

THE WOMEN IN THE WORD

by Mary E. Baxter

Baxter's study of the women mentioned in the Bible, examining their stories, character, and significance in the unfolding of God's redemptive purposes from Genesis through the New Testament.

53 Chapters

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01. Eve - Gen_2:18

EVE. The Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone."—Genesis 2:18. When the Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul, He said, "It is not good that the man should be alone." (Genesis 2:18.) Even unfallen human nature was possessed of a selfish principle, which needed the discipline of considering and of caring for others. There are very few unmarried men who are not selfish, and only those unmarried women can be unselfish who have found something definite to live for. It needs the check of another will, the friction of the dispositions in another which are contrary to our own, in order to develop in us the consideration and thoughtfulness for others which are so characteristic in the life of Jesus.

It was God's own thought that man should not be alone; He said: "I will make him an help meet for him." (Genesis 2:18, or R. V. "answering to him.") God saw the need, and God created the supply. He had already made every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air, and had brought them to Adam that he might give names to them; but in all God's fair creation there was no true companion found for Adam. He alone was made in the image of God and in His likeness; he alone had dominion over the animal creation; there was not an equal to be found for him. In order that a helpmeet should be created who should respond to the necessities of man, who should be the complement of himself and his representative, Adam must suffer loss. "The Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man." (Genesis 2:21-22.) It was a type of death and resurrection. Adam suffered loss in order to gain what was better. It was a true picture of the death of Christ, in order that the Church, His Bride, might be taken from His pierced side, blood-bought, living out of His death. Just as man proceeded from God, and was made alive with His very breath, so woman proceeded from man, and we understand the depth of that word of Paul's, "He that loveth his wife loveth himself." (Ephesians 5:28.)

After man had sinned, he no longer trusted God to prepare a help meet for him. "And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of ALL WHOM THEY CHOSE." (Genesis 6:1-2.) Their object was a selfish one. They sought in their wives what should please them, and, doubtless, the wives sought in their husbands what should please them. Every marriage entered into with a selfish object produces bitter fruit; it is wrong at the very root.

Eve was created for Adam's sake, and Adam said of her: "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." (Genesis 2:23-24.) There must be sacrifice on both sides.

One of the happiest marriages we know was entered into by a dear Christian woman on the Continent with a blind minister for the very purpose of caring for him. Being eyes to him, she enables him to carry out his ministerial work. Why is it so happy? Because it is unselfish; she is a helpmeet for her husband, and she has found in him a patience and a self-denial which, with her naturally impetuous and impulsive disposition, makes the gain as much hers as his. When a wife seeks in her husband the affection which shall satisfy her, or the attention which shall gratify her self-love, she is not acting as a helpmeet; she is making her husband minister to her, instead of taking her place as minister to him. And when a husband is exacting with his wife, claiming all her time, all her attention, all her thoughts to revolve around him, he will never be fully satisfied with her. Selfishness is a plant that produces sour fruit, and sows discord wherever it grows.

There was no jar in the union of Adam and Eve until the serpent made his appearance. He approached the weaker vessel, saying to the woman, "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Genesis 3:1.)

How should Eve act? Created to be Adam's helpmeet, her duty was to sustain her position and dominion over the lower creation. How could she consistently listen to a serpent, and how could she, who shared Adam's dominion over all but God, endure that her God should be called in question? The very listening to the reptile was a departure from God and a treachery against her husband. Her answer was a true one, but she ought never to have answered at all. It gave ground to the serpent to continue his temptation. The serpent had already found out that it was more easy to draw the woman into conversation than the man; and her first answer gave him ground to speak again:

"Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day that ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:4-5.) The enemy of souls was wise in his tactics. He knew that in these early days, when man was fresh from the hand of his Creator, he had not yet become flesh. (Genesis 6:3.) The spirit, which responded to God, had still the upper hand, and he addressed his chief temptation to the higher and not the lower part of man's nature: "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:5.)

Eve's ambition was stirred. Could there be anything wrong in desiring to be like God? But Eve, in entertaining such thoughts without reference to her God, failed in her position of helpmeet to Adam. She acted without respect to him, and without considering either God's authority or her husband's good. It was THE FIRST MANIFESTATION OF SELF in God's creation. It is, however, this very object of being like God that He sets before His people now, "Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son." (Romans 8:29.) It is only through Christ that we find the way to be conformed to Him. Disobedience towards God can never lead to God, and Satan's short cut was a fatal one. No sooner had the enemy laid hold of Eve on this point than he could appeal to her on lower ground.

"The woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food," and "the lust of the flesh" began to work within her; "and that it was pleasant to the eyes;" "the lust of the eyes" was awakened too; "and a tree to be desired to make one wise," "the pride of life" (1 John 2:16) was working, and acting upon her own judgment,—a judgment biassed by the serpent—"she took of the fruit thereof and did eat." With this fatal act, every unselfish instinct seemed to die within her; "she gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat." (Genesis 3:6.) Adam's helpmeet had become Satan's

instrument of temptation! The knowledge of evil awoke within them, and the man and his wife began to be afraid of God.

It was a new experience to them to find evil where they had not formerly suspected it, and to feel the need to hide themselves away from God. It was an awful moment when the man and the woman made in God's image found within them an impulse to flee from Him, as though their Father and their Creator were their enemy. The sin of the first woman brought about this grievous, this disastrous change. But neither the fig-leaves nor their hiding-place among the trees of the garden answered their purpose. God found them out, and He said unto Adam:

"Where art thou?" (Genesis 3:9.) The man's answer condemned him: "I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." (Genesis 3:10.) UNTRUTH WAS DEVELOPED ALREADY.

"Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat?" (Genesis 3:11.)

Adam lost his manliness and said: "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." (Genesis 3:12.)

Eve had become, not a helpmeet, but a hindrance to her husband. Adam had become, not a protector, but an accuser to his wife; sin and selfishness came in together, and the seeds of disunion were sown which were to bring forth the harvest of earth's sorrow. And when God questioned the woman:

"What is this that thou hast done?" she said: "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." (Genesis 3:13.)

It is a sorry history; but oh, what a picture of many a household where self is ruling! How often, when a loss occurs in business, and the husband is deeply mortified, the wife will speak bitter words of reproach: "If you had only done as I advised you, you would not have ruined us all." Or the husband will bitterly retort: "If only you had not been so extravagant, things would never have come to this pass; you have yourself to thank for it." How often when a son or a daughter brings shame and grief upon their parents, bitter words of recrimination and retaliation are spoken! The wife, given to be a helpmeet, a blessing to her husband, to win him back when he has wandered, only galls the open wound; and the history of fallen Adam and Eve is constantly repeated even in the houses of God's children! If only the wife could recognise her high calling to suffer for Christ and with Christ in relation to her husband; the Bible tells us that the husband, even without the Word, may be won by the conversation, or manner of life, of the wife, which they behold with fear. (1 Peter 3:1-2.) But Adam and Eve were still in Eden, and before the Lord cast them out, He gave them the promise, spoken, neither to the fallen man nor yet to the fallen woman, but to the serpent—that her Seed should bruise the serpent's head, and a way of salvation should be made.

There is just one other instance of self-life recorded of Eve. Sent out from the garden into the world which had become full of thorns and briars, Eve became a mother, and named her first son Cain, saying, "I HAVE GOTTEN a man from the Lord." (Genesis 4:1.) The selfish wife becomes a selfish mother. "I have gotten" expresses her thoughts regarding her boy. If the first idea in the possession of a child is the selfish one, what we have got, and what the child is to be to us—how

can we be fit to train him for heaven? It is only as we count our children to be the Lord's possession that we can bring them up in His nurture and admonition.

Eve became a mother a second time, and had the bitterness of seeing her child's blood shed by the very son whom her selfish heart had named Cain; and, perhaps, it was only when she learnt the lesson of sacrifice from Abel's altar that God could trust her with her son Seth, who was "appointed" or "put" by the hand of God in the place of his slain brother. (Genesis 4:25.) Seth was, so to speak, a resurrection child, and through him the family of the faithful descended.

02. Sarah. Part I - Heb_11:2

SARAH.

"By faith even Sarah herself received power to conceive seed when she was past age, since she counted Him faithful who had promised."—Hebrews 11:2., R.V.

Sarah is the first woman mentioned in (Hebrews 11:11) among those who "obtained a good report through faith," and in this picture gallery of His faithful witnesses, the Lord mentions nothing else about Sarah but her faith. All the great imperfections of her life had been forgiven and blotted out, and nothing was remembered against her. But that faith which she exercised in becoming the mother of the child of promise was counted worthy of record side by side with the faith of an Enoch, an Abraham, a Moses, etc.

We have seen in the history of Eve that the vocation of woman, as she came from the hand of her Creator was to be a helpmeet to her husband, and in this vocation Sarah very frequently and very signally failed; yet the germ of faith, which in time brings forth faithfulness, was discernible in her from the first. She accompanied her husband when God called him out of Ur of the Chaldees, leaving behind her country, her kindred, her father's house, and all the familiar friends and the familiar scenes of her childhood. She was one with her husband in his trusting the God who gave him, for all he had lost, only promises of temporal blessing, with, however, a glorious share of spiritual blessing, a reality of communion with God INFINITELY MORE BLESSED than all the benefits he had left in his old home.

Having reached the land of Canaan, Sarah's husband set up memorials to the Lord at every halting-place on his journey, and called upon the name of his God, without fear of the heathen who carried on their worship around. (Genesis 12:7-8.) But an unexpected trouble came upon them; there was a famine in the land. What should people do in the time of famine? Most men would say: "Do the best you can for yourselves." God says: "Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." (Psalms 37:3.) Abraham, accustomed as he was to take counsel with his God, failed in the point of temporal need. He followed after the way of most men, looked round him for ways of escape, and went down into Egypt to sojourn there (Genesis 12:10), without waiting for God's direction. How could it be that he, a man whose faith in God had been such that he could leave all behind him in his own land, for the apparent uncertainty of the promises that God made him, should, in a time of famine, place no reliance on the forethought and care of a God whom he had trusted thus far? How comes it that many a Christian in the present day, who has come out from the world, and from sin, and who has trusted his soul's salvation into the hands of his God, relying solely upon the precious blood of Christ, and who is in perfect security without a fear of failure at the judgment day—how comes it, that yet when temporal need comes upon him, he seeks himself the way of escape, and does not completely and unreservedly commit his cause to God? Can the faith for the soul be real where there is so little trust about lesser things?

Sarah was at this juncture no real help to her husband. She failed in being a helpmeet. If she had had the confidence to remain in the land of Canaan, and had said, "Our God, who has led us thus far, will never fail us in a time of famine," Abraham might have been spared the failure and the disgrace with which he a witness for God, afterwards returned from the land of Egypt.

LACK OF FAITH, LACK OF FAITHFULNESS. When they were about to enter Egypt, Abraham proposed to Sarah that their relationship should be kept a secret, that they should say she was his sister. Here is the husband tempting the wife to sin. With Eve it was the wife who tempted the husband. Here again, if Sarah had stood on the side of God, and said: "A God who has led us so far cannot fail to take care of me. God has promised to make thee a great nation, to bless thee, to make thy name great, and to make thee a blessing, to bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee. How can He then let harm come to me?"—how she might have encouraged her husband's faith! But instead of looking at things with the eye of faith, Sarah comes down to earthly combinations, and falls into Abraham's plans to deceive Pharaoh. The consequence is that no altar, no memorial for their God was set up in Egypt, and they were made no blessing there. They had to depart from that land, truly with increased riches, but with no increase of honour, and without leaving behind them one saved soul, one altar reared, one vestige of witness for the God for whose sake they had left all at His call in their old Chaldean home. (Genesis 12:17-20; Genesis 13:1-3.)

We come now to another page of Sarah's history; God had promised Abraham on two separate occasions that his seed should be numerous: "I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered" (Genesis 13:16), and again: "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness." (Genesis 15:5-6.) An earthly seed and a heavenly seed; and both innumerable! But year after year went by, and no sign of the promised seed appeared. Sarah began to be impatient, and FAITH IS NOT IMPATIENT.

Faith for the promised seed failed her.

Unbelief is full of plans and human propositions; and so was Sarah, when she came to Abraham and said to him:

"Behold, now, the Lord hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her." (Genesis 16:2.) Sarah was no helpmeet to her husband in this proposition; it was not of Divine origin. It came from the restlessness of unbelief. But Abraham hearkened to the voice of Sarah, and took Hagar to wife, contrary to the first order of God, that a man should cleave unto his wife; polygamy was never God's order. When Hagar saw that she was likely to be the mother of a child, she despised her mistress. This was more than Sarah could bear. Anger and indignation took possession of her, and forgetting altogether that it was she who had brought this thing about, she looked at things only from her own point of view. She felt wronged, and reproached her husband:

"My wrong be upon thee: I gave my handmaid into thy bosom: and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the Lord judge between me and thee. (Genesis 16:5.) A family quarrel might have ensued. But if Sarah had not her eye upon God, Abraham was looking to

the Lord, and he spoke to Sarah as a man who knew how to trust. He could trust his wife, the circumstances, and Hagar too, into the hands of his faithful God:

"Behold, Thy maid is in Thy hand; do to her that which is good in Thine eyes." (Genesis 16:6.)

Personal feelings were set aside. The question as between man and man had no weight when Abraham looked at things from above. Sarah dealt hardly with her servant, and Hagar fled from her face. Here again Sarah was no helpmeet to her husband. She acted selfishly and cruelly, because she considered herself rather than her God.

How wonderful that such a woman should at last have come to be numbered among the heroes of faith! Let us take courage; let us trust our God to show us our failure, shortcoming, and sin, in many of our household and family relations; let us trust Him to show us where we are wrong, to purify us, and work in us that life of faith which shall be to His glory, that sin may cease and the life of Christ be formed in us.

03. Sarah. Part II - Heb_11:11.

SARAH.

PART II.

"She judged Him faithful Who had promised."—Hebrews 11:11. When Abram was ninety-nine years old (Genesis 17:1), God appeared to him after thirteen years of silence, the result apparently of his unbelieving step in taking Hagar to wife. But now He speaks of a Covenant, and gives to Abram circumcision as a sign between God and his seed. Then God changes his name, and calls him Abraham, "the father of a multitude of nations." (Genesis 17:5., R.V.) And God said unto Abraham:

"As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah (princess) shall her name be. And I will bless her, and moreover I will give thee a son of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be of her." (Genesis 17:15., R. V.)

Thirty long years had elapsed since God's first promise to Abraham. Physical impossibility stood in the way of the fulfilment of that promise, and, at first, "Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart,

"Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear? O that Ishmael might live before Thee!" (Genesis 17:17-18.)

God could not choose one that was born after the flesh (Galatians 4:23), and He reiterated His Word that Sarah should bear a son, that through him Abraham's seed should be established, and God's covenant with Abraham.

After this, the long silence which had existed between God and Abraham because of his unbelief was broken, "and the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre" (Genesis 18:1., R. V.). It was in the form of three men. And Abraham hastened to his wife into the tent, and called upon her to make cakes for the men who were come to him. Also Abraham himself helped in the preparation of the repast which he would spread before them. And while the men did eat, they said to him, "Where is Sarah thy wife?"

"Behold, in the tent."

"I will certainly return unto thee when the season cometh round; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son," (Genesis 18:10) was the message the three men brought to him.

"And Sarah heard in the tent door." (Genesis 18:10., R. V.) Her first thought was to consider herself. How could such a thing be possible? All experience of human nature was against such a possibility and "Sarah laughed within herself." Was this the woman of whom it should be said wheresoever the Word of God should go: "She judged Him faithful Who had promised?" Yes, it was even so. But a deep work had to be done upon Sarah's heart before she could be recognised as a woman of faith. There was duplicity as well as unbelief within her, and we may well conceive

that at this time she was not the helpmeet to her husband she might have been. "The Lord said unto Abraham, "Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? (Genesis 18:13.) "IS ANYTHING TOO HARD FOR THE LORD?" And God repeats His Word. "At the set time, I will return unto thee when the season cometh round, and Sarah shall have a son. Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not." (Genesis 18:15.) She even told a lie to God! And yet, in the New Testament neither her unbelief nor her lie are mentioned against her. Before He could place her among the worthies of faith, God had forgiven her, and cast her iniquities into the depths of the sea. (Micah 7:19.) But God was not deceived; He could not ignore sin; it must be brought to book; therefore He said, "Nay, but thou didst laugh."

Perhaps the destruction of Sodom, and the fearful judgment upon Lot's wife which intervened between the promise of God to Sarah and its accomplishment, may have done much to deepen Sarah's respect for God, and her faith in His spoken Word.

When, after the destruction of the cities of the Plain, Abraham journeyed into the land of the south, and came to Gerar (Genesis 20:1), it seemed almost inconceivable that he should have again repeated his duplicity with regard to Sarah, saying of her, "She is my sister." Perhaps the rebuke of Abimelech in giving Abraham money compensation may have gone far to humble Sarah. "Thus she was reproved." (Genesis 20:16.) The judgment upon Sodom, speaking to her of the mighty power of God and His hatred of sin, and then her fall, and her husband's, into untruth, may have shown both of them how their own hearts were not to be relied upon, and Sarah may have been a more serious as well as a more humble woman before the Lord made her the mother of His promised seed. But the Lord is true. He visited Sarah, as He had said, and a son was born to Abraham in his old age, and he called him, as God had foretold, Isaac (laughter). It may, perhaps, have been in remembrance of his laugh when God declared to him that Sarah should bear a son, that the remembrance of his unbelief might be ever before him, and warn him lest he should fall again into the same sin.

Sarah's joy was, of course, very great. God's promise could never have been fulfilled if her unbelief had not been overcome. BY FAITH SARAH "RECEIVED STRENGTH to conceive seed." And now, at last, she had learnt to look at God rather than herself, at God rather than circumstances. She said:

"God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me. Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? for I have borne him a son in his old age." (Genesis 21:6-7.)

Time went on, and the babe grew. But there was in the house one thing, as the fruit of Abraham's and Sarah's unbelief, which must be set in order. There was always the Egyptian Hagar in the house, and the lad Ishmael; and on the day when Isaac was weaned, Sarah saw Ishmael mocking. The old, irritable spirit got the better of her; and yet there was something of the prophetess about her when she said,

"Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac. (Genesis 21:10.) She saw, at any rate, in a measure, from God's side; Isaac's birth was the fulfilment of God's promise; Ishmael's was not; he was born after the flesh; Isaac was by promise. (Galatians 4:23.) When Abraham took his family affairs and laid them

before his God, God justified Sarah, and said, "In all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called."

Sarah had fulfilled her vocation; she was God's witness. He was faithful Who promised, and she had responded to Him; faith had taken the place of unbelief within her, so that all the Canaanites around would have the testimony of how great was the God of Abraham. All her former life, all her mistakes and failures to help her husband, were blotted out, and this one fact remains behind, that, as Abraham "considered not his own body" (Romans 4:19), but "was fully persuaded that what God had promised He was able also to perform," so Sarah, contrary to experience, and contrary to human reasonings, "judged Him faithful that promised." (Hebrews 11:11.)

Oh, what a lesson it is to us, in all the details of our family and social life, to see things with the eye of God, to take counsel with Him about everything, to justify Him in all His ways and all His providences! So only can a Christian wife be a true helpmeet to her husband.

Only one more thing is told us of Sarah. It is of her burial. Sarah's name means "princess;" and as a princess Abraham buried her. The only land he possessed in all the world was Sarah's grave, which he bought of Ephron the Hittite. But beyond the grave, amidst those who shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven, Sarah shall have her place, because "she judged Him faithful that promised."

04. Hagar - Gen_16:13

HAGAR.

"And she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou art a God that seeth; for she said, Have I even here looked after Him that seeth me?"—Genesis 16:13., R.V.

Hagar was born a slave. She was an Egyptian, and probably came into the possession of Sarah, Abraham's wife, during their sojourn in the land of Egypt. In any case, we find her living as Sarah's attendant. When Sarah, in her impatience, gave Hagar to her husband to wife, she neither consulted God nor yet the interest of her handmaid; she acted from selfish motives, and trouble, disunion, envy, and jealousy were introduced into her formerly peaceful tent.

Hagar had learnt to despise her mistress, and when Abraham, in his kingly spirit, had trusted Sarah into God's hands, and had recognised his wife's authority over Hagar, saying: "Behold, thy maid is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee,"—Hagar had "fled from her face." (Genesis 16:8.)

It would seem to human eyes as though Abraham ought to have taken up the cause of his maid, and, had he given way to pure natural feeling, he would have done so; but, like his God, Abraham looked at things from above. Probably already he had begun to see that the step he had taken was one of unbelief; and he knew his God and his own heart too well to think he could extricate himself from such a dilemma, so he threw himself upon the mercy of his God, and trusted all consequences to Him. But what about Hagar? Would God forsake her when Abraham, His faithful servant, so implicitly trusted Him with her? Impossible. Our holy God "has not forsaken them that seek Him." (Psalms 9:10.) "THE ANGEL OF THE LORD FOUND HER"

—implying that he had been seeking after her. He found her "by a fountain of water in the wilderness." (Genesis 16:7.) He addressed her thus:

"Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou?" (Genesis 16:8.)

If Hagar had been wronged, her retaliation in escaping from Sarai was also a wrong. When God is dealing with a soul, the sin of that soul must be put right, before God can deal with another party who has injured this one. Hagar must recognise that she was Sarai's maid. While considering her own cause, she must consider also her own responsibility as handmaid. She could have no sympathy from God independently of the position in the family where God had placed her. The Lord would have nothing to say to her as other than "Sarai's maid."

O how wonderful it is that God enters thus into family circumstances! Let a wife be a true helpmeet to her husband, and then God will put His hand upon that husband, and deal with him, if the wife suffers wrong through words or deeds of his. Let the child submit to his parents, and then if the parents wrong him, God shall be his defence. Let the servant place her cause in the hands of God, and He will deal with the mistress; but when she does so, it must be as the servant who serves "not with eye-service, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God." (Colossians 3:22.)

"Whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go?"

Poor Hagar was wandering in the wilderness.

SHE DID NOT KNOW HER WAY.

Whenever we get out of the line of God's direct leading, we are in a pathless wilderness; we do not know our way. The only answer that Hagar could give was this:

"I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai." (Genesis 16:8.)

"And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands." (Genesis 16:9.)

It seemed unkind; it seemed impossible; but the true way of conquest is by submitting. Jesus through death destroyed him that had the power of death. (Hebrews 2:14.) If we yield for God's sake to the "all things" which "work together" for our good, we then become in everything masters of the situation. But the angel of the Lord did not finish with this word about submission. He continued: "I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude...thou shalt bear a son, and shall call his name Ishmael; because the Lord hath heard thy affliction." (Genesis 16:10-11.) It was as though the angel would say to her: "If Abram does not hear, if Sarai does not hear, if nobody understands how deeply thou hast been wronged, and how unjust is the treatment to which thou art subjected, I, thy God, have heard; thy cause is in My hands." What a word of comfort for those who suffer unjustly!

Hagar came into the liberty which belonged to those who recognise the presence of God, "She called the name of the Lord that spake to her, THOU GOD SEEST ME;" for she said, "Have I also here looked after Him that seeth me?" (Genesis 16:13., R. V.) It was a revelation to Hagar that God took in all the circumstances, and weighed them in the balances of the sanctuary. Before God, she was no bond slave, but the Lord's dear child. She was servant before men, but she was the Lord's precious charge before God. Hope came into her heart, and in the fulness of her confidence, she gave a name to the fountain of water near which the angel had found her, and called it, "The well of the Living One who seeth me." (R. V.)

Hagar's child was born; Abraham became, very naturally, attached to his son. But while that son and his mother still remained in the family, all was not right with Abraham, because they were the proof of his unbelief. The time must come when wrong things are put right; and so it came to pass in Abraham's tent when Isaac was born. A great feast was made on the day that Isaac was weaned. "And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which had been born unto Abraham, mocking. Wherefore she said unto Abraham,

"Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." (Genesis 21:10.)

It was a bitter moment for Abraham; little sleep did he have that night. God was speaking, to him, and He showed him that that bondwoman and her son must no longer find room in his tent: "In Isaac shall thy seed be called. And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed!"

Abraham, once clear about the will of God, made no delay. He "rose up early in the morning "to do the will of his God. In spite of his unrest for the suffering of Hagar, in spite of the bitter pang of parting with his boy, Abraham "took bread and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away." (Genesis 21:14.).

Poor Hagar! she had once at her own will wandered in the wilderness, but now, by the will of God, and by the will of her master, Abraham, she wandered again in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. Abraham knew his God too well to distrust Him. But when Hagar aimlessly went to and fro in the wilderness, O, how Abraham must have borne her up in prayer, and how his heart must have gone out for that beloved Ishmael, whom he would hardly in this world see again!

Hagar must be tried to the utmost. The water in the bottle was spent. The burning lips of Ishmael and his drooping limbs told of approaching fever; and in her despair Hagar "cast him under one of the shrubs," (Genesis 21:15.) where she found a little shade, "and she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bow-shot; for she said "Let me not see the death of the child." (Genesis 21:16.) Had Hagar forgotten the name she had given to the well? Had God ceased to be "the Living One?" Had He ceased to be "Thou God seeth me?" (Genesis 16:13.) Surely not; but Hagar was looking another way, looking at her wrongs, looking at her fainting child, instead of looking to God. "She sat over against him, and lifted up her voice and wept." But it was not in vain that Ishmael had heard his father's prayers, and learnt to know that there was power in Israel's God.

"GOD HEARD THE VOICE OF THE LAD." When the mother failed to pray, the lad himself became an intercessor. "And the angel of the Lord called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her.

What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation." (Genesis 21:17.)

God had not ceased to look after her, but her eyes were holden that she could not see. Then God opened her eyes, and close at hand she saw a well of water.

There is no possibility for a child of God to be in such a position that there is no provision of God to help. The well of water is always nearer than we know, nearer than we see. Jesus is ever at hand. Is it forgiveness we need, He has purchased it for us, and waits that we shall accept His gift. If it is power over sin, He has equally provided. If it is healing for sickness, if wisdom in perplexity, or relief in a strain of temporal need,—the Lord, our Shepherd, is at hand, and His provisions fail us only when we are unbelieving.

Hagar went "and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink." (Genesis 21:19.) It was the turning point. From this time "God was with the lad," Ishmael, as well as Hagar, was acquainted with his God. And Hagar learnt, outcast as she was from Abraham's family, that the Lord had taken her in, and would never cease to befriend her. Let us learn from Hagar's history how near to us and how true to us is the living God.

05. Rebekah. Part I - Gen_24:1-67.

REBEKAH.

PART I.

Genesis 24:1-67.

"Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord."— Proverbs 18:22.

Rebekah, Isaac's wife, was given him in answer to prayer. Many a marriage is entered into from purely human and selfish motives; such cannot prosper. The greatest judgment which ever visited this earth—the flood—was sent when "the sons of God," who were probably converted men, saw "the daughters of men," probably unconverted women, "and they took them wives of ALL WHICH THEY CHOSE." (Genesis 6:2.) A young man is fascinated with the pretty eyes and bright manner of some young girl, and, thinking she is always the same, he falls in love with her; and for no higher object than to indulge and gratify himself, he seeks her hand in marriage. He does not inquire if that sweet look is just as sweet at home, when things are difficult in the family whether she is kind to younger brothers and sisters, and likely to make a good mother if God should give them children. No; he has taken a fancy to her, and he must have that girl for his wife. Another man is ambitious, he seeks a wife with money, family, or talent to recommend her, but again from selfish motives, that he may gain advantage, and he expects his wife, when he has married her, to minister to his ambition, his love of money, his pride of position, neither considering the will of God nor the happiness of his wife, but only his own interest.

It is the same on the other side very often. How many girls think of themselves, of the house they shall gain, the money they may have, the position they shall occupy, in marrying such and such a man, rather than the vocation which God gave to woman, to be "an helpmeet" to her husband.

There are some noble exceptions; some who weigh the matter before the Lord, and once clear about His will, take up the vocation of "helpmeet," and seek in everything—in the education of the children, in the earthly calling of the husband, in the circle of their friends, and more than all in their relation to God—to supplement their husband, making up for his deficiencies, watching and praying over his faults, cheerfully and patiently taking from the Lord all which may be difficult in his disposition or his circumstances, and trusting God to make him bear with them in like manner. Such partners in life are not found by chance;

GOD GIVES THEM IN ANSWER TO PRAYER.

