Absalom

2 Samuel 11: 12.

"The fool hath said in his heart, No God!"

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David is the principal object before the mind of the Spirit of God in both the 1st and the 2nd books of Samuel. In the 1st book we see him brought from obscurity into honour and praise, and there standing, by the good hand of God, in full righteousness amid the persecutions of the wicked. In the 2nd we see him descending from honour, through sin, into degradation and ruin, but there learning the rich and marvellous ways of the grace of God. It is thus the sorrow of righteousness, or "David the martyr," that we first see; and the shame of sin, or "David the penitent," that we next see.

And these things give us different characters in the Psalms. In some of them we hear the breathings of a convicted conscience, a heart exercised in thoughts of transgression, searching after God again, and from thence rising into a blessed sense of grace and salvation. In others we hear the sorrows of conscious righteousness suffering the reproach of the wicked, but knowing all the while its title to fulness of joy and strength in God.

These are the varied exercises known to David's soul; and in all this he is the type of God's remnant in the latter time, who will have to pass through the shame and sorrows of afflicted and yet conscious integrity, and the shame also of convicted sin. For that remnant, though righteous in their own persons and conduct, will identify themselves with their nation in all its blood-guiltiness,* and look on Him who was pierced, and mourn as though they had pierced Him themselves.

*And as this unguilty remnant thus confess the sin of the nation, because they identify themselves with it, so does Jesus in the Psalms, though without sin, confess it, because He has consented to be "made sin for us."

And (wonderful, and yet blessed to tell it) David would not have known all that is in God, had he not passed through the sin of 2 Samuel, as well as the sorrow of 1 Samuel, for it is sin that manifests God.

And what a truth that is! I learn God in the darkness of mine own iniquity. For there was in God a deeper secret than all that His hand revealed in creation. There was the treasure of His bosom. There was grace in God, love *for guilty ones;* and Adam's sin drew that secret out; for "the Seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head" at once came forth to tell him that God had something better than all the fruit of His six days' work of creation.

The direct history of Absalom may be considered as beginning with 2 Sam. 11. In the previous chapters of this book David had been advancing into power and the kingdom, approving himself to

God and to the conscience of all men. In no scene in which he is called to take a part does he seek himself, or eye his own advantages. He considers the sorrows and dishonour of others rather than his own gains, and will be serving others though at his own expense. Thus he weeps over Saul and over Abner (2 Sam. 1 - 4), and it is his first concern, after he comes to the throne, to bring home the ark of God to Israel, and prepare it a worthy habitation; for which end he would be base in his own sight, and despise the shame of others. He sought the greatness of God's house, and not his own wealth, and the Lord prospered him whithersoever he went. As David would be only a *servant*, the Lord would make him *honourable and prosperous;* and even his mistakes savour of his virtues. It is his impatience to be *serving* that leads to his errors touching both the carriage of the ark and the building of the house. No doubt he was to be blamed, for in those matters he had not waited on the counsel of the Lord, as he had been wont to do; but this came from his desire to be doing service for God. He thought, to be sure, that in these things he must be right. He trusted his heart in them, and therefore did foolishly (Prov. 28: 26); but still his errors savour of that which was characteristically "David," being connected in his mind with desire to be in service for the Lord and His people. (2 Sam. 5 - 10.)

All this indeed is excellent; but all this does not make out a well-fought fight, and a stainless victory for David. All is not over even yet; such holy beginnings as these are not every thing. The strength of the summer sun is still to try this promise of the spring. He that girdeth on his armour must not boast as he that putteth it off. "Ye have need of patience" is the word, and so we shall find it even here with David.

It was the time, we read, when kings went forth to battle. (2 Sam. 11: 1.) But David the king tarries at Jerusalem, and that sets him at once in the flesh. He was not where the Spirit could own him, but has chosen his own way. It may seem to be a small thing, but it is enough for the enemy of his soul. It is only, one might say, a tarrying in the city when he should have been in the field of battle. But the little foxes spoil the vines, we read, "for the vines themselves are tender;" and this beginning may account for any result. Soft relaxing habits quickly come in, for the next moment we see him, instead of having girded the sword upon his thigh, lying on his bed at eventide. The outposts had been left unguarded, and the very citadel becomes an easy spoil for the enemy. Nothing could do for him now but to arise and shake himself, like Samson, in the strength of the Lord. But, like Samson, he appears as though he had already betrayed the secret of the Lord. And all because he got into the way of his own heart. He was drawn away by his own lusts and enticed; and lust was soon to conceive sin, and sin to bring forth death. Jerusalem, beloved, was David's place for himself, when the field of battle was God's place for him; and, little as that may seem, it is enough to lead to adultery. "Lord," may we all say, "it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."

