

The Mystery of the Kingdom

Introduction

On the Existence and Principle of a Mystic Sense

In claiming a mystical import for the Books of Kings, I may be asked on what grounds the claim is made. Some few perhaps are willing to receive such an application of the Word, in submission to the witness of a certain spiritual sense within them which, often far in advance of their spiritual intelligence, instinctively leads them to make such or similar applications. Others, again, may be favorably disposed to such interpretations, because the writings of the early Church invariably assume such a method of exposition. The greater number, however, in these days when men are so quick to doubt, if not to reject, all that is above them, even if struck with the correspondence between certain histories of old, and certain spiritual realities within and around them, and while they feel that the New Testament in some degree recognizes this correspondence, because they know neither its limit, nor the principle on which it proceeds, are cautiously afraid of recognizing it any further than the express examples found in the New Testament. Such persons, however, if honest with themselves and with the Word of God, must continually feel that there is some principle recognized in the New Testament, in its quotations from, and applications of, the Prophets and the Law, which at present is hidden from them. I am fully satisfied that the Word itself contain the full answer and key to this, and indeed to every difficulty. I therefore throw together a few hints on the subject, which will sufficiently show the grounds on which I have traced a mystical application throughout the Books of Kings. To my own mind the principle they involve in one more and more confirmed by a continually accumulating weight of evidence - evidence, indeed which is not of such a nature as to be cognizable by all, inasmuch as it requires both a certain capacity and an exercise of it in the things of God; but which will be increasingly satisfactory, I believe, to those who will test it in the daily study and meditation of the Word of God.

Our question is of a mystic sense. Now is not this, in fact, simply a question respecting the character of the Word of God? Will not an apprehension of its true character, through grace, lead us on to what we want - a knowledge of its true sense and right interpretation?

1. For the character of the written Word, then, to whom can we better turn than to the Lord Himself, "the Word made flesh?" (John 1:14). If He is "the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8), "without variableness or shadow of turning" (James 1:17), may not His manifestations of Himself in the flesh be regarded as at least analogous to His manifestations in His Word of old? And if there be anything peculiar to His manifestations of Himself on earth, should we not, while we turn aside to see this great sight, ask ourselves, and ask of God, whether the same peculiarities are not to be expected and found in His words of old?

[i] Now the first thing I observe of Christ is that there was more in Him than met the eye or ear. Though seen and heard, He was yet hidden. The vessel, indeed, was seen: the treasure was not seen. To discern Him, a certain capacity was needed, vouchsafed of God. "Flesh and blood never revealed him" (Matt. 16:17). "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not" (John 1:10): for "He came neither striving nor crying among men, neither was His voice heard in the streets" (Matt. 12:16-19). But "He that was of God heard God's words: The Jews heard them not, because they were not of God "(John 8:47). Antichrists came in other guise, "saying, I am Christ" (Matt. 24:5): the Christ of God never said this. "He bore not witness of Himself" (John 5:31): for He must be otherwise discerned. Even when asked, "Art thou the Christ?" His answer once and again was simply a reference to His works (Matt. 11:3-5; John 10:24); and the lost, who knew their need of such works, at once discerned Him.

Such was the Incarnate Word, and in such ways was He discerned. And such is also the written Word. Containing within itself far more than meets the eye or ear, yea, more than has entered into man's heart to conceive (I Cor. 2:9), it comes under man's eyes, and is heard by their ears, and yet only reveals its treasures to the sons of God. The call of God, the Spirit's grace, a life of faith, a walk with Christ, pondering and treasuring up His words, even when dark and hidden, - in such ways was the Incarnate Word discerned of old: in such ways is the written Word opened now. Mere intellect cannot open it. God speaks to the heart. If the heart is dead, the Word is sealed.

[ii] Again, Christ's manifestations of Himself were in proportion to the need and faith of those that sought Him. We see this everywhere. As Life-giver to the dead, as healer to the sick, as Savior to the lost - to the Pharisee, He is only a teacher (John 3:2; Luke 7:39); to the Scribe, a doctor, proposing to them difficulties out of the law (Luke 20:41). According to your faith, according to your need, - this seems to be the measure of His manifestation. The power of God in Him seemed ever ready, waiting upon faith and need in man. So it is with the written Word. Nothing rightly introduces us to it, nothing opens its treasures, but need and faith. A walk of faith very especially opens the Word; for faith ever brings us into need and trial; and trial wants a manifestation of God, and that manifestation is not denied. According to the need, the Word is opened. But let us come to it to prove our wisdom; to judge it rather than to be judged; to speculate about it with curious, captious, criticizing eye; to find our own notions in its words, or else to reject them. - let us do this, and then, though we may be reckoned learned Scribes, the Word will remain really closed, its treasures hidden from us. We shall be dark and barren as ever, with this only added, the responsibility of having misused or rejected a revelation of the living God. The way, therefore, to read the Word is not to attempt to exhaust its contents; but simply to seek in it what we need. In this way, what we draw from it, as it suits our wants, will through grace be such as we can use. I have observed, that truth we do not need is, in general, truth we cannot bear, the possession of which, so far from being a help, either puffs up the possessor, or becomes a stumbling block in his way, by leading his understanding first to forestall, and then supersede, his conscience.

2. From Christ I pass to His words, to inquire what light they throw upon the character, and so upon the interpretation, of the written Word. We have observed in Christ Himself, and the same is true of His works, that there was more in Him than met the eye; there was something below the surface; and that this hidden treasure was only opened out by the Spirit to faith and need. We shall find the selfsame peculiarities in the words He spoke. Parables were his chosen form of speech. "Without a parable spake He not unto the multitude." (Matt. 13:34). Nay, such were His words, that even His own disciples, while they followed, often misunderstood Him. His exhortations to beware of leaven (Matt. 16:6); to sell a garment and buy a sword (Luke 22:28); to eat His flesh and drink His blood (John 6:56-60); to ask of Him living water, which should be to those who received it a well of water springing up unto eternal life (John 4:10-14); these and many other such, which at once meet us, will sufficiently show how often a secret meaning lay hidden under His plainest words. In fact they were like Himself - "an open secret", open to all, but opened to few; a revelation and a mystery; from the wise and prudent they hid those things which yet, as seemed good to the Father, were by them revealed to babes. But then comes the question, - Do not these words of Christ throw some light on the character of His words, and the Word of His Spirit spoken by holy men of old?

3. This question is even more pressed upon us by our Lord's own references to the Word. Few, I suppose, have carefully read those references, and indeed the New Testament mode in general of quoting the Old, without feeling that here is something peculiar in it. The facts are simply these, - Christ and His apostles continually refer to various passages from the law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms; but these references, though claimed as applicable either to the Church or Christ, appear, when we turn to them, to be quoted apart from their proper context, and to relate not to Christ, but rather to certain circumstances in the life of some Old Testament saint, or to some portion of the history of the ancient Israel.

[1] For instance, our Lord thus speaks to the Jews of His day; - "Now have they seen and hated both Me and My Father: but this cometh to pass, that the word which is written in their law might be fulfilled, They hated Me without a cause" (John 15:24,25 compared to Psalm 35:19). But these words, when we turn to them, are found in a Psalm, which, even if it had not an inspired heading, claiming it to be "A Psalm of David", would yet, from its general character and tenor, show that it applied to David himself, and was uttered by him in reference to the men of his own day. The same remarks apply to the passages quoted by our Lord, as also by St. Peter, in reference to the traitor Judas. Our Lord's words are, - "I know whom I have chosen: but it is done that the Scriptures might be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with Me hath lifted up his heel against Me:" (John 13:18). Thus also St. Peter, - "Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, who was guide to them that took Jesus. For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and his bishopric let another take "(Acts 1:16-20, compared with Psalm 69:25; and 109:8). Now this quotation, so remarkably introduced, is made up of extracts from two Psalms, both of which, like the one already referred to, are divinely described as "Psalms of David". See titles of Psalms 69 and 109). Similar in character are our Lord's words respecting John the Baptist: - "For all the prophets prophesied until John, and if ye

will receive it, this is Elias which was for to come" (Matt. 11:13,14). It appears that the disciples, having received on the holy mount God' own witness that His son was come, could not reconcile this with the statement of the Scribes that Elijah must first come. The case was evidently one of difficulty. The Scriptures had foretold that "Elias should first come", and John had said he was not Elias. Accordingly they submit the difficulty to their Lord: - "Why then say the Scribes that Elias must first come? Jesus answered and said, Elias truly shall first come and restore all things; but I say unto you that Elias is come already; and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Then the disciples understood that He spake to them of John the Baptist" (Matt. 17:10-12).

[ii] Nor is our Lord alone in this method of applying the Word. The Evangelists use it quite as frequently. Thus St. Matthew opens his Gospel with several quotations from the Prophets, applying them to Christ or to the circumstances which occurred in connection with Him; yet these quotations, when we turn to their context, appear continually to belong to other persons, and to a very different age. Thus we read, "Joseph took the young child and departed into Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the Prophet, Out of Egypt have I called my son" (Matt. 2:15, compared with Hosea 11:1). But this passage, when we turn to it in Hosea evidently applies to the literal Israel, and to their deliverance from the house of bondage. Again we read, "Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceedingly wroth, and sent forth and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Ramah was there a voice heard, lamentation and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted because they were not: (Matt. 2:16-18). Now, I think it must strike every one that what is distinctly spoken by the Prophet in reference to Ramah, a town of Benjamin, is as distinctly applied by the Evangelist to Bethlehem, which was, as all know, a town of Judah. On turning to the passage in Jeremiah too, its context further shows that the prophecy applies to Israel going into captivity; and that, while foretelling this, it gives hope to Rachel that her sons shall return; agreeably to which promise, Benjamin, Rachel' son, did return from Babylon with Judah. The passage in Jeremiah runs this: - "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted because they were not. Thus saith the Lord, Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears; for thy work shall be rewarded said the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border" (Jer. 31:15-17). Still more remarkable is the next quotation in the same chapter. "And Joseph, when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea, was afraid to go thither: nevertheless, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee, and came and dwelt at Nazareth; that is might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene" (Matt. 2:22,23). Now there is no such passage as this in any prophet. The reference is simply a mystic application of the general tenor of all "the prophets".

[iii] Nor is this mode of applying the Old Testament peculiar to the Evangelists or to our Lord. The other New Testament writers continually use it. Thus St. Paul, writing to the Hebrews, finds the proof of the fact, that "Christ who sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one, in the words Behold, I and the children which God hath given

me" (Heb. 2:11-13); words which, when we turn to the place in Scripture where they occur, appear to be an utterance of Isaiah of old, in reference to the children whom God had given him for signs in Israel (Isaiah 8:18). Similar is the passage where, in comparing the glory of angels with that of Christ, St. Paul applies to Christ the words, "I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to me a son" (Heb. 1:5). But these words, in the passage whence they are cited, are spoken of Solomon, David's son (II Sam. 7:14). The Apostle at once directly applies them to David's Lord. Now in these and similar passages, we have words uttered of some ancient saint applied to Christ. Let us now take an example where this order is reversed, and where a passage, which in the Old Testament speaks of Christ, is in the New Testament applied to Christians. We find examples of this in St. Paul. One [example] may suffice us here. In Isaiah 49, one is addressed by the name of Israel, to whom a promise is made, that He shall be a light to the Gentiles, and for salvation to the ends of the earth. Then follow these words, "Thus saith the Lord, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee, and I will give thee for a covenant to the people, and to establish the earth, and to cause to inhabit the desolate heritages; that thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; and to those that are in darkness, Show yourselves" (Isa. 49:8,9). Now how is this passage quoted in the New Testament? Not of Christ, but of Christians. "We then, as workers together with Him, beseech you that ye receive not the grace of God in vain; for He saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in a day of salvation have I succored thee. Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (II Cor. 6:1,2).

The following passage may to some appear even more difficult. In the tenth of Romans, the Apostle, while speaking of Israel's unbelief, in proof that their rejection of the Gospel, could not be attributed to their not having heard it, quotes a verse from the Nineteenth Psalm. He had just cited the Scripture, "Whosoever believeth shall not be ashamed". The question remained, Had the Jews heard the Gospel? If not, how could they believe? The apostle therefore asks, "Have they not heard?" and answers, "Yea, verily; their sound (the sound of the Gospel preachers) went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world" (Rom. 10:18). Now this answer, a verse from the nineteenth Psalm, thus applied by Paul to the preaching of the Gospel by the Church, in its first connection, speaks of the witness of the heavens to God's glory. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their sound is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world" (Psa. 19:1-4). Thus what the Psalmist says of the heavens, Paul applies to the Church. "Yea, verily, their sound is gone unto all lands." The witness of the heavens to God's glory, a witness heard by all lands, is cited as proof that the Church had proclaimed, nay could not but proclaim, the Gospel to all, and that the Jews had heard it.¹

Now when we remember that these applications of Scripture are applications made by the Holy Ghost, and that they pervade the entire writings of the New Testament, we shall I think feel that we have unexceptionable witness at least to the fact that the Word contains some-thing beneath and besides its first and historic meaning. In saying this, I by no means deny the first or literal sense both of the histories and prophecies of the Old Testament; I am only contending that this first and historic sense is not the only one, nor

indeed the highest one; for it will often be found hyperbolic in the extreme as respects its first and historic sense subject. For myself, therefore, I cannot regard these New Testament quotations from the Old but as grapes of Eshcol; examples of, not exceptions to, the fruitful Carmel whence they come; for I cannot so think of the Word of God, as that it lacks that unity of character which everywhere shines out so brightly even in this first creation.

Can we, by comparing these examples, trace the principle on which they are applied? or is the principle anywhere distinctly stated? or do any other Scriptures throw light either directly or incidentally upon the point, so as to enable us to use this principle in reference to the rest of the Scripture? I reply, that though a mere examination of the letter of the Word will not show to one lacking the needed capacity the principle on which the Apostles ever quote it, yet I am assured that the passages cited are one and all applied in conformity to one and the same principle of interpretation. Nay, further, there are in the Epistles, not only incidental allusion, but more than one direct statement upon the subject, which leads us not only to recognize a mystic sense, but to trace the ground on which it proceeds, and the true reason for it.