Isaac did not seek his own wife, but that he prayed for her is clear (Genesis 24:63); his father Abraham prayed for her, and Eliezer, the old house steward, prayed for her. There is something exceedingly touching in this. Eliezer was once the heir presumptive to all Abraham's Property. Once Abraham had said, "Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in mine house is mine heir." (Genesis 15:2-3.) Yet he it was whom Abraham could trust with the

important mission of going to his native land to seek a wife for his son! And the servant, instead of feeling hurt at having to take a lower place, threw all his heart into his mission. He alone could be trusted with such a momentous matter, he whose hopes of earthly position fell with the very existence of Isaac! But such are the ways of God. A conquered will is the one which He uses. The praying master sent the praying servant away, with the assurance which himself must have received in answer to his prayer;

"The Lord God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land, He shall send His angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence." (Genesis 24:7.) Abraham was sure of his God.

All the time of Eliezer's journey, his faithful master, and Isaac too, must have been bearing him up in prayer, and he too did everything in the spirit of prayer; so completely did each of them regard the choice of a wife as God's business.

Arrived at the outskirts of the city of Nahor, Abraham's brother, Eliezer kneels down to plead with God for a sign. In the greatest simplicity, he asks that when the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water, the damsel of whom he shall ask water, and whose answer shall be, "Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also" (Genesis 24:14), shall be the one chosen of God to be the wife of Isaac. Perhaps at that very moment, away in Canaan, a father and son were praying God to guide that servant.

Before Eliezer had done speaking, Rebekah, Abraham's great niece, came out, and spoke the very words which Eliezer had proposed,

"Drink, my lord;" and after he had been refreshed, she added, "I will draw for thy camels also." (Genesis 24:18-19.) O what a sense of

QUIET, HOLY AWE creeps over us when an undoubted answer to prayer is given us! God comes so near, we seem to feel the very breath of His presence. No wonder Eliezer, "wondering at her, held his peace, to wit whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not." (Genesis 24:21.) And when he asked her name, and found that she was a near relation of Abraham, he must indeed have been thrilled with the nearness and goodness of God, who had so fully answered his prayer. And Rebekah? The first impression she made upon him was of a fair, frank young girl, ready to do a kindness to a tired stranger. Next she showed hospitality:

"We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in." (Genesis 24:25.) No pretension, but frank, free, hearty welcome! How much this would grace the tent of Isaac!

"But when he discovered moreover in answer to his enquiries that she was the daughter of Bethuel, the man bowed down his head," (Genesis 24:26) and worshipped the Lord. He was not ashamed to worship his God in the presence of this young girl with whom he was only just acquainted. From Eliezer's prayer, not from his words, the maiden learned from whom the stranger had come. Rebekah was not constrained and unnatural because she was in the presence of a praying man; and this showed that she knew something of her God. She received earrings and bracelets from him, and ran to tell her family of the tidings from Abraham's tent; and her brother Laban came out to bring Eliezer into the house. But how little did Rebekah think how

intimately she was concerned in the purpose of his journey, or how great a change in her circumstances was at hand! How little she thought, when she so willingly drew water for the camels, that it was the last time she would render such a service in the land of her birth! When, before so much as tasting food, Eliezer unfolded his errand, and told in all reverence and simplicity how God had guided him, and at once demanded a decision, and her father and brother both said, "THE THING PROCEEDETH FROM THE LORD; we cannot speak to thee good or bad, behold Rebekah is before thee, take her, and let her be thy master's son's wife, as the Lord hath spoken;" and when, still before taking food, she saw her new acquaintance again bowing down to worship,—Rebekah began to understand what the mind of the Lord was concerning her. O how different this from the levity with which young people often speak of, and enter into, the marriage relationship!

Now Eliezer was free to eat and to be at ease, the object of his journey was accomplished. But after one night's sojourn, the servant longed to be at home again, and refused to tarry even another day.

"Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way."

There remained one thing to be done. The Lord had shown His mind. Her father and brother had recognised it, but how about Rebekah herself?

Wilt thou go with this man?"

"I will go." The answer was prompt and definite, At only one day's notice, this bride, who was prayed for, was ready to leave all that she might enter a praying family! Eliezer had spoken to her of Isaac, and her heart was taken captive; she had no fear to wed such an one.

Arriving on the scene of her future home, the first sight of her future husband was as he walked .in the field to meditate and to pray. (Genesis 24:63.) This history is a lovely TYPE OF CHRIST'S CALL TO HIS BRIDE.

Now, as never before, He is calling those whom His Father has given Him (John 17:9-11) to leave all and follow Him. From earthliness and self, from pride and fashion, from glory among men, from the vain manner of life received by tradition from our fathers (1 Peter 1:18), He calls His Bride to "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth." (Revelation 14:4.) How many are there who are ready to leave all and follow, and who from the depths of their hearts can say, "I will go with this Man?" (Genesis 24:58.)

06. Rebekah. Part II - Gen_27:1-46

REBEKAH.

PART II.

Genesis 27:1-46

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."—Galatians 6:7

Rebekah, received as she was so peculiarly in answer to prayer, both by his father and Eliezer; and arriving at the very moment when he himself was occupied in prayer, was God's comfort to Isaac after his mother's death.

Isaac and Rebekah did not enter lightly into the marriage relationship. They had not, as many others have, a long time of betrothal in which they could get acquainted one with the other, but they trusted their God to make them accord, and He abundantly answered prayer. O, how infinitely more blessed is it to rest in God's choice than in our own, in this most important of relationships! How much more real is love which begins unselfishly than that so-called love which seeks its own!

There was one hindrance to the happiness of this newly-married couple. Rebekah had no children. Medical science was known at this time, but neither Isaac nor his wife had recourse to it. "Isaac entreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren, and the Lord was entreated of him." (Genesis 25:21.) It was PART OF HIS LIFE OF PRAYER to trust for physical as well as spiritual blessings.

Before Rebekah's children were born, for they were twins, Rebekah went to inquire of the Lord, who told her that she should be the mother of two nations, that the one people should be stronger than the other people, and the elder should serve the younger. It was always so in God's economy. Abel took precedence of Cain, Abram of Nahor and Haran, Isaac of Ishmael, and, later on, Judah of Reuben, and David of his brethren. "The last shall be first, and the first last." (Matthew 20:16.) That which man esteems is never God's choice. Man's best and God's best are of a different order. When her sons were grown, Isaac clung most to his elder son Esau, "because he did eat of his venison," which shows us that Isaac's weakness was, perhaps, the love of good living. "Rebekah loved Jacob." (Genesis 25:28.) Here was a weak point in this godly family. It is a terrible mistake when parents are partial, and prefer one child above another. Parents have to take God's place with their children until they themselves learn to understand God, and children are keenly alive to every trace of injustice and every bit of partiality. It is self in a parent which prefers one child to another because of similarity of tastes or of disposition. God loved the world which was at enmity with Him. If parents love best the children who are a comfort to them, they love with a selfish love rather than Divine.

GOD CAN LOVE THE UNLOVELY.

There was one time in his life when Isaac fell into the same snare into which his father had twice fallen. There was a famine in the land. Isaac, although directed by God to remain in Gerar, and trust Him to supply his need in the time of famine, yet could not trust God to preserve his life. Because he feared Abimelech would slay him for his wife's sake, therefore he denied his relationship to her, and said of her, "She is my sister," (Genesis 26:7) or, near relation. Surely this duplicity, THIS ONE ACT OF UNTRUTH, must have had an evil effect on the minds of his sons, and, no doubt, it led the way to the act of deceit which marked an era, and a sad one, in the life of Jacob. Sin scatters its seeds, and multiplies itself wherever it is found.

After this time, trouble arose in the family. Esau married the wife of a Hittite, and so entered a heathen family, and then took a second wife, also a heathen, contrary to the mind of God, and his marriage was a grief of mind to Isaac and to Rebekah. (Genesis 26:34-35.) Heathen practices were introduced into this godly household, and a heathenish spirit contended with the spirit of God for mastery. How often the world has come in through such a marriage! But Isaac was still a patriarch, a kind of royal priest to his God; and, as the head of the family, he was the earthly instrument of blessing. When his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called his beloved son Esau, and told him that in the uncertainty of life at his age, it was upon his heart to bless him before he died. He directed his son to go out into the field and take venison, and make savoury meat that he might eat and his soul might bless him before he died. Isaac knew full well God's prophecy to Rebekah that her elder son should serve the younger, but his carnal, earthly love for his fine, handsome, noble, elder son, made him seek to compel his God to give blessing to Esau.

What should Rebekah do in such circumstances? If she sided with her God, she would be against her husband; if she sided with her husband, she would take part against God. Her own inclination led her strongly to seek the blessing for Jacob, and, no doubt, she justified herself by saying in her heart "God has promised the blessing to Jacob; it can be no harm for me to try and secure it for him." But, O how much of unbelief there was in this woman's heart! How she failed at this moment to be a true helpmeet to her husband, and a faithful mother to her son! "We which have believed do enter into rest," and "he that is entered into His rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from His." (Hebrews 4:3; Hebrews 4:10.) Rebekah had not learnt: "Their strength is to sit still." (Isaiah 30:7.)

She heard Isaac when he gave these directions to his elder son, and her unbelieving heart trembled lest Isaac should prevail with God, and Jacob should lose the promised blessing. She would try and secure it at any cost, and make THE END JUSTIFY THE MEANS.

She "spake unto Jacob her son, saying,

"Behold, I heard thy father speak to Esau thy brother, saying, Bring me venison, and make me savoury meat, that I may eat, and bless thee before the Lord before my death. Now, therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command thee. Go now to the flock and fetch me from thence two good kids of the goats; and I will make them savoury meat for thy father, such as he loveth: and thou shalt bring it to thy father, that he may eat, and that he may bless thee before his death." (Genesis 27:6-10.)

What should Jacob do? He was about forty years of age, old enough to have an enlightened conscience; he knew that untruth displeased a holy God; but Rebekah was his mother, and he

could easily excuse himself, and shift the responsibility, by pleading that he obeyed his mother. How many sons there are who are perfectly obedient just as long as they see it is to their own advantage; but the moment a command from father or mother crosses their will, this obedience breaks down!

Jacob made only one objection to his mother; it was on the ground that perhaps the plan would not answer!

"Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man: My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver; and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing." (Genesis 27:11-12.)

It was no question with him whether it was right or wrong, but only, would it succeed? "The way of the just is uprightness" (Isaiah 26:7), but Jacob failed in this very point. We have no evidence up to this time that Jacob was a truly spiritual man. He had not yet seen the wondrous ladder which connected a holy God with a sinful Jacob. The natural heart of a man, as soon as it is born, goes astray speaking lies. This is a sad picture of a godly home—deceit and lying entering in: and yet it is a photograph. How many godly families harbour such reptiles!

"His mother said unto him, Upon me be thy curse, my son: only obey my voice, and go fetch me them." (Genesis 27:13.)

Rebekah was ready to suffer if she could only obtain the blessing for Jacob; but, like her predecessor, Eve, she went the enemy's way instead of God's way to obtain the blessing. She made all her arrangements, clothed Jacob in Esau's clothes, and put the skins of the goats upon his neck and hands, in order to deceive her husband, made savoury meat, and gave it to Jacob to take to his blind father, and sent him in to receive the blessing, putting a lie in his mouth, and telling him to announce himself as Esau, the first-born. And no doubt the tempter made her think it was loyalty to God, and that Isaac's partiality to Esau would hinder the accomplishment of God's promise. She must put her hand to it. And Rebekah fell into the snare.

Poor blind Isaac! He had a disquieting misgiving; the voice was the voice of his younger son; the savoury meat came too quickly to hand; he called his son that he might feel him, and in his perplexity, he cried out:

"The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." (Genesis 27:22.)

Probably it never struck the father that his wife and his son would combine to deceive him and take advantage of his blindness. So he blessed him;" but even then he asked the question:

"Art thou my very son Esau? And he said, I am." (Genesis 27:24.)

Isaac pronounced the blessing in its very fulness upon Jacob. But could not God have so ordered it that without deceit and without so deep a plot, the blessing might yet have come upon Jacob? Surely He was to be trusted. We never need to help our God to keep His promises. With the very blessing there came a curse. When Esau returned, and found that his praying mother and his home-loving brother had betrayed him, hatred took possession of his heart. How could he respect their religion! He made no profession, and he would think it beneath him to resort to such mean expedients as they had had recourse to. His respect for his mother and his love for his brother had

received a shock. Who knows whether his soul was not lost in part through this very thing?

Esau procured a blessing such as became him, but he "hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him," (Genesis 27:41) and actually declared that as soon as his father was dead, he would slay his brother Jacob. And now the curse did come upon Rebekah. With her own hand she had to send away her younger son, who was the desire of her eyes; she must part with, and never see again, him whom she loved better than life. O if Rebekah had only trusted God, how blessedly He might have brought about the fulfilment of His promise, and Rebekah, as well as Sarah, might have had her place amongst the worthies of faith in Hebrew 11!

07. Leah and Rachel - Gen_29:1-35.

LEAH AND RACHEL.

Genesis 29:1-35; Genesis 30:1-43; Genesis 31:1-55 "They two shall be one flesh."—Ephesians 5:31 The last recorded words of Rebekah are sad ones. She besought Jacob to flee to her brother Laban until Esau's anger should turn away, and promised that which she could never perform: "Then will I send, and fetch thee from thence." (Genesis 27:45.) Afterwards she said to her husband: "I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth: if Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these which are of the daughters of the land, what good should my life do me?" (Genesis 27:46.) "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength" (Isaiah 40:31), but they that lean to their own resources grow weary.

Jacob left home, and on his journey he had the wondrous vision of Christ as God's ladder, connecting heaven and earth, and so became REALLY ACQUAINTED WITH HIS GOD.

Proceeding to Haran, he made the acquaintance of some Syrian shepherds who were watering their flocks, and inquired about the family of Laban. He learnt from them that he was living and well, and that Rachel, his daughter, was at hand with the sheep. The first sight of Rachel, recalling to Jacob's home-loving mind the family of his mother, touched a tender chord in his heart. He immediately became her servant, and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock and he "kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept," (Genesis 29:11.) telling her his near relationship, that he was Rebekah's son. A real affection sprang up between the two, and when Laban, who was a sharp-eyed man of business, suggested to Jacob some reward for his work,—for Jacob could not be an idle man,—Jacob suggested that he should serve him seven years for Rachel, his younger daughter.

"And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her." (Genesis 29:20.) But after all, this was human love. He admired the beautiful girl: there was perhaps much which accorded in their dispositions, but he had not received her from the hand of God as his father had received Rebekah. It accorded more with the character of Jacob to toil for his wife. His whole spirit was servile, and all his religion took its tone from this characteristic. When his seven years' betrothal came to an end, the wedding day was fixed; but Laban deceived him, and gave him his elder daughter instead. And when Jacob remonstrated with him:

"What is this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? Wherefore, then, hast thou beguiled me?" Laban answered, and, perhaps, there was something of irony in the reply:

"It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the first-born." (Genesis 29:26.) Was it an allusion to his dealings with Esau?

Jacob was legally married to Leah. In God's order, man was to have one wife, and He had never reversed this order, nor given His blessing to polygamy in any sense. What should Jacob do? He had served for Rachel; his heart was united to her; but just as cleverly as he had deceived his

father, Laban had deceived him. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for WHATSOEVER A MAN SOWETH that shall he also reap." (Galatians 6:7.) Jacob had sown deception, and he was reaping it now.

Laban proposed that Jacob should serve seven other years for Rachel, but that he should marry both the sisters at this time. And Jacob, without consulting his God, hearkened to the half-heathen Laban, who, while he feared God, yet had idols in his house. (Genesis 31:19.)

God could not bless this arrangement. Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah. The Lord executeth judgment for the oppressed (Psalms 103:6), and He gave Leah a son, whom she named Reuben—"See a son"—for she said: "Surely the Lord hath looked upon my affliction; now therefore my husband will love me." (Genesis 29:32.) Poor despised Leah! she was plain, and Rachel was beautiful. There was something attractive in her younger sister; there was little attraction about Leah; but God made compensation in giving her to be a happy mother. O, how this misery in the family shows the terrible mistake of reversing God's order of things! Marriage is the type of Christ and His Church. A man shall leave father and mother and cleave to his wife, not his wives.

God gave Leah another son, and she called him Simeon, and said: "Because the Lord hath heard that I was hated, He hath therefore given me this son also." And then a third son also, whom she called Levi—"joined"—and then a fourth son, whom she called Judah, and said: "Now will I praise the Lord." (Genesis 29:32-35.) It was a great compensation to this woman, lonely in her own home, that she should have the little ones around her and the consciousness that each child came as a direct gift from God. But as Leah grew happier in her surroundings, Rachel became more dissatisfied. She "envied her sister, and said unto Jacob:

"Give me children, or else I die." (Genesis 30:1.)

Jacob bitterly retaliated, and said: "Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb." (Genesis 30:2.) Then, following the example of Sarah, and probably the custom among the heathen, she gave her maid to her husband, that in case she should bear children, Rachel might reckon them her own, and Bilhah bore Jacob two sons. Leah followed her example, and gave her maid to her husband, and Zilpah also bore him two sons. But the complications in the family only grew greater by this multiplication: it was not God's divine order. At last God heard Rachel's prayer; and after her sister's family had numbered seven, and four children were born to the handmaids, God gave Rachel also a child, "and she called his name Joseph, and said: The Lord shall add to me another son." (Genesis 30:23-24.) O how this history shows us the misery there is in the ways of man, and how much of the evil of human nature comes out when the strict lines which God has laid down are not followed by His children! The family of Jacob must have been a hot-bed of jealousy, strife, contention, evil-speaking, pride, and bitterness; and the chief contention was between two sisters! If Jacob had trusted God to give him Rachel, or had given up his will and been satisfied with Leah, all these complications would not have arisen.

Meanwhile, business matters brought other difficulties. Laban was a selfish and self-seeking man. God blessed Jacob according to His promise, and Laban envied him; and, at last, "Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it was not toward him as before." (Genesis 31:2.) And now the Lord visited Jacob, and told him to return to the land of his fathers and to his kindred, and

promised, "I WILL BE WITH THEE." (Genesis 31:3.)

Jacob must break to Leah and Rachel the news that he was about to take them from their father's house and from their home. Both the sisters, when they found that God had spoken to him, sided with their husband against their father, and were ready to depart. But Jacob, instead of trusting God and doing the thing openly, "stole away unawares to Laban the Syrian, in that he told him not that he fled." (Genesis 31:20.) His mother's example had told only too strongly upon Jacob, and instead of raising Leah and Rachel by uprightness and integrity, he persuaded them to share his deceit, and help him in his flight. It is a precious thing when a man watches over the faults in his wife with a godly jealousy, seeking in every way to warn her, that she may be purified and kept pure in the sight of God. And it is a blessed thing when a wife watches over her husband in the same way, each watching for the other's soul. God has meant that husband and wife should be "heirs together of the grace of life." (1 Peter 3:7.) If two people who have agreed to spend their lives together are not made a blessing to each other, they must naturally be a curse. It is easier for one to do wrong if he sees his partner in life doing the same. From this time we hear little of importance about the wives of Jacob, except when Rachel's youngest son was born, and the mother died, calling the little babe: "The son of my sorrow," whereas his father called him "The son of the right hand." His life was his mother's death.

Neither of these wives was, as God would have had her, a true and unselfish helpmeet for her husband.

08. Jochebed, the Mother of Moses - Exo_1:1-22; Exo_2:1-25.

JOCHEBED: THE MOTHER OF MOSES.

Exodus 1:1-22; Exodus 2:1-25 The children of Israel were still in Egypt, but they were no longer honoured by the Egyptians as the people of their great deliverer, Joseph. "There arose up a new king over Egypt," or rather a new dynasty, "which knew not Joseph" (Exodus 1:8.), and which, consequently, knew not the God of Joseph. This Pharaoh was an oppressor; he made the children of Israel to "serve with rigour." "They made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigour." The government of Egypt saw with fear and trembling the increase of the seed of Abraham in their midst. They "were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them;" and the Egyptians marked with consternation that "the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew." (Exodus 1:7-12.) God had declared to Abraham that his seed should be "as the dust of the earth" (Genesis 13:16), and no earthly power could hinder their increase. The reigning Pharaoh, however, was determined to stamp out this people from his dominions; and he conceived the cruel and unjust plan of destroying all the male children, and issued his command to the Hebrew midwives, that they should destroy all the newborn sons of the Hebrews, but let the infant daughters live. But these women "feared" God, and they "saved the men children alive." (Exodus 1:17.)

It was in circumstances such as these that Amram, the grandson of Levi, married Jochebed, the daughter of Kohath, and she bore a son. (Exodus 6:20.)

There was something unusual about this child; Stephen in speaking of him (Acts 7:20, marg.), says that he was "fair unto God;" Paul speaks of him as "a proper child" (Hebrews 11:23.), and in (Exodus 2:2.) we read of him as "a goodly child." There may have been many goodly children amongst the little babes which were in danger from the persecution of Pharaoh, but this expression, "fair unto God," must mean something beyond beauty of countenance or intelligence.

Moses was a faith child. We may infer that his parents had borne upon their hearts the burden of the state of their people, and, probably, they had cried to God for a deliverer; and it may be that, as John the Baptist's mission was in direct answer to the prayers of Zacharias and Elizabeth, his parents, so the mission of Moses was a direct answer to the prayers of his Levite parents.

"BY FAITH

Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment." (Hebrews 11:23.) In the first place Jochebed hid her child for three months, but it was a difficult course to pursue. The cry of a healthy child soon betrayed his whereabouts, and the day arrived when she could hide him no longer. What could she do? Probably she prayed about it, and may have been led distinctly by her God to make for him an ark of bullrushes, and to daub it with slime and with pitch, and to put the child therein, and then to lay him in the flags by the river's brink. (Exodus 2:3.) When the water

was calm, the little vessel might ride safely there; but any flood or even rise of the water might float it to the mid-current, and carry it and its precious burden down the stream. It would have been a venturesome experiment, if Jochebed had been unable to trust her God. She stationed Miriam, Moses' elder sister, to watch on the river side what should become of the little ark and the beloved child.

God had His own plan for the future deliverance of Egypt. Just at this time, the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the river, and her maidens walked along by the river side. Probably some movement of the child, or some cry, may have drawn her attention to the ark. It was a covered vessel. She sent her maid to fetch it, and the little burden was easily borne. The royal princess opened it, and saw the child, and "the babe wept." It was an appeal to all the woman in her heart. She instinctively perceived the state of the case. There must be somewhere a weeping mother, an anxious family. This child belonged to somebody. Pharaoh's daughter had compassion upon him, and said: "This is one of the Hebrew's children." (Exodus 2:6.) THIS WAS NO ACCIDENT. The princess was but an instrument ordained of God to provide for the future education and position of this, His chosen instrument. Nothing happens by chance. God makes all things work together for good to them that love Him. (Romans 8:28.) He can make princes and princesses serve His purpose with His own children.

Miriam, seeing what had happened, approached Pharaoh's daughter, saying:

"Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?"

"Go."

"And the maid went and called the child's mother." (Exodus 2:7-8.) It was another provision from the hand of God. Little Moses was to be brought up in a heathen court: O, how he needed a counteracting influence, and what influence could equal that of a praying mother? In early morning and late night, when he was still of tender years, the prayers of his mother went up for him. He would remember the old teaching at that mother's knee, how God had been the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. He would have learnt the story of the Creation, of the Flood, and the wondrous vision of Jacob. His early impressions of the God of his fathers would be of a real, true, living God, who spoke, and acted, loved and cared for His people. From his early childhood, he would know that the gods of Egypt were but myths and shadows; and so, above all the learning he would get in the Egyptian schools, there was the mightier influence of the God his mother knew, to deliver him from superstition and error, and certainly he learned early to know God for himself.

Christian mother, does your home influence counteract the sin, the untruth, the impurity, the hollowness of the world, so that your son finds the home life a haven of rest from temptation and shame? Is there so much of God in your life that it more than outweighs other influences which surround him? Blessed mother, if it is so!

Pharaoh's daughter said to Jochebed: "Take this child away and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages." (Exodus 2:9.) This is the last we hear of Jochebed, Moses' mother. THE RESULT OF HER LIFE'S WORK was the man Moses. The true mother lives again in her son. There is the answer to her prayers; there is the result of her watchfulness; there is the true correction of her own faults reproduced in her son. Moses might never have been the man he was had it not been for Jochebed. Who knows how many a leader of God's people may be at the

present time in course of training by some pious mother? Who knows but that the little James or John or William, who is playing with the kitten on the hearth, may some day become a man to whom hundreds or thousands may look for help and direction? Oh let every mother who reads these pages understand her vocation when a higher than Pharaoh's daughter says to her: "Take this child and nurse it for Me, and I will give thee thy wages." But the wages of Jochebed were not to be given by the princes of this world. To be the mother of a Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, like whom there arose not since in Israel (Deuteronomy 34:10): this was an honour which none but God could give.

09. Zipporah, the Wife of Moses - Exo_4:18-26

ZIPPORAH: THE WIFE OF MOSES.

Exodus 4:18-26 When God sent Moses to school in the land of Midian, after he had sought to deliver Israel by his own unaided hand, Moses, in his flight, sat down by a well. He had left the soil of Egypt, and was already in the mountainous country of Midian (Exodus 2:15.), probably a part of Mount Sinai, or, at least, in that neighbour-hood. The priest or prince of Midian seems to have been a shepherd king. The valleys which lay in between the rocky heights were rich pasture lands, and it paid better in that country to keep sheep than to do much in the tillage of the land. Water was scarce; the watercourses ran in the pasture lands of the valleys; it was easier to take the sheep to the place where water could be found than to carry water to fields where corn and other grain could be sown.

It was the custom in many of the countries of the East for the daughters of a family to lead the flocks and herds to the wells for water. Water was a precious thing, and the servants might easily waste it, and, therefore, the members of the family who would know its value were trusted with this office. The seven daughters of the Midianitish prince came to draw water at the well where Moses was sitting. Shepherds, doubtless from some unfriendly tribe, very frequently "came and drove them away." There was, perhaps, only sufficient for one flock; and to the surprise of the young women, the stranger who sat upon the well, "stood up and helped them and watered their flock." (Exodus 2:17.) It was a bold step to take. We know not how many were the men whom this unaided stranger vanquished, but if they were only a dozen or twenty, it was no small victory, when Moses alone overcame them.

Reuel, or Jethro, their father, in surprise at their quick return, said to his daughters:

How is it that ye are come so soon to-day?"

"An Egyptian," they said, "delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds, and also drew water enough for us and watered the flock." (Exodus 2:18-19.)

Hospitality was more commonly exercised in those Old Testament times, when disorderly Christians, i.e., those who will not work (2 Thessalonians 3:11), were not at large, sponging upon industrious and hard-working people of God. And Jethro said to his daughters:

"And where is he? Why is it that ye have left the man? Call him, that he may eat bread." (Exodus 2:20.)

Thus God provided His servant a home in a strange land. Moses was highly cultivated, but this very fact made him superior to becoming a burden upon strangers. He asked his host for employment. Thus the polished student obtained the charge of Jethro's sheep, and finally Jethro gave him Zipporah, his daughter, in marriage. There, in Midian, his first son was born, and he named him Gershom, which means, "A stranger here." (Exodus 2:21-22.)

It is almost certain that Zipporah learnt from Moses to fear the true God, but she was a woman of some strength of character, and she had certain ideas of her own which she did not willingly yield to her husband. They may have been conscientious scruples.

CROSSES IN THE FAMILY. When a father and mother do not see eye-to-eye about the bringing up and the education of their children, the cross is no light one to bear. Such a cross is far from uncommon.

God had appeared to Moses at the burning bush, and commanded him to return to Egypt that he might be, as His instrument, the deliverer of His people. When he communicated to Jethro the message of his God, Jethro made no difficulty, but said to Moses:

"Go in peace." His God also encouraged him by saying: "All the men are dead which sought thy life." (Exodus 4:18-19.) Moses took with him his wife and his sons—for a second son was now born into the family—and Moses was now eighty years of age.

It is evident that circumcision was a great stumbling-block to Zipporah. She did not understand the covenant with God, and, probably, considerable contention, or at least, difference of opinion, prevailed between Moses and his wife; and perhaps, at the time of his return to Egypt, Moses was feeling strongly that Zipporah must be brought into the mind of God concerning this thing. But how can a man overcome an obstinate woman? or, how can a woman overcome an obstinate man? There is but one way, and that is to COMMIT THEM TO THE LORD. On the journey God said to Moses:

"Thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord, Israel is My son, even My first-born; and I say unto thee, Let My son go, that he may serve Me; and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy first-born." (Exodus 4:22-23.)