But it is not merely one lust that enters by this door and riots in David's veins, for love of his fair name in the world now proves just as much a lust in him as the desire of his eye. The one led him to adultery with Bath-sheba, the other goads him to the murder of Uriah. He had no thirst after Uriah's blood, but rather contrives expedients to preserve it, and to that end will do all but surrender his place and reputation among men. He sends to the field of battle to fetch him home to his wife, and thus to be a covert for his sin; and when that will not do, his subtle and uneasy heart devises to make Uriah drunk, that he may still accomplish his end, and use him as a veil under which to hide his own iniquity. Nor is it till all these schemes were baffled, and righteousness in Uriah refuses to be so used in the service of sin in David, that David sacrifices him to his lust. To his love of the world he sacrifices Uriah now, as he had just before sacrificed Bath-sheba to the desire of his eye. And he will sacrifice even his nation to the same. He will so order it that the army of Israel may be defeated, as well as the blood of Uriah be shed before the walls of Rabbah, rather than that his good name should be made a scandal. All must go

rather than David hazard that. Just as Pilate afterwards: — he was Caesar's friend, the world's friend; and, rather than hazard any breach in that friendship, Jesus must die. Sad thus to tell it, David and Pilate are found together. There was no more thirst for innocent blood in Pilate than there was in David; but there was the same love of his credit in the world in David as there was in Pilate. Pilate as well as David can try many devices to preserve the innocent blood and the world for himself at the same time; but David as well as Pilate will give up the one for the other if both cannot be retained together.

It is sad thus to class David and Pilate together. But flesh is flesh in whomsoever found. But David had now to prove that "sin, when it is perfected, bringeth forth death." And well is it for us when we prove that here through the Holy Ghost, and do not wait to prove it by the judgment of God by and by. So was it now with David. Adultery, murder, and falsehood had perfected the sin, and now came the bitterness of his soul. He takes the sentence of death in himself. "His bones wax old, and his moisture is turned into the drought of summer." (Psalm 32.) Death within was consuming him as a moth fretting a garment. There was no strength of grace as yet to confess the sin; but the life within was sensitive of the wound it had received. The spirit felt the grief it had been put to, but David kept silence and did not tell out his shame as yet, for guile was still in the spirit. (Psalm 32.) The voice of a prophet must call forth confession; but when it does come forth, it is indeed of a divine quality; for it is not merely the trespass against Uriah that his soul is conscious of and his lips confess, but he sees his sin in the light of God's glory. And it is there, beloved, we always see it when we see it aright; it is there we divinely know what sin is. "I have sinned against the Lord," said David; and with this apprehension he utters, "against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." (Ps. 51.) Before this confession the spirit had its wound within, and it was intolerable. But this confession perfects his conversion; and then he was able to teach sinners the ways of the Lord, as Peter after he was converted could strengthen his brethren. When he had learnt the blessedness of grace abounding over sin, he could present himself to all other poor sinners as the warrant of their confidence in the Lord. "For this," says he, "shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found." (Ps. 32.) Like Paul he is set forth a pattern of all long-suffering, and like Peter he knows the restoring of a soul that had erred from the ways of righteousness.

In the striking style of Scripture, we now read, after David had accomplished his sin, "the thing that David had done displeased the Lord." There is no long account of God's anger, but this tells us of His mind towards the sin of His servant. But if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive them; and so we find it here. "I have sinned against the Lord" says David. "The Lord has put away thy sin," answers the prophet. (2 Sam. 12.)

2 Samuel 13, 14.

But acceptance into God's favour always puts us into one interest with God's honour in the world; and, from the moment of our acceptance through His grace, we are to be the servants of His glory. The moment we rest as sinners, we begin our labour as saints. By faith we rest as sinners knowing the virtue of the blood of Jesus for the full repose of the conscience before God: but from thence we labour as only in the prospect of the rest that is ours as saints. We become the servants of God's glory when we are made free through God's grace. And so here: David had been just led to his rest as a sinner — "The Lord has put away thy sin;" but now he must serve God's glory as a sinner brought near. As the name of God had been reproached through David, David must now bear the reproach too: and God will show His entire separation from the sin of His servant, and before all men, He must measure his former work into his bosom. The child that Bathsheba had borne him must die; as his sword had slain, Uriah, the

sword now shall not depart from his house; and that which he had done to the shame of others, and done it secretly, others should now do to his shame in the sight of the sun.

It is in connection with all this that Absalom is introduced to us. He is to be made the rod in the Lord's hand for the chastening of David — a rod, too, taken out of his own stem — his own child; as the Lord by Nathan had just said to him, "behold I will raise up evil against thee, out of thine own house." Absalom meant not so, like the Assyrian afterwards (Isa. 10: 7). The Assyrian was to have a commission from the lord against the hypocritical nation, but in his heart he thinks only of the spoil and the prey. Absalom is now to serve his own lusts, but God will use him for the renewing of His servant in holiness.