4. I now proceed, therefore, at once from examples of a mystic sense, to some of those passages in which we have a direct statement of the rule or principle of their application. [i] The first I refer to is the well known passage in St. Peter, where we read, "No prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation" (II Pet. 1:20. Greek, *idios epilusis*). These words at once mark the distinctive character of the Word of God. Other books are "of private interpretation". What is said in them of any person, thing, city, or nation, relates to, and is to be understood of, that person, thing, city, or nation, only. Not so, however, what Scripture says, be the Scripture in the form of law, or history, or psalms, or what we strictly prophecy. In saying this, I may appear to some to be exceeding the limits which St. Peter has assigned to his own canon of interpretation, inasmuch as what he says of prophecy I apply to the entire Word. But this objection will not, I think, be urged by those who have carefully noted and understood the use which Christ and His apostles make of the Old Testament. Such would rather confess that it would be hard to affirm of any part of the Word, that it is not prophetic in the widest sense. The New Testament again and again refers to simple narratives and historic scenes, to minute particulars in the histories of Melchisedec, Sarah, and Hagar, and applies them all as foreshadowing, and so foretelling other things, which have been fulfilled, or which are yet fulfilling. Moreover, the fact is, that the letter of the Word will often be found hyperbolic as respects its primary or historic subject.² The inference is, as more than one Apostle has clearly shown, that such and similar words must have a higher, that is, a prophetic import.³

But to return to St. Peter's words. He expressly says, that "no Scripture is of private interpretation." Unlike man's word, it has more than one object and application. The letter covers another, though a kindred, sense. For instance what is spoken of Egypt (Ex. 12:12), of leaven (Ex. 12:15), of the sprinkled blood (Ex. 12:13), of the Red Sea (Ex. 14:22), of manna (Ex. 12:15), of crossing Jordan (Joshua 3:15-17), all this in the letter belongs to others, not to us; it was as we know, historically fulfilled in the earthly Israel;

but in spirit it as much applies, even in all its details, to us, and is only "profitable" (II Tim. 3:16) to us in this secondary application.

And it is remarkable how the child of God naturally reads the Word in this way, long before he knows the reason why he does so; for the spiritual sense within him, far in advance of his spiritual discernment or strength, instinctively draws to and uses that which is suited to it. Thus, in tracing Israel's course from Egypt to the land, in the bondage and in the deliverance from it, the young Christian, as well as the more advanced pilgrim, instinctively discerns his own course, and traces his own experience. He sees that what is said of Israel is not of private interpretation. He feels that in all points it applies to him. And the more he meditates upon these subjects, the more is he amazed at the fullness and exactness of the analogy between himself and Israel. But he soon goes a step further. He has felt the application of the history to himself. He soon finds that if it is true of himself, it is true of the whole Church; nay, that it is only true of himself in virtue of his relation to that Church, and as one member of that redeemed body.

Nor is this the final application of this wondrous Word. He who reads it with a prayerful and humble heart, soon finds that what was written of Israel, full of application though it be to himself and the Church, applies yet further to the Lord Himself. [The word made flesh.] If Israel is called out of Egypt when a child, so is Christ (Matt. 2:15, and Hosea 11:1). If Israel has a day of temptation in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1, and Deut. 8:2); if Israel lives there not by bread alone, but by every word of God (Matt. 4:4, and Deut. 8:3); so in all points does Christ also. And this is not in the letter only, but in the spirit also: in His flesh, and in resurrection.

I might multiply instances of this; but enough, perhaps, has been said to illustrate the rule that no Scripture is of private interpretation. Is it too presumptuous to ask, if any and what reason can be given for the resemblance or analogy which we have referred to? Why is it that the words, which primarily apply to Israel of old, equally apply to Christ, the Church, and the believer? I would not speak presumptuously; but if I mistake not, the reason is this, that whether it be of Israel of old, or one of Israel, or Christ, or the Church, or the believer, each if faithful to his calling, is or has been a vessel for the manifestation of the Word, whose path is and ever must be one. Israel of old was the chosen vessel of the Word of God (Ex. 29:45); so was the Israelite of a humble and contrite heart (Isa. 57:15); so is the saint (I Cor. 6:9); so is the Church (II Cor 6:16); so above all, is Christ (John 1:14). In Him God was fully manifested. Yet the Word which dwelt among us in Christ, "in all the fullness of the God-head bodily" (Col. 2:9) was the same Word which, in another manner, of old appeared in Israel, which yet dwells in a saint, and in the universal Church, making each a vessel as it pleases Him for His own manifestations. The history, therefore, of any of these is the history of a manifestation of the Word; and as He is the same yesterday, and today, and forever, the words which describe any one of the vessels or modes in which He has manifested Himself, will apply in measure to all the vessels and all the manifestations. The objects, indeed, in or by which the Word has chosen to reveal Himself, as well as the character and measures of the revelation He has

made by them, have varied. But the light has been on (John 1:9). The sun has been the same. The different vessels have only either reflected or manifested Him.

It is for this reason, if I err not, that to the spiritual eye the Old Testament is so full of Christ even while full of personal application to ourselves also. For this reason, it is that Israel and David continually teach us the Christian's path, even when they also confessedly point to our blessed Lord. Some seem, indeed, to speak as though if any person of office prefigured Christ, it cannot apply to the Church likewise. But the truth is just the reverse. What is a type of one, will probably be of the other; if of the Head, it will be of the members also.

Nor is it Israel and David only which have been vessels to reveal the glory of God. "The heavens declare His glory" (Psa. 19:1). What is said of "the heavens", therefore can be applied to that heavenly thing, God's Church. What is true of the one will be more or less true of the other also. So St. Paul, without preface or apology, at once applies the Psalm, making the witness of the heavens to God's glory the proof of the Church's witness to His glory in the gospel; saying, "Their sound is gone forth into all lands, and their words unto the ends of the world" (Rom. 10:18). He might with equal truth have quoted any of the other verses. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming forth out of his chamber, - this is as true of God's Church as of the heavens. Nay, it is in the spiritual thing, not in the natural, that the highest fulfillment ever rests; even as in all the words respecting Israel and Egypt, the wilderness and the promised land. And here too, as in the passages respecting Israel, we know how often a young Christian makes some such spiritual application, without at all knowing why. The spiritual sense within feels what suits it, and uses it in spite of rules.⁴

[ii] Closely allied to the passage already quoted from St. Peter is another from St. Paul, which expresses the same doctrine though rather in another aspect, - "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past to the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, . . . who is the brightness of His glory, the express image of His person" (Heb. 1:1-3). The contrast here, as others have observed, is not merely between God speaking by servants and by a Son, but between the completeness of the manifestation in the Son, as compared with the partial and imperfect character of each one of the previous manifestations. Hitherto God's manifestations had been piecemeal. He spake of old "at sundry times, in divers manners" - in many parts and in many ways (Grk.), at one time making a revelation of His grace, at another of truth, at another of foreknowledge or might power. But in the Son we have all these combined. "Being the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of His person", He fully expresses God; and, in and by Himself alone, at once fulfills all those relations, of which righteous men of old had in their words and acts been partial and feeble shadows. God "in times past", in the words and deeds, of prophets, kings, and priests; in their offices and relations towards Himself or Israel; even in the creatures whose blood was shed (Heb. 9:19, etc.), the bullocks, lambs, and doves; yea, in things also without voice or life, in the laver, the altar, the ark, unceasingly was manifesting some aspect or office of His Son, the Word. The manifestations were indeed partial, "in divers manners", but they were all glimpses or manifestations of the self-same Word. All grant this in the victims for, and

laws of, sacrifice. Many see it in the bread (John 6:32-35), the veil (Heb. 10:20), the altar (Heb. 8:10). But with not a few it seems too bold to apply this to prophets, kings, and priests, erring mortals like ourselves and stained with sin. Yet surely the latter, even as the former, ever point to Christ. Their offices and relationships, bestowed by God, bestowed for His people's good, though often miserably misused by some earthly prophet, or priest, or ruler, all stretch forth their arms to Christ, beseeching Him to fulfill what in man's hands had been only repeated failure. Often too their acts and experiences directly foreshadow Him; witness the Psalms of David quoted in the New Testament (such as Psa 22, 40, and 69). Nay, more, David (as in Psa. 18), and Solomon (as in Psa. 72), and many others, as Eliakim (Isa. 22:20-24), and Joshua (Zech. 6:11-13), and Zerubbabel (Zech. 3 and 4); these prophets, priests, and kings, are spoken of in terms, which as applied to them alone, are most exaggerated. But this exaggeration vanishes at once when we see that their offices and works were, as one has said, the prelude of the Incarnate, the partial revelations of the offices and relationships of Him who should come and fulfill all things.

And a moment's thought will show that such a mode of revelation was needed by the facts to be revealed, even as it was most graciously adapted to our infirmity. Such and so diverse are the offices of Christ; so varied are His works; so wondrous the truths respecting His blessed person; so manifold the relationships He bore, for man to God, and for God to man; so different the various stages and forms of His inward and outward kingdom, that no one statement or figure however perfect could possibly contain them all. God, therefore, as also in pity for our weakness, knowing how slow we should be to apprehend the varied fullness of His only begotten Son, laid hold of every creature and relation among men, by which He could shadow forth distinctly some one relation or office of His Son. Thus in the prophet, we have the office of the Word as teaching in the Church, in the king as ruling, in the priest cleansing; their acts and relations, as also those of many others, leading us more definitely to understand the completeness of the work of redemption and the character of the Redeemer.

[iii] A third Scripture which bears upon this subject may be found in Romans 12. The Apostle is speaking there of teaching and exhortation, and characterizes that teaching which is of God by the words, "according to the analogy of faith" (Rom. 7:6 or "of the faith" (see Greek). In other words, true teaching will not apply things commanded or commended to the Jew of old as literally commanded or binding now, but will ever take them "according to the analogy", or "proportion of the faith"; discerning the relation and proportion between this and other dispensations. Many seem wholly to forget that "the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change in the law" (Heb. 7:12), and that this change from a carnal to a spiritual priest involves a corresponding change in all the particulars of the former dispensation. Alas! The lack of spiritual capacity to discern God's mind in His Word has first been made a ground for denying that the Word is spiritual; and then its letter, not its spirit, directly in opposition to an Apostle's word (II Cor. 3:6; see also John 6:63), has been used to consecrate the flesh and quench the Spirit. We say, indeed, that the literal Israel answers to a spiritual Israel now; we see the general analogy between the two dispensation yet, in applying the details, how often is

one thing taken spiritually, according to the analogy or proportion of faith; the next literally contrary to that proportion.

The consequences are around us everywhere in the confusion between the Spirit and the flesh, not only unmentioned, but justified by the letter of the Word of God.

And yet the rule of the Apostle is very simple, at least as far as it refers to this and the preceding dispensation, turning directly upon the distinct character of Abraham's two-fold seed, first in the flesh, then in the Spirit.⁵ To the literal or carnal see, the Old Testament Word literally applied: to the spiritual seed, the same words apply spiritually. Were they, the literal seed, to be circumcised, to keep the feasts, to leave Egypt, to cross the sea; were they to wander in a wilderness, to live by faith, eating bread from heaven forty years; were they to fight with, and utterly extirpate their enemies in the promised land, Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites? Just so are we. The very words in which letter apply to them, in spirit equally apply to us also. For carnal birth in Abraham's family, we have spiritual birth in his family now: - "If ye be Christ's ye are Abraham's seed" (Gal. 3:26,29): for circumcision in the flesh we have spiritual circumcision now (Phil 3:3; Col. 2:11): for their carnal weapons our spiritual weapons, "the sword of the Spirit, the shield of faith" (II Cor. 10:4,5; Eph. 6:16,17). The subject is indeed extensive as the Word, but the principle is "according to the analogy of faith," resting on the proportion between this and the former dispensation. It is true indeed that the New Testament does not systematically explain this analogy. But the instances of it which we find are so numerous, the coincidences referred to are so deep and manifold, that we have enough to satisfy us of the existence of a vast system, even if quite unable to trace out that system or its limits in all its parts. It almost seems as if the natural world, of which the Jew was a part, was so formed as to be a fit shadow of that spiritual world of which the church is a portion; so close is the correspondence and analogy between the natural things of the old, and the spiritual things of the new creation. For my own part, I cannot look into the Law, but I see all nature taken up and used to represent, as the New Testament shows us, some spiritual reality. The very infirmities and diseases of the flesh; its defilements and cleansings; its meats and drinks, clean and unclean; the times and the seasons, the harvest and firstfruits, the new moon and the Sabbath day (Col. 3:16-17); these, and a thousand similar things in nature are all figures of higher and better things, which have been opened to us by Christ's resurrection. Nay more, the very laws of nature, as we call them, are referred to as a proof of spiritual truths: witness Paul's answer to the objector against the doctrine of the resurrection (I Cor. 15:35-37). It is all as in Ezekiel's vision, "as if a wheel were within a wheel," while yet also "the wheels are full of eyes round about" (Ezek 1:16-18). Well may we say with Job, "Lo, these are parts of His ways, but how little a portion is heard of Him" (Job 26 :14).

But enough in reference to a mystic sense. The subject is one which needs eyes to see rather than proofs and reasons. And though he that has even in measure seen the truth may be a means to point others to it, yet the capacity to receive it is the gift of God. That a man lacking this capacity may profess to apply the Word and so err, or that having a measure of capacity may go beyond his measure, is not only possible but easy, and is, I may perhaps add, the staple objection with some to mystic interpretation. But it is equally

probable that the mind of God may in such interpretation be expressed, and many of His children, feeling it beyond them, be ready to reject it. For as it is in nature, so it is in grace. He that has looked into this world has found it in the laws of light, and laws of motion, the very terms to express which will often be unintelligible to all save those whose minds have been exercised on the same subjects. So in the treasures of the written Word are "many things hard to be understood" (II Pet. 3:16), and which can only be understood by those "who by reason of use have had their senses exercised" (Heb. 5:11-14) in them. "O Lord, how great are Thy works, and Thy thoughts are very deep. A brutish man knoweth not, neither doth a fool understand this" (Psa. 92:5,6).

¹ I add a few more examples of New Testament applications of the Old, in all which we find the same characteristic peculiarity: - Matt. 13:14, compared with Isa. 6:9,10; Matt. 13:35, compared with Psa. 78:2; Matt. 15:7,8, compared with Isa. 29:13; John 2:17, compared with Psa. 59:9; John 19:36, compared with Ex. 12:46, and Psa. 34:20; Acts 13:41, compared with Habakkuk 1:5,6; Acts 15:15,16, compared with Amos 9:11,12; Rom. 8:36, compared with Psa. 54:22; I Cor. 14:32, compared with Isa. 28:11,12; II Cor. 6:16, compared with Leviticus 26:11,12; II Cor. 8:15, compared with Ex. 16:18; Gal. 4:30, compared with Gen. 21:10; Heb. 13:5, compared with Joshua 5.

² See Psalm 18, comparing the title with verses 20-24, and verses 42-44. See also Psalm 72, the title and verses 5-15, and indeed the whole Psalm. See also Isa. 22:20-24. Also Zechariah 6:11-13.

³ See the Apostle's argument in Acts 2:25-36, and 8:35-37. They argue thus - David said, Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, nor suffer thy Holy One to see corruption. But David fell asleep - his sepulchre is with us - he saw corruption; therefore these words uttered by David, apply to some one else.