It is probable that this message brought things to a climax in Moses' family. Probably, he felt the necessity of intense prayer. Seeing that Pharaoh's first-born would be slain if God could not have His way, Moses feared for his own uncircumcised first-born, who was in the company. Was it not in answer to his prayer that, "by the way in the inn, the Lord met him and sought to kill him?" All must be put right in Moses' family, whatever it might cost, if he was to be the leader of God's people. He knew Zipporah; but having trusted his God, God must deal with Zipporah. She saw her husband within an inch of death, and she knew instinctively what God meant by it. She saw the danger of being left alone with her two sons. She took a sharp stone, and circumcised her child, saying at the same time a very hard thing to her husband. Yet God had conquered; the witness of the covenant was clear in Moses' house; Zipporah, at any rate, could see that nothing came by chance, and she recognised the voice of God to her in His dealing with her husband.

Every family trial is the voice of God. His appeals to the families of those who are His special witnesses are very strong and very striking; it must be a very blind eye, or a very deaf ear which does not detect them. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." (Hebrews 12:11.) But they must let themselves be exercised, must listen to the voice of God.

10. Miriam, The Prophetess - Num_12:1-16.

MIRIAM: THE PROPHETESS.

Numbers 12:1-16.

"I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy."—Joel 2:28.

Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron (Exodus 15:20.), is the first of her order mentioned in the Word of God. While the Lord never ordained a woman to be priest, nor do we read of women as bishops or pastors in the New Testament, the vocation of "prophetess" is common to both dispensations. Hannah (1 Samuel 1:2) was practically a prophetess, and so was Huldah, to whom King Josiah went in his time of perplexity. Deborah (Judges 4:5) was a prophetess (2 Kings 22:14), and there were also false prophetesses, such as Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14), as well as false prophets. In the New Testament, Peter specially declares that the pouring out of the Spirit of God upon all flesh should be upon sons and daughters, servants, and handmaids, "and they shall prophesy," quoting from the Old Testament. (Joel 2:28-32); compare (Acts 2:17-18.) A number of those who "spake"

"AS THE SPIRIT GAVE THEM UTTERANCE," (Acts 2:4.) of the wonderful works of God on the Day of Pentecost, were women speaking in the spirit of prophecy. Philip, the deacon, we read, had four daughters "which did prophesy" (Acts 21:9); the Apostle Paul speaks of those women who laboured with him in the Gospel. (Phl 4:3.) It is he who specially recommends that, when women pray and prophesy, their heads should be covered; and explains what is this office of prophesying in the words: "He that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort." (1 Chronicles 11:5; 1 Chronicles 14:3.) And while he commands that women should not speak in church, he ordains that all, i.e., both men and women, may prophesy, one by one, that all may learn, and may be comforted. (1Cr 14:31-34.)

God's order in the family is not according to earthly birthright. Speaking of the leaders of His people Israel, He says: "I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam." (Micah 6:4.) All these children of Amram were of the prophet order. Miriam was the eldest, Moses the youngest; yet Moses is first mentioned, because he knew his God more fully than either his brother or his sister. Aaron, his elder brother, ranks next, and Miriam, the eldest of the three, ranks last.

We have already noticed how Miriam watched by the infant Moses on the borders of the Nile, and how she called her mother to be her infant brother's nurse in the employ of Pharaoh's daughter. From this time, no more is heard of Miriam until the wondrous deliverance of Israel from the Red Sea by a miracle of God. Then the prophetic vocation of Miriam is first recognised in Scripture. She, as well as Moses, took in the greatness of the deliverance, the glory of the living God whom she served.

Moses spoke the inspired song with which begins: "and Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand," and with the enthusiasm of one who was inspired, led the praises of the pious women of Israel, who went out with her "with timbrels and with dances." (Exodus 15:20.) She composed a chorus which they should sing together:

"Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea." (Exodus 15:21.) Here Miriam was in her place, exercising, as a helpmeet to her brother, the gift which God had committed to her; NOT TAKING THE FIRST PLACE. But in her further history, Miriam had to learn a lesson which is greatly needed to be learnt by many female evangelists. "Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married," (Numbers 12:1.) and their reproaches took the form of a contention with Moses for the leadership of Israel.

"Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? Hath He not spoken also by us?" (Numbers 12:2.) No one could deny that Aaron and Miriam were inspired, and that they uttered the words of God, and had a prophet vocation; but God had never called them to the same leadership of Israel to which Moses was called. The office of both of them was subordinate. God had said to Moses: "I have made thee a god to Pharaoh; and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet." (Exodus 7:1.) "And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God." (Exodus 7:1; Exodus 4:16.)

How many a church, how many a mission, has been mined by internal divisions! Some whom God has not called have striven for the mastery, because they have money, position, talent, or some earthly advantage. Should they not fear to sacrifice the welfare of God's own work for the aggrandisement of their own little personality?

If it was unbecoming for Aaron to seek the pre-eminence, it was infinitely more unbecoming for Miriam to seek it. If a woman evangelist loses the retiring spirit which is becoming to a woman, she has lost all which Paul would express by the covering for the head which should accompany the exercise of prophesying in a woman. A bold woman evangelist (1 Chronicles 11:5) does more harm by her unfeminine manner than she does good by her words. But will God interfere in family quarrels? When Aaron and Miriam spoke against Moses, it is written: "And the Lord heard it...And the Lord spake suddenly unto Moses, and unto Aaron, and unto Miriam, Come out ye three unto the tabernacle of the congregation." (Numbers 12:4.) A FAMILY DISPUTE in such a family, which was set in evidence before all God's people, could not be hushed up on the quiet. All Israel was involved in it. If their leaders showed the spirit of jealousy, if ambition should actuate Aaron and Miriam, then ambition could be allowed among the people too. If strife and anger were seen in their leaders, it would justify the people in committing the same sins. God is intensely strict with spiritual leaders.

"And they three came out." (Numbers 12:4.) All the congregation of Israel must witness what God had to say and do in the family of Moses. "And the Lord came down in the pillar of the cloud." (Numbers 12:5.) The matter was so important that there must be an actual manifestation of God's presence before the wrong could be put right. The pillar of cloud stood in awful solemnity in the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord "called Aaron, and Miriam: and they both came forth." (Numbers 12:5.) God should decide between the brothers and sister, and He said: "Hear now My words: If there be a prophet among you, I, the Lord, will make Myself known unto him in a vision,

and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all Mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?" (Numbers 12:6-8.)

Aaron and Miriam had presumed upon their vocation. They were prophets; why should Moses be greater than they? But God bore witness that Moses was ABOVE A PROPHET. His faithfulness was superior to the highest spiritual gift. God would speak to him, not in a dream, nor in dark speeches, but mouth to mouth and face to face. After these solemn words, we read: "And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them, and He departed." (Numbers 12:9.) The cloud, the Lord's glory, "departed from off the tabernacle." (Numbers 12:10.) But an awful judgment had fallen on the family. "Miriam became leprous, white as snow;" and all the congregation of Israel must behold her disgrace. According to the law, Miriam must be shut out from the camp. "Every leper...both male and female shall be put out, without the camp shall ye put them, that they defile not their camps, in the midst whereof I dwell." (Numbers 5:2-3.) Aaron keenly felt the rebuke, and owned the sin as his, equally with his sister. Unable himself to speak directly to the Lord under the sense of his sin, he said to Moses, "Alas, my lord, I beseech thee, lay not the sin upon us, wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned. Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb." (Numbers 12:12.) And Moses prayed for her healing.

God heard the prayer: Miriam was healed. But for seven days she was without the camp, excommunicated like any common leper: and the whole camp of Israel was hindered one whole week on their journeys, until Miriam was received again! Miriam was no private individual; a flaw in a prophetess, and the sister of Moses, affected every soul in Israel. No doubt from this time she became a humbler woman, and learnt that faithfulness is more important than the greatest gifts.

O that God may teach many a sister evangelist who reads these words to be lowly in heart, to take a second place, and, above all, never to allow for an instant the spirit of strife and jealousy, lest God's judgment should come upon her, and she be humbled as Miriam was. And let us learn how tremendous is the influence of a teacher, man or woman, for good or evil. One member may hinder blessing in a whole congregation, and their blood will be required at his or her hands. (Ezekiel 18:1-32.) "None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." (Romans 14:7.) Only one thing more are we told of this prophetess. When the people abode in Kadesh, "Miriam died there, and was buried there." (Numbers 20:1.)

11. Rahab - Jos_2:1-24.

RAHAB.

Joshua 2:1-24.

"Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you."—Matthew 21:31 The children of Israel were on the borders of the Land of Promise, and Joshua, Moses' successor, sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly, saying: "Go, view the land, even Jericho." (Joshua 2:1.) These men were utterly unacquainted with the city, and with the character of its inhabitants: but it was no chance that they came to the house of a woman whose life was known throughout the city as evil and profligate. When men of God come into contact with those who are sinful, one of two things must happen: either they must be dragged down into sin, or the sinner must be brought to repentance. Oil and water cannot mix, and the Spirit of God cannot mix with the spirit of the evil one.

It was not long before Rahab, the harlot, in whose house the spies lodged, began to suffer persecution. The King of Jericho heard that the children of Israel were come to search the land, and he sent a warrant for their arrest, and the officers stood before the house of Rahab with the command that she should deliver them up. It was A MOMENT OF DECISION.

There is little doubt, from what happened afterwards, that these men of God had spoken of their God, and had borne in faithful testimony the unhallowed atmosphere of that house; and now came a time when the woman must decide whether she should take part with God's people or whether she would be the means of their destruction. She chose for God, took the two men, and hid them, at the risk of her own life. She returned answer:

"There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were: and it came to pass, about the time of shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out: whither the men went, I wot not: pursue after them quickly; for ye shall overtake them."

Rahab told a lie, and a lie is one of the worst of sins in the sight of God. But let us remember that this poor woman had never heard the Ten Commandments, and did not know the difference between sin and righteousness. Paul says: "I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shall not covet...For without the law sin was dead." (Romans 7:7-8.) So it was with Rahab; she had not learnt it was a sin to tell a lie; it was in her a sin of ignorance.

She had brought the men to the roof of the house, and hid them with the stalks of flax which she had laid in order upon the roof, ready for the winter spinning. Rahab had placed her life in danger because she had been so deeply impressed with the fact that their God was the true God; and we may be sure that, at the same time, she repented of her sinful life.

After the officers of justice had left her house and gone to pursue after the spies, supposing that Rahab had told them the truth, she came to her hidden guests, and said to them:

"I know that the Lord hath given you the land." These very words bear witness that somebody had spoken to her about the Lord, and the thought had taken possession of her. She had begun to fear God, and "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalms 111:10), and she said: "I know that...your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt." From these words we may gather that however wicked may have been Rahab's former life, as soon as she heard of the Mighty God who could perform a miracle for the sake of His people, an awful and reverent sense of this God had taken possession of her mind, and she had learnt to regard Him as greater even than the king of her country. God loves to find hearts that tremble at His Word. (Isaiah 66:5.) O how often some judgment of God happens, some sudden death or terrible disaster, and for a few days a slight impression is made, and then men forget, and go on just as before! It was not so with Rahab: she laid to heart what she heard of God.

"As soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you; for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath." (Joshua 2:11.) THIS WAS THE TESTIMONY OF A HEATHEN woman, and a heathen woman of a disreputable character! Placed by her side, how would the young scoffers of the 19th century appear, who would, nevertheless recoil from the appellation of heathen, who would like to be considered to belong to a Christian community? Placed by the side of this woman, how would those appear who mock and jeer at answers to prayer, and who relegate the living God to a level with the deities of past mythology. Is there not a greater dignity, is there not more of real and common sense about this heathen woman than about these 19th century men? How silly is agnosticism compared to this simple, reverent bowing to a superior Power! This woman was not ashamed of the measure of faith which she had in God. She believed that life and death were in His hands, and so she said:

"Now, therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the Lord, since I have shown you kindness, that ye will also show kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token: and that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death."

Rahab had become, not a believer only, but an intercessor. She sought, not only her own life, but the lives of her family. Would that every Christian believer were as noble and as zealous for the souls of their family as was this once heathen woman! The spies answered her: "Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business. And it shall be, when the Lord hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee." Neither Rahab nor yet the spies uttered a doubt as to the fulfilment of God's promise. Both were sure that God's people should prevail. When she saw that the way was safe, Rahab let down the spies by a cord through the window, for her house was upon the town wall. But before they departed, they told her to bind a line of scarlet thread in the window, and charged her to bring every member of her family into her house which was upon the wall; and they said:

"And it shall be that whosoever shall go out of the doors of thy house into the street, his blood shall be upon his head, and we will be guiltless: and whosoever shall be with thee in the house, his blood shall be upon our head, if any hand be upon him."

What does this scarlet line signify? Surely, the precious blood of Christ. It is like a type beforehand of that blood which shelters and which proclaims the safety of those who trust in it. Out from the shelter of the blood, destruction, and damnation, and eternal death can touch the souls of men; but, sheltered by the blood, no destroying angel, no fear of judgment, can reach them. "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1.) O how needful it is to have every member of our house and family sheltered by the precious blood: husband, wife, children, servants, workmen, all under the blood!

One warning the spies gave to Rahab still:

"If thou utter this our business, then we will be quit of thine oath which thou hast made us to swear."

"According unto your words, so be it," was her answer. (Joshua 2:20-21.)

"And she sent them away, and they departed: and she bound the scarlet line in the window." Days passed by; but Rahab was at peace. She knew that judgment was coming, but she feared nothing. Does our faith in God give us a like fearlessness? If not, it cannot be as real as hers. At last, the time came when Joshua marshalled his hosts, and they compassed the city of Jericho, and for seven days walked round the city, blowing with rams' horns. Doubtless many of the inhabitants mocked at this curious method of warfare; but there was one face serious all the time; it was that of the heathen woman who had learnt to put her trust in Israel's God. When "the wall" of the city "fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him," there was one house which stood erect. And Joshua called the two spies, and said to them:

"Go unto the harlot's house, and bring out thence the woman, and all that she hath, as ye sware unto her." (Joshua 6:20-22.)

Rahab had been wise; not one member of her family was wanting; she had imbued them with her own faith. "And they brought out all her kindred...And Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father's household, and all that she had; and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day; because she hid the messengers which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho." (Joshua 7:22-25.) And this woman, once so degraded, was honoured by being one of the direct line from which the Lord Jesus Christ was descended. (Matthew 1:5.)

12. Deborah - Jdg_4:1-24.

DEBORAH.

Judges 4:1-24.

"I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey which thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman."—Judges 4:9.

It is not the usual order of God to put woman in the place of authority: "Adam was first formed, then Eve." (1 Timothy 2:13.) Deborah was an exception. The children of Israel had sinned grievously against the Lord, and apparently there was no man that could serve His purpose as judge over Israel. Just as, later on, He was driven to employ the child Samuel when the high priest Eli was not equal to the occasion, so now, a woman must do the part of a man.

It is always sin which puts things out of God's order, and all kinds of complications follow. At this time, the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and "the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin, king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host was Sisera, which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles." Again and again, this history had been repeated. God had fulfilled His word, "If ye will not hearken unto Me, and will not do all these commandments; and if ye shall despise My statutes, or if your soul abhor My judgments, so that ye will not do all My commandments, but that ye break My covenant: I will also do this unto you;...I will set My face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you." (Leviticus 26:14-17.) But God had made a provision, which was recorded by the Psalmist, "Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses." (Psalms 107:6; Psalms 107:13; Psalms 107:19; Psalms 107:28.)

After twenty years of oppression by the king of Canaan, "the children of Israel cried unto the Lord," "And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time:...and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment." (Jude 4:1-4.) As their cry rose up to heaven, God, in answer, stirred the heart of this remarkable woman, and she knew how to understand the mind of the Lord, and the way of His deliverance, for she was in the secret of her God, and she knew that all things were possible to Him.

"She sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam, out of Kedesh-naphtali, and said unto him:

"Hath not the Lord God of Israel commanded, saying, Go, and draw toward Mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun? And I will draw unto thee, to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand." Had Barak possessed the same faith in his God which characterised Deborah, and had he possessed true manliness, he might, perhaps, have gone out alone and unaided; but Barak feared to undertake the command of an army against Sisera, except he had some one by his side to encourage him. Barak was not himself sufficiently

acquainted with his God to receive direct communications from Him, but he was wise enough and humble enough to learn from a woman when he knew she was sent of God. He said to the prophetess:

"If thou wilt go with me, then I will go but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go." (Judges 4:8.)

There is a mightier power than many know in the fellowship of kindred spirits. In the work of the Lord, who that preaches to a difficult congregation does not know the difference it makes when some half-dozen who are in full sympathy are sitting near him, with closed eyes, and hearts engaged in prayer? Nevertheless, a true man of God is not dependent upon any man; and when Barak refused to go except Deborah should go with him, there was an evident want of manliness in his character, which gives one easily to understand why a woman should have been used in such an exceptional way to be over him in Israel. Deborah in this also knew the mind of God. She said:

"I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding, the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." When men are not manly, they cannot be trusted with honour. Conceit and unmanliness generally go together. God knows what instruments He can trust.

"Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh." (Judges 4:9.) And with the inspiration of this inspired woman, he gathered ten thousand men. Sisera, the captain of the Canaanitish army, heard that Barak had marshalled an army to oppose him, and he gathered together his "nine hundred chariots of iron," and all the people that were with him over a large space of country, from Harosheth of the Gentiles in the south, unto the river of Kishon in the north of his dominions. But Barak needed a fresh impetus, and Deborah called him, saying:

"Up; for this is the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the Lord gone out before thee?" Thus called, "Barak went down from Mount Tabor, and ten thousand men after him."

Sometimes there are things to be done and. dared in the Church of God which men fear to attempt. An Elizabeth Fry was a leader in prison work; a Sarah Foster, of Newcastle, in the rescue of the fallen. It was women who began the great temperance movement in America. It was a woman, the late Mrs. Daniells, of Aldershot, who first thought of Soldiers' Homes and systematic work amongst the soldiers as a class.

It was a woman, Miss Marsh, who first began work among the navvies. The policemen's work, the work among railway men, sailors, etc., has generally in England had its origin with one or more godly women. A woman may give the inspiration to a work as Deborah did to Barak.

"But there was One who went before him and before his host. It was no power of Deborah's, nor yet of Barak's, nor any military genius in his officers, which won that victory.

"THE LORD DISCOMFITED SISERA, and all his chariots, and all his host with the edge of the sword before Barak:" and Sisera, who had thought to gain an easy victory, jumped down from his chariot, "and fled away on his feet." (Judges 4:15.) But God had determined his destruction; and as Deborah had prophesied, he became the victim of a woman.

Entering the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, who was a friend of Jabin's, Jael met him with hospitality, gave him refreshment, and bade him lie down to rest, while she stood as sentinel at the door to answer or baffle any inquiries. What her intention might have been with regard to Sisera, we know not. God has the hearts of all men in his hands; and, whether driven by a sudden impulse, or whether conscious that she was an instrument of God in what she did, Jael took a nail of the tent and a hammer, and with one determined, decided blow, she drove the iron stake right through the sleeping man's temples, and fastened it safely into the ground with the blow. The poor, writhing body soon ceased to breathe, and the enemy of Israel was no more. It was an unwomanly deed, but intended by God to be a reproach to unmanly men. When it so happens that, in politics, in the affairs of nations, in Church matters, and in Christian work, women are found to dare things which men are not courageous enough to undertake, it is not intended to institute a new order of things, but rather to provoke men to jealousy, that they may take the first place, which God had given them. But God gave the glory neither to Jael, nor to Deborah, nor to Barak. God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel. And the hand of the children of Israel prospered, and prevailed against Jabin, the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin, king of Canaan."

13. Deborah's Song - Jdg_5:1-31.

DEBORAH'S SONG.

"I arose, a mother in Israel."—Judges 5:7 The unusual call of Deborah the prophetess ended with the conquest of Jabin. She still remained a judge and a prophetess, but her military campaign was at an end; she was no longer a Joan of Arc in Israel, but she gave herself to her ordinary work, and composed a song of victory, which was doubtless set to music, and sung by the priestly tribe. But there is one thing that strikes one in the song of Deborah. There was so much of herself in it. The position had been too much for her; she could not forget the part she had played in it. "Then sang Deborah, and Barak the son of Abinoam, saying: Praise ye the Lord for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves." (Judges 5:1.) These first words witness how strong was the impression made on the people by this remarkable woman. Doubtless, the ten thousand men gathered by her and Barak were volunteers, and their military service was neither a forced matter nor an affair of money, but there was all the enthusiasm of the voluntary principle in it. "They willingly offered themselves."

"Hear, O ye kings," sings Deborah, "I, even I, will sing unto the Lord: I will sing praise to the Lord God of Israel." (Judges 5:3.) Barak was singing as well as Deborah; but Deborah was most present to her own mind: yet this woman lived in communion with the Unseen. She saw the Lord go out of Seir, marching out of the field of Edom, the earth trembling, the heavens dropping, the clouds dropping water, the mountains melting, even Sinai itself, before the Lord God of Israel. And then she discoursed on the desolation of the land through the destruction of Jabin. "The highways were unoccupied"—the Canaanites made them dangerous—"and the travellers walked through by ways." (Judges 5:6.) The country villages became so unsafe that they were hardly to be found in Israel "until that I," said Deborah, "arose, THAT I AROSE a mother in Israel." Here we see the danger of her position. O how much more blessed would it be if she had said, "Until the Lord arose." Deborah was no small person in her own eyes.

She speaks of the idolatry of the people. "They chose new gods; then was war in the gates;" and yet their armour was so poor that she asks, "Was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?" (Judges 5:8.) And again she sounds the strain of the willingness of the people: "My heart is toward the governors of Israel, that offered themselves willingly among the people." "My heart"—Deborah continues somebody, great in her own eyes! She is not simply an instrument of the Lord, although she intersperses her song with His praises.

"Awake, awake, Deborah;" she sings, "awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam." Deborah first, and Barak second! This was reversing the order of God; but this old prophetess did not perceive it; she had not learnt by the example of the meek and lowly One to take the last place, and to be among the people of God as one that serveth. It was to His little flock that Jesus taught: "He that will be chief among you, let him be as the younger." It is true she said: "The Lord made me have dominion over the mighty;" (Judges 5:13.) but it would have been more womanly to have taken the place by constraint, and not to have

boasted of it. Yet Deborah had a keen sense of what was due to God, and of the real call of the tribes of Israel to take up their position with Him against Israel's foes.

"Out of Ephraim was there a root of them against Amalek." She speaks of Benjamin and Machir, while Zebulun was only useful in handling the pen of the writer, no doubt by way of encouraging others to take the field against Canaan. But "the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; even Issachar, and also Barak; he was sent on foot into the valley"—as the infantry who could not manage the mountain passes. But there was one tribe whose internal divisions unfitted them to come to the help of the Lord. It was Reuben. "For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart;" and she was obliged to ask: "Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks?" (Judges 5:16.) There is a time for everything, a time in which the flocks should not be neglected; but when the commonwealth of Israel calls for a stand against the enemy, all personal matters, all family matters and business matters must be put aside, and everyone must take his share of danger and hardship for the common good. O that men understood this in the Church! O that that unity of the members of the body which Paul writes of (1 Chronicles 12:1-40) were a recognised and powerful reality at this time!

"Gilead abode beyond Jordan: and why did Dan remain in ships? Asher continued on the sea shore, and abode in his breaches;" while the neighbouring tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali jeopardised their lives in the high places of the field. "They loved not their lives unto the death." (Revelation 12:11.) But God did not allow defeat to come upon His people because of the defection of some tribes. God had the universe at his command; and "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera." In the midst of her song, Deborah becomes the mouthpiece of the angel of the Lord. It is an inspired curse that she utters:

"Curse ye, Meroz, said the angel of the Lord; curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty." There is no neutrality in the kingdom of God: "He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad." (Matthew 12:30.)

After extolling highly the deed of Jael, and turning into irony the expectation of Sisera's mother that he should come back victorious and laden with the spoil, Deborah closes her song:

"So let all Thine enemies perish, O Lord; but let them that love Him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might." (Judges 5:31.)

Deborah was an imperfect, but a useful woman. Let every redeemed and truly converted woman who reads these pages learn that, bought by the blood of Christ and saved by His life, our responsibilities are infinitely greater than hers, and God's grace in Christ for us is equal to them all. This is all we hear of the history of Deborah. Of her private life we know nothing—what kind of wife, what kind of mother, what kind of mistress she made; and yet how many there are who would like to know how such a woman dealt with the details of home life. No prophetic gift, no calling of the Spirit of God into active and public service can excuse a woman for unfaithfulness in family and domestic matters. The being a worker together with God can never excuse her from being a helpmeet to her husband; but the two things can go blessedly together where the public call is really from God. In His economy, one call does not necessarily supersede another, and "he that is faithful in that which is least," can be "faithful also in much." (Luke 16:10.)

14. Manoah's Wife - Jdg_13:1-25.

MANOAH'S WIFE.

Judges 13:1-25. The children of Israel had again fallen away from God, "and the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years," that is to say, almost, if not quite, a generation. In every age, God has His witnesses; there is always one man or one woman to be found who lays to heart the cause of God, and to whom the sins of their country are a burden and a sorrow; there is always someone or other who takes sides with God against the spirit of his generation. It is possible that Manoah, a man "of the family of the Danites," (Judges 13:2.) was such an one. The angel of the Lord appeared unto his wife: indicating to us that she was a woman who understood communion with God. He said to her:

"Behold, now, thou art barren, and barest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son. Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing. For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son, and no razor shall come on his head; for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." (Judges 13:3-5.)

God's angels come where they are welcome: God's messages to hearing hearts and attentive spirits; His messages of deliverance come where the cry for deliverance has already gone up to Him: and it is more than probable that Manoah and his wife had already done a work of intercession for their land in their generation. The woman came and told her husband; and this is evidence that she believed he would understand her communion with God. There are some wives who cannot tell their husbands what passes between God and their souls. How should an infidel husband, or an unbeliever, or even an unspiritual believer, understand communications from God which are in the Spirit, and which are addressed to "the hidden man of the heart?" (1 Peter 3:4.) "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." (1 Corinthians 2:14.) When Manoah heard from his wife the communication of the angel he "entreated the Lord, and said:

"O, my Lord, let the man of God which Thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born." (Judges 13:8.) Would that every godly parent sought and received counsel from God what to do with his child or his children. Children would be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord to a very much greater extent if parents, instead of following their own whims, gratifying their own pride, or yielding to their own laziness, educated their children in the spirit, and under the direct guidance of God.

O HOW MANY MISTAKES have we all made in bringing up our children, by failing to secure God's counsel in the matter.

It was a simple request. "And God hearkened to the voice of Manoah; and the angel of God came again unto the woman as she sat in the field; but Manoah, her husband, was not with her." And she ran and fetched him, and when he came to the man, he said unto him:

"Art thou the man that spakest unto the woman?" And he said, I am. (Judges 13:11.)

"And Manoah said: Now let thy words come to pass. How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?" (or, R.V., What shall be the manner of the child, and what shall be his work?) There is complete self-abnegation in this request of Manoah's. He does not ask that his son shall be a credit to him, shall build up the family name, or reflect honour upon him or his ancestors. Manoah recognised that, as the father of God's deliverer, he was but God's steward even of his own child. And the angel of the Lord repeated to Manoah what he had said to his wife regarding abstinence from strong drink and from everything that was unclean. Let us pause a moment, and consider. The priests of God were forbidden to take wine and strong drink when they went into the tabernacle, that they might "put difference between holy and unholy, between unclean and clean." (Leviticus 10:9-10.) The mother of John the Baptist was told that her son should drink neither wine nor strong drink, but that he should be filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb; implying that the Holy Ghost and strong drink cannot occupy the same individual. Again, it is strikingly said: "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18); as though alcoholic spirit and the Spirit of God could not accord. And here we find that the mother of the strongest man that ever lived must avoid those stimulants which deluded people make use of to give them physical strength.

Manoah, having thus received the confirmation of the directions regarding his child from the angel of the Lord, besought him to remain until he could make ready a kid for him, not knowing he was an angel of the Lord; but his answer was:

"Though thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread; and if thou wilt offer a burnt-offering, thou must offer it unto the Lord."

Still this Israelite knew not Him that spake unto him. So dull is human nature TO DISCERN WHAT IS DIVINE.

