonish garment, his wife and children were put to death along with him. In denouncing the curse on Joab's family as well as himself, David therefore only recognised a law which was universally acted on in his day. The law may have been a hard one, but we are not to blame David for acting on a principle of retribution universally acknowledged. We are to remember, too, that David was now acting in a public capacity, and as the chief magistrate of the nation. If he had put Joab to death, his act would have involved his family in many a woe; in denouncing his deeds and calling for retribution on them generation after generation, he only carried out the same principle a little further. That Joab deserved to die for his dastardly crime, none could have denied; if David abstained from inflicting that punishment, it was only natural that he should be very emphatic in proclaiming what such a criminal might look for, in never-failing visitations on himself and his seed, when he was left to be dealt with by the God of justice.

Having thus disposed of Joab, David had next to dispose of the dead body of Abner. He determined that every circumstance connected with Abner's funeral should manifest the sincerity of his grief at his untimely end. In the first place, he caused him to be buried at Hebron. We know of the tomb at Hebron where the bodies of the patriarchs lay; if it was at all legitimate to place

others in that grave, we may believe that a place in it was found for Abner. In the second place, the mourning company attended the funeral with rent clothes and girdings of sackcloth, while the king himself followed the bier, and at the grave both king and people gave way to a burst of tears. In the third place, the king pronounced an elegy over him, short, but expressive of his sense of the unworthy death which had come to such a man: —

"Should Abner die as a fool dieth?

Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters;

As a man falleth before the children of iniquity, so didst thou fall."

Had he died the death of one taken in battle, his bound hands and his feet in fetters would have denoted that after honourable conflict he had been defeated in the field, and that he died the death due to a public enemy. Instead of this, he had fallen before the children of iniquity, before men mean enough to betray him and murder him, while he was under the protection of the king. In the fourth place, he sternly refused to eat bread till that day, so full of darkness and infamy, should have passed away. The public manifestations of David's grief showed very clearly how far he was from approving of the death of Abner. And they had the desired effect. The people were pleased with the evidence afforded of David's feelings, and the event that had seemed likely to destroy his prospects turned out in this way in his favour. "The people took notice of this, and it pleased them, as whatsoever the

king did pleased all the people.' It was another evidence of the conquering power of goodness and forbearance. By his generous treatment of his foes, David secured a position in the hearts of his people, and established his kingdom on a basis of security which he could not have obtained by any amount of severity. For ages and ages, the two methods of dealing with a reluctant people, generosity and severity, have been pitted against each other, and always with the effect that severity fails and generosity succeeds. There were many who were indignant at the clemency shown by Lord Canning after the Indian mutiny. They would have had him inspire terror by acts of awful severity. But the peaceful career of our Indian empire and the absence of any attempt to renew the insurrection since that time show that the policy of clemency was the policy of wisdom and of success.

Still another step was taken by David that shows how painfully he was impressed by the death of Abner. To "his servants" – that is, his cabinet or his staff – he said in confidence, "Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?" He recognised in Abner one of those men of consummate ability who are born to rule, or at least to render the highest service to the actual ruler of a country by their great influence over men. It seems very probable that he looked to him as his own chief officer for the future. Rebel though he had been, he seemed quite cured of his rebellion, and now that he cordially acknowledged David's right to the throne, he would probably have been his right-hand man. Abner, Saul's cousin, was probably a much older

man than Joab, who was David's nephew, and who could not have been much older than David himself. The loss of Abner was a great personal loss especially as it threw him more into the hands of these sons of Zeruiah, Joab and Abishai, whose impetuous, lordly temper was too much for him to restrain. The representation to his confidential servants, "I am weak, and these men, the sons of Zeruiah, are too strong for me," was an appeal to them for cordial help in the affairs of the kingdom, in order that Joab and his brother might not be able to carry everything their own way. David, like many another man, needed to say, Save me from my friends. We get a vivid glimpse of the perplexities of kings, and of the compensations of a humbler lot. Men in high places, worried by the difficulties of managing their affairs and servants, and by the endless annoyances to which their jealousies and their self-will give rise, may find much to envy in the simple, unembarrassed life of the humblest of the people.

From the assassination of Abner, the real source of the opposition that had been raised to David, the narrative proceeds to the assassination of Ishbosheth, the titular king. "When Saul's son heard that Abner was dead in Hebron, his hands were feeble, and all the Israelites were troubled." The contrast is striking between his conduct under difficulty and that of David. In the history of the latter, faith often faltered in times of trouble, and the spirit of distrust found a footing in his soul. But these occasions occurred in the course of protracted and terrible struggles; they were exceptions to his usual bearing; faith

commonly bore him up in his darkest trials. Ishbosheth, on the other hand, seems to have had no resource, no sustaining power whatever, under visible reverses. David's slips were like the temporary falling back of the gallant soldier when surprised by a sudden onslaught, or when, fagged and weary, he is driven back by superior numbers; but as soon as he has recovered himself, he dashes back undaunted to the conflict. Ishbosheth was like the soldier who throws down his arms and rushes from the field as soon as he feels the bitter storm of battle. With all his falls, there was something in David that showed him to be cast in a different mould from ordinary men. He was habitually aiming at a higher standard, and upheld by the consciousness of a higher strength; he was ever and anon resorting to "the secret place of the Most High," taking hold of Him as his covenant God, and labouring to draw down from Him the inspiration and the strength of a nobler life than that of the mass of the children of men.

The godless course which Ishbosheth had followed in setting up a claim to the throne in opposition to the Divine call of David not only lost him the distinction he coveted, but cost him his life. He made himself a mark for treacherous and heartless men; and one day, while lying in his bed at noon, was despatched by two of his servants. The two men that murdered him seem to have been among those whom Saul enriched with the spoil of the Gibeonites. They were brothers, men of Beeroth, which was formerly one of the cities of the Gibeonites, but was now reckoned to Benjamin.

Saul appears to have attacked the Beerothites, and given their property to his favourites (comp. 1 Sam. xxii. 7 and 2 Sam. xxi. 2). A curse went with the transaction; Ishbosheth, one of Saul's sons, was murdered by two of those who were enriched by the unhallowed deed; and many years after, his bloody house had to yield up seven of his sons to justice, when a great famine showed that for this crime wrath rested on the land.

