

THE STORY OF DAVID



DAVID ATTACKED BY SAUL.

THE STORY OF DAVID

ITS LESSONS FOR TO-DAY

BY THE

REV. JOHN WILD

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	11
I. FIRST GLIMPSES OF DAVID	15
II. SAUL	26
III. EARLY TRIUMPHS AND PERILS	33
IV. DAVID AND JONATHAN	43
V. THE CAVE OF ADULLAM	51
VI. DAVID AND HIS MIGHTY MEN	62
VII. DAVID'S LOYAL FORBEARANCE	69
VIII. NABAL AND ABIGAIL	79
IX. DAVID AGAIN SPARES SAUL	87
X. DAVID ANOINTED THE SECOND TIME	102
XI. DOUBLE DEFEAT OF THE PHILISTINES	116
XII. THE ARK OF GOD BROUGHT TO JERUSALEM	125
XIII. DAVID'S DESIRE TO BUILD A TEMPLE	132
XIV. EXTENSION OF THE KINGDOM	139
XV. DAVID'S STAR AT ITS ZENITH	152
XVI. DAVID'S GREAT SIN	161
XVII. DOMESTIC TROUBLES	170
XVIII. FLIGHT FROM JERUSALEM	183
XIX. DIVIDED COUNSELS	195
XX. DEATH OF ABSALOM	201
XXI. DAVID NUMBERS THE PEOPLE	216
XXII. PREPARATIONS FOR THE TEMPLE	228
XXIII. DAVID'S LAST DAYS	237
XXIV. SOME GREAT THOUGHTS ABOUT DAVID	245

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.



	PAGE
DAVID ATTACKED BY SAUL. <i>Frontispiece.</i>	
DAVID AND GOLIATH	21
ESCAPE OF DAVID THROUGH THE WINDOW	37
DAVID AND JONATHAN	47
TRADITIONAL CAVE OF ADULLAM IN THE WADY KHUREITAN	55
DAVID SHOWING SAUL THAT HE HAD SPARED HIS LIFE	71
PROBABLE SITE OF GATH	91
COMBAT BETWEEN THE CHAMPIONS OF DAVID AND ISH-BOSHETH	109
THE VALLEY OF REPHAIM	121
ABISHAI SAVES THE LIFE OF DAVID	141
HEBRON	179
VIEW FROM OLIVET TO THE SOUTH	185
DEATH OF ABSALOM	203
ABSALOM'S TOMB	207
DAVID MOURNING FOR ABSALOM	211
THE JERUSALEM OF TO-DAY.	239

THE STORY OF DAVID.



INTRODUCTION.

THE stormy and adventurous career of David, King of Israel, beginning as a shepherd lad, ending as a mighty Oriental potentate, is one of the most stirring and remarkable recorded in history, sacred or profane. No more interesting story can be imagined than the tale of his life—the perils and escapes of his youth, the heroic deeds of his early manhood, the lofty statesmanship of his maturer years, and, alas, the follies, sins, and sorrows that marked his old age and dimmed the splendours of his unique fame as warrior, poet, and king.

To at all understand the greatness of the work accomplished by this extraordinary man, it is necessary to have some knowledge of the disastrous time—as far as his nation was concerned—in which his lot was cast. Israel was then in a most pitiable and forlorn condition. Surrounded on all sides by enemies stronger than

themselves—with Moab, Ammon, and Edom in the east, with the Philistines in the west, and plagued internally by their ancient enemies, the peoples who possessed Canaan before Joshua led the conquering hosts of Israel over Jordan, and who still held fortified places like Jebus, afterwards Jerusalem—the scattered tribes had no common centre of unity, and no leader universally trusted and obeyed.

Saul, it is true, had some time before been anointed king by Samuel, the great prophet and seer who had “judged” Israel for nearly half-a-century, and he had proved himself a valiant and skilful captain; but he seems never to have exerted much authority outside the limits of Benjamin, his own tribe, and his military successes, not consolidated by statesmanship, bore little enduring fruit.

The Philistines, becoming more and more troublesome, were driving the Hebrews from the fertile parts of the country into hiding-places among the hills, from which they scarcely ventured to emerge, even to till their fields and gather in their harvests. Checked for a time by Saul, and especially by a notable victory in which Jonathan, the son of Saul and heir to the kingdom, took a chief part, these implacable enemies continued to close round the unhappy monarch until his final defeat and death on Mount Gilboa.

David's life-work, from a patriotic and secular point of view, was to weld the scattered tribes into a compact and powerful nation; to subdue every enemy; and out of the discordant and unruly materials of the broken people to establish a vast and wealthy kingdom reaching from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates, a kingdom which could treat on something like equal terms with the mighty empires of Assyria and Egypt, and the fame of which reached all over the then known world.

How this was accomplished, and what manner of man he was that accomplished it, is told in the following pages, in simple narrative form. The varied beauties of the story; its manly, healthful lessons of courage and faith, have been, for the most part, left to tell their own tale as they appear in the historical books of the Old Testament. Nowhere, it may be remarked, but in the Bible would the character of a hero and saint be described with such absolute and transparent fidelity to truth. The man is evidently painted as he was. We recognise him as a brother, though so far removed from us in time, in circumstances, and in gifts.

No attempt has been made to bring before the reader the controversies that have raged—and still rage—concerning his writings, or to discuss the difficulties, chronological and otherwise, that occur in the course of the narrative. The main outlines

and facts of the life are undisputed, and it is with them that the writer has chiefly concerned himself.

The Psalms given at the close of many of the chapters are those which appear—either from the titles or from internal evidence—to be connected with the events narrated therein.

CHAPTER I.

FIRST GLIMPSES OF DAVID.

To an adventurous English lad in this quiet country of ours the task of looking after a few sheep does not seem very inviting, nor does it offer many opportunities for heroic exploits. Our tranquil fields and lanes seldom contain anything more dangerous than an excitable bull, nor are our shepherds often called upon to risk their lives in defence of their flocks. But it was very different in Judæa in the days when David was young. The country had not then been thoroughly cleared of its ancient forests, and savage beasts roamed in the woods that clothed the uplands near Bethlehem, where David was born, and sometimes attacked the flocks in their pasture grounds. The keepers, therefore, had not only to be watchful, but strong and brave; always ready for a fight, even when their foes were bears or lions.

We first hear of David as a lad of fifteen or sixteen, keeping his father's sheep "in the wilderness," ruddy with exposure to sunshine and rain, not very tall, though fleet as a wild roe; possessed of uncommon strength and activity, and with a

reputation for boldness and courage gained in desperate fights with the beasts of the desert. Those watches in the dark and cold of winter nights, listening for the stealthy steps of some prowling foe must have been sufficient to test his native stoutness of heart, and, doubtless, bred in him the cool and resolute courage afterwards displayed on many a battlefield, and which made him, even in his failing age, feared by traitors as an "old lion."

His father, Jesse the Bethlehemite, was at this time an old man, David being the youngest of his eight sons. The lad had also two sisters, both much older than himself, one of whom, Zeruiah, was the mother of Joab, Abishai, and Asahel, men of about David's age, though really his nephews, whom we shall often meet in the course of this history.

The family life of Jesse and his household, up to the memorable appearance of Samuel at Bethlehem now to be narrated, had apparently been as quiet and uneventful as that of one of the old patriarchs, and the man was little known or regarded in Israel. David himself had, indeed, a reputation in the countryside as a brave shepherd, and also as a skilful harper and minstrel; but beyond this the family was of little account.

One day, however, the monotony of this pastoral life was disturbed by a visit from

Samuel, and the elders of the little town anxiously inquired the reason of his unexpected appearance. The prophet did not enlighten them, but informed Jesse privately that he wished to see all his family together. A summons brought them under the parental roof, all but little David, who was probably thought too insignificant to be included, and the aged seer looked upon the long line of "tall and beautiful" young men, as David is said to have afterwards described them, but his prophetic eye failed to discern one towards whom he could perform his Divine errand. "Hast thou not yet another son?" he said, and David was sent for. Then the Spirit of God informed Samuel that this was the man whom He had chosen to be King over His people Israel in place of Saul, and on him the prophet poured the vial of the sacred oil of anointing, which by God's command he had brought with him from Gilgal.

The full significance of Samuel's mysterious act does not appear to have been understood at the time, perhaps not even by David himself; but it is recorded that from that day forward the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and in the stormy and adventurous career on which he was soon to embark neither wisdom nor courage was ever found wanting, even in the greatest straits and direst difficulties. Events soon brought the divinely-commissioned young hero to the front. At this time, King Saul was suffering

severely in two ways: an "evil spirit from God was troubling him," and he was sorely pressed by the Philistines. To relieve the first of these troubles, the King's servants advised that a skilful musician should be sought who might play on the harp when the attacks of melancholy came on, and "Then," they said, "thou shalt be well." Saul consenting, one of those present suggested, "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite that is cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the Lord is with him." David was accordingly sent for, and his ministry proving effectual, he stood before Saul, who came to love him greatly and made him his armour-bearer. "So it came to pass when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp and played with his hand; so Saul was refreshed and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him." From the King's other trouble, his formidable and restless enemies, David was also instrumental in delivering him. It may be noted here that there is much difficulty in determining whether the remarkable event now to be narrated took place before or after his introduction to Saul as a minstrel. A great deal has been written on the subject, but no certain conclusion can be reached.

The war between Israel and the Philistines had become a life and death struggle, and there

came a day when the armies of the two nations faced each other on either side of a narrow valley in the hill country of Judæa. From the Philistine ranks there stepped forth, clad in complete and glittering armour, the gigantic figure of Goliath of Gath. With boasting and contemptuous words he challenged Saul and his army to choose them a man to fight with him, that, single-handed, they might decide which nation should be master and which slave. Dismay seized the hearts of the panic-stricken Hebrews. Saul himself, who should have been his people's champion, both by reason of his rank and of his towering stature, shrank from the combat, and not one of his men of war could be found to accept the challenge. For forty successive days was this insulting and, to the Israelites, humiliating, scene repeated, and the gloom of Saul and his followers was deepening into despair, when David appeared on the scene. He had come to the camp with food for his brothers, who were with the host, and his brave and pious spirit was wounded to the quick as he heard the "armies of the living God" insulted and defied, and no one found to take up the gage of battle on their behalf. It was told him also that King Saul had offered a great reward to the man who should fight and kill the Philistine. His resolve was instantly taken. Brought before Saul, he said to the King, "Let no man's heart fail him, I will go and fight this Philistine." Saul answered, with

natural surprise, "Thou art not able ; thou art but a youth." Then David told of his exploits as a shepherd ; how he had fought with a lion and a bear which had attacked his father's sheep, and how he had wrestled with and killed them. "God," he said, "who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the bear, will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine, for he has defied the armies of the living God."

On hearing David's confident speech, Saul, probably as a kind of forlorn hope, consented to his enterprise, and offered him his own armour ; but this the young man refused. He preferred using his natural advantages of activity and fleetness of foot, and the familiar weapons of a sling and a stone. These last were more formidable than we are apt to imagine. The slingers of Israel were trained men, able to hit their mark to a hair's breadth, and send showers of missiles against their enemies as deadly in their effects as "England's arrow flight," celebrated in song and story. So, armed only with his staff and sling, he drew near to his formidable foe, picking up a few smooth stones from a brook as he went along.

Goliath beheld his approach with mingled rage and disdain. "Am I a dog," he said, "that thou comest against me with staves ? Come, and I will give thy flesh to the fowls and beasts." David answered with words of trust in the shield of the



DAVID AND GOLIATH.

Lord his God. Cursing David by his gods, the giant came on to the fight, but almost before he knew, his fate was upon him. Agile as a deer, the youth bounded forward to meet his foe, placing in the sling one of the stones he carried. A few rapid turns of the wrist, and the deadly missile sang through the air and crashed into the thick skull of the overgrown monster, who fell forward on his face—dead. His giant strength, his complete and splendid armour, his warlike training, all useless against the simple weapon of his youthful foe. Then, amid the shouts of the triumphant Israelites and the dismayed silence of their enemies, David ran and stood over the Philistine, and with the giant's own sword cut off his head.

As was usual in such cases, the fall of their champion was followed by a complete break-up of the host, and Saul and his men chased the flying Philistines until they found shelter within the walls of their cities.

The wildest joy took possession of the people at this splendid victory, the first of a long series gained by the valour and address of the young hero fresh from the pastoral hills of Bethlehem. On such occasions as these, when the victors returned from the fight, the women met them with song "answering one another;" one group exultingly chanting, "Saul hath slain his thousands," and another replying, "And David his ten thousands."

This exuberant joy is not to be wondered at. For a long time there had been "sore war" between Israel and the combative and predatory Philistines, and although notable defeats had been inflicted on them in the earlier years of Saul's reign, yet their power remained unbroken, and they were always ready to "vex" Israel whenever opportunity offered. The appearance, therefore, of a leader who seemed able to cope successfully with them was inexpressibly welcome.

PSALM XXIII.

¶ A Psalm of David.

THE LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

"The twenty-third Psalm is the nightingale of the Psalms. It is small, of a homely feather, singing shyly out of obscurity; but, oh! it has filled the air of the whole world with melodious joy, greater than the heart can conceive. Blessed be the day on which that Psalm was born." ("Life Thoughts," H. W. Beecher.)

PSALM CLI.

(Found only in the Septuagint.)

I WAS small amongst my brethren, and the youngest in my father's house. I was feeding my father's sheep. My hands made a harp and my fingers fitted a psaltery. And who shall tell it to my Lord? He is the Lord, He heareth. He sent His messenger and took me from my father's flocks, and anointed me with the oil of His anointing. My brethren were beautiful and tall, but the Lord was not well pleased with them. I went out to meet the Philistine, and he cursed me by his idols. But I drew his own sword and beheaded him, and took away the reproach from the children of Israel.

CHAPTER II.

SAUL.

THE remarkable man who at this time ruled Israel is delineated at length in another of these volumes; but a brief sketch of him in this place is necessary to the full comprehension of David's character and powers; for the personal intercourse between the first and second kings of Israel was so extraordinary, its incidents so romantic, its vicissitudes so great, its character by turns so loving, so fierce, so tragic, that it touched and woke into music all the chords of the many-stringed harp of David's complex and varied nature. But for the influence of Saul, with his royal generosity, his consuming hatreds, his deep and remorseful repentances, his enthusiastic devotions, his jealousies and despairing glooms, David, as we read of him in the pages of Holy Writ, could hardly have been.

Few sadder tragedies than the life-history of the first king of Israel meet us in the records of the world. Called—like his great successor—from the quiet obscurity of a pastoral life, to the dangerous elevation of an eastern monarch, by the

desire of his countrymen for a leader in a time of great peril, his physical qualifications were naturally regarded as of great importance. "See!" exclaimed the Prophet Samuel, when he presented him to the people, "See the man whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among the people." Head and shoulders he towered above them all, a spear which none else could wield his constant companion. In character and disposition, he was a true Benjamite, with all the restless fierceness of the tribe of which their father Jacob had prophesied:—"Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf; in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil." In this respect, at least, he was a fitting chief for a people fighting for very existence against a host of implacable enemies, both without and within the borders of their land, and splendidly he prepared the way for the truer kingly genius of his successor.

Yet this fitness was not without strange drawbacks. His life had been spent in seclusion, and even among the people of the countryside, his familiar friends, he seems to have borne the character of a shy, retiring, and self-distrustful man; so much so that even after his coronation many of his tribesmen refused to receive him, deeming him unfit for his position. Indeed, on that great occasion he was at first not to be found; he had "hidden himself among the stuff;" and after it was over he took no steps to assert his

dignity or exert his power, but went quietly home and resumed his duties as a herdsman. As to his mental and spiritual qualifications, even after he had been anointed with the sacred oil, when he was made a new man ("God gave him a new heart"), and he received the spirit of prophecy, the matter seemed so strange and unaccountable to those who knew him, that it became a proverb in Israel, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

A circumstance, however, soon occurred that caused his slumbering powers to awake. One day, when following his oxen in the field, tidings came that the men of Jabesh-Gilead, who were connected with his father's house by ties of close friendship, were in imminent peril from the Ammonites. Instantly, kindled by the breath of God, the spirit of the leader and king broke out into sudden flame. Hewing in pieces the animals he was driving, he sent portions to all Israel, with the stirring message—"Whosoever comes not after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done to his cattle." The response was universal and immediate, and now Saul proved his capacity as a warrior. Crossing the Jordan by night, he divided his forces into three bands, and fell upon the Ammonites like a thunderbolt in the morning watch, completely destroying their host and rescuing the almost despairing men of Gilead. This exploit bore its natural fruit. A leader had been found capable of "organising victory," and the hearts of the people

turned to him, freely and gladly recognising him as their king.

It is to be noted that, although God for His own purposes granted the petition of the tribes for a supreme head, he yet rebuked it through Samuel, and warned the people of evil consequences sure to ensue; as also we read in the prophet Hosea, "He gave them a king in His anger and took him away in His wrath."

A remarkable illustration of the mingled strength and weakness of Saul's character is found in the foolish command and rash vow that doomed to death his well-loved son, Jonathan. On a day of battle and victory of which Jonathan was the chief hero, the king ordered that none of the people should taste food until evening, and he had been avenged on his enemies. Jonathan, like the rest of the men, became exhausted with the long day's slaughter and pursuit of the Philistines, and, ignorant of his father's command, ate some of the wild honey plentiful in the woods of the district. On this becoming known, Saul, true to his oath, issued the stern edict, "Thou shalt surely die, Jonathan," and the dread sentence would have been carried out but for the interference of the people, grateful for the "salvation" that Jonathan had wrought. "Shall Jonathan die?" they said. "God forbid, there shall not a hair of his head fall to the ground." And their voice prevailed.

A most capable warrior, however, did Saul prove himself. Under his directing hand a standing army, "the host," began to be formed. Whenever he saw a strong and valiant man, he took him and gave him a place in his body-guard, a band of brave and experienced soldiers, with the king's cousin, "the generous and princely Abner," at its head. With this formidable weapon at his disposal he gave the enemies of his country no rest. Moab, Ammon, Amalek, Edom, all felt the weight of his hand. In the words of Scripture, "whithersoever he turned himself he vexed them," and for a brief space only Philistia was a serious trouble to Israel.

Such was Saul in his best days, when the light of God's favour was with him; when he listened to the counsels of God given him through the aged and venerated Samuel; when the Spirit of God was mighty in him, as it had been in Gideon, and Samson, and Jephthah, to work deliverance for Israel. Not a perfect man by any means; but one who was doing the work of his time, and with great possibilities before him.

Soon and quickly, however, the shadows gathered over the fair prospects of the king and nation. The native wilfulness and impatience of Saul's character began to break through the salutary restraint that the Spirit of God and the influence of Samuel had exercised over him. First restiveness, then direct disobedience; this

was the path that Saul trod and that led him to his fall, and the earliest words of impending rejection were soon heard from God's Ambassador. The occasion was as follows. The Philistines had gathered and offered battle. Samuel appointed a day on which to offer sacrifice, but failed to appear at the set time. Saul would not wait, and himself offered a sacrifice, contrary to God's express command. No sooner was this done than the prophet appeared, and his awful rebuke of the king's impatience foreshadowed the doom which awaited the unhappy monarch. Later he disobeyed the word of God in a still more direct manner. Commanded utterly to destroy the Amalekites for their cruelty to Israel in past times, he spared the King and the chief of the spoil, apparently to grace his triumph. And now the seer was commissioned by the Most High to announce the utter rejection of Saul and his house. In reply to Saul's excuses he uttered the memorable words, "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams;" and further, "because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee from being king." So, under the cloud of the Divine anger, forsaken by Samuel, and continually pressed by the ever-restless Philistines, the natural gloom of his character gradually deepened into intermittent madness. In the expressive language of Scripture, "an evil spirit from God troubled him;" for sin ever brings its own reward. As a

forlorn hope he sought forbidden supernatural aid. In his earlier and better days he had decreed the banishment of all who had what were called "familiar spirits;" but now he went to the "Witch of Endor," in the hope of compelling the spirit of the dead Samuel once more to converse with and counsel him. The result was—despair; and on the morrow of that evil day, both Saul and Jonathan fell in battle, slain on their own familiar high places—the green and pleasant table-lands of Mount Gilboa. The fitful fever of his tempestuous life was over, and his body was carried away in triumph by his enemies.

Such was Saul, the first of the long line of the kings of Israel. Many striking and some lovable qualities were his, marred, as they were, with grievous faults.

Perhaps he merited the appellation of "gloomy giant," which Dean Stanley has bestowed upon him in his wonderful sketch of his career; but Samuel loved and mourned for him, while the affectionate relationship of father and son has seldom been more beautifully illustrated than in Saul and Jonathan.

"They were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided," was their epitaph, written by the gifted hand of one who knew and loved them well.

CHAPTER III.

EARLY TRIUMPHS AND PERILS.

THE battle over, the conqueror of Goliath was summoned to the presence of the king, Abner, the chief of the host, conducting him. A long and interesting conversation appears to have taken place between Saul and the ruddy youth, who at that time the king little suspected was the "neighbour, better than thou," to whom Samuel had told him God would give the kingdom.

Little of what was said is recorded; but the immediate reward enjoyed by David was a position in the royal household and among the men of war. This was not what had been promised. Saul, with the customary prodigality of eastern monarchs—in words—had proclaimed that he would enrich with great riches the man who should kill the giant, give him his daughter to wife, and make his father's house free in Israel. This promise was shamelessly broken; but still, to the humble shepherd lad, to sit at the king's table, to be one of his armour-bearers, and be entrusted with affairs of moment, was notable advancement and great honour.

In his new life the remarkable qualities that dwelt in the immature youth, and especially the wisdom with which God had endowed him, began to be manifested. He went about the king's errands with so much faithfulness and diligence; he moved among the older servants of Saul, who might well have been jealous of him, with such sweetness of demeanour, that he was in favour with all, and when the king set him over the men of war, the thing was good in the eyes of all—the Court, the host, and the people alike. These honours, however, were transient, dependent on the fickle favour of the moody king, and destined soon to pass away. A more lasting and precious reward was the friendship of the brave, generous, and tender-hearted Jonathan, one of the most lovable and elevated characters in all history, even in that of the Bible. The affection that sprang up between the two young men appears to have been of quick growth, but proved lasting in character. "It came to pass that when David had made an end of speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and he loved him as his own soul." According to Oriental custom, the young prince expressed his love by a present, stripped himself of his robe, his sword, and his bow, and gave them to David, and followed up this striking symbol of personal sacrifice by a devotion that for his brief remaining space of life never failed or faltered. During all the

painful vicissitudes of David's intercourse with Saul, Jonathan's loyalty to his friend never changed. Time and again he stood between him and the tempest of the royal anger, warned him of threatened dangers, and fearlessly pleaded his cause even in Saul's fiercest moods. Well might David say in his beautiful lament over the death of his friend—"Very pleasant hast thou been to me, my brother Jonathan. Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of woman."

This blessing of pure and devoted friendship came to David at a time when he was in sore need of it. His growing popularity with the nation, his success in war, and the many manifest tokens that God was with him in all he did and said, soon roused the jealousy of Saul. The king "eyed" David from the day when the song was first heard, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." "What more," was the not unnatural thought of the unhappy monarch, "what more can he have but the kingdom?"

This idea no doubt greatly aggravated the mental and spiritual disorder, the intermittent madness, the "evil spirit" which troubled Saul. For a long time past it had been growing upon him, and David, being a sweet singer and skilful harper, was accustomed to soothe his troubled spirit, and assuage the violence of the attacks with strains of music; a ministration which had proved singularly efficacious in calming the stormy winds

of passion which swept over his soul. But now a very serious element of danger began to attach to it. Apparently music was losing its power in face of the growing fierceness of the king's malady, and the new jealousies that were awakening in his heart. A verse of Scripture tells this sad and mysterious part of the story very briefly and emphatically—"And it came to pass on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house; and David played with his hand, as at other times; and there was a javelin in Saul's hand. And Saul cast the javelin; for he said, 'I will smite David even to the wall with it.' And David avoided out of his presence twice."

After this failure of open violence, the desperate king condescended to a series of veiled attacks on David's life, which, it is not too much to say, were marked by nothing better than meanness and low cunning. He remembered his original promise to give to the slayer of Goliath his daughter to wife. First, the princess Merab, and afterwards Michal, the second daughter, who loved David, was offered, with the added condition that he should produce a hundred Philistine foreskins as a dowry. Saul made this stipulation in the hope that in the attempt to slay so many, the youthful aspirant for royal favour would himself fall a victim. "I will give her to him that she may be a snare to him," thought the treacherous king, "that



ESCAPE OF DAVID THROUGH THE WINDOW.

the hand of the Philistines may be against him." The subtle and cruel plot failed, according to its deserts. David quickly formed his plans, and succeeded in killing, not merely one, but two hundred of his enemies, and brought the trophies of his valour to the enraged and disappointed tyrant. This abortive effort resulted in the further strengthening of David's position in the court and camp; for the princes of the Philistines, in their desire to avenge the slain men, again attacked the Israelitish army, and David defeated them so skilfully that his reputation as a warrior became greater than ever—"his name was much set by."