⁴ The following example is from a well known book Edwards' Narrative of the Revival of Religion in New England. It occurs in the Account of Abigail Hutchinson. "As she awoke on Monday morning, a little before day, such words as these were on her mind, "The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin"; which were accompanied by a lively sense of the excellency of Christ, and His sufficiency to satisfy for the sins of the whole world. She then thought of that expression, "It is a pleasant thing for the eyes to see the Sun," words which then seemed to her to be very applicable to Jesus Christ. By these things her mind was led into such contemplations and views of Christ, as fill her exceedingly full of joy".

⁵ Abraham had two wives "these are the two covenants" (Gal. 4:24) - and by each there is a seed agreeing to the character of the mother; the first, "born after the flesh"; the second "born after the Spirit" (Gal. 4:29).

Section II

The Steps Which Led to a King

I have said that the First Book of Kings gives us the kingdom under Saul. In speaking of that character of Rule which he represents, I shall follow the order of the Scripture, which gives us the causes which led Israel to desire a king, before it details the character and history of the object of their desire. We shall find that the setting up of the kingdom in the hand of Saul was only the direct consequence of certain prior acts of Israel. Those acts were the root and branch of which Saul's kingdom in due time was the fruit. First, the failure of the priests led to a prophet taking their place. And then the failure of the prophet led to the setting up of the desired king.

In thus tracing the setting up of Saul to man's failure, I may perhaps to some seem to be interfering with God's purpose and prerogative; and I may be asked how the Kingdom, which was clearly a part of His purpose, can be spoken of as the result of man's failure. But such an objection will not come from those who have considered God's ways; for the answer to it, though it can only be heard in the sanctuary, is on every side. Redemption was no after-thought of God. Before He laid the measures of the earth; before the foundations thereof were fastened; before the morning stars sang together because the work was good; before that work was marred by sin; even then had He "predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto Himself" (Eph. 1:4-7); "not according to works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (II Tim. 1:9). But does this alter the fact that man's disobedience led to the "fall"? [Man certainly did not 'fall' as he was created exactly to do what was carried out in the garden of Eden. For the sake of brevity, we bow to the widely accepted term - fall] By no means. Man is left to choose his way, to listen to the tempter's lure, "Ye shall be as gods" (Gen 3:5), to seek to be this in independence. God permits this; and yet out of it all fulfils His own gracious will, even to make man by dependence what he sought to be by himself in independence, "conformed to the image of Him" (Rom. 8:29) who is "the image of God" (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3), "these vile bodies fashioned like unto His glorious body" (Phil. 3:21). And it is thus touching the kingdom. The kingdom in the hand of the Beloved was no after- thought of God. Nor does the fact that He had purposed to give Israel a king after His own heart, interfere with the fact that their failure led first to a king after their heart. The failure of Israel in seeking such a king, and the failure of their king, is, as ever, the door for God to come in grace, to give a better king and a better rule to the praise of His grace, even as the first is throughout the witness of man's ruin.

Let us return then to the causes which gradually led to the kingdom in the hand of Saul. The steps are few and simple. The first step is the failure of the priests. This leads to a prophet taking their place. And then the failure of the prophet leads to the setting up of the desired king. Deeply significant is all this to the soul taught of God. Too true a picture of what we see around and within us.

I. The first step is The Failure of the Priests.

Now these priests were those in Israel whose place was to stand before God. They represent the elect in this aspect; that of communion. The priests, Levites, and common Israelites do not, strictly speaking, represent different portions of the Church. Like the various offerings which typify, not many offerings, but different aspects of the same, these different offices represent the different relations, into the participation of all which the elect is called. God of old, spoke "in divers manners and at sundry times." His revelations then were, as I have said, piece-meal. In these last days, He was spoken by a Son, who revealed not one aspect of God's mind, but all; who is Himself, Priest, Levite, Israelite. As Priest He communes with God. As Levite He serves. As Israelite He is one of Abraham's seed. And His members are called, as He is, into the same relations. Whether we apprehend or do not apprehend them, our calling, if in Him, is to be "as He is" (I John 4:17), and to "follow on to apprehend that for which we apprehended" (Phil. 3:12). Just in proportion as through faith we apprehend the place of communion, we stand as priests. Just as we apprehend the place of service, we are Levites. We are Israelites when we only apprehend redemption, and see no more than that we are members of "the holy nation," the elect people. Such as apprehend the first, practically do many things which the last cannot. It is not that all are not called with the same calling. All are so called. But all do not apprehend that for which in Christ they are apprehended. "Are all prophets" to open the mind of God? No (I Cor. 12:29). For all do not apprehend their union with Christ in this relation by the Holy Ghost. And yet of all it may be said, "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things" (I John 2:20). The last gives us our calling for which we are apprehended - the first our apprehension of that calling. The priest then shows the elect as apprehending the place of communion with God: The Levite as in service for Him: The common Israelite shows him as one of the peculiar people, the seed of Abraham, the friend of God. The failure of the priests therefore represents the failure of the Church in communion with God.¹ Three several forms of this failure are given here.

[i] The first is misuse of God's sacrifice. The sons of Eli seem to have regarded it as solely for their own convenience. God's part and God's glory in it were quite forgotten; for "the priest's custom with the people was, that when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant came while the flesh was seething, with a flesh-hook of three teeth in his hand; and he struck it into the pan, or cauldron, or pot. All that the flesh-hook brought up, the priest took for himself. Also, before they burnt the fat, the priest's servant came, and said to the men that sacrificed, Give flesh to roast for the priest; for he will not have sodden flesh of thee, but raw. And if any man (remembering that the fat of the sacrifice was the Lord's appointed portion) (Lev. 3:3-5,9,10,14-16; also 7:30-33) said unto him, Let them not fail to burn the fat presently, and then take as much as thy soul desireth; then he would answer him, Nay, but thou shalt give it me now, and if not, I will take it by force. Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord; for men abhorred the offering of the Lord" (I Sam. 2:12-17).

Such was the sin of the priests; misusing the holy things, regarding the sacrifice as solely for their own convenience; forgetting that though by God's ordinance the priests were to be fed on the offering of the Lord, He also was to be satisfied and honored in it.

And this form of evil is as common now perhaps as in Eli's days, and its punishment and end are yet the same. There is a way of regarding God's sacrifice as solely to satisfy us, forgetting God's part in it, and that it is also, to satisfy Him. The atonement may be so regarded, merely in reference to our wants, to the exclusion of that portion of the truth connected with it respecting God's glory. The consequence inevitable will be a misuse of Christ's body and blood, leading men to turn God's grace into lasciviousness. How many are there who profess to make their boast in grace, and to know their place as members of Christ, who yet would be astonished to be told that this union with Him involves practical conformity to Him in His ways. Such look on the sacrifice of Christ as a reprieve to their flesh, rather than as the witness that their flesh must die. They seem to think Christ died in the flesh that they might live in it: they would ever dwell on that part of the truth, which speaks of our satisfaction in His death, to the exclusion of that which witnesses that, if we are satisfied with His death, we must also die with Him. The consequence is, first a godless walk on the part of priests, and then "men abhor the offering of the Lord," as though it were chargeable with this ungodliness. "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure!" (II Tim. 2:19). And though many professing to know God, shall in works deny Him (Tit. 1:16), turning His grace into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 4), the truth of His grace shall stand, and be life and meat to His saints (John 6:53-58), while others in it eat and drink their own judgment (I Cor. 11:29).

Here then is the first sin of the priests, and the first step to Saul. Evils in worship and communion, permitted without restraint, make Israel cry out for something else, at last for rule like the nations. And Saul in due time is the result.

[ii] But the sin of the priests did not stop here with misuse of the holy things. Their next step is fornication. "They lay with the women that assembled by troops at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation" (Ch. 2:22). The New Testament repeatedly teaches the spiritual application of this. So we read in the Epistle of James, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God" (Jas. 4:4). But what is said of Babylon the mother of harlots (Rev. 17:1,2; and compare II Cor. 11:2), not to refer to other Scriptures, makes the spiritual application of the sin of the priests intelligible enough. The sin was a mingling and defiling of the holy seed, an incontinency with what was disallowed by God, a seeking in forbidden relations through spiritual lust what God for our profit has denied. Such a failure of the priests is but too common now. Who is not witness to the mixing of the holy seed in unhallowed unions, to the dishonor of the Church's holy calling. To two Churches, both commended by their Lord for charity, service, faith, and patience, and for last works more than the first, this word is sent, - "Thou hast those there who teach My servants to commit fornication" (Rev. 2:14,20). Here is fornication, not only permitted, but taught in the church. Solemn and humbling thought! And we have but to look around us to see such fornication yet

taught; friendships with the world, a mingling of the holy see, commended, if not commanded, in the very house of God.

[iii] One other fact is mentioned here, which further illustrates the state of the priests. I refer to the particulars connected with God's call to Samuel. This call was indeed itself the seal and witness of the failure of the priests; but the way in which it was received witnessed the same. God calls one of His elect, to make known to him the Church's sin. This young saint, though "ministering to the Lord" (Ch 3:1), is as yet doing so "before Eli", "not knowing the Lord" (Ch. 3:1,7). And how many are yet ministering to the Lord in the same way, personally ignorant of learning from the Lord, and walking before His saints rather than before Him. Such an one is wakened of the Lord to see the evil in His house; and little thinking that God is speaking to him, he goes at once to the aged priest. But Eli sends him back again to sleep; - "Go lie down, I called thee not" (Ch. 3:5-6). God calls His child to see and hear the evil in the Church. The aged priest sends him to sleep again, because he had not called him. And those who should be walking in living communion with God, on whom lies the responsibility of witnessing against the Church's sin, instead of "keeping knowledge as the Lord's messengers" (Mal. 2:7), are yet often employed in sending to sleep those whom God wakes up, as though God could not speak unless by them. It is true that if God wakes up a soul to speak with it, He will make it hear. But how often are such lulled to sleep again for awhile by aged priests. And yet, as in the case before us, an aged priest, with all his present unfaithfulness, and though God passes him by, not deigning to make him the vehicle for revealing His mind, can often discern what a younger saint, even though more faithful, cannot. Such discernment, however, proves nothing as to faithfulness. By-gone communion, though it may give ability to discern whether God is speaking to others, will not procure for us present messages from Himself.

2. Such was the failure of the Priests. God's judgment speedily follows. The family of Eli are cut off in a day (Ch. 4:17-18). God then raises up a Prophet, that is, teaching comes in, in the place of communion. For awhile the Prophet's word seems to restore Israel. He bids them return to the Lord; and blessing attends his words (Ch. 7:3). His word comes to all Israel. He delivers them from the Philistines; he judges Israel; he builds an altar. And then the Prophet fails. And this is the second step to the setting up of the kingdom in the hand of Saul. The Prophet, who had taken the place of the Priest, fails to direct Israel; and a King according to their desire is the result.

The failure of the Prophet is seen as follows:

[i] First, one called of God appoints his sons to office, irrespective of the call of God. "It came to pass that when Samuel was old, he made his sons judges over Israel" (Ch. 8:1). Now here at once was failure. God raises up a man, fits him for his work, makes him a prophet, and by his mouth guides Israel. God, having raised up such an one, is with him. But in process of time, this man appointed of God thinks he can and may appoint others. But man cannot make a prophet or judge, for man cannot enable his brother to apprehend those relations of Christ, the personal apprehension of which by a saint, through the Holy Ghost, makes him a gifted man. This is Gods prerogative. Could we qualify men to be

prophets or judges, it might indeed be ours to elect and appoint. But spiritual gifts are not ours to give. "Now hath God set the members every one in the body, as it hath pleased Him" (I Cor. 12:18). And our attempts to do His work are vanity. The Books of Judges, which opens the subject, in a single verse reveals this truth: - "When the Lord raised them up judges, then the Lord was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge" (Judges 2:18). But when a judge made judges, it availed nought. Yet this is what Samuel did. Here was teaching (the prophet) providing for the exercise of discipline, independent of gift from God. Failure this to begin with, and tending to further failure.

I need not apply this. Samuel's course is to be seen still. But too many man-made judges prove it. Now, as then, it is hard to wait and let God guide His own house. We are continually marring His work by doing it for Him. This is the secret of our wretchedness: we will do God's work for Him: we leave nothing for Him to do. And the consequence is, nothing is done; for God will yet do His own work: all who anticipate Him only lose their labor. His will is indeed to save His people, yet not by their actings, but by His own. But, as one has said, "impatience, the fruit of zeal without corresponding faith in the zeal of the Lord of Hosts, has throughout marred the blessing." So Sarah got Ishmael; so Moses failed to deliver; so Samuel appointed his sons; so Israel got Saul; so Saul lost the kingdom. For flesh and blood could not wait for God. In each instance, the necessity of the case might have been urged as the plea that something must be done. But faith recognizes no such necessity. Faith reckons upon God, that He knows and cares for His people's need. "He that believeth shall not make haste" (Isa. 28:16).

But Samuel forgot this, and others since him have forgotten it, and with precisely the same result. Time was, when ministers of the Church were made so by God (Gal. 1:1). He had spoken to them; they could not but speak (Amos 3:8; II Cor. 4:13). And He fitted them for their work; and He was their provision in it. Colleges and livings then there were none. A dying daily was then the living; a bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord (I Cor. 15:31; II Cor. 4:10). In such a course He wrought to His own praise. Full well we know it is not thus when judges make judges. If we know not, the history here may perhaps teach us.

[ii] It tells us that the sons of Samuel were unfaithful judges. Set in office by their father, without the call of God, "they walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment." (Ch. 8:3). This at once led to asking for a king. "They said to Samuel, Thy sons walk not in thy ways; now make us a king to judge us like the nations" (Ch. 8:5). And thus has it ever been. If judges lacking God's call are appointed in the Church, there is necessarily inability to meet the claims upon them. Discipline is not justly administered: there is a regarding of men's persons, "having them in admiration because of advantage" (Jude 16). And then Israel, like Samuel, unable to wait for God, chose the remedy for themselves. "Nay, but we will have a king, that we may be like the nations (that is, like the Gentile world), and that our king may judge us, and go before us, and fight our battles" (Ch. 8:20). Let discipline be unfaithfully exercised; let the Church become a place where, under the pretense of godly judgment, godless injustice and partiality is allowed; then will the people be prepared and call out

for some government, even such as is seen in the world, to deliver them from the distressing uncertainty of partial and unfaithful judges.