One more request Manoah made:

"What is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honour?" But the angel of the Lord only replied:

"Why askest thou thus after my name? seeing it is secret;" or "wonderful" (Marg.).

Manoah knew how to obey, and took the kid with the meat-offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the Lord in the angel's presence; but, to his amazement, "when the flame went up towards heaven from off the altar," the angel of the Lord "did wondrously," according to His name. He "ascended in the flame of the altar." And then it was that the revelation was made to this godly couple that he was the angel of the Lord. It is when God's child is laid upon the altar, it is when all that he is turns to ashes and is consumed, that Jesus can dwell in his heart by faith, and in the ascending flame of the sacrifice there is the living presence of the Lord, joining His consecrated child to God, to heaven, and to heavenly things.

Manoah was in terror. He said unto his wife:

"We shall surely die, because we have seen God." (Judges 13:22.) For he knew those words of (Exodus 33:20): "There shall no man see Me and live." But Manoah's wife had understood the

meaning of the offering; in spirit she was already dead, and she fell back upon the value of the offering.

"If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would have not received a burnt-offering and a meat-offering at our hands, neither would He have showed us all these things, nor would, as at this time, have told us such things as these." The woman had an intuition of divine things which Manoah had not as yet. It is such mothers—those who thus understand their God, thus help their husbands into deeper communion with Him—who prove to be the mothers of God's deliverers and God's reformers. Samson, the promised son, strange, inconsistent man that he was, yet so honoured God by his faith that he was given a place in Hebrews 11:1-40, among those "of whom the world was not worthy."

15. Naomi and Ruth. Part I - Rth_1:1-22.

NAOMI AND RUTH.

"Entreat me not to leave thee."—Ruth 1:1-22 The book of Ruth, a perfectly true history in itself, is also a wonderful parable of the Church of Christ, and sometimes in the course of the thoughts we pen, we may need to take it in its parabolic sense.

It was in the days when the Judges ruled in Israel. "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25.); and it is most significant that just then "there was a famine in the land." A famine never came upon the land of promise by accident; God had ensured a blessing to their basket and their store when His people hearkened to His voice. (Deuteronomy 28:5; Deuteronomy 28:11.) The cause of this famine is not mentioned, but the history of a family under this trial is given to us in detail, as though to show us there was ample ground for this severe discipline.

"A certain man of Bethlehem-judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. And the name of the man was Elimelech." Hebrew names are significant, and the name Elimelech means "My God is King." But this man belied his name, and acted as though self-rule was the order of his life; without first seeking direction from his God, he went into the country of Moab, and he carried his family with him. The name Moab signifies "Of the father," and Moab is a type of the old Adam, of living to the flesh.

Once settled in the land of Moab, the family "continued there," and found, themselves at home in the land of God's enemies. It is a dangerous thing for children of God to come down to the level of the flesh, to consider and yield to the old Adam too often they continue there. We cannot be in the atmosphere of the ungodly and unbelieving without being tainted by it, unless we are sent on a special mission from our God.

Very naturally, the sons of Elimelech and Naomi "took them wives of the women of Moab." But this again was in direct disobedience to the Word of God. He had commanded that no covenant should be made with the people of the land. "Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give to his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following Me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly." (Deuteronomy 7:3-4. See also Joshua 23:12.) It is not to be wondered at that

DEATH ENTERED this family. "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die." (Romans 8:13.) Elimelech died; then Mahlon and Chilion; and Naomi were left alone.

God has ways of seeking His wanderers; He cannot forget them. It is in moments of trial that God gains the ear of His children. In her widowhood and childlessness, Naomi paid attention to every bit of news which came from her old country; and "she heard in the country of Moab bow the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread." Nothing happens by accident, and God knew, when

He ordered it that the report of plentiful food in her own land should reach Naomi's ears, how her heart would be touched by it, and that, probably, she might be aroused to return to the land of promise. She may have thought, "If I had only remained in God's hands and trusted Him, my husband and sons might have lived still—I could not be worse off than now." It is a dangerous thing when a child of God leaves the ground of God's promises and gets on to other grounds: expediency, earthly resources, or the opinion of the world. There is no meeting with God on such grounds. Naomi was eating the fruit of trusting herself rather than her God. "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (Isaiah 8:20.) No sooner did Naomi arise to return to the land of promise than her two daughters-in-law determined to accompany her. Let a backslider set his or her face resolutely towards God again, it will have its effect in the family circle; sons, daughters, friends, will soon find it out, and that one soul will not return to God alone. Orpah and Ruth accompanied her some distance, and then Naomi explained to them the difficulties which lay in the way.

CONVERSION AND DISCIPLESHIP.

There is a great difference between the two. Some souls are converted after a certain order, who seem never to have understood that there is something on the part of the child of God to give up. But our Lord is very explicit when He says: "If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple." And again: "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple." (Luke 14:27-28; Luke 14:33.) The test was too great for Orpah; she was not prepared to leave father, mother, sisters, and brothers, home and friends and land for the sake of the God of Israel; she "kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clave unto her."

Then Naomi spoke one final word to Ruth: "Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods; return thou after thy sister-in-law." Naomi did not say: "Thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and her home, her occupations, and her pleasures," but "unto her gods;" this was the test-point. It must be a moment of decision for Ruth. Now she must declare whose god she worshipped.

Something new had entered into the life of Ruth. She had heard, and her whole soul was penetrated with what she had heard, of the God of Israel. It was the tidings of His faithfulness to His people which had influenced Naomi to return to her land. If He was the true and only God, then He had a right to the trust and the obedience of all the creatures which He had made. The question with Ruth was, not what she should gain personally by the change, but what was due to this one and only true God. Just as long as an important decision hangs upon the gain or loss it is to us personally—just as long as self-love must be the umpire—the decision is evaded, recalled, never thoroughly final. "I want to serve God, but I don't want to be peculiar;" "I must have some relaxations;" "I want the joy of serving Him, but I don't want to be despised, to be misunderstood, or to be looked down upon;" "I want to preserve my reputation;" "I must have credit for all that I do for Him: if I get this, I can forego the world." Such are human considerations.

Miserable self-pleasing! This is not to serve God. If the service of God is not worth the loss of all, it is worth nothing. If we do not count the honour of being despised for His sake who was despised for ours worth more than our miserable and most undeserved reputation, then we prove ourselves

unworthy of Him. Ruth took in that the God of Israel was God indeed, and worthy of all, and more than all, that she could give. And so she answered Naomi by an act of consecration which has been a model for all time:

"Entreat me not to leave thee, nor to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me and more also if aught but death part thee and me."

Young sister, are you now deliberating about an alliance with a pleasing but ungodly young man, whose position in the world, and whose admiration of you, pleases and gratifies your pride? Are you weighing what you would gain in accepting him, and what you would gain in rejecting him? O, put self out of the question. You belong to Another. What would your God gain or lose? What would please Him? What would make for the honour of His Kingdom? What would carry out His will? He is your Father—what should a child do in such a crisis to please such a Father? O choose with Ruth!

Ruth was a true disciple, ready, not only to take all, but to give all. O how many a believer in the present day would be saved from back-sliding if he could take such a stand as she took. Instead of the miserable questions, "Is there harm in this? Is there harm in smoking a pipe? Is there harm in reading a novel? Is there harm in such and such an amusement, in church gambling, in the fashionable bazaars?" the faithful disciple's heart would say: "Intreat me not to leave Thee." How quick would be the decision: "I cannot leave Thee—to smoke; I cannot leave Thee—to dance; I cannot leave Thee—to read what would not interest Thee." If this were the heart's language, there would be more of true discipleship.

RUTH WOULD NOT CHOOSE her way: "Whither thou goest, I will go." Ruth would not choose her dwelling-place: "Where thou lodgest, I will lodge." She would not choose her companions: "Thy people shall be my people." It is this absence of choice which distinguishes a true disciple of Jesus. Abraham "went out, not knowing whither he went." (Hebrews 11:8.) Saul of Tarsus said to his new-found Saviour, "What wilt Thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6.) This is the spirit of the true disciple. When Naomi saw that Ruth "was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her." So the two widows, the old and the young, journeyed together "until they came to Bethlehem." The first spot in the land of promise which Ruth visited was named "the house of bread." God does not leave his newborn children empty, but He satisfies them with favour. (Deuteronomy 23:23.)

16. Naomi and Ruth. Part II - Rth_1:1-22.

NAOMI AND RUTH.

PART II: When Naomi re-entered the land of promise, and came to her city, Bethlehem, there were many who recognised her; for she was no unknown person. "All the city was moved...Is this Naomi?" they said.

Many a line was furrowing the face of the once beautiful Naomi; there was a sadness and weariness upon it; there were marks of her having passed through much during her absence from Bethlehem. She said unto them,

"Call me not Naomi, call me Mara; for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me? I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me." (The word Naomi means "blessing," and Mara "bitter.")

O how Naomi had learnt before it was written that "he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption." (Galatians 6:8)! And yet better days were before her.

It was the beginning of barley harvest in Bethlehem, and Ruth, the Moabitess, said to her mother-in-law:

"Let me now go to the field and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace."

"Go, my daughter."

It was but right and natural that Ruth, the young widow, should do what she could to sustain her mother-in-law in her old age; and it is but right that a disciple should glean ears of corn in the Lord's harvest field. "He that gathereth not with Me scattereth." (Matthew 7:30.) It is difficult to understand how any immortal soul can be satisfied with his own salvation without being actively engaged in seeking the salvation of others. It is inconceivable selfishness for a man to say in his heart: "I am all right; what does it matter to me whether other souls are saved or whether they perish."

Ruth did not assume to be a reaper, but

ONLY A GLEANER.

There are some prominent workers in the harvest field who sweep hundreds into the fold. But there are also patient gleaners who teach in Sunday schools, who visit from house to house, who write letters to their acquaintances, who speak a word to those they travel with by the way. God bless these precious gleaners. They gather many an ear of corn which reapers pass by.

It was in the field of Boaz that Ruth gleaned. Her first introduction to him was when he first appeared in the morning and said to the reapers.

"The Lord be with you."

"The Lord bless thee," was their response. How many strikes might be avoided if this kind of intercourse were more common between employers and employed.

Boaz soon found out that a foreigner was in the field, and asked the servant who was set over the reapers:

"Whose damsel is this?" When he heard that it was the Moabitish woman that came back with Naomi from Moab, and that she had asked permission to glean in the field, Boaz accosted her:

"Hearest thou not, my daughter?" He claimed relationship with her. And so it is when the Lord of the harvest perceives some newly-saved soul following after others and seeking to lead them to the Lord: He makes acquaintance with them, and owns relationship: "Not ashamed to call them brethren" (Hebrews 2:11):

"Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens." No field but the Master's field; nothing which bears another name than His; no work which is not distinctly Christ's work, for the reapers and gleaners in His harvest field. There must be nothing exclusive, nothing which separates from others, for we are members of one body.

"LET THINE EYES BE ON THE FIELD that they do reap, and go thou after them." A true worker for the Lord must have disciplined eyes; not fixed on special corners of the field, but bearing the interests of the whole field of the Lord upon his heart, howsoever many denominational divisions it may have. Boaz provided that when she should be thirsty she should drink from that which the young men had drawn. Gleaners must know "the wells of salvation." There are some workers in the harvest who are wonderfully elated by every little fragment of intercourse they have with God, and they must tell it out with pride and self-consciousness in the next testimony-meeting. But Ruth was humbled by the notice of Boaz, and crushed to the earth by this unexpected kindness. She asked:

"Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?" This is the instinctive spirit of a true disciple—a humble follower of the Lamb. And Boaz answered:

"It hath fully been showed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come to a people which thou knewest not heretofore."

Every little family trial which has been borne by the grace of Christ has been fully shown to our Master; every cross which has been borne; every suffering which has been undergone; everything which has been left for His sake; every laying down of the will; hath fully been shown to Jesus, and He who seeth in secret Himself will reward openly. (Matthew 6:4.)

"The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." Ruth had no conception of the fact that her humble efforts should interest a man like Boaz. She thought herself utterly beneath his notice; she had yet to learn how those who trust in the living God always find they have something in common. In her reply, she could only speak of grace. She felt she merited nothing. "Let me find favour (or grace),

in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens."

Boaz made every provision for the stranger damsel; she was to share the meal times of the reapers, and Boaz commanded the reapers to let fall some of the handfuls on purpose for her, and leave them that she might glean them. It would be well for many a reaper if he would thus bring out the gleaners. It is a precious thing to encourage and help on some worker for the Lord, and so arrange that they shall find the joy of seeing souls decide for Christ. None but those who know it can tell the intense joy of seeing lost souls coming to the Saviour.

Ruth gleaned in the field until even. She was not wearied. She was beginning to be at home in the land. And when she had beaten out the ears of corn, it was about an ephah of barley. With her spoil she returned to her mother-in-law, who said to her:

"Where hast thou gleaned to-day? and where wroughtest thou? blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee." And when Ruth told her that the proprietor of the land was Boaz, Naomi answered:

"Blessed be the Lord, who has not left off His kindness to the living and to the dead...The man is near of kin unto us, one of our own next kinsmen," or A REDEEMER.

We do not, at the moment of our conversion, know all that has to be known of Jesus, but little by little, as we follow on, He reveals Himself to us, first, as the Saviour who forgives, and then, as the Shepherd, who cares for us, the Keeper, who keeps us from sinning as we trust Him, the Lord of the harvest, who gives us our work to do, and sends us to one and another immortal soul with life-messages. Then we know Him as the eternal Son of God, who was from the beginning. Then we come by degrees to understand our calling to let Him conform us to His image that we may be united to Him. But they are few who know Jesus as the coming Bridegroom; who having this hope in them purify themselves even as He is pure. (1 John 3:3.)

Naomi counselled Ruth that they should not meet her in any other field. "So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz, to glean unto the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest: and dwelt with her mother-in-law." And then it was that Naomi made known unto her the law in Israel which provided that the brother or nearest kinsman of one who had died without children should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. And she directed Ruth to go down to the threshing-floor and claim Boaz as her nearest kinsman or redeemer.

There are many who follow Christ and work for Him, but have more of the spirit of service, more of the Spirit of bondmen, than that of real union with Him; many who work because they feel they ought, or because it is expected of them, or that they will lose a reward if they do not work. And there are those who work for Him because they cannot help it, because their interests are one with His, and it comes as naturally to them as breathing to "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth." (Revelation 14:5.) These are they who understand true union with the Lord, these are they who know what it is to wash themselves and put their raiment on them—"the righteousness of saints" (Revelation 19:8)—and get down to the threshing-floor, and claim from Christ the oneness of heart, and spirit, and mind, which He has made possible to His own disciples. When Ruth said to Boaz:

"Thou art a near kinsman," or, "one that hath a right to redeem," Boaz said:

"Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter...It is true that I am thy near kinsman; howbeit there is A KINSMAN NEARER than I." What is it that impedes the fullest fellowship and union with our Lord? Surely, the spirit of self. Self is the kinsman that comes nearer; whether it is self-pity or self-conceit; whether it is self-mortification, self-indulgence, or self-consciousness. Whatever occupies us with ourselves shuts out our Lord.

Boaz sent Ruth back to Naomi, promising that he would deal with the kinsman. We can never destroy self. Self is stronger than we; it needs the hand of the King of kings to put it down. When Ruth returned to her mother-in-law and detailed all that had passed, she said to her.

"SIT STILL, MY DAUGHTER, until thou know how the matter will fall; for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day." (Ruth 3:18.) No amount of energy can overcome self: the only help for it is to sit still and let the Lord deal with it His way.

Boaz took ten men of the elders of the city, and sat in the gate until the kinsman appeared, and then he called him on one side, and told him that Naomi sold a parcel of land which belonged to Elimelech, and that his was the first right of purchase.

"If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it; but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me that I may know: for there is none to redeem it beside thee, and I am after thee." And the kinsman said:

"I will redeem it."

"What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth, the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance." This was an unexpected condition: this was the crucial point. And the kinsman answered,

"I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it."

Mine own! It was the spirit of self; he could not deny himself; he must consider himself. It is the picture of self-life. Boaz had dealt with it, and now the way was open, and there was no barrier to the union of Boaz and Ruth.

Boaz "bought all that was Elimelech's and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi," and with the rest he bought Ruth the Moabitess, to raise up the name of the dead, "that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren." And the elders of the city bore witness.

Thus Ruth became the wife of Boaz. And thus, as He deals with our self life, and as we yield to Him all that we are and have, a living sacrifice, we become united to our Boaz—the Lord Jesus Christ—one with Him as He is One with the Father. And the name of the dead, Jesus the Crucified, is raised up upon His inheritance; He receives a people for His name. (Acts 15:14); He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied. (Isaiah 53:11.)

17. Hannah - 1Sa_1:1-28.

HANNAH. A PROPHET'S MOTHER.

1 Samuel 1:1-28.

It was in the times of the Judges; there was no king in Israel (Judges 21:25), when a certain man of Ephraim, named Elkanah, took two wives. This was against the order of God, and necessarily brought trouble into the family. The name of Hannah, one, probably the first, of these two wives, means "gracious," and she was like her name. But Hannah had the humiliation, so deep among Jewish women, of being childless, while Peninnah, her rival, had children. Strife was sure to reign in such a household, and it was the habit of Peninnah to reproach Hannah as though she were under the curse of God, and she sought "to make her fret because she had no children." Peninnah was one of those women whose chief talent seems to lie in the power they have to wound others by unkind words. She signalled herself by her skill in making another suffer by adding to a sorrow which already existed. Such a woman is a disgrace to God's thought of womanhood.

Nevertheless, this was a godly household as far as light was given in those early days: Elkanah went up from his city year after year "to worship and to sacrifice unto the Lord of hosts in Shiloh." And Hannah, her heart bleeding with its open sore, went up with her husband to worship. There, in God's temple, alone with Him, she was at large. But these were hard times for godly people. There was defection in the priesthood, and that necessarily gave the tone to the whole of society. When a minister of the Gospel looks upon his avocation just as another man does upon a worldly profession, as a means of gaining a livelihood, and he allows the customs of society, dinner parties and evening parties, croquet parties and garden parties, to absorb his time, just as though he were no teacher of immortal souls, that the children of God are "not of this world"—it is no wonder that the people take after him. "It shall be, as with the people, so with the priest." (Isaiah 24:2.)

It was the custom, when the yearly sacrifice was made, to give portions or presents to every member of the family, and Elkanah did not fail in this custom. "He gave to Peninnah his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions: but unto Hannah he gave a double portion; for he loved Hannah." Yet her husband's love, and his manifest esteem for her, could not make up for the misery she suffered at the hands of Peninnah.

There was probably more than this;

HANNAH WAS A PROPHETESS, called by the Spirit of God to bear upon her heart the burden of her people, and of the unrighteous priesthood in her degenerate days. The cause of God was dear to her, she mourned for the sin of the priests.

Hannah "wept and did not eat." Her husband sought to comfort her, and said:

"Why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?" But the void in Hannah's heart was deeper than human comfort could reach;

it took a tenderer hand to heal the sore, and the instinct of her soul drove her to her God. There, before the tabernacle, probably within its courts, Hannah "poured out her soul to the Lord." She "was in bitterness of soul, and she prayed and wept sore. And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of Hosts, if Thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of Thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget Thine handmaid, but wilt give unto Thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head." A straw will show which way the wind blows, and the tone of Hannah's prayers throws light upon the burden of her soul. She asked of God no son who should shine in the world, who should make a fortune, and become a great man, as regarded possessions, honour, or political power. She wanted a Nazarite, a consecrated and dedicated man, one who should be the Lord's special witness, to shine in the midst of darkness, to be a blessing where the priesthood failed to be so. Hannah wanted a prophet son, an interpreter of God; and by this we see how powerless her husband's comfort was to her.

Hannah's prayer was not audible; she was so deeply conscious of the presence of her God that she did not need to speak aloud; in the secret of His presence she knew she was heard. She spoke, in her heart; her lips moved, but her voice was not heard. The high priest was sitting by the door of the tabernacle, and marked this woman, absorbed as she was in her communion with God, and by her deep grief, Eli thought she had been drunken, and said to her:

How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee."

Harsh judgment does not spring out of close communion with God. "God is love," and God enables His children to love the unlovely as He does. But Eli had grieved his God by not restraining his sons, and he had lost his spiritual perception, if he ever had any; he had not the quick scent which recognises at once a soul which lives near to God.

Hannah answered Eli in all graceful humility, without one trace of bitterness, or wounded personal feeling. She recognised him as her superior in ecclesiastical position, although in spirit she was far beyond the high priest.

"No, my lord; I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I poured out my soul before the Lord. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and my provocation have I spoken hitherto." (1 Samuel 1:15, R. V.) Hannah had been dealing with God; but He chose to send an answer through human lips. "Eli answered and said:

"Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of Him."

There was a strong contrast between Eve and Hannah. Eve sought a son for herself; Hannah prayed for a son for God. In Eve's heart "I have gotten" was the expression with which she greeted the gift of God; but "I HAVE GIVEN" was the thought in Hannah's heart.

Even before her child was born, Hannah's confidence in God was such that she acted as though she had already received the answer to her prayer. "The woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad." "What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." (Mark 11:24.) Faith in God can never be in vain; "The Lord remembered" Hannah, and gave her a son whom she called Samuel, i.e., "Asked," "Because I have asked him of the Lord." (1 Samuel 1:20.) When the time came round for the yearly sacrifice,

Hannah did not go up as usual. She waited until she could fulfil her vow, "I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him that he may appear before the Lord, and there abide for ever." "What!" says some worldly mother, "did she make such a fuss and pray so earnestly for a child, and then decide so coolly to part with him when he was but a boy? Does that show a mother's love?" Hannah's love was an unselfish love; she loved God best, and she loved her boy for God, and not for herself. Not with the heroism of a Stoic, but with the consecration of a believing child of God, she kept her vow. And when her boy was weaned, she brought him to the tabernacle, and said to Eli:

"O my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord. For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of Him: therefore I also have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord." A consecrated mother does not count it a trial, but an honour, to yield a child for the mission field; an unconsecrated mother counts it a gain to part with a son for India or for China if he has a chance of making a fortune there, but thinks herself much to be pitied if he leaves her to go to the mission field! A consecrated mother holds her son as God's property, and as hers only in partnership with God; an unconsecrated mother, in the spirit of Eve, says: "He is mine, and I must realise the benefit that will accrue to my son if I let him leave me." The consecrated mother is a helpmeet to her son; the unconsecrated mother, by her very example, teaches him selfishness. Hannah was a true prophet's mother—prophet blood flowed through her veins. The very essence of the prophet's spirit was hers. No wonder Samuel imbibed it.

18. Hannah's Song - 1Sa_2:1-36.

HANNAH'S SONG.

1 Samuel 2:1-36.

Communion with God looses the tongue for praise. Perhaps Hannah had no idea she was a prophetess, until God had, in so wonderful and miraculous a way, answered her prayer. Human probabilities had been so against it. Physically, she could not have been a mother, and she must have regarded with awe the body on which the hand of God had come, and have understood as none can understand without experience the revelation of her God: "I am the Lord that healeth thee." (Exodus 15:26.) And Hannah prayed no longer "silently in her heart," no longer with moving, but dumb lips; the Lord Himself was the subject of her song: "My heart exulteth in the Lord." A worldly woman might have said: "My heart exults in the defeat of Peninnah," or, "My heart rejoices that I am no longer reproached;" but "the Lord" was the refrain of Hannah's song."

"My heart exulteth in the Lord, mine horn is exalted in the Lord." "Mine horn," i.e., "My strength." Hannah saw in herself no strength. Neither in soul, nor body, nor circumstances was she strong; but the deep and personal experience she had had of God made her heart glory within her that He was ever at hand as her Strength and Power for the present, and in the time to come. And now, having let out her heart in praise to God, she can without bitterness speak of her enemies:

"My mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in Thy salvation."

It is safe to speak of our enemies when we think of the salvation of God; bitterness and malice, the works of the flesh, cannot flourish in the heart of him who rejoices in God's salvation. Hannah's eye rests not upon her enemies; she looks again unto her God.

"There is none holy as the Lord; for there is none beside Thee: neither is there any rock like our God."

She is bearing upon her heart the words of the song taught by Moses:

"Ascribe ye greatness unto our God. The Rock, His work is perfect." "For their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges." (Deuteronomy 32:3-4; Deuteronomy 32:31., R. V.) Once more alluding to Peninnah, she says:

"Talk no more so exceeding proudly: let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed." In the balances of her God, Peninnah weighed very light, the misunderstanding of Eli was a feather's weight, the reproaches of all the women around her were as nothing; Hannah had suffered under the proud talking, the strife of tongues (Psalms 31:20) had out her to the heart; but now that she had an eye for God, the balances were adjusted—man and God took their true position.

"The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength."

Hannah received the lesson which the apostle Paul learnt slowly (2 Chronicles 12:9-11), and she saw, even in the dimness of Old Testament light, that the strength of the flesh went for nothing, and that all real power belonged unto God. (Psalms 62:11.)

"They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry have ceased." That is to say, they have ceased to hunger, because God has become responsible to provide for them.

Hannah sees God in everything that occurs. "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, He also lifteth up." With Hannah, chance was an unknown thing. She saw God making all things work together for good to them that love Him. It was not the oppression of the rich that made poor, it was not the talent or diligence of the rich which gave them their possessions; she saw the Lord's hand in all. Circumstances had no power to humble, it is God that bringeth low; man had no power to exalt, it is God that lifteth up. And then she saw in God's exaltation a glory so beyond what the eye of man can see, that she could almost have joined with John in his vision in the Isle of Patmos, when he said: "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever" (Revelation 1:5-6), and Hannah sings from the depth of her own blessed experience:

"He lifteth up the needy from the dunghill, to make them sit with princes, and inherit the throne of glory."

Again she sees what many are learning in these days—the keeping power of God. "He will keep the feet of His saints." He had kept Hannah's spirit under reproach; she had seen it was God's habit to do so, and she would trust Him still. She would not deal with the wicked; God should put them to silence in darkness. "For by strength shall no man prevail."

One other truth she learnt was the uselessness of striving with the Lord.

"They that strive with the Lord shall be broken to pieces."

Hannah had learnt to submit before she had learnt to trust, and now her soul was filled with glory; and this woman, true to God, true to her husband, true to her child, becomes a teacher whose lessons are made of use for generations after she has passed away from this world.

God raise up mothers such as Hannah!

19. Michal, Saul's Daughter - 1Sa_18:20-30

MICHAL, SAUL'S DAUGHTER.

1 Samuel 18:20-30.

Through His servant Samuel, God had already anointed David as His chosen king over His people Israel. But the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit had gained possession of him.

David was of a beautiful countenance (1 Samuel 16:12), and the younger daughter of Saul lost her heart to him, yet it would seem that Michal was attracted far more by David's external appearance than by any appreciation of his godly life. Saul, under the influence of Satan as he was, made Michal's love to David serve his own ends, and promised her to him to wife if he should slay one hundred Philistines; and he sent his servants that they might commune with David and instigate him to purchase Michal for his wife by such a slaughter of the king's enemies. But in Saul's wicked heart there was, all the time, a hope that he would lose his life in the attempt. How little Saul knew the shield that was protecting God's chosen king, and that no power of his could take away the life which God chose to preserve!

David was pleased to be Saul's son-in-law; he saw God's hand at work to give him a claim to the kingdom. He arose with his men, slew two hundred Philistines instead of one, and so earned Michal to be his wife. At first she took her husband's side against her ungodly father, but in doing so, she betrayed the treachery of her heart, and when Saul sent to take David, she did not hesitate to tell a lie to screen him from Saul's anger. David's wife did not share his confidence in God. He had said, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me" (Psalms 23:4); but Michal substituted human devices for faith in God. Hearing of her father's determination to slay David, she persuaded him to flee, and she let him down through a window, that he might escape. But Saul was not so easily to be put off; and when her father commanded that David should be brought to him, Michal was ready with her lie, and told Saul that he was sick.

Disappointed of his purpose, Saul commanded that the messengers should bring David up in the bed, that he might be slain, and the imperious king found that Michal had substituted an image on which he should wreak his vengeance and so she had mocked him.

SHE DECEIVED HER FATHER. A woman who will be untrue to her father will be untrue to her husband also. There was a want of integrity about Saul's daughter which followed her through life. The enmity of Saul against David increased, and David was obliged to flee. Then it was that Michal his wife was given to another, and she very soon forgot her first love. Michal's was no true woman's heart. Neither God nor David were all in all to her. There is, in the present day, especially amongst certain classes of our population, an appalling lightness about engagements to marry. One hears of a young couple engaged to be married, and for the merest trifle, this covenant, which ought to be made in heaven, is broken. "What God hath joined together let no man put asunder."