Seeing his hidden plots fail, the king now began to make no secret of his enmity, and of his uncontrollable desire to get rid of David by fair means or foul. He so far forgot the dignity of his high position, he so far discarded even the semblance of justice and righteousness towards the man to whom he owed so much, that he appealed to the loyalty of the servants who surrounded him, asking them to slay David. Jonathan himself was importuned by his father, and besought to cast his friendship to the winds, and seek the life of the man he loved. The prince was an affectionate and dutiful son; but he was also a true-hearted friend, so he ventured on a reasoned remonstrance—"Let not the king sin against his servant, even against David, because he hath not sinned against thee, and because his works have been to thee-ward very good;" and

then he reminded his father of what the persecuted man had done in the time of the kingdom's danger. Saul was not yet hardened in his hatred; indeed, even to the end, and when his pursuit of his supposed foe was fiercest, he was ever and anon seized with fits of remorse and conscience-stricken repentance, as we shall see later; so at this time he listened to his son's arguments, and took an oath that he would not cause David to be put to death.

Such oaths as these have generally little value, and this one did not stand the test of a fresh provocation. Another victory of the national army, under the conduct and leadership of David, over the Philistines, and the added laurels it placed upon the brow of the victor, served to rekindle the unhappy jealousy of the king. Gloomy and morose, he sat in his house, with his spear in his hand, a prey to the evil spirit that troubled him. As usual, David was sent for to exercise his healing art of music; but the sweet strains that flowed forth at his touch upon the instrument of ten strings were powerless, and only the agile spring of the watchful minstrel saved him from being pinned to the wall by the javelin of the wretched man he was trying to soothe and bless.

This was enough. David felt he was no longer safe in the king's presence. He fled the Court that night, and never again did Saul and the man who was chosen to succeed him meet in friendly intercourse. In banishing the young musician, Saul

drove away the only man who had power to exorcise the evil spirit that troubled him, and he was left a prey to the passions that were destroying him. These led to an immediate attempt at deliberate murder. Sending messengers to David's house to prevent his escape in the night, he went in the morning to slay him with his own hands. But David had gone. Michal, his wife, had heard of the king's intentions, and deceived the messengers by saying her husband was sick, and by placing an image in the bed to represent him. When they insisted on seeing him, she let him down through the window, and he escaped, fleeing to Samuel at Ramah.

PSALM VII.

¶ Shiggaion of David, which he sang unto the LORD, concerning the words of Cush the Benjamite.

O LORD, my God, in thee do I put my trust : save me from all them that persecute me, and deliver me : lest he tear my soul like a lion, rending it in pieces, while there is none to deliver. O Lord my God, if I have done this ; if there be iniquity in my hands ; if I have rewarded evil unto him that was at peace with me ; (yea, I have delivered him that was without cause mine enemy :) Let the enemy persecute my soul, and take it ; yea, let him tread down my life upon the earth, and lay mine honour in the dust. Arise, O Lord, in thine anger, lift up thyself because of the rage of mine enemies : and awake for me to the judgment that thou hast commanded. So shall the congregation of the people compass thee about : for their sakes therefore return thou on high. The Lord shall judge the people : judge me, O Lord,

according to my righteousness, and according to mine integrity that is in me. Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end; but establish the just: for the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins. My defence is of God, which saveth the upright in heart. God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; he ordaineth his arrows against the persecutors. Behold, he travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief, and brought forth falsehood. He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate. I will praise the Lord according to his righteousness: and will sing praise to the name of the Lord Most High.

CHAPTER IV.

DAVID AND JONATHAN.

WITH the flight of David from the presence of the king a new chapter of his history opens: one differing in almost every respect from that which then closed. Hitherto his position, though full of peril, had been one of honour, dignity, and renown in Israel. No breath of suspicion had clouded his fair fame. His every enterprise had prospered. He had been the man—as the leaders of the people afterwards reminded him—who had “led out and brought in Israel,” and altogether had figured as the foremost man in the kingdom, most loved by the people, most dreaded by their enemies.

So marked, so unvarying, had been his success in everything he undertook, that it was evident to everybody, king and people alike, that the Lord was with him, and no doubt this conviction greatly embittered the hostility of Saul, who knew himself forsaken of God.

Up to this time David had been indeed “a man after God’s own heart.” Now all this was

changed. Henceforward, until the vacant throne itself offered him a shelter, he was to be a persecuted outlaw, a refugee, hunted, as he himself expressed it, "like a partridge on the mountains." It may be that his flight was justifiable: the violence of Saul's last attack, perhaps, made it a necessity; but it is clear from the events which immediately followed that David's brave heart, for the time, began to fail him; his trust in Divine protection and favour, so often proved, began to grow weaker as his perils increased.

At first, as was natural, he sought shelter with Samuel, who still lived, though in retirement, and he told the prophet all his troubles. The two went together, and dwelt at Naioth, in Ramah, where one of the "schools of the prophets," which Samuel had established, was situated. Thither Saul's relentless animosity pursued him, and, undeterred by the presence of the aged seer or the sacredness of the place, the king sent messengers to take him. But God once more interposed a shield of protection, against which the spear of Saul was powerless. When the messengers arrived at Naioth, they found a company of prophets prophesying, and were themselves compelled to prophesy also. The obstinate fury of the king on hearing of this impelled him to send a second and a third company, but they were also stayed in their errand in the same mysterious manner. At last Saul went himself, no doubt

fully determined that he would not submit to the influence of the arresting Spirit of God, but take his enemy by force, as it were, from the very sanctuary. He might have known better than thus brave the resistless spirit of prophesy of which he himself had been a partaker when his heart was pure. As he approached Naioth, this same power came upon him and he prophesied before Samuel, "and lay down naked all that day and all that night"—naked, no doubt, in more ways than one.

This striking evidence of Divine favour and protection does not seem to have re-assured the heart of the outlaw. Neither the presence and influence of Samuel, nor the powerlessness of his foe to seize him at Naioth, appeared sufficient protection, and he fled the place, and sought an interview with Jonathan.

The conversation that ensued is very remarkable. The language of David betokened the utmost apprehension, if not abject fear. "What have I done? What is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life?" he said to his friend. "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death. If there be iniquity in me, slay me thyself; why shouldst thou bring me to thy father?" The reply of Jonathan was calm and re-assuring. Notwithstanding all that had passed, he was loth to believe that Saul seriously meant to take David's life, but consented

to adopt any suggestion with a view to ascertain the real determination of the king.

This composure did not arise from the comparative safety of his own position, but from a far higher source. It appears that the course of events, and perhaps some knowledge of the fact that David had been anointed by Samuel, just as his own father had been long years before, had completely convinced him that David was Saul's destined successor on the throne of Israel. His language now to the trembling man before him was full of this conviction. Far from adopting the tone of a powerful protector, which would not have been unnatural under the circumstances, he solemnly renewed his league and covenant of friendship with David, and asked of him a promise that he would deal kindly with him in the days to come. Here is his request: "Thou shalt not only, while yet I live, show me the kindness of the Lord, that I die not; but also thou shalt not cast off thy kindness from my house for ever; no, not when the Lord hath cut off the enemies of David, every one of them from the face of the earth." What a singular and striking scene! On the one side the persecuted outlaw declaring there was but a step between him and death; on the other, the powerful prince, calm and settled in the assurance of the future greatness of his friend, acting the part of a suppliant. There can be no question as to who shows to the most advantage here. On this, as on



DAVID AND JONATHAN.

every occasion where he appears on the scene, the character of Jonathan shines with undimmed lustre, no unworthy thought, word, or deed appearing in the sacred record.

The unwillingness of the loyal son to think ill of his father led the young men to arrange a test of Saul's real intentions, David's ready invention devising the means. The morrow was the new moon, when it was customary for David, in company with Jonathan and Abner, to eat at the king's table on three successive days. David proposed to absent himself, and that Jonathan should judge by the king's demeanour whether good or evil was determined. On the first day Saul made no remark, but on the second he inquired, "Why cometh not the son of Jesse?" On Jonathan making the excuse agreed upon, that he was gone to Bethlehem to attend the yearly family sacrifice, Saul's disappointment and wrath broke through all bounds and the decent restraint he had hitherto observed in the presence of his son. In uncontrollable anger he unveiled the secret jealousies and terrors of his heart. Turning fiercely on Jonathan, he exclaimed, "Thou son of a perverse, rebellious woman, do I not know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own shame? As long as he lives on the ground thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom; wherefore send and fetch him; for he shall surely die." The generous spirit of the young prince rose in revolt

against this manifest injustice, and for the first and only time, as far as we know, father and son were in open rupture. With some heat he demanded, "Wherefore shall he be slain? What hath he done?" Saul's answer was a javelin, and Jonathan rose and left the table, fiercely angry and deeply grieved, and went to tell his friend the unhappy tidings. They, of course, could not meet openly, but David was in hiding in the neighbourhood; and Jonathan, taking his bow and a little lad with him, shot some arrows in a manner which, by a previous understanding, conveyed to the watcher an intimation of the peril in which he stood. After dismissing the boy with the "artillery," the friends met in the shelter of the wood for a final farewell of the tenderest character. David came out of his hiding-place and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times, and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, and renewed their mutual promises of faithfulness.

Parting thus, one went forward to his stormy, chequered, and finally triumphant career, the other to his forlorn fidelity to the waning fortunes of his father, to fall in a lost battle with his lifelong Philistine foes.

CHAPTER V.

THE CAVE OF ADULLAM

THE period of David's history on which we now enter, though not stained by any dark crimes, such as occasionally sullied the crowned splendours of his later years, is, nevertheless, deeply humiliating. It began with a lie, which involved the most disastrous consequences, and its course was marked by such deception and disgrace that we are prompted to ask if it be possible that the man whose actions are thus portrayed can really be the same David whose earlier years were so pure and upright, and who, very shortly afterwards, displayed so much personal dignity and such splendid powers of self-control.

On leaving Jonathan the fugitive first sought shelter at Nob, the city of the priests. Here dwelt Ahimelech, the representative of the house of Ithamar, a son of Aaron, and a large number of his brethren, all performing priestly duties and wearing the linen ephod. Here also were the daily sacrifices of the tabernacle offered, and here the shew-bread was spread before the Lord, according to the due order of the Mosaic law. Situated on the slopes

of Mount Olivet, Nob overlooked the city of the Jebusites, the ancient Salem, where Melchizedek reigned as king and priest in Abraham's time, with its towering stronghold, still occupied in force by a remnant of the Canaanites.

At the appearance of David, alone and unarmed, Ahimelech was both astonished and alarmed. In ignorance of recent events, he no doubt knew something of the king's jealousy of the leader of his armies, and he anxiously inquired as to the meaning of the visit.

Instead of dealing openly with this minister of God, as he had done with Samuel, David gave an utterly false account of his circumstances. He averred that Saul had sent him on a secret mission, so that he had arranged with his servants to meet him at an appointed place, and as the royal business required haste, he had come without sword or weapon of any kind. He then asked Ahimelech to supply him with bread and any weapon that might be in the place; but the only available supply of the former was the shew-bread just ready for the weekly removal, while the solitary sword to be found in Nob was that of Goliath, "laid up behind the ephod." These Ahimelech gave him. Thus equipped, David departed; but not without serious misgiving as to the consequences of what had taken place. During his conversation with Ahimelech, his quick and nervous perceptions had taken note of a watcher.

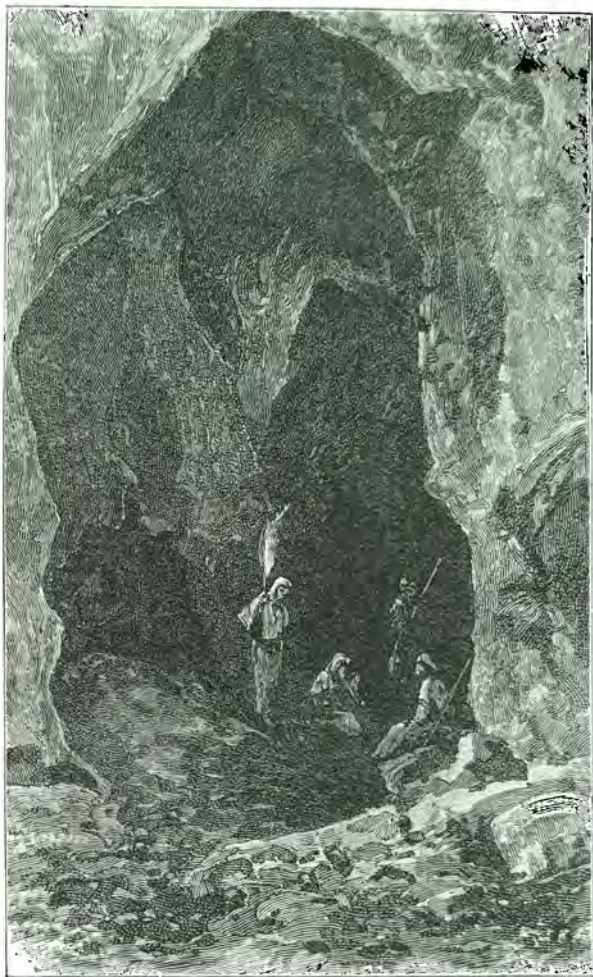
He had recognised a face well-known to him, of one not a priest, not even an Israelite at all ; but of an Edomite, Doeg by name, the chief of Saul's herdsmen. Through this man he greatly feared that an account of the proceedings would reach the king, and he dreaded the consequences—rightly, as the event showed.

Embarked on a course of deception and distrust of Divine protection, David was speedily to taste its bitterness and prove its futility. What motive prompted his next act it is not easy to imagine—unless, indeed, it was the recklessness of despair. He sought refuge at Gath—Gath, the chief city of his enemies, the Philistines, the home of Goliath, where his name would be known and hated more than in any other place on the face of the earth—and sought the protection of its king. His reception was what might have been expected, though, perhaps, less fierce. The servants of Achish said, “Is not this David, the king of the land? Did they not sing one to another of him in dances, saying, ‘Saul hath slain his thousands and David his ten thousands?’” No wonder that David was sore afraid of the vengeance of the king and his people, and was put to his wits’ end to devise some means of disarming their wrath. And such means! The remembrance of them in after years must have caused many a flush of shame, as the picture of his deep degradation rose up before his mental vision. Afraid of his enemies’

anger, he would assuage it by exciting their contempt. So he "changed his behaviour," consummate actor that he was; he feigned himself a madman; he scrabbled on the doors of the gate; he let his spittle fall down upon his beard. For his personal safety, which had been the care of God in a hundred perils, he deliberately postured as a man not to be feared, but despised—an imbecile. And is this David, the anointed of God, the deliverer of His people, the leader of shouting armies, the "darling of the songs of Israel?" Holy Scripture, which ever pictures humanity as it is, gives us this glimpse of its weakness and folly in the person of one of its brightest representatives. "Have I need of madmen," asked Achish, "that ye have brought this fellow into my presence?" And he drove him away.

The best that can be said of this episode in David's chequered career is that it was short. Probably a few days covered the whole series of transactions between the parting with Jonathan and his expulsion from Philistia. But what a time of wild excitement it must have been! That it dwelt in his memory long and painfully is evident from the Psalm which afterwards, in a quieter time, was inspired by its recollections, and by the penitence that filled his soul at the thought of his unworthy conduct, and by thankfulness for deliverance from extreme peril to body and soul.

Driven from the haunts of men, the homeless



TRADITIONAL CAVE OF ADULLAM IN THE
WADY KHUREITUN.

wanderer now turned his steps towards the rugged region that lay between his native city, Bethlehem, and the shores of the Dead Sea, the Wilderness of Judæa. The place of refuge he sought was probably quite familiar to him. In his wanderings with his father's flocks, he had, no doubt, visited the Cave of Adullam, and penetrated its dark and gloomy recesses. Dr. Thompson describes the approach as having "a fearful gorge below, gigantic cliffs above, and the path winding along a shelf of rock, narrow enough to make the nervous shudder." Access is gained by a long leap from a great rock hanging on the edge of this shelf into a low window which opened into the perpendicular face of the cliff, and creeping, half-dazed, through a narrow crevice, the visitor stands beneath the dark vault of the first grand chamber of the mysterious and oppressive cavern.

In this place of comparative safety, much of his natural serenity of heart and composure of mind seems to have returned to the hunted man, and he quickly began to form plans for the future. The life that lay immediately before him was clearly that of an outlaw. He could expect nothing from Saul but constant pursuit and sleepless hatred, so that the only course open to him was to make himself as strong against his enemy as possible. He speedily formed plans to communicate with his family—now in peril from their connection with him—and his brethren and all his father's house

took up their abode in the cave. The news of this step on David's part quickly spread, and a formidable band of four hundred men soon arrayed themselves under the renowned leader. "Every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him, and he became a captain over them." This desolate and gloomy cave, however, was no fit place for the aged Jesse and his wife, so David sought an interview with the King of Moab, and asked him to provide an asylum for his father and mother, "till he should see what God would do for him." The request was granted, and they dwelt in Moab all the time that David was in the hold.

One thing they yet lacked: they had no priest with them through whom they might inquire of God, though the prophet Gad appears either to have been in the cave, or to have had occasional access to David; but this want the violence and cruelty of Saul soon supplied.

Disappointed and alarmed at the continual non-success of his designs against his rival's life, the king appealed to the loyalty of his fellow-tribesmen. His address to them is not without pathos in its evident sense of desolation and forsakenness by God and man. "Hear now, ye Benjamites," he said, "all of you have conspired against me, and there is none that sheweth me that my son hath made a league with the son of Jesse; and there is none of you that is sorry for me, or sheweth unto me

that my son hath stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as at this day." The words of the king were responded to, not by any Benjamite, but by Doeg, the Edomite, who told Saul what had occurred at Nob, adding the malevolent lie that Ahimelech had "inquired of God" for David on that occasion. The high priest, who was present, denied this latter charge, but defended his conduct by reciting the known loyalty of David to Saul, and the fact that he was the king's son-in-law, and "goeth at thy bidding, and is honourable in thine house."

Unaffected by this reasonable defence, Saul commanded his servants that were about him to slay Ahimelech and his brethren, and on their refusal, said to Doeg, "Turn thou and fall upon the priests." The Edomite performed the bloody command of his master with sufficient zeal, and slew the whole company present, in all eighty-five persons, and afterwards smote Nob with the edge of the sword, destroying both men and women, children and sucklings, with the cattle, Abiathar only, one of the grandsons of Ahimelech, escaping the general massacre. This man fled to David at Adullam, carrying the sad tidings, and became his faithful friend, counsellor, and priest.

Thus began David's career as a guerilla chief. An outlaw, though still faithful to the king, who continued to be his bitter enemy; and formidable, not to his country, but to its foes: a career in

which his great qualities shone out with conspicuous lustre, and which only ended when the death of Saul and Jonathan on Gilboa brought, first the tribe of Judah, and afterwards the whole of Israel, to his feet.

PSALM XXXIV.

¶ A Psalm of David, when he changed his behaviour before Abimelech; who drove him away, and he departed.

I WILL bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together. I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him. O fear the Lord, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing. Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord. What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all. He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken. Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate. The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate.

CHAPTER VI.

DAVID AND HIS MIGHTY MEN.

ALTHOUGH David's sojourn in the cave of Adullam is one of the best known incidents of his life, little of what happened there is recorded. One remarkable circumstance, however, is casually mentioned in the First Book of Chronicles.

The Philistines, it appears, made one of their periodical raids on Southern Judæa, and placed a garrison at Bethlehem. At this time the situation of the "son of Jesse" must have been singularly isolated and forlorn. Secure though he was in his rocky fortress, and surrounded by a band of gallant and devoted followers; outside the circle of his retreat every man's hand was against him, Hebrew, Philistine, and Canaanite alike. He was still in early manhood; not more than twenty-two years had passed over his head. But the other day, it must have seemed to him, he was keeping his father's sheep, with no care but for their safety. Tender-hearted and impressionable even to the end of his life, the difficulties and responsibilities of his position must at this time have pressed very

heavily on his youthful spirit, and made him look back with regret to the peaceful quietness of his early home. One day, with a heart full of longing, of "home-sickness," he (for a moment) gave expression to his desires. The remembrance of the cool waters of the well of Bethlehem had risen up before him, and he exclaimed, "O that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate!"

These pathetic words were overheard, and found an instant response in the hearts of the brave men who stood near. Taking their lives in their hands, they resolved at all hazards to obtain for David the refreshing draught he had craved; they boldly broke through the Philistine guard, drew the water, and returned in safety with their precious burden. On presenting it to their leader, however, his generous soul revolted at the thought of satisfying his personal desires with what had been obtained with such deadly peril. "My God forbid it me," he said, "that I should drink the blood of these men that have put their lives in jeopardy, for with the jeopardy of their lives they brought it;" and he poured it out as an oblation to the Lord.

This incident is a striking example of the personal devotion which it was one of David's gifts to excite in the hearts of those who were brought into contact with him. These men who performed this notable feat of arms to gratify the passing desire of their captain were probably of a very different

stamp to the young prince whose heart beat for David in the hostile camp of Saul. Yet, even Jonathan's self-sacrificing love could hardly have dictated conduct more devoted than that shown by "the three mightiest" of the host of Adullam.

The abode of David in the cave was not of long duration. For some unexplained reason it became no longer a place of safety, and at the bidding of the prophet Gad, he quitted its shelter and went into the forest of Hareth: a locality whose exact situation cannot now be identified, but which was certainly not far away.

The question of how David and his band obtained the necessaries of life at this time has been much debated. By some writers he has been described as nothing else than a freebooter, an Eastern Roderick Dhu, living on plunder, or extorting black-mail from the inhabitants of the country. Of this there is no evidence whatever, and the little that is known on the subject points to an entirely different conclusion. The government of Saul at this unhappy period appears to have been of a very unsatisfactory character, and its authority to have diminished day by day. The unsettled state of the country, in all probability, found the outlaws sufficient work in protecting the peaceable inhabitants from the violence of both external and internal enemies, and for these services a reward was reasonably looked for and bestowed. Two incidents, one of which occurred immediately,

while the other will be narrated later on, go far to prove this.

One of the harassing attacks constantly made on the frontier towns of Judæa by the war-loving Philistines was at this time directed against Keilah, a city of considerable size and importance. When David heard of it—and he seems, outlaw as he was, to have been kept pretty well informed of what happened in the country—he was in some perplexity. Anxious to help his brethren whose threshing-floors were being robbed, he was restrained by the formidable greatness of the undertaking, and by the remonstrances of his followers, who reasoned, naturally enough—"If we be afraid here in Judæa, how much more if we go to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?" This difficulty was solved, as so many of David's difficulties were, by inquiring of the Lord. In what manner the inquiry was made we do not certainly know; but the answer was as clear and distinct as the question—"Shall I go and smite these Philistines?" "Go and smite the Philistines, and save Keilah." Twice the inquiry was made and twice was the assurance of victory given; and, satisfied therewith, David and his band attacked the marauding Philistines, slew them with a great slaughter, and saved the city.

The victory was complete; but it brought with it a great peril and a bitter lesson of human ingratitude. In his anxiety to rescue the men of Keilah,

David had quitted the comparative safety of the open forest and of the wilderness, and entered into a town that had "gates and bars." Saul's sleepless hatred saw its opportunity, and he instantly determined to surround and besiege the place. Intelligence of this speedily reached David, and again he sought the guidance of God. At this time Abiathar was with him in Keilah, with "an ephod in his hand," and through him the inquiries were made. "Will Saul come down?" and "Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into his hand?" As before, the answers were plain and direct affirmatives, so David and his rescuing band, numbering now about six hundred, fled for their lives from the city they had saved, and went "whithersoever they could go."

The life of the future king of Israel must, at this period, have been one not only full of danger, but of peril of an exceedingly trying nature. Hunted day by day, his little force in constant danger of being surrounded and destroyed by the overwhelming forces at the command of Saul, with full knowledge that his movements and place of refuge might at any time be disclosed to Saul, and only instant flight could then save him, the fortitude and self-control of David is nothing less than marvellous. Chased from one stronghold of the desert to another, only the utmost vigilance and resourcefulness could have succeeded in baffling

the pursuit of the royal host. One gleam of comfort, however, visited him in this distressful time.

While in the wilderness of Ziph, Jonathan found means to communicate with him. Possibly some secret correspondence had been passing between them ever since they parted; but whether this be so or not, the two friends met again, and for the last time, within the shelter of a neighbouring wood. The thoughts of Jonathan's generous heart had not changed. True to his settled conviction as to the future of his friend, he deliberately set himself to confirm David's faith in that future. By his calm and assured words, "he strengthened his hand in God." "Fear not," he said, "for the hand of Saul, my father, shall not find thee; and then thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul, my father, knoweth."

PSALM CXLII.

[†] Maschil of David; A Prayer when he was in the cave.

I CRIED unto the Lord with my voice; with my voice unto the Lord did I make my supplication. I poured out my complaint before him; I shewed before him my trouble. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me. I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. I cried unto thee, O Lord; I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living. Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are

stronger than I. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name : the righteous shall compass me about ; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me.

PSALM LVII.

^a To the chief Musician, Al-taschith, Michtam of David, when he fled from Saul in the cave.