The murderers of Ishbosheth, Baanah and Rechab, mistaking the character of David as much as it had been mistaken by the Amalekite who pretended that he had slain Saul, hastened to Hebron, bearing with them the head of their victim, a ghastly evidence of the reality of the deed. This revolting trophy they carried all the way from Mahanaim to Hebron, a distance of some fifty miles. Mean and selfish themselves, they thought other men must be the same. They were among those poor creatures who are unable to rise above their own poor level in their conceptions of others. When they presented themselves before David, he showed all his former superiority to selfish, jealous feelings. He was roused indeed to the highest pitch of indignation. We can hardly conceive the astonishment and horror with which they would receive his answer, "As the Lord liveth, who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity, when one told me saying, Behold, Saul is dead, thinking to have brought good tidings, I took hold on him and slew him in Ziklag, who thought that I would have given him a reward for his tidings. How much more when wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house

upon his bed! Shall I not therefore require his blood at your hand, and take you away from the earth?" Simple death was not judged a severe enough punishment for such guilt; as they had cut off the head of Ishbosheth after killing him, so after they were slain their hands and their feet were cut off; and thereafter they were hanged over the pool in Hebron – a token of the execration in which the crime was held. Here was another evidence that deeds of violence done to his rivals, so far from finding acceptance, were detestable in the eyes of David. And here was another fulfilment of the resolution which he had made when he took possession of the throne – "I will early destroy all the wicked of the land, that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the Lord."

These rapid, instantaneous executions by order of David have raised painful feelings in many. Granting that the retribution was justly deserved, and granting that the rapidity of the punishment was in accord with military law, ancient and modern, and that it was necessary in order to make a due impression on the people, still it may be asked, How could David, as a pious man, hurry these sinners into the presence of their Judge without giving them any exhortation to repentance or leaving them a moment in which to ask for mercy? The question is undoubtedly a difficult one. But the difficulty arises in a great degree from our ascribing to David and others the same knowledge of the future state and the same vivid impressions regarding it that we have ourselves. We often forget that to those who lived in the Old Testament the future life was wrapped in far greater obscurity than it is to us. That good

men had no knowledge of it, we cannot allow; but certainly they knew vastly less about it than has been revealed to us. And the general effect of this was that the consciousness of a future life was much fainter even among good men then than now. They did not think about it; it was not present to their thoughts. There is no use trying to make David either a wiser or a better man than he was. There is no use trying to place him high above the level or the light of his age. If it be asked, How did David feel with reference to the future life of these men? the answer is, that probably it was not much, if at all, in his thoughts. That which was prominent in his thoughts was that they had sacrificed their lives by their atrocious wickedness, and the sooner they were punished the better. If he thought of their future, he would feel that they were in the hands of God, and that they would be judged by Him according to the tenor of their lives. It cannot be said that compassion for them mingled with David's feelings. The one prominent feeling he had was that of their guilt; for that they must suffer. And David, like other soldiers who have shed much blood, was so accustomed to the sight of violent death, that the horror which it usually excites was no longer familiar to him.

It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ that has brought life and immortality to light. So far from the future life being a dim and shadowy revelation, it is now one of the clearest doctrines of the faith. It is one of the doctrines which every earnest preacher of the Gospel is profoundly earnest in dwelling on. That death ushers us into the presence of God, that after death cometh the

judgment, that every one of us is to give account of himself to God, that the final condition of men is to be one of misery or one of life, are among the clearest revelations of the Gospel. And this fact invests every man's death with profound significance in the Christian's view. That the condemned criminal may have time to prepare, our courts of law invariably interpose an interval between the sentence and the punishment. Would only that men were more consistent here! If we shudder at the thought of a dying sinner appearing in all the blackness of his guilt before God, let us think more how we may turn sinners from their wickedness while they live. Let us see the atrocious guilt of encouraging them in ways of sin that cannot but bring on them the retribution of a righteous God. O ye who, careless yourselves, laugh at the serious impressions and scruples of others; ye who teach those that would otherwise do better to drink and gamble and especially to scoff; ye who do your best to frustrate the prayers of tender-hearted fathers and mothers whose deepest desire is that their children may be saved; ye, in one word, who are missionaries of the devil and help to people hell – would that you pondered your awful guilt! For "whosoever shall cause any of the least of these to offend, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were cast into the depths of the sea."

# CHAPTER VI.

## *DAVID KING OF ALL ISRAEL*

### **2 Samuel v. 1-9**

After seven and a half years of opposition,<sup>2</sup> David was now left without a rival, and the representatives of the whole tribes came to Hebron to anoint him king. They gave three reasons for their act, nearly all of which, however, would have been as valid at the death of Saul as they were at this time.

The first was that David and they were closely related – "Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh;" rather an unusual reason, but in the circumstances not unnatural. For David's alliance with the Philistines had thrown some doubt on his nationality; it was not very clear at that time whether he was to be regarded as a Hebrew or as a naturalized Philistine; but now the doubts that had existed on that point had all disappeared; conclusive evidence

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<sup>2</sup> There is difficulty in adjusting all the dates. In chap. ii. 10, it is said that Ishbosheth reigned two years. The usual explanation is that he reigned two years before war broke out between him and David. Another supposition is that there was an interregnum in Israel of five and a half years, and that Ishbosheth reigned the last two years of David's seven and a half. The accuracy of the text has been questioned, and it has been proposed (on very slender MS. authority) to read that Ishbosheth reigned *six* years in place of two.

had been afforded that David was out-and-out a Hebrew, and therefore that he was not disqualified for the Hebrew throne.

This conclusion is confirmed by what they give as their second reason – his former exploits and services against their enemies. "Also, in time past, when Saul was king, thou wast he that ledest out and broughtest in Israel." In former days, David had proved himself Saul's most efficient lieutenant; he had been at the head of the armies of Israel, and his achievements in that capacity pointed to him as the fit and natural successor of Saul.

The third reason is the most conclusive – "The Lord said to thee, Thou shalt feed My people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel." It was little to the credit of the elders that this reason, which should have been the first, and which needed no other reasons to confirm it, was given by them as the last. The truth, however, is, that if they had made it their first and great reason, they would on the very face of their speech have condemned themselves. Why, if this was the command of God, had they been so long of carrying it out? Ought not effect to have been given to it at the very first, independent of all other reasons whatsoever? The elders cannot but give it a place among their reasons for offering him the throne; but it is not allowed to have its own place, and it is added to the others as if they needed to be supplemented before effect could be given to it. The elders did not show that supreme regard to the will of God which ought ever to be the first consideration in every loyal heart. It is the great offence of multitudes, even among those who make a

Christian profession, that while they are willing to pay regard to God's will as one of many considerations, they are not prepared to pay supreme regard to it. It may be taken along with other considerations, but it is not allowed to be the chief consideration. Religion may have a place in their life, but not the first place. But can a service thus rendered be acceptable to God? Can God accept the second or the third place in any man's regard? Does not the first commandment dispose of this question: "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me"?

"So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and King David made a league with them in Hebron before the Lord; and they anointed David king over Israel."

It was a happy circumstance that David was able to neutralise the effects of the murders of Abner and Ishbosheth, and to convince the people that he had no share in these crimes. Notwithstanding the prejudice against his side which in themselves they were fitted to create in the supporters of Saul's family, they did not cause any further opposition to his claims. The tact of the king removed any stumbling-block that might have arisen from these untoward events. And thus the throne of David was at last set up, amid the universal approval of the nation.