(Matthew 19:6.) The promise to spend life's journey together is no light promise to make, no light promise to keep, and, still more, no light promise to break. It should never be entered into by Christian young people without a clear understanding of the mind of God. One party may break it off very lightly while the heart of the other may be so wounded as never through life entirely to recover, unless the Lord Himself takes the place which has been left void by a heartless trifler. On the Continent of Europe engagements are made public, and the families send circulars to their friends with the names of the engaged parties printed together, so that, for very shame, they are not lightly broken, as they often are in England and in America. If those who have pledged themselves to be all in all to one another can, for a whim, or in a moment of anger, break this pledge, it would be but a step further, after marriage has been solemnised, to be like Michal, and break the marriage tie itself. The facility of divorce in American society has become a scandal in the world.

Poor Michal had never recognised David as her king, nor Jehovah as her God. She had married to satisfy her own delight in David's appearance, or in his manner, or something which ministered to herself. No wonder, when David was no longer present, that her self-seeking heart must find another attraction.

When, at last David became king, and demanded of Abner that he should restore Michal, Saul's daughter, whom he calls "my wife Michal, which I espoused to me" (2 Samuel 3:13-14), Ish-bosheth and Abner took her from her husband, who "went along with her; weeping behind her." But there was no reconciliation between David and Michal; she was bitter against her first love; she never submitted to him as king; and when David brought up the Ark of the Lord, Michal appeared in her true character. She despised David in her heart, and mocked at his joy in the service of God.

Thus this woman who lived to herself had to live by herself, for, probably, she lived in solitary confinement until the day of her death. It is a sad history of a selfish woman, who never fulfilled her vocation as a help-meet.

20. Abigail - 1Sa_25:1-44.

ABIGAIL.

1 Samuel 25:1-44.

David, the anointed of God, was a wanderer in the wilderness which was part of that very land which God had chosen him to reign over; yet in God's eyes a king; by faith, the Lord's anointed. At this time, David and his followers (1 Samuel 25:1-2) were dependent, day by day, upon supplies coming as God sent them to him in direct answer to prayer; and he testified: "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." (Psalms 23:5.) In this history some light is thrown upon the way in which their wants were supplied.

"There was a man in Maon, whose possessions were in Carmel; and the man was very great, and he had three thousand sheep, and a thousand goats: and he was shearing his sheep in Carmel." David was well acquainted with the surroundings and circumstances of this man, and news was brought to him that the sheep-shearing had commenced. So he sent out ten young men with a friendly message to the rich farmer, and charged them, "Get you up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and greet him in my name: and thus shall ye say to him that liveth in prosperity, Peace be both to thee, and peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou hast." There was a kingly, a priestly character in David's greeting. He wielded sway over no earthly empire, but the God of peace was surely with him, and he spoke with his God's authority in this message of peace. But with him, as with Christ's disciples later, the law held good: "If the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again." (Luke 10:6.) Christ Himself does not force His peace where it is unwelcome.

Having thus greeted Nabal, David made a reasonable request. He, with his young men, had been a wall of defence to Nabal's shepherds. He asks now for some share in the provisions which were so plentiful at the sheep-shearing time, saying,

"Let the young men find favour in thine eyes: for we come in a good day: give, I pray thee, whatsoever cometh to thine hand unto thy servants, and to thy son David."

David's young men had been reduced to obedience. He practised kingly power in the wilderness before he exercised it in Jerusalem. "They spake to Nabal according to all these words in the name of David, and ceased." A true type of real disciples; they added no words of their own.

Two parties apparently became acquainted with David's message. Nabal, who "was churlish and evil in his doings; and he was of the house of Caleb"; and Abigail, Nabal's wife, "a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance."

David's request was very differently received by these two. Nabal answered David's servants and said:

"Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now-a-days that break away every man 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 whence they be?"

Nabal calls God's anointed a servant who breaks away from his master. He sides with Saul, man's king, and rejects David, the Lord's anointed. He is full of himself; My bread and my water and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers. In grudging David, he grudges God. The name of Nabal means "fool." He is indeed a fool for time and eternity whose self-life is so prominent that he cannot recognise God's David, our beloved Lord, the Christ of God.

David was indignant, and was about to lead his forces against the ungrateful farmer, and destroy him and his possessions; but Abigail, a true helpmeet, a wife after God's own heart, heard from one of the young men what had happened, and when an appeal was made to her: "Now, therefore, know and consider what thou wilt do; for evil is determined against our master, and against all his household: for he is such a son of Belial that a man cannot speak to him," Abigail rose to the occasion. She spoke no word to her husband, but she made haste and "took two hundred loaves, and two bottles of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, and a hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on asses," sending the servants on before with these provisions, and she followed after, but strictly prohibited her servants from telling the unreasonable Nabal.

Abigail met David, half way towards the execution of his purpose of vengeance. She was a woman of deeds more than of words; she had not waited long to decide what was the right thing to do; she had recognised David's claim as just and reasonable; and now when she saw David, "she hasted, and lighted off the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and fell at his feet." She took the lowest place, while Nabal had taken the highest, the place of judgment. There was a grace about this woman which was beyond the dispensation in which she lived. Like Daniel, who confessed his sins and the sins of his people, Abigail, as being one with her husband by the fact that she was his wife, took his sin upon her.

"Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be," she said.

O, how few there are who understand this refinement of Christian spirit! O, how few know the burden of another's sin! Paul says: "Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?" (2Cr 11:29.)

Having taken the lowest place, Abigail, like a true prophetess, is in a position to point out to David where he may be in the wrong.

"Now, therefore, my lord, as the Lord liveth and as thy soul liveth, seeing the Lord hath withholden thee from coming to shed blood, and from avenging thyself with thine own hand, now let thine enemies, and they that seek evil to my lord, be as Nabal."

Abigail takes no credit to herself: she recognises God's hand, and is herself only an instrument, not so much as to be mentioned; and then she beseeches him to accept her present, but accounts it unworthy for himself. She retires out of view, and says: "Now this blessing which thine handmaid hath brought unto my lord, let it even be given unto the young men that follow my lord," and then beseeches for pardon as though she had been the guilty one who had insulted him.

Again she rises into a prophetic strain, and declares to David:

"The Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house; because my lord fighteth the battles of the Lord, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy days. Yet a man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul." Nabal reckons. David a servant who has escaped from his master; Abigail reckons Saul "a man," but David, who is the Lord's anointed, is her "lord."

Again she prophesies: "The soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God; and the souls of thine enemies, them shall He sling out, as out of the middle of a sling. And it shall come to pass, when the Lord shall have done to my lord according to all the good that He hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have appointed thee ruler over Israel, that this shall be no grief unto thee, nor offence of heart unto my lord, either that thou hast shed blood causeless, or that my lord hath avenged himself."

Abigail speaks as God's messenger oven to the anointed king; and only now, after securing her husband's interests and David's own interests, she mentions herself. "But when the Lord should have dealt well with my lord, then remember thy handmaid." Perhaps with another husband, one who would not have been a continual cross to her as Nabal must have been, this exceptional woman would never have been what she became in the constant furnace of domestic trial.

David understood her, and he understood her vocation and her ministry to him. He recognised her as A MESSENGER OF GOD.

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to me: and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with my own hand." Then David received of her hand that which she had brought him, and spoke to her these words—also prophetic—

"Go up in peace to thine house; see, I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person."

Abigail's mission accomplished, she went home into quite another atmosphere. From the presence of the Lord's anointed, she returned to find her wretched husband revelling in his drunkenness. She had learnt to restrain her tongue, and she told him "nothing till the morning light," and then he listened with nerves shaken, so that his cowardly spirit died within him, and he was as though paralysed with fear, and in ten days, his miserable life ceased to be upon this earth. God thus vindicated the character of His beloved David. And David, God's king, heard of it, and sent to Abigail, calling her to take her place by his side, and reign with him over Israel when God's time should come.

It is a true history, but wonderfully prophetic of the Church of Christ called by our David to recognise His Kingship in these last days, and finally to reign with Him for ever.

21. Bathsheba - 2Sa_11:12.

BATHSHEBA.

2 Samuel 11:1-27; 2 Samuel 12:1-31.

God's people are a tempted people. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man." (1 Chronicles 10:13.) None need be ashamed because he is tempted, but only if he falls under the temptation. We have need to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," and we have need to watch lest we go, of our own free will into circumstances which will naturally lead us into temptation.

David, the man after God's own heart, was not exempt from temptation. After many years of close guidance from his God, and after the distinct promise, "I will guide thee with Mine eye" (Psalms 32:8), and an experience of God's faithfulness to His promise, he rested at home "at the time when kings go forth to battle," without asking or receiving counsel from his God. He "tarried still at Jerusalem," sending Joab and his servants to do the fighting for him.

There is a wonderful fight in which all God's people should be engaged: it is "the good fight of faith." (1 Timothy 6:12.) A time of rest which is given by God is a precious benefit; a time of rest which is self-provided may be at any time an occasion for temptation: and thus it proved with David. Satan has his hand in all those circumstances which have not been committed beforehand to the Lord.

David's communion with God had been slackening. Instead of inquiring habitually of the Lord as he had done in the time of his trials, he went to war without God's intimate direction, and now had become indolent.

Indolence and self-seeking open the door to other temptations. When "David arose from off his bed" the enemy provided a beautiful woman to be a snare to him, and David, off his guard, sent for this woman for no good purpose.

It was a critical moment for Bathsheba. She was probably flattered with the king's admiration. It was a question whether she should think of herself, or whether she should consider what she owed to God, what she owed to her husband, and what she owed to her king. Abigail had proved a wondrous blessing to David in reproving him with all godly and womanly dignity, when he had sought to avenge himself with his own hand against Nabal. Abigail was a blessed woman, a true helpmeet. But Bathsheba, placed in the same circumstances as those of Joseph in Potiphar's house, did not stand, as he did, for God against temptation, she did not say as she might have done: "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" It is very probable that Satan came in his insinuating way, and said to her that such a good man as David must be right, and that it could not be sin to do what he should tell her; and so, with David in her eyes rather than God, this woman, who was made to be a helpmeet and a blessing to man, became a helper of his sin, an instrument of the wicked one for his destruction, and an occasion for the enemies of the Lord to

blaspheme even until now.

How much sin might have been spared, how much misery, how much of the dark history of David's family in the future, if Bathsheba had acted with the holy dignity which characterised Joseph in Egypt! But, instead of this, she YIELDED TO TEMPTATION, and the king, God's witness, God's sweet Psalmist, fell, and Bathsheba with him.

How far Bathsheba connived at David's wicked attempts to hide his sin by sending for Uriah, and urging him to go down to his house, making him drunk, and then, when his device did not succeed, inciting Joab to place him in a position in the army where he could not escape death, we know not. It is more than probable she had a hand in it. If she were ambitious to be the wife of the king, she had her will, but sorrow was in store for her. The king, whose company was prized by all who knew him, must have been greatly altered in his state of backsliding. Like every other backslider, he must have been dissatisfied with himself, dissatisfied with his surroundings, ill at ease with his God; and it was only when the faithful, holy prophet Nathan came in the name of his God to awaken David's conscience, that a change came about in his experience. Probably there may have been bitter words and recriminations between David and Bathsheba during those months of darkness when God's face was hidden from him. When the reproof of God by Nathan came home to David, "Thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house: because thou hast despised Me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife." It is probable that Bathsheba also came under God's curse. When Nathan again said to David: "Thou art the man," Bathsheba would feel: "And I am the woman who has sinned against the Lord." When God struck the child that it was very sick, who would share David's fastings and his watchings like the mother of that child? Who would feel the justice of the blow as she would? It was, probably, this bitter sorrow, this valley of the shadow of death, that brought her to the end of herself in God's presence, and that fitted her by-and-by to be the mother of God's chosen successor to David, the future king, Solomon.

Bathsheba shared the sorrows of David's later life—the awful sin of his children, Ammon, Tamar, Absalom, Adonijah—O what a history of sin, uncleanness, murder, conspiracy! All were the result of that one sin, that opportunity lost, in which, if Bathsheba had been true, she might have prevented, though she little knew it then, all which subsequently happened. In the end of David's life, when his son, Adonijah, taking advantage of his aged father's enfeebled condition, attempted to seize the kingdom, Bathsheba rose to the occasion. Prompted by Nathan, the faithful old prophet who had been the king's best adviser, she undertook to inform the king of his son's conspiracy, and Nathan undertook to confirm her words. Everything for the future of the kingdom, and for the future of Solomon, her son, might depend upon this effort.

Bathsheba knew, and Nathan knew how God had chosen Solomon to succeed David. It was in the presence of the princes of Israel that David had given a charge to Solomon to build a house for the Lord God of Israel (1 Chronicles 22:6; 1 Chronicles 22:19), and in the course of his charge to Solomon David had quoted the word of God to him, spoken before Solomon's birth: "Behold, a son shall be born unto thee, who shall be a man of rest: and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about, for his name shall be Solomon (peaceable): and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days. He shall build a house for My name; and he shall be My son, and I will be his

Father, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel for ever." (1 Chronicles 22:9-10.) In the strength of this word of God, Bathsheba went forward, presented herself before the aged king, and did obeisance.

"What wouldest thou?" said the king.

"My lord," she answered, "thou swarest by the Lord thy God unto thine handmaid, saying, Assuredly Solomon, thy son, shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne: and now behold Adonijah reigneth: and now, my lord the king, thou knowest it not...And thou, my lord, O king, the eyes of all Israel are upon thee, that thou souldst tell them who shall sit on the throne of my lord the king after him." And Nathan the prophet followed immediately with the same tidings.

"Call me Bathsheba." The queen stood before him.

It was the moment of crisis: such a moment for quiet, firm waiting upon the Lord. O, how much must have passed in that queen mother's heart in that crisis! And the king said:

"As the Lord liveth that hath redeemed my soul out of all distress, even as I sware unto thee by the Lord God of Israel, saying, Assuredly Solomon, thy son, shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead; even so will I certainly do this day."

"Let my lord King David live for ever," was Bathsheba's reply, with her face bowed down to the very ground.

"Call me Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada," commanded the king: and when they appeared, the old king gave immediate orders for the anointing of Solomon king, and for the proclamation that Solomon was made king already in his father's stead over all Israel.

Bathsheba had well and wisely done her part: but when David was dead, and Adonijah, whom Solomon had pardoned, besought Bathsheba to intercede with Solomon that Abishag, who had nursed David in his old age, should be given him to wife, Bathsheba did not act by faith. Probably she was led by the natural instinct which leads a woman to do all she can to please without thinking of the consequences. Solomon saw the matter as it really was, and judged accordingly. Far from doing Adonijah a benefit, Bathsheba had only helped forward his execution. (1 Kings 2:13-25.) Another lesson for women. How often the desire to do some one a pleasure has led to sad consequences! With every true child of God, that which "is not of faith is sin." (Romans 14:20.) Faith can wait for guidance from God, and He will make known His mind. It is a dangerous thing to do anything for the simple purpose of pleasing another, and so currying favour in their eyes. There is more of selfishness in this than many think.

Bathsheba's beauty and love of pleasing were her snare. Beauty is a great temptation to many women; they are intoxicated with admiration; but O, what dangers lie in this! A woman's beauty is as much a gift to be used by God as any other gift she has; the beauty of a spiritual woman is as much the Lord's property as the tongue of the preacher; or the heart of the intercessor. If every godly woman sees herself to be not her own, but bought with a price, she may glorify God in her body and her spirit, which are His, and so prove a true helpmeet to her husband, her son, or her brother.

It is a striking fact that, in the generations of the Lord Jesus, only FOUR WOMEN'S NAMES are mentioned, and these were all such as had a shadow upon their characters, sinners saved by grace, unclean in themselves, but made clean by the blood of Christ, anticipated by faith. Tamar, Judah's daughter-in-law, Rahab the harlot, Ruth the former idolatress, and Bathsheba, all found their place in the line of Christ's ancestry. He took upon Him the likeness of sinful flesh, and by His precious blood, He puts away sin, and takes His place in the human nature which He has purified.

O the depth of His wondrous, unspeakable love to undeserving sinners whom He is not ashamed to call brethren. (Hebrews 2:11.)

22. The Wife of Jeroboam - 1Ki_14:1-31.

THE WIFE OF JEROBOAM.

1 Kings 14:1-31.

King Jeroboam earned for himself a terrible and unenviable reputation. He is continually spoken of in the two books of the Kings as "Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin."

What kind of wife would such a man have? We have seen in the case of Abigail that a godly woman can be godly when her husband is most unspiritual and wicked; but, too often, the head of the family gives tone to the whole, and there is no evidence that Jeroboam's wife was godly.

Abijah, their eldest son, the heir to the throne, fell sick. Would Jeroboam, in this trial, recognise the hand of God? He had received a very solemn call when, at the altar of Bethel, he had put forth his hand to seize the prophet who was sent of God to reprove him: he had found that a higher power than his had dried up the strength of his right hand, "so that he could not pull it in again to him." He had also seen and experienced the healing power of God, when the very prophet against whom his enmity was stirred entreated the face of God at his request, and, in answer, his hand was restored again and became as it was before." (1 Kings 13:3; 1 Kings 13:6.)

What should he now do? The judgments of God had entered his family. The son on whom his hopes were built was sick unto death. No doubt the doctors had done all they could, and every remedy which riches or talent could procure had been sought and tried. God was driving the idolatrous king into a corner, but Jeroboam did not humble himself; he "returned not from his evil way" (1 Kings 13:33). Instead of dealing with God, he fell back upon human help, and now, as a last resource, he would seek to obtain second-hand a counsel from God. O how inadequate are the conceptions of God in the hearts of those who are not subject to Him! Jeroboam thought to dupe God!

"Arise, I pray thee," he said to his wife, "and disguise thyself, that thou be not known to be the wife of Jeroboam; and get thee to Shiloh: behold, there is Ahijah the prophet, which told me that I should be king over this people."

What idea of the living God had the king and queen, that they could attempt to deceive His prophet by any disguise? Did they know they were dealing with God in the person of His prophet?

"And take with thee," said the king, "ten loaves, and cracknels, and a cruse of honey" (a poor woman's offering) "and go to him: he shall tell thee what shall become of the child."

There is something very solemn in the fact that an unconverted man, living in rebellion against God, one who was guilty of drawing aside ten tribes of the people of the Lord into idolatry, yet knew so well that God was true, that now, in his greatest need, he sent to none of the priests of his own creation, none of the prophets who were under his patronage, but to the one man of God who lived in communion with Him in the land. He that "knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself,

neither did according to His will, shall be beaten with many stripes." (Luke 12:47.)

What should Jeroboam's wife do? If she were a true woman of God she could never have yielded to be a party to such deception. Duplicity and faith cannot live together. Jeroboam's wife was no true helpmeet, no counteracting influence against the idolatry with which he sought to establish his throne and secure his dynasty in Israel.

"AND JEROBOAM'S WIFE DID SO."

O, dear Christian wife, if thy husband should command thee something in which thou canst not act transparently, but must needs go aside from the uprightness which belongs to the path of the just (Isaiah 26:7), stand true to thy God, even though thou must meet with reproach where it cuts thee closest! Never encourage thy husband on a wrong path.

"Jeroboam's wife did so, and arose and went to Shiloh, and came to the house of Ahijah." The old prophet was blind. He "could not see; for his eyes were set by reason of his age;" but, in God's sight, he was a "seer" still, for he could see what other men could not, he could see what God revealed to him. And the Lord was beforehand with the disguised queen. She, who was used to ride in her chariot, and to have servants to wait upon her, and to relieve her of the burden of anything she might carry in her hands, must have found it a hard undertaking to walk this distance on foot, and carry the basket with her offering. But what will not a mother's love accomplish? She was counting on the success of her journey, all unconscious that God was on before, and that her disguise was useless. And the Lord said unto Ahijah, "Behold, the wife of Jeroboam cometh to ask a thing of thee for her son, for he is sick; thus and thus shalt thou say unto her; for it shall be, when she cometh in, that she shall feign herself to be another woman." The prophet was prepared. God does not allow His prophets who wait on Him to meet any circumstances unprepared. "The Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets." (Amos 3:7.) He is there before an unexpected visitor shall enter, how then can a child of God fear a trying interview? If He who knows all things is at hand, why dread to meet a deceiver? God showed His prophet what to do.

"And it was so, when Ahijah heard the sound of her feet, as she came in at the door, that he said, Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam; why feignest thou thyself to be another? for I am sent to thee with heavy tidings." Who had betrayed her? How did Ahijah discover her plot? Poor distracted mother! She sought to take advantage of the blind prophet by his blindness, but she saw that her stratagem was in vain; it had been contravened by a higher Power; and there she stood; her deception exposed; humbled, mortified, and despairing, with nothing but heavy tidings from an offended God to greet her!

"Go tell Jeroboam," said the prophet, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Forasmuch as I exalted thee from among the people, and made thee prince over My people Israel, and rent the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it thee; and yet thou hast not been as My servant David, who kept My commandments, and who followed Me with all his heart, to do that only which was right in Mine eyes; but hast done evil above all that were before thee: for thou hast gone and made thee other gods, and molten images, to provoke Me to anger, and hast cast Me behind thy back; therefore, behold, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam." The king and queen had sacrificed everything, even their soul's salvation, to the building up of their dynasty, the establishment of their

house, the satisfaction of their ambition, and they had thought their interests safer in their own hands than in the hands of God; and now the queen must hear that all their hopes were to be blighted in the person of her beloved child, on whom all their hopes were fixed. The old prophet added a declaration of judgment after judgment, ending with the words: "Him that dieth of Jeroboam in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth in the fields shall the fowls of the air eat: for the Lord hath spoken it. Arise thou, therefore, get thee to thine own house: and when thy feet enter into the city, THE CHILD SHALL DIE."

O, the agony of that moment for the wife of Jeroboam! What should she do? Sooner or later she must return to the city, and every step she took would hasten her child's death. While she stood without, he still breathed, but she would never see him in life again! Should she stay away to prolong that beloved life a few more hours, or should she hurry forward in the hope that perhaps one look of recognition might be given her, and the stern prophecy which had reached her from God relax in its severity for a last farewell? It must have been an awful, maddening time of anxiety for a broken-hearted mother. But one more communication must the wife of Jeroboam listen to. Ahijah said of the young prince:

"All Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him; for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam." There was still in Israel an appreciation of one who could be true to God. But such a one was too ripe fruit to be left still in that source of idolatry, the house of Jeroboam!

"Moreover, the Lord shall raise him up a king over Israel, who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam that day...And He shall give Israel up, because of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin."

Jeroboam's wife, still wearing her disguise, worn and weary in body and in mind, "arose, and departed, and came to Tirzah." She had taken her decision; she must be at the side of her son whether he was living or dead. The word of the prophet was fulfilled: "When she came to the threshold of the door, the child died." And still further was the Word of God fulfilled, "They buried him; and all Israel mourned for him, according to the word of the Lord, which He spake by the hand of His servant Ahijah the prophet."

O what a lesson this is that deceit and treachery can never answer in the long run. "He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." (John 3:21.) This poor unhappy queen reaped a terrible harvest for her sowing; no stratagem of man's can turn aside the judgment of God; the only true wisdom is to yield to His rebuke, and then trust to His tender mercy.

23. Jezebel - 1Ki_16:1-34; 1Ki_19:1-21; 1Ki_21:1-29.

JEZEBEL.

1 Kings 16:1-34; 1 Kings 19:1-21; 1 Kings 21:1-29.

King Ahab had succeeded his father Omri on the throne of Israel. He not only followed the ways of Jeroboam, but "did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him. And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him." Ahab was disobeying the plain command of God (Deuteronomy 7:3; Joshua 23:12-13) in marrying a heathen woman, and, moreover, he was putting himself under the power of a beautiful, but utterly unscrupulous woman, whose first influence over her husband was to induce him to build a house for Baal-worship, and rear up an altar to the false god which she served. Not content with this, Jezebel, who seems to have had a peculiar influence over her husband, and to have made use of the weakness of his character to gain her own wicked ends, commenced A DIRECT PERSECUTION against the prophets of the Lord. She conceived the idea of destroying every prophet of the Lord in her husband's dominions, and actually commenced the massacre, and so great a reign of terror came about in Israel, that a hundred prophets at once took refuge in a cave provided by Obadiah, one of Ahab's courtiers, who supplied them with food and kept their hiding-place secret. (1 Kings 18:13.)

Whenever the enemy succeeds in securing a bold and unscrupulous witness, the Lord raises up a witness on His side. "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him." (Isaiah 59:19.) It was at this very time that Elijah, prepared beforehand by three and a half years of close and solitary communion with his God, came forth to Mount Carmel, and, in the presence of the subdued and astonished king Ahab, challenged God, in the presence of assembled Israel, to send down fire from heaven and make manifest that He was God. When God's prophet had done all these things by His Word, and when the fire fell, and the representative gathering—king, princes, priests, prophets, and people—fell upon their faces and declared: "The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God," then Elijah expected that Jezebel, too, would be convinced, and that Baal-worship had got its death-stroke in Israel. But things were not yet ripe. God is in no hurry, He waits for the right moment. "He hath made every thing beautiful in His time." (Ecclesiastes 3:11.) When Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done and how her false prophets were slain with the sword, then Jezebel, utterly undaunted, sent a messenger to Elijah to threaten his life; and Elijah—who had stood unscathed amidst all the fire of persecution, all the trying ordeal of being in his own person the only witness who dared to acknowledge his God in that tremendous crisis on Mount Carmel—now fled before the face of this wicked woman Jezebel.

Elijah did not fear for his life; he had taken his life in his hand during years of silent testimony for his God, and in his bold witness against Ahab. But, O, his heart was broken, that it could still be possible for Jezebel to exercise an influence over her convinced husband. If Jezebel were not

conquered, then Israel's conversion could not be permanent, and it was more than Elijah could bear. He asked only that he might die. So tremendous is the power of an unscrupulous, wicked woman even against a prophet of the Lord.

We hear no more of Jezebel after this time until king Ahab returned from his successful campaign against the Syrians. When Ahab was consciously undeserving and humbled, God had made use of him to scatter the boasting Syrians; but in his foolish pride he had saved the life of Ben-hadad that he might, perhaps, have the glory of exhibiting his captive in some triumphal procession. The Lord had rebuked him by His prophet, and said, "Because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people." (1 Kings 20:43.) Ahab was "heavy and displeased," sulky and ill-tempered, instead of humble and broken. There had been a temporary measure of nearness to God; now he was open even to the influence of his wicked wife, and of the devil whose instrument she was.

Satan is never at a loss to tempt those who leave open the door of their hearts for his entrance, and when men quarrel with circumstances which God controls, the door is only upon the latch, and Satan finds a ready ingress. Ahab was a covetous man as well as an idolater. Covetousness is idolatry. (Colossians 3:5.) Ahab looked with a covetous eye upon a vineyard belonging to Naboth, the Jezreelite, which joined his vegetable garden; and he spoke to Naboth, saying:

"Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house; and I will give thee for it a better vine-yard than it; or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money." (1 Kings 21:6.) Naboth was a man who lived in the fear of God; he answered:

"The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee." The sulky king lost his temper, and so yielded to his displeasure, that he took to his bed, "turned away his face, and would eat no bread." God had been trusting him with triumphs over his enemies, he had been having some real dealings with God, although it had not come to an absolute conversion, but now the tide is turning in another direction, and Jezebel comes to the help of the arch enemy as his instrument to overthrow the little current for good which had set in her husband's life. She comes to him with the question:

"Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread?" And when the king told her how things stood between him and Naboth, the unprincipled woman said to him, with galling satire:

"Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry; I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."

Presuming upon her position as queen, this prophetess of Baal "wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders, and to the nobles that were in his city...Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people: and set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And then carry him out, and stone him, that he may die." (1 Kings 21:7-10.)

Jezebel stopped short at nothing for the accomplishment of her purpose; imperious, unscrupulous, cruel, even murder did not stay the hand of this priestess of Baal, this upholder of the power of Satan in the land. Ahab was but a tool in her hands, and the nobles of Israel were little better.

Jezebel carried all before her, and when her wicked purpose was accomplished, and the innocent Naboth was stoned—a true martyr to his conscientious scruples about the family holding which had come to him through his fathers as a charge from God—the officials who were in complicity with Jezebel, sent to her, saying:

"Naboth is stoned, and is dead." And in her fiendish triumph, the wicked queen aroused her sulky consort, saying:

Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead." And Ahab arose, and took possession. But an unexpected check awaited him in the very spot which he had coveted, and the stern figure of the holy prophet Elijah, standing, as was his wont, in the presence of the God of Israel, met the gaze of Ahab, and a searching voice, the sound of which, perhaps, is following him even in hell, asked the question:

"Hast thou killed, and also taken possession?" And then Ahab must hear the awful fate which God had determined upon him and upon his posterity. Part of this terrible curse ran thus:

"THE DOGS SHALL EAT JEZEBEL by the walls of Jezreel." (2 Kings 21:23.)

Years passed by. Ahab lost his life in his attempt to recover Ramoth-gilead, but Jezebel lived still, and her wicked and immoral influence still held power in the court, and in the city of Jezreel. But God raised up the furious Jehu to scour from the land of Israel every representative of Ahab's family. When he came to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it. Perhaps she felt her time was coming; but like other infamous women, she was determined, if she died, to die in all the splendour of her usual attire. "She painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at a window," with the insolent, dogged purpose to fight it out to the last. But Jezebel's time was come, and none of her creatures would have power to maintain her cause, for God's fiat was gone out against her.

"Who is on my side? Who?" cried the victorious Jehu, as he entered into the city and saw the wicked queen. "And there looked out to him two or three eunuchs."

"Throw her down," was the king's command, and this wretched woman, who had dominated king, and nobles, and prophets, who had ruled as an incarnate demon for years in Israel, was thrown down into the common street, and must have died in the fall.

Jehu went on to eat and to drink, and, after a time, he sent a messenger:

"Go, see now this cursed woman, and bury her: for she is a king's daughter." "But they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands," and Jehu recognised the fulfilment of Elijah's words: "In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel: and the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel: so that they shall not say, This is Jezebel." (2 Kings 9:30; 2 Kings 9:37.) So died one of the most wicked women who ever defiled the earth which God created. Powerful, influential, intellectual, beautiful, but wicked, she sold herself to work evil, and spent her life in fighting against God and His cause. Who can tell what the eternal condition of such soul must be? No imagination can picture it, no thought dwell upon it. A veil is drawn over this awful reality, and yet Jezebel exists in the blackness of darkness for ever!

Why does God permit such to live, and to live long upon the earth? Perhaps Elijah would never have been the prophet that he was, but for his suffering through this incarnate fiend. Where the secret of all hearts is made known, we shall understand God's economy in the education of His children, as we cannot do now.

Let us lay our hand upon our mouth when we see that cruelty, oppression and injustice are suffered. The end is not yet. He, who sees the end from the beginning, will yet be justified in all His ways with His creatures.

24. Athaliah - 2Ch_21:1-20.

ATHALIAH.

2 Chronicles 21:5-6; 2 Chronicles 22:10; 2 Chronicles 23:1-21.

Spiritual life is not hereditary, but sin is an entail, which, if not overcome, descends from parent to child. Athaliah, the daughter of Jezebel, exceeded, if possible, her wicked mother in wickedness. Our first introduction to her is as the wife of Jehoram, the son of the good king Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat's weakness had been in that he did not separate himself as he ought to have done from those who walked far from God. He had said to Ahab, who had called him to go to battle against Ramoth-Gilead:

I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses." (1 Kings 22:4.)

How should Ahab, "dead in trespasses and sins," believe in the difference between a sinner and a man of God, if Jehoshaphat, a man of God, did not bear witness to it? This grieved God and He sent His prophet to reprove him, saying:

"Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? For this thing, wrath is upon thee from before the Lord." (2 Chronicles 19:2.) It was after this that he espoused his son to Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. This was no accident; Jehoshaphat must have done it with his eyes open. It is impossible to be unfaithful to our calling as children of light, without compromising our witness for God more and more. Jehoshaphat's son undid all the good which his godly father had done. O how little this godly father considered in such an alliance the probability of the loss of his son's soul for ever!

"Jehoram was thirty and two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, like as did the house of Ahab; for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife; and he wrought that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord." The first mention in God's Book of this wicked woman was her evil influence upon her husband. Perhaps it was by her counsel that he slew all his relations, "and divers also of the princes of Israel" (2 Chronicles 21:4).

God reprov'd the king. "There came a writing to him from Elijah the prophet" (2 Chronicles 21:12-15), who had been caught up to heaven, which warned him of the terrible sickness by which he should lose his life, and yet this startling message led to no return to God on the part of the king. The influence of Athaliah was stronger than the warning of Elijah; the king's tendency to idolatry stronger than any appeal which came from the living God. But Athaliah, while she hindered her husband from serving God, had no power to help him when under the judgment of God. Athaliah and her false gods could not hinder the fulfilment of God's word; Jehoram "died of sore diseases." His youngest son succeeded him on the throne, and we read of him: "Forty and two years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign; and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Athaliah, the daughter (or grand-daughter) of Omri. He also walked in the

ways of the house of Ahab: for HIS MOTHER WAS HIS COUNSELLOR TO DO WICKEDLY."

Insatiate in her wickedness, this abominable woman, having ruined her husband, disregarded the awful lesson taught her by his sufferings, and, in the face of it, set herself to ruin her son!

Those who have worked among the fallen, and amongst thieves, have frequently noticed that the most reckless of women are anxious to save their children from the terrible life which they have lived, and they often hear it said by these lost mothers: "Do what you can to save my child." But here was a woman whose great delight apparently was to bring her husband and children to ruin. It is surely a masterpiece of Satan when all the woman is destroyed in the wife and the mother, and she becomes "earthly, sensual, devilish" (James 3:155).

Ahaziah, like Jehoram, was cut off. In the destruction of his cousin, Jehoram, the king of Israel, he, too, fell a victim to Jehu, whom God had raised up to destroy the house of Ahab. This was the moment for which his unnatural mother had long been looking. Her ambitious heart wanted the throne, although every step towards it might be stained by the blood of her nearest relations.

"When Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal of the house of Judah." But God had said that David should not want a man to stand before him and to sit upon his throne, and no power of wickedness can prevent the fulfilment of His Word. Jehoshabeath, the daughter of the king, the wife of Jehoiada the priest, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him away from the king's sons that were slain, and for six years he was hidden with Jehoiada the priest and his aunt, all unknown to the wicked Athaliah, who now reigned over the land.

It is an unnatural thing for a woman to seek to be prominent. It is not in God's order for a woman to rule, and every true woman shrinks from the position even when it is forced upon her. It is the devil who makes men unmanly, women unwomanly, and children unchildlike, God's law is never against, but may be above, nature.

Athaliah had her desire. In her unnatural loneliness, with neither husband nor son, nephew or grandson, to dispute her claim to the throne, she realised her aspirations, and wielded the sceptre of Judah, but only just as long as God permitted. And meanwhile idolatry flourished in Judah, and wickedness seemed to have the upper hand. But a testimony for God was being borne by Elisha during these evil days, and schools of the prophets were multiplied; a strong and earnest desire to get rid of idolatry was rising among the generation of the time, and, as soon as all was ripe, God perfected His plan, and laid it upon the heart of Jehoiada to bring forth young Joash, show him to the people, and recall them to their ancient loyalty to the successors of the house of Judah. In one day there was a revolution, and in that day, Athaliah had to learn that GOD WAS GREATER THAN SHE, and that the rule of the wicked is short. The child Joash had been anointed king. The congregation had made a covenant with the king in the house of God. The life-guards had left their allegiance to Athaliah, and were gathered round the young king, and the Levites kept "the watch of the Lord," and compassed the king round about, every man with his weapons in his hand. Joash was crowned with the testimony in his hand. Jehoiada and his sons anointed him, and they said, "God save the king."

Sounds reached the ears of Athaliah which were not familiar, and she suspected treachery. With, perhaps, a trembling voice, she asked the cause of the tumult, and she saw the people run, and

heard them praising the king. What should she do? She was too desperate a woman to remain and die in the palace. She came also to the place of concourse, and arrived in the house of the Lord. But when she saw the youthful king, and that all the army, and the priests and the elders of the people were on the side of Joash and Jehoiada, she "rent her clothes," and cried:

"Treason, treason."

Jehoiada the priest had closely calculated; in his reckonings he had reckoned with his God, and what he did was done by God's command, He boldly gave command that the rejected queen should be driven forth from between the ranks, and forthwith executed! and, without one friend, one follower, one subject to stand on her side, the miserable woman died by the sword, and went to render her account to the God whom she had rejected, blasphemed, and withstood. And yet Athaliah might have been saved. The prophet Elisha was no unknown person in the land. At times Jehoram her husband had hearkened to him, but Athaliah would not. From first to last in her history, not one good thing is recorded. It was a life of unmixed evil, badly begun, badly continued, badly ended. O how fearful such a life must be, looked back upon from the eternal doom which it has merited and inherited! Such is the life of an ambitious woman who rejects God!

25. Huldah, The Prophetess - 2Ch_34:14-33

HULDAH, THE PROPHETESS.

2 Chronicles 34:14-33.

There is only one mention of Huldah, the prophetess, in the whole Word of God, but that mention is highly honourable. It was in the time of revival, when king Josiah, specially raised up by God to restore His true worship in Jerusalem, had set himself to repair the house of the Lord his God. Before attempting to do this, he had begun to purge Judah and Jerusalem from idolatry, and he had thoroughly cleared the land of all traces of idol worship, unsparingly throwing down the graven images, the sun images, and the molten images, breaking them in pieces, and making dust of them. THE SCRIPTURES DISCOVERED.

While clearing out the rubbish from the house of the Lord, a great discovery was made by Hilkiyah, the priest. He found "a book of the law of the Lord given by Moses." So complete had been the apostasy of the children of Judah, that the very Word of God was covered over by the rubbish of the building, and the people seemed not to have missed it! What a type this is of many a dead Church, many an unspiritual Christian, many an unfruitful Sunday School; music, singing, bazaars, entertainments, church-building—anything and everything taking precedence of the Word of the Living God!

King Josiah had two faithful friends: Shaphan the scribe, and Hilkiyah the priest: without any feeling of reserve, they brought the book of the law to the king. Blessed it was to have a king to whom they could thus speak freely, and to whom they could propose to read from the book of the law! "Shaphan read it before the king," and "when the king had heard the words of the law, he rent his clothes." He let himself be broken by the power of the Word of God. He felt it "quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword." (Hebrews 4:12.) God's Word was to him as a fire, and as a hammer, that broke the rock in pieces (Jeremiah 23:29); the king acknowledged his Master in the Word which he had heard. So he sent Hilkiyah and Shaphan with two others, saying: "Go, enquire of the Lord for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found: for great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the Word of the Lord to do after all that is written in this book."

How should the high priest and his companions enquire of the Lord? Who would be nearer God than they? Who would be a better interpreter of His mind? There was no priest higher than Hilkiyah. Probably Shaphan stood at the head of the scribes. But both Hilkiyah and Shaphan were conscious that there was one in Jerusalem who had a better understanding of the heart of God than they had.

IT WAS A WOMAN.

It is perhaps more especially in times of crisis that God raises up godly women to be His interpreters. He can count upon their weakness; they can give Him His place.

"So Hilkiah, and they that the king had commanded, went to Huldah, the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvath the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the second quarter); and they communed with her." As wife of the keeper of the wardrobe it is very probable that Huldah's earthly talents lay in the way of needlework, and that there was nothing at all extraordinary about her usual life; but men of God were conscious that the Lord was with her, that He spoke to her and through her, and that she understood Him. They could not be in her presence without being brought nearer to God; woman as she was, she was a true Levite. (Deuteronomy 10:8.) Nothing is told us of her pedigree or of any other thing whatsoever regarding her but that a king, a high priest, and a learned scribe could get nearer to God through her than by any other means. This speaks much for the saintliness of this woman. This tells a tale which the greatest eloquence could not tell. Huldah must have been a woman of prayer, leading, perhaps, a very retired life, but a life the power of which told upon all who were round about her.

She got her message from God, and said:

"Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Tell ye the man that sent you to me, Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel."

Huldah was simply a messenger; she spoke with no personal authority; and yet there was both authority and power in her message. She knew that evil was coming upon Jerusalem, and she knew the reason. She was obliged to tell out the determination of God to bring upon Jerusalem and its inhabitants all the curses that were written in the book of the law, and that because of their idolatry, therefore, His wrath was poured out, and it should not be quenched.

God gave her also a personal message to the young Josiah:

"But unto the king of Judah, who sent you to enquire of the Lord, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, As touching the words which thou hast heard; because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest His words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and hast humbled thyself before Me, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before Me; I also have heard thee, saith the Lord. Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace, neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof."

Here was the message. They brought it to the king; and the effect of it was such that king Josiah "sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem," and he "went up to the house of the Lord," and, as the head of his people, he instructed them in the Word of God. The king himself took the book of the law, and with his own voice he "read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of the Lord." And this was not all. The king meant definite business with his God. He "stood in his place, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep His commandments, and His testimonies, and His statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book. And he caused all that were found in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it."

Such was the effect of one godly woman's fearless prophecy. Nothing more is told us of Huldah. She gave her message, and retired from the scene. But she had left her mark upon her generation; and if she had never spoken another word to the king, or high priest, or Shaphan the scribe, she had, nevertheless, left her impress upon the lives of each of these distinguished men.

She had fulfilled her mission, and she might rest in peace. Blessed are the women who are willing to be used or set aside just when God wills. O, how powerfully He can use those who have no choice as to the use which He shall make of them, those who are willing to be nothing and nobody. God raise up Huldahs in this generation, for Jesus' sake.

26. Esther - Est_4:1-17; Est_5:1-14; Est_6:1-14; Est_7:1-10.

ESTHER.

Esther 4:1-17; Esther 5:1-14; Esther 6:1-14; Esther 7:1-10. The name Esther means "Secret," and the history of this famous Jewess finds its chronology between the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, in the days when many of the Jews were still captives in Persia, which kingdom had conquered Babylon. The state of morality in these Eastern kingdoms had become terribly low, and the harem system was in its fullest force. O how grievous that the children of God through their sins should be subject to a people the standard of whose life was such!

Amongst the captives in Shushan, the palace, there was a certain Jew, whose name was Mordecai, and the history of this man was so important in the eyes of God that He mentions the affairs of the king Ahasuerus, or Artaxerxes, simply to bring out the faith and loyalty of Mordecai to God and to his people. Ahasuerus, a sensual man, held a feast, in the course of which, when probably inflamed with wine, he called for his queen, Vashti, to appear, that his lords should look upon her beauty. Whether it was womanly modesty, or whether it was self-will, which caused the queen to disobey, we know not, but, in any case, Vashti was degraded from her position, and the king determined to elect another in her place, and for this purpose sought to replenish his harem.

It is grievous to think that a maiden of Israel should have been introduced into the king's harem, but so it was, and the young cousin of Mordecai, the beautiful Esther, became a competitor with Persian maidens for the crown-royal of Persia. There was a graciousness about the Jewish maiden which pleased both the king and his chamberlain, and Ahasuerus set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti.

Meanwhile, the Jewish maiden obeyed Mordecai, her elder cousin, just as when she was brought up with him. While she lived in a heathen court, THE FEAR OF GOD was greater to her than all the riches, and pleasures and indulgences of her royal estate; and when Mordecai discovered the delinquencies of two chamberlains, she "certified the king thereof in Mordecai's name."

It is not surprising that a king, the principle of whose life was self-indulgence, should have been capricious in his likes and dislikes, and by such caprice should have exalted an unworthy favourite to a place of honour. A selfish despot is the greatest of tyrants. Haman, the Agagite, was the name of this favourite, and, probably, he was a simple flatterer with a smooth tongue who made the king his tool to obtain his own aggrandisement. It was flattering to the pride of this unworthy man that all the king's servants in the king's gate bowed and revered him. But there was one man, a servant of the King of Kings, who would not own the superiority of Haman. "Mordecai bowed not nor did him reverence." So bitter was the enmity which this treatment inspired in Haman that he was full of wrath, and in his senseless, wicked anger, he sought not only to lay hands on Mordecai, but to destroy all the Jews throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus. Probably he had discovered that Mordecai, far from being a selfish man like himself, had his people very near his heart, and that death would be doubly bitter to him if his people also were destroyed. Haman's

influence with the king was such that he obtained a decree that all the Jews should be destroyed and the very day of execution was fixed!

Mordecai was, probably, one of those men so rare in a generation, who have the cause of God upon their hearts. It was not for his own sake that he had introduced Esther into the palace, it was not for the sake of the position which she held; he bore his people upon his heart, he thought of how he and the queen should serve the people of the Lord. And now that all the Jews were in mourning and in fear for their lives, Mordecai rent his clothes, put on sack-cloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and bitter cry. It was not long before Esther heard of the mourning of Mordecai, and, to her surprise and horror, learnt the reason of it; and Mordecai charged her to go in to the king to make supplication to him and to make request for her people.

It was a crisis in the life of the young queen: all her life previously was but a preparation for this moment. Her people's very existence might depend on her. To enter uncalled into the presence of the imperious despot meant death to herself, but to fail in supplicating for her race meant death to everyone of her people! What should Esther do? Mordecai sent this message:

"Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance, arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this." God can always raise up instruments for His work; He is not dependent upon man, but there are moments when He may give us A SPECIAL CALL eternal issues hang upon such moments!

How should Mordecai know that enlargement and deliverance should arise to the Jews from another place? He must have been alone with his God; he must have pleaded for his people and received a distinct answer, for he spoke with authority of what God should do. By God's grace, Esther was made equal to the occasion. She rose to the situation, and returned Mordecai this answer,

"Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish."

Once decided to take her life in her hand, once laid down upon the altar as a living sacrifice for her people, Esther became the true helpmeet which woman should be. But in this case, it was not the helpmeet of her husband, but of her people. When the hearts of His children have learnt to trust Him, God has no difficulty in arranging circumstances in such a way that prayer can be answered.

Esther ventured into the inner court of the king's house. The king held out the golden sceptre. She only invited him and Haman to a feast, and trusted for what should follow. Meanwhile God went on working, and took sleep from the king's eyes. He ordered the book of the records of the Chronicles to be read before him, and discovered how Mordecai had apprised him of the treachery of his chamberlains. He called in the morning for his favourite Haman, and commanded that he should honour Mordecai by leading him on horseback through the streets of the city and proclaiming before him:

"Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour." When the time of Esther's banquet had arrived, the king asked her what was her petition. The favourable moment had come: God had let everything work up to this moment. And when the queen urged upon her royal husband the plea:

"Let my life be given me upon my petition, and my people at my request," and the king discovered the treachery of Haman, the tables were turned, and the gallows which Haman had prepared for Mordecai were used for the man who had plotted his downfall.

Esther had not been called to her royal position in vain, and throughout the whole kingdom, deliverance came to the Jews. They had light and gladness and joy and honour, and many of the people of the land became Jews, for the fear of the Jews came upon them (Esther 8:16-17).

"Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" It is IN MOMENTS OF CRISIS. that the faithfulness of God's children is tried. He will ever hold out His golden sceptre to His children. But let none think that what happens is accidental. There is a purpose in every test, in every trial, that the gold may be refined and the grace which He has given to His children made manifest. Every child of God is called to be a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1), but the life of sacrifice is peculiarly a woman's vocation. There are times when, disregarding her own feelings and desires, she may follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth (Revelation 14:4) in her own home-life; enduring hardness, selfishness, perhaps from a drunken husband, rudeness, perhaps from rebellious children, unkindness from evil-speaking neighbours—without answering a word. Who knows how many husbands and sons have been convinced of sin by the witness of such a life? Who knows how many neighbours have seen Christ in such a woman, and have been led to seek Him for themselves. Esther took her life in her hand for the sake of her people. Every true woman of God will die to her own self-life daily, and all day long, that the life of Jesus may be manifest in her.

27. Job's Wife - Job_2:9-10

JOB'S WIFE.

Job 2:9-10.

Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord" (Proverbs 18:22). So says the wise man, and yet this "good thing" may sometimes prove the hardest test of a godly man's faith.

We are familiar with the history of Job, a man whose patience is proverbial even in the Word of God, a man whose home and family life was such that God testified of him as being "perfect and upright, one that feared God and eschewed evil." Job's family, consisting of ten children, had already grown up, and some of them had families of their own, before his great troubles fell on him. For God's own purpose—to bring Job himself into a relation to, and an understanding of his God, beyond what he had ever known before, Satan was allowed to apply to him every imaginable test; his farm-stock, his servants, his camels, his very children, all were taken from him in one day. But with the dignity of a man whose will has been for years subdued to his God, "Job arose and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground," not to grumble, not to pity himself, not to complain to fellow-men, but to worship the God who had smitten him! All the words which came from his lips were these:

"Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." It was God's own testimony to this His precious witness:

"In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly."

Oh! how intensely important it is, when a husband is passing through the furnace, that his wife shall be ON THE SIDE OF GOD. and understand His dealings with her husband! But the continuation of his history is evidence that Job's wife sympathised more with her husband than with her God, and she helped to weaken rather than to strengthen him. When Satan came a second time to present himself before the Lord, and the Lord asked him a second time:

"Hast thou considered My servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and he still holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst Me against him, to destroy him without cause"—Satan answered the Lord:

"Skin for skin; yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth Thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse Thee to Thy face."

Satan had his revenge to the full against the faithfulness of Job, who had not murmured about the sore trials which had befallen him, for the Lord said unto Satan:

"Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life." And so the enemy, with cruel malignity, went "forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his

crown."

What should his wife do under such circumstances? How natural it is to a woman to sympathise! But, oh, how much of this sympathy is not only useless, but deleterious to those to whom it is offered! "How ill you look!" "How much I feel for you!" never helps a sufferer out of the suffering he is enduring. Human sympathy spends itself in indignation against the person or the thing which has caused the suffering; but this can never lessen it. The real help to a sufferer is to lift him on to another ground, and show him what God is saying to him.

JOB'S WIFE WAS INDIGNANT with something or somebody, and when her husband "took a potsherd to scrape himself withal," and, in his deep humiliation, "sat down among the ashes," his wife said to him:

"Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God and die." As much as to say: "Why go on enduring such misery? It is better to get out of it even if by dying."

O! how terrible is the influence upon a sufferer of one who does not speak in the mind of God! O, how cruel is the influence of a worldly or a carnal spirit where the whole being is crushed down with suffering! Job's wife was no helpmeet to her husband. Job, with all his suffering and all the throbbing pain which racked his poor, afflicted body, had to sustain his wife's faith, when she was tempting him to give up:

"Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

"In all this did not Job sin with his lips." So much could not be said of Job's wife.

O! how many a Christian wife has failed to be a helpmeet to her husband, because, in times of trouble and temptation, she has failed to recognise the hand of God, and has sympathised with him as though the circumstances were accidental, or as though the persons through whom he was tried were wilfully malicious. A wife who comes to her husband in the spirit of a prophet, who understands what God is saying, and what God is doing, and who reminds him in his hour of trial of the Hand which is upon the mainspring of events, of the Heart which never ceases to be a Father's heart, of the good Shepherd's care over His sheep—is, indeed, a blessing to a tried husband.

It is no accident that when "the Lord turned the captivity of Job," his friends, his brethren, his sisters, his acquaintances, his sheep, camels, oxen, asses, and also his sons and daughters are named; yet Job's wife who had so signally failed, IS NEVER ONCE MENTIONED! The Lord make His children true in their family relationships, that He may say to them, as He did to Abraham: "I will bless thee...and thou shalt be a blessing." (Genesis 12:2.)

28. Belshazzar's Queen Mother - Dan_5:1-31.

BELSHAZZAR'S QUEEN MOTHER.

Daniel 5:1-31.

King Belshazzar of Babylon was the grandson of King Nebuchadnezzar, whose daughter, Nitocris, his father had married. This king, although he must have known the dealings of God with his grandfather, was an utterly godless and sensual man, possessed apparently of great force of character, but using it for his own ends, and failing to acknowledge the supremacy of the God who made heaven and earth, and who so marvellously revealed Himself in the deliverance of the Jewish youths in the furnace, and in His dealings with Nebuchadnezzar himself, when He visited him with madness, and afterwards restored him.

Babylon was at this time besieged by Darius the Median. So sure was Belshazzar that his city could stand the siege, and so confident was he in his own power that, with the enemy at the gates, "he made a great feast to a thousand of his lords," and indulged in excess of wine in their presence. While, probably, in a state of intoxication, he went further in a DARING DEED OF BLASPHEMY, and called for the sacred vessels which had been brought from Jerusalem, that he, "his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein." By this very deed, he treated the God of Israel with contempt, and acted as though he were His superior.

"Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further" (Job 38:11), is God's law of control to every power in His creation, whether of man or of the elements. "In the same hour" that the deed of sacrilege was being committed, "came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote."

Besides the enemy who was at that very moment draining away the waters of the Euphrates into a neighbouring marsh, that so the river might be fordable for his besieging troops, there was the mysterious Enemy whose hand traced the indecipherable characters upon the wall of the king's banqueting house—an enemy within and an enemy without! O miserable, doomed king! what wilt thou do? At last the bold countenance of the tyrant begins to change, his thoughts trouble him, the joints of his loins are loosed, his knees smite one against another, his courage fails him, and he who counted himself strong against the hosts of Persia, trembles like the veriest coward because the unknown God whom he has blasphemed mysteriously writes his doom, and he is in terrible suspense to understand it. He cries aloud to bring in all the human help that can be found—astrologers, Chaldeans, soothsayers; but, in vain. The king offers gorgeous clothing, with scarlet and chains of gold, and posts of honour; but not one of the king's wise men can read the writing, not one can make known the interpretation; none of these can understand THE LANGUAGE OF THE MOST HIGH.

Terror increases upon the king. He is greatly troubled, his countenance is changed in him, and his lords are astonished. The rumour of the mysterious writing spreads; it reaches one who has not been at the banquet—one whose acquaintance in that worldly court is with the man of God, the

aged Daniel, who still witnesses, in the midst of evil, to the presence and power of the God of heaven. The queen, that is, the queen-mother, "by reason of the words of the king and his lords, came into the banqueting house." The mission of this woman is not to encourage her son in feasting and revelry, and in his blasphemy of the true God; she comes into his presence as a friend of Daniel, a disciple of God's true witness in the kingdom.

What must it have been for this woman, who, probably, was a true believer, to live in such a court, at such a time! We can hardly imagine such a life. We hear nothing more of her in the Word of God but her sudden appearance at this juncture. But it is enough to tell us that where she went, she went for God, and what she said, she spoke for God. It may be that her life and the life of Daniel were a salt in the ungodly court, in those ungodly days. How many AN UNKNOWN WOMAN who abstains from the worldly gatherings in a worldly house, may spread there a savour of Christ, a savour of life unto life! The worldly butterflies around will ask why it is she never comes to the balls, why she is never found at the dinner parties, why it is she never attends an entertainment, etc., and the answer, perhaps, in sneering accents, will be: "O, she is too religious!" But this answer remains engraven on the hearts of many, and perhaps comes back in times of trial and of suffering, to awaken them eventually to a knowledge of the Lord. The queen-mother stood, probably, in simple clothing, in the midst of those who were gorgeously apparelled, and another current came in with her. She spoke and said:

"O king, live for ever: let not thy thoughts trouble thee nor let thy countenance be changed: there is a man in thy kingdom in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and, in the days of thy father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him; whom the king Nebuchadnezzar thy father, the king, I say, thy father, made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers."

How came it that this woman was so much acquainted with Daniel? Doubtless her heart had yearned for the truth, and she had longed for something different from her surroundings; and in her communion of spirit with Daniel, who was no longer a favourite at court, but hidden away somewhere in a corner, as though he were useless, this royal personage had found something better than all the pleasures and all the distinctions of a court. She had learnt, probably, to know her God through Daniel, and Daniel must have found, in fellowship with this queenly woman, one heart which understood and sympathised with him, and which received the testimony of the true God. The queen-mother went on to affirm that "an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and showing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel, whom the king named Belshazzar;" and she had no hesitation in adding:

"Now let Daniel be called, and he will shew the interpretation."

She could count on Daniel, and she knew that God could count on him also: by faith she was the daughter of Abraham (Galatians 3:7). This woman had borne her testimony, and she retired off the scene. She had done her work. But the witness she had borne to her God was counted WORTHY OF A PLACE IN THE BIBLE.

Daniel was brought before the king; he interpreted the writing, and with it preached a sermon to Belshazzar, strong in its conviction of his sin, but too late to bring him to repentance. Daniel

reminded him of God's dealings with his grandfather, and declared:

"And thou, his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this; but hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven...and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified."

Just as soon as God's witness had thus testified to the blasphemies of the king, "the part of the hand that wrote" disappeared, and the judgment of the king was thus interpreted:

"God hath numbered thy kingdom; and finished it;...Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting;...Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians."

"In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain." The queen-mother had fulfilled her vocation. Perhaps she, too, was slain, but she had not lived for nought. The king had missed his vocation, and he must bear the consequences for ever and for ever.

29. Elizabeth - Luk_1:1-80.

ELIZABETH.

Luke 1:5-7; Luke 1:39-45; Luke 1:56-63.

"There was in the days of Herod the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth." The name Elizabeth signifies "The oath of God," or "The daughter of the covenant," and Elizabeth was a true type of a covenant daughter of God. It is written of her, as well as of her husband, that they were "righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless."

How few there are, especially how few married couples, who are RIGHTEOUS BEFORE GOD, who, tried in the balances of the sanctuary, are found blameless! How few of whom the Lord Himself can say they are righteous, how few who are Israelites indeed in whom is no guile, or, who, like Daniel, are found with no fault in them concerning their daily work. (Daniel 6:4.)

Zacharias and Elizabeth were of one mind, and that mind was obedience to the Lord without a question. Yet they were not without trial. The Lord's people are always a tried people. It is the invariable rule that what the Lord sees to be gold must pass through the fire and be refined. Every one whom the Lord loveth must endure chastening; every son whom He receiveth must be scourged, and every daughter too. (Hebrews 12:6.) This blameless, righteous, priestly couple, "had no child, because that Elizabeth was barren, and they were both now well stricken in years." This was no small trial; but there was another far more intense: it was the degeneracy and unreality of the Jewish religion of their day. A day came when Zacharias brought strange tidings to Elizabeth. They were not spoken by word of mouth, for he was dumb, but in writing, he made known to her how he had seen a vision in the temple, and how their prayer of years for a son was heard of God; how this son should be a Nazarite, and should be filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb; that he should be an evangelist with power, and many of the children of Israel should he turn to the Lord their God; that he should "go before Him in the spirit and power of Elias; to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." And he made known to his wondering wife that his very dumbness was a sign from God that these words should be fulfilled in their season. This message brought about A NEW ERA in this woman's life. The faithful routine of service in little things to God, the quiet but almost despairing cry that she, like her sisters around her, might have a child, and that he might be a power in the service of her God, and then the quiet renunciation of her will—this had been the life of Elizabeth day after day, month after month, and year after year. And now this strange revulsion, this unexpected break, this light in the midst of darkness, was an appeal from on high to her how far she could trust her God to do what He had promised. Scripture is silent as to whether Elizabeth believed at once; but, in any case, she did believe, sooner or later, and there must have been an increasing silence in her soul as she rose to her vocation as the mother and guardian of the future prophet and forerunner of God's Messiah.

There came a day when, in her quiet home in the hill country of Judea, Mary, her cousin, came to see her. This visit had a wondrous effect upon Elizabeth. She was "FILLED WITH THE HOLY GHOST." In point of chronology, the very first human being of whom such is mentioned is Elizabeth, and she spake out with a loud voice and said:

"Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

Mary had held no communication with Elizabeth. There was no penny post in those days. But the Spirit of God in one woman recognised the Spirit of God in the other, and it was a message from on high to Mary when Elizabeth recognised her as the Messiah's mother.

What the communion of spirit between these two women was, and what the intense nearness to God, in the impossibility of explaining their position to man, it would be impossible to imagine. All unworthy in themselves, but wondrously privileged by God, the mother of the Messiah and the mother of His forerunner understood Him, and understood one another, and Elizabeth, as being the elder addressed her younger cousin thus:

"And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord." When Elizabeth's son was born, her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shown great mercy upon her, and they rejoiced with her. It was a fulfilment of the angel's prophecy to her husband. "Thou shalt have joy and gladness: and many shall rejoice at his birth." (Luke 1:14.) But there was one whose voice was unheard, and yet he was a deeply interested party. The tongue of Zacharias was still tied; the father of the future prophet was still dumb. But on the eighth day, they came to circumcise the child, and they called him "Zacharias," after the name of his father; but Elizabeth had understood the heaven-given name, and she alone withstood the relatives, and said:

"Not so; but he shall be called John." The male relatives argued the point; they wanted, in Jewish fashion, to preserve the family name, and disregarding Elizabeth's decision, "they made signs to the father how he would have him called," and Zacharias traced upon his writing-table the simple words:

"His name is John."

Thus he justified his believing and obedient wife. This act of faith performed, "his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God."

Elizabeth had found her vocation—to pray for and to train the future prophet. She could not have said to Mary, "Blessed is she that believed," except she herself had been "strong in faith, giving glory to God." Blessed was John to have such a mother, and blessed was Elizabeth to have such a son.

God raise up amongst us mothers like Elizabeth, for the well-being of His Church, and for the training of His prophets.

30. Mary, the Mother of Jesus - Luk_1:26-38

MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS.

Luke 1:26-38.

Six months after the mission of Gabriel to Zacharias, God sent him on another errand.

Gabriel's mission was to a virgin, named Mary, betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David, and his lineal descendant. (Luke 3:24-32.) The angel's salutation was abrupt and unprepared:

"Hail, thou that art highly favoured (or endued with grace), the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women." The thought that she was, or ever should be, anything remark—able had probably never so much as crossed Mary's mind. She must have been one of the most lowly-minded, one in whom a God-wrought self-renunciation and self-forgetfulness were marked features; and such a salutation as the angel's would be received by her with unqualified astonishment. Who was she to be blessed among women? Did Mary fear that she was deceived, and that, after all, her visitor was no angel from heaven, but a deceiving spirit? "She was troubled," greatly troubled, and "cast in her mind what manner of salutation this might be." There are some who take as a matter of course any of God's gracious visitations; who count themselves worthy of His favour and think themselves wronged if they have not conscious and enjoyable communion with God. Mary was not of this number; she was crushed with the sense of her nothingness, and the angel reassured her:

"Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found grace with God." (R. V.) No man can approach God but through grace. Heavenly messengers never flatter. The song which the angels in heaven sing with the redeemed is, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." (Revelation 5:12.) The grace of God in His redemption through Jesus Christ is the wonder of God's whole creation. "Thou hast found grace" was more to Mary than could have been any praise for what she was, or for what she did; grace glorifies God, not man. The angel revealed to her a wondrous calling:

"Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end."

Perhaps there never was a Jewish woman who had any claim to be called pious, in whose heart the longing to be the mother of the Messiah had never found entrance; and now this humble Jewish maiden stood before this wondrous announcement that she was THE WOMAN CHOSEN OF GOD.

After generations of her Jewish sisters had been passed by, the Desire of all nations, the Sun of Righteousness which should arise with healing in His wings, "the Lord our Righteousness," the Star which should arise out of Jacob, and the Sceptre out of Israel—should be her Son! It was

more than Mary could conceive. The honour to which she was called crushed her. In her ingenuous simplicity, Mary asked the angel how this should be.

"The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God," was the angel's answer.

It began slowly to dawn upon Mary what should be the cost. To be honoured of God would mean to be misunderstood by man; to be the mother of the Messiah meant to be a mother without being a wife; how explain her position? She must learn the most definite confidence in God in whom she trusted. This greatest honour involved the greatest sacrifice that a godly woman could make. But so it is ever: when God calls His children to be living sacrifices, they have to live counter to the traditions of the world, to all the preconceptions of fellow Christians, and to be really "hid with Christ in God." (Colossians 3:3.) Joseph would not understand her; her own parents would not understand her; her friends and relations would not understand her; it would be a living death, but it would be a means of bringing life eternal into the world. THE HIGHEST DEGREE OF SACRIFICE was called for in Mary, and she looked steadily at the position which was placed before her. Only one thing was lacking, and that was her acquiescence. She could not help her God, but she could yield up her will in full view of all it should cost her. Laying herself as a living sacrifice upon the altar, she said:

"Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word." But in His tender love, our God gave Mary one precious token of sympathy in revealing to her His grace to her cousin Elizabeth, saying: "She hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible"—or, "For no word from God shall be void of power." (R.V.)

Days passed by, and the time must come when the great secret which had been told to Mary must become known. What would become of her character? How could she explain herself? How could she make others understand Gabriel's announcement to her? O, how wonderfully God cares for His own! When we trust Him, He takes all in hand, and never leaves us in an impossible position. Just when things were at their worst, and Joseph, her betrothed, "being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily," the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, explaining to him what Mary could never have explained.

"Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost."

O, how easy it is for God to disentangle His own, and to justify them before those in whose eyes justification is necessary. We may well trust such a God and such a Shepherd with our name, our reputation, and all our concerns, for He is faithful unto death.

And, moreover, the angel told Joseph:

"She shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins."

Joseph knew well that the vision was a heavenly message to him: his obedient spirit yielded to the voice of the Lord, and he took Mary under his protection as his wife. And thus God provided for His

trusting child just the shelter and the shadow which her circumstances so peculiarly needed.

O how safe it is to trust our God! O how sure is every step when our Lord leads us, and how utterly senseless it is to make provision to defend our own character when One who is so much higher can do it better than we can! Let it be the motto of our lives as women: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it unto me according to Thy word." Our difficulties may be great in our home life; husbands, sons, daughters, servants, visitors, may misunderstand us; but when we walk with God, we can trust Him to make our way, and to bring all our loved ones to understand us just when the critical moments arrive.

31. Mary's Song of Praise - Luk_1:39-56

MARY'S SONG OF PRAISE.

Luke 1:39-56.

Before Mary became the wife of Joseph, an intense longing possessed her for communion with Elizabeth. Both these holy women were subjects of peculiar grace; both subjects of a miracle.

Mary arose, and took her journey with haste to the city in the hill country of Judea, where Zacharias and Elizabeth sojourned; and no sooner did Elizabeth hear the salutation of Mary than she was filled with the Holy Ghost, and lifted up her voice with a loud cry, and said:

"Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

It was tender grace in our loving God to have given Mary this strong confirmation of the faith which He had imparted to her that she should be the mother of the Messiah. It was more to her, perhaps, than almost anything else that took place between the time of the angel's salutation and the birth of her Divine Son. God knows how to provide SPECIAL ENCOURAGEMENT FOR SPECIAL TIMES OF TRIAL.

We need not plan and plot and arrange for ourselves. He never leads us through dark valleys or fiery furnaces, but that He is with us; His presence, His rod, His staff, strengthen and comfort us. The Holy Spirit made Elizabeth a prophetess, and with all the dignity of a God-filled woman, she declared to Mary:

"Blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord." This was a strength for the suffering which came upon her when Joseph misunderstood and distrusted her, and when, if her heart had not been filled with God, she would have been at the point of despair.

Mary was filled with the Spirit, even as Elizabeth was, for her impulse was to praise God. (Ephesians 5:18; Ephesians 5:20.) She sang:

"My soul doth magnify the Lord." No thought of self-glorification took possession of her heart; no thought of self-pity; no thought of self-defence; the Lord was so great in her eyes that herself was out of sight; and in lowliness of heart she said:

"My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." Her Son and yet her Saviour! Mary was conscious, indeed, that she needed One who should save her from her sins. Instead of taking pride in the unparalleled position to which God had called her as the mother of the Messiah, the very position which the Church of Rome gives her, Mary spoke of her low estate.

"He hath looked upon the low estate of His hand-maiden." A sinner only, a sinner who needed a Saviour: and thus taking root in grace, she ventures to lift her eyes to see the greatness of her

position.

"Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." But again it is not in self-glorification, but in the depth of consciousness how great His grace has been to her.

"He that is mighty hath done to me great things; and Holy is His Name."

And, as though she would guard herself from the thought that there was anything extraordinary in her to commend her, she says:

"His mercy is unto generations and generations on them that fear Him." (R. V.) Another glance at her God, and she says:

"He hath shewed strength with His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts."

How she has learnt through the condescension of God, even to her, that the fond imagination of her nation that the Messiah should first come in earthly glory and deliver them from the Roman yoke, was an imagination which God should set! God needed no earthly princes:

"He hath put down princes from their thrones, and hath exalted them of low degree." In her own person and her own laid-down life and reputation, Mary was a witness beforehand of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

She has found a fulness of satisfaction in her God, and thus she sings:

"The hungry He hath filled with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away." And with the thought of Israel in her heart, sacrificed as she was for her people and all her fallen race, she says:

"He hath holpen Israel His servant, that He might remember mercy (as He spake unto our fathers) toward Abraham and his seed for ever."

Three months' stay with Elizabeth strengthened Mary's faith, and then she returned home to go through the furnace which awaited her.

32. Mary and the Child Jesus. Part I - Luk_2:1-20 & Mat_2:1-23.

MARY AND THE CHILD JESUS.

Luke 2:1-20; Matthew 2:1-23.

God had provided a protector for His child who yielded herself so unreservedly to Him. Joseph became legally Mary's husband, but in the wondrous destiny to which she was called, many difficulties may have risen in the mind of the Jewish maiden. Christ must be born in Bethlehem. Joseph's home was in Nazareth. How would God bring about that the birth of His Son should be in the city of the prophecy?

All was known to God beforehand, and all was pre-arranged. Mary had nothing to do but to be still. God "worketh all things according to the counsel of His own will." (Ephesians 1:2.) Just in those very days of crisis, a proclamation was made that throughout the whole Roman world, including all tributary countries, such as Palestine, a universal census should take place; and every head of a family had to appear in the city of his birth, to be enrolled according to his pedigree. This led Joseph and Mary—both descended from David, the one from Solomon, and the other from Nathan, sons of David—to Bethlehem, David's city. While there, "the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger: because there was no room for them in the inn."

Truly, the world knew Him not; truly, Mary, who had sacrificed all she was and all she had for her coming Messiah, began already to taste the fellowship of His sufferings. Never had there been a birth of such moment as the birth of the Son of God, yet never was there one less marked by man when it took place. Many rejoiced in the birth of John the Baptist; the world was asleep when Jesus was born. It was more than possible that Mary's faith may have been tried by the little notice it occasioned. But while earth was indifferent, heaven was all astir.

SILENT WAITING.

While Mary, in her silence, alone in the stable, was pondering over God's great purpose in sending the Messiah to save His people from their sins, just a mile or two away the whole heaven was filled with angels, and a few shepherds were holding wondrous communion with the unseen world, and learning the greatness of the event which had happened in the eyes of God and of those who lived in His presence.

It was not long before these shepherds "came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger." Now Mary began to reap the fruit of her faith in God. He sent her believing souls just fresh from the presence of the angels, who related what they had seen and what had been spoken by the heavenly host, and she knew that her little Babe who was foretold to be the Son of God was indeed "a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord," a Saviour who should bring glory to God in the highest, "and on earth peace, good will toward men." Yet Mary waited while the indifferent, unconscious world went on as usual. She had no power to make men know how much

the birth of her Son affected them! The shepherds went to tell others the things that they had seen and heard, but Mary proclaimed nothing. She "kept all these things and pondered them in her heart." She was not called to be a herald, but a listener, and "a living sacrifice." She took in the thoughts which God revealed to her, and she was always responsive to her God who spoke to her. But Mary had less to do with man than many of God's children. An active, bustling woman could not have served God's purpose as the mother of the Messiah. But other visitors broke in upon her solitude. After the visit of the shepherds, there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem to inquire for Him who was "born King of the Jews." (Matthew 2:2.) Guided by the scribes of the people, who knew the letter of the prophecy, they were directed to Bethlehem by Herod the king, who "was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him" at announcement of the birth of Jesus. He said,

"Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found Him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also."

Happily, the wise men had another guide, an unfailing one, a star which shone from heaven, and which, when they got out of the atmosphere of Jerusalem and of Herod, went again before them "until it came and stood over where the young child was."

TAUGHT OF GOD as were the shepherds, these wise men saw nothing in the surroundings of the young child to stumble their faith; they saw things in the light of the revelation of their God. They fell down and worshipped Him; and when they opened their treasures they presented unto Him gifts; "gold"—as the offering to a king—"and frankincense"—in acknowledgment that He was God—"and myrrh"—as a token that He should die.

If Mary's faith had been deepened and strengthened by the visit of the shepherds, it would be much more enlarged by the visit of the wise men. She was beginning to learn more and more that the things of God are not received by man, that God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, that that which is great in His eyes is not valued by the world, "and that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." She had learnt that to have the highest honour which God could put upon her meant a total renunciation of earthly prestige; she must be nothing and nobody; that even the Messiah, who was her Son, must be nothing and nobody until the moment should come that God should make Him known.

It is a moment of crisis in every life when this lesson is truly learnt and when the last hold on the approbation of the world and the understanding of friends is yielded, and God becomes All in all. The wise men were warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, and "they departed into their own country another way." But God had a communication for Joseph and Mary too. The angel of the Lord said to Joseph in a dream:

"Arise and take the young child and His mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy Him."

Joseph's business connections were all probably in Galilee. "Go into Egypt" meant the establishment of quite new business relations. It was expensive, it was inconvenient, it was no doubt a trial to Mary, but she had said: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, BE IT UNTO ME EVEN AS THOU WILT." And this yielding of herself to God was not for a day, but for ever! It meant: Whatever Thou wilt, whenever Thou wilt, and however Thou wilt in all things. A consecration of one's self in a holiness meeting means very little unless in every detail of life we can yield to our

God, and say to Him: "All right, Lord," whatsoever happens. The diabolical action of Herod in causing the little children of Bethlehem to be slain took place during the absence of the family of Joseph, and it was only when they were warned again from heaven that they came back to Nazareth, and dwelt there as before. Thus this little family lived and worked according to the recognised direction of God. Very little is told us of Mary at this time, except the repeated declaration that she pondered or kept these things in her heart. She was ever taking in from her God all which happened, and He found in her a heart which waited on and trusted Him.

33. Mary and the Child Jesus. Part II - Luk_2:21-52

MARY AND THE CHILD JESUS.

PART II.

Luke 2:21-52.

"Blessed are the meek."—Matthew 5:5.

Jesus "was a minister of the circumcision for the faith of God." He was circumcised when He was eight days old, just like any other Jewish child; and, as a Jewish mother, Mary had to pass through the ordinary purification (Exodus 13:12; Exodus 22:29; Numbers 8:17). Thus even for Jesus, pure and without sin as He was, a sacrifice had to be offered because he took on Him "the likeness of sinful flesh." (Romans 8:3.)

Mary's faith had much to exercise it. It would have been so natural to think that such a Son as Jesus would be an exception, would need no circumcision, and that in her case God would waive the purification, which was to remind His people that they were born in sin. But Jesus must bear the Cross from His birth; He came to take the place of fallen man, and He must show that it is not in external differences that God manifests His glory; it is in "the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible." (1 Peter 3:4.) When Jesus taught His disciples, He did not say, "Take My yoke upon you, for I am the King of kings and the Lord of lords," but, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart." (Matthew 11:29.) It is the meek who shall inherit the earth. (Matthew 5:5.) Yet from time to time God gave Mary LITTLE BITS OF OPEN HEAVEN, to strengthen her faith and keep her looking, "not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen." (2 Chronicles 4:18.) When Jesus was brought into the temple, the Spirit of God led there at the same moment the aged Simeon, who had long "looked for the consolation of Israel," a man on whom the Holy Ghost was, and to whom it was revealed by the Spirit "that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." The same spiritual intelligence which had made the shepherds see their Saviour in the little Babe, and which had made the wise men see in Him their King, led Simeon also to recognise in Him the Lord's Anointed. He took the Babe, poorly clad as He was, from the arms of His humbly-clad mother, and he blessed God, and said:

"Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel."

Perhaps this was the first ray of light that fell upon Mary's soul, to make known to her that the Gentiles also should be blessed through her Divine Son.

She and Joseph " marvelled at those things which were spoken of Him," and Simeon had a special message for her:

"Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

How little Mary understood what that sword should be, and how in the future she would be a witness of the crucifixion of Him on whom her hopes, and the hopes of those who looked for redemption in Israel were built!

How far Mary attempted anything like the education of Jesus we know not, but probably she would exercise the same control as any other mother, and Jesus "learned obedience." (Hebrews 5:8; Luke 2:51.) The time came when Jesus should attain His majority, at the age of twelve years, and His parents, who were wont to go up to Jerusalem "after the custom of the feast," took Him with them, as they may have done in previous years; but this time, Mary, who was ordinarily a silent woman, was occupied with her relations, belonging to the same caravan, when they were return-from the feast back to Galilee. We never lose sight of Jesus without suffering loss. For one day, her kinsfolk were first with Mary. Jesus had tarried in Jerusalem; a whole day had passed by, and Mary and Joseph had not discovered their loss! It was a clear evidence that something else or somebody else had pre-occupied them. Mary, who had received many communications from heaven, now acted on earthly lines, and "sought Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance." Why did she not go at once to God, acknowledge her inattention, and inquire where Jesus was? It was not likely that He would be found where they sought Him; family gossip would have no attraction for Him who was the Son of God.

They had to return to the place whence they started. We never can miss Jesus without having to RETRACE OUR STEPS: we must always go over the ground again until we find the exact point where we last recollect having spoken with or listened to Him. Three days had passed when they recollected that it was in the temple they last saw Him, and returning thither, they found Him "in the midst of the doctors," not assuming superiority, not seeking to instruct them, but, with all the humility of an educated child, He was "hearing them and asking them questions." This led them in their turn to ask questions of Him, and, without losing His position as the younger, He could answer so that "they were astonished at His understanding and answers."

Mary was the first to speak to Him:

"Son, why hast Thou thus dealt with us? behold, Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing." O what a reproach was conveyed in the words of Jesus:

"How is it that ye sought Me?" Was it on human lines or Divine? Was it as being one with relations and acquaintances, or was it as being One with God? It may be that the subject matter which occupied Him with the doctors was the reality of the Passover, the blood, without shedding of which is no remission, the flesh which was eaten, and all in the type which brought out the truth of the great Antitype, "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) And He added to His mother:

"Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" And that business was the written Word—nothing had such an attraction for Him. The things of His Father were all found there. There he read all that was prophesied of Him. Yet He was the pattern Son. He must learn obedience. So "He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but

His mother kept all these sayings in her heart." The temporary distraction which had made Mary lose sight of Jesus had given way to her habitual recollectedness, and she was again the patient listener, the quiet, meditative woman, who laid to heart all her God said and did. Such women are a power in their very stillness.

34. Mary and the Marriage of Cana - Joh_2:1-25.

MARY AND THE MARRIAGE OF CANA.

John 2:1-25. The Lord Jesus was already called to His ministry, but, as the perfect Man, we never find Him denying family responsibilities. He was as ready to serve His Father in this as in anything else. When He was called with His disciples to a marriage in His mother's family, He did not plead that His ministry was so important that He could not answer to the call; He was present there, and His mother was probably responsible for the provision. Thus, when the supply of wine ran out, it seemed natural that she should call on Him to exercise His Divine power in the present pressing need. And she said to Him:

"They have no wine."

Jesus was always led by His Father; moment by moment, He received from Him the words He should speak, and the deeds He should do. He answered her:

"Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come." Had Mary possessed the sensitive and touchy spirit which some almost pride themselves upon, she would have been hurt at such an answer. But Mary knew too much of God to do anything but receive the rebuke as being merited. She immediately took her right place. She had learned her lesson, and she passed it on to the servants:

"Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it."

O if every woman, by her every word and deed, taught this great lesson, she would not have lived in vain. As soon as Mary understood things were ripe, HIS HOUR WAS COME.

"Fill the water-pots with water." The guests had washed; why provide for them again? The servants did not argue, but obeyed; the water in the water-pots was turned into wine, and Mary had been made a blessing. This was one more step out of self into Christ, in the pathway which led to her place at the Cross—almost the nearest place to Jesus. But she had yet another lesson to learn. In the days of His ministry, when Jesus was in Galilee, there came a day when His mother and His brethren stood without, desiring to speak to Him. (Matthew 12:47.) But He, answering to the messenger sent by them, said:

"Who is My mother? and who are My brethren? And He stretched forth His hand towards His disciples, and said, Behold My mother and My brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother." As early as the day when she found Jesus teaching in the temple, Mary had to learn that the authority of His Heavenly Father was paramount with Jesus. More deeply still she learnt it at the Marriage Feast, and now she was prepared to know that heavenly relationships take precedence of earthly relationships. All this was preparation for Calvary; and when Jesus hung there, Mary was one of the four disciples who stood beneath the Cross, and, with perhaps the last gleam of human vision before He died, He saw His mother, and commended her to His beloved disciple John:

"Behold thy mother!" "Behold thy son!"

Mary was one of those who were found at the sepulchre, and one of those who saw Jesus risen. (Mark 15:47.) SHE HAD FULFILLED HER MISSION;

"Blessed is she that believed." Without being great or prominent in herself, she helped to make ready the way of the Lord. She had been a true handmaid, not of man, but of the living God, and, perhaps, no woman more fully fulfilled her vocation. The Lord teach us all the same self-renunciation, the same faith, the same humility. Amen.

35. Anna, the Prophetess - Luk_2:36-38

ANNA: THE PROPHETESS.

Luke 2:36-38.

Anna is one of the prophetesses mentioned in the Word of God as such. In early life she married, but we may well believe that the Lord was with her in all the commonplaces of housekeeping and household duties. The same God who afterwards gave her her vocation was her Counsellor and Strength. Whenever God gives to a woman a special spiritual vocation, it will generally be found that her home life was made of God a preparation for it. In the early Church it was one of the necessities for the office of a Bishop that he should be "one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God?" (1 Timothy 3:4-5) With how much more reason must a woman, whose ordinary vocation is in the house, be true and faithful in little things if God is to call her to any unwonted ministry in His vineyard!

Anna's married life was short—only seven years—and then came the deepest blow of all to the heart of a woman, and especially a Jewish woman—

WIDOWHOOD.

Sorrow hardens those who live a selfish life. They give themselves up to self-pity, bemoaning their lot, looking upon their God as hard, and jealously envying what seems the happier lot of others. But a widow who has accepted the Lord her God as her stay is perhaps one of the happiest, one of the most useful, one of the most gracious of God's creatures.

Anna's vocation was that of prayer. "She was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day."

"What a dull life!" some young person might say, and seen from the outside it might seem so; but those who looked on the face of the aged prophetess would see nothing monotonous there. Living continually face to face with God, drinking in perpetually the thoughts which He would impart to her, losing the narrowness of self-interest and absorbed in the continually widened interests which God would make known to her as she was able to bear them—there must have been a light upon the countenance of Anna which was a study in itself, for God and heaven shone there.

There are few who could be fitted for a vocation such as this—only those who understand that "a living sacrifice" means A LIFE OF PRAYER.

During the temple services, Anna would have no pre-eminent place, but in some quiet corner, when the praises of the priests and Levites were going up to heaven, this still woman would be praying, and bearing up every worshipper upon her heart. When the children were brought into the temple that they might be presented to the Lord, the dedication of the parents would be buoyed up by the prayers of Anna. If Jerusalem were visited with a pestilence, perhaps no other had more to

do than Anna with its removal, for she would bear upon her heart the sin of her people which God was rebuking, and would take case after case of those who were smitten, and inquire of the Lord concerning them. She was at home with those who were unworldly; she was not to be found at feasts or in worldly gatherings; but wherever there was a need for God, wherever there was a cry after God, there Anna found admission; it was just there that prayer was needed.

Surely it was no accident that brought her into the temple just when the Spirit of the Lord guided Simeon thither, and the parents of the Lord Jesus had brought Him, as an infant, "to do for Him after the custom of the law." The same instinct from on high which gave Simeon to see in Him the Lord's Christ, led Anna to "give thanks likewise unto the Lord." She, too, recognised her Redeemer "and

SPAKE OF HIM to all that looked for redemption in Jerusalem." (Luke 2:38.)

It may be, she was a woman of few words; most people who pray intensely are so. But when she did speak, her one theme was Himself, and she knew who would understand her. Probably the majority of the population of Jerusalem did not know even of her existence, but Anna knew all those "who looked for redemption in Jerusalem," and probably, those in the hill country of Judea who laid up in their hearts all that was revealed concerning the vocation of John the Baptist. This little company, with their eyes upon the coming King, and the coming Kingdom, lived in an atmosphere contrary to the world of their day. Herod and Jerusalem "were troubled" at the birth of Jesus: Anna's whole soul was filled with adoration for it; the aged intercessor saw the answer to her prayers. The Lord raise up praying Annas in our day of whom it may be said, "She spake of Him."

36. Widow of Nain - Luk_7:11-25

THE WIDOW OF NAIN.

Luke 7:11-15.

It was the day after Jesus had been working a wondrous miracle in the healing of the Centurion's servant. Full of blessing, full of life, full of salvation, full of healing, He went His way, and wherever He went, something happened to mark that One who was more than an ordinary man was walking through the cities and villages of Palestine.

He went into a city called Nain, which signifies "beautiful," "and many of His disciples went with Him, and much people." But His first sight in the beautiful city was one of sorrow and death. Probably if we looked down upon some of the most beautiful portions of this earth with the eyes of Jesus, we should see death where others see beauty, sorrow where others see joy, because our eyes would be opened as His are, to see sin and all its consequences.

"Now when He came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow." Few words there are in this description, but, O, how much they meant! The mother's house was now empty; she had lived for this son; the mother's dependence was now gone; she had hoped all from this son; the work of years was apparently useless. To what purpose had she brought up this boy? The expense, the trouble, the tears, the prayers, over his education; were they then given for nothing? Life had no more attraction for her. It was a blank that she looked forward to. The past said: "A dead husband," the present said: "A dead son," the future said: "An empty struggle for a useless life."

Poor, broken-hearted widow! Look up; there is a God who is the God of the widow (Psalms 68:5), and He never forgets His charge. There is not a widow on the face of the earth about whom God is ignorant or indifferent. "Let thy widows trust in Me," He says. (Jeremiah 49:11.) The widows were to be cared for in the land at harvest time. (Deuteronomy 24:19.) The widow's raiment must not be taken to pledge. (Deuteronomy 24:17.) "He relieveth the fatherless and widow." (Psalms 146:9.) "He will establish the border of the widow" (Proverbs 15:25.) He will "plead for the widow." (Isaiah 1:17), etc. We have yet to find a really faithful, obedient, trustful, Christian widow for whom God has not cared.

"Much people of the city was with her." But all the multitude could not restore her dead son or make her other than a desolate widow. They could express sympathy, but it could only remind her of her loss. She needed a sympathy which would take her out of her sorrow, not remind her of it. Human sympathy draws down to earth, God's sympathy lifts up to heaven.

"And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her, and said unto her,

WEEP NOT."

It would be a heartless exhortation and a powerless one from the lips of man. Why should she not weep? How could she but weep when all her hopes were crushed? But it was the command of a Mighty One, of Him who had the key to the situation; of Him who has power to wipe tears from off all eyes, and take away the rebuke of His people from the face of all the earth. (Isaiah 25:8.) And just now it was with authority, and not with human sentimentality, that Jesus spoke.

He came and touched the bier; and they that bare him stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise."

Let Jesus come into a desolate widowhood, and the widow has more than she has lost; the emptiness is more than filled when Jesus Christ fills the heart, the life, the thoughts, the hands of a widow; He can reverse anything which happens, He is mightier than death itself, for He is "the Resurrection and the Life." (John 11:25.)

There must have been a thrill passing through the multitude, as for a moment they stopped their wailing and their weeping at the sound of this unexpected command. How every eye must have turned to the bier! And when they saw him that was dead sit up, and when they heard him begin to speak,—surely the multitude must have known that it was a Master hand which touched the dead. The young man lived! There was on earth One who was stronger than death. But there was one above all the rest to whom that which had occurred was more than a mere novelty, a wondrous sight. It was an empty life refilled; it was a lost occupation restored, and Jesus Christ had done it. The widow had her work again. Jesus "delivered him to his mother." But there are widow's houses where an only son has been carried out lifeless, where the rooms remain desolate and the loved one is removed, and yet Jesus Himself so fills the place of the one who is gone that He satisfies and fills the bereaved heart with eternal rest and satisfaction in Himself. When He says: "Weep not," it is never a mockery or a mere sentiment; it is a command which conveys the power to obey; it is a creative word, and blessed is the widow who has found in Jesus the object and fulness of her desolated life.

37. The Woman which was a Sinner - Luk_7:30-50

THE WOMAN WHICH WAS A SINNER.

Luke 7:30-50.

"The Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves," because they were not baptised of John; and Jesus, knowing their heart, said, "Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the market-place, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you and ye have not wept. For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil. The Son of Man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold, a gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!"

They were unwelcome words to those who sought to establish their own righteousness; but there were ears which heard them and conveyed them to a very different heart, a very dissimilar spirit; they reached a woman of the city who was a sinner! Something in the words of Jesus, something in His presence, inspired hope in the heart of the hopeless; and this woman, who perhaps had long looked on herself as utterly, irremediably condemned, found a ray of light shining into her dark despair. This is the Man who can bring help to me.

Jesus had accepted the invitation of one of the Pharisees "that He would eat with him," and this poor woman, attracted as she never had been by anyone before, crept quietly in after Him. She brought with her an alabaster box of ointment, purchased, perhaps, by the proceeds of sin. There was but ONE PLACE IN THE WORLD in the Pharisee's house which belonged to her; there is but one place in the wide world which belongs to sinners—it is at the feet of Jesus. And there she stood behind Him, out of sight, weeping. He had spoken no word to her, but His presence said very much; and as the hot tears fell in a stream upon His feet, she began to wash the dust of the journey away with them, and she wiped them with the hair of her head. Then she also "kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment."

It was the same Jesus who, later on, after His resurrection, said to Mary Magdalene: "Touch Me not;" but Mary's was an educated soul which had learnt to understand the heart of Jesus, and she did not need a touch, or anything which would be patent to her senses, in order to believe in the love of her Lord. Devils such as had been cast out of Mary Magdalene, still possessed this poor woman of the city, as her broken heart expressed itself in what she was doing. The Pharisee who had bidden Jesus saw what was going on, and made his own comment—not openly, it was simply the thought of his heart:

"This man, if He were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him; for she is a sinner."

How often in the day such an uncalled-for judgment arises in the hearts of those who think that they are righteous and despise others! O how humbling it is, that one who needs the blood of

Christ as much as the guiltiest sinner, can yet be so under the power of the enemy as to judge that sinner in his or her heart! Simon has many disciples; who is there amongst us that has not had to be cleansed from the sin of judging others in our hearts?

If the Pharisee's jealous eyes had watched what was going on externally, the eyes of Jesus, which are as a flame of fire, had marked all that was going on internally in the Pharisee's heart. Jesus was in the habit of answering thoughts; He does so still.

"Simon," He said, "I have somewhat to say unto thee."

"Master, say on."

"There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most?"

"I suppose that he to whom he forgave most," was the Pharisee's answer.

It was only "I suppose;" he did not put his heart into the answer, and yet he "rightly judged."

Then Jesus, who had not so much as looked upon the poor sinner, by turning to her, showed her that, all the while, He had been conscious of her broken heart and of her burning tears, and "He said unto Simon:

SEEST THOU THIS WOMAN?"

"O Pharisee, seest thou one who hates sin and is ready to flee from it? O thou who settest thyself up to judge, seest thou this woman, nearer God, nearer heaven, than thou art, with all thy fancied righteousness?"

"I entered into thine house, thou gavest Me no water for My feet." Thou hast not treated Me even as an ordinary guest, thou hast markedly neglected Me, "but she has washed My feet with tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest Me no kiss; but this woman, since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss My feet. My head with oil Thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed My feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee"—by thine own judgment which is spoken, by the value which she sets upon Me—there is proof to thee that "her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." "By that little love, Simon, it is clear thou hast been little forgiven. Has there been nothing to forgive; or has there been much to forgive and it is not yet forgiven? Judge thou, Simon, which it is." And He said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven." The wicked imputations of Simon's thoughts were rebuked by the position which Jesus took to the poor woman; on His side nothing passed, but words of pardon. What a rebuke to Simon!

There were many who sat at meat (no doubt it was an arranged thing), to criticise Jesus, and they began to say among themselves:

"Who is this that forgiveth sins also?" But the woman did not stay to see the argument out; she had got what she came for, and Jesus dismissed her with the words:

"Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." And thus when a sinner comes to Jesus with a broken heart, recognising His presence, and hating the darkness of his sin as he sees it in the light, there is power and there is justice in Jesus to forgive sins, and to say with all the power of His limitless authority: "Go in peace."

38. Ministering Women - Luk_8:2-3

MINISTERING WOMEN.

Luke 8:2-3. The Lord Jesus "went throughout every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with Him, and certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna and many others, which ministered unto Him of their substance."

There are many people who think that distinctly spiritual service for the Master is of a higher order than ministering in temporal matters, yet, surely, it would never have been noticed in the Word of God that certain women ministered to Jesus of their substance if He had not thought it worth recording! These women had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, and in the same spirit as the one leper who returned to give glory to God, these women DEVOTED THEIR LIVES and their substance to Him who had healed them. We do not read in any part of the history of Jesus's life that any men who had been healed followed Him. There was one exception; the man out of whom the legion was cast prayed Him that He might be with Him, but Jesus would not suffer it; He sent him as a witness to his friends of the great things which God had done for him, and had had mercy on him. (Mark 5:19.) The women who followed Jesus were of divers orders and position of society. There was Mary Magdalene, supposed to be the type of a fallen woman, for Christ had cast out of her seven devils. (Mark 16:9.) But there was also Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, a woman of high position, and, probably, considerable wealth, and who, perhaps, followed Jesus at a great cost, the loss of all her position and prestige, and also of old acquaintances and friends. There was Susanna, whom we do not hear of afterwards, "and many others." It is more than probable that they carried their tents with them, and in the many ways in which women can make life comfortable, they would care for the wants of Jesus and His disciples, washing and mending their clothes, cooking their food, running errands for them, and in every way making themselves useful. A consecrated woman, to whom God has given no other special gift, may be a precious help to the Church of God in saving the time of evangelists—men and women—by relieving them of those temporal cares; and who should say that this service to Christ is of little account? "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much." (Luke 16:10.) The Shunammite was no mean servant of God when she cared for Elisha. The women who ministered to Paul were highly recommended by him. There was Mary, "who bestowed much labour on us" (Romans 16:6); and there was the Philippian woman, Lydia, who was the first European woman that offered hospitality to Paul (Acts 16:14-15), and so set the example in the infant church of Philippi, that that church took the lead in caring for this precious Apostle and servant of God. Paul wrote to them: "Ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction. Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the Gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving but ye only. For even in Thessalonica, ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Not because I desire a gift; but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all and abound; I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent

from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God." So highly does Paul speak of the ministering women who thought of his needs, and so pleased God. In the life of an itinerant evangelist, there are often many trials. An uncomfortable lodging is one of these. Very frequently an evangelist is placed in a room where it is impossible to sleep because of the uncleanness of the place, infested often with vermin. A ministering woman will always take care how the evangelist is lodged. True children of God care little what they eat or drink, or what kind of furniture they have, or whether the bed is hard or soft which they sleep on; but cleanliness when it is possible, as in England, becomes a necessity to one who lives near to God. Another, a great necessity, is quiet. No true evangelist can go to preach except he has received from his Master the message he is going to deliver, and every true ministering woman will do her utmost to find SOME QUIET CORNER where an evangelist whom she entertains can be alone; a garret full of boxes would be preferable to a true child of God, if he could have it alone, than ever so comfortable a chamber where voices and the presence of other people were disturbing him. A true ministering woman, when she receives an evangelist into her house, will not try to make a show of all the comforts or the luxuries she has. The man of God is not of this world, and she will think rather of what he would like, than of making a show of what she has. The Shunammite was one of God's angel ministers; there was no extravagance in her furnishing of Elisha's little room; a bed, a table, a candlestick (2 Kings 4:10), and it was done. (In our days the wash-hand-stand would be a necessary addition.) But the ministering women do not live for evangelists only. There is a quiet ministry of prayer and of attention which they may give in the name of the Lord to all the members of their households, looking upon the smallest duty as done unto the Lord, and every self-denial as borne for Him. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me." (Matthew 25:40.) "Whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in My Name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward." A ministering woman brings God near to everyone with whom she comes in contact. Everyone is helped or reprov'd by her life; wherever she is she leaves her mark for God.

Every woman is either a selfish woman or a ministering woman, but there are some whose ministry is selfish: only to get favour to themselves. There are others who minister distinctly "in the Lord," and, therefore, they have no choice as to whom they shall minister. Taking everything from the Lord, they see God in everything. It is no light vocation to minister thus to Him who "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45.)

39. The Woman of Samaria. Part II - Joh_4:1-42

THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA.

John 4:1-42.

It happened on a day when Jesus Christ was weary, that He came near to the city of Sychar, in the province of Samaria, and sat down on Jacob's well. It was "about the sixth hour," that is twelve o'clock by our time, and the hottest part of the day. Even when weary, Jesus had little opportunity to refresh Himself in an unbroken rest.

How many a woman, a mother of a family, when she is worn with headache, and has had a hard morning's work, sits down for a few minutes of rest, and tries to get a snatch of sleep in the afternoon, but as sure as she sits down, little Mary begins to cry, or a button comes off Thomas's boot, or somebody calls at the door, and she is inclined to say: "How trying it is! I never can get a moment's rest." Dear tried sister, Jesus knows even this trial, and that it is not light to one who has much to do and not much strength to do it with.

"There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water." Jesus never took anything into His own hands; He did not Himself judge whether He should pay attention to the woman, or whether He should try to sleep. Everything was ordered for Him by His Father, and He was always quiet enough and attentive enough to ascertain His Father's will. God willed that He should speak to the woman, and He received of His Father exactly what He should say to her. "The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of Myself, but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works." (John 14:10.) It was as an obedient Son that He said to her the words:

"Give me to drink." And by the same Father, Who communed with Him about all He should do or say, Jesus was prepared for the rude, unwomanly retort:

"How is it that Thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria?"

How many a man, receiving such an answer, would have turned and said: "Well, you might be civil at least!" But Jesus, as a "Lamb dumb before her shearers" (Isaiah 53:7), answered not a word in self-defence or in anger, when He was so rudely treated. He manifested the power of God in enduring grief, "suffering wrongfully" (1 Peter 2:19), although He had done nothing to merit such treatment. There are many who could bear a much greater indignity far better than a rude or inconsiderate saying—nothing makes them so angry, nothing makes them feel so hurt—but Jesus who "pleased not Himself" (Romans 15:3), and who received not honour from men (John 5:41), had none of the touchy feeling in His heart, which would lead Him to defend Himself. He looked upon Himself all the time as not His own, but His Father's; He had not His own character to maintain, but His Father's, and He knew that His Father was in charge of all events which occurred. With perfect serenity He answered the offensive utterance:

"If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee Give Me to drink; thou wouldst have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water" (4:10). When a rude person receives a

rude word in return for his remarks, he feels that he and the other party are on a level. Each has had his say, and each has done his best to offend and wound the other; but when a rude remark meets only love and gentleness, O how ashamed the speaker becomes that the other party can control himself when he has failed to do so! "A soft answer turneth away wrath." (Proverbs 15:1.) Jesus had conquered the woman already; He had secured her attention, and had shown her that He had something to give her far more precious than she had to give Him. Then she asked Him:

"Sir, Thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; from whence then hast Thou this living water?" The spirit of the question was a very different one from that in which she first spoke to Jesus. It was an inquirer now who addressed Him, and none of the snappishness of her former words remained.

"Art Thou greater," she continued, "than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?"

Something in the person of Jesus must have impressed her, or why should she say: "Art Thou greater?" His manifest greatness was in His gentleness. "Thy gentleness hath made me great." (Psalms 18:35.) O, if every woman, tempted to evil temper and to unkind retorts, could learn the lesson—the greatness of the mastery of the tongue—how much blessing might result, and how many a home might be made happier! The answer of Jesus must have been a surprise:

"Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again. But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

Very naturally, she took it all materially, and thought only of water which could quench the thirst of her body. She could form no idea of what was meant by "a well of water springing up into everlasting life;" and yet there was a something in the Stranger which had won her confidence; there was a power, a reality about this Jew which made her feel that He could teach her, and, without knowing what the water would be, she said to Him:

"Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw."

40. The Woman of Samaria. Part II - Joh_4:1-42

THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA.

PART II.

There are many superficial conversions in our days. There are those who profess to belong to the Lord, and yet their experience is by no means described by the words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman, "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst," for they thirst for amusement, for admiration, for money, for power, for pleasure, for fame, and for other earthly things, just exactly as though they were not converted at all! "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (John 2:15.) What does this thirst prove? Surely this—that they are not drinking of the water which the Lord Jesus gives; they may have once sipped a little, but it is not their habit to "draw water out of the wells of salvation" (Isaiah 12:3), and, therefore, the eternal life which Jesus gives to those who follow Him has never yet become a well of water springing up within them.

Such converts are dependent upon prayer meetings and preaching services, special ministers and Christian friends, to keep the little life they have alive. And, in addition, they must needs have, in order to make their lives tolerable, a large slice of the world! It is a miserable kind of conversion; it is that of the wheat where the thorns grew up and choked it, and it became unfruitful. These are the believers who do no good in the world, and about whom it is absolutely necessary to ask the question whether they have been converted or not! There is not enough light in their lives for people to distinguish whether they are the children of light or the children of darkness!

Everyone who drinks continually of the water which Jesus gives ceases to thirst for the world's pleasures, or for anything which it has to give. God is their satisfying Portion. But the Samaritan woman had begun to thirst:

"Sir, give me this water." Instantly Jesus met her as a Prophet. Looking fully into her eyes, with His eyes, which are as a flame of fire, He said unto her:

"Go, call thy husband, and come hither." This was the open wound; this was the sore point; this was the sinful thing which needed setting right. There is no true conversion until the Lord Jesus has laid His finger upon the sore place, the source of sin within. If we would drink of the living water, our lives must be pure and without spot before our God, and all that is wrong must come out and be judged, forgiven and set right in His sight.

"I have no husband."

"Thou hast well said, I have no husband; for thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband; in that saidst thou truly." The woman did not attempt a denial; she did not begin to excuse herself; startled by finding herself known as she really was, she bowed before Him whom she recognised as Prophet and Master:

"Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet."

It was as though she had said: "Thou hast found me out; Thou hast disclosed the deep wickedness of my heart; I know that Thou art right and I am wrong; Thou art holy and I am sinful"; and then, just like all those who are not enlightened by the Holy Ghost, she fell back on the little rag of religion which she had, and spoke of the differences between the Samaritans and the Jews:

"Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

"Woman, believe Me," was the answer of Jesus, taking her out of her depth, "the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what; we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship Him."

Here was the secret of the living water; it was a changed life which she needed; a new heart, and a new spirit, new motives, new aims, and new impulses. The convicted sinner was at the end of all her resources; nothing could extenuate the past; nothing could justify the present; her only hope was in the coming One:

"I know that Messiah cometh, which is called the Christ; when He is come He will tell us all things" (R. V.). It was the instinct of an awakened soul. There is no hope for such outside of Jesus. But she was unprepared for the declaration:

"I that speak unto thee am He."

She was ready to receive Him; doubts found no place as a nonconducting influence between her convicted soul and her Saviour. The sinner and the Saviour had met. Old things were already passed away, all things were become new (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Jesus had conquered, and won unto Himself His first Samaritan follower and His first Samaritan evangelist.

41. The Woman of Samaria. Part III - Joh_4:27-42

THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA.

PART III.

John 4:27-42.

God so ordered it that no interruption should occur in the conversation of Jesus with the Samaritan woman until the critical moment when He revealed Himself as the Messiah, and she accepted Him as her Saviour. But just then "the disciples returned, and marvelled that He talked with the woman," and yet none of them questioned Him on the matter. But the woman had got what she wanted. Perhaps for long years there had been the yearning of her soul for something satisfactory, something which she felt her need of, and which would make it possible that her dark life should be made light, her sinful life clean; and now that she had found it, all else was left. She "left her water-pot, and went her way into the city "to tell about Jesus. It was a simple sermon:

"Come, see a Man which told me all things that ever I did; is not this the Christ?" A woman preacher who is sent of God does not need to become a Doctor of Divinity. Let her leave the knotty points which scholars wrangle over to others, but let her testimony be: "Come, see a Man," come and look at Jesus, come and receive of Him what I have received of Him. He has "told me all things that ever I did, He has searched my heart as no human being could: "is not this the Christ?" The woman's character was so well known in Samaria that everyone was conscious that if Jesus had told her all things that ever she did, He had told her what was not much to her credit. In her simple testimony there was no assumption of being herself anything remarkable; it was Jesus she sought to honour; He was the subject of her discourse. And it was effectual. "Many of the Samaritans of that city believed on Him for the saying of the woman which testified, He told me all that I ever did." Is it not a dangerous thing that one so recently converted, and converted out of such sin, should be allowed to preach to others as though she had been an example of holiness for years? Jesus Himself not only suffered it, but rejoiced to see her testimony, and spoke of it as the promise of a harvest. When his disciples prayed Him, saying, "Master, eat," He said:

"I have meat to eat that ye know not of." And when they wondered if anybody had brought Him something to eat, He replied:

"My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work."

Just at that moment of weariness, when the flesh would have petitioned for an inactive hour, He had renounced His will for His Father's, and this precious soul had been gathered into the fold, and His prophetic eye saw through that one a coming harvest:

"Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold I say unto you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest" (John 4:35).

Seeing, as He did, future things, Jesus' heart was glowing already with the foresight of the wondrous work among the Samaritans which was done by Philip the evangelist, and his four daughters, after the time of Pentecost (Acts 8:5-8; Acts 21:9), and He saw the beginning of it in the testimony of this one Samaritan woman. When those who came out of the city "besought Him that He would tarry with them, He abode there two days; and many more believed because of His own word." And their testimony was a very clear one. They said to the woman:

"Now we believe, not because of thy saying, for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, and Saviour of the world." As Prophet and Priest, to convince and to forgive, the Christ of God became known to this people. So suddenly and so completely can the Lord Jesus transform even the most sinful woman into a witness for Him. But it is only when He has met us as a prophet, dealt closely with our sin, and brought it to the surface, where it can be rebuked and put away, that He can make us really fit to be instruments in His service. Then our testimony is not to what we are, but to what He is, and He is glorified in us.

42. The Syrophenician Woman - Mat_15:21-28

THE SYROPHENICIAN WOMAN.

Matthew 15:21-28.

Jesus never took a journey by chance, nor because of any choice of His own. All His movements were guided from above. "I do always those things that please Him" (John 8:29). Thus we find that there was no repetition in His ministry. Every case of healing was a typical case; every soul He dealt with was also typical—that He might teach evangelists who should follow Him and win souls in His name, how they should deal with such cases when they came across them.

Leaving the neighbourhood of Capernaum, and the land of Gennesaret, Jesus went into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. Just as His mission, when He sat at Jacob's well, was to one individual, so this journey beyond the limits of Palestine was for the sake of a single individual; both of these were women. Numbers do not count much with God. He is truly the Lord of hosts, but He is the Father of His children, He knoweth them all by their names, He knows them individually, and has individual love for each of them.

"A woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto Him, saying:

"Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." To this mother her child's case was as though it were her own.

Such a heart could not pray indifferent, superficial prayers, which can neither honour God, bless the petitioner, nor obtain an answer. The woman was intense in her desire and intense in her appreciation of Jesus.

"Have mercy on me; my daughter is grievously vexed." Such is the cry of a persevering parent. But Jesus "answered her not a word." This was unusual with the Master. Generally, with Him, to hear a petition was to answer it, to see a sick one was to heal him, but those who understood Him best were put to the proof by Jesus; and those who understand Him best now are always a tested people.

"Send her away; for she crieth after us."

Such was the disciples' request. Some believe that it meant: "Do what she asks for, and dismiss the case quickly." Others think that the disciples were impatient at the interruption, and wanted Him to dismiss a Gentile, as unworthy of notice.

It matters little; but His answer is full of import:

"I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Here was the hindrance. It was not part of Christ's vocation to undertake for a Gentile woman, and the words might have fallen like a funeral knell upon the woman's ear. But instead of giving way to

despair, she looked away from her trouble to the face and the person of Jesus, and considering fully His hand of might and His ear of love, she pursued her plea:

"Lord, help me."

It is just this getting away from the thing prayed for, and dealing with the character of the God to whom we pray, which strengthens our faith for the answer.

"It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs."

Dead to herself in her earnestness for her child, and in her confidence in the Master, she said:

"Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

How often in answering prayer God has to pull us up, short and sharp, just because we have not yet learnt our nothingness in His sight; He has to show us that we are dogs—nothing and nobody—and we must needs learn humbling lessons before our prayer can be answered. But when the woman took her place, she demanded all that belonged to that position: "Truth, Lord, let me be a dog, but give me the dog's portion, for 'the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.' The healing of my daughter is but a tiny crumb of the grace of power and love which belongs to One like Thee." The test had done its work, the lesson was learnt, the example of faith and humility was manifest, for Jesus was teaching His very disciples a lesson of faith which they had not yet learnt, through His dealing with this Gentile woman.

"O woman," He said to her, "great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

Great faith receives a great answer; "her daughter was made whole from that very hour."

Answers to prayers are not obtained by an impatient clamour, or a constant repetition, as though the power lay in the prayer itself. Real faith is an appreciation of Jesus, and a persevering dependence upon His doing that which becomes His character. This will prevail, and God is glorified by it. Every believer's faith which is tried, and stands the trial, raises the standard of faith higher throughout the whole body of Christ. "Blessed is she that believed." (Luke 1:45.)

43. Martha, the Bustling Woman - Luk_10:28-42

MARTHA, THE BUSTLING WOMAN.

Luke 10:28-42.

There were times, when Jesus was going through the towns and villages with His disciples, that He parted company with them for a time. "As they went, He entered into a certain village, and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house."

Martha was a thorough housewife. All her soul seems to have been in the hospitality which she could afford to her valued Guest. But Martha thought more of what she would like to do for Jesus than of what Jesus would like to have done for Him. She thought of what she would bestow upon Him rather than of what He desired. There was a great deal of self in her hospitality. The truest hospitality is to interfere as little as possible with the habits and wishes of a guest. The truly hospitable housewife does not make herself or her service apparent; she does not load her table or deck out her rooms with ornaments which have to be taken care of, and fill the guest with fear lest he should break or soil everything that he touches. The Christ-like housewife cares for her guest; not for her furniture: for his comfort, and not for her reputation as a housekeeper or manager.

There are some houses in which one feels very uncomfortable, lest one should do the wrong thing, sit in the wrong place, speak the wrong word, or do something at the wrong time. There are other houses where one feels as much at home as in one's own house. The Shunammite, in giving hospitality to Elisha, studied his taste; but Martha studied her own. She "was cumbered about much serving." It was true she sought to honour Jesus. All was done for Him, but it was done in her way and not in His way. Her plans were made about the dinner irrespective of His convenience or that of Mary, and so it came to pass that she had far too much to do in the time remaining to her. She got into a bustle and fret, and just as people do in such a condition, began to think whose fault it was. It could not be her fault; had not she been at work from early morning? had she not done everything which mortal woman could do? but that lazy Mary, who was sitting enjoying herself at Jesus' feet, did not help at all. She wondered that Jesus should encourage her to be so selfish, when there was so much to be done. And, boiling with indignation, she went and interrupted the Master and His disciple, and, seeing everything from her own selfish point of view, thought herself justified in doing so.

"Lord, dost Thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me."

Martha was persuaded that hers was a righteous cause, and being so sure that she was in the right, of course her sister was in the wrong, and she implied that Jesus was in the wrong too. An unrestful spirit can never see straight; she was unprepared for the answer:

"Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." To one who looks at things only from an earthly point of view, Martha would seem to have reason on her side; but Jesus had come to the house, not for the sake of entertainment, good living, the comfortable room, the tastefully arranged furniture. He sought something very different—worshippers who should "worship the Father in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23), and He had found one in Mary. He wanted appreciative hearts and quiet spirits to take in the things of the kingdom of God, and Martha's cumbrous service was only a hindrance to Him. He would very much have preferred a cup of milk and a crust of bread to the sumptuous fare which distracted Martha from the things of His kingdom.

She met with a rebuke just when she expected Jesus to justify her wounded sense of innocence, and while she thought she had the right on her side, she had, in addition to her household cares, the rebuke of her Master:

"Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things."

Oh, how many a bustling woman feels it is quite enough to have the dinner in danger of being late, the stockings unended, visitors neglected, etc., without being complained of! A rebuke when she is in such a spirit is like the straw which breaks the camel's back! But the bustling woman must come to a stop in order to see her mistake. She cannot listen to Jesus until she learns to be still. She carries all her fever of the kitchen into the dining-room, and sits down at table with a flurried, flushed, anxious face, not likely to help her guests; she carries the worries and frets she has had with the children into her intercourse with her husband when he comes back from work, and she finds that her moments of prayer are interrupted. She is in too much of a turmoil to realise the presence of her God