BE merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me : for my soul trusteth in thee : yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast. I will cry unto God Most High ; unto God that performeth all things for me. He shall send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up. God shall send forth his mercy and his truth. My soul is among lions : and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens ; let thy glory be above all the earth. They have prepared a net for my steps ; my soul is bowed down : they have digged a pit before me, into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves. My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed : I will sing and give praise. Awake up, my glory ; awake, psaltery and harp : I myself will awake early. I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people : I will sing unto thee among the nations. For thy mercy is great unto the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens : let thy glory be above all the earth.

CHAPTER VII.

DAVID'S LOYAL FORBEARANCE.

AND now David had immediate need of all the faith and courage with which the words of his friend and prince had inspired him. The people among whom he lived, the Ziphites, joined hands with his adversary, approaching Saul with information as to his whereabouts, and with an offer to seize him and deliver him up if the king would go down to them. The reply of the unhappy monarch to this proposal is like the despairing clutch of a drowning man at any object which seems to promise safety, so pathetic is it in its confession of helplessness and sudden grasp at any gleam of hope. "Blessed be ye of the Lord; for ye have compassion on me," were his first words, and then he urged them to return and procure all possible information as to David's haunts and lurking-places; for, he said, "it is told me that he dealeth very subtilly;" adding, with a touch of his native ferocity, "I will search him out throughout all the thousands of Judah." Of course word of this was brought to the "lurking-place" of the

outlaw and his band, and quitting the hill of Hachilah, which had been giving them shelter, they sought refuge in the wilderness of Maon. Thither Saul pursued them, and with so strong a force that escape at last seemed impossible. Close on the track of the fugitive band came the fierce king, with his host of trained warriors, and now they had their prey in full sight.

Once assured of their position, the numbers of the royal army were sufficient to surround David and his men and ensure their capture. This now seemed imminent, for only a hill separated pursuer and pursued, and escape was cut off, when suddenly revenge and victory was snatched, as it were, out of the very grasp of the vindictive king. In hot haste came a messenger to Saul with the unwelcome intelligence that the Philistines had invaded his territory, and a summons for him to meet them. There was no help for it. His kingdom was in danger, and he must leave his coveted prey, that seemed ready to be devoured, and go to fight his nation's foes. What impotent rage must have surged in his unquiet heart at being thus baulked! but there was no remedy. God put a bridle in his jaws, and turned him from his headstrong and wilful pursuit of a man who had done him no wrong. He was compelled to submit, and leave his personal enemy in at least temporary safety.

The respite, however, was short. While Saul



DAVID SHOWING SAUL THAT HE HAD SPARED
HIS LIFE.

was encountering the Philistines David and his men took up a new abode in the mountainous district of En-gedi. Thither the king, after having repulsed the Philistines, followed him with a chosen band of 3,000 men, determined to make an end of the man whom he persisted in considering a dangerous and troublesome foe. Surrounded by his host of hardy warriors, mostly Benjamites, and therefore devoted to him and his house, and skilled in all the arts of war that were then known in Palestine, probably the last thing that Saul feared was any danger to himself. Commanding an irresistible force, with a heart full of malice, he was once more on the track of his foe, and knew himself within striking distance. What should now turn him aside from his path of vengeance? Not another invasion of the Philistines; they had just received a chastisement that would keep them quiet for some time at least. But he was to be turned aside even more effectually than before. They were now among the strongholds of En-gedi, in a country of steep and rugged hills and rocky eminences, the home and refuge of wild goats, The sides of the sheltered ravines that lie between are pierced in all directions by caves of fantastic form that penetrate deep into the hillsides, and sometimes have openings at the further end, through which access to the country beyond may be gained. At their entrances are rudely-built folds, and the numerous flocks of sheep find

shelter in them. As Saul and his army marched along a valley-path, the king turned aside for a momentary purpose into the seclusion of one of these caves, little imagining whom its dark recesses sheltered. Coming out of the daylight, his eye could not pierce its gloom; but clustered about its sides, hidden behind its scattered rocks, effectually screened by almost perfect darkness, were the men whom he sought with such deadly intent, whose blood he thirsted for—David and his band. When the outlaws saw their implacable foe alone and completely in their power, a murmur and thrill of joy went through them. Now was their time: this was the opportunity for striking a blow that should give them freedom and deliverance, and, as they doubted not, place their leader on the throne of Israel, with themselves as his trusted friends. “See,” they eagerly whispered to David, “see, behold the day of which the Lord said unto thee, ‘I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee.’”

The temptation to make an end once and for ever of the persecution he was undergoing must have been strong upon David. One blow, and it would be over, and before him would lie the honour and dignities of the monarchy. Should he strike? The question seems scarcely to have been entertained. The “divinity which doth hedge in a king” spread in David’s eyes its protecting mantle even over the guilty Saul. With

the rare and noble self-restraint which has before been spoken of, he put aside all thoughts of vengeance. Only one thing he would do: he would make manifest to the king his loyalty and prove his reverence to the throne. So, as Saul spread his robe around him, after the custom of Orientals under the circumstances, David lightly approached him, cut off the skirt of the robe without being observed by the distracted Saul, probably lost in his own gloomy thoughts, and then rejoined his companions. He had some trouble with them, however, for they were far from satisfied with their leader's forbearance, considering all they had at stake, and wished to kill Saul themselves. David, with his matchless powers of persuasion, diverted them from their purpose, pleading that the defenceless man before them was the Lord's anointed; and it is a striking proof of the extreme tenderness and sensitiveness of David's regard for his king that his heart smote him for having done even so much as cut off the skirt of the royal robe.

So Saul departed from the cave of En-gedi unharmed, and unconscious of the great peril that had lurked within it. It was not until he had proceeded some distance on his way that David shewed himself, and cried after him, "My lord the king." Saul, turning, saw the man he was seeking stooping with his face to earth and making obeisance, and then between the two

passed an appeal and a response, every word of which is too precious and significant to bear either compression or paraphrase.

“ And David said to Saul, Wherefore hearest thou men’s words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt ? Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how that the Lord had delivered thee into mine hand in the cave : and some bade me kill thee : but mine eye spared thee ; and I said, I will not put forth mine hand against my lord ; for he is the Lord’s anointed. Moreover, my father, see, yea, see the skirt of thy robe in my hand : for in that I cut off the skirt of thy robe, and killed thee not, know thou and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in mine hand, and I have not sinned against thee ; yet thou huntest my soul to take it. The Lord judge between me and thee, and the Lord avenge me of thee : but mine hand shall not be upon thee. As saith the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked : but mine hand shall not be upon thee.

“ After whom is the king of Israel come out ? After whom dost thou pursue ? After a dead dog, after a flea ? The Lord therefore be judge, and judge between me and thee, and see, and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thine hand.

“ And it came to pass, when David had made an end of speaking these words unto Saul, that Saul said, Is this thy voice, my son David ? And Saul lifted up his voice, and wept. And he said to David, Thou art more righteous than I ; for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil. And thou hast shewed this day how that thou hast dealt well with me : forasmuch as when the Lord had delivered me into thine hand, thou killedst me not.

“ For if a man find his enemy, will he let him go well away ? wherefore the Lord reward thee good for that thou hast done unto me this day. And now, behold, I know well

that thou shalt surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand. Swear now therefore unto me by the Lord that thou wilt not cut off my seed after me, and that thou wilt not destroy my name out of my father's house. And David sware unto Saul. And Saul went home; but David and his men gat them up unto the hold."

PSALM LIV.

¶ To the chief Musician on Neginoth, Maschil, A Psalm of David, when the Ziphims came and said to Saul, Doth not David hide himself with us?

SAVE me, O God, by thy name, and judge me by thy strength. Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth. For strangers are risen up against me, and oppressors seek after my soul: they have not set God before them. Behold, God is mine helper: the Lord is with them that uphold my soul. He shall reward evil unto mine enemies: cut them off in thy truth. I will freely sacrifice unto thee: I will praise thy name, O Lord; for it is good. For he hath delivered me out of all trouble: and mine eye hath seen his desire upon mine enemies.

PSALM LXIII.

¶ A Psalm of David when he was in the wilderness of Judah.

O GOD, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary. Because thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips: When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches. Because thou hast been my help,

therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice. My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me. But those that seek my soul, to destroy it, shall go into the lower parts of the earth. They shall fall by the sword: they shall be a portion for foxes. But the king shall rejoice in God; every one that sweareth by him shall glory: but the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped.

CHAPTER VIII.

NABAL AND ABIGAIL.

THE second incident referred to as throwing light on the means by which David and his band obtained subsistence at this time has now to be told.

A rich, but vulgar and brutal man, named Nabal, a descendant of the faithful Caleb, companion of Joshua, dwelt in Maon, and had great possessions in the shape of flocks and herds that browsed on the slopes of the southern Carmel, a fertile hill not far from the shores of the Dead Sea. Round about, the country was wild and desolate, the haunt of savage beasts, and, probably, of lawless and desperate men. The shepherds of Nabal, with their flocks, had been in constant peril from these enemies, and had learned to dread them; but of late they had experienced a period of quietness and security, with a total immunity from loss, owing to the presence of the band of men under David's leadership in Maon and En-gedi, who with a strong hand restrained and put down all violence against the peaceful shepherds and their helpless charge. In the

language of the men themselves, "they were a wall unto them both by night and day while they were keeping their sheep." When the time of shearing arrived—always observed as a period of rejoicing and plenty—the men charged with that duty came to Carmel, and Nabal with them.

David thought this a proper opportunity of applying to the wealthy sheep-master for a suitable reward for the services he and his followers had rendered during the year to the unprotected shepherds, and accordingly sent ten young men with a courteous message and request for "whatever cometh to thy hand." Had the man been either wise, generous, or even just, he would have returned courtesy for courtesy, with a present in acknowledgment of valuable services rendered. He was none of these, however; but, on the contrary, a finished specimen of the avaricious churl: a class of men who very commonly over-reach themselves in their greed and rude denials of just claims upon them. His answer was a curt refusal, with a sneer thrown in at David's outlawed position. "Who is David?" he said, and "who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants now-a-days that break away every man from his master. Shall I take my bread and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not whence they be?" So the young men returned empty-handed.

At this insulting answer David's wrath flamed

out. Nabal was not Saul. No sanctity as "the Lord's anointed" spread its protection round the ungrateful owner of the 3,000 sheep and 1,000 goats that dotted the slopes of Carmel. Such an injury was one to be instantly avenged. The command was prompt. "Gird ye on every man his sword. Surely in vain have I kept all that this fellow hath in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that pertained to him, and he hath requited me evil for good;" so 400 armed warriors, with their chief at their head, set forth, bent on the destruction of every male of Nabal's household.

But now David himself was to experience the restraining hand of God. The reckless vengeance he meditated was not permitted. Among those who stood by when his messengers were rudely repulsed was one of the shepherds who through the months past had made the acquaintance of the protecting band. He at once divined the probable consequence of his master's conduct, and knowing the uselessness of attempting any remonstrance, went in great alarm to his mistress, and told her what had happened.

Now, Nabal, in addition to his wealth in flocks and herds, possessed that inestimable treasure, a wise and discreet wife—Abigail—who, with her quick woman's wit, at once saw the pressing danger of the situation, and acted with a promptitude that fortunately was a match for David's

instant decision. Without waiting to consult her husband, she at once prepared a liberal "present," two hundred loaves, two bottles or skins of wine, five sheep ready dressed, five measures of parched corn, a hundred clusters of raisins, two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on asses, and immediately set forth to meet the approach of the powerful outlaw.

Her servant had told her of the circumstances under which David's demand was made, and of its justice, and she seems to have been fully aware of his great renown, his position with regard to Saul, and that he was one who feared God, notwithstanding his present equivocal position. In spite of the haste she had made, she was only just in time. As she rode on she met David at the head of his company, intent on his errand of revenge. Falling at his feet, she addressed him with words of wise remonstrance, strikingly in contrast with the coarse foolishness of her husband. At once admitting the iniquity of his conduct, and speaking of him in terms of the scantiest respect—"Nabal (Fool) is his name," she said, "and folly is with him"—she begged David's acceptance of "the blessing" she had brought for the young men, and deprecated the vengeance he meditated. Skilfully appealing to the best feelings of her hearer, she delicately reminded him of his calling, the mercies he had received from God, and of his hopes of the kingdom. "Do not stain thy hand in bloody

vengeance," was in effect her plea ; " thou art fighting the battles of the Lord thy God ; and He will bind thy soul in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God ; but the souls of thine enemies He shall sling out and make thee a sure house, and then it shall be no grief of heart or offence unto thee that thou hast abstained from avenging thyself with thine own hand."

The words went home ; the pleadings in themselves were wise and reasonable ; the speaker was a beautiful and gracious woman, interceding for her household, and David's heart melted, his purpose of deadly revenge vanished, and he answered in grateful words of acknowledgment of the service she had rendered in her promptness and wisdom. " Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me ; and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood and from avenging myself with mine own hand. Go up in peace to thine house ; see, I have accepted thee, and have accepted thy person." Thus the incident, for the time, ended, and thus God's restraining hand kept His servant from a sin of violence which could hardly have borne cool reflection, and which, had it been perpetrated, would probably have been cause of remorse in later days.

Abigail, with a heart full of thankfulness, no doubt, for the deliverance she had experienced, went home to tell her husband of what had

happened, and acquaint him with the dangers they had so narrowly escaped. Arriving there, she found the house full of feasting and merriment. Nabal, as was usual at sheep-shearing, was celebrating the occasion by a drunken orgie, and in no state to listen to her tidings. Not until the morning could she tell him of what had passed, and so vivid was the narrative she gave of the peril which had hung over him that the man, unnerved by the excesses of the previous day, hardly survived the shock. His heart died within him; he became as a stone; and about ten days afterwards "it came to pass that the Lord smote Nabal that he died."

All the circumstances of this episode of what have been called David's "freebooting days" make it clear that he and his men did not live by plundering their countrymen. Perhaps the comparison that has been drawn between their position and that of Robin Hood and the outlaws of Sherwood Forest, who protected the poor at the expense of the rich, has in it some degree of justice; but even this hardly covers the whole case. Nabal was a rich man, and also a coarse and cruel one. As one of his servants said of him, "He is such a son of Belial that a man cannot speak to him." Yet no attempt was made to rob him; on the contrary, his lawful possessions were protected, and when a recompense was sought the demand was made in a perfectly respectful and

open manner. It is clear, therefore, that the banished and hunted men were a terror not to the peaceful inhabitants of the land, but to evil-doers, and were recognised as such by the people of the district.

The narrative, unfortunately, does not close without an indication of a weakness in David's character, which, in its later developments, cost him dear. On hearing of the death of Nabal, he sent messengers to Abigail with a proposition that she should become his wife. He had already, as we know, married Michal, Saul's daughter; but after his exile she had been given to another. A plurality of wives was not unknown in Israel at that time, and although he had since then married Ahinoam, the Jezreelitess, David no doubt considered himself justified in espousing the rich and beautiful widow whose good sense and practical wisdom had been so remarkably proved, and she joined him in the wilderness, expressing her consent in a characteristically Oriental fashion: "Let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord." He thus laid the foundation of the family troubles that sadly darkened his after life, and became the cause of much dissension and bloodshed. A great deal can be said, and has been said, in extenuation of this; but the fact remains that it was the beginning of a long course of evils: of a sensuality that has always been the bane of kings, and that sapped

the firmness of David's character in a manner that brought endless trouble both to the man himself and to the nation committed to his care.

In this vice especially, the beginnings of wrong open the flood-gates of a torrent that too often proves irresistible, and that overwhelms the weak defences of our frail humanity

CHAPTER IX.

DAVID AGAIN SPARES SAUL.

DAVID was now once more to experience the treachery of the people who had before betrayed him to Saul. The Ziphites again approached the king with the information that he had returned to his former hiding-place in Hachilah. It might, perhaps, have been expected that after the occurrences at En-gedi further pursuit of "his son David" would have been impossible, even for Saul. But it was not so. His relentings, if he had any, were not proof against opportunity, and he collected his forces and marched into the wilderness of Ziph, pitching his camp on the hill of Hachilah. A scene occurred so similar in many respects to that enacted at En-gedi, that some have supposed the incident to be the same. The details, however, are so different, and so striking in their individuality, that there can be little doubt that they relate to distinct events.

It was night. Surrounded by his host, near him its great captain, Abner, the son of Ner, his well-known and formidable spear stuck in the ground close to his head, and on his pillow a cruse

of water, Saul lay in fancied security. On him, and on all his people, a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen, and every sense was lulled to rest. In the gloom and quietness two forms are seen stealthily approaching. They come near and bend over the prostrate and unconscious king. They are none other than David and his nephew, Abishai, who have left their comrades in the wilderness, and, under cover of night, found their way to the very couch of Saul, their enemy. Knowing well his leader's reluctance to raise his hand against the king, Abishai whispers, "God hath delivered him into thine hand; now let me smite him with the spear to the earth at once, and I will not smite the second time." "No, no! He is still the Lord's anointed, and who can lift up his hand against him and be guiltless? Let him alone; the Lord shall smite him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall perish in battle; take but his spear and the cruse of water, and let us go."

The earnestness and authority of David prevails even over the "hard" son of Zeruiah, and the two steal away unobserved among the shadows. Presently from a neighbouring hill-top rings out a well-known voice, "Abner, answerest thou not, Abner?" Starting from his sleep, the chieftain replied, "Who art thou that criest to the king?" Came the answer, "Art thou not a valiant man? and who is like unto thee in Israel? Wherefore then hast thou not kept thy lord the king? This

thing is not good; thou art worthy to die; see where the king's spear is, and the cruse of water that was at his bolster." The confounded man had nothing to say, but the outcry aroused Saul, and he awoke to the consciousness that once again his life had been at the mercy of his hated foe, and once again had been spared.

What followed was but a repetition of the scene at En-gedi. Passionate protestations of loyalty on David's part; broken acknowledgments and words of shame and repentance on Saul's. The end was the same. Saul returned with his host to his home at Gibeah, and David re-joined his exiled companions.

This incident is the last that is narrated of David's free, though perilous, life in the wilderness and among the mountains of Judah. It forms a worthy close to a strange and eventful portion of his career, in which he displayed qualities that marked him in the eyes of the whole nation as a leader of men, and more, as a man capable of ruling his own spirit. Deeply graven in his character were the lines traced by the iron pen of adversity and danger. They never faded even in the plenitude of prosperity and power. The remembrance of what he underwent in the uplands of Judæa was strong within him when, in his old age, he was driven from Jerusalem by his rebellious son Absalom. Though it is perhaps hardly likely that many of his glorious songs of peril and deliverance

were actually written while under the stress and strain of his hunted life, their substance, the beginnings of them, must have haunted his brain while watching against his foes in the brilliant starlit nights of that eastern clime, to be afterwards put into form and shape for the services of the tabernacle in the comparative leisure of his maturer years.

Nothing less than the fiery heat of Saul's relentless persecutions, the treachery of supposed friends, the utter devotion of his tried and trusted followers, the merciful interpositions of God in his behalf, could have wrought in him the tone and temper of heart and spirit that found expression in the burning words that for nearly three thousand years have supplied the needs of countless human hearts breaking under trial and disappointment, and have been found sufficient. It is not in security and power, in splendour and in luxury, that sparks are struck so vivid as those that gleam in the eighteenth and its companion psalms, but in desolation, and peril, and mortal trouble. Encompassed by Divine providences, strengthened in the depth and bottom of his soul by the Spirit of God, to David it was given to pour forth, as from an exhaustless fountain, the wondrous songs that for ages have been the consolation of God's people, and that have gladdened the weary hearts of millions.

Strange and glorious privilege for the son of Jesse, the shepherd lad, the hunted outcast, the



PROBABLE SITE OF GATH.

warrior-king, to be also the sweet psalmist of Israel and of the world.

The failure of his attempts towards a real reconciliation with Saul seems to have had a very disastrous effect on David. What the circumstances were that caused him to distrust the king's protestations we are not told; but it is very evident that he did distrust them, and that his misgivings were well-founded. And now, after having twice spared his master's life, and twice had his uprightness and faithfulness acknowledged from the king's own lips, the fact that he dare not trust himself in the court of Saul, but still had to secrete himself and his friends in the wilderness, appears to have discouraged him so much that he determined to quit Judah altogether and take up his abode in the land of the Philistines. "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul," he thought to himself. "There is nothing better for me than to escape where he shall despair of finding me." So he went a second time to Gath as a refugee and an outlaw.

His position, however, was widely different from what it was when he played the madman before Achish and his servants. Then he was alone, helpless in the midst of his enemies. Now he came at the head of a band of hardy and skilful fighting men, whose assistance would be very valuable in the disturbed state of the country, and able to treat with the haughty lords of the

Philistines on something like equal terms. He was received in the royal city with much hospitality, and dwelt there for some time; but eventually proposed to the king that a place should be given him where he and his companions might dwell apart from the immediate neighbourhood of the Court. Achish, who appears to have been an open-hearted, generous, unsuspecting kind of man, worthy of better treatment than he often received at the hand of David, assented to this, and gave him Ziklag, to which he and his band betook themselves, possessing for the first time a place of security and rest.

So far, so good; but David speedily found himself in very difficult circumstances. He was not as yet strong enough to occupy a perfectly independent position in the Philistine country. It was absolutely necessary that he should do something to ingratiate himself with the Philistine king and lords, and how could he do this so effectively as by taking their part against Israel? The shelter and hospitality he was receiving also called for some equivalent, so that he was bound to take action to prove his fidelity to his hosts. But how war against Israel and his master Saul? The notion was utterly abhorrent to David's soul; indeed, for him, it was an impossible course. In this difficulty he took counsel, not of the Lord, but of his native subtlety and almost infinite capacities for deceit. (It is notable that

when this man had made up his mind to any action of doubtful righteousness, he carefully abstained from inquiring of the Lord, though ready enough to do so when his conscience was clear: an example which finds imitators in every generation.) Yes, he and his men would visit Judæa and would bring back spoil, obtained no matter how, that should prove to the Philistine lords that he had indeed become the revengeful enemy of his own people. Accordingly, they set out upon a raid, but passing the southern borders of Judæa they entered the country of the Amalekites and the neighbouring tribes, sacking their cities, and putting to death every man, woman, and child they found. This cruel and bloody course of action was a clear necessity under the circumstances, or seemed so. Captives might tell tales, and survivors left on the spot might find their way to Gath, with disastrous results to Achish's faith in David. So, laden with spoil, the successful marauders appeared at Gath, and their leader told a lying tale of battles in Judah and the injuries done to the Hebrews, which Achish the king believed. With simple cunning he had counted upon this, and said to himself, "He hath made his people Israel utterly to abhor him, therefore he shall be my servant for ever." But he was no match for David in intrigue.

The jealous and suspicious lords, however, were not so entirely satisfied with the good faith of the

successful guerilla chief as their master. They were willing enough to tolerate him in their country and see him organise and carry out victorious raids against all and sundry; but there was a limit to their faith. There are times and circumstances when the presence of a doubtful friend is a peril too serious to be lightly risked, and one of these is a pitched battle. Shoulder to shoulder, complete confidence every man in his neighbour, is necessary then, otherwise disaster; and the wary Philistine lords were not willing to admit possible traitors in their array of battle. Accordingly, when next the armies of Israel and Philistia faced each other, and David and his men appeared under the command of Achish, they angrily demanded of the king, "What do these Hebrews here? Make this fellow return unto the place thou hast appointed him, lest in the battle he be an adversary to us. Is not this David of whom they sang to each other in dances, and wherewith should he reconcile himself to his master but with the heads of these men?" The remonstrance was too reasonable and too powerfully urged to be disregarded, and Achish was reluctantly compelled to dismiss David and his band, which he did with many words of confidence in their entire good faith and loyalty. "I know that thou art good in my sight, as an angel of God; I have found no evil in thee since the day thou came unto me." Generous words of confidence. Would that they

had been better deserved! David replied with a show of indignation at not being allowed to fight against the enemies of "my lord the king," but speedily took his departure, no doubt greatly relieved at his escape from a serious dilemma.

On the return of the band to Ziklag, a melancholy scene presented itself to their grieved and astonished gaze. The city itself had been burned with fire, and hardly a living thing was to be seen. Wives, children, cattle, possessions, all had disappeared; desolation reigned. The hardy adventurers were completely broken down at this unlooked-for calamity. Scarcely three days had passed since they had left their homes in peace and apparent security, and now everything was gone. Giving way to grief, the people wept until they had no more power to weep. On David himself the blow fell with great severity. Not only had his wives, Abigail and Ahinoam, disappeared, with all that he had, but threatening murmurs began to be heard among his followers. It was his first serious reverse in war, and in their distress the people spoke of stoning him. But at this time of difficulty and perplexity there was no evil in his heart barring his way to God, and he could "encourage himself" in the Lord, and inquire as to his course of action. It was evident that some enemy had invaded the city during the absence of its defenders, and Abiathar being present with the ephod, the

question was asked, "Shall I pursue after this troop? shall I overtake them?" The response came, "Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all." Thus directed, David, with his band, exhausted as they were with a long march, began a hot pursuit, until they came to the brook Besor. But here no fewer than two hundred of his men broke down, being too faint to cross the river, the remaining four hundred pressing on with their leader.