This was a most memorable event in David's history. It was the fulfilment of one great instalment of God's promises to him. It was fitted very greatly to deepen his trust in God, as his Protector and his Friend. To be able to look back on even

one case of a Divine promise distinctly fulfilled to us is a great help to faith in all future time. For David to be able to look back on that early period of his life, so crowded with trials and sufferings, perplexities and dangers, and to mark how God had delivered him from every one of them, and, in spite of the fearful opposition that had been raised against him, had at last seated him firmly on the throne, was well fitted to advance the spirit of trust to that place of supremacy which it gained in him. After such an overwhelming experience, it was little wonder that his trust in God became so strong, and his purpose to serve God so intense. The sorrows of death had compassed him, and the pains of Hades had taken hold on him, yet the Lord had been with him, and had most wonderfully delivered him. And in token of his deliverance he makes his vow of continual service, "O Lord, truly I am Thy servant; I am Thy servant and the son of Thine handmaid; Thou hast loosed my bonds. I will offer to Thee the sacrifices of praise, and will call upon the name of the Lord."

We can hardly pass from this event in David's history without recalling his typical relation to Him who in after-years was to be known as the "Son of David." The resemblance between the early history of David and that of our blessed Lord in some of its features is too obvious to need to be pointed out. Like David, Jesus spends His early years in the obscurity of a country village. Like him, He enters on His public life under a striking and convincing evidence of the Divine favour – David by conquering Goliath, Jesus by the descent of the Spirit at His baptism, and

the voice from heaven which proclaimed, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Like David, soon after His Divine call Jesus is led out to the wilderness, to undergo hardship and temptation; but, unlike David, He conquers the enemy at every onset. Like David, Jesus attaches to Himself a small but valiant band of followers, whose achievements in the spiritual warfare rival the deeds of David's "worthies" in the natural. Like David, Jesus is concerned for His relatives; David, in his extremity, commits his father and mother to the king of Moab: Jesus, on the cross, commits His mother to the beloved disciple. In the higher exercises of David's spirit, too, there is much that resembles the experiences of Christ. The convincing proof of this is, that most of the Psalms which the Christian Church has ever held to be Messianic have their foundation in the experiences of David. It is impossible not to see that in one sense there must have been a measureless distance between the experience of a sinful man like David and that of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Divinity of His person, the atoning efficacy of His death, and the glory of His resurrection, Jesus is high above any of the sons of men. Yet there must likewise have been some marvellous similarity between Him and David, seeing that David's words of sorrow and of hope were so often accepted by Jesus to express His own emotions. Strange indeed it is that the words in which David, in the twenty-second Psalm, pours out the desolation of his spirit, were the words in which Jesus found expression for His unexampled distress upon the cross. Strange, too, that David's

deliverances were so like Christ's that the same language does for both; nay, that the very words in which Jesus commended His soul to the Father, as it was passing from His body, were words which had first been used by David.

But it does not concern us at present to look so much at the general resemblances between David and our blessed Lord, as at the analogy in the fortunes of their respective kingdoms. And here the most obvious feature is the bitter opposition to their claims offered in both instances even by those who might have been expected most cordially to welcome them. Of both it might be said, "They came unto their own, but their own received them not." First, David is hunted almost to death by Saul; and then, even after Saul's death, his claims are resisted by most of the tribes. So in His lifetime Jesus encounters all the hatred and opposition of the scribes and Pharisees; and even after His resurrection, the council do their utmost to denounce His claims and frighten His followers. Against the one and the other the enemy brings to bear all the devices of hatred and opposition. When Jesus rose from the grave, we see Him personally raised high above all the efforts of His enemies; when David was acknowledged king by all Israel, he reached a corresponding elevation. And now that David is recognised as king, how do we find him employing his energies? It is to defend and bless his kingdom, to obtain for it peace and prosperity, to expel its foes, to secure to the utmost of his power the welfare of all his people. From His throne in glory, Jesus does the same. And

what encouragement may not the friends and subjects of Christ's kingdom derive from the example of David! For if David, once he was established in his kingdom, spared no effort to do good to his people, if he scattered blessings among them from the stores which he was able to command, how much more may Christ be relied on to do the same! Has He not been placed far above all principality and power, and every name that is named, and been made "Head over all things for the Church which is His body"? Rejoice then, ye members of Christ's kingdom! Raise your eyes to the throne of glory, and see how God has set His King upon His holy hill of Zion! And be encouraged to tell Him of all your own needs and the troubles and needs of His Church; for has He not ascended on high, and led captivity captive, and received gifts for men? And if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, will you not ask, and shall you not receive according to your faith? Will not God supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus?

From the spectacle at Hebron, when all the elders of Israel confirmed David on the throne, and entered into a solemn league with reference to the kingdom, we pass with David to the field of battle. The first enterprise to which he addressed himself was the capture of Jerusalem, or rather of the stronghold of Zion. It is not expressly stated that he consulted God before taking this step, but we can hardly suppose that he would do it without Divine direction. From the days of Moses, God had taught His people that a place would be appointed by Him where He would

set His name; Jerusalem was to be that place; and it cannot be thought that when David would not even go up to Hebron without consulting the Lord, he would proceed to make Jerusalem his capital without a Divine warrant.

No doubt the place was well known to him. It had already received consecration when Melchizedek reigned in it, "king of righteousness and king of peace." In the days of Joshua its king was Adonizedek, "lord of righteousness" – a noble title, brought down from the days of Melchizedek, however unworthy the bearer of it might be of the designation, for he was the head of the confederacy against Joshua (Josh. x. 1, 3), and he ended his career by being hanged on a tree. After the slaughter of the Philistine, David had carried his head to Jerusalem, or to some place so near that it might be called by that name; very probably Nob was the place, which, according to an old tradition, was situated on the slope of Mount Olivet. Often in his wanderings, when his mind was much occupied with fortresses and defences, the image of this place would occur to him; observing how the mountains were round about Jerusalem, he would see how well it was adapted to be the metropolis of the country. But this could not be done while the stronghold of Zion was in the hands of the Jebusites, and while the Jebusites were so numerous that they might be called "the people of the land."

So impregnable was this stronghold deemed, that any attempt that David might make to get possession of it was treated with contempt. The precise circumstances of the siege are somewhat

obscure; if we compare the marginal readings and the text in the Authorized Version, and still more in the Revised Version, we may see what difficulty our translators had in arriving at the meaning of the passage. The most probable supposition is that the Jebusites placed their lame and blind on the walls, to show how little artificial defence the place needed, and defied David to touch even these sorry defenders. Such defiance David could not but have regarded as he regarded the defiance of Goliath – as an insult to that mighty God in whose name and in whose strength he carried on his work. Advancing in the same strength in which he advanced against Goliath, he got possession of the stronghold. To stimulate the chivalry of his men he had promised the first place in his army to whoever, by means of the watercourse, should first get on the battlements and defeat the Jebusites. Joab was the man who made this daring and successful attempt. Reaping the promised reward, he thereby raised himself to the first place in the now united forces of the twelve tribes of Israel. After the murder of Abner, he had probably been degraded; but now, by his dash and bravery, he established his position on a firmer basis than ever. While he contributed by this means to the security and glory of the kingdom, he diminished at the same time the king's personal satisfaction, inasmuch as David could not regard without anxiety the possession of so much power and influence by so daring and useful, but unscrupulous and bold-tempered, a man.