We need not particularly consider the circumstance which is made to introduce Absalom to us. The sin of Amnon, and the sorrows of Tamar, had their purpose, and could well have been used in God's grace to keep poor David in lively recollection of his own sin and sorrow. It was a voice "in his own house" that must have spoken in thunder to him. Blood and uncleanness were staining his own children under his own eye. Tamar's virgin garment was now rent, a sore remembrance of the stain upon himself; and Amnon's blood was shed, awakening the voice of Uriah's blood in his ear from the earth. But we need not more particularly look at this. Absalom was Tamar's brother, and the son of David by a daughter of the king of Geshur (2 Sam. 3: 3) but we have nothing of him till now, when he appears at once before us its the subtle and wilful one, whose heart and eye were full only of their own devices and objects to reach which appears to be all his care. Amnon's wrong to his sister had raised a deadly fire in his heart, which two full years had no power to quench; but his crafty soul must find the happiest way to let out his rage on its victim. The fire buries as though it had been kindled but yesterday, and his subtlety devises a sure passage for it. It is all of Satan. The guile of the serpent ministers to the fury of the lion, and Absalom plots the matter of the sheep-shearing that he may get the blood of Amnon. David has some misgivings. How indeed could it be otherwise? Must he not, after all that he had done and all that the prophet had said to him, have feared every stir in the house? For one of his own house was to bring the evil upon him. He does not like this sheep-shearing feast which Absalom proposes. But he is pressed about it, and Amnon then goes, and falls before the treachery and sword of his brother. (2 Sam. 13.)

Absalom by this had defiled the land, and forfeited his life. (Num. 35: 33.) All that he can now do is to fly to strangers, for the land had no city of refuge for such an one. The avenger of blood might claim him of Bezer or of Kedesh. He had shed his brother's blood, and this cried for vengeance. But David was a man of affection. He had a heart that sought its indulgence in the relations and sympathies of human life, and, being the man after God's own heart, he would have found his joy rather in the ministrations of grace than in the exactions of righteousness. But Absalom had fled, for he was now debtor to that law of which David was the guardian, for David held his throne on the terms of reading the law continually. (Deut. 17.) What then can now be done? David may mourn for the son slain, and for the son banished, but are not both equally lost to him?

Now Joab was, in modern language, a consummate politician. He was nephew to the king, and thus the king's honour was in some sense his honour, and that he knew and valued and sought to retain; and therefore he never seeks to disturb the throne as now settled in the house of Jesse, his grandfather. He was content to be the *second* in the kingdom, for that his worldly wisdom tell him he might be in safety, but more than that he knew he could not seek without hazard. He could get both Abner and Amasa out of his way, when he thought they were intruding into that place, which he had eyed for himself; but the first place he would leave with David, and therefore never conspires against him, but is ever watchful of his interest, ever ready to let David take the principal post of honour (2 Sam. 12: 28),

and is even quicker than David himself (2 Sam. 24) to discern and provide for the stability of the throne.

Such an one could not but be busy at such a moment as this. He knew the softness of David's heart, and easily calculated that any device to help him to bring back his banished child would be acceptable; and to do this acceptable service to the king, and thus to have a fresh claim to be the second round his throne, sets Joab in motion now. He did not much care for Absalom's exile, but in some sense "he carried the bag and bare what was put therein."

But the case was a very difficult one; for David, as I have said, might love his son and desire his return. But David was guardian of that law to which his son had exposed himself, and it was hard for Joab to contrive a way whereby David might let "mercy rejoice against judgment," and thus bring back his banished one.

"A wise woman" of Tekoah is, therefore provided, whom Joab instructs in this matter. Perhaps we may not know the proper sense of that description of her, but it will shortly appear that she was wise indeed, and that too in the secrets of God Himself. She feigns herself it mourner, and comes to the king with just such a title of sorrow as must at once have caught his affections, and brought his own sorrow fully to mind. She tells him of her two sons, how one had slain the other in a quarrel in a field, and that the kinsman was out against the manslayer, threatening to leave her a withered stump in the earth. David is surprised. Such matters should lie with the proper judges to determine between the avenger and the manslayer. (Num. 35.) But David is surprised — nature speaks in him too quickly — the yearnings of nature move him, and he gives her a pledge three times assured that nothing shall befall her son. Then, armed with this pledge, she more distinctly assails the heart of the king. She is willing to let the pledge be to Absalom the, king's son, and not to her son, and would have it known that she had been all the while pleading for David's sorrow and not for her own.