While in some perplexity as to the direction their pursuit should take, they found lying in a field a man who had evidently fainted from exhaustion, and hoping to obtain some information from him, they stayed while refreshments were given him. Reviving, the man told David that he was an Egyptian, servant to an Amalekite, who was one of the party that had burned Ziklag, and that he had been left behind because he had fallen sick. He apparently knew the plans of the marauders, and expressed his willingness to guide the pursuers to where they would find their enemies encamped. This he faithfully performed; and David and his men fell upon the unprepared Amalekites in the gloom of the evening, while they were engaged in feasting, eating, and drinking and dancing, because of the success that had attended their expedition, and the great spoil they had gathered. A bloody slaughter ensued, lasting almost a whole day, the narrative stating that the entire band was destroyed

except four hundred young men who rode upon camels, and so escaped.

In fulfilment of the Divine promise, everything that had been carried away from Ziklag was recovered; nothing was missing; wives and children were safe and unharmed, and the household treasures were all there. In addition to this, an immense amount of spoil taken from Philistine and Hebrew cities was found; and thus enriched, the victorious company retraced their steps to the brook Besor, where they had left their comrades. But here there was some trouble. The more turbulent spirits among David's followers demurred to sharing the spoil with the two hundred that had not taken part in the battle, and desired that they should simply receive their own and be sent away. To this David would not agree, and laid it down as a rule that should guide their conduct then and for the future, that "as his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his be that remaineth by the stuff; they shall part alike." The voice of the leader was obeyed, the justice of his ruling recognised, and the difficulty was settled.

Of a portion of the Philistine spoil David made a very politic use, sending presents to his friends in Judah wherever he and his men had been wont to haunt, with the message—"Behold, a present for you of the spoil of the enemies of the Lord."

PSALM XXXI.

THE FORTRESS PSALM.

¶ To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.

IN thee, O Lord, do I put my trust ; let me never be ashamed ; deliver me in thy righteousness. Bow down thine ear to me : deliver me speedily : be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me. For thou art my rock and my fortress ; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me. Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me : for thou art my strength. Into thine hand I commit my spirit : thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth. I have hated them that regard lying vanities : but I trust in the Lord. I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy : for thou hast considered my trouble ; thou hast known my soul in adversities ; and hast not shut me up into the hand of the enemy : thou hast set my feet in a large room. Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am in trouble ; mine eye is consumed with grief, yea, my soul and my belly. For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing : my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed. I was a reproach among all mine enemies, but especially among my neighbours, and a fear to mine acquaintance : they that did see me without fled from me. I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind : I am like a broken vessel. For I have heard the slander of many : fear was on every side : while they took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life. But I trusted in thee, O Lord : I said, Thou art my God. My times are in thy hand : deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me. Make thy face to shine upon thy servant : save me for thy mercies' sake. Let me not be ashamed, O Lord ; for I have called upon thee : let the wicked be ashamed, and let them be silent in the grave. Let the lying lips be put to silence ; which speak grievous things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous. Oh, how great is thy goodness, which thou

hast laid up for them that fear thee ; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men ! Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man : thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues. Blessed be the Lord : for he hath showed me his marvellous kindness in a strong city. For I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes : nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee. O love the Lord, all ye his saints : for the Lord preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer. Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord.

CHAPTER X.

DAVID ANOINTED THE SECOND TIME.

DURING the sixteen months spent by David in Ziklag, his little band of four hundred men grew into a "great host, like the host of God." Day by day there fell to him the flower of the fighting men of Israel, attracted by his great renown, and, no doubt, despairing of the moody tyrant that reigned in Benjamin. The tribe of Gad especially furnished him with troops fit for any war: "men of might, that could handle shield and buckler, whose faces were as the faces of lions, and were as swift as the roes upon the mountains." Some of Manasseh also came; but the most important addition his growing forces received was a band of expert warriors from Judah and Benjamin.

It was a sure sign of the failing authority and power of Saul when the men of his own tribe began to forsake him and fall away to his rival—a token that his reign was near its close. The men of this fighting "clan" were renowned archers and slingers, able to use both the right hand and the left in hurling stones and shooting arrows with the most deadly accuracy.

David was fully conscious of the significance of this reinforcement and all that it portended, but seems to have had some doubts of the good faith of its members. Hearing of their approach, he went out to meet them. "If ye come peaceably," he said, "to help me, my heart shall be knit unto you; but if ye come with treachery, the God of our fathers look thereon, and rebuke it." The response left no room for doubt. The spirit came upon the leader, Amasai, and he said, "Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse. Peace, peace, be unto thee, and peace be to thine helpers, for thy God helpeth thee." So David received them, and made them captains of his band.

While he was thus prospering, though in an enemy's country, and continually receiving fresh evidences that the hearts of Israel were turning towards him as the man who should deliver them from their present distressed condition, there came a day when a fugitive from the camp of Saul made his appearance at Ziklag with his clothes rent, and earth upon his head. He was an Amalekite, and brought to David what he supposed would be the welcome news of the death of Saul. His tidings were true. Saul, with a multitude of Israel, had fallen upon Mount Gilboa; but, unfortunately for himself, this man—no doubt with the idea that he would be rewarded for his services—invented a story of how he had been by chance in the battle, had encountered Saul, hard pressed by the Philis-

tines, and at the king's own request had slain him ; and in confirmation of his tale produced the royal crown and bracelet. This ingenious fiction had not the effect he desired. David's jealousy of injury inflicted on the anointed king awoke, and he directed one of the young men near to fall upon him, and " he smote him that he died."

And there was grief in the camp. It is not likely that many of the outlawed band would mourn for Saul personally ; but the victory of the Philistines meant more than his death and that of his sons. It meant that the victorious enemy had penetrated to the heart of the land, and had established themselves in the strong hill country of Benjamin, and had once more driven the Hebrews to their hiding-places in the caves and rocks. Moreover, Saul had not fallen alone. Jonathan, whose bravery and gentleness had endeared him to the whole nation, was dead, and with him a multitude of the people. So they mourned, and wept, and fasted with no simulated grief, notwithstanding the hopes that must have risen tumultuously in their hearts of a speedy return to their homes. This mourning will never be forgotten ; for there was one in their midst whose poignant grief inspired a lamentation touching and beautiful beyond expression, which abides to this day the classic example of its kind.

David had looked his last on Jonathan. Never again should their mutual hands be clasped in

friendship. Death had parted them; and though David may have had the faith which he expressed long afterwards concerning the child he lost—"I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me"—yet now, in the flush and vigour of youth, that time must have seemed far distant; so he lamented his friend in words of inconsolable woe. Nor was Saul forgotten. With his death all sense of injury became obliterated, and only the gallant king who had fought so bravely for his country was remembered. And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan, his son. "The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places; How are the mighty fallen! 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. Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain upon you, nor fields of offerings; for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil. From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty. Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights; who put on

ornaments of gold upon your apparel. How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant hast thou been unto me; thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"

Many have been the attempts to paraphrase this lovely ode and give it rhyme and metre, but none of the so-called poems can compare with the exquisite beauty of the lamentation as it stands in the "English pure and undefiled" of our Authorised Version.

The time had now come for David to take some decisive steps towards obtaining the promised kingship. While Saul lived he had steadily resisted every temptation to rebel, but now the throne was practically vacant. His way was, therefore, clear to inquire of the Lord as to whether he should visit Judah, and there put to the test the assurances he had received that Israel desired him as their king. He accordingly asked counsel, and, divinely guided, went up with his whole force to Hebron. His welcome there was enthusiastic, the men of Judah immediately accepting him as Saul's successor, and anointing him king. From every tribe appeared the picked forces of Israel to take part in anointing him for the second

time king: mighty men of valour, famous in the house of their fathers; men who had understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do; men who could keep rank; single-hearted men, expert in war: all these came with a perfect heart to Hebron to take part in his coronation, and were with him three days, hospitably entertained by the neighbouring tribes, eating and drinking, and rejoicing with great joy.

And, indeed, there was cause for joy. The nightmare of Saul's unhappy reign (for such it had been in its later years) was over, and morning began to dawn for the chosen nation.

Peace, however, was not yet for Israel. Saul and two of his sons, Jonathan and Melchi-shua, had fallen on Mount Gilboa, but a third son, Ish-bosheth, still survived. He was not a man of strong character, and could probably have himself offered no effectual resistance to David's claim to the throne; but one man stood in the way of national unity by espousing his cause. Abner, the chief of the host of Saul, was faithful to the fallen house, and refused to desert its fortunes. Setting up the standard of Ish-bosheth at Mahanaim, a city on the other side of Jordan, in the territory of Gilead, he succeeded in detaching a great portion of the nation from active allegiance to David, and for two years maintained a civil war, in which the rival tribes of Judah and Benjamin were the chief combatants.

At the very beginning of the strife the politic David made an attempt to gain over the Gileadites, which, had it succeeded, would probably have prevented the war that followed. The men of Jabesh-gilead, on hearing of the death of Saul and that the Philistines had exposed his body in Beth-shan, mindful of their ancient obligations to him, had made a night expedition, carried it away, and gave it decent burial in their own city.

Hearing of this, David sent messages of thanks to them for what they had done; adding the suggestive words: "Now let your hands be strong, and be ye valiant, for your master Saul is dead, and also the house of Judah have anointed me king over them." But the faithful Gileadites were not to be seduced from their allegiance to Saul and his house, and followed Abner, the consequence being a long war, in which Judah gradually overcame the weaker tribe, notwithstanding the gallant efforts of its leader.

It is at this juncture that the name of Joab first appears in the narrative as a powerful factor in David's career, though he had no doubt been a member of the band since its formation in the Cave of Adullam. He was the eldest of the three sons of Zeruiah, David's sister, and was therefore the nephew of the king, although, in the matter of age, they were more like cousins, both being at this time about thirty years old, and in the flush of youth and vigour.



COMBAT BETWEEN THE CHAMPIONS OF DAVID
AND ISH-BOSHETH.

The influence of Joab, necessarily very great from his strongly marked and powerful character, was not always fortunate. A bold and hardy soldier, with a keen eye for the practical aspect of affairs, and far from scrupulous in the means he used to gain his ends, yet faithful in his way, he sometimes goaded his master almost to madness by his wilfulness, sometimes caused him the keenest anguish by his harsh revengefulness, and sometimes firmly and nobly resisted when his king acted unworthily. During the war an occurrence took place that greatly embittered the personal relations between the leaders of either side, and resulted in a tragedy that brought out the savage and relentless elements in the character of Joab. At the conclusion of a long day's battle, in which the Benjamites had been defeated, Abner was obliged to seek safety in flight, and was pursued by Asahel, Joab's youngest brother, a mere stripling, "light of foot as a wild roe." Twice the experienced and powerful warrior turned and warned the lad against his useless chase. "Wherefore should I smite thee?" he said; "how then should I hold up my face to Joab, thy brother?" The headstrong youth persisted in his foolish pursuit of a man for whom he was no match, and met his fate. Joab came up soon after, and at the sight of his brother's corpse an unreasoning and insatiable desire for vengeance on the slayer took possession of his heart, and never left him

till he had treacherously sheathed his sword in Abner's body.

The long struggle was brought to an end by a quarrel between Ish-bosheth and the captain of his army. With or without reason, this titular king accused Abner of having acted shamefully with one of his father Saul's concubines, Rizpah by name. At this Abner broke into a transport of rage. That his puppet—for Ish-bosheth seems to have been little more—should dare to question anything that he might choose to do was insupportable. Did not this son of Saul owe his position and all that he had to the prowess of the great leader of his forces? Who was he that he should take upon himself to find fault? The wretched king, dumb with fear, returned no answer to these angry and insolent words of his tyrannical servant; but the unappeased Abner immediately opened communications with Hebron, and proposed a league with the object of bringing all Israel under David's rule. A ready response was forthcoming; but a condition—not a very worthy one—was made. David said, "I will make a league with thee, but thou must bring with thee Michal, Saul's daughter, when thou comest to see my face." A demand was then sent to Ish-bosheth that he should take Michal from the husband to whom she had been given, and deliver her up. To a requirement from David, backed up by Abner, no refusal was possible, and the much-tried princess was brought to Hebron.

In fulfilment of his compact, the chief now took secret counsel with the elders of all the tribes, including Benjamin, and found them all ready to desert the house of Saul and to range themselves under the banner of David. With twenty companions, he went to Hebron, made his final arrangements with the king, and after a feast he and his friends returned to gather all Israel to make a league with David.

All this was done during the absence of Joab on a warlike expedition, and probably without his knowledge; but no sooner had Abner departed than he arrived at Hebron, triumphant, and with much spoil. When informed that the man he hated had been with David and had left in peace, his anger knew no bounds. With something very like the insolence of Abner towards his king, the wrathful chief sought audience of David, and demanded, "What hast thou done? Why hast thou sent Abner away? Thou knowest the son of Ner, that he came to deceive thee, and to spy on all that thou doest." The answer is not recorded; but whatever it was, it did not turn Joab aside from his revengeful purpose. As soon as he left the king's presence he sent a deceitful message after Abner, which brought the ill-fated man back to Hebron, and Joab, taking him aside as if for quiet speech on the business in hand, basely and treacherously murdered him. The deed was vile, and cruel in the eyes of all. To David it was

simply heart-breaking, the more so that he felt powerless to punish the murderer as he deserved. He did not, however, disguise his grief and anger. He buried him with all honour, himself following the body, and lamenting: "Died Abner as a fool dieth? Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters; as a man falleth before wicked men, so fellest thou."

David's conduct on this occasion pleased all the people, for they and all Israel understood that it was not "of the king to slay Abner, the son of Ner." A fast was ordered, and David mourned to his servants in words that even now are constantly quoted when a hero goes to his rest: "Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?" and then, with genuine anger, he exclaimed, "And I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men, the sons of Zeruiah, be too hard for me: the Lord shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness."

PSALM XXVII.

¶ A Psalm of David

THE Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident. One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord

all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple. For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock. And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me: therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the Lord. Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice: have mercy also upon me, and answer me. When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek. Hide not thy face far from me; put not thy servant away in anger: thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation. When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up. Teach me thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies. Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies: for false witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty. I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.

CHAPTER XI.

DOUBLE DEFEAT OF THE PHILISTINES.

WITH the death of Abner all opposition to David ceased. Ish-bosheth might have given some little trouble, weak as he was, but his short reign of two years was terminated by a violent death. Two treacherous servants, anxious to curry favour with his successful rival, slew him in his bed, and took his head to Hebron. There they met with a reception and fate similar to that which befel the man who boasted of having killed Saul. By David's orders they were cut to pieces. And now David was anointed supreme monarch of an united people. Their enemies had no longer to deal only with the spasmodic efforts of individual tribes, but with the organised armies of the whole nation, under leaders of exceptional genius and valour. The result was soon apparent. Encouraged by victories on all sides, after he had reigned seven years and six months in Hebron, David found himself strong enough to attempt the capture of the stronghold of the Jebusites, the fortified height of Jerusalem, afterwards known as Mount Zion.

Once resolved upon, this important operation

does not seem to have occupied much time. Gathering his forces, the king marched from Hebron, and easily taking possession of the lower part of the city, summoned the garrison of the castle to surrender. The demand was answered with mockery. Secure in their immemorial possession, which neither Joshua nor any of his successors had been apparently able to disturb, and in the natural strength of the place, the Jebusites, deeming that the blind and the lame among them would be sufficient defence against any assault that David could make, sent a curt refusal. An assault was instantly ordered, the ardour of the assailants being stimulated by a proclamation that "whoever should first climb the steep ascent and smite the enemy should be chief and captain of the host." The fierce and stalwart Joab did not let the opportunity pass. First of the storming party, he attained the height, and after what must have been a desperate struggle, took possession of the fortress which for four centuries had frowned defiance on all the efforts of Israel, and was therefore firmly fixed in his commanding position as chief of the royal army. To Jerusalem, ever afterwards to be known emphatically as "The City of David," the king removed his seat of government, and began his long and splendid reign of thirty-three years.

The short sojourn in Hebron, though it appears in the pages of history but as a kind of half-forgotten prelude to the famous achievements in

war and statesmanship which extended his dominions from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates, was nevertheless of the highest importance in David's career. There he consolidated his power over the scattered, and for the most part independent, tribes of Israel, and there he proved his capacity for kingly rule. Everything, it is recorded, that David did in those days pleased the people. It was then true that "the king could do no wrong," in a sense different to that in which the phrase is usually employed. So far as we know, nothing that can be called crime, or anything that was then deemed unworthy of a ruler, stained his reign at Hebron.

One weakness of David's character—that before alluded to—showed, however, serious development. He went to that city with two wives in his train; he carried seven with him to Jerusalem. Michal had rejoined him, and four others he had married—Maachah, the daughter of the king of Geshur; Haggith, the mother of Absalom and Adonijah; Abital, and Eglah. Six sons had been born to him; so that his household had begun to assume the proportions of the ordinary Oriental potentate, with results that, alas! were scarcely more happy than those common in the families of Eastern kings.

The tidings that David had been received as king by all the tribes of Israel, and had established himself in a place so naturally strong and

occupying such a commanding position as the city of Jebus, were very unwelcome to the Philistines. During his reign at Hebron over Judah, and while he was occupied in the war with the house of Saul, they had been content to let him alone, not fearing any serious trouble. But now the case was different. The chief who for years past had been the "darling of the songs of Israel," and whose prowess in war they knew full well, was now in a position effectually to champion the cause of his nation, and it was hardly to be expected that he would be content to let things remain as they were. The threatened danger had better be dealt with at once, before David had time to organise his army and consolidate his power. They accordingly mustered their entire strength and marched towards Jerusalem, encamping in the valley of Rephaim. The extent of their apprehensions and the importance they attached to the impending conflict may be gathered from the circumstance that they took with them to the battle the images of their gods, thus in a special manner invoking supernatural help in the crisis.

David, on his part, was equally conscious of the critical nature of the struggle, and he also betook himself to the God of his fathers. Exercising his high privilege of direct inquiry, he asked, "Shall I go up to the Philistines? Wilt thou deliver them into mine hand?" The Lord answered, "Go up; for I will doubtless deliver

them into thine hand." The battle which followed is not described in any detail, but the few words given to it are full of suggestiveness. In the lowlands of Rephaim lay the Philistine army, encamped in order under the banners of their lords. On the hill-crests of Judah, like a threatening cloud, appeared the host of Israel, with David at its head. What followed is best described by the king himself. "God hath broken in upon mine enemies by mine hand, like the breaking forth of waters." Down the hillside like a torrent rushed the charging host. The shout of Israel, "always like the shout of a king," the onset of Israel, irresistible as floods broken loose, overwhelmed the compact array of the enemy. In utter confusion and disorder, in a rout so complete that they were compelled to leave behind them even their gods, the Philistines fled, and by David's special command the images were burnt on the field of battle.

The victory was a memorable one. That it might not be forgotten, the name of the place was called Baal-perazim, or the plain of breaches, "because the Lord hath broken forth on mine enemies like the breach of waters;" and in later years the prophet Isaiah illustrated the wrath of a coming time of trouble in the words, "The Lord shall rise up as in Mount Perazim."

The Philistines, however, though defeated, were not crushed, and they had come to see that



THE VALLEY OF REPHAIM.

the struggle with Israel was a mortal one. The country was too small to hold a warlike predatory nation like theirs and a king like David. They prepared themselves, therefore, for another effort, again mustered their forces, and spread themselves in the same valley of Rephaim. As before, David inquired of the Lord as to his course of action, and the answer he received is worthy of note. This time it was not a simple direction to go up and fight with a promise of victory, but a direction as to what might be called the strategy of the battle. "Thou shalt not go up, but fetch a compass behind them and come upon them over against the mulberry trees. And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself; for then shall the Lord go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines."

The reason is not far to seek. Although the king knew well enough that it was by the grace and favour of God that his victories were gained, as we see by his full-hearted and ample acknowledgments of the Divine help, yet it is quite conceivable that many in his army might be disposed to ascribe them to the skill of their leaders and their own prowess. Men, perhaps, like the sons of Zeruiah, hardy and stalwart warriors, who delighted in the rush and tumult of battle, and flushed with victory, needed to be taught that it was "the host of the Lord" that

overcame their enemies, and that the real, though invisible, "Captain of the Host" was none other than their God. This lesson could surely hardly fail to be learnt when they saw their trusted leader, skilled and experienced in all the arts of war, receiving counsel and directions as to the conduct of a battle through the sacred oracle, and following it with complete success. It is to be noted, also, that nothing approaching supineness or indolence could be induced by either the counsel or the promise given to David. The words were, "When thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, then thou shalt bestir thyself." God would work and smite their enemies, but it would be by their hands. They must "be strong and very courageous," as God had charged Joshua in the old time, and thus should victory be won. And so it was now; David did as the Lord commanded him, and smote the Philistines from Geba to Gezer, with the effect, not only of reducing them to quietness, but also of spreading abroad his fame, and making his name the terror of the neighbouring nations.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ARK OF GOD BROUGHT TO JERUSALEM.

FOR a time undisturbed by foreign wars, David was able to turn his attention to home matters. The first of these appears to have been the extension and beautifying of Jerusalem to make it a fit capital for a great and powerful nation, a task in which he was materially assisted by Joab. In the building of the palace, his neighbour and friend, Hiram, king of Tyre, rendered valuable service, sending him cedar from the forests of Lebanon, and skilled artificers, masons, and carpenters for the work.

And now, peaceably established in his own city, David resolved to carry out what had been, no doubt, a long-meditated purpose. First, however, he took counsel of his people; for he desired that the work to be done should be the action of the whole nation. Sending, therefore, for his chief captains and all the leading men, he confided to them the great thought that was in his heart. Through them he addressed all the congregation of Israel, and proposed that if it seemed good to them, and if it appeared to be of the Lord, they

should gather themselves together with the priests and Levites that dwelt in all their cities, and bring again the Ark of God to them, for, he said, "We inquired not at it in the days of Saul." This proposal pleased all the tribes. It meant a return to the practices of an earlier and better day, to the hallowed customs that had prevailed before Israel's unfaithfulness to the God of their fathers had brought upon them the calamity of subjection to their enemies and the banishment of the sacred symbol of His presence among them.

Great preparations were made for the occasion. Thirty thousand chosen men accompanied their king to Kirjath-jearim, the place where the Ark had rested ever since, twenty years before, the afflicted and terrified Philistines had sent it away from their midst in order to get rid of the plagues its presence caused among them. They found it in the house of Abinadab, tended by his two sons Uzzah and Ahio, and a new cart having been prepared for its removal, in long procession they set forth on their way to Jerusalem, the king and all his companions expressing their joy in songs and the sound of all kinds of music. But a severe check awaited them. As the Ark passed over the threshing-floor of Nachon, the oxen drawing the cart stumbled on the smooth surface and shook it, and Uzzah took hold of it to steady it. This act of unhallowed familiarity

kindled the Divine anger, and God smote the offender that he died. So severe an admonition, the significance of which he evidently did not then understand, mortified David deeply, and he forbade the continuance of the journey. "How shall I bring the Ark of God home to me?" he said, with a mixture of fear and displeasure, and he ordered it to be carried into the neighbouring house of Obed-edom the Gittite, the assembly dispersing and the king returning to Jerusalem.

The matter, however, was too near David's heart and had been too long purposed to be lightly abandoned. Calm reflection told him that there must have been some fundamental error in the whole proceeding to render so severe a rebuke necessary. He remembered, what he had apparently forgotten in the first instance, the strict injunction given to Moses that none should minister to the Ark except the Levites, and that provision was made in its structure for its carriage by staves on men's shoulders, as during the forty years' wanderings in the wilderness. He found that although the presence and blessing of God had been sought, yet it had not been "after the due order," and, therefore, that God's holy law had not been scrupulously obeyed. He therefore soon took heart of grace, and on hearing that the house of Obed-edom had been greatly blessed since the reception of the Ark, he determined to make a fresh attempt.

Once more he summoned the chiefs of the people; but this time was specially careful to gather the sons of Aaron with the Levites, and to them he committed the care of the Ark, charging them to sanctify themselves for the performance of their sacred duties. He determined that the journey should be accompanied throughout by sacrificial worship and continual songs of praise, and for this the fullest and most elaborate arrangements were made. The Levites, who were skilful in music, had each a part or instrument allotted to them, and chanting the glorious chorus of the sixty-eighth Psalm, "Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered," the joyous procession turned its steps towards the city which the presence of God was henceforth to consecrate and make holy.

Borne on the shoulders of the priests slowly advanced the Ark of the Lord God "who dwelleth between the cherubims." Girt with a linen ephod came King David, and with him and round him his chief captains and mighty men. With sound of trumpet and shouting, the vast multitude pressed forward to Zion; but when they that bore the Ark had gone only six paces the onward march was stayed that the appointed sacrifice of seven bullocks and seven rams might be offered. In this way, with every imaginable manifestation of joy and pious fervour, David "dancing before the Lord with all his might," Jerusalem was approached, and as they neared its gates, it is said, a new

train of jubilation was heard. The royal minstrel had prepared a special song of welcome for the symbol of the presence of Jehovah. In dramatic chorus, after the antiphonal manner of Hebrew poetry, the massive gates of the old pagan city were bidden to open that it might enter. "Lift up your heads, oh ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in," was the demand; and then, as if voicing the doubt and ignorance of the old dwellers of the city of Jebus, came the answer, "Who is this King of Glory?" and then the joyous and confident response, "the Lord of Hosts, he is the King of Glory." So entered the Ark of God into Jerusalem, into the city in which the whole law given through Moses was one day to be perfectly fulfilled, and the sacrifice offered—full, perfect, sufficient—for the sins of the whole world by "Great David's greater Son": the city, "beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth," but which also came to be "spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified."