The place thus taken was called the city, and sometimes the

castle, of David, and it became from this time his residence and the capital of his kingdom. Much though the various sites in Jerusalem have been debated, it is surely beyond reasonable doubt that the fortress thus occupied was Mount Zion, the same height which still exists in the south-western corner of the area which came to be covered by Jerusalem. This seems to have been the only part that the Jebusites had fortified, and with the loss of this stronghold their hold of other parts of Jerusalem was lost. Henceforth, as a people, they disappear from Jerusalem, although individual Jebusites might still, like Araunah, hold patches of land in the neighbourhood (2 Sam. xxiv. 16). The captured fortress was turned by David into his royal residence. And seeing that a military stronghold was very inadequate for the purposes of a capital, he began, by the building of Millo, that extension of the city which was afterwards carried out by others on so large a scale.

By thus taking possession of Mount Zion and commencing those extensions which helped to make Jerusalem so great and celebrated a city, David introduced two names into the sacred language of the Bible which have ever since retained a halo, surpassing all other names in the world. Yet, very obviously, it was nothing in the little hill which has borne the name of Zion for so many centuries, nor in the physical features of the city of Jerusalem, that has given them their remarkable distinction. Neither is it for mere historical or intellectual associations, in the common sense of the term, that they have attained their

eminence. It would not be difficult to find more picturesque rocks than Zion and more striking cities than Jerusalem. It would not be difficult to find places more memorable in art, in science, and intellectual culture. That which gives them their unrivalled pre-eminence is their relation to God's revelation of Himself to man. Zion was memorable because it was God's dwelling-place, Jerusalem because it was the city of the great King. If Jerusalem and Zion impress our imagination even above other places, it is because God had so much to do with them. The very idea of God makes them great.

But they impress much more than our imagination. We recall the unrivalled moral and spiritual forces that were concentrated there: the goodly fellowship of the prophets, the noble army of the martyrs, the glorious company of the apostles, all living under the shadow of Mount Zion, and uttering those words that have moved the world as they received them from the mouth of the Lord. We recall Him who claimed to be Himself God, whose blessed lessons, and holy life, and atoning death were so closely connected with Jerusalem, and would alone have made it for ever memorable, even if it had been signalized by nothing else. Unless David was illuminated from above to a far greater degree than we have any reason to believe, he could have little thought, when he captured that citadel, what a marvellous chapter in the world's history he was beginning. Century after century, millennium after millennium has passed; and still Zion and Jerusalem draw all eyes and hearts, and pilgrims from the ends of the earth, as

they look even on the ruins of former days, are conscious of a thrill which no other city in all the world can give. Nor is that all. When a name has to be found on earth for the home of the blessed in heaven, it is the new Jerusalem; when the scene of heavenly worship, vocal with the voice of harpers harping with their harps, has to be distinguished, it is said to be Mount Zion. Is not all this a striking testimony that nothing so ennobles either places or men as the gracious fellowship of God? View this distinction of Jerusalem and Mount Zion, if you choose, as the result of mere natural causes. Though the effect must be held far beyond the efficacy of the cause, yet you have this fact: that the places in all the world that to civilized mankind have become far the most glorious are those with which it is believed that God maintained a close and unexampled connection. View it, as it ought to be viewed, as a supernatural result; count the fellowship of God at Jerusalem a real fellowship, and His Spirit a living Spirit; count the presence of Jesus Christ to have been indeed that of God manifest in the flesh; you have now a cause really adequate to the effect, and you have a far more striking proof than before of the dignity and glory which God's presence brings. Would that every one of you might ponder the lesson of Jerusalem and Zion! O ye sons of men, God has drawn nigh to you, and He has drawn nigh to you as a God of salvation. Hear then His message! "For if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape if we refuse Him that speaketh from heaven."

# CHAPTER VII.

## *THE KINGDOM ESTABLISHED*

### **2 Samuel v. 10-25**

The events in David's reign that followed the capture of Mount Zion and the appointment of Jerusalem as the capital of the country were all of a prosperous kind. "David," we are told, "waxed greater and greater, for the Lord of hosts was with him." "And David perceived that the Lord had established him to be king over Israel, and that He had exalted his kingdom for His people Israel's sake."

In these words we find two things: a fact and an explanation. The fact is, that now the tide fairly turned in David's history, and that, instead of a sad chronicle of hardship and disappointment, the record of his reign becomes one of unmingled success and prosperity. The fact is far from an unusual one in the history of men's lives. How often, even in the case of men who have become eminent, has the first stage of life been one of disappointment and sorrow, and the last part one of prosperity so great as to exceed the fondest dreams of youth. Effort after effort has been made by a young man to get a footing in the literary world, but his books have proved comparative failures.

At last he issues one which catches in a remarkable degree the popular taste, and thereafter fame and fortune attend him, and lay their richest offerings at his feet. A similar tale is to be told of many an artist and professional man. And even persons of more ordinary gifts, who have found the battle of life awfully difficult in its earlier stages, have gradually, through diligence and perseverance, acquired an excellent position, more than fulfilling every reasonable desire for success. No man is indeed exempt from the risk of failure if he chooses a path of life for which he has no special fitness, or if he encounters a storm of unfavourable contingencies; but it is an encouraging thing for those who begin life under hard conditions, but with a brave heart and a resolute purpose to do their best, that, as a general rule, the sky clears as the day advances, and the troubles and struggles of the morning yield to success and enjoyment later in the day.

But in the present instance we have not merely a statement of the fact that the tide turned in the case of David, giving him prosperity and enlargement in every quarter, but an explanation of the fact – it was due to the gracious presence and favour of God. This by no means implies that his adversities were due to an opposite cause. God had been with him in the wilderness, save when he resorted to deceit and other tricks of carnal policy; but He had been with him to try him and to train him, not to crown him with prosperity. But now, the purpose of the early training being accomplished, God is with him to "grant him all his heart's desire and fulfil all his counsel." If God, indeed, had

not been with him, sanctifying his early trials, He would not have been with him in the end, crowning him with loving-kindness and tender mercies. But in the time of their trials, God is with His people more in secret, hid, at least, from the observation of the world; when the time comes for conspicuous blessing and prosperity, He comes more into view in His own gracious and bountiful character. In the case of David, God was not only with him, but David "perceived" it; he was conscious of the fact. His filial spirit recognized the source of all his prosperity and blessing, as it had done when he was enabled in his boyhood to slay the lion and the bear, and in his youth to triumph over Goliath. Unlike many successful men, who ascribe their success so largely to their personal talents and ways of working, he felt that the great factor in his success was God. If he possessed talents and had used them to advantage, it was God who had given them originally, and it was God who had enabled him to employ them well. But in every man's career, there are many other elements to be considered besides his own abilities. There is what the world calls "luck," that is to say those conditions of success which are quite out of our control; as for instance in business the unexpected rise or fall of markets, the occurrence of favourable openings, the honesty or dishonesty of partners and connections, the stability or the vicissitudes of investments. The difference between the successful man of the world and the successful godly man in these respects is, that the one speaks only of his luck, the other sees the hand of God in ordering all such

things for his benefit. This last was David's case. Well did he know that the very best use he could make of his abilities could not ensure success unless God was present to order and direct to a prosperous issue the ten thousand incidental influences that bore on the outcome of his undertakings. And when he saw that these influences were all directed to this end, that nothing went wrong, that all conspired steadily and harmoniously to the enlargement and establishment of his kingdom, he perceived that the Lord was with him, and was now visibly fulfilling to him that great principle of His government which He had so solemnly declared to Eli, "Them that honour Me, I will honour."