Such were the steps which led to Saul. The failure of the priests led to a prophet taking their place; and then the failure of the prophet led to Israel's desired king. First, failure in communion leads to teaching being substituted in its place; and then failure in teaching and discipline, to the setting up of man's rule. And this is universally true. No congregation of believers can exist, be it small or great, ancient or modern, in which these phenomena do not appear. For, indeed, "flesh is flesh" (John 3:6); and "the thing that hath been it is that which shall be" (Ecc. 1:9). Wherever, through failure in communion and discipline, rule is sought as a remedy by saints, that form of it which Saul represents will probably - as in Israel's case, so now - be that which is first obtained. What this rule is, we shall presently see, in considering the character and course of Saul. Enough for me here to say, that the rule they sought and obtained was a practical rejection of God from their midst; and He said, "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me" (Ch. 8:7).

A very little knowledge of the kingdom without will show how true all this is there. And a knowledge of what goes on in "the kingdom within" will but seal the same. Let the Church of individual saints fail in communion; let them droop or err as priests; the next resource will be in prophets, teaching. And this, though for a season staying the onward tide of evil, will in its turn, likewise fail. Then the remedy cried out for is something seen - some other fresh gift of God, to rule or go before us. Men think by rule to remedy their state, into which lack of communion, or lack of faithful discipline, - the latter itself a consequence of the former, - has already brought them.

But such remedies will not do. Man's rule, and walking like the world, will never make up for lack of true communion. Such rule, even as the setting up of the kingdom in the hand of Saul, may at first appear a present remedy for the evils which come in through failure in the priest and prophet. But the long run will show, that this also fails, and that first and last the only safety is in God.

Such is the lesson here. If communion be unbroken, little teaching will suffice. If communion fails, teaching comes in. If faithful teaching and discipline be present, man's rule is not sought. Man's rule sought for is but the proof of previous and deeper failure. Before an Epistle was written, communion led the Apostolic Church above all teaching, in selling their goods, and holding fellowship with all saints. "The multitude of them that believed were of one hearts and of one soul; neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed were his own" (Acts 4:32). Afterwards when communion failed, neither teaching, nor rule, could ever raise the Church higher, or indeed so high. The Lord keep His priests happy in communion, walking according to their calling, with Him. It is the safe and honored place. Unseen indeed we may be - may we be, of men; but near to Him in whom is fullness of joy. Amen.

¹ I add here the words of another, the value of which will be found by those who care and are able to go further in this field "Men, in the types, are the actings of the elect, faithful or not: women, the principles they are connected with."

Section III

The Steps Which Led to a King (continued)

In a living body, one member does not suffer alone. So neither can the Church be without sympathy, or its members independent of each other's state. "If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it" (I Cor. 12:26). We find this from the beginning. Achan sinned, Israel suffered (Joshua 7:1). The spies murmured, and Caleb must with the rest wander forty years (Num. 13:30; 14:33,34; Joshua 14:1,15). So intimately do the acts of one member affect the rest.

The history before us is no exception to this. The failure of the priests affects Israel, leading to ask for a king. But the Holy Ghost, while thus showing us the ultimate consequence of their failure, gives us in detail its immediate effects also. In the sketch given in the preceding pages, I have passed over these details, wishing to keep the great steps which led to Saul clear and unencumbered. The details, however, are so weighty, that before I go on to consider the character of Rule which Israel got according to their wish, I turn for a moment to the immediate consequences of the priest's failure. I speak not of the consequences to themselves - this we have already seen; - but rather to the consequences upon Israel. The 4th, 5th, and 6th chapters give us the particulars; first in the circumstances connected with the loss of the Ark, and then in the judgment which accompanied its restoration. Both its loss for a season, and the chastening inflicted on its restorations, upon the men of Beth-shemesh, were but the natural effects of the priests, failure.

1. The circumstances connected with the loss of the Ark were simply these:

[i] Israel is in narrow straits. Within, God's altar and house are, as we have seen, defiled by sin. Without, Philistines come up and put themselves in array against them. They join battle, and Israel is smitten before the Philistines, and they slay of the army about four thousand men (chap. 4:2). Israel then come together to consult what should be done; and, as usual instead of waiting for God, they act for themselves. They send at once for the Ark of God, in the hope that, as before it Jordan had dried up, it might yet aid them. "Let us fetch," said they, "the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us. That when it cometh among us, it may save us." Vain thought! The Ark is no defense to them nor are they to it. They lose it, and the Philistines take it.

What was this Ark? Is there anything answering to it in the Christian Church? Can we lose it, as Israel did, to our enemies?

For the Ark, it was that hallowed chest which held the tables of the Law. While in the tabernacle, though not afterwards in the temple, it contained also within it the golden pot of manna, and Aaron's rod that budded (Heb. 9:4, and I Kings 8:9). Its cover, of pure gold, called the Mercy seat, formed, as it were, a throne for that glorious cloud which rested on it, and witnessed the Lord's presence among His people.

Now, the vessels of the Tabernacle all represented certain offices or covenant relations of Christ, or rather certain forms or aspects of His covenant relations.¹ The altar set forth the truth of Christ's relation as satisfying God and man; the laver, as cleansing His priests; the candlestick, as giving them light; the shewbread, as giving them bread within the holy place. The ark set forth the truth of His relation to God and man, as securing God's presence among His people; as sealing the truth of the word, "Emmanuel, God with us," and witnessing that elect man is now the Lord's dwelling-place. The ark then represents one form of the truth of God. In the last dispensation the forms which embodied or revealed these truths were carnal forms. Yet truth is still for us contained in forms; for our present powers of perception only allow us to take cognizance of the forms of spiritual truth, not of the truth itself. A doctrine is now our form, and but a form, of truth. The doctrine of God's presence in His Church is that form of truth which the Ark both veiled and revealed.

If this be apprehended, it will at once open to us the spiritual import of Israel's act in sending for the Ark and then losing it. It teaches how prone we are to look to doctrines to help us, rather than to God, and to rest in doctrines rather than in God. It teaches too how even the elect, in conflict with evil (wicked spirits are our foes, Eph. 6:12), if sin be in their camp, cannot keep the truth of God. They may think indeed that the truth of God's presence with them will give them strength. But that truth, which when they were faithful was a blessing, is no defense to them when walking carelessly out of communion with Him. Nor are they able to keep it: it is taken from them. From Eve's days to the present this has been ever so. Poor Eve met the lie of Satan by God's truth. "The serpent said unto the woman, Yea hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the trees of the garden, but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it lest ye die" (Gen. 3:2,3). Here was God's truth brought to meet the Devil's lie. But truth held out of communion will never keep us. The spies had the truth: they spoke it (Num. 13:27,28), but being out of communion with God, it only served to aggravate their sin. Balaam too had the truth (Num. 23:18-24), but he had no communion; and, spite of this words, he fell with the king of Midian (Num. 31:8). Truth held by us, while we are parleying with or listening to the tempter, or while out of communion with God, will not Help, but be used against us. The doctrine of the Holy Ghost in the Church, God's presence with us, will not save but judge us while we walk in sin; yea, will aggravate our sin, and bring tenfold more judgment upon us when unfaithful than if we held it not. And yet that very truth, which in the hands of the carnal, may not only be powerless, but even used against them, is, as we see in our Lord's temptation, the sword of the Spirit, whereby to overcome the evil one. But it has no power, save in judgment, to those who walk not with God. We see it every day. There is not a truth, be it doctrinal or practical, which may not be wrested by the adversary from the disobedient. Promises are of no avail. Precepts are powerless. Experimental truths, which when walking with God were realized, when far from Him bring no peace to the warring soul, conscious of careless walking or willful sin. And indeed it is a mercy that it is so: for God's truths and gifts, whether His ark, His altar, or His laver, these things were given, not to make us independent of God, but to bring and keep us nearer to Him. Justly therefore, when we keep at a distance from Him, does He make us feel that His most precious gifts are nought without the Giver - that neither can

they preserve us from the evil we dread, nor can we preserve them in our possession for Him.

[ii] But if the loss of the ark shows us the consequences to Israel of the failure of the priests, its history among the Philistines opens out a kindred truth. The Ark among the Philistines was their constant curse. Before it their god is broken. By its presence, a judgment from the God of Israel smites their persons and their lands (Ch. 5:8 and 6:5), until they are glad to get rid of it, with the acknowledgment of His power over them. So God's truth, the truth of His presence, in the hands of the world, will be the certain cause of trial and judgment to them. The world, because through the unfaithfulness of the Church they have got hold of certain precious truths, often seem to think the difference between them and Israel is not so very great. Babylon, which takes so many vessels of the sanctuary, especially falls into this snare. But there is a wide difference. Israel, though judged when in sin by the presence of the Ark, when faithful may rejoice in it. When did Philistines rejoice in the Ark? Never. And the truths of God, the joy and glory of His priests, yet make the world uneasy, and cast down their god; like the Ark among the Philistines, therefore, they must be got rid of as soon as may be.

And here I cannot but note, in passing, the effect of the Ark's presence, in a religious point of view, among the Philistines. It led them to talk of what God had done for Israel, and to offer a trespass offering to Israel's God. Certain religious words are said, and certain religious acts are performed, under cover of which the Ark is, as they think, decently dismissed. Their words respecting Israel's redemption are all true enough: - "Wherefore do ye harden your hearts, as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? When He had wrought wonderfully among them did they not let the people go" (Ch. 6:6)? For their acts, five golden mice, and five golden emerods - a trespass offering without blood - are offered to the God of Israel. What God has done for Israel is truly preached. Precious things without blood are offered. Thus is the ark dismissed. All precisely parallel to much which is called religion in the religious world, which is meanwhile (and do they not know it?) only a civil way of getting rid of what makes them uneasy. Be it noted. It is by religious words and acts - the words true, the acts unchristian - that the world gets rid of the truth of God's presence.

2. The circumstances connected with the restoration of the Ark are no less instructive than those connected with its loss, and show no less than the other the far-spreading effects of the failure of the priests, on God's chosen people. God's Ark, for awhile lost by Israel, is again by His grace brought among them. But the men of Beth-shemesh, the priests having failed whose lips should keep knowledge, though rejoiced to see it return, and ready with grateful hearts to sacrifice to God, do with the Ark what was forbidden. They looked into that Ark which none but priests might look on. And judgment at once followed. "The Lord smote the men of Beth-shemesh; and the people lamented because the Lord had smitten many of the people with a great slaughter. And the men of Beth-shemesh said, Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God" (Ch. 6:19,20).

The application of this, according to the analogy of the dispensations, is most simple, yet full of warning. There were things for Israel, as the Ark of God, which, though given for Israel's blessing, and to be kept in their midst, could yet not be touched by all, or looked on by them. None but priests could touch or look upon the Ark. None but Levites bear it.² "And I, brethren," said Paul to the Corinthians, "could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat; for hitherto ye were not able to bear it" (I Cor. 3:1,2) So, also Heb. 5:11-14). There are truths which should ever be in the Church, on the preservation of which in our midst much blessing depends, and which are given of God for us, which yet cannot be looked at safely, save when we realize communion with God, and walk humbly and truly in it. Of this sort especially are some of the truths foreshadowed in certain vessels of the Tabernacle. All Israel can use the brazen altar, and see the vessels of the outer court. Priests only can see the shewbread and incense altar: nay, they only look on these things within the holy-place; out of sight of Israel, in God's more immediate presence, walking before Him rather than before His saints. And this is yet the only place to look on some truths respecting Christ. In priestly communion we can and may discern all things. But of all things dangerous, the most dangerous is carnal handling of spiritual truths. (The recovery of the doctrine of universal reconciliation will turn grace into lasciviousness by those who are not in true communion with God [Priests]). "The right faith is that we worship."

This then is the lesson taught here. Long lost truth by grace regained by the Church, as it was lost through failure in communion, will often be met on its recovery by a corresponding lack of communion, and judgment on Israel will be the result. For our God is a consuming fire. And the more precious the blessing is which He communicates, the more jealous is He of the way in which it is received and used. We are apt to think, knowing that truth is of God, that the mere presence of truth among us, must necessarily involve blessing. But truth of itself, without preparedness of heart, may be, nay will be, only judgment. (James 4:17 He that knows to do good... etc.). Surely some of us have seen and felt this in the recovery, through grace, of certain lost and forgotten truths within our own days. The truth respecting the Incarnation, involving as it does so much, among other points, God's presence in the Church, by the Holy Ghost; - the consequences flowing from Christ's true humanity, whereby God is "Emmanuel, God with us"; - the truths of His return; - how have all these, in some cases, on their first recovery, been accompanied by judgments upon those, who though they rejoiced at that recovery, yet misused what was recovered through lack of communion.

And how precisely the consequences of such failure is the same now as of old. The men of Beth-shemesh, like David afterwards on a like occasion (II Sam. 6:9), at once wished to get rid of the Ark. It caused them judgment; and they forgot that it arose from the failure of the priests and Levites with them. And how often have we seen precious truth, just restored, shunned by saints on account of the judgments which have accompanied its misuse on its restoration. Instead of judging themselves for unpreparedness and incapacity rightly to use the gifts of God, men are ready to judge the gifts as the cause of all their sorrow. The very chastening which comes in mercy to teach the difference between the use and misuse of truth, is made an argument for hastily dismissing the whole matter. Yet wisdom is justified of all her children. And though, like David, many

have yet to learn by painful chastenings, the deep responsibility of handling the truths of God, with him they will say at last, "Sanctify yourselves, ye and your brethren, that ye may bring up the Ark of the Lord God of Israel. For because ye did it not at the first, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought Him not after the due order" (I Ch. 15:12,13).

¹ The different parts of the Tabernacle, the respective burdens of Kohath, Gershon, and Merari, bring out each a particular and definite line of truth. The vessels, Kohath's burden, seem one and all, to have reference to the truths connected with Christ's offices, or covenant relations. The hangings, Gershon's charge, as being the covering of the Tabernacle, and so answering to what garments are to an individual, seem clearly to point to the truths connected with Christ's condition, or developed character. Respecting the boards and sockets, Merari's burden, I do not feel so sure. As being composed of wood and gold, they may represent the truths connected with His two-fold nature, human and divine; and I am disposed to think this is correct.

² The law directed, that when the Ark move, Aaron and his sons were to go into the holy place, there to wrap up the Ark in the veil. Over that, they were to put a covering of badgers- skins, and then a cloth of blue. The staves were then put in . When this was done, the Levites, the sons of Kohath, were permitted to bear it by the staves. But the law was express "They shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die" (Num. 4:15)

Section IV

The Respective Characters of the First Two Kings

"God's thoughts are not man's thoughts." We have one proof of this in the setting up of the king whom Israel asked. And the intimations we obtain upon this subject of the mind of God, show us how different are His thoughts from the thoughts even of His own elect. Their hope is, when the priest and prophet fail, to find in some new or added gift the remedy for Israel's state. A king, they think, will bring the needed help. Rule, the character of which they determine for themselves, is therefore asked of God. In answer to this request, God first returns a solemn warning, pointing out the consequences which such a request involves. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in Me is thy help. I will be thy king. Where is any other that may save thee in all thy cities"? (Hosea 13:9,10). But Israel persists in the petition; - "Nay, but we will have a king" (Ch. 8:19). He therefore gives them their own desire. "Thou saidst, Give me a king. I gave thee a king in Mine anger, and took him away in My wrath" (Hosea 13:10,11). As with flesh in the wilderness, so was it with the desired king: - "He gave them their request, but withal sent leanness into their soul" (Psa. 106:15).