But neither the august dignity nor the dreadful fall of Jerusalem was present to the mind of the joyful worshippers of that day. When the Ark had been brought to the place prepared for it, David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord, and then solemnly blessed the whole congregation.

It had been a great day for the son of Jesse.

One of the chief desires of his heart had been accomplished, and he himself had been honoured by being entrusted with the offices of both king and priest. The central figure of the vast and varied national gathering intent on the worship of Jehovah, he had given utterance to his full heart in song and dance, in sacrifice and benediction; and now, after having feasted the people, he was at liberty to return and bless his household, and lie down to rest a thankful and a happy man.

PSALM CXXXII.

¶ A Song of degrees.

LORD, remember David, and all his afflictions: how he swore unto the Lord, and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob; surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob. Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah: we found it in the fields of the wood. We will go into his tabernacles: we will worship at his footstool. Arise, O Lord, into thy rest; thou, and the ark of thy strength. Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness; and let thy saints shout for joy. For thy servant David's sake turn not away the face of thine anointed. The Lord hath sworn in truth unto David: he will not turn from it: Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne. If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore. For the Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision: I will

satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy. There will I make the horn of David to bud: I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed. His enemies will I clothe with shame: but upon himself shall his crown flourish.

CHAPTER XIII.

DAVID'S DESIRE TO BUILD A TEMPLE.

ONE circumstance, personal to David, had occurred that somewhat marred the close of the day's celebrations.

As the procession entered the city, the king's exuberant joy had been observed by the Princess Michal with a cold and disapproving eye. That he should express his exultation by putting off his royal robe, and "leaping and dancing with all his might before the Lord," clothed with a linen ephod, did not seem to her either dignified or fitting. So she greeted her husband with grave irony. "How glorious was the King of Israel to-day, who uncovered himself in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself!" David's answer showed that for his own dignity he cared not one jot when occupied with the service of God. "It was before the Lord," he said, "and I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight." Nevertheless, her evident scorn kindled his anger, and he made a vow of separation which, in effect, sentenced her to perpetual widowhood; and we hear no more of Michal.

It is impossible not to feel that this woman had a hard fate. In her early youth she had loved David, and once her quick and ready wit had saved his life. Taken by force from him and given to another man, new ties had only just time to grow strong, when compulsion was again employed to restore her to David. Him she found with six wives already, and evidently prepared to add to them indefinitely; and now, hardly had she taken her rightful place in the palace of Jerusalem when she suffered the doom of banishment from the royal presence.

The Ark having found a resting-place in Zion after its long wanderings, the king took care to provide for its attendance and for the solemn performance of the rites prescribed in the Mosaic law. That God was jealous of the "due order" of His worship had been terribly shown in the death of Uzzah, and David had taken the lesson deeply to heart.

It may be remarked here that, although the Ark was brought to Jerusalem, and apparently the principal worship established there, the Tabernacle services at Gibeon, where they had been carried on since the destruction of Nob by Saul, were not immediately discontinued. Morning by morning, and evening by evening, the daily sacrifices were offered there, Zadok officiating as high priest, while Abiathar celebrated at Jerusalem. But in the royal city a splendour of musical accompaniment, both vocal and instrumental, was added,

which was henceforth continued as part of the regular worship, both in the Tabernacle and the Temple, until the close of the dispensation.

In this time of peace and leisure, the thankfulness of David's heart prompted him to exercise his gifts of song in the fullest measure. One anthem of joy and triumph is given at length in the sacred record as having been then first placed in the hands of three chief musicians, Asaph, Heman, and Ethan, and as parts of it are found in several of the Psalms as we have them in the Bible, it is evident that this was a period in which the sweet singer of Israel poured forth his glorious lays in richest abundance. It was, indeed, a very bright spot in David's life. His early struggles were over. He could look back upon manifold perils escaped, and see how God had delivered him out of them all. He could perceive, and it is expressly recorded did perceive, that he had been raised to his position of dignity and power for the sake of the chosen nation; that God, by his hand, might deliver them from their enemies and perform the promises made to their fathers. Thus he had abundant material for the exercise of his splendid gifts, and there can be little doubt that now, before the terrible wars in which he was soon to be engaged steeped his hands in blood, and before uncontrolled power and a growing sensuality had stained his soul with worse than blood, a large—perhaps a principal—part of the Psalter, as he left it, was composed.

Whether this were so or not, one thing is certain: David's heart was busy with the things that concerned the Lord his God. Lodged in princely fashion, and dwelling in a city daily growing in stateliness and beauty, his thoughts turned to the Ark of God dwelling beneath curtains, as it had done while Israel yet wandered homeless in the wilderness. The people were now in the promised land, secure and prosperous; was it not time, and was it not fitting, that some noble and beautiful house of God should be built worthy to be the dwelling-place of Jehovah? Such was the thought that arose in the king's mind. Perhaps the seed of the idea had long been germinating in his heart: perhaps it was the immediate fruit of his new prosperity and gladness. We do not know; but at any rate the aspiration was not unworthy of him, and he laid it before God. Sending for Nathan, the king said, "See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the Ark of God dwelleth within curtains"—few words, but containing and suggesting a whole world of thought. The prophet, recognising the greatness of the idea and the spirit that prompted it, and perhaps with a sudden vision of the future temple flashing before his eyes, replied, "Go, do all that is in thine heart, for the Lord is with thee." But it was not to be, yet. That night the word of the Lord came through Nathan.

"Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the Lord, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in? Whereas

I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel, spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar? Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, I took thee from the sheep-cote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people—over Israel: And I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth. Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime, and as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the Lord telleth thee that he will make thee an house. And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men; but my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever. According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David."

Such is the account given in the second of Samuel; but we learn later in the sacred record

(1 Chronicles xxii. 8) that God gave a reason why His servant David should not build the house. "Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars; thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight."

The response of David is most touching and beautiful in its mingled humility and thankfulness. It must be read as given to be thoroughly appreciated.

"Then went king David in, and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God? And what can David say more unto thee? for thou, Lord God, knowest thy servant. For thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all these great things, to make thy servant know them. Wherefore thou art great, O Lord God: for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears. And what one nation in the earth is like thy people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to himself, and to make him a name, and to do for you great things and terrible, for thy land, before thy people, which thou redeemedst to thee from Egypt, from the nations and their gods? For thou hast confirmed to thyself thy people Israel to be a people unto thee for ever; and thou, Lord, art become their God. And now, O Lord God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and do as thou hast said. And let thy name be magnified for

ever, saying, The Lord of hosts is the God over Israel ; and let the house of thy servant David be established before thee. For thou, O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house : therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee. And now, O Lord God, thou art that God, and thy words be true, and thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant. Therefore now let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may continue for ever before thee : for thou, O Lord God, hast spoken it ; and with thy blessing let the house of thy servant be blessed for ever."

CHAPTER XIV.

EXTENSION OF THE KINGDOM.

As the King of Israel was at this point of his career on the eve of a series of wars which resulted in a vast extension of his dominions, and brought him into contact with the great empires of the world, it is necessary here to give a short account of his surroundings.

It is first to be observed how circumscribed and narrow was the territory over which he ruled. A glance at a map will show the Philistines cutting off access to the Great Sea in Southern Palestine, while on the north another remnant of the ancient Phœnician family, the Sidonians, occupied the coast. On the other side Jordan, Zobah, Ammon, Moab, Edom — all hostile powers, ever ready to take advantage of Israel's distress—made an uneasy frontier; while behind them, Egypt in the south, Assyria and Babylonia in the east, and the powerful Hittite kingdom, of which so much has been heard in recent years, formed a threatening background.

This state of things was in striking contrast with the promise made to Abraham as to the

land his seed should possess, which was expressly described as extending from the River of Egypt to the Great River, Euphrates. No doubt this promise, and a desire for its fulfilment, was uppermost in David's mind when he began his long and exhausting campaign against the peoples who then occupied portions of those territories, and he would also be familiar with the remarkable prophecies given through Balaam concerning the Sceptre that should rise out of Israel and smite the corners of Moab, and take Edom for a possession. It cannot, therefore, be thought that mere lust of conquest impelled David to attack these nations and reduce them to submission. He desired rather to take up the unfinished work of Joshua and execute the counsels of the Most High. Under these circumstances it is surely very probable that he sought and obtained Divine directions, as he had so often done before when embarking on great and perilous undertakings; and that thus strengthened, he went forth to war.

It was perhaps during the peaceful interval enjoyed after the defeat of the Philistines at Baal-perazim and Gibeon that the elaborate organisation of the army which we find detailed in the Second Book of Samuel and First Book of Chronicles was perfected. It has been shortly described as consisting of—first, the host, which included all the fighting-men of Israel, with Joab as chief; secondly,



ABISHAI SAVES THE LIFE OF DAVID.

of the body-guard, the Cherethites and Pelethites, foreigners, which Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, commanded; and thirdly, of the 600, with Abishai at their head. There were also grades and ranks of honour among the "mighty men," of which we catch a glimpse in the following: "And Abishai, the brother of Joab, he was chief of the three, for lifting up his spear against three hundred, he slew them, and had a name among the three. Of the three he was more honourable than the two, for he was their captain; howbeit he attained not to the first three. Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man of Kabzeel, who had done many acts: he slew two lion-like men of Moab, also he went down and slew a lion in a pit in a snowy day. And he slew an Egyptian, a man of great stature, five cubits high, and in the Egyptian's hand was a spear like a weaver's beam; and he went down to him with a staff, and plucked the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and slew him with his own spear. These things did Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, and had a name among the three mighties. Behold, he was honourable among the thirty, but attained not to the first three, and David set him over his guard." Then follow the names of other valiant men whom the king distinguished by special appointments.

Before turning his attention to his more formidable foes on the east of Jordan, David appears to

have found it necessary again to deal with the troublesome Philistines. This he did in an effectual manner, defeating them in battle, and capturing and occupying Gath and its suburbs. No details of this war have come down to us: at least, none that can certainly be identified with it; but it seems probable that many of the desperate hand-to-hand fights between Hebrew and Philistine "mighty men" that are recorded in various places occurred about this time. Among these, an exploit that bears a singular resemblance to David's own triumph over Goliath is ascribed to one of his nephews, Jonathan, the son of Shimeah, brother of the king. In a certain battle at Gath, a man of gigantic stature appeared, who had six fingers on each hand, and six toes on each foot. Following the example of his ill-fated predecessor, he "defied Israel," but a like doom overtook him. Jonathan slew him. Another of the great brood—a brother of Goliath the Gittite, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam—fell by the hand of El-hanan, a Bethlehemite, one of David's mighty ones; and another, Sippai by name, was slain by Sibbechai, the Hushathite. Possibly also in this struggle occurred the incident that nearly brought the career of "the light and splendour of Israel" to a premature conclusion. Up to this time David had never hesitated to expose his own person in the fierce encounters of war, and had always been in the thickest of the

fight. On one occasion, however, the fortune of war brought him in front of a monstrous foe when he was exhausted with a long day's fighting. The giant, Ishbi-benob, armed with a spear equal in weight to three hundred shekels of brass, came near slaying the fainting king, but Abishai interposed just in time to save the life of his leader, and laid the monster low. This narrow escape caused the utmost consternation throughout the camp. Without David, where would they be? The army took matters into its own hands. They swore unto the king, "Thou shalt no more go with us to the battle, that thou quench not the light of Israel"—the torch that lighted Israel to victory. The resolve was kept, whether it was made at this time or later; for in the accounts of the long and desperate wars that established his kingdom on the other side of Jordan, there is no evidence that David ever again engaged in personal conflict.

And now the time had come for the host of Israel to measure its strength with the armies of the nations that occupied the territory between Jordan and the Euphrates—the far-stretching lands that had been promised to Abraham and his seed. The first people to feel the weight of the conqueror's hand were the Moabites. This seems to require some explanation, for hitherto Moab had been friendly to David and his little kingdom. He had Moabitish blood in his veins, through his

great-grandmother, Ruth, who had belonged to that tribe; and it will be remembered that when Saul's hatred had driven him to take refuge in the Cave of Adullam, his aged father and mother had found shelter and protection with Moab's king. No hint is given in Holy Scripture of the motives that prompted David first to attack that kingdom, and exact the fearful vengeance recorded; but there is a Jewish tradition to the effect that the compact had been violated, and Jesse and his wife put to death. However this may be, there is no doubt as to the drastic treatment meted out to the once friendly people. Defeated in battle, they were "cast down to the ground." It is not very clear what is meant by the phrase, "David measured them by a line," even when it is added, "with two lines measured he to put to death, and with one full line to keep alive." It may be that two-thirds of the Moabites were slaughtered; but some have supposed the expression to refer to the possessions of the kingdom generally. The tribe, however, being thoroughly subdued, became tributary and brought gifts.

Flushed with victory, the host now marched northward towards the Euphrates. The first enemy that barred its path was Hadadezer, the powerful and wealthy king of Zobah. He was no mean foe. Against the footmen of Israel he brought a vast array of chariots and cavalry, and an army that seems to have been splendidly equipped with all

the requisites of war. Nevertheless, the valour of the invading force prevailed, and an enormous spoil fell to the lot of the victors. A thousand chariots, seven thousand horsemen, and twenty thousand infantry David took from the vanquished king, whilst from his nobles and from his cities gold and brass in abundance was sent to Jerusalem.

The tidings of his signal success caused great alarm among the surrounding peoples, and especially at Damascus, the chief city of the Syrians. Quickly perceiving that the cause of Hadadezer was their own cause, they mustered their strength and came to his succour; but the onward course of Israel was not to be stayed. In a bloody battle the allies were defeated with a loss of twenty thousand men, and David took possession of the country, placing garrisons in the chief towns and exacting tribute. One friend the conqueror made in this war. Enmity had reigned between Hadadezer and Toi, king of Hamath, a considerable city on the Orontes; so when the latter heard that David had defeated his rival of Zobah, he sent his son Joram with congratulations, and presents of gold, and silver, and brass, which, with spoil of Zobah and Damascus, was sent to Jerusalem, and dedicated to the service of the Tabernacle.

The next stage of the war was a series of expeditions against Edom. Abishai first invaded

its desolate fastnesses, and gained a victory in "the valley of salt," slaying eighteen thousand men. Afterwards both Joab and David himself, with, apparently, the whole host of Israel, penetrated into the heart of the country, occupying its capital Petra, the "rose-red city, half as old as Time," and all but exterminating the whole tribe. For six months, we are told, Joab was engaged in the savage work of hunting out every male Edomite he could find, and in killing and burying them in the rocky caverns with which the mountains of the country are everywhere pierced. Garrisons were placed in the principal towns, and the whole district added to the Hebrew kingdom. The short comment of the sacred historian on this splendid series of triumphs is, "The Lord preserved David whithersoever he went."

PSALM LXVIII.

¶ To the chief Musician, A Psalm or Song of David.

LET God arise, let his enemies be scattered : let them also that hate him flee before him. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away : as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God. But let the righteous be glad ; let them rejoice before God : yea, let them exceedingly rejoice. Sing unto God, sing praises to his name : extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his name JAH, and rejoice before him. A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation. God setteth the solitary in families : he bringeth out those which are bound with chains : but the rebellious dwell in a

dry land. O God, when thou wentest forth before thy people, when thou didst march through the wilderness; the earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel. Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, whereby thou didst confirm thine inheritance, when it was weary. Thy congregation hath dwelt therein: thou, O God, hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor. The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it. Kings of armies did flee apace: and she that tarried at home divided the spoil. Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold. When the Almighty scattered kings in it, it was white as snow in Salmon. The hill of God is as the hill of Bashan; an high hill as the hill of Bashan. Why leap ye, ye high hills? this is the hill which God desireth to dwell in; yea, the Lord will dwell in it for ever. The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place. Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast received gifts for men: yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them. Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death. But God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses. The Lord said, I will bring again from Bashan, I will bring my people again from the depths of the sea. That thy foot may be dipped in the blood of thine enemies, and the tongue of thy dogs in the same. They have seen thy goings, O God; even the goings of my God, my King, in the sanctuary. The singers went before, the players on instruments followed after; among them were the damsels playing with timbrels. Bless ye God

in the congregations, even the Lord, from the fountain of Israel. There is little Benjamin with their ruler, the princes of Judah and their council, the princes of Zebulun, and the princes of Naphtali. Thy God hath commanded thy strength: strengthen, O God, that which thou hast wrought for us. Because of thy temple at Jerusalem shall kings bring presents unto thee. Rebuke the company of spearmen, the multitude of the bulls, with the calves of the people, till every one submit himself with pieces of silver: scatter thou the people that delight in war. Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God. Sing unto God, ye kingdoms of the earth; O sing praises unto the Lord; to him that rideth upon the heavens of heavens, which were of old; lo, he doth send out his voice, and that a mighty voice. Ascribe ye strength unto God: his excellency is over Israel, and his strength is in the clouds. O God, thou art terrible out of thy holy places: the God of Israel is he that giveth strength and power unto his people. Blessed be God.

PSALM CVIII.

¶ A Song or Psalm of David.

O GOD, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise, even with my glory. Awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early. I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people: and I will sing praises unto thee among the nations. For thy mercy is great above the heavens: and thy truth reacheth unto the clouds. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: and thy glory above all the earth; that thy beloved may be delivered: save with thy right hand, and answer me. God hath spoken in his holiness; I will rejoice, I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth. Gilead is mine; Manasseh is mine; Ephraim also is the strength of mine head; Judah is my lawgiver; Moab is my washpot;

over Edom will I cast out my shoe ; over Philistia will I triumph. Who will bring me into the strong city ? who will lead me into Edom ? Wilt not thou, O God, who hast cast us off ? and wilt not thou, O God, go forth with our hosts ? Give us help from trouble : for vain is the help of man. Through God we shall do valiantly : for he it is that shall tread down our enemies.

CHAPTER XV.

DAVID'S STAR AT ITS ZENITH.

WAR ended for a time, the king returned to Jerusalem in triumph, and apparently turned his whole attention to domestic affairs, especially the administration of justice. Under his fostering care the kingdom began to show the signs of settled and orderly government, with duly-appointed officers of state for peace as well as war. "And David reigned over all Israel; and David executed judgment and justice unto all his people. And Joab, the son of Zeruiah, was over the host; and Jehoshaphat, the son of Ahilud, was recorder; and Zadok, the son of Ahitub, and Abimelech, the son of Abiathar, were the priests; and Seraiah was the scribe; and Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, was over both the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and David's sons were chief rulers."

An incident is here narrated which shows how the thoughts of the victorious king, in the midst of his triumphs and splendour, sometimes, at least, turned backwards to the days of his early struggles and dangers. The remembrance of Jonathan and of their mutual covenant rose up

in his mind. "Thou shalt not only while yet I live show me the kindness of the Lord, that I die not: but also thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever: no, not when the Lord hath cut off the enemies of David every one from the face of the earth," had been the words of his friend, and they still rang in his ears. Surely the time was now ripe for making some effort towards the fulfilment of this obligation. Accordingly he caused inquiries to be set on foot, and learned from an old servant of the house of Saul, Ziba by name, that a son of Jonathan, Mephibosheth, had survived the slaughter at Gilboa, and still lived among the Gileadites. He was a child of five years old when the news of his father's death arrived at his home, and his nurse had caught up the lad and fled, but had stumbled in her haste, and let him fall, with the consequence that he became lame for life in both his feet. Summoning Mephibosheth to his presence, the king greeted him kindly, restored to him the estates of the house of Saul, and gave him a place at the royal table among his own sons, making Ziba steward. Thus David redeemed his promise to the friend of his youth.

After this pleasant interlude, we must return to the scenes of war. It will have been observed that so far the territory of the powerful tribe of the Ammonites had escaped invasion, though their neighbours both north and south had been sub-

dued. It appears that at some period in David's career Nahash, the king of Ammon, had shown him some special kindness. Of the nature of the favour we have no information, but it was of sufficient weight to secure immunity from attack: at least while Nahash lived.

At this juncture, however, he died, and his death was the signal for desperate war, the occasion being as follows: When Hanun, his son, succeeded to the throne, David, generously mindful of the benefits received, said to his servants: "I will shew kindness unto Hanun, the son of Nahash, as his father shewed kindness unto me," and he sent messengers with words of condolence and comfort. This courtesy was requited in a very extraordinary and shameful fashion. The messengers were seized, half of their beards was cut off—perhaps the worst insult that could be offered to an Oriental—part of their garments was cut away, and then they were dismissed the Court. Possibly the princes of Ammon had some reasonable grounds for the advice they gave their young king in this matter. They knew what had been going on all around them, and might well suspect David of designs on them now that the king his friend was dead. At all events, what they said was: "Thinkest thou that David doth honour thy father, that he hath sent comforters unto thee? Hath not David rather sent his servants to search the city, and to

spy it out, and to overthrow it?" Unfortunately Hanun listened to their counsel, and acted in the rash and reckless manner related. Whether Ammon had been in danger before or not, conflict with Israel was now certain. No monarch could brook such an insulting response to friendly overtures, not even if he were the head of an established dynasty and secure on his throne of prescriptive right, much less one in David's position. He was the first of his line, had not very long been acknowledged king of Israel as a nation, and at that particular time was holding a large extent of recently conquered country by force of arms. To have submitted to such a rebuff from Ammon would have seemed a confession of weakness calculated to incite the Syrians, Moabites, and Edomites to instant revolt. The princes of Ammon speedily became aware of the certain effects of their conduct, and made vigorous preparations for the inevitable fight. Knowing that alone they would not be able to cope with the forces of Israel, they hired bands of mercenaries from Syria and Mesopotamia, including an immense host of chariots and horsemen. David, on his part, seems to have taken the turn of events very quietly. Hearing of the dismal plight of his ambassadors—"for the men were greatly ashamed"—he sent word that they need not return to Jerusalem immediately, but might "tarry at Jericho until their beards were grown," sparing them the

ridicule they would otherwise have encountered at home. It was not until he heard of the gathering of the allied Syrians and Ammonites, and of their preparation for a campaign, that he took action; but when he did, it was of a thoroughly effectual character. Collecting the whole of the host of fighting men, he committed them to the capable hands of Joab, and sent them to the battle.

The Hebrew leader found his enemies encamped in and around a city called Medeba, divided into two distinct hosts—the Ammonites immediately before the gates of their city, and their allies, under their own kings, in another part of the field. The situation was dangerous, but the military genius of Joab was equal to the occasion. Evidently considering the Syrian army the more formidable foe, he confronted it with the picked men of Israel under his immediate command, and committed the rest of the people to Abishai, with directions to charge the Ammonites. "If the Syrians be too strong for me," he said to his brother, "then thou shalt help me; but if the children of Ammon be too strong for thee, then I will help thee;" and then, under the stress of immediate and deadly peril, one of the few recorded expressions of his innate trust in the God of Israel escaped him: "Be of good courage, and let us behave ourselves valiantly for our people and for the cities of our God: and let the Lord do that which is good in His sight." Such

were his final words before giving the signal for battle, and then the host of Israel threw themselves on the marshalled ranks of chariots and cavalry with irresistible and victorious onset. The first to give way were the forces of the allied kings, and their flight so discouraged the Ammonites that they speedily sought safety within the walls of Medeba. Having thus dispersed the dangerous combination formed against Israel, Joab returned to Jerusalem, and the mass of the people, according to custom, sought their homes.

The Syrians, however, were far from resting content with this defeat, and, thoroughly alarmed, took steps to place a still more formidable force in the field against David. This time they appealed to the tribes beyond the Euphrates for help, and also formed an alliance with Hadarezer, the king of Zobah, placing the whole force under the supreme command of Shobach, his chief captain. Again David summoned the host, and placing himself at its head, met and defeated his enemies in a battle so decisive that it broke up for ever the dangerous alliances that had so seriously threatened the growing empire of Israel. Hadarezer and his people made peace with David and became his tributaries, while the Syrians left the Ammonites to their fate, refusing any more to champion their hopeless cause.

The victories here described, by extending the

borders of the Hebrew kingdom to the Euphrates, gave it a name and a place among the empires of the period, the date being about 1,000 years before the Christian era. By them God made David "a name like unto the name of the great men that were in the earth." They find a place in heathen records and probably influenced the course of the struggle for universal supremacy between Assyria, Egypt, and Babylonia.

PSALM XVIII.