But is this way of claiming to be specially favoured and blessed by God not objectionable? Is it not what the world calls "cant"? Is it not highly offensive in any man to claim to be a favourite of Heaven? Is this not what hypocrites and fanatics are so fond of doing, and is it not a course which every good, humble-minded man will be careful to avoid?

This may be a plausible way of reasoning, but one thing is certain – it has not the support of Scripture. If it be an offence publicly to recognise the special favour and blessing with which it has pleased God to visit us, David himself was the greatest offender in this respect the world has ever known. What is the great burden of his psalms of thanksgiving? Is it not an acknowledgment of the special mercies and favours that God bestowed on him, especially in his times of great necessity? And does not the whole tenor of the Psalms and the whole tenor of

Scripture prove that good men are to take especial note of all the mercies they receive from God, and are not to confine them to their own bosom, but to tell of all His gracious acts and bless His name for ever and ever? "They shall abundantly utter the memory of Thy great goodness, and shall sing of Thy righteousness." That God is to be acknowledged in all our ways, that God's mercy in choosing us in Christ Jesus and blessing us with all spiritual blessings in Him is to be especially recognized, and that we are not to shrink from extolling God's name for conferring on us favours infinitely beyond what belong to the men of the world, are among the plainest lessons of the word of God.

What the world is so ready to believe is, that this cannot be done save in the spirit of the Pharisee who thanked God that he was not as other men. And whenever a worldly man falls foul of one who owns the distinguishing spiritual mercies that God has bestowed on him, it is this accusation he is sure to hurl at his head. But this just shows the recklessness and injustice of the world. Strange indeed if God in His word has imposed on us a duty which cannot be discharged but in company with those who say, "Stand by thyself; come not nigh; I am holier than thou"! The truth is, the world cannot or will not distinguish between the Pharisee, puffed up with the conceit of his goodness, and for this goodness of his deeming himself the favourite of Heaven, and the humble saint, conscious that in him dwelleth no good thing, and filled with adoring wonder at the mercy of God in making of one so unworthy a monument of His grace. The one is

as unlike the other as light is to darkness. What good men need to bear in mind is, that when they do make mention of the special goodness of God to them they should be most careful to do so in no boastful mood, but in the spirit of a most real, and not an assumed or formal, humility. And seeing how ready the world is to misunderstand and misrepresent the feeling, and to turn into a reproach what is done as a most sincere act of gratitude to God, it becomes them to be cautious how they introduce such topics among persons who have no sympathy with their view. "Cast not your pearls before swine," said our Lord, "lest they turn again and rend you." "Come near," said the Psalmist, "and hear, *all ye that fear God*, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul."

Midway between the two statements before us on the greatness and prosperity which God conferred on David, mention is made of his friendly relations with the king of Tyre (ver. 11). The Phœnicians were not included among the seven nations of Palestine whom the Israelites were to extirpate, so that a friendly alliance with them was not forbidden. It appears that Hiram was disposed for such an alliance, and David accepted of his friendly overtures. There is something refreshing in this peaceful episode in a history and in a time when war and violence seem to have been the normal condition of the intercourse of neighbouring nations. Tyre had a great genius for commerce; and the spirit of commerce is alien from the spirit of war. That it is always a nobler spirit cannot be said; for while commerce *ought* to rest on the idea of mutual benefit, and many of its sons honourably

fulfil this condition, it often degenerates into the most atrocious selfishness, and heeds not what havoc it may inflict on others provided it derives personal gain from its undertakings. What an untold amount of sin and misery has been wrought by the opium traffic, as well as by the traffic in strong drink, when pressed by cruel avarice on barbarous nations that have so often lost all of humanity they possessed through the fire-water of the *Christian* trader! But we have no reason to believe that there was anything specially hurtful in the traffic which Tyre now began with Israel, although the intercourse of the two countries afterwards led to other results pernicious to the latter – the introduction of Phœnician idolatry and the overthrow of pure worship in the greater part of the tribes of Israel. Meanwhile what Hiram does is to send to David cedar trees, and carpenters, and masons, by means of whom a more civilized style of dwelling is introduced; and the new city which David has commenced to build, and especially the house which is to be his own, present features of skill and beauty hitherto unknown in Israel. For, amid all his zeal for higher things, the young king of Israel does not disdain to advance his kingdom in material comforts. Of these, as of other things of the kind, he knows well that they are good if a man use them lawfully; and his effort is at once to promote the welfare of the kingdom in the amenities and comforts of life, and to deepen that profound regard for God and that exalted estimate of His favour which will prevent His people from relying for their prosperity on mere outward conditions, and encourage them ever

to place their confidence in their heavenly Protector and King.

We pass by, as not requiring more comment than we have already bestowed on a parallel passage (2 Sam. iii. 2-5), the unsavoury statement that "David took to him more concubines and wives" in Jerusalem. With all his light and grace, he had not overcome the prevalent notion that the dignity and resources of a kingdom were to be measured by the number and rank of the king's wives. The moral element involved in the arrangement he does not seem to have at all apprehended; and consequently, amid all the glory and prosperity that God has given him, he thoughtlessly multiplies the evil that was to spread havoc and desolation in his house.

We proceed, therefore, to what occupies the remainder of this chapter – the narrative of his wars with the Philistines. Two campaigns against these inveterate enemies of Israel are recorded, and the decisive encounter in both cases took place in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem.