But "wise woman" as she was, she had deeper resources than even these. She had reached David's heart, and got a pledge from the desire and heat of human affection; but she seeks now to reconcile his *conscience to* all this, and to let him learn that he had a title in God Himself to let "mercy rejoice against judgment" to the guilty, as his soul desired, and as his lips had pledged. For all would be imperfect without this; for the king, as we have seen, was debtor to the law, and none could set it aside but he who established it. Samson, it is true, may marry a Philistine harlot, though the law denied all such commerce with any Gentile, when he has a dispensation from the Lawgiver. Gideon or Manoah may sacrifice on to rock, though the ordained place is elsewhere, if the Angel-Jehovah will stand by; and David himself may forsake the altar at Gibeon even for the threshing-floor of a Jebusite, when the God of grace meets him there. Now it is this principle of truth which the "wise woman" now brings to bear on the conscience, as her tale of woe had lately borne on the heart, of the king. She pleads with David in behalf of Absalom the very mercy of God in the gospel. She tells the king that he should fetch home his banished one; for says she, "we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground (i.e. good for nothing see: 1 Sam. 7: 6), 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." Here she brings God's own way before David. She pleads that law of liberty (James 2: 12) — which expresses even the heart of God Himself in His dealings with poor sinners, the gospel of God's grace in which He righteously refuses to hear the law, and is just while the justifier of the guilty, having devised a way by which His banished ones return to him. Thus she pleads with his conscience, as she had before pleaded with his affections, and what call David do? Must he not give an answer in peace? Is he not satisfied? If the light of the gospel be thus by this wise woman brought to shine on him, must he not walk, and act in the light of it? Can he refuse to reflect it? This seems to be the way of her wisdom, and indeed it is

strange and blessed. What a testimony this is! What a telling of the wonders of grace! That which is no better than water spilt on the ground is gathered up to be brought home to God Himself. (2 Sam. 14.)

This that we are meditating on is somewhat a neglected scripture. But it shows us that we may ofttimes find some stray and rich kidneys of wheat in the distant corners of the Lord's granary. And this gospel in the mouth of this unknown widow, the "wise woman of Tekoah," further shows us that Israel, even in their infant dispensation, had sweet truths to feed upon. From the beginning indeed the joy has been but one. "'The woman's seed" was the king's highway cast up under the eye of faith, the known and published good news, whereby God hath devised to fetch home His banished ones.

The king, however, seems not to be quite at ease. The pleading of our wise woman was as wise as it could have been. Nothing in its season could have been more perfect. But the king was the guardian of the law, and the softness of his heart had betrayed him into an act of grace by which he had undertaken to set the law aside, but the thought seems to be lurking there, that he was debtor to the law. However, according to the king's word, Absalom is brought home, but it is on terms of not seeing the king's face; and so he dwells two full years in Jerusalem apart from David.

But he is still Absalom; wherever or however we see him, he is himself. His taste remains in him, and his scent is not changed, even though he had now returned from captivity. (Jer. 48: 11.) He comes home the wilful Absalom still, the servant of his own passions and of them only. "Who is lord over us?" is the language of all his actings. His tongue was his own. "No God," says he, in his heart continually. All that can be said in any way of commendation is, like Saul before him, of his comeliness in the flesh. "In all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty. From the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him:" we have no account of him beyond this of his beauty. His acts from first to last are enough to give him his right name and place before us; for in his own personal character, and in all in which it displays itself, Absalom is still the wilful one. He is the Saul of his day, or the apostate seed of the serpent, and the agent of the dragon, the usurper, the proud one who consults only his own will, which most surely carries him forth into full and constant resistance of God and His people. Even favours have but little claim on him. He may send to Joab to whom he owed every thing a second time, but beyond that small courtesy his heart owns no debt to him.

2 Samuel 15 - 18.

But the heart that is thus dead to the claims of kindness finds it easy to entertain any thing that Satan would propose. Thus, having exercised the rude strength of the lion in the corn-fields of his friends, he is quite prepared to practise the guile of the serpent in the kingdom of his father. The one or the other must be the way of Absalom. The child of him that was a liar and a murderer from the beginning, he knows no other master. He is Absalom, "the father of peace." But it is the peace of a deceiver. He comes in peaceably and takes the kingdom by flatteries. By good words and fair speeches he deceives the simple. He steals the hearts of his father's subjects, the people of the Lord and of His anointed. Nothing can be more corrupt than all his ways, for he is the mere slave of his own evil desires, let them urge him as they may, or set his heart on work with whatever device they may. And he will use any means for his own ends. He pretends the payment of a vow at Hebron, and takes with him two hundred men out of Jerusalem, to furnish as it might seem the table at the sacrificial feast; but all this was only to further his design upon the throne of his father. His slanders of his father, and flatteries of the people, had already prepared the nation for his pretensions; and now he sends out spies from Hebron to declare him through the land, and all too well in readiness for him, and speedily, therefore, the conspiracy was strong, and the people increased continually with him.

The Absaloms of every day have had their evil counsellors. This has been already noticed in the case of Saul, and some of these confederacies were then traced. Now we see it in the case of this apostate son of David. He gets Ahithophel to be with him, one who had stood among David's children. But the counsellor joins the child: one who had eaten of David's bread, and another with whom David had taken sweet counsel, none other or less than they, must now be found together against him.

But all this gives occasion to one of the most affecting scenes in the history of David as a penitent. We know not whether the more to admire the beautiful workmanship of the Spirit of God in David, when suffering for righteousness, or when suffering for transgression. Thus I have before touched upon. We see him the martyr in the days of Saul, but then as led by the Spirit reading a sweet lesson of instruction to us, showing all patience and all holy confidence in God; consenting to be hunted as a partridge in the mountains day after day, rather than take vengeance into his own hands, or lift himself up against the Lord's anointed. (1 Samuel.) And so now, though the scene be changed, and we have David the penitent rather than David the martyr, yet all is of equal interest and value to us, under the forming hand of the Spirit of God. (2 Samuel.)

Thus, when in 1 Samuel, the testimony of his conscience was for him, he would gird himself with all the gladness in God that he could get. He put on the ephod, he ate the bread of the sanctuary, he had the prophet and the priest with him in exile, and he carried the sword of Goliath, sweet pledge as it was that no weapon formed against him could prosper. All this was his then, and he claimed it all with confidence, carrying within him his title to rejoice in spirit, though circumstances were against him, knowing full well that he might have all in God, though nothing in man. He ate the fruit of an unwounded conscience, the glad feast of the Lord's unclouded countenance. Indeed he dared not then to have eaten the bread of mourners. Could he surround the altar of God with tears? Could he fast while the bridegroom was with him?

But now in 2 Samuel it is otherwise, for the testimony of his conscience was against him. He is now a sinner. It is sin that has found him out, and has brought him into remembrance before God, and it is not for such an one to keep holy day. He must bow his head and accept his punishment. And so he does, and brings forth fruit that was as much in season, as his previous harvest of joy and confidence had been in season. And in the same spirit of true repentance, he would be alone in the trouble. He would have Ittai his friend go back, and leave him to meet the sorrow alone, for it was he alone that had sinned and drawn out the hand of the Lord; but what had those sheep done? And still in the same spirit he sends back the ark and its priests, as having a joy for him that it did not become him now to taste. The ark, the presence of God, was David's best joy; but he was not entitled now to have it, and therefore he sends it home. All this was just the sorrow that became him now. "Carry back the ark of God," says he, "into the city: if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again and show 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 to Him."

Nothing of joy was his at present. Lot the ark go back to the city, to shed the gladness of its presence there, he will go forward to Mount Olivet with tears and barefooted. He will eat nothing but the bread of mourners, and know nothing but the sorrow of the Bridegroom's absence. Surely this was godly sorrow working repentance. And beside all this, he will allow even the wicked to reproach him. Another Benjamite comes out against him to plague him sorely; one too whom he had never wronged, or done despite to, any more than to his kinsman Saul of old. But Shimei comes out against him in this the day of his calamity, and reviles him, casting stones at him, and cursing him still as he goes. But David reviles not again. He hears the righteous rebukes of God in all this, and bows his head. God had given Shimei a commission to do this. What could David suffer more than David deserved? was the

thought of the heart of our penitent. Therefore let Shimei, the unworthy Shimei, do or speak as he may, with David it. is not Shimei but the Lord. (2 Sam. 15, 16.)

All this was fruit meet for repentance. It was all perfect in season. But though thus silent as towards Shimei, David in spirit judges that he may plead against Ahithophel, and he says, "O Lord, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness." And this desire the Lord allows, for he answers it by speedily confounding that evil counsellor.

The counsel which this apostate friend, and companion of David, counselled in those days, was as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God. But the Lord had now appointed to overthrow him. Absalom rejects his counsel, his word is passed by; and as his reputation for wisdom in the state was every thing to him, his household gods are thus now stolen from him, his "good thing" is gone, and he sinks down a defiled dishonoured ruin.

What a lesson to us all, beloved! What did any thing avail Haman, while Mordecai sat at the gate? What would not Saul give up, if he could but be honoured before the people? Oh the solemn lesson which all this reads to us. Have we, beloved, any thing that, if it were touched, our life would be touched, or is our life so bound up with Jesus, that we could stand the wreck of all beside? What treasures are they which we are laying up day by day? what vineyard is it that we are cultivating? Where is the ruling passion fixed, brethren? Where is the current of the heart flowing, what point is it hasting towards? Does Jesus draw its desires, and awaken its intelligence, or what of this world is its master-spring? It is well, beloved, to put these challenges to our poor hearts, and try them thus in the presence of our blessed Lord. "When Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, and arose, and gat him home to his house, to his city, and put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died." (2 Sam. 17.)

And Absalom the king is soon to be like this counsellor of his kingdom, for the beast and his false prophet perish together. But there was no prayer in the month of David against Absalom, as there had been against Ahithophol. How very striking is this, as indeed is every expression that we get of his heart all through these scenes. Nothing can be more perfect than this drawing by the divine hand. I have noticed this already in some features, and here again we trace it. He numbers the people, setting captains over hundreds and thousands of them, and making Joab, Abishai, and Ittai the chiefs. But he would fain go forth himself, for it was his sin which had brought all this mischief on the land, and David was of too noble a heart to let the mischief find any in the foreground but himself; and beside, he has his desire on Absalom still, and judges that his presence might help to shield him, for David was of too soft a heart to disown the feelings of a father even towards a rebel son.

But his people will not hear of this. What a loved man he was! and deservedly so, I am well assured: one, I judge, of the most attractive men that ever lived, who had qualities which could well command, and then detain beyond almost any other, the hearts and desires of all who know him. "Thou shalt not go forth," the people answered, "for if we flee away they will not care for us; but now thou art worth ten thousand of us therefore now it is better that thou succour us out of the city." As afterwards, when he was hazarding his life in battle with the Philistines, his men sware to him, saying "Thou shalt go no more out with us to battle, that thou quench not the light of Israel" (2 Sam. 21: 17). And indeed he was their light, their gladness, and their leader, the honoured and loved one of his day, in favour with God and man. But he now bows to the word of his people, and though his heart is still towards Absalom, he goes not out, but, "deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom," is the last command he gives his captains on sending them forth to the battle.

With a heart stored with such affections "he sits between the gates to wait the solemn issue," and

the captains and their armies go to the battle of the wood of Ephraim. Victory or defeat would be much the same to David. No result but must tell him whence it came, and be armed with a sad remembrance of that other battle in which another had fallen, fallen too in the judgment of God, as one murdered by his hand, though he was all the while dallying in the city. But the Lord is but refining, and in no wise destroying him. His chastening, blessed be His name, is salvation. For though He is jealous for His holy name, He pities His people. The battle is hot for a moment in the wood of Ephraim, but the Lord is in it, as before at Gibeon; and as there the hailstones, so here the wood devours more than the sword. There was a great slaughter that day of more than twenty thousand men. All is confusion and utter destruction in the ranks of the apostate, and Absalom is caught in the boughs of a great oak, and is taken up between the heaven and the earth, a spectacle to both. He is made a show of openly; for "he that is hanged is accursed of God," "and cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." (2 Sam. 18.)

2 Samuel 19 - 23.

Here was the end of another apostate, a more fearful one even than Saul. The paper on "Saul," to which this is in some sort kindred, has shown us that the evil king of Israel was a type of the wicked one in the latter day, who is to do according to his will, to magnify himself above God, and hold nothing in honour or desire but himself and his own way. Absalom in his day, as I have already observed, is type of the same wicked one. They are different samples of the same last great enemy of God and his people, who is to fill up the measure of human iniquity, and then call down the penal fire of God on all the corruptions of the earth. But there are features of all this self-will and wickedness in Absalom, that exceed even what we saw in Saul. Thus, Saul had been produced by the desire of the revolted heart of the nation. He was the man after the nation's heart. But Absalom generated his own evil preeminence. It was not the nation's but his own desire that brings him forth. And there is more of the violation of all the laws of nature in Absalom than in Saul. Absalom is the profane as well as the wicked prince (Ezek. 21: 25). With him it is not simply unbridled wickedness, but that profane wickedness that could trample on all the claims even of nature. Heady, high-minded, disobedient to parents, unthankful, without natural affection, the very characteristics of the perilous times in the last days, are more awfully developed in Absalom, than perhaps in any other even of the same rank of persons in Scripture.

It is not merely a corrupted, but an usurped, kingdom we see in the hand of Absalom; and this is another advance in iniquity upon the times of Saul. And still further I may observe, that Absalom seems entirely to disclaim the Lord all through the day of his usurpation. There is not one thought of God in the kingdom then. Ahithophel's counsel but no counsel from the Lord, — the strength of his thousands but no strength in the Lord, appears then. And as there is not one thought of God to stir his conscience, neither is there one thought or softening movement of heart because of his father's sorrow. Even the counsel to smite David alone pleased Absalom well (2 Sam. 17). Even Saul could weep at times, and confess righteousness in David; but Absalom's soul has nothing like a gracious visitation oven for a single moment. He never, if I may so say, even thinks of saying, "I have sinned," as Saul does. For what does Absalom care for sin? "Tush, God does not see," this is the language of his uncircumcised heart and lips from beginning to end.

Nor is there one Jonathan to relieve the entire darkness of the scene, as there had been in the court and camp of Saul. There was not one single point of relief with Absalom and all that was confederate with him. It is all the unmixed darkness of an evil and apostate hour. And the Lord can in no wise own him. He gives him no commission all through the days of his usurpation; He could not. He had entrusted Saul with the slaughter of the Amalekites, but Absalom is in no wise known to Him. He

is his own, and none but his own, from beginning to end.

Such was Absalom, — one of the darkest pictures of human nature that we are given to look at in the word of God; and such is now his end. He hangs in the tree, — another Lot's wife to be had in constant remembrance. He had taken and reared up for himself a pillar in the king's dale, and called it after his own name, because he had no son to keep his memorial alive in the earth. But the Lord was now giving him another and a far different memorial — a memorial in shame and not in glory. His body was cast into a pit in the wood, and a great heap of stones was laid on him. All his glory was thus tarnished. He was hung by the hair of his head, which had been his boast in the flesh; and, instead of a, pillar to his own name, he is made a pillar to us — a witness of the shame and ruin of apostacy. — "The wise shall inherit glory, but shame shall be the promotion of fools."

This overthrow of Absalom was like the loss of Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea, or as the fall of Saul on Mount Gilboa, or as by and by, the ruin of that man who having planted the tabernacle of his palaces in the glorious holy mountain shall then come to his end, and none shall help him.

But here let us mark it, that Moses and the congregation of Israel may sing "the Lord has triumphed gloriously;" and Deborah and Barak in their turn may likewise sing, "so let all thine enemies perish, O Lord;" for songs belong to a merry heart, to those who have the testimony of their conscience with them. But there could be no music in David's heart now. That heart was no sanctuary of praise now. How could David at this time enter the gates, and praise the Lord? Those gates open only to the righteous nation that keep the truth. God had appointed salvation for walls and bulwarks, and praise for gates; but David must be silent there, because he had sinned against the Lord. O dear Brethren, that we may be faithful to our own joys; that we may so carry ourselves before the Lord our God, as to be able to run along with the saints in their prosperity, and with the chosen in their gladness, and know no check in our spirit, as poor David now knows in this feast-day of the Lord.

No: David has no music at this time. Absalom had fallen, and the blood of Uriah was crying from the ground afresh in David's ears. It was not meet that he should make merry and be glad. He could not eat of the sacrifices, for such and such things had befallen him (Lev. 10: 19). Victory was defeat, and life was death to David. His path is still the perfect path of the penitent; and thus he now goes to his chamber rather than to his throne; and as he goes, he weeps. and says, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Better is it to have our path ordered by the Spirit within, though it may be a path of heaviness, than allow it to be determined by mere circumstances around. Thus was it now with David. The Spirit of God was leading him along, and he shall find life and peace at the end, though his sin had made the way dark and dreary for the present. But his sorrow must be all his own. The people had earned a victory, and were entitled to their rewards, and the king's sorrow must not be allowed to tarnish their joy. Joab therefore recalls David to his people, and his people's claims upon him, and David is awakened and goes forth to take his place in the scene again. He arises and sits in the gate; all the people come before him, and the tide of their desires return to him, and all his enemies are put to shame (2 Sam. 19.)

Thus was the restoration in happy progress; but there arises even after this, a little delay and difficulty in setting all in order, for the mischief had been great. Hence the matter of Sheba, the son of Bichri, another Benjamite (2 Sam. 20.)

But the Lord returns to him in full reconciliation. He is again inquired of by him; and in a day of public calamity, David learns that no sin of his was then in remembrance, but the sin of Saul and his bloody house. And this was for the healing of David's wounded spirit. The goodness of God had led

him to repentance; and no sting was to be left behind, no remembrance of all that had now passed was to remain; save where our sin, beloved, is ever to be remembered, in the increased care and diligence and watchfulness of our own spirit (2 Sam. 21.)

This was very gracious. But even more than this is preparing to witness to David what God was; for in the same grace and tender-kindness, the good Lord, in due season, prepares a song for David, wherein the Spirit leads him to forget all but the divine mercies. "David spake the words of this song in the day that the Lord had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul." It is Saul that is here called to mind and not Absalom. Nothing is remembered but the injuries of an evil and unoffended enemy, and all the tale of sin and shame that followed is forgotten. David sings like a "virgin soul." The Spirit recalls nothing that could have checked the song, and the flow of his heart in the joy of it; for when the Lord forgives He forgets also. At the end of the wilderness (though the Lord had disciplined and rebuked Israel by the way), it was only this: "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel" (2 Sam. 22.)

There was something very gracious and exalted in the Lord putting this song into David's lips. But we are to see greater things than even these, for after this song which thus rehearses the goodness of God and his rich triumphant grace, we read "the last words of David." In them the Spirit leads him to trace the moral of his whole history. His commission as King of Israel had been to rule "in the fear of God," and thus be as "the light of the morning" to his people. But this had not been so, and therefore his house was for the present not to be established; but the Spirit leads him still onward to look above present failure to One who should thus rule and thus establish his house for ever, and in whom these mercies of God to him should be sure and abiding mercies, when also the sons of the alien, the sons of Belial, the seed of all evil-doers, should be utterly consumed in the decreed place, thrust away as unprofitable thorns. To this, as to his rest, the Spirit of God leads David, and these are his "last words" (2 Sam. 23.)

Thus, in these three chapters, we get the full reconciliation between God and his servant, attested by three witnesses. The matter of the Gibeonites — the song — the last words of David — all tell us this. And thus we have seen the way of David, but also the end of the Lord. "The man who was raised up on high," "the anointed of the God of Jacob," "the sweet Psalmist of Israel," is set up to celebrate in his own person and history the shining ways of God. Sin had reigned unto death; but grace had also reigned, through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.

2 Samuel.

Here we end the path of David through the 1st and 2nd books of Samuel, or through the, times of "Saul" and "Absalom." It is *grace* which God has been exhibiting in this history; and exhibiting in it all its blessed fulness. — We see its early dawn in the election of David, when men were despising him (1 Sam. 16: 11). — We see its brighter and fuller shinings all through the days of the trial and sorrow of righteousness, for grace then was watching over its object, lest any fowler should hurt him, keeping him, though hunted like a bird in the mountains, night and day (1 Sam. 18 - 31). Then, grace established this elect and favoured one in honour and peace above the malice and power of all his foes (2 Sam. 5). At the end grace shows its brightest glory, and does its noblest and holiest work, — it restores this elect and honoured one, when, in a dark and evil hour, he had turned from the ways of righteousness and peace (2 Sam. 11 - 23). Then did it rise to its noonday strength. Its early dawn had been sweet, the course which it then ran, as in the heavens, was bright and steady, but its full glory now broke out, when tainted David, like a "virgin soul," sings his joys and triumphs in God.

These were the treasures of grace; and God was making a show of them, to His praise and our comfort, in David. Glory comes forth to shine afterwards, in like manner, in Solomon; but grace thus beforehand, had told of herself in David. It was grace *electing*, grace *refreshing*, grace *exalting*, and grace *restoring*, that the lips of the sinner might be occupied with a theme of blissful and everlasting praise.

But there is one other thing that we have to notice still. — As grace was thus displayed *towards* David, so was it displayed in David. It was the great rule of his life, giving character to his dealings with others, as it had thus given character to God's dealings with Him. Being called to inherit blessing, he renders blessing. Thus, when reviled, he reviled not again (1 Sam. 17: 29). Afterwards when persecuted, he threatened not, but suffered it (1 Sam 18 - 31). In every scene in which he is called to take a part, either in action or in suffering (save where he is turned aside by Satan for awhile, as we have been seeing), it is not himself he is seeking or honouring, but others that he is serving in grace and kindness. The death of Saul and Jonathan make easy way for David to the throne; but his own advantage is not the circumstance in that event which governs his thoughts about it, he sees only the dishonour of the Lords anointed in it, and therefore weeps, instead of triumphs, over the day of Mount Gilboa. So in the fall of Abner and Ishbosheth, which was the quenching of the last light of Saul in Israel, it is only the sorrow and fasting of David that we hear of. It was not his own honour or advantage, that even then determined the state of his mind. — And so when fully settled in the throne, he is the man of grace and kindness still, remembering in that hour of glory those who had been the friends of his affliction and exile, and making it his care and business to find out some of the house of Saul to whom he might show the "kindness of God" (2 Sam. 1 - 10). He would be an imitator or follower of God, as a dear child; for what a God-like desire was that, "Is there not yet any of the house of Saul that I might show the kindness of God unto him?" Saul's house had deserved evil, and not good, from David; but this made David's kindness to them *God's kindness*, for "God commendeth His love toward us, in that when we were yet sinners Christ died for us." — And, in the same grace afterwards, David refuses to judge Shimei (2 Sam. 16, 19). The thought of the sons of Zeruiah was loathsome to David's soul. "What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah?" says he to them, when they were for exacting righteousness. They understood not grace, but David understood nothing else. Mercy had rejoiced over judgment towards himself in the heart of the Lord, and nothing but the same can or must be found in the heart of David towards Shimei or the worst of his enemies.

Thus the history of David, through these 1st and 2nd books of Samuel, or through these times of "Saul" and "Absalom," tells us, beloved, what God's ways *are*, and what our ways *should* be. As His ways to us are in grace, so should be our ways to one another and to all men. In "this present evil world" of sin and sorrow we are learning God's grace to perfection, in our own souls, daily, and should let others learn it in our walk and intercourse with them in like manner daily. By and by in the shining "world to come," we shall learn glory in the same perfection. For David was followed by Solomon, and the God of all grace has called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, that He Himself may be our boast and song, and satisfying praise for ever and ever.

Dearly beloved, in the joy and liberty of the precious and perfect love which is ours now, let us pray that we might abound in the hope of the kingdom that is to be ours also, and walk above a world in which our blessed Master could not rest. — Grant this to all thy saints, O Lord, for Jesus our Saviour's sake! Amen.