In all this, Israel's thoughts were not God's thoughts. The next step shows that God's thoughts are not man's thoughts. The desired king fails to deliver. God then comes in again in grace. He meets their need Himself, giving a king after His own heart. But Israel cannot yet think with God. Spite of His gift in grace, a gift to which they owe their safety, Saul, their own choice, though he fails to deliver, is yet preferred; David, God's choice though he delivers, is rejected. My wish is to point out the different characters of Rule in the Church which these kings represent. For the Church is yet of Israel's mind. The Rule asked for and chosen by themselves, though confessedly powerless against evil, is yet preferred to that given of God, and which can really aid.

1. The character and consequences of the Rule asked by Israel are seen respectively in their request, and in God's reply.

[i] First, its character is seen in Israel's request, which is to the very letter granted. Israel did not only ask for a king. They stated very precisely what sort of a king they would have: - "a king to judge us like the nations; that we also may be like the nations, and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles" (Ch. 8:6,20). Their wish was, under the sense of their need, to have something strong in their midst and before their eyes, to do those things for them which God had done for their fathers. Such an one was asked who could fight their battles and go before them, and do for them what God had covenanted to do: who could, in fact, take His place, as though He were absent from them, and needed one to act instead of Him for and towards His people. In a word, a gift of God was wanted rather than God. And God in giving them Saul, gave them exactly what they asked.¹ Israel had desired something strong in their midst "to go before them." God gave the strongest man in Israel. "Behold," says Samuel, as he sets Saul before them, - "Behold the king whom ye have chosen and whom ye have desired (Ch. 12:13). "A choice young man and a goodly: there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier

person than he: from his shoulders and upwards he was higher than any of the people" (Ch. 9:2)." Samuel said unto the people, Behold, there is none like him among all the people. And the people shouted and said, Let the king live" (Ch. 10:23,24).

And his ways agree with his person, and with Israel's desire in asking such a king. As their eyes rested on him with joy because "there was none like him"; so his eye rested, not on God, but on the strong in Israel. "When Saul saw any strong man or any valiant man, he took him to him(self): "(Ch. 14:52). The same spirit leads him ever in was, to meet strength with strength. Thus against the Ammonites he gathers all Israel. (Ch. 11:7,8). So too against Amalek (Ch. 15:4). So again in the valley of Elah, he meets the Philistines with an host (Ch. 17:21). What is strong in Israel, that he looks for and uses. But a present God, One who in Himself can be everything to Israel, such an One he never once seems to reckon on. In one word, Saul and his ways throughout were an example of using the gifts of God, for Israel's good indeed, but as though God were absent. As though He who had dwelt with them in a tent when they dwelt in tents, who had walked with forty years when they walked in a wilderness, would be content, now that He brought them over Jordan, to dwell apart from them, or let gifts take His place, or allow His work, in still saving and caring for them, to be done by others. Little did they know God who thought thus; little did they think how by such thoughts they were making His best gifts real curses.

[ii] For what were the consequences of such a king? God, in reply to their request, tells them that their desired king involves two things: first, a practical rejection of Himself from being king in Israel; and, secondly, a bringing of all Israel into bondage. As far as God is concerned, a king like Saul is a rejection of God. A king, "to judge Israel, and fight their battles," to do what God had covenanted to do, what was this but practically saying that He either could not or would not help, and that something else must therefore take His place? So God regards it. "They have not rejected thee," says God to Samuel, "but they have rejected Me" (Ch. 8:7). As far as Israel is concerned, a word sums it all up - "Ye shall be his servants." "This shall be the manner of your king; he will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, and he will take your daughters to be cooks and bakers; and he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them; and he will take the tenth of your seed and of your vineyards; and he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and put them to his work; and he will take the tenth of your sheep, and ye shall be his servants" (Ch. 8:11-17). This is remarkable. As their king would take God's place, so says God, he will take My portion. He will take "the tenth", which is My share; and he will take you, who are now My servants, to be "his servants", and to do "his work" instead of Mine. It came to this, - the relation Israel had formerly held to God they should now hold to Saul. God's rule is changed for man's rule. And as God is put out of His place, so are Israel out of theirs; "Ye shall be his servants."

2. What a contrast to all this is David, God's gift in grace, the king "after God's own heart" (Ch. 13:14). In him we have one ever occupied with the Giver, rather than with His gift, expecting and finding all in Him. Such a king, as he does not take God's place, so neither does he take God's portion. Under him Israel are not his, but the Lord's servants.

Unlike Saul, one of majestic mien, David is "but a youth and ruddy" (Ch. 17:42); the youngest son, keeping his father's sheep (Ch. 15:11), calling himself "a dead dog, a flea, a partridge" (Ch. 24:14; 26:20), from first to last he lives to declare that Israel's strength is nought, but that God ever goes before, and judges, and fights for Israel. Friends and foes all see this. Their witness is not to David's strength, but they see and they testify, "that the Lord is with him" (Ch. 16:18; 18:12,14,28, etc.).

But an example may better illustrate the contrast between the two. In the valley of Elah, Saul and David meet. Saul comes before us at the head of Israel, meeting army with army, strength arrayed against strength (Ch. 17:21). To such an one, who saw not a present God, it was but natural to say, as he looked upon the stripling, the shepherd lad, "Thou are not able to go against the Philistine." To such an one it seemed only right, if the stripling would go, in preparation for the battle, to put upon him and in his hands, all the strength the flesh could grasp. Accordingly Saul take David, and put on him "his armor, and his helmet, and his sword, and his coat of mail." He had said, indeed, "Go, and the Lord be with thee," - many preach grace who cannot trust it, - but the armor showed his real estimate of the sufficiency of a present God. And this ever marks Saul. If his lips, as they often do, speak grace, his acts deny it by a practical appeal to other strength. What a contrast in David; his words and ways agree; his thought is not that he, a youth and ruddy, but that God, present in the midst, is Israel's strength. "The Lord," says he, "who delivered me from the bear and lion, He will deliver me." So with the armor; "David said, I cannot go with these, for I have not proved them; and he put them off him." And so in all he does. A staff, a sling, and but five smooth stones - this was poor armor. But David saw a present God. In his eyes it is not David and the Philistine, but God and the Philistine who meet: - "The battle is the Lord's." "Thou comest with sword and spear; I come to thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand, and all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth." Thus did David prevail, with a sling and a stone; but there was no sword in the hand of David" (Ch. 17:47.50).

Such was David; and hence his "doings, begun, continued, and ended in God," as they witnessed His presence, brought Him glory. And so it is ever. Does David doubt, he inquires of the Lord (Ch. 23:2). Do his followers doubt, he inquires yet again (Ch. 23:4). Does he know that Saul secretly plots against him he says at once to the priest, "Bring hither the ephod." And the character of his inquiries, the child-like confidence in God which they express, all testify how he witnessed to a present God. "Then said David, O Lord God of Israel, thy servant hath certainly heard that Saul seeketh to come to Keilah, to destroy the city for my sake. Will the men of Keilah deliver me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as thy servant hath heard? O Lord God of Israel, I beseech Thee, tell Thy servant. And the Lord said, he will come down. Then said David, Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hands of Saul? And the Lord said, They will deliver thee up" (Ch. 23:10,12). And David's course is the same even when he fails, as the history in Chapters 27-30 shows. He goes down to Gath, and gets entangled: the consequence is chastening from God. Ziklad, the city where he dwelt, is burnt with fire, and his wives and all he has are carried away. "And David was greatly distressed, for the people spake of stoning him; but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God. And

David said to the priest, Bring hither the ephod. And David enquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I pursue after this troop? shall I overtake them? And He answered him, Pursue, for thou shalt surely overtake them, and recover all." Well might David be "the man after God's own heart." God looked upon His chosen people Israel, and found none believing His presence, or trusting His love. But there is one, a failing man, deeply conscious of what he is, but one who has learnt also to believe what God is. With no opinion of himself, he has ever a good opinion of God; his witness ever is, that God is near; that He is good, that He is the remedy - Himself the present remedy - for all Israel's wants.

If we want a foil to all this, we have but to remember Saul. Commanded by God's prophet to wait a message from God, he cannot trust God sufficiently to wait the appointed time; he must himself act for Israel (Ch. 13:8-13). So again, when God is manifestly working for Israel's good, Saul says to the priest, "Bring hither the ark." Here we are reminded of his words to David, "Go and the Lord be with thee." But what are his acts? Instead of waiting for God's answer, he says to the priest, "Withdraw thine hand" (Ch. 14:18,19). Again he acts for himself. The end is, that when he would inquire of God, he gets no answer. "Then said Saul to his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit" (Ch. 27:7). To him, practically at least, there was no God in Israel.

3. Such were Saul and David; and the spiritual realities which they foreshadowed are now around us in the Church. Saul, the king after man's heart, put by Israel into God's place, stands the type of one form of anti-Christian rule. In him we have rule in the place of the Word, that is, in the place of the manifestation of God; not, in the first instance, willfully against Christ - though practically indeed it amounts to this - but acting in His place, and standing as His vicar for Him.² Of such rule we have the most perfect expression in the Church of Rome. Popery openly confesses and declares that ministry and rule are vicarial; that is, they are to do for Christ the work which He did when present. They are to do it instead of Him; thus involving the idea of an absent and forgetful Lord. Such a notion, as in Popery, where it has had full play, may and probably will, end in openly making some creature Christ's vicar; but, in principle it exists wherever ministerial rule is claimed or recognized as vicarial. It may exist as much in the sect of yesterday, as in the system which boasts a lineage of a thousand years; nay, perhaps its virus may be more active in the former than in the latter; inasmuch as the sect of yesterday, being yet in its youth, and free from these prescriptive bonds which are some restraint to the workings of older systems, may have greater powers, and give wider room for the vigorous expression of that spirit, which is after all only one form of the natural acting of the old man. Such rule may be known by its acts and fruits, not by its words. Like Saul, standing in the strength of gift, rather than in the strength of God the Giver, it will ever choose seen things and strong things to serve Israel. It can see and own God's gifts; it cannot Himself. It forgets that He who can use weak things to confound the strong, and things which are not to bring to nought the things that are, is yet "the living God," and will yet be "the Savior", and do His own work in His Church, to His own glory. And vicarial rule, in forgetting this, practically excommunicates Christ and rejects God. Zealous for gift, it denies grace; it denies God, that which He most asks for, a place among men, as Himself, beyond and above all His gifts, their one sufficient portion.

And vicarial rule, as it puts God out of, so it puts man into, His place. Under it the Church, as Israel in Saul's case, is brought into bondage. Indeed it is become a proverb that spiritual dominion, or what is commonly recognized as such, is generally a spirit of domination; that it has a disposition to enslave and imposes a heavy yoke, not only on men's bodies but upon their minds. The Church of Rome, in which the fullest manifestations of vicarial rule has as yet been seen, is proof enough of this. Like Saul, it makes rules far beyond the Word of God; and then, like Saul, judges those whose faith leads them, beyond or without rules, to deliver Israel. Such, if they dare to act independently of that rule which claims to be acting for God, - in a word, if they walk before a present God rather than before men who take His place, - will, though their faith deliver Israel, yet hear Saul's word, - "Thou shalt surely die, Jonathan" (Ch. 14:44). Vain it is to answer, "I did but taste a little honey with the rod that is in mine hand." The answer is yet, "Thou shalt surely die." But faith is not to be so tied. A Jonathan can see, if Israel cannot, that by such rules "Saul troubles Israel" (Ch. 14:29). Yet the mass of Israel do not see this: they are tied and troubled by such acts, and yet in bondage to them.

One word more respecting vicarial rule. Saul did not assume his place. It was given him according to Israel's wish. So has it been with anti-Christian rule in the place of Christ. Ministers do not seize this place; it is ever yielded by the people. Pastors have not so much arrogated it, as the flocks have sought it. It is but the old story over again of Moses in the mount. The mediator is out of sight, in God's presence for Israel. Then the cry is, "Give us gods to go before us" (Ex. 32:1). Out of communion, man wants and will have something seen and tangible, to put in the place of an unseen and distrusted God.

But enough of Saul, the king after man's own heart, and of the rule he represents. Let us now turn to that rule which is after God's heart. David also is a king. Here again we have rule; but rule according to Christ. We must not therefore suppose that rule in itself is opposed to God; for Christ Himself is King as well as Priest. But in David, as indeed in Him whom David represents, rule ever glorifies God. Even in that day when "every knee shall bow to Christ, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; when every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord," it shall be "to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10,11). And David's rule is to the same end, ever witnessing for God, that His joy is to dwell among and care for men. His rule, therefore, so far from being vicarial, in the sense I have used the word, that is, to do instead of God, or for Him, what He would do if there, proceeds on a principle the very reverse, and only exists to be the witness for His abiding presence. In a word, David embodies the truth which St. Paul affirms, that "the gifts which Christ gave" to guide the Church, "when He ascended up on high", so far from being in the place of an absent Lord, are "that the Lord God might dwell among them" (Compare Psa. 68:18, and Eph. 4:8); that rulers in the Church are nothing, save as they witness for a present God; that they do nothing to any purpose, save as they lead to Him. And surely this is the secret of the power of apostolic ministry: - "They went forth and preached, the Lord working" (Mark 16:20). They preached, the Lord worked. They confessed that they were powerless, but that in all the diversities of work, there was one sufficient Workman: - "There are diversities of operation, but it is the same God who worketh all in all" (I Cor. 12:6).

And, indeed, if Christ be in the Church, if His gifts are a proof, not that He is absent and needs vicars, but "that He yet dwells amongst us," what can be more dishonoring to Him than ministerial rule as in His place or stead; what more to His glory and our blessing than a recognition of His presence. Under the one, the height of the man, the power of the gift or creature, will be everything in Israel's eyes. In the other, the gift is nothing save to witness that the Giver lives. God does indeed use men as instruments towards and in the Church; but where they are truly His gifts in grace, instead of usurping His place, or getting between Him and His saints, they live but to bring the Church into His presence. When most used of God they most testify, "Thine is the kingdom," not ours. And instead of claiming for themselves the homage due to God, instead of bringing the Church into bondage by perverting His gifts, they, if in their place, as much as any others, nay more than any others, must say with David, "the kingdom is the Lord's, and He is the Governor among the people: (Psa. 22:28).

Such rule gendereth not to bondage; for as it practically witnesses how God serves, how He waits to meet and minister to His people's need, so it stamps on those who apprehend it the impress of that word, "He that is great, let him be servant of all" (Mark 10:44). It delivers from bondage too, inasmuch as it brings men personally to deal with Him, who can alone set them free. For, as one has said, "true government in the church is not a setting of points right, but of souls right: nothing therefore is done unless the conscience of the church is brought in the act to deal with God. It is pure unmasked Popery, the clergy dictating to the conscience of the church. Is the conscience of the church to be disposed of by others, be they never so wise"? God's answer is seen in St. Paul's words: - "Let every one be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5). He cares not to set the point right. He would set the soul right. False rule in the Church ever reverses this. And it may thus be known. It usurps God's place in dealing with conscience. It is quite content to set points right. It cares little about setting souls right.

I might enlarge upon this subject, but what I have said may give the clue to the other details in the characters of Saul and David. I therefore only add one word on the treatment which God's prophet, God's priest, and God's king, receive from Saul. God's prophet he neglects and disobeys (Chs. 13 and 15); God's priest he slays (Ch. 12); God's king he casts out and persecutes (Chs. 24 and 26). True teaching, true worship and communion, true rule in the Church, fare but badly when vicarial rule is strong. The first is neglected, the second destroyed, the third openly cast out. Yet Saul, in due season, comes to his end: - "The mighty fall, the weapons of war perish!" (II Sam. 1:27). I need not trace how all this is applicable to "the kingdom within". There the same tendency exists, as in the Church without, to substitute gift for God. It is a solemn thought, but it is most true, that God's gifts may be made only a means of rejecting Him. Nor will any religious profession or outward connection exempt us from the temptation. Not only is it true that no church or sect will keep us from it; but churches and sects, the better they are, may the more lead us to it. I know not what good thing of God there is, doctrine, ordinance, or gift, which may not be used practically to make us deny Him from whom they come. Yea, the better the gift, the greater may be the temptation to put it into the place of God. The remedy, the only remedy, is in personal communion with God, in the knowledge that He is Himself better to us than all else beside.

May the Lord bestow upon His Church the spirit of wisdom in the knowledge of Him, the discern what is according, and what opposed, to His mind. And may we know His presence. Jerusalem can well afford to be without walls, when God is there (Zech. 2:4,5).

¹ It is to be remembered that Saul means "demanded," according to the usual etymology.

² I am satisfied that, according to the derivation of the word, Antichrist means, primarily, "in the place of Christ," rather than 'against Christ.' The word anti in Latin vice, whence we get the word Vicar - the very title claimed in reference to Christ by the Pope of Rome - is literally "in the place of." For examples of this sense of anti in composition I add the following for which I am indebted to Elliot's *Horae Apocalypticae*, p. 839: Acts 13:7, the deputy, or proconsul: not "against the consul," but "in the place of the consul."

Section V

The Causes of God's Rejection of the First King

We have already traced the steps which led to the setting up of Saul. It remains to consider the causes which led to God's rejection of him. Two acts of his are recorded, agreeing in character though differing in form, as a punishment for which he lost the kingdom. Both these acts were connected with religious worship; both excused by Saul; both, probably, such as Israel justified. Yet both were judged of God. The spirit of Saul yet lives and reigns; and acts, answering to those for which Saul lost the kingdom, still are wrought and still justified in the Church. Are we guilty of such acts? Are we approving them? Surely these are questions which deserve from us a careful and attentive answer.

1. Saul's sin was first, disobedience in acting irrespective of God. The command given to him was, that in certain circumstances which should arise, he should wait for the direction of the prophet of God, and not presume to act without that direction (Ch 10:8). The circumstances arise precisely as foretold (Ch 13:7). They are urgent in the extreme. Israel is sore distressed. The prophet lingers as though he would not come. Saul has no direction from God: yet he must himself do something for Israel's good. He knows this is disobedience, for the prophet's word was express; he was to wait at Gilgal for a word from God. But necessity seems to compel. He "forces himself" therefore, and acts irrespective of God. He offers a burnt-offering; but ere he can offer a peace-offering upon it, the prophet appears according to his word. And what is Saul's excuse, which he immediately pours forth into the ear of the sorrowing though faithful prophet? From first to last, a summing up of the circumstances in which he was placed, by them to justify a course which he knew was wrong. "I saw," says he, "that the people were scattered from me; I saw that thou camest not within the days appointed: I saw that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash: therefore I said, The Philistines will come down to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication: I forced myself therefore" (Ch. 13:11,12). In a word, the hope of saving Israel; the fear of the danger which pressed upon him; the apparent failure of God's prophet, though he came as appointed; these are the grounds on which he seeks to justify an act, the performance of which he confesses was a "forcing of himself". But this justification is not accepted. "Samuel said unto Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord. And now thy kingdom shall not continue, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee" (Ch. 13:13,14).

It needs not much discernment of what is going on in the Church, to see how the spirit of Saul still abides and works. How many things are there, acts of sacrifice it may be, now as then, which stand precisely on the same ground as this of Saul's; which are felt by the actors to be questionable at least, which need self-forcing to be performed, which are without commandment from the Lord; yea, contrary to His command, which yet are justified by the apparent necessity of the case. Some evil to be met seems great. God has bidden us wait on Him for direction. We have no such direction in the particular case. Shall we not act with what strength we have, and according to our own judgment? The

sin of disobedience, at such a time, seems almost justified by our need. The disobedience is so trifling; merely acting without a command from God; acting according to the best of our ability, with a sincere desire for Israel's good. Surely in such circumstances we need not wait. True, we have been commanded not so to act - not to be forced by circumstances to act irrespective of a word from God; or take any step in doubt (Rom. 14:23), as though He had failed His Church, or needed us to sin and disobey Him to fulfill His purpose. But when circumstances press upon the Church, the spirit of Saul cannot so wait for God, or resist at once doing something which looks, at least, like aiding Israel. Something therefore is done: a sacrifice it may be: something good, something which looks religious: which yet, if it be analyzed before God, proves two things; first, infidelity in His presence; and secondly, confidence that our remedy, if not quite so efficient as God's, will yet do something to meet the need.

But religious acts performed with a bad conscience, performed without commandment from God, though their object be to help Israel, and trifling as their sin may be regarded by the doers, are very differently judged by God. To Him they are most hateful; far worse in His sight than those sins which most stink in the world's nostrils. For the exhibition of our filthiness, bad as it is, only proves what we are; but unbelief does what it can to misrepresent God. It gives Him a bad character, practically affirming Him to be, what man even most shrinks from being called; a liar and one who cannot be trusted. All unbelief "makes God a liar" (I John 5:10), and assumed Him careless about His saints; but acts of unbelief, which are like this of Saul's which, though begun and ended with a bad conscience, are covered with a cloak of worship and religious zeal, are doubly offensive to Him. For they assume that man is careful and God careless of the Church; but that man, acting in disobedience and with a bad conscience, can be accepted. But Saul thinks little of all this; for as he regards not Israel's conscience, he can scarcely be expected to regard his own. And it is a sure mark of Saul's rule yet, that those who exercise it, while perhaps seeking to bless the Church, yet live in practical unbelief of God's presence by the Holy Ghost, even while in religious acts they appear outwardly to be serving God and His saints, are by those very acts forcing their own conscience. Oh! what an unveiling will there one day be, when sacrifices and service are weighed in God's balances and not in man's! Then how many of the religious acts and religious deeds of religious men, will be found to have been unmixed belief; begun without command, performed in doubt with an evil conscience, and entailing shame and contempt rather than a good reward.

2. We return once more to Saul. Having begun, as we have seen, by acting irrespective of God's command, his next step is disobedience, in acting contrary to God's command. Here, as in the former instance, the word was express. Saul is to smite Amalek, and utterly to destroy them. Nothing is to be spared. "Both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass, all are to be destroyed" (Ch. 15:2,3). Instead, however, of obeying this command, the king of Amalek and the best of the spoil are spared. And, as a reason for the disobedience, Saul alleges that what had been spared was spared for sacrifice unto the Lord. But the apology does not satisfy God. Hath the Lord [He asks] as great delight in burnt offerings, as in obeying His voice? Behold to obey is

better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He also hath rejected thee from being king (Ch. 15:22,23).

Now, this command, the way it was executed, the excuse rendered, and God's judgment of it, all these in spirit surely yet remain. It will not be difficult to point to the spiritual realities they prefigured, in the Church, and in the present day.

What then was the command? It was to "smite Amalek, and utterly to destroy all they had." In the letter (the letter killeth, see II Cor. 3:6) this command, with its dispensation, has passed away: the literal Amalek has long since perished; but, in spirit, it is binding still. To see its force, we have only to discern the spiritual idea or reality of which Amalek was the appointed figure. Of course, as one of Israel's enemies, Amalek represents some enemy of the Church, some spiritual enemy, for the Church is spiritual. "We wrestle not", - as Joshua and the carnal Israel did, - "against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against wicked spirits in heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12, marg.)

"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh; for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (II Cor. 10:3-5). And indeed our appointed weapons show the character of our foe, - "the shield of faith," "the breastplate of righteousness," "the helmet of salvation," "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" (Eph. 6:14-17) - these, as they are forged by no earthly hand, so are they for no earthly conflict.

But which of our spiritual foes does Amalek represent? For as Israel had many enemies, so has the Church. Now, though to trace the true application of all the nations connected with ancient Israel, requires a measure of the gift of discerning of spirits, which few, I believe, if any, now possess: yet, to discern some of the plainer of these is surely within our reach. The typical idea of Egypt and Babylon is sufficiently plain. I believe it is so with Amalek also. Amalek was one of Esau's sons (Gen. 36:1-12). As such, as the offspring of him who, as the rejected first born, has ever been the chief type of fleshly strength, Amalek, as his father Esau, stands a figure of the same fleshly strength, though in a rather different aspect, and at a further stage. Just as Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, generation after generation, all represent the same elect, the one seed of promise; each, though in slightly different aspects, foreshadowing that same 'younger son,' whose blessing stands not in the right or strength of the flesh, but in God's electing grace (Gal. 4:22-31); so it is with Esau and his seed. From generation to generation they foreshadowed the one same 'elder son.' For "that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6); and again, "As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterwards that which is spiritual" (I Cor 15:46,48). Esau and Amalek represented that which was first and natural, the strength of the flesh, the rejected firstborn, as distinguished from the new creature.

Now, this flesh and its strength, though one of Israel's foes, has good things of its own. Indeed, it is a great mistake to think that flesh has nothing but what is vile and refuse. The old or natural man has what may be esteemed good things; but of its best things the doom is fixed: the redemption of the elect seals their judgment (Gal. 5:24). What these good things are may be seen in the Jew. Indeed, the Jew is the true 'elder son'. In him we see the perfection, if perfection it may be called, of "that which is first and natural." And what were his good things? St. Paul more than once refers to them, always in condemnation. "If any man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more." And then comes the catalogue of good things wherein the flesh might glory: - "Circumcised the eighth day; of the stock of Israel; of the tribe of Benjamin;" - that is, of the tribe which came up from Babylon; - "a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless" (Phil. 3:4-6). Here we have, first, birth in the flesh of Abraham's seed; next, the right administration of carnal ordinances; then connection with the most distinguished part of Israel; then blameless moral conduct; then religious zeal. These things may give us a clue to the other good things of the flesh. They are the good things which man can do without grace. They include all that prudence, and affection, and religiousness of the natural heart, which, though certainly religious, is as certainly not Christian; which may be seen now, as in Christ's days, under many forms; now compassing sea and land to make one proselyte; now zealous for the temple and its gold; now building the tombs of the prophets and garnishing the sepulchers of the righteous; now saying, If we had been in the days of our fathers we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets (Matt. 23:15,16, 29.30); yet ever to be known by this mark, "a desire to make fair show in the flesh" (Gal. 6:12), a desire to be something or have something here. Well might Paul say, "These things were gain to me," for in these could Paul, as a man, glory: but all these things were to be "counted as dung," and judged by those, who, being "the true circumcision", could "rejoice in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:3,7).

But these good things of the flesh, instead of being judged according to God's command, are spared for sacrifice by the spiritual Saul. Vicarial rule has ever approved the sparing and using of the flesh, in God's service, as it is said, but in truth to its own glory. I need not multiply examples. We cannot look around without seeing the wisdom of the flesh where it should never be, commending, or striving to commend, the truth of God; or making it less unpalatable to the world by garnitures which the flesh can own (compare I Cor. 1:15). So, again, with the affections of the flesh. To what but these do we owe the wholesale introduction of the world within the Church. Natural affection prompts it. And if the light of God's Spirit and Word should raise a single doubt, the plea to dedicate or "sacrifice to the Lord," is as ready now as of old, to remove any remaining scruples. So it is with the religion of the flesh. Is this judged as it should be in the Church? Is it not considered right to spare it? In the Church of Rome, the most perfect antitype of Saul, we have the fullest exemplification of all this. There is not, I think I may boldly say, one good thing in the flesh which that system has not spared; and sparing, has consecrated, as it says, to God's service. But we have enough of it, alas, elsewhere. And in very deed, let God and His will be but out of sight, our wisdom will soon imitate Saul: the best of Amalek will be spared: and having done this, we may even boast of our obedience. But

the boast, "I have performed the commandment of the Lord" (Ch. 15:13,14), is answered by the lowing of Amalekite herds. Nor does the plea of sacrifice alter God's judgment. His answer in a moment overthrows it, - "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." And, indeed, if it were rightly weighed, such justification is an aggravation of the sin. It shows not only how light God's commands are held; but how little communion we have with His mind, how little His purpose is understood, either towards His elect, or toward that flesh, of which redemption has sealed the judgment.

And here, by the way, I may observe how lightly many value a knowledge of the purpose of God in His acts, both of grace and judgment. The casting off of Esau and his seed; the call of Jacob; the bringing of the elect, in due season, over Jordan; the consequence of such acts; the purpose they show in the mind of God; such subjects were evidently nought to Saul. And so, too, is it in these days. What is taught in the rejection of the Jew; how it seals the death and utter worthlessness of the flesh; what is taught in the call of the Church; how its new and heavenly life affects what is of nature - what is of the flesh; how all these acts and purposes of God throw light on His commands; these things, alas! are nothing to many saints.