The narrative is so brief that we have difficulty in apprehending all the circumstances. The first invasion of the Philistines took place soon after David was anointed king over all Israel. It is not said whether this occurred before David possessed himself of Mount Zion, nor, considering the structure common in Hebrew narrative, does the circumstance that in the history it follows that event prove that it was subsequent to it in the order of time. On the contrary, there is an expression that seems hardly consistent with this idea. We read (ver. 17) that when David

heard of the invasion he "went *down* into the hold." Now, this expression could not be used of the stronghold of Zion, for that hill is on the height of the central plateau, and invariably the Scriptures speak of "going up to Zion." If he had possession of Mount Zion, he would surely have gone to it when the Philistines took possession of the plain of Rephaim. The hold to which he went down must have been in a lower position; indeed, "the hold" is the expression used of the place or places of protection to which David resorted when he was pursued by Saul (see 1 Sam. xxii. 4). Further, when we turn to the twenty-third chapter of this book, which records some memorable incidents of the war with the Philistines, we find (vers. 13, 14) that when the Philistines pitched in the valley of Rephaim David was in a hold near the cave of Adullam. The valley of Rephaim, or "the giants," is an extensive plain to the south-west of Jerusalem, forming a great natural entrance to the city. When we duly consider the import of these facts, we see that the campaign was very serious, and David's difficulties very great. The Philistines were encamped in force on the summit of the plateau near the natural metropolis of the country. David was encamped in a hold in the low country in the south-west, making use of that very cave of Adullam where he had taken refuge in his conflicts with Saul. This was far from a hopeful state of matters. To the eye of man, his position may have appeared very desperate. Such an emergency was a fit time for a solemn application to God for direction. "David inquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up to the Philistines? Wilt Thou deliver

them into mine hand? And the Lord said unto David, Go up, for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into thine hand." Up, accordingly, David went, attacked the Philistines and smote them at a place called Baal-perazim, somewhere most likely between Adullam and Jerusalem. The expression "The Lord hath broken forth on mine enemies before me, as the breach of waters," seems to imply that He broke the Philistine host into two, like flooded water breaking an embankment, preventing them from uniting and rallying, and sending them in two detachments into flight and confusion. Considering the superior position of the Philistines, and the great advantage they seem to have had over David in numbers also, this was a signal victory, even though it did not reduce the foe to helplessness.

For when the Philistines had got time to recover, they again came up, pitched again in the plain of Rephaim, and appeared to render unavailing the signal achievement of David at Baal-perazim. Again David inquired what he should do. The reply was somewhat different from before. David was not to go straight up to face the enemy, as he had done before. He was to "fetch a compass behind them," that is, as we understand it, to make a circuit, so as to get in the enemy's rear over against a grove of mulberry trees. That tree has not yet disappeared from the neighbourhood of Jerusalem; a mulberry tree still marks the spot in the valley of Jehoshaphat where, according to tradition, Isaiah was sawn asunder (Stanley's "Sinai and Palestine"). When he should hear "the sound of a going" (Revised Version, "the sound

of a march") in the tops of the mulberry trees, then he was to bestir himself. It is difficult to conceive any natural cause that should give rise to a sound like that of a march "in the tops of the mulberry trees;" but if not a natural, it must have been a supernatural indication of some sound that would alarm the Philistines and make the moment favourable for an attack. It is probable that the presence of David and his troop in the rear of the Philistines was not suspected, the mulberry trees forming a screen between them. When David got his opportunity, he availed himself of it to great advantage; he inflicted a thorough defeat on the Philistines, and smiting them from Geba to Gazer, he appears to have all but annihilated their force. In this way, he gave the *coup de grâce* to his former allies.

We have said that it appears to have been during these campaigns against the Philistines that the incidents took place which are recorded fully in the twenty-third chapter of this book. It does not seem possible that these incidents occurred at or about the time when David was flying from Saul, at which time the cave of Adullam was one of his resorts. Neither is it likely that they occurred during the early years of David's reign, while he was yet at strife with the house of Saul. At least, it is more natural to refer them to the time when the Philistines, having heard that David had been anointed king over Israel, came up to seek David, although we do not consider it impossible that they occurred in the earlier period of his reign. The record shows how wonderfully the spirit of David had passed into his men, and what splendid

deeds of courage were performed by them, often in the face of tremendous odds. We get a fine glimpse here of one of the great sources of David's popularity – his extraordinary *pluck* as we now call it, and readiness for the most daring adventures, often crowned with all but miraculous success. In all ages, men of this type have been marvellous favourites with their comrades. The annals of the British army, and still more the British navy, contain many such records. And even when we go down to pirates and freebooters, we find the odium of their mode of life in many cases remarkably softened by the splendour of their valour, by their running unheard-of risks, and sometimes by sheer daring and bravery obtaining signal advantages over the greatest odds. The achievements of David's "three mighties," as well as of his "thirty," formed a splendid instance of this kind of warfare. All that we know of them is comprised within a few lines, but when we call to mind the enthusiasm that used to be awakened all over our own country by the achievements of Nelson and his officers, or more recently by General Gordon, of China and Egypt, we can easily understand the thrilling effect which these wonderful tales of valour would have throughout all the tribes of Israel.

The personal affection for David and his heroes which would thus be formed must have been very warm, nay, even enthusiastic. In the case of David, whatever may have been true of the others, all the influence thus acquired was employed for the welfare of the nation and the glory of God. The supreme desire of his heart was that the people might give all the

glory to Jehovah, and derive from these brilliant successes fresh assurances how faithful God was to His promises to Israel. Alike as a man of piety and a man of patriotism, he made this his aim. Knowing as he did what was due to God, and animated by a profound desire to render to God His due, he would have been horrified had he intercepted in his own person aught of the honour and glory which were His. But for the people's sake also, as a man of patriotism, his desire was equally strong that God should have all the glory. What were military successes however brilliant to the nation, or a reputation however eminent, compared to their enjoying the favour and friendship of God? Success – how ephemeral it was; reputation – as transient as the glow of a cloud beside the setting sun; but God's favour and gracious presence with the nation was a perpetual treasure, enlivening, healing, strengthening, guiding for evermore. "Happy is that people that is in such a case; yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord."

# CHAPTER VIII.

## *THE ARK BROUGHT UP TO JERUSALEM*

### 2 Samuel vi

The first care of David when settled on the throne had been to obtain possession of the stronghold of Zion, on which and on the city which was to surround it he fixed as the capital of the kingdom and the dwelling-place of the God of Israel. This being done, he next set about bringing up the ark of the testimony from Kirjath-jearim, where it had been left after being restored by the Philistines in the early days of Samuel. David's first attempt to place the ark on Mount Zion failed through want of due reverence on the part of those who were transporting it; but after an interval of three months the attempt was renewed, and the sacred symbol was duly installed on Mount Zion, in the midst of the tabernacle prepared by David for its reception.

In bringing up the ark to Jerusalem, the king showed a commendable desire to interest the whole nation, as far as possible, in the solemn service. He gathered together the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand, and went with them to bring

up the ark from Baale of Judah, which must be another name for Kirjath-jearim, distant from Jerusalem about ten miles. The people, numerous as they were, grudged neither the time, the trouble, nor the expense. A handful might have sufficed for all the actual labour that was required; but thousands of the chief people were summoned to be present, and that on the principle both of rendering due honour to God, and of conferring a benefit on the people. It is not a handful of professional men only that should be called to take a part in the service of religion; Christian people generally should have an interest in the ark of God; and other things being equal, that Church which interests the greatest number of people and attracts them to active work will not only do most for advancing God's kingdom, but will enjoy most of inward life and prosperity.