¶ To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, the servant of the Lord, who spake unto the Lord the words of this song in the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul: And he said,

I WILL love thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies. The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me. In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears. Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth. There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness was under his feet. And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the

skies. At the brightness that was before him his thick clouds passed, hail stones and coals of fire. The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hail stones and coals of fire. Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; and he shot out lightnings, and discomfited them. Then the chaunnels of waters were seen, and the foundations of the world were discovered at thy rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils. He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them which hated me: for they were too strong for me. They prevented me in the day of my calamity: but the Lord was my stay. He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me. The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all his judgments were before me, and I did not put away his statutes from me. I was also upright before him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity. Therefore hath the Lord recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his eyesight. With the merciful thou wilt show thyself merciful; with an upright man thou wilt show thyself upright; with the pure thou wilt show thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt show thyself froward. For thou wilt save the afflicted people; but wilt bring down high looks. For thou wilt light my candle: the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness. For by thee I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall. As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the Lord is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him. For who is God save the Lord? or who is a rock save our God? It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect. He maketh my feet

like hinds' feet, and setteth me upon my high places. He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms. Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy right hand hath holden me up, and thy gentleness hath made me great. Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, that my feet did not slip. I have pursued mine enemies, and overtaken them: neither did I turn again till they were consumed. I have wounded them that they were not able to rise: they are fallen under my feet. For thou hast girded me with strength unto the battle: thou hast subdued under me those that rose up against me. Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies; that I might destroy them that hate me. They cried, but there was none to save them: even unto the Lord, but he answered them not. Then did I beat them small as the dust before the wind: I did cast them out as the dirt in the streets. Thou hast delivered me from the strivings of the people; and thou hast made me the head of the heathen: a people whom I have not known shall serve me. As soon as they hear of me, they shall obey me: the strangers shall submit themselves unto me. The strangers shall fade away, and be afraid out of their close places. The Lord liveth; and blessed be my rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted. It is God that avengeth me, and subdueth the people unto me. He delivereth me from mine enemies: yea, thou liftest me up above those that rise up against me: thou hast delivered me from the violent man. Therefore will I give thanks unto thee, O Lord, among the heathen, and sing praises unto thy name. Great deliverance giveth he to his king; and showeth mercy to his anointed, to David, and to his seed for evermore.

CHAPTER XVI.

DAVID'S GREAT SIN.

DAVID'S reign had now reached the noontide of its fame and splendour. At home and abroad, in peace and in war, his administration was in the highest degree successful, and many years of prosperity seemed to lie before him. If there were gathering clouds, they concerned him personally, and were visible to no eye but God's. None could have anticipated the disastrous eclipse—the black shadow that was soon to darken his whole future, and leave him, as has been said, “a broken man.” The calamity came suddenly; but its germs had long been developing. Evidences of an increasing sensuality have been several times pointed out in the course of this history; the seed had been growing secretly, and it was now to bear bitter fruit.

Renewed war with Ammon gave occasion for the distressing and direful incident now to be related, the wickedness and treachery of which could hardly be depicted in too strong terms.

It occurred while Joab and the army were besieging Rabbah, a strong city of the Ammonites. Among the captains of the host was Uriah the

Hittite, a brave and hardy soldier, whose name is included in the list of David's valiant men. This unfortunate victim of the lust and perfidy of his king had left at home in Jerusalem a wife of surpassing beauty, named Bath-sheba. Walking on the roof of his house in the cool of the evening, David saw this woman washing herself, and immediately conceived a violent passion for her. Self-restraint in these matters he seems to have entirely lost; for during his reign in Jerusalem he had added many wives to his household, and yielding to the dictates of his uncontrolled desires, he sent to invite her to the palace. Meeting with no opposition from the tempted woman ("the invitations of a king are commands"), he committed the sin that has for ever associated his name with "that which destroyeth kings" (Proverbs iii. 1). The offence could not be concealed, and open shame threatened both the tempter and the tempted. In great alarm, David sent for the injured husband, and by expedients too mean and contemptible to be recorded, tried to hide his misconduct.

The generous soldier was proof against temptation, and made answer—"The Ark, and Israel, and Judah abide in tents; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields. Shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink? As thou livest and as thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing;" and even under the

influence of wine his determination was unaltered. Thus baffled, the desperate king resolved to destroy his faithful and self-denying servant. Dismissing him, he sent by his hand a letter to Joab, in which was written—"Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire from him, that he may be smitten, and die." A more treacherous and cruel act can hardly be conceived; but what will not men do when driven to extremity by the consequences of their own wickedness?

What Joab thought of the order we do not know. Information would probably reach him that would make him at least guess at the motives that prompted it. Perhaps he did not think it anything very bad, for such actions are not uncommon in Eastern despotisms; and it has been suggested also that possibly he was not sorry to carry out an order that would place the king more or less in his power. However this may be, he obeyed the vile command. Ordering an assault, he placed the doomed man in a position of almost certain death, and after Uriah had fallen, sent a message to David that showed he fully understood the whole matter. Instructing the messenger, he said, "When thou hast made an end of telling the matters of the war unto the king, and if so be that the king's wrath arise, and he say unto thee, Wherefore approached ye so nigh unto the city when ye did fight? Knew ye not that they would shoot from the wall? Then say thou, Thy servant

Uriah the Hittite is dead also." It fell out exactly as Joab had anticipated. David's wrath, real or simulated, on hearing of the loss sustained, was instantly quieted by the intelligence of Uriah's death, and he said, "Thus shalt thou say unto Joab, Let not this thing displease thee, for the sword devoureth one as well as another; make thy battle more strong against the city, and overthrow it; and encourage thou him." On hearing of her husband's death, Bath-sheba observed the usual period of mourning, and was then taken into the palace, and became the king's wife.

So, as far as man was concerned, the incident apparently ended. David had another wife, obtained by means that there was nobody to question, and that was all. But "the thing that David had done displeased the Lord." Here was rottenness at the core. David's whole life—all that he had attempted and attained—all the fair fruit of his splendid gifts—had ripened in the sunshine of God's favour. This he had now forfeited, and disaster must follow. Not quickly, perhaps. Sometimes "the mills of God grind slowly; yet they grind exceeding small." So a year passed, and all seemed well. Bath-sheba bore him a son: a child to whom the father's heart seems to have gone out with peculiar tenderness and absorbing love.

Suddenly there stood before him a prophet of the Lord—Nathan—and he had a tale to tell. "There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the

other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up; and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb and dressed it for the man that was come to him."

Natural and righteous anger flamed in the king's heart at this pitiful story, and with vengeful promptness he gave sentence, "The man that hath done this thing shall surely die."

"Thou art the man!"

Like a scorching blast the dread words fell on the ears of the conscience-stricken king, and then followed, as from the very judgment-throne of God Himself, the Divine arraignment of his crime. "I anointed thee king over Israel, and delivered thee out of the hand of Saul. I gave thee thy master's house, and Judah and Israel; and thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife. Wherefore hast thou thus despised my commandment? Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from thine house. I will raise up evil against thee; and as thou hast sinned secretly, so shalt thou be punished openly."

Convicted in his inmost heart, no shadow of excuse or deprecation of the Divine anger escaped David's lips. He was not the man to assert his kingly dignity or the plenitude of his royal power in the presence of his God, though that presence was represented only by a subject whom a word could have banished and slain. Only one low moan came from his white lips. "I have sinned against the Lord." This measured the height and breadth of his crime, and touched its bottomless depths. "Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." The word of confession reached the throne of the Most High, and brought the answering word of pardon. "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die;" but—for it was a God of justice that spake—"because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born to thee shall surely die."

The blow fell. The well-loved child became very sick, and the father's heart was wrung with anguish as he saw the progress of fatal disease, and knew it as the consequence and punishment of his own wrong-doing. He did not despair; for he knew something of the Divine mercies. "Who can tell," he thought within himself, "whether God will be gracious to me that the child may live?" So he wept and mourned before God, and fasted and prayed. But on the seventh day the child died, and then before his wondering servants David

gathered up his robes and anointed himself, and went into the house of God and worshipped. To their astonished questions as to the reason of this strange change of behaviour, so different from the custom of bereaved parents, he answered with a dignity and pathos, and a consciousness and faith that this was not the end, that makes the saying memorable through all time: "While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me that the child may live? But now that he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

In the meantime, the war against Ammon had been vigorously prosecuted. Rabbah, the royal city, held out for a long time, being well supplied with that great necessity for a besieged town—water. At length, the outworks being taken and capitulation being only a question of time, Joab sent to David a request, or suggestion, that the king should come in person and take it; "Lest," he said, with a loyalty to his sovereign that did him honour, "lest I take the city, and it be called by my name." Accordingly David proceeded thither, fought against "the City of Waters," and took possession of it. At last the Ammonites, his sole remaining enemies, were at his mercy; and very cruel that mercy appears to have been. The crown of the unfortunate Hanun, a coronet of massive

gold set with precious stones, he appropriated to his personal use, and sent a great abundance of spoil to Jerusalem. With regard to the people, it is related that he put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick-kiln. What the exact meaning of these expressions may be it is difficult to say. Some have sought to put a more merciful interpretation upon them than appears at first sight, arguing that servitude is all they import; and it is surely permissible at least to hope that such may actually have been the case.

Soon after this the king's heart was gladdened by the birth of Solomon, the second child of Bath-sheba: the future "man of peace," who was also called Jedidiah, "the beloved of the Lord," and who succeeded to the throne when David "was gathered to his fathers."

PSALM LI.

¶ To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bath-sheba.

HAVE mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with

hyssop, and I shall be clean : wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness ; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God : and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence ; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation ; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways ; and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation : and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness. O Lord, open thou my lips ; and my mouth shall show forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice ; else would I give it : thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit : a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion : build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering : then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.

CHAPTER XVII.

DOMESTIC TROUBLES.

A FURTHER domestic calamity, the consequences of which indescribably embittered many succeeding years, now fell upon the king. It arose out of the relationships to each other of the many children of his many wives. An outrage of a peculiarly detestable character was committed by Amnon, David's eldest son, the child of Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, on his half sister, Tamar, the daughter of Maachah. For some reason, the king, although very wroth, failed to punish the offender as he deserved, perhaps because he felt the weakness of his own example in such matters; and the unfortunate woman took refuge in the house of her own brother, Absalom.

It is in this connection that we first meet with the name of this beautiful, gifted, but treacherous and ill-fated son of David. Highly incensed at the indignity put upon his sister, and no doubt very angry at his father's supineness, a deadly hatred for Amnon took possession of him, which

was strengthened by the concealment he was forced to practise. He spake not a word to his brother, good or bad, but nursed his wrath until a suitable time should come for vengeance. Two years passed away, and the scandal was apparently forgotten, when one day Absalom appeared before the king with a request. He had sheep-shearers, he said, on his estate at Baal-hazor, and, it being a time of rejoicing, begged that his father, with his servants, would honour the feast with his presence. As perhaps Absalom anticipated, David declined the invitation, giving as his reason that it was not suitable that so many should be chargeable on his son's hospitality.

The refusal being accepted, Absalom's next request was, "I pray thee, let my brother Amnon go with us." The suspicions of the father were at once aroused, and he said, "Why should he go with thee?" The persuasions of Absalom, however, prevailed, and the king's consent to the proposal that all his sons, including Amnon, should attend the feast was obtained. As far as this guilty man was concerned, it was an invitation to death. The long-awaited-for hour of revenge had come, and Absalom had already given his orders to his servants. "Mark ye now when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon; then kill him: fear not, have not I commanded you? Be courageous, and be valiant."

The treacherous and bloody scheme was carried out, and David's first-born son fell beneath the blows dealt—if not by the hand of a brother, at least by that brother's orders. The assembly immediately broke up in the utmost confusion and dismay. The remainder of the king's sons, terrified by the fate that had so suddenly overtaken Amnon, and not knowing who might be the next victim of Absalom's perfidy, fled towards Jerusalem as fast as their mules could carry them. Arriving there, they found that tidings of the catastrophe had preceded them. On the first alarm, some swift-footed messenger had sped to King David, conveying the terrible news that Absalom had slain all the king's sons, that there was not one of them left.

The shock was overwhelming. In the intensity of his despair the afflicted father tore his garments and fell prostrate on the earth. One who stood by, however, who evidently knew all about the matter, hastened to correct the false tidings. This was Jonadab, a nephew of the king, whom we already know as a valiant warrior, and who had also a reputation for great subtlety of character, and he told David the real facts of the case. "Amnon only is dead," he explained, and he had been slain in revenge for the dishonour done to Absalom's sister; all the rest were safe. The arrival of the terrified survivors confirmed his words,

and the violence of David's grief was assuaged ; but the whole company "wept very sore" for Amnon, their father's first-born, and the heir to the throne.

By this act of deceitful revenge Absalom became self-banished from his father's house and the royal city, and thus began the long estrangement that knew no real healing, but culminated in rebellion, war, and death.

Return to Jerusalem being, of course, impossible, the fugitive fled to the court of his father-in-law Talmai, king of Geshur. That city could hardly have been a secure abode had David been minded to pursue him ; but paternal affection, always strong in the royal heart of the great king, forbade any such course. On the contrary, during the three years that Absalom dwelt in Geshur David mourned for his son every day. In the pathetic language of Scripture, his soul "longed to go forth unto Absalom" continually.

To put an end to this unsatisfactory state of things, the astute and politic Joab devised a scheme as ingenious as it was successful in its immediate object. Knowing, no doubt, the sensitiveness of the king's mind when appealed to through the medium of an apt and telling parable, he sent a "wise woman" to his judgment seat with a piteous tale of a strife between her two sons, which had resulted in the death of one and the flight of

the survivor from threatened vengeance. She concluded with an entreaty for help, lest he should also be slain and "her coal which was left should be quenched." The kind-hearted monarch, promising the protection she asked for, she craved permission to speak "one word." "Say on," was the reply; and then followed the application of her story. The king doth not send to fetch home again *his* banished. He is faulty in this, for "we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person; yet doth he devise means that his banished be not expelled from him." Skilfully following up this telling appeal, with perhaps a touch of Oriental flattery, she continued: "Then thine handmaid said 'The word of my lord the king shall now be comfortable, for as an angel of God, so is my lord the king to discern good and bad; therefore the Lord thy God will be with thee.'" The shaft went home. In effect, David had heard as a comment on a judgment of his own the well-remembered words "Thou art the man!" from the lips of this woman of Tekoah, and he felt it keenly. Such reflections did not hinder him from giving the matter the consideration it deserved; but first he must get to the bottom of what struck him as a piece of ingenious strategy on somebody's part. "Tell me," he said, "is not the hand of Joab with thee in all this?" Very wisely, the woman confessed

at once that Joab had instructed her and put all the words she had spoken in her mouth. It speaks volumes for the wisdom and self-restraint of King David that he did not allow the knowledge that he had been "got at" in this cunning fashion to influence his decision. A smaller man would have been irritated at such an attempt to force his hand. David was too large-hearted for this, and sending for the chief of his army, he generously and openly told him, "Behold now, I have done this thing : go therefore, and bring again the young man Absalom." With great joy the princely Joab made his obeisance and paid his thanks, recognising the greatness of the king's act. "To-day thy servant knoweth that I have found grace in thy sight, my lord, O king, in that the king hath granted the request of his servant." A stern word, however, was spoken before the peacemaker was sent on his errand to Geshur : "Let him turn to his own house, let him not see my face," was the command ; so Absalom returned to Jerusalem, but he and his father still dwelt apart.

It can hardly be said that this partial restoration of the banished prince was wise or politic. Such half-measures are seldom successful. Oftener than not they irritate rather than heal, and it is certainly surprising that a ruler of men so experienced and far-seeing as David should not have anticipated evil consequences ; but, possibly, he was influenced

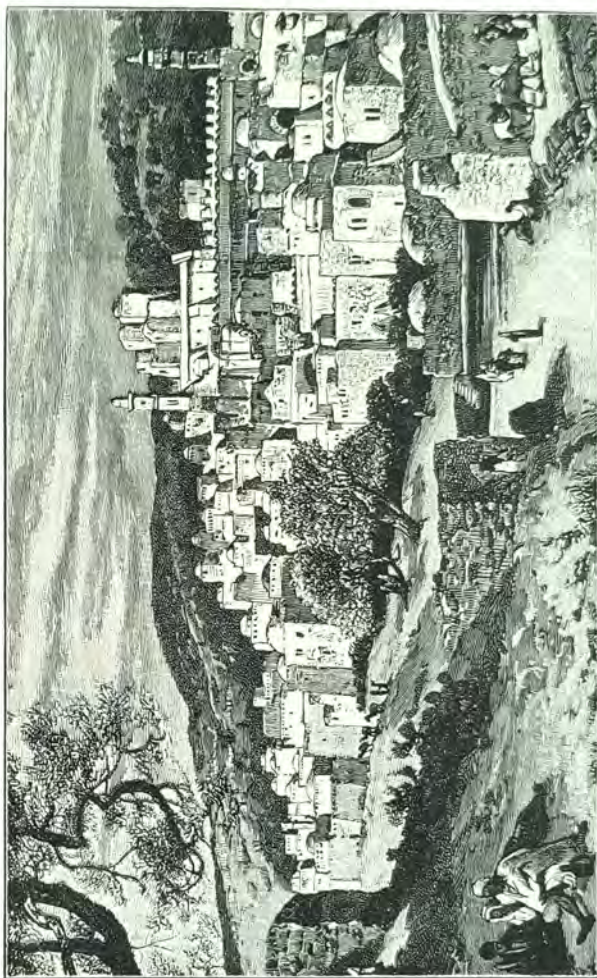
by a fear of domestic dissensions. Up to this time there had been much to pity, and perhaps much to excuse, in Absalom's position and conduct, he being by far the ablest of the royal children, and evidently feared as well as loved. The three sons who had been born to him, and who he had hoped would continue his line, had all been taken away by death, leaving him a bereaved and disappointed man. The act of violence which had driven him from Court and his father's presence was, no doubt, in his eyes, a justifiable revenge for a grievous wrong; and now to live apart in disgrace, forbidden to approach the palace, chafed his proud spirit beyond endurance. The three years' exile at Geshur had been tolerable, for he had not been irritated by daily reminders of his unfortunate position; but two years at Jerusalem exhausted his patience. Twice he sent to Joab, requesting an interview, but without success; he would not see him. At last he resolved to force an audience. "See," he said to his servants, "Joab's field is near mine, and he hath barley there; go and set it on fire." On hearing of this, the astonished Joab immediately went to him, and asked him what he meant. The prince's answer was to the point, and perfectly reasonable and justifiable. "Behold, I sent unto thee, saying, Come hither, that I may send thee to the king, to say, Wherefore am I come from Geshur? It had been good for me to have been there still; now, therefore,

let me see the king's face, and if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me." This bold expedient proved successful. Joab told David the circumstance, and Absalom was admitted to the royal presence. He bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king, and the king and father once more gave his well-loved son the kiss of peace.

Restored to royal favour, Absalom seems to have almost at once embarked on the course of ambitious deceit and treachery which finally brought about his ruin. Soured and embittered by the vicissitudes of his unhappy life, he aspired to the crown, reckless of the trouble his conduct must cause to the household to which he had been reunited, and of the sea of blood through which he must wade in order to gain his unhallowed ends. He had many qualifications for the career he had marked out for himself. Pre-eminent in personal beauty, he possessed the art of masking his wild and desperate nature under a semblance of winning courtesy and princely grace. "In all Israel there was none so much praised for beauty as Absalom; from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him." To enhance the personal popularity this gift naturally brought him—which would hardly have counted for very much in important affairs of State—the ambitious prince sought to raise himself in the eyes of the people by preparing a splendid retinue to attend him in all

his movements. He procured chariots and horsemen, and organised a band of fifty men to run before him on his journeys, to his estates at Ephraim (or Ephron) and in the Jordan valley. In this way he assumed a regal dignity which, no doubt, had its effect in preparing the way for his subsequent treasonable action. Not content with this, he deliberately set himself to alienate the affections of the people at large from the king on more important matters, and to win them for himself. Frequenting the place of judgment, he addressed himself to any man that came with a suit to the king, taking him by the hand in a friendly manner, kissing him, and telling him that his matters were good and right, but that there was no man deputed to hear him; and adding, "O that I were made judge in the land, that any man who had any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice." In this underhand and deceitful way Absalom "stole the hearts of the men of Israel," and undermined the authority of his father with surprising and wonderful success. Possibly at this time David, burdened with an increasing weight of years, and with failing vigour, both of body and mind, had relaxed the sedulous attention he had once given to the wants of his people, and thus laid himself open to the insidious efforts of his ungrateful son.

The day quickly came when Absalom thought



THE HEHRON OF TO-DAY.

himself strong enough to throw off the mask and raise the standard of open rebellion. This, of course, could not be done in Jerusalem, where the king was surrounded by his personal friends and trusty body-guard, and where any local outbreak would be quickly suppressed. He therefore approached his unsuspecting father with a request that he might go to Hebron to pay a vow which he said he had made while he was an exile in Geshur. "Go in peace" was the gracious and kindly answer of the king; and the traitorous son departed with a lie on his lips to organise a revolt against the aged monarch, now more than sixty years old. Taking with him an escort of two hundred men, of whom it is expressly recorded that they knew nothing of Absalom's designs, he came to Hebron, and from there sent emissaries throughout all the land of Israel with the message—"As soon as ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then ye shall say, 'Absalom reigneth in Hebron!'" The response appears to have been all but universal, so effectually had the rebel prince stolen the hearts of the people by his wily and subtle conduct during the past few years.

More important than any other individual defection from David's followers was that of Ahithophel, the chief counsellor of the kingdom, a man in such repute for wisdom and sagacity that it is said of him that his counsel in those days was as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God.

Thus supported, the conspiracy became strong, and at last the intelligence reached the ears of David at Jerusalem—"the hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom."

CHAPTER XVIII.

FLIGHT FROM JERUSALEM.

IT is not altogether easy to account for David's sudden resolution to leave Jerusalem and seek safety in flight. There, in the stronghold of Zion, he was safe, at least for a time. Only on the supposition that the accounts which reached him indicated an uprising little less than national, and so strong that even Zion's bulwarks, manned by the veterans of his many wars, could afford him only a temporary shelter, can it be understood. But whatever the cause, there appears to have been no hesitation. The king's word was "Arise, and let us flee; for we shall not else escape from Absalom; make speed to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword." Possibly these last words afford a key to the matter. He was unwilling to expose the Holy City to the horrors of a siege and the desolations of a civil war. The devoted servants of the king acquiesced: what David said was law to them; so early the next morning the mournful flight began. The rescuer of the royal city from the hands of the

Jebusites, the great ruler who had rebuilt and adorned it and consecrated it by bringing into its midst the Ark of God, quitted it in fear and haste, fleeing from the face of an ungrateful, rebellious, and usurping son. That the events of this sad day made a deep impression on Israel and were long remembered is evident from the remarkable fact that they are recorded at greater length in Holy Scripture than the occurrences of any other single day from first to last.

The morning sun, as it shone on the long procession issuing from the gates of Jerusalem, had perhaps seldom looked upon a more pathetic spectacle. The central figure was of course the grief-stricken king. Barefoot, with his head covered, and weeping as he went, he trod the familiar path that led over the brook Kidron and ascended the slopes of Mount Olivet. Before him marched his faithful soldiery; first the body-guard that from the beginning of his career had followed his fortunes, with Ittai the Gittite at their head, and after them the portion of the host at that time stationed at Jerusalem, commanded by the sons of Zeruiah. Then came the royal household, his wives—except ten women that he left behind to occupy the palace—and children, and with them a multitude of the people.

There was at least a semblance of Divine benediction on the fugitive band as it passed out of the gates of the city. The Ark of the



VIEW FROM OLIVET TO THE SOUTH.

Covenant of God, borne by Levites, was brought from its resting-place by Zadok and Abiathar, and set down while the procession slowly and sorrowfully filed by, "until all the people had done passing out of the city." The two priests, loyal to their king, purposed to bear him company on the perilous and uncertain journey to the wilderness, and carry with them the holy symbol of Jehovah's presence and favour. But this David would not permit. Let the Ark remain in the place which God had found and chosen for its resting-place; and as for himself, well, "If I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, to shew me both it, and his habitation: but if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him." Thus in the midst of his heart-break David's unquenchable devotion to the worship and service of his God asserted itself as the ruling element in his nature, and at his desire Zadok and Abiathar carried back the Ark into the city.

Another incident is recorded that shows how completely David was master over his own spirit amid all the grief and excitement of this eventful morning. As already mentioned, the king's body-guard, the Cherethites and Pelethites, was at this time under the command of Ittai of Gath, a valiant and trusted Philistine noble. With a consideration for the hardships of his special case which is nothing less than wonderful under all the

circumstances, David invited him to return to Jerusalem, where he might remain in peace; "for thou art a stranger," he said, "and also an exile. Whereas thou camest but yesterday, should I this day make thee go up and down with us? seeing I go whither I may, return thou, and take back thy brethren: mercy and truth be with thee." High-minded and kingly words, but they were met in a spirit equally generous and lofty. Said this stranger, "As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be." So Ittai resumed his place at the head of his company, and amid lamentation and mourning and tears, for "all the country wept with a loud voice," the procession passed over Kidron and took its way to the wilderness.

All communication with Jerusalem, however, was not cut off by this flight. In dismissing Zadok and Abiathar, David had reminded them that they had each of them a son who might be useful as messengers, and he had further arranged that he and his company would tarry in the plain of the wilderness (on this side Jordan) until he received some intelligence from them as to how things were going.

Before the summit of Olivet was reached, a word came to David that seemed to reduce his fortunes to their lowest ebb. "Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom." The blow

was very severe, for now the rebellious prince had on his side not only force, but what was equally precious—counsel. There is also some probability that the desertion would be felt with peculiar bitterness by the afflicted king, because he would know, or at least suspect, his sin with Bath-sheba had helped to bring it about, for she is supposed to have been a grand-daughter of the statesman, who would naturally resent the treatment she and her husband had received, and therefore be quite prepared to play the traitor when opportunity offered. There was only one thing that David could do with any effect under these circumstances: he could pray; and that he did. “O Lord, I pray thee, turn the counsels of Ahithophel into foolishness.”