Such were the causes for which Saul lost the kingdom: disobedience first and last: first, disobedience in acting without a command from God; and then, disobedience in acting contrary to His command, in sparing for sacrifice what He had devoted to judgment. Let it be remembered, that in both cases the disobedience was linked with sacrifice to the Lord; in the last case its justification was attempted on this very ground. Samuel's failure, too, was covered by service; - how similar in their workings are the forms of unbelief: - he, too, would help Israel by doing God's work. God, however, in both cases refuses the officious aid. Let this not be forgotten in these busy days, when on all hands, more than ever, the plea for unbidden and forbidden acts is, that they are service to the Church, or sacrifice to the Lord. "They also serve who only stand and wait." This is, perhaps, of all the greatest sacrifice, and the hardest service.

Section VI

The Relative Position of the First Two Kings, from the Rejection Until the Death of Saul

The position of God's true witnesses has ever been a stumbling block to the world. It is well if it be not an offence to the Church. It is one of the last lessons really learned by the saint, and one the soonest forgotten. Hard as it is to learn the true character of God's saints, it is harder to be content with the place that character involves. Many who have, through grace, attained to reach the first, have shrunk from the second, fearing the cost at which it is to be sustained. In vain does the Scripture testify that, from Abel downwards, God's witnesses have been strangers here. In vain, I say, for we are surprised that, if faithful, we must be cast out. We cannot believe that our portion is to be rejected here.

But it should not surprise us; for what is God's position, I say not in the world, but in His own Church? Is He walked with? Is He received? Are not creatures continually put into His place? God manifest in the flesh is a sufficient answer. His life and death cannot be misunderstood. "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, but His own received Him not" (John 1:10,11). Strange truth this! but truth, nevertheless, unveiling man's heart. God comes into the world His hands have made. He comes doing good. But the world has no room for Him: they judge Him as an impostor. "By what authority doest thou these things?" (Matt. 21:23), is His people's answer to His deeds of love. "Not this man, but Barabbas" (John 18:40), their last request. "Now Barabbas was a robber."

To what can we trace this? To what but this, that God's presence and truth ever judges man. God is light. And the light shows things as they are (Eph. 5:13): and man, proud man, cannot bear this. He is not content to be shown as he is. He would fain still hide his nakedness (evil works) from himself and others. The light exposes him. The only alternative then left him is either to humble himself, or reject the light. And where man will not be humbled, the light must be cast out, be it in God's only begotten Son, or in His witnesses.

The history before us is no exception to this. And the relative position occupied by Saul and David, after the rejection of the former until his death, will show us what place the witness for God's rule in Israel must yet expect. We shall miss one of the plainest lessons of the First Book of Kings, if this relative position is not apprehended by us.

1. The relative position of Saul and David, as respects Israel, is easily traced. It stands out on every page. The one has all Israel with him; the other, a despicable remnant. The one is at his ease; the other driven from place to place.

[i] The one has all Israel. Saul, though rejected by God, guilty of disobeying His prophet, stained with the blood of His priest, and seeking the life of His anointed king, is followed while he lives by nearly the whole of Israel. Round him though in vain, they gather against the Philistines (Ch 17:2). At his word, they come up against David (Ch 23:8)).

Yea, though David delivers the men of Keilah, when the Philistines fight against that city and rob its threshing floors, yet when Saul seeks him the men of Keilah will deliver him up (Ch 23:1-5,10-13). Even the true prophet at first seems afraid to own him (Ch 16:2), lest he too should be slain by Saul. The Philistines said truly, "Ye are servants to Saul" (Ch 17:8). He rules them as he will, and they obey. David, meanwhile, God's elect and God's beloved, is all but alone: the deliverer of Israel is soon forgotten by them. Out of all Israel, only a poor despised band of some four hundred men are with him. "David escaped to the cave of Adullam: and every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him. And there were with him about four hundred men" (Ch 22:1,2). The Book ends with only "six hundred with him" (Ch 30:9). What a picture! Here is the beloved of God, driven out into the wilderness, oft times hunted and in straits, his life endangered at the hand of Saul. With him are about four hundred men, debtors, discontented ones, and distressed individuals. The rich and wise are not with him.

We have seen what Saul and David represent. Need I ask how this page in their history agrees with what we see around us? After whom are the great mass of the Church following? At whose bidding do they move? Are they with the king after man's heart; or with that rule which witnesses for God? Is not David even yet a stranger among his own people? I speak not of Christendom at large. There, we are for the most part ready to allow, God's rule has been usurped by man. But how is it with us nearer home? What rules governs the Church? Is God's presence and sufficiency in His house believed? Alas, a thousand indications of Saul's rule appear. Man is yet ruling for God, instead of God by man. If God again appears in His Church to bless, and claims His prerogative of calling whom He will, man in His place will object both to the work and to the workman. But let us each weigh this for himself. This only will I say, for such as may, perhaps, through their own necessities, have been brought to feel the impotence against evil of vicarial rule, - and who, like "the debtors and distressed ones" with David, are learning the trials as well as the blessings of those who, rejected even by their brethren, walk with God, - this only will I say, - God is still a sufficient portion. And trying and painful as it may be to learn this, even by our own failures, the lesson is only to be so learned - all experience proves this - and it is well worth learning at any cost. It will not be learned without deep experience of our own wretchedness - without a despair of ourselves, and of all that is in man. It will not be learned without letting others know, as well as ourselves, that we are no stronger, perhaps that we are weaker, than the rest. But the lesson is God's sufficiency, not our own: and the emptier we may be made of self, the more room will there be for Him to reveal Himself. Where we are something, God will not be all. May He be "all and in all" to His own praise.

[ii] But there is another point to note here. Not only is David all but alone; but while Saul reigns, he is driven from place to place, as he says, "like a partridge" (I Sam. 26:20). Saul, when not pursuing David, abides in ease and rest. "Saul sat upon his seat to meat as at other times: but David's place is empty" (Ch. 20:25,27). He flees from place to place: first to Samuel, to Ramah, (Ch. 19:18), then back again to Jonathan, where he "hides himself in the field" (Ch. 20:24). Soon his wanderings take a wider range; first to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest (Ch. 21:1); then to Achish (Ch. 21:10), then to Adullam (Ch. 22:1);

thence to the land of Judah, to the forest of Hareth (Ch. 22:5); thence to Keilah (Ch. 23:5); thence "whithersoever he could go" (Ch. 23:13); in strong holds in the wilderness (Ch. 23:14); in the wood (Ch. 23:16); in the hills of Hachilah (Ch. 23:19); in the rock in the wilderness of Maon (Ch. 23:25); thus he flies from place to place: and so it continues while Saul lives and reigns. From Engedi (Ch. 24:1) to the rocks of the wild goats (Ch. 24:2); thence to Hachlah (Ch. 26:1); thence to Gath, to Achish (Ch. 27:2); thence to Ziklag (Ch. 26:6); then again to Achish (Ch. 28:1); then back again to Ziklag, which he finds smitten and burned (Ch. 30:1); then in pursuit of the band of rovers.

Now all this is full of teaching. We often hear it urged against those who desire to be subject to that spirit and those actions which David represents, that they are changeable; today in spirit here, tomorrow there; sometimes with the priest; sometimes with the prophet; sometimes in company, it may even be, with the avowed foes of Israel. It is quite true. And for more reasons than one. Much of this changing about is wholly owing to the enmity and pursuit of Saul. It is to the bitter actions of vicarial rule that these things are due. Those who speak lightly of these wanderings may be themselves the cause. I cannot doubt that much of the unsteadiness of those who are with the spiritual David "without the camp", is the very consequence of the treatment which they receive from those, who, thought Israelites indeed, yet obey Saul's rule, even when it calls upon them to pursue and destroy David. But doubtless there is a deeper reason. After all, Saul was but the second cause. If faith is to be seen, if God is to be known, there must be trial. David, therefore, unlike Moab or Saul, cannot "settle upon his lees". He is "emptied from vessel to vessel" (Jer. 48:2). In the course of this discipline, failures appear in David which we never see in Saul. When did Saul "go down to Achish, or feign himself mad?" When did "he scrabble on the gate, or let his spittle down his beard?" (Ch. 21:13). Yet in the course of this, graces also are brought out in David, such as Saul's rule could never show. But above all, God is seen; His ability to help; His never failing presence with His erring children to meet their need. And as for David appearing weak sometimes, David would gladly have confessed, that David was weak at all times. David, it must be remembered, is not the witness that 'David is anything'. His witness is ever the reverse; that David is nothing - nothing better than "a dead dog or flea" (Ch. 24:14); but that the living God is there, "a sure refuge." And the failures of David and his trials only prove this more and more. Man, indeed is abased; but God is glorified.

And surely lessons are yet learned in this same course of David's, a course which is indeed very contemptible and humbling to us as regards ourselves, which those who know not this painful and sifting discipline must confess that as yet they have not learned. God's goodness is learned in a way little dreamed of before; and man's wretched failure becomes something more than a doctrine. I say this plainly, lest I should be thought to affirm, that they who are witnesses for God's rule, may not and do not, like David before them, fall into a hundred inconsistencies. I am well assured that those who search for such inconsistencies will be amply rewarded for their pains. But I am equally assured, that if they choose they cannot but see, through all these perplexities and contradictions, proof sufficient that, spite of these failures, those who are guilty of them, still according to their measure, are seeking simply to walk with God. All this, I doubt not, will appear very absurd to those who think that a walk of faith begins or proceeds from some

calculations of the effect to be produced by it on the Church or world, or of the credit which it may bring. Those who walk, or seek to walk with God, are led often where they know not; often scarce understanding themselves, they are little understood by others; with a course open to misrepresentation, nay more, at times guilty of inconsistencies, which those never fall into who do not walk by faith; in and by these very inconsistencies, they often prove their truthfulness of heart, more than if they never fell. And do they not, by those very falls, lay Israel and its rulers under the obligation of asking why the elect and beloved of God should wander thus? Do they not call upon the Church to ask how far her own unfaithfulness and lack of communion with the mind of God, may not be the cause or occasion of these very failings.

2. So much for the relative position of Saul and David with respect to Israel. Let us now observe their relative position with respect to Israel's foes. This, too, is remarkable. The natural heart is ready to conclude, that such a course as that of David's must necessarily lack power; that because it so thoroughly exposes the weakness of the flesh, therefore strength must be wholly wanting to it. This is far from being the case. Saul can gather Israel; but the valley of Elah proves what Israel's strength is worth. "There went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, and "all the men of Israel, when they saw him, fled from him, and were sore afraid" (Ch. 28:4,5). David comes into the camp alone, the witness that God is there; and the champion of the Philistines from whom all Israel fled, falls before him. And the same remains true after he is cast out by Saul and hunted like a partridge on the mountains. Even in this despicable condition, David does what Saul cannot do. He smites the Philistines again and again (Ch. 27:51, 28:25, 19:8, and 23:4,5); he invades the Geshurites and the Gezrites and the Amalekites (Ch. 27:8); he destroys the band of rovers (Ch. 30:17), and "of their spoil he sends to the elders of Judah; and to them which were in Bethel and in South Ramoth; and to them which were in Jatter, and in Aroer, and in Siphmoth; and to them which were in Estimoa; and to them which were in Rachal, and in the cities of the Jerahmeelites; and to them which were in Hormah, and in Chorashan; and it Athack; and to them which were in Hebron; and to all the places where David himself and his men were wont to haunt" (Ch. 30:26-31). Israel is a gainer by poor distressed David. Saul, meanwhile, and his host, together with his three sons, though they fight for Israel, flee before the Philistines, and fall down slain in Mount Gilboa (Ch. 31:1).

Is there nothing answering to this now? Are not the church - even those who follow Saul - yet gainers by gifts from those who are "without the camp." How many precious things, spoils taken from the strong, in lonely conflicts, of which the Church knows little, and perhaps as little cares, how many blessed truths, won from the very jaws of the eater, are yet shared, not only with their fainting followers, but with those who never followed at all, by those who often are despised as light and unstable souls, even though the spoils won by them feed such as remain behind. If such thing yet abide, to God be the praise. They show His abiding care and love to His failing people. They witness that He yet remains among us who first fought the fight alone, and whose arm brought salvation; who then, by His Spirit, made known to the sons of men the loving kindness of the Lord, and His great goodness towards the house of Israel (Isa. 63:5,7).

One word more I cannot but add here, respecting Saul's position towards Israel's foes, not only after, but previous to, God's rejection of him. We have seen that after his repeated disobedience, God was with him no more. But in his earlier days, before he was rejected, and when he was victorious in his ways, it is remarkable that his victories almost all lay in one direction. He appears easily to have overcome Moab, and Ammon and Edom (Ch. 14:47; 15:7); all nations on that side of Jordan, which was next to the wilderness; he seems scarcely ever to have prevailed against the Philistines;⁴ and others whose place was over Jordan; the Jebusites, who held Jerusalem he never attempted to meddle with. The flesh and its strength, in its different forms, is discerned and attacked too by the 'spiritual Saul'; [spiritual wickedness stands for false doctrine - I Tim. 4:1]; but wicked spirits in heavenly places seem beyond him. David's victories, in the other hand, were on both sides of Jordan. Philistines and Jebusites, in due time, both fall before him.

3. I pass on now to consider the relative position of Saul and David to each other, from the rejection of the former until his death. In the earlier part of the history, when an evil spirit from God troubles Saul (Ch. 16:14), he is comforted by David, yea, he loves him (Ch. 16:21,23). This, however, is very brief. God works by David; the Philistine is slain by his hand; and Saul at once becomes jealous of him; first persecuting and then seeking his life. It would seem from the narrative of David's return from the slaughter of the Philistines, that though Saul had been in times past comforted by him, he had now forgotten him; for "when Saul saw David go forth against the Philistines, he said unto Abner, Whose son is this? and Abner said, As thy soul liveth, O King, I cannot tell. And the king said, Inquire whose son this stripling is" (Ch. 16:55,56). This, I believe, is perfect in its place. Saul, though comforted by the sound of David's harp, seems never really to have known him. Be this as it may, before long Saul is actively seeking David's life. David on the contrary, for awhile still serving Saul, often in peril of his own life, then hunted from place to place, even when his enemy's life is in his hand, once and again refuses to take it. "The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth my hand against him, seeing he (Saul) is the Lord's anointed" (Ch. 24:4-6 and 26:8-11). The men of David may say, Behold the day of which the Lord said unto thee, "Behold I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand." But David will yet stay his servants by his words, nor allow them to destroy Saul. To take Saul's life is not David's calling. His place is yet to wait on God.

David's spirit yet remains. Even yet must Saul be debtor to David, both for his own comfort and Israel's good. The very blessings wrought by God through David may cause Saul to hate David, yet David will not here avenge himself. Saul is still "the Lord's anointed." There is now in the Church, as then in Israel, a gift from God, far out of its proper place; and which, like Saul, may be taking God's place among His people, which yet is gift from God, and which however misdirected or misapplied, is not an object for us to fight with. We may see, perhaps, that it is bringing Israel into bondage; we may even see that it is taking God's place. Our place respecting it is still David's place, to separate from it, and leave it for the Lord's judgment. Doubtless some who are with David will yet say, as Abishai, "God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand." But David's answer is yet according to God, - "Who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord's anointed and be guiltless?" This is a point which needs much of the mind of God. If misdirected gift rules the Church - misdirected gift of the character which Saul

represents - is that rule, which is set forth in David, to seek to destroy it? I believe never. God will, in His own time, remove it as He will. Of course there are evils in the Church, which must be judged. But of that rule which Saul represents, it is according to His mind to leave it for His judgment. Indeed I believe that not only that form of antichrist which is shown in Saul, but that all the various forms of antichrist are left by the Church for the Lord's judgment; the true and elect remnant, meanwhile, being separate from and suffering at the hands of each. "Whom the Lord shall consume and destroy" (I Thess. 2:8), is true of all; whether Sennacherib, Ahitophel, Judas or that which they represent.

The present day christian is one which needs to remember this. Even David is at last (indeed as at first) only kept by grace. He would be the servant of Achish the Philistine (Ch. 28:2). But God saves him even from this: for God is not at a loss for instruments to do His work. To Israel the word is not, even respecting Babylon when they have been led captive there, "Set yourselves in array against her;" but rather, "Come out of her my people" (Jer. 51:6).

Such are the relative positions of David and Saul. Surely the thoughts of God, received into our hearts, can alone prepare us for such a path, or enable us in it to trace witnesses and presages of coming glory.

¹ The victory, in ch. 14, seems rather to have been Jonathan's than Saul's. Saul's part in the matter seems to have been simply 'troubling the land,' by his officious orders.

Section VII

Various Estimates of David, During the Reign of Saul

Ability to discern God's work and workmen in the church and in the world is one unfailling mark of communion with Him. Many are His who fail here. Nothing more certainly marks the teaching of God than capacity to recognize His true servants here; while the veil of humiliation and the cross is on them, and while they are "a gazing stock to the world" (I Cor. 4:9; Heb. 10:33). The Father's teaching alone will suffice for this: and indeed, it needs as much the Father's teaching now to recognize His servants, as of old to recognize in the poor despised and humbled Nazarene "the Christ, the Son of the living God." "Flesh and blood cannot reveal it; but the Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 16:16, 17).

This capacity may be possessed in different measures, as well as not possessed at all, even by saints, for the measure of their communion with God's thoughts will vary according to the different measures of their personal communion with Him. Some may be found His children, who as yet, like little babes, though of His family are not only ignorant of His mind, but unable through infancy or weakness in the spiritual life, to "discern between the things that differ" (Phil. 1:10). Others there are among God's people, who through unfaithfulness, and want of a 'single eye', cause the light that is in them to become darkness. Others there are, faithful in different measures to the light bestowed, whose ability to discern the things of God will be found varying exactly according to their individual faithfulness. Very humbling is it to flesh and blood, to find continually that those who have made the greatest progress in communion with the mind of God are those who, in themselves, are the least worthy of such blessing. But it is of a piece with God's ways. The needy are readier to know their need. If they have not God's strength, they are helpless. If they have not God's wisdom, they are utter fools. Their very necessity casts them on God, and in that which meets their ruin they discern His work. Thus often do fools discern where God is, when the wise see Him not. Their capacity, through the Spirit, for finding and using Him is their need.

The various estimates which were formed by Israel respecting God's witness, David, during the reign of Saul, are full of instruction upon this subject. Nabal, Jonathan, and the Adullamites, were all Israelites - the called of God. But how vast the difference of their estimate of God's beloved! It is still that way. Not only the capacity to discern beauty in that character of rule which David represents, but when discovered, the different measures in which it may be sympathized with or esteemed by saints, all these may still be seen in the Church, varying as of old. The various estimates recorded of David during the reign of Saul, may lead us to inquire how far we enter into God's thoughts respecting that which is His witness, or how far we are of Israel's mind in the matter.

1. Nabal's estimate of David may be expressed in his own words. "Nabal said, Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants now-a-days that break away every one from his master." David had by the confession of Nabal's own servants, "been a wall to Nabal night and day" (I Sam. 25:16). All that Nabal possessed had David kept

for him in the wilderness; so "that nothing was missed of all that pertained to him" (verse 21); yet Nabal's answer is "Who is David? . . . there be many servants now-a-days that break away from his master. Shall I then 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 from whence they be?" (Ch. 25:10, 11).

Who and what was this Nabal? He was an Israelite, "of Caleb's house" (Ch. 25:3); as such, closely related to David (I Chron. 2:9-15). We are told that "his possessions were very great in Carmel," in the tribe of Judah, closely adjoining to Hebron, the city which was given to Caleb for his inheritance. But though of Caleb's house, and from him inheriting large possessions, the reward of his father's faith, "Nabal was churlish and evil in his ways." The riches God had given him to possess he regards as his own: he says, "My bread, my water, my flesh, and my shearers." And not content with refusing to share these with David and his men, though of the same family with David, and doubtless knowing of his former acts, he rails against him as "a servant broken loose from his master," as "a man whom he knows not whence he is."

Now these riches of Nabal, "three thousand sheep, and a thousand goats," with "a good land of fountains and brooks of water," as being the blessing of that dispensation, answer not to the same earthly (Deut. 7:13, 14; 8:7; etc.) possessions now, - for such things are not our riches now, - but to those "spiritual blessings in heavenly places: (Eph. 1:3) of which the riches of Canaan were the types, and which God gives to His Church, as "risen with Christ." [The natural gifts of old times were a type of the spiritual gifts of this age.] A rich Israelite now, is not a Christian rich in this world's goods; but one rich in gifts for the edifying and feeding of many souls. Such gifts, humbling as it is to say, are often found far from David and his place: nay, they have a tendency to keep us apart from David and his position. It is indeed humiliating, but it is too true, that riches of gift or spiritual power, a good inheritance in the truth, transmitted to us by some faithful spiritual father, name and authority in the Church, these things, God's gifts to His saints, may be and often are a hindrance to rightly estimating David. There are rich ones in Israel yet, possessed of many gifts, who can only speak evil of David, or at least speak lightly of him. It needs but little acquaintance with our own hearts or the Church, to know that the very gifts of God may be coveted simply to make us something, to build up our name, or our house in Israel; and that when His gifts have set us on high, it becomes harder to be nothing in the eyes of men, - nothing in the estimation of the wise in Israel. But so it is. It is not only earthly riches which may be a snare: spiritual riches may be an equal one, tempting us practically to judge that position, and despise that spirit which needs God Himself every hour. Spiritual riches, or spiritual gifts, are no defense from carnality of heart: witness the Church of Corinth, which was "enriched by the Lord in all utterances and in all knowledge, so that they came behind in no gift" (I Cor. 1:5 and compare I Cor. 3:1, 3). Yet their conduct to, and estimate of Paul, whose ministry and spiritual rule in principle resembles David's, while they were ready to receive "false apostles who would take from them and smite them on the face" (II Cor. 11:20), are very closely analogous to Nabals' conduct here. From Paul's day to the present, this has ever been so, more or less; at least there has been a tendency to it, in "those who come behind in no gift." For such it is often hard to recognize in what is poor and weak in itself, in

what is forced to be from hour to hour dependent, in what has nothing to show but a present God, God's elect vessel fitted to His own glory. Rule which appears to possess strength in itself, or which stands in some gift, will be received, when God's witness is treated at least with suspicion.

Let's return to Nabal. His estimate of David is that he is nothing better than "a servant broken loose from his master." Like Eliab (Ch. 17:28), Nabal judges David's course as the fruit of self-will and is ready to say, "I know thy pride and the naughtiness of thine heart." Many think the same of that which is now in David's place. Faith's ways and words are still judged by the flesh as "naughtiness and pride of heart." The flesh always considers it "pride" to reckon on a living God. Even saints, if they walk carnally, will echo the judgment of the flesh. If David cross them in his path of faith, they neither have sympathy with, nor pity for him. They think nothing of what it must have cost him to break so many ties; they think not of the struggles and anxieties which he must have passed through alone; think not of the comfort or defense which they themselves have personally received through him; or of the spoils of enemies shared by this fugitive with his people. It is enough that David's place is a trying one, a disreputable one in Israel's eyes. He must therefore be judged as a runaway; they "know not whence he is."

2. Jonathan's estimate of David differs much from this. So far from calling him "a servant broken loose", so far from disclaiming all knowledge of him or leaving him unpitied to his fate, Jonathan ever sees in David God's chosen and anointed king. Though the son of Saul, he loves David faithfully to the end (Ch. 18:3). He speaks for him, ever vindicating him to his father (Ch. 19:4, 5), and when David is forced to flee, in the faith that he shall yet be king, Jonathan enters into covenant with him, not for himself only, but for his seed (Ch. 20:12-17). It is through him that David learns Saul's purpose against him, and flees to Ahimelech, to Nob (Ch. 20:35 and 21:1). Even after David is a fugitive from place to place, while Saul is pursuing him, Jonathan finds means to meet David "in the wood" and there "strengthens his hand in God. And Jonathan said unto him Fear not; for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next under thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth. And they two made a covenant there before the Lord. And David abode in the wood, but Jonathan went to his house" (Ch. 23:15-18).

Here then was one who estimated David according to God; who though closely related to that power which hated David, yet loved him as his own soul, and ever sought his good. Even when David is persecuted by the hand of Saul, it is Saul's son who comforts him, and reminds him of the promise of the Lord, and "strengthens his hand in God." Yet he casts not in his lot with David. "David abode in the wood, but Jonathan went to his house."

Is there nothing like this now? Is there no faithful seed, who like Jonathan, through faith in God, have done exploits, who have themselves been threatened with death by Saul for these very exploits, because they were performed independent of man's rule, simply by faith in God, who yet are so connected with antichristian rule that it seems impossible for them to leave it or to share the portion of him who they know is the called of God. They

may go to David in the wood; they may acknowledge when out of the power or presence of Saul's rule, that David shall one day prevail; yea, they may "strengthen David's hand in God"; but to abide with him is too great a cross to bear; so they sorrowfully return back to dwell with that which hates David.

Yet they hope to see the glory which David shall one day reach, though they shrink from enduring what fellowship with David costs. The hope is vain! Jonathan falls, as he lives, with Saul. So far from being as he had hoped, next to David on his throne, he never even sees his glory. Is it not so yet? Surely, if it is true that to reign in the kingdom when it is revealed, we must now suffer in the place of Christ rejected (II Tim. 2:12); it is equally true that to see Christ's rule in power in "the mystery of the kingdom", we must in it share His place. Even yet He says "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Acts 9:4); for He is present in and with His members. If we would ever apprehend that form of the kingdom, which is shown us in David's throne, it must be in separation from, not communion with Saul. Such as shrink from this, with their eyes really open to know David, may hope like Jonathan to see his reign, but they never see it. That aspect of the kingdom which is seen in David's throne is never apprehended by them. There is a measure of spiritual power in the kingdom to be realized, which their souls never realize. Poor Adullamites in due season see Saul fallen and David's throne, but Jonathan sees it not; he falls with Saul. Oh, may saints if they wish to see the glory of Christ in the Church, if their eyes have been opened to know what rule is according to God, faithfully abide by it, cost what it may. To own it, to go down to it "in the wood," to strengthen it there, shows a will according to God; but of what avail is this if overborne by the love of present ease, we go down again to dwell with Saul.

3. I pass on to the Adullamites' estimate of David. Of all Israel, these few poor "debtors" alone give David, in their hearts and lives, the place which God gives him. "He became a captain over them" (Ch. 22:2). This was precisely God's thought - "The Lord hath sought a man after His own heart, and commanded him to be captain over His people" (Ch. 13:14). A few wretched "debtors," from whom more is claimed in Israel - rightly claimed too - than they can pay: a few "discontented ones", a few "in distress," finding their real state and that Saul's rule cannot meet it cast in their lot with David. Little entering into his thoughts (Ch. 24:4-6; 26:7-9); at times questioning his will (Ch. 23:3); again, through trials, almost rising in rebellion against him (Ch. 30:6); they have yet been brought to share his place with him. God's prophet is with them (Ch. 22:5); God's priest also (Ch. 23:6); and they go out and come in under the rule of God's beloved king. Little credit can they take to themselves for this. To their need they owe their place. This only they have discovered, that Saul's rule cannot help them, and that David can. Therefore are they found with him. They come to him "debtors and distressed ones"; he is "a captain to them" and under him they become "mighty men" (I Chron. 11:15-17; 12:1). Doubtless, in the days of Saul, they were often the jest of those, who like Nabal, were "at ease in Zion." But "though Abraham were ignorant of them, and Israel acknowledged them not, they are God's remnant; He bears rule over them; they are called by His Name" (Isa. 63:16, 17).

David then is discerned by some even in the reign of Saul: if not by the wise and prudent, yet by babes. Surely there are some Adullamites still, who in their lives are nearer to David than his kinsman Nabal, or his friend Jonathan. Some of the weakest and vilest in the Church, because they are weakest and vilest in the Church, are the first to discover where strength lies which can meet their need. Just as in the reception of the Gospel, publicans and harlots find the truth, when wise Scribes and religious Pharisees miss it; because the first, by their very misery are made to feel the utter helplessness of everything, save the grace of a present and living God; so is it in the apprehension of all that is of Christ, and among other things of His rule in the Church. Such as have much to lose, whether a name for wisdom, or place in the Church, will yet stumble at the old stumbling-stone. But thus does God "destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent: that no flesh may glory in His presence" (I Cor. 1:19, 29); for "by strength shall no man prevail" (Ch. 2:9).

Gift then is not what we want. Place in the Church is not what we want. We want an eye opened by the blessed Lord, perhaps in a way very little to our credit, or to our exaltation, either in our own eyes or the eyes of others, to see our need of God Himself. Then may we perhaps find where He is working in His Church. I believe that those who see this will have to pay for it. But the end will make amends for all.

I conclude those notes on the history of Saul's reign, with Hannah's song, which standing as a preface to the First Book of Kings, embodies its great principles, and contains in the words of the Holy Spirit, a summary of the chief lesson which the whole is meant to teach. If we have even in measure learned to sing this song, even as Hannah learned it, by the experience of the Lord's sufficiency, in spite of all our weakness, it is well - "And Hannah said, My heart rejoiceth in the Lord; mine horn is exalted in the Lord; my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation. The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength. They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased; so that the barren hath borne seven, and she that hath many children is waxed feeble. The Lord killeth, and maketh alive; He bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich; He bringeth low and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory. He will keep the feet of His saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail. The Lord shall judge the ends of the earth, and He shall give strength unto His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed" (I Sam. 2:1-10).