The joyful spirit in which this service was performed by David and his people is another interesting feature of the transaction. Evidently it was not looked on as a toilsome service, but as a blessed festival, adapted to cheer the heart and raise the spirits. What was the precise nature of the service? It was to bring into the heart of the nation, into the new capital of the kingdom, the ark of the covenant, that piece of sacred furniture which had been constructed nearly five hundred years before in the wilderness of Sinai, the memorial of God's holy covenant with the people, and the symbol of His gracious presence among them. In spirit it was bringing God into the very midst of the nation, and on the choicest and most prominent pedestal the country now supplied

setting up a constant memento of the presence of the Holy One. Rightly understood, the service could bring joy only to spiritual hearts; it could give pleasure to none who had reason to dread the presence of God. To those who knew Him as their reconciled Father and the covenant God of the nation, it was most attractive. It was as if the sun were again shining on them after a long eclipse, or as if the father of a loved and loving family had returned after a weary absence. God enthroned on Zion, God in the midst of Jerusalem – what happier or more thrilling thought was it possible to cherish? God, the sun and shield of the nation, occupying for His residence the one fitting place in all the land, and sending over Jerusalem and over all the country emanations of love and grace, full of blessing for all that feared His name! The happiness with which this service was entered on by David and his people is surely the type of the spirit in which all service to God should be rendered by those whose sins He has blotted out, and on whom He has bestowed the privileges of His children.

But the best of services may be gone about in a faulty way. There may be some criminal neglect of God's will that, like the dead fly in the apothecary's pot of ointment, causes the perfume to send forth a stinking savour. And so it was on this occasion. God had expressly directed that when the ark was moved from place to place it should be borne on poles on the shoulders of the Levites, and never carried in a cart, like a common piece of furniture. But in the removal of the ark from Kirjath-jearim, this direction was entirely overlooked.

Instead of following the directions given to Moses, the example of the Philistines was copied when they sent the ark back to Bethshemesh. The Philistines had placed it in a new cart, and the men of Israel now did the same. What induced them to follow the example of the Philistines rather than the directions of Moses, we do not know, and can hardly conjecture. It does not appear to have been a mere oversight. It had something of a deliberate plan about it, as if the law given in the wilderness were now obsolete, and in so small a matter any method might be chosen that the people liked. It was substituting a heathen example for a Divine rule in the worship of God. We cannot suppose that David was guilty of deliberately setting aside the authority of God. On his part, it may have been an error of inadvertence. But that somewhere there was a serious offence is evident from the punishment with which it was visited (1 Chron. xv. 13). The jagged bridlepaths of those parts are not at all adapted for wheeled conveyances, and when the oxen stumbled, and the ark was shaken, Uzzah, who was driving the cart, put forth his hand to steady it. "The anger of God," we are told, "was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God." His effort to steady the ark must have been made in a presumptuous way, without reverence for the sacred vessel. Only a Levite was authorized to touch it, and Uzzah was apparently a man of Judah. The punishment may seem to us hard for an offence which was ceremonial rather than moral; but in that economy, moral truth was taught through ceremonial

observances, and neglect of the one was treated as involving neglect of the other. The punishment was like the punishment of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, for offering strange fire in their censers. It may be that both in their case, and in the case of Uzzah, there were unrecorded circumstances, unknown to us, making it clear that the ceremonial offence was not a mere accident, but that it was associated with evil personal qualities well fitted to provoke the judgment of God. The great lesson for all time is to beware of following our own devices in the worship of God when we have clear instructions in His word how we are to worship Him.

This lamentable event put a sudden end to the joyful service. It was like the bursting of a thunderstorm on an excursion party that rapidly sends every one to flight. And it is doubtful whether the spirit shown by David was altogether right. He was displeased "because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzzah, and he called the name of the place Perez-uzzah to this day. And David was afraid of the Lord that day and said, How shall the ark of the Lord come to me? So David would not remove the ark of the Lord into the city of David; but David carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite." The narrative reads as if David resented the judgment which God had inflicted, and in a somewhat petulant spirit abandoned the enterprise because he found God too hard to please. That some such feeling should have fluttered about his heart was not to be wondered at; but surely it was a feeling to which he ought not to have given entertainment,

as it certainly was one on which he ought not to have acted. If God was offended, David surely knew that He must have had good ground for being so. It became him and the people, therefore, to accept God's judgment, humble themselves before Him, and seek forgiveness for the negligent manner in which they had addressed themselves to this very solemn service. Instead of this David throws up the matter in a fit of sullen temper, as if it were impossible to please God in it, and the enterprise must therefore be abandoned. He leaves the ark in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite, returning to Jerusalem crestfallen and displeased, altogether in a spirit most opposite to that in which he had set out.

It may happen to you that some Christian undertaking on which you have entered with great zeal and ardour, and without any surmise that you are not doing right, is not blessed, but meets with some rough shock, that places you in a very painful position. In the most disinterested spirit, you have tried perhaps to set up in some neglected district a school or a mission, and you expect all encouragement and approbation from those who are most interested in the welfare of the district. Instead of receiving approval, you find that you are regarded as an enemy and an intruder. You are attacked with unexampled rudeness, sinister aims are laid to your charge, and the purpose of your undertaking is declared to be to hurt and discourage those whom you were bound to aid. The shock is so violent and so rude that for a time you cannot understand it. On the part of man it admits of no

reasonable justification whatever. But when you go into your closet, and think of the matter as permitted by God, you wonder still more why God should thwart you in your endeavour to do good. Rebellious feelings hover about your heart that if God is to treat you in this way, it were better to abandon His service altogether. But surely no such feeling is ever to find a settled place in your heart. You may be sure that the rebuff which God has permitted you to encounter is meant as a trial of your faith and humility; and if you wait on God for further light and humbly ask a true view of God's will; if, above all, you beware of retiring in sullen silence from God's active service, good may come out of the apparent evil, and you may yet find cause to bless God even for the shock that made you so uncomfortable at the time.

The Lord does not forsake His people, nor leave them for ever under a cloud. It was not long before the downcast heart of David was reassured. When the ark had been left at the house of Obed-edom, Obed-edom was not afraid to take it in. Its presence in other places had hitherto been the signal for disaster and death. Among the Philistines, in city after city, at Bethshemesh, and now at Perez-uzzah, it had spread death on every side. Obed-edom was no sufferer. Probably he was a God-fearing man, conscious of no purpose but that of honouring God. A manifest blessing rested on his house. "The God of heaven," says Bishop Hall, "pays liberally for His lodging." It is not so much God's ark in our time and country that needs a lodging, but God's servants, God's poor, sometimes persecuted fugitives flying from

an oppressor, very often pious men in foreign countries labouring under infinite discouragements to serve God. The Obed-edom who takes them in will not suffer. Even should he be put to loss or inconvenience, the day of recompense draweth nigh. "I was a stranger, and ye took Me in."