An answer was almost immediately given in the person of Hushai, the Archite. By this time the king's painful steps had reached the top of the mount, and there he paused to worship. While so engaged, with his coat rent and earth upon his head, there appeared the figure of one who under happier circumstances had been called the “friend” of David. As Ahithophel had been the king's counsellor, so Hushai had been his friend, and now he was to prove himself a helper indeed. His presence came like a gleam of light amid very dark shadows. Here was one who, from his high reputation, might well be a rival to the wise man of Giloh, and perhaps the cause of divided

counsels in the camp of Absalom. With this idea flashing through his fertile brain, the king spake : " If thou passest on with me : thou wilt be a burden unto me : but if thou returnest to the city, then thou mayest for me defeat the counsel of Ahithophel ; " and he told him of the arrangements made for the conveyance of messages by the sons of the high priests. Hushai therefore returned to Jerusalem, and waited for the entrance of Absalom.

The next interruption to the journey occurred as David and his people descended the further side of Mount Olivet. This was the appearance of Ziba, the servant and steward of Mephibosheth, with a couple of asses laden with bread and fruit and wine. Answering the questions of the king, he averred that his master had preferred to stay behind in the city, hoping that the people on David's departure would make him king, as being next heir to Saul ; but that he, Ziba, being loyal to David, had come with refreshments for the king and his people in the wilderness. Believing his story, and no doubt irritated at the apparent ingratitude of the son of Jonathan, the king immediately bestowed upon him his master's property—a somewhat hasty act, and, as it turned out, of doubtful justice.

An incident of a very different character next occurred. As the fugitive band skirted the territory of Benjamin on their way to Jordan, a member of the house of Saul, Shimei of Bahurim.

appeared on a neighbouring hillside. Uttering the most dreadful imprecations, he cast stones and scattered dust in the air, in the Oriental fashion of malediction. "Come out, come out," he yelled across the narrow ravine that separated him from the aged monarch; "come out, thou bloody man, thou man of Belial: the Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul; behold thou art taken in thy mischief, because thou art a bloody man." This was more than the fiery spirit of Abishai could bear. "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king?" he exclaimed; "let me, I pray thee, go over and take off his head." David's answer was the answer of a broken heart: "Let him alone; behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life; how much more now may this Benjamite do it? let him alone and let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him. And it may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day." So the man was left alone according to the king's word, to return at no distant date to grovel at David's feet, and implore pardon for his vile and insolent behaviour. A little further on, the whole band being weary, they halted, refreshed themselves, and awaited tidings from Jerusalem.

PSALM III.

† A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son.

LORD, how are they increased that trouble me! many are

they that rise up against me. Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. But thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head. I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the Lord sustained me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about. Arise, O Lord; save me, O my God: for thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek bone; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly. Salvation belongeth unto the Lord: thy blessing is upon thy people.

PSALM LXIX.

¶ To the chief Musician upon Shoshannim,
A Psalm of David.

SAVE me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God. They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head: they that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty: then I restored that which I took not away. O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from thee. Let not them that wait on thee, O Lord God of hosts, be ashamed for my sake: let not those that seek thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel. Because for thy sake I have borne reproach; shame hath covered my face. I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children. For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me. When I wept, and chastened my soul with fasting, that was to my reproach. I made sackcloth also my garment; and I became a proverb to them. They that sit

in the gate speak against me; and I was the song of the drunkards. But as for me, my prayer is unto thee, O Lord, in an acceptable time: O God, in the multitude of thy mercy hear me, in the truth of thy salvation. Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink: let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters. Let not the water-flood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me. Hear me, O Lord; for thy lovingkindness is good: turn unto me according to the multitude of thy tender mercies. And hide not thy face from thy servant, for I am in trouble: hear me speedily. Draw nigh unto my soul, and redeem it: deliver me because of mine enemies. Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my dishonour: mine adversaries are all before thee. Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink. Let their table become a snare before them: and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake. Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them. Let their habitation be desolate; and let none dwell in their tents. For they persecute him whom thou hast smitten; and they talk to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded. Add iniquity unto their iniquity: and let them not come into thy righteousness. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous. But I am poor and sorrowful: let thy salvation, O God, set me up on high. I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving. This also shall please the Lord better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs. The humble shall see this, and be glad: and your heart shall live that seek God.

For the Lord heareth the poor, and despiseth not his prisoners. Let the heaven and earth praise him, the seas, and every thing that moveth therein. For God will save Zion, and will build the cities of Judah : that they may dwell there, and have it in possession. The seed also of his servants shall inherit it: and they that love his name shall dwell therein.

CHAPTER XIX.

DIVIDED COUNSELS.

THE king had not quitted Jerusalem a moment too soon. It was yet early in the day when Absalom with his forces and Ahithophel, his counsellor, entered the royal city and took possession of the palace. The first to greet him was Hushai the Archite. "God save the king. God save the king," was the welcome that fell on the astonished ears of the rebel prince. In much surprise he enquired—"Is this thy kindness to thy friend? Why wentest thou not with thy friend?" The ready-witted and courtly Archite was at no loss for an answer. "Nay," he replied, with subtle flattery; "but whom the Lord, and this people, and all the men of Israel choose, his will I be, and with him will I abide; as I have served in thy father's presence, so will I be in thy presence." Satisfied with this fair-sounding assurance, Absalom at once numbered Hushai among his counsellors, wondering a little, perhaps, at the facility with which his father's ancient friends fell to him in this day of his prosperity.

The sage of Giloh quickly justified his

reputation. At his suggestion the prince committed an act so personally offensive to the exiled king as almost to exclude the possibility of reconciliation.

This was the first decisive step. It committed Absalom to a struggle that must be carried on to the bitter end, as the astute old statesman very well knew. It was his mode of "strengthening the hands" of all engaged in the rebellion by making their leader desperate.

His next proposal was on similar lines. The point was to get rid of David: that accomplished, everything else would be simple. "Give me," he said, "twelve thousand picked men, and before the day is over I will fall on thy father and his followers while they are weary and weak-handed, smite the king only, and bring back all the rest to thee; so the war will be at once ended, and all the people will have peace." The wisdom and vigour of his counsel delighted Absalom and his friends; but before acting upon it the prince determined to ask the opinion of Hushai. This was the crisis David had foreseen, the emergency in which the presence of his "friend" might prove invaluable. The wise Archite was equal to the occasion. Ahithophel's counsel is not good at this time, but rash in the extreme, was the tenor of his advice. What? Attack David, and Joab, and Abishai, and the mighty men of a hundred battles while they were yet in the heat and anger of their first retreat before a foe, chafed in their minds as a bear robbed

of her whelps; it would be madness! All Israel knows what mighty deeds these men have performed, and if at first a few should fall before them, as is most probable, a panic will be certain to ensue, and the heart even of the most valiant will utterly melt. Besides, as far as killing David is concerned, he is not likely to be found with the rest of the people. Knowing the value set on his life, he will, no doubt, lodge in some secure hiding-place, and so the whole enterprise will miscarry. This was Hushai's criticism on the scheme of Ahithophel, and it evidently made a great impression; but further, he had a plan of his own to propose. "Let us proceed," he suggested, "not in this headlong way, but in a quicker, more effectual, and more certain fashion. Why should we fight a doubtful battle when we have the means to simply overwhelm thy father and all his band? Gather all Israel together: they are like the sand of the seashore; put thyself at their head, and go forth to battle in thine own person. Thou shalt light upon him as the dew falleth on the ground, and of him, and of all the men with him, there shall not be one left, and even if he take refuge in a city it can be pulled down to the last stone."

This specious, but cowardly and procrastinating, advice was taken. It no doubt accorded well with the secret dread the rebellious son and his companions entertained of the valiant old king and his renowned captains, who had never known

defeat. Said Absalom gravely, "The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel," and he put off the dangerous enterprise to another day; "for," says the sacred historian, "the Lord had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that he might bring evil upon Absalom."

The fatal consequences of delay were clearly foreseen by the man whose sagacious and resolute plan of action had been rejected, and as he had no desire to have part in an unsuccessful rebellion, he went quietly home to Giloh, put his house in order, hanged himself, and was buried in the sepulchre of his father. This blow to the enterprise he had done so much to foster and make formidable must have been very severe. For Ahithophel to despair of it was an omen of the most discouraging character; and, indeed, no real progress appears afterwards to have been made.

Immediately on delivering his counsel, and apparently without waiting to hear Absalom's decision, Hushai went to Zadok and Abiathar, and told them all that had passed. "Send quickly to David, and tell him not to stay on this side Jordan, but pass over at once and get into a place of safety," he said, "for fear he may be swallowed up."

Everything was in readiness. Just outside the city, at En-rogel, Ahimaaz and Jonathan were waiting—for they dared not be seen leaving Jerusalem

—and on receiving their message, at once started for the wilderness. Their departure was noticed, however; Absalom's quick suspicions were at once aroused, and he despatched men in pursuit. They had got as far as Bahurim, when, perceiving that they were followed, they darted aside into the shelter of a friendly house. Taking refuge in a well, the woman in charge spread a covering over its mouth and scattered corn over it, and replying to the eager questions of the pursuers, told them that the young men had gone on and crossed a neighbouring brook. Having thus got rid of the inconvenient chase, the messengers sped on, and by nightfall had reached the expecting and anxious king. Their appearance must have been inexpressibly welcome, but the tidings they brought occasioned the greatest alarm. Ahithophel and his twelve thousand men might soon be, and were perhaps then, on their track, and they were in no condition to make a successful resistance. There could be no rest or safety on the western bank of the Jordan; so in the darkness of the night the weary band again bestirred themselves, crossed the river, and when the morning light appeared they had all passed over; not a soul was left behind. Thus peaceably ended this long and eventful day—a day which at one time seemed likely to witness the last act of the drama of David's chequered life, but the close of which found him in comparative safety, though an exile, with the waters of the

Jordan rolling between him and those who sought his life.

PSALM XLI.

¶ To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.

BLESSED is he that considereth the poor : the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive ; and he shall be blessed upon the earth : and thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies. The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing : thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness. I said, Lord, be merciful unto me : heal my soul ; for I have sinned against thee. Mine enemies speak evil of me, When shall he die, and his name perish ? And if he come to see me, he speaketh vanity : his heart gathereth iniquity to itself ; when he goeth abroad, he telleth it. All that hate me whisper together against me : against me do they devise my hurt. An evil disease, say they, cleaveth fast unto him : and now that he lieth he shall rise up no more. Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me. But thou, O Lord, be merciful unto me, and raise me up, that I may requite them. By this I know that thou favourest me, because mine enemy doth not triumph over me. And as for me, thou upholdest me in mine integrity, and settest me before thy face for ever. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen.

CHAPTER XX.

DEATH OF ABSALOM.

THE reception accorded to David and his men in the land of Gilead was of the most friendly and hospitable nature; indeed, surprisingly so when the character of his last visit to the country is borne in mind. Then he was a powerful, relentless, and conquering foe; now he was a fugitive, seeking shelter from his revolted countrymen and his usurping son; and it says much for the conciliatory rule he must have exercised over the subdued territories that the inhabitants should have received him in his adversity with such marked kindness. Among the Ammonites, Shobi was in power, a son of his friend Nahash, whom he had probably placed on the throne as a tributary prince, in place of the rash and unfortunate Hanun. No opposition seems to have been offered to his journey to Mahanaim, the strong city of northern Gilead, from whence Ish-bosheth and Abner had governed the greater part of Israel while David reigned over Judah at Hebron.

Arrived there, Shobi of Rabbah, Machir of Lodebar, and Barzillai, "an aged chief, of vast wealth and influence," came forward with an abundant supply of necessaries for David's wearied and exhausted followers. They brought "beds, and basons, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched corn, and beans, and lentiles, and parched pulse, and honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese of kine." Treated in this hospitable fashion, in no fear of immediate attack, and probably strengthened by loyalist fugitives from Judah, the spirit of the little army soon began to revive, and preparations were made for the inevitable struggle with the insurgent forces.

In the meantime Absalom reigned in Jerusalem. He organised the host under the command of Amasa, a cousin of Joab, and after an interval, estimated at about three months, crossed the Jordan and encamped in Gilead.

The decisive trial of strength could not longer be delayed. David set his army in fighting order, dividing it into three bands, under the direction of Joab, Abishai, and Ittai respectively, proposing himself to take the chief command, and go to the battle with his people. This, however, was overruled. "Thou shalt not go forth," said the chiefs of the army, "for thou art worth ten thousand of us. We may flee, or half of us be killed, and they will not care; it is thee they seek. Stay thou,



DEATH OF ABSALOM.

and succour us out of the city." The king recognised the wisdom of the advice, and quietly replied: "What seemeth you best I will do." So he stationed himself at the gate of Mahanaim, and watched the host as it filed out in divisions of hundreds and thousands on its way to battle. He does not appear to have had any misgivings as to the result; his one care was for his son. "Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom." This was his sole charge to his captains; the conduct of the war he left to them.

Owing probably to the skilful generalship of Joab, to whom the country was perfectly familiar, the battle was joined under conditions that could hardly have been more favourable to the veteran troops under his command, or less advantageous to the vast host opposed to him. It was fought in the forest of Ephraim, and raged over a wide extent of country in woody defiles, in which the inexperienced soldiers of Absalom appear to have become entangled, separated, and finally defeated with great slaughter. "The wood devoured that day more than the sword devoured." In the confusion and disorder that ensued, Absalom himself, riding apparently alone, met a detachment of the opposing army, and in attempting to escape, was carried under the trees of a great oak, whose lower branches caught his head, and his mule going from under him, he was left

hanging "between heaven and earth," helpless, an easy victim to any man who chose to kill him. The king's charge concerning him, however, was known through the whole army, and no ordinary soldier dared to touch him. The supposed slayer of Saul and the murderers of Ish-bosheth had met with too evil a fate at the hands of David for any similar risk to be lightly taken. But one came and told Joab, "I saw Absalom hanged on an oak." That grim warrior had no idea of allowing the king's tender-heartedness to stand in the way of ridding the country of the rebellious and ambitious prince; he had a fashion, as we have already seen, of taking matters into his own hands when he deemed such a course desirable. "Why," he fiercely demanded of his informant, "didst thou not slay him? I would have rewarded thee." "Nay," was the reply; "I heard the king's command; he would have found out who had done it, thou thyself wouldest have turned against me, and I should have wrought evil against my own life." Joab had no answer. "I may not tarry thus with thee," he said, and hurried off to complete the tragedy of this ill-omened rebellion. Arrived at "the great terebinth," he found the wretched man still suspended, perhaps by the long hair that had been accounted one of his chief beauties. With ten of his followers, Joab drew around the doomed man a circle of death, and smote him through the heart "while he was still alive in the



"ABSALOM'S TOMB."

midst of the oak." This was the signal for the cessation of strife. In such a war as this the death of either the king or the usurper necessarily removes all pretexts for fighting, and Joab, always moderate in civil strife, immediately blew the trumpet of peace and recalled his pursuing troops. The body of the dead prince was taken down and thrown into a "great pit," and covered with a heap of stones.

It was a sad and ignominious end; not so had the gifted Absalom hoped to be buried. Bereft of his sons, he had, while yet prosperous and powerful, prepared himself a memorial by raising a pillar in "the king's dale," and there, no doubt, he had expected his bones to be laid with honour and affectionate remembrance. His dark sin had changed all this, and now he lay far from his home and kindred in the strange and unfamiliar recesses of the forest of Ephraim. As for his followers, "they fled every man to his tent." The victory was won, peace and restoration were assured; but who was to tell the bereaved father of its fearful cost? Young Ahimaaz volunteered to run and bear the tidings of how God had avenged the king of his enemies, but Joab hesitated. He knew the weight of the blow that must fall on the father at the news of his son's death, and wished to spare the lad the disappointment he would certainly feel at the reception accorded to his message. Turning to a bystander, he bade

him go and tell David what he had seen. Nothing loth, the man departed, but no sooner had he gone than the impatient son of Zadok importuned Joab to allow him to run also. Having at last received an unwilling permission, by a better choice of route he succeeded in out-running his predecessor, and arrived first at the gate of Mahanaim.

During the long and weary day the king had sat at the entrance of the city, awaiting the issue of the battle. At last the watchman stationed on the wall called out that he saw a man rapidly approaching. "He bringeth tidings," said the king. He was the fleet son of Zadok, whose peculiar action in running was well known and easily recognised. Soon he was at the gate, and exclaiming, "All is well," fell on his face before David, adding—"Blessed be the Lord thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king." "Is the young man Absalom safe?" fell from the trembling lips of the listener, who paid little heed to the news of victory. The young man's heart failed him at the pathetic words. He could not tell the father of what had befallen his son. Evading the question, he answered that when he was sent away he saw a great tumult, but knew not what it was. Bidden to stand aside, the second messenger appeared. "Tidings, my lord the king; for the Lord hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against



DAVID MOURNING FOR ABSALOM.

thee." Again the eager inquiry, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" This time there was no concealment. Gravely the man answered, "The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is." The fatal words fell upon the father's ear like clods upon a coffin. In irrepressible agitation he rose up and sought the solitude of the chamber overhead, weeping as he went, and thus he said: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

This burst of heart-break, like so many of David's utterances under the pressure of great emotion, lives, and will live, while humanity is what it is, as the one perfect and sufficient expression of a father's overwhelming grief and of inconsolable bereavement. Absalom was dead—"the estranged, misguided Absalom; the proud, bright being who had burst away in all his princely beauty to defy the heart that cherished him"; and this to the father obscured all the brightness of the day of victory and peace, changing it into the blackness of mourning and desolation.

It was no triumphal entry the victorious army made into the city that had sheltered them. There was no welcoming king to greet them: he was shut up mourning for his dead son; so with ardour damped and with aggrieved hearts, yet

respecting David's natural sorrow, "the people gat them by stealth that day into the city, as people being ashamed steal away when they flee in battle."

A sorry ending this to the day's fighting, and a poor return for the valour and devotion the army had displayed. It was too much for Joab. Bursting rudely into the king's presence (the mighty warrior feared not the face of any man), he told him plainly: "Thou hast shamed this day the faces of all thy servants, which this day have saved thy life, and the lives of thy sons and of thy daughters, and the lives of thy wives, and the lives of thy concubines; in that thou lovest thine enemies, and hatest thy friends. For thou hast declared this day that thou regardest neither princes nor servants: for this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well. Now therefore arise, go forth, and speak comfortably unto thy servants: for I swear by the Lord, if thou go not forth, there will not tarry one with thee this night: and that will be worse unto thee than all the evil that befell thee from thy youth until now."

This honest, though rude and unpalatable, counsel produced the desired result. David, with the self-command that never entirely deserted him, shook off the paralysing effect of his inordinate grief, and showed himself in his place at the gate

of the city, and the people came before him to do him reverence, and no doubt—for the king was accustomed to bless the people on great occasions—received his thanks and the royal benediction.

CHAPTER XXI.

DAVID NUMBERS THE PEOPLE.

IT might have been expected that now David would at once have returned to Jerusalem and resumed his reign in the capital; but a period of strange hesitation appears to have ensued. He apparently waited for his people to take the initiative in bringing him back, and especially expected the men of Judah, his own tribe, to invite him to return. It was from the more northern tribes, however, that the first movement came. Israel began to remember that the yet exiled king had been the man who had delivered them from the oppression of the Philistines and other enemies, and now Absalom, whom they had chosen king over them, was dead in battle. "Now therefore," they said to each other, "why speak ye not a word of bringing the king back?"

On this reaching the ears of David, he at once opened communications with Jerusalem. Sending to Zadok and Abiathar, he suggested that they should represent to the elders of Judah that all Israel were making overtures for a restoration, and ask them why Judah should be last to bring the

king back to his house, seeing he was of their bone and of their flesh. To Amasa, the chief of the army, he also sent a special message, promising to make him captain of the host in place of Joab. These proposals met with the fullest and readiest response; he "bowed the heart of all the men of Judah, even as the heart of one man," and they at once sent this word to the king: "Return thou, and all thy servants."

The wholesale desertion of this tribe to the standard of Absalom had been one of the most remarkable incidents of the rebellion. David had reigned over Judah long years before any of the other tribes acknowledged him as king, and had been looked upon as the special and peculiar glory of that people. No doubt they were now ashamed of and bitterly regretted their disloyalty, and this, perhaps, had caused their hesitation, so now they were only too glad to welcome him as the king of all Israel.

Thus assured of a friendly reception, David and his host journeyed from Mahanaim, and came to the banks of Jordan. Here they were met by a vast concourse of the men of Judah, come to formally conduct the king over the river as a pledge of their loyal intentions towards him. With them came the wretched Shimei of Bahurim, full of protestations of penitence and acknowledgments of his guilt. Falling on his face, he entreated David not to take to heart his

wicked and perverse behaviour on the day of the flight from Jerusalem. Pointing to his large band of followers—for he had brought with him a thousand Benjamites—he said that, knowing the sin he had committed, he had come first of the house of Joseph to greet the king on his return. No revenge dwelt in the heart of David at this happy time; but before he could speak, Abishai interposed. He had before been with difficulty restrained from slaying Shimei in the midst of his imprecations, and now he fiercely asked whether the offender should not die for having cursed the Lord's anointed. "No man shall die this day," was the stern answer. "What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah, that ye should be adversaries to me? For do not I know that I am this day king over Israel?" and he gave assurance to Shimei that his life should be spared. Now also appeared Mephibosheth, and he, too, had protestations and explanations to make. He declared that he had wished to follow David when he quitted Jerusalem, but that his servant Ziba had disobeyed, and deceived, and slandered him, being lame and helpless. He appealed to his miserable condition, unwashed, unshaven, and with his diseased feet undressed and untended, as a proof of the sincerity of his mourning during David's absence, but left it to the king, who was "as an angel of God," to do what seemed good to him. The answer was sufficiently

curt, "I have said, thou and Ziba divide the land."

And now came a parting with one of the chief benefactors and friends who had succoured and sustained him in the land of Gilead. The aged Barzillai had accompanied David as far as the fords of Jordan, and was now invited to cross over and take up his abode in Jerusalem as a loved and honoured guest. His answer is worth transcribing: "How long have I to live," said the venerable chief, "that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem? I am this day fourscore years old; and can I discern between good and evil? Can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I hear any more the voice of singing men or singing women? Wherefore, then, should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king? Let me, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother." This request was of course granted, but they went over Jordan together, and then the king kissed Barzillai and blessed him, and the gracious and kindly old man returned to his own place. Chimham, his son, however, continued with David, and dwelt many years in Jerusalem.

A very remarkable episode occurred before the royal city was reached: one that threatened to bring about a rebellion as serious as that of Absalom. As already mentioned, the first movement

towards David's restoration was made by the northern tribes; but it was at the invitation of Judah that the Jordan was actually crossed. This isolated action on the part of David's own tribe caused much irritation in the other parts of the kingdom, and while the king halted at Gilgal a body of the men of Israel appeared with angry remonstrances. "Why have our brethren, the men of Judah, stolen thee away, and have brought the king, and his household, and all David's men with him, over Jordan?" Judah made the obvious answer that David was near of kin to them; but this did not satisfy the discontented tribesmen. "We have ten parts in the king," said they. "Why thus did ye despise us that our advice should not be first had on bringing back our king?"

The contention became very sharp, fierce words were spoken, and the quarrel resulted in a disaffected Benjamite blowing the trumpet of discord and crying, "We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: every man to his tents, O Israel."

It seems strange, but so slight were the ties that bound the tribes of Israel together, and so deep was the jealousy with which the powerful and often arrogant tribe of Judah was especially regarded, that this seditious appeal by Sheba was at once responded to, all Israel following him, while only the men of Judah accompanied the king to Jerusalem.

This outbreak, of course, demanded immediate attention. Joab was no longer captain of the host, having been deposed by David because of his share in the death of Absalom; so the king commanded Amasa to assemble the army within three days and prepare to march against Sheba. But Amasa, though no doubt a brave and skilful soldier, was not Joab. The appointed time passed, the captain did not appear, and the king grew impatient. He feared lest the rebel should succeed in occupying the fortified towns from which he could only be dislodged with great difficulty and much fighting. Abishai was therefore ordered to gather what men he could and pursue the rebel. Joab, though no longer chief, went with him, and on their way they met Amasa.

A bloody and treacherous tragedy was now enacted. The dark and revengeful spirit of the deposed captain could not endure the sight of his rival, and he at once resolved to murder him. In the same deceitful way in which he had invited the approach of Abner, he greeted him with words of friendship. "Art thou in health, my brother?" and then, while giving the customary kiss, plunged his sword into his unsuspecting victim, killing him at a blow. The deed was brutal and daring in the extreme; but it answered its purpose. Amasa removed, Joab took supreme command of the host and continued the pursuit; nor does he appear ever to have been called to account for his action

during David's lifetime, though it was never forgotten nor forgiven.

In the meantime Sheba had established himself in Abel-Beth-maachah, a strong city of Northern Palestine. Thither Joab led his army and laid siege to it. Before its walls the war was brought to an end. A woman of the city one day demanded speech of the leader of the besieging army, and accused him of seeking to destroy a city and a mother in Israel. "Why wilt thou swallow up the inheritance of the Lord?" she said. "Far be it, far be it from me to swallow up or destroy," was the reply; and then Joab promised that if Sheba was delivered up he would depart from the city. The woman "in her wisdom" went to the elders of the place, and presently the head of the insurgent general was thrown over the wall, and the rebellion was over.