Again, then, King David, encouraged by the experience of Obed-edom, goes forth in royal state to bring up the ark to Jerusalem. The error that had proved so fatal was now rectified. "David said, None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites, for them hath the Lord chosen to carry the ark of God and to minister unto Him for ever" (1 Chron. xv. 2). In token of his humility and his conviction that every service that man renders to God is tainted and needs forgiveness, oxen and fatlings were sacrificed ere the bearers of the ark had well begun to move. The spirit of enthusiastic joy again swayed the multitude, brightened probably by the assurance that no judgment need now be dreaded, but that they might confidently look for the smile of an approving God. The feelings of the king himself were wonderfully wrought up, and he gave free expression to the joy of his heart. There are occasions of great rejoicing when all ceremony is forgotten, and no forms or appearances are suffered to stem the tide of enthusiasm as it gushes right from the heart. It was an occasion of this kind to David. The check he had sustained three months before had only dammed up his feelings, and they rolled out now with all the greater volume. His soul was stirred by the thought that the symbol of Godhead was

now to be placed in his own city, close to his own dwelling; that it was to find an abiding place of rest in the heart of the kingdom, on the heights where Melchizedek had reigned, close to where he had blessed Abraham, and which God had destined as His own dwelling from the foundations of the world. Glorious memories of the past, mingling with bright anticipations of the future, recollections of the grace revealed to the fathers, and visions of the same grace streaming forth to distant ages, as generation after generation of the faithful came up here to attend the holy festivals, might well excite that tumult of emotion in David's breast before which the ordinary restraints of royalty were utterly flung aside. He sacrificed, he played, he sang, he leapt and danced before the Lord, with all his might; he made a display of enthusiasm which the cold-hearted Michal, as she could not understand it nor sympathise with it, had the folly to despise and the cruelty to ridicule. The ordinary temper of the sexes was reversed – the man was enthusiastic; the woman was cold. Little did she know of the springs of true enthusiasm in the service of God! To her faithless eye, the ark was little more than a chest of gold, and where it was kept was of little consequence; her carnal heart could not appreciate the glory that excelleth; her blind eye could see none of the visions that had overpowered the soul of her husband.

A few other circumstances are briefly noticed in connection with the close of the service, when the ark had been solemnly enshrined within the tabernacle that David had reared for it on

Mount Zion.

The first is that "David offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings before the Lord." The burnt-offering was a fresh memorial of sin, and therefore a fresh confession that even in connection with that very holy service there were sins to be confessed, atoned for, and forgiven. For there is this great difference between the service of the formalist and the service of the earnest worshipper: that while the one can see nothing faulty in his performance, the other sees a multitude of imperfections in his. Clearer light and a clearer eye, even the light thrown by the glory of God's purity on the best works of man, reveal a host of blemishes, unseen in ordinary light and by the carnal eye. Our very prayers need to be purged, our tears to be wept over, our repentances repented of. Little could the best services ever done by him avail the spiritual worshipper if it were not for the High-priest over the house of God who ever liveth to make intercession for him.

Again, we find David after the offering of the burnt-offerings and the peace-offerings "blessing the people in the name of the Lord of hosts." This was something more than merely expressing a wish or offering a prayer for their welfare. It was like the benediction with which we close our public services. The benediction is more than a prayer. The servant of the Lord appears in the attitude of dropping on the heads of the people the blessing which he invokes. Not that he or any man can convey heavenly blessings to a people that do not by faith appropriate

them and rejoice in them. But the act of benediction implies this: These blessings are yours if you will only have them. They are provided, they are made over to you, if you will only accept them. The last act of public worship is a great encouragement to faith. When the peace of God that passeth all understanding, or the blessing of God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, or the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost are invoked over your heads, it is to assure you that if you will but accept of them through Jesus Christ, these great blessings are actually yours. True, there is no part of our service more frequently spoiled by formality; but there is none richer with true blessing to faith. So when David blessed the people, it was an assurance to them that God's blessing was within their reach; it was theirs if they would only take it. How strange that any hearts should be callous under such an announcement; that any should fail to leap to it, as it were, and rejoice in it, as glad tidings of great joy!

The third thing David did was to deal to every one of Israel, both man and woman, a loaf of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine. It was a characteristic act, worthy of a bountiful and generous nature like David's. It may be that associating bodily gratifications with Divine service is liable to abuse, that the taste which it gratifies is not a high one, and that it tempts some men to attend religious services for the same reason as some followed Jesus – for the loaves and fishes. Yet Jesus did not abstain on some rare occasions from feeding the

multitude, though the act was liable to abuse. The example both of David and of Jesus may show us that though not habitually, yet occasionally, it is both right and fitting that religious service should be associated with a simple repast. There is nothing in Scripture to warrant the practice, adopted in some missions in very poor districts, of feeding the people habitually when they come up for religious service, and there is much in the argument that such a practice degrades religion and obscures the glory of the blessings which Divine service is designed to bring to the poor. But occasionally the rigid rule may be somewhat relaxed, and thus a sort of symbolical proof afforded that godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

The last thing recorded of David is, that he returned to bless his house. The cares of the State and the public duties of the day were not allowed to interfere with his domestic duty. Whatever may have been his ordinary practice, on this occasion at least he was specially concerned for his household, and desirous that in a special sense they should share the blessing. It is plain from this that, amid all the imperfections of his motley household, he could not allow his children to grow up ignorant of God, thus dealing a rebuke to all who, outdoing the very heathen in heathenism, have houses without an altar and without a God. It is painful to find that the spirit of the king was not shared by every member of his family. It was when he was returning to this duty that Michal met him and addressed to him these

insulting words: "How glorious was the king of Israel to-day, who uncovered himself to-day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamefully uncovers himself." On the mind of David himself, this ebullition had no effect but to confirm him in his feeling, and reiterate his conviction that his enthusiasm reflected on him not shame but glory. But a woman of Michal's character could not but act like an icicle on the spiritual life of the household. She belonged to a class that cannot tolerate enthusiasm in religion. In any other cause, enthusiasm may be excused, perhaps extolled and admired: in the painter, the musician, the traveller, even the child of pleasure; the only persons whose enthusiasm is unbearable are those who are enthusiastic in their regard for their Saviour, and in the answer they give to the question, "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" There are, doubtless, times to be calm, and times to be enthusiastic; but can it be right to give all our coldness to Christ and all our enthusiasm to the world?

# CHAPTER IX.

## *PROPOSAL TO BUILD A TEMPLE*

### **2 Samuel vii**

The spirit of David was essentially active and fond of work. He was one of those who are ever pressing on, not content to keep things as they are, moving personally towards improvement, and urging others to do the same. Even in Eastern countries, with their proverbial stillness and conservatism, such men are sometimes found, but they are far more common elsewhere. Great undertakings do not frighten them; they have spirit enough for a lifetime of effort, they never seem weary of pushing on. When they look on the disorders of the world they are not content with the languid utterance, "Something must be done;" they consider what it is possible for them to do, and gird themselves to the doing of it.

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