From this time forth peace appears to have prevailed in Israel. David's long wars were ended, and henceforth he devoted himself to the internal affairs of his kingdom, and especially to preparations for the building of the Temple.

Two incidents, however, both of them painful, occurred about this time. The first, in its origin, carries us back to the days of Joshua and the conquest of Canaan. That mighty leader had made a covenant with a people called the Gibeonites, by which they escaped the destruction that overtook the neighbouring nations, and the compact

was faithfully observed by Israel for centuries. At some part of his career Saul had broken faith with this tribe, and had endeavoured to destroy it, "in his zeal for the children of Israel and Judah;" and had thus transgressed against them and offended God. Now, for three years in succession, there was scarcity in the land, and David inquired of the Lord as to the reason. "It is for Saul and his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites," was the answer. On this the king sent to the Gibeonites to inquire as to what satisfaction they required in order to be reconciled, and to "bless the inheritance of the Lord." They asked for vengeance on the house of Saul; and in response seven men were delivered up and were hanged. Among these were the two sons of Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, one of Saul's concubines; and of this woman it is narrated that for nearly six months, from the beginning of barley harvest (the end of March) to the autumnal rains she watched by the dead bodies of her children, "suffering neither the birds of the air to rest upon them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night." This singular and affecting story of maternal affection reaching the ears of David, he did what he could to console the broken-hearted mother. First sending to Jabesh-Gilead, he procured thence the remains of Saul and Jonathan; and then, gathering the bones of the men that had been hanged, he buried them all together in the family sepulchre of Kish, the

ancestral home of Benjamin. After this, it is said, "God was entreated for the land," restoring its usual fertility.

The next calamity arose out of a direct personal offence of David himself, in which it appears, however, that the whole nation had some share. As already narrated, the borders of the kingdom had been greatly extended ; rich and powerful tribes had been subdued and become tributary, and the name and fame of the capital were spread everywhere. The result of all this was a great increase both of the numbers and wealth of the population, and the hearts of king and people were lifted up in self-conceit and pride.

In an evil day David determined to have his subjects numbered. Now, this was entirely contrary to the spirit of the promises made to the chosen people, which were that they should be as the stars of heaven for multitude, and as the sand of the sea-shore : that is, unnumbered. This action of the king, therefore, was in the highest degree objectionable, and one likely to provoke the Divine anger. Joab especially seems to have felt this ; the king's word was abominable to him, and he opposed it to the utmost of his ability, as did also other chiefs of the army. But the influence of the great captain of the host, powerful as it was, had its limits. When the king had made up his mind his will had to be done, no matter who objected ; so his word prevailed, and those who were charged

with the duty of taking the census, with Joab at their head, went forth and began their arduous work.

For nine months and twenty days the enumerators laboured, beginning with the trans-Jordanic territory, crossing over to the north of western Palestine, and finally working their way to the south of Judah, omitting, however, the tribes of Levi and Benjamin; this exception being a characteristic piece of wilfulness on the part of Joab. The result is stated in the Second Book of Samuel, as shewing that in Israel there were eight hundred thousand men that drew sword, and in Judah five hundred thousand; while in the corresponding place in the Book of Chronicles, the figures given are one million one hundred thousand men for Israel, and four hundred and seventy thousand men for Judah.

There appears to have been a secret consciousness on the part of David that the thing he had ordered was not right; for no sooner were the returns put into his hands than, we are told, his heart smote him, and he approached God with a prayer for pardon: "I have sinned greatly, in that I have done: and now, I beseech Thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Thy servant, for I have done very foolishly."

Very stern was the Divine answer. It came by the mouth of Gad, the seer—the same who had been with David in the Cave of Adullam: "I offer

thee three things, choose thou one of them ; either three years' famine, or three months to be destroyed before thy foes, while that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh thee ; or else, three days the sword of the Lord, even the pestilence in the land." There was both wisdom and piety in David's choice. "I am in a great strait," he said to the prophet ; "let me fall now into the hand of the Lord, for very great are His mercies ; but let me not fall into the hand of man." So God sent his angel, a minister to execute wrath upon evil-doers. He went through the land, and by the pestilence there fell of Israel seventy thousand men. Approaching Jerusalem, he stood by the threshing-floor of Ornan, the Jebusite, with a drawn sword stretched out over the city. Here, the repentant king, who, with his elders, was clothed in sackcloth, no doubt fasting and praying that the affliction might be stayed, discerned him, and the whole company fell upon their faces. Then David said unto God, "Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered ? Even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed ; but as for those sheep, what have they done ? Let Thine hand, I pray Thee, O Lord my God, be on me and on my father's house, but not on Thy people, that they should be plagued." So God heard the prayer of his interceding servant, as He does hear a man when he prays for his friends, and said to the angel, "It is enough ; stay now thine hand ;" and the plague was stayed.

David was now commanded to offer a sacrifice at the place where the destroying angel had stood ; so he went to Ornan, and bought the threshing-floor, refusing to accept it as a present, for he would not offer burnt-offerings that cost him nothing ; and when he sacrificed, God signified His acceptance of him by answering with fire from heaven upon the altar of burnt-offering.

The site became sacred. Thereon Solomon afterwards built his Temple, and above it, from that time to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, the smoke of the daily sacrifice arose morning by morning, and evening by evening, with hardly an interruption.

CHAPTER XXII.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE TEMPLE.

DURING all this time preparations for the building of the temple went on apace, chiefly in the way of gathering material for the structure. It is altogether impossible even to estimate the wealth that at this period was pouring in from all quarters, and enriching Israel beyond example; but it must have been very great. A perfect organisation appears also to have existed. David was a ruler who attended not only to large affairs of State, but who had also a capacity for detail; so that the revenues of his kingdom flowed in carefully-devised and well-constructed channels. We read of overseers appointed to superintend almost every source of national wealth. The vineyards, the corn-fields, the woodlands, the oil-cellars, the herds and flocks, were all under efficient supervision, controlled by "the rulers of the substance that was king David's."

A very large annual revenue was therefore at the disposal of the king in the later years of his life—the produce of the territory under his immediate government. Besides this, the annual tributes paid by the vassal kings of the trans-

Jordanic peoples must have amounted to a considerable sum; and the rapidly-growing commerce of the whole country would help to fill the national exchequer to overflowing. There was also an immense accumulation of treasure. For at least seventy years riches of all kinds had been dedicated to the service of God, and stored up under the care of responsible officers. Samuel had begun the good work, Saul had continued it, and since David's accession to the throne, Joab, and Abner, "and the chief fathers, the captains over thousands, and the captains over hundreds, and the captains of the host," had never ceased to send to Jerusalem portions of the spoil that had fallen to them in battle, as offerings to the Lord. In this way a great abundance of material had been gathered; gold, silver, brass, iron, marble, and precious stones were in the custody of the officers charged with their safe keeping, ready to the builder's hand.

Nor were men capable of putting them to their proper use wanting. Already the entire tribe of Levi, from thirty years old, thirty-eight thousand strong, was organised for the service of the tabernacle, of whom twenty-four thousand "were to set forward the work of the house of the Lord;" while six thousand were officers and judges, four thousand were porters, and four thousand praised the Lord with instruments of music, at the morning and evening sacrifices, and at the feasts. This multitude was increased by a later ordinance of David,

directing that the age for entrance into active service should be altered to twenty years; and all were charged with various ministries of the house of God. To music, special attention was given, the arrangements being as follows: David and the captains of the host separated unto the service Asaph and his three sons, "who prophesied according to the order of the king;" Jeduthun and his five sons, "who prophesied with a harp, to give thanks and to praise the Lord;" Heman, the king's seer, and his fourteen sons and three daughters, "for song in the house of the Lord with cymbals, psalteries, and harps, for the service of the house of God;" these last named being the leaders of the singing, and the entire choir numbering two hundred and eighty-eight persons.

Such was the material and such the organised force available for the preparation for the great house which the king "purposed should be built for the habitation of the mighty God of Jacob."

But David was not yet satisfied. The Temple was to be "exceeding magnificent, of fame and of glory throughout all countries," and he desired that his whole people should have a share in its glories. Accordingly he summoned all his sons with the princes of the tribes, the captains, the stewards of his substance and the valiant and mighty men to Jerusalem, and in solemn audience, standing on his feet, addressed them, "Hear me, my brethren and my people." He then told them

all that was in his heart—how he had desired to build the Temple, but that God had forbidden him, and had chosen Solomon his son to sit on his throne and do the work. Next David spoke of the preparations he himself had made, and of what he had given “of his own proper good,” because of the affection he had for the house of the Lord, and finally asked, “And who, then, is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?” The response was so universal and so abundant that it filled the king’s heart with joy, and he blessed the Lord before all the congregation in words of such entire and perfect thankfulness, and yet so replete with humility and self-dedication, that they stand for ever as the example of what must always be in the hearts of those who offer themselves and their substance unto God.

Wherefore David blessed the Lord before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed be thou, Lord God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now, therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee. For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners,

as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding. O Lord our God, all this store that we have prepared to build thee an house for thine holy name cometh of thine hand, and is all thine own. I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things: and now have I seen with joy thy people, which are present here, to offer willingly unto thee. O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and prepare their heart unto thee: and give unto Solomon my son a perfect heart, to keep thy commandments, thy testimonies, and thy statutes, and to do all these things, and to build the palace, for the which I have made provision. And David said to all the congregation, Now bless the Lord your God. And all the congregation blessed the Lord God of their fathers, and bowed down their heads, and worshipped the Lord and the king. And they sacrificed sacrifices unto the Lord, and offered burnt offerings unto the Lord, on the morrow after that day, even a thousand bullocks, a thousand rams, and a thousand lambs, with their drink offerings, and sacrifices in abundance for all Israel: And did eat and drink before the Lord on that day with great gladness.

It is recorded that during the building of the temple there was heard no sound of hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron.

Like some tall palm the noiseless fabric sprang.

The stones had all been prepared in the quarries in so accurate a fashion that when brought to Mount Moriah nothing remained but to fit them into their places.

This remarkable circumstance points to carefully prepared plans in the very earliest stages of the work, and accordingly we find that in his preliminary labours David was not guided merely by a strong desire that the house should be great and splendid ; but that he had a clear conception of the whole building, both in its general plan and in its principal details.

This knowledge, it is expressly stated, was given to him by Divine inspiration. In his own words: "The Lord made me to understand it in writing by his hand upon me." Having thus received it he committed it to Solomon his son, "the pattern of the porch, and of the houses thereof, and of the treasures thereof, and of the upper chambers thereof, and of the inner parlours thereof, and of the place of the mercy seat ; and the pattern of all that he had by the spirit, of the courts of the house of the Lord, and of all the chambers round about, of the treasures of the house of God, and of the treasures of the dedicated things." Thus, as a prophet, David received by inspiration of the Almighty, the plans for the temple ; and it may be observed that the dimensions given were exactly double those of the tabernacle of Moses, which, it is stated, was built according to the pattern which God showed on Mount Sinai.

As a sacred gift, then, the king committed to Solomon, who was "young and tender," with solemn

charge and warning, his plans and his treasures, which yet were none of his, but God's, from whom he had received them all: "Thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy fathers, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts; if thou seek him he will be found of thee, but if thou forsake him he will cast thee off for ever. Take heed now, for the Lord hath chosen thee to build an house for the sanctuary: be strong and do it." Once again: "Be strong and of good courage and do it; fear not nor be dismayed: for the Lord God, my God, will be with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the Lord."

It is pleasant to think that in this godly and pious fashion, and in such congenial work, the last years of King David's life were spent. The tone and temper of heart and spirit which had been wrought in him by the multitudinous experiences of his long and chequered career is wonderfully expressed in the exquisite beauty and deep pathos of one of his last utterances, that recorded in 2 Samuel xxiii.

David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, The spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue. The God of Israel said,

the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain. Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow. But the sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands: but the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear; and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place.

With this may well be joined the verses from the *Lyra Apostolica*, which, in their keen appreciation of the lights and shadows of his life, must always find a place in any history of the prophethood.

Latest born of Jesse's race,
Wonder lights thy bashful face,
While the Prophet's gifted oil
Seals thee for a path of toil. . . .

Go! and mid thy flocks awhile
At thy doom of greatness smile;
Bold to bear God's heaviest load,
Dimly guessing at the road—

Rocky road, and scarce ascended,
Though thy foot be angel-tended.
Double praise thou shalt attain
In royal court and battle plain.

Then come heart-ache, care, distress,
Blighted hope and loneliness ;
Wounds from friend and gifts from foe,
Dizzied faith, and guilt and woe ;

Loftiest aims by earth defiled,
Gleams of wisdom sin-beguiled,
Sated power's tyrannic mood,
Counsels shar'd with men of blood.

Sad success, parental tears,
And a dreary gift of years.
Strange that guileless face and form
To lavish on the scathing storm ! . . .

Little chary of thy fame,
Dust unborn may praise or blame,
But to mould thee for the root
Of man's promis'd healing fruit.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DAVID'S LAST DAYS.

ONE more incident remains to be related. It occurred when the king "was old and stricken in years," apparently so worn out with the stress and strain of his eventful life that, though the actual years numbered no more than seventy, and his servants covered him with clothes, his bodily forces were so exhausted that "he got no heat."

This was a rebellion, or, rather an attempted rebellion on the part of Adonijah, fourth son of the king, though probably at this time the eldest (of his second son, Daniel, or Chileab, we know nothing), and consequently by birth heir to the crown. Aspiring to reign while his father yet lived and before his younger brother Solomon should be established as David's successor, his pretensions were encouraged and made dangerous by persons of no less eminence than Joab and Abiathar the priest. No explanation is found in Holy Scripture of the strange conduct of those ancient friends of the old king, but it probably arose in Joab's case out of the estrangement that had existed between David and the captain of his host

ever since the slaying of Absalom; and as regards Abiathar out of jealousy of Zadok. The two priests were respectively representatives of what may be called the rival houses of Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron, and appear to have occupied equal positions during the latter years of the reign, David's favour evidently inclining towards Zadok. Counting on the feebleness of the king, Adonijah, after the example of his ill-fated brother, assumed regal state with chariots and horsemen and a retinue of fifty men, and finally called together his friends at a feast and was proclaimed king. Hearing of this, Nathan the prophet, who had not been taken into the counsels of the conspirators, sought audience of Bathsheba and told her of the peril that threatened her and her son, counselling her to seek immediate help of David himself. Greatly alarmed the queen-mother went to the king and informed him that, unknown to him, Adonijah reigned, and that Joab and Abiathar were with him. Her words being confirmed by Nathan, David roused himself and took action with all his old vigour and effectiveness. "As the Lord liveth," he swore to Bathsheba, "as the Lord liveth, who hath redeemed my soul out of all distress, even as I swear unto thee by the Lord God of Israel, saying, assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead: even so will I certainly do this day." Then he directed Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet



THE JERUSALEM OF TO-DAY.

and Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, with his own body-guard of mighty men, to set Solomon on the king's own mule and take him to Gihon, and anoint him there king over Israel, and blow with the trumpet and say, "God save King Solomon."

The order was promptly obeyed. Taking a horn of the sacred oil from the tabernacle the priest and the prophet, in the audience of a multitude of the people, solemnly anointed Solomon as king, and at the sound of the trumpet the whole assembly shouted, "God save King Solomon," rejoicing with such resounding joy that "the earth rent with the sound of them."

The music and the cheering penetrated to the chamber where Adonijah and his guests were yet feasting, and was the first intimation they received of what had happened. At the sound of the trumpet, and knowing that it boded no good to his present enterprise, Joab sprang up. "Wherefore is this noise of the city being in an uproar?" He was soon answered. Abiathar's son Jonathan entered and described what he had just seen at Gihon. "This is the noise that ye have heard, and also Solomon sitteth on the throne of the kingdom."

It was sufficient. No thought of resistance to the action of the king appears to have been entertained, even for a moment. The guests went every man to his own house while Adonijah himself sought refuge in the sanctuary, laying hold of the

horns of the altar. Then the faithful servants of the king bore the good news to their master, and they blessed him and said, "God make the name of Solomon better than thy name, and make his throne better than thy throne." The aged monarch bowed himself in thankfulness upon the bed and responded, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel which hath given one to sit on my throne this day, mine eyes even seeing it."

The attempted rebellion thus failed, but it seems to have left in David's mind a misgiving as to possible peril for Solomon while Joab lived. He was yet captain of the host; his loyalty was at least doubtful, and he had so repeatedly shown his readiness for deeds of bloody violence when his will was crossed, that the king might well fear for his young successor when his own overmastering influence should be removed. Added to this there was the deep resentment that had never left his breast at the cold-blooded and treacherous murders of Abner and Amasa and at the death of Absalom, deeds that he had hated, but that he had been powerless to prevent and almost powerless to punish. Those feelings found expression in his final charge to Solomon not to let Joab live, not to let "his hoar head go down to the grave in peace." A similar charge he also gave regarding Shimei of Bahurim, possibly from similar motives. Both commands were obeyed, and after David's death the two old men fell by the hands of Benaiah, the

son of Jehoiada. It is impossible to deny that there is a touch of savagery, as well as of statecraft in this "legacy of vengeance," as it has been called, but it should be remembered that David—in part at least—belonged to a rude and savage age, although his genius and gifts lifted him far above his predecessors, the Ehuds, Jephthahs, and Samsons who before his time had judged and delivered Israel. He was, in a manner, the last of them, as well as the first of the more civilised and refined Hebrew leaders of later centuries.

So, at the ripe age of three score and ten he passed peacefully away, full of days, riches, and honour, and was buried in "the city of David," within the walls of the sacred city, his well-loved Jerusalem. And Solomon, his son, reigned in his stead.

PSALM CXLV.

David's Psalm of Praise.

I will extol thee, my God, O King; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever. Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts. I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works. And men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts: and I will declare thy greatness. They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness. The Lord is gracious and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of

great mercy. The Lord is good to all : and his tender mercies are over all his works. All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord ; and thy saints shall bless thee. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power ; to make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom. Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations. The Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down. The eyes of all wait upon thee ; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing. The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works. The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him : he also will hear their cry, and will save them. The Lord preserveth all them that love him : but all the wicked will be destroy. My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord : and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SOME GREAT THOUGHTS ABOUT DAVID.

THIS brief sketch of David, king of Israel, poet, warrior, prophet, of his life-history, of "his reign and his might and the times that went over him" would hardly be complete without some notice of the impression his career has made on the minds and hearts of students of Holy Scripture. With scarcely an exception, as far as their thoughts have been recorded, they have found it impossible to write of him without enthusiastic delight. Some—most of them—have loved to dwell on his manifold excellences; others, desiring to point a moral rather than adorn a tale, have laid stress on his dark sins and bitter repentances. All have recognised his figure as unique, unapproached, marvellous in its mingled strength and weakness. The extracts given below are from writers of widely divergent views, theologically, but they unite in setting forth the beauty and power of the character of the son of Jesse and his immortal songs of Zion.

"The position of David was virtually that of the founder of the Jewish monarchy. In this

sense his name is repeated in every possible form. 'The city of David,' 'The seed of David,' 'The house of David,' 'The key of David,' 'The oath sworn unto David,' are expressions which pervade the whole subsequent history and poetry of the Old Testament, and much of the figurative language of the New. The cruelty, the self-indulgence, the too-ready falsehood, appear sufficiently in the events of his history. But there was a grace, a charm about him which entwined the affections of the nation round his person and his memory, and made him, in spite of the savage manners of the time and wildness of his own life, at once the centre of something like a court, the head of a new civilisation. He was a born king of Israel by his natural gifts. His immense activity and martial spirit united him by a natural succession to the earlier chiefs of Israel, while his accomplishments and genius fitted him especially to exercise a vast control over the whole future greatness of the church and commonwealth. The force and passion of the ruder age was blended with a depth of emotion which broke out in every relation of life. Never before had there been such a faithful friend, such an affectionate father. Never before had king or chief inspired such passionate loyalty, or given it back in equal degree. The tenderness of his personal affection penetrated his public life. He loved his people with a pathetic compassion, beyond even that of

Moses. Even from the history we gather that the ancient fear of God was, for the first time, passing into the love of God. In the vision of David in Paradise, as related by Mohammed, he is well represented as offering up the prayer, 'O Lord, grant to me the love of thee; grant that I may love those that love thee; grant that I may do the deeds that may win thy love. Make my love of thee to be dearer to me than myself, my family, than wealth, and even than cool water.'"
—*Stanley*.

"His harp was full-stringed, and every angel of joy and of sorrow swept over the chords as he passed; but the melody always breathed of heaven. And such oceans of affection lay within his breast, as could not always slumber in their calmness. For the hearts of a hundred men strove and struggled together within the narrow continent of his single heart; and will the scornful men have no sympathy for one so conditioned, but scorn him, because he ruled not with constant quietness the unruly host of diverse natures which dwelt within his single soul? Of self-command surely he will not be held deficient, who endured Saul's javelin to be so often launched at him, while the people without were ready to hail him king; who endured all bodily hardships, and taunts of his enemies, while revenge was in his hand; and ruled his desperate band like a company of saints, and restrained them from their country's injury. But

that he should not be able to enact all characters without a fault, the simple shepherd, the conquering hero and the romantic lover, the perfect friend, the innocent outlaw and the royal monarch, the poet, the prophet, and the regenerator of the church, and, withal, the *man*, the *man* of vast soul, who played not these parts by turns, but was the original of them all and wholly present in them all. Oh ! that he should have fulfilled this high priesthood of humanity, this universal ministry of manhood without an error, were more than human. With the defence of his backslidings, which he hath himself more keenly scrutinised, more clearly decerned against, and more bitterly lamented than any of his censors, we do not charge ourselves, because they were, in a manner, necessary that he might be the full-orbed man which was needed to utter every form of spiritual feeling. The Lord did not intend that His church should be without a rule for uttering its gladness and its glory, its lamentation and its grief ; and to bring such a rule and institute into being He raised up his servant David, as formerly He raised up Moses, to give to the church an institute of law : and to that end He led him the round of all human conditions, that he might catch the spirit proper to every one, and utter it according to truth. He allowed him not to curtail his being by treading the round of one function ; but by every variety of function He cultivated his whole

being, and filled his soul with wisdom and feeling. He found him objects for every affection, that the affection might not slumber and die. He brought him up in the sheep-pastures, that the groundwork of his character might be laid amongst the simple and universal forms of feeling. He took him to the camp, and made him a conqueror, that he might be filled with nobleness of soul and ideas of glory. He placed him in the palace, that he might be filled with ideas of majesty and sovereign might. He carried him to the wilderness, and placed him in solitudes, that his soul might dwell alone in the sublime conceptions of God and His mighty works; and He kept him there for long years, with only one step between him and death, that he might be well schooled to trust and depend upon the providence of God.”—*Irving on the Psalms*.

“What is there necessary for me to know which the Psalms are not able to teach? They are to beginners an easy and familiar introduction—a mighty argumentation of all virtue and knowledge in such as are matured before—a strong confirmation to the most perfect amongst others. Heroical magnanimity, exquisite justice, grave moderation, exact wisdom, repentance unfeigned, unwearied patience, the mysteries of God, the sufferings of Christ, the terrors of wrath, the comforts of grace, the works of Providence over this world, and the promised joys of the world to

come, all good to be either known, or done, or had, this one celestial fountain yieldeth. Let there be any grief or disease incident unto the soul of man, any wound or sickness named, for which there is not in this treasure-house a present comfortable remedy at all times ready to be found.”—*Hooker*.

“He only who knows the number of the waves of the ocean, and the abundance of tears in the human eye; He who sees the sighs of the heart, before they are uttered, and who hears them still, when they are hushed into silence—He alone can tell how many holy emotions, how many heavenly vibrations, have been produced and will ever be produced in the souls of men by the reverberations of these marvellous strains, of these predestinated hymns, read, meditated, sung, in every hour of day and night, in every winding of the vale of tears. The Psalter of David is like a mystic harp, hung on the walls of the true Zion. Under the breath of the spirit of God, it sends forth its infinite varieties of devotion, which, rolling on from echo to echo, from soul to soul, awakes in each a separate note, mingling in that one prolonged voice of thankfulness and penitence, praise and prayer.”—*Gerbert*.

“It seems to me that the Psalms are for everyone who sings them like a mirror of the soul, in which it can recognise its movements and express its feelings. For in this book thou findest the whole life of man pictured, the moods of the

heart, the movements of the thought. If thou hast need of repentance, if thou hast met trial and temptation, if thou art exposed to persecution or calumny, in all, and in every case, thou canst here find instruction and bring thy case before God in the words of the Psalms."—*Athanasius*.

"O God, how have I spoken with Thee when I read the Psalms of David, those songs so full of faith, those cries that shut out all pride! How have I spoken with Thee in them, and been enkindled and inflamed with love, when I could have read them before the whole world as a witness against the pride of man!"—*Augustine*.

"All the wonders of Greek civilisation heaped together are less wonderful than is the simple Book of Psalms—the history of the human soul in relation to its Maker."—*Gladstone*.

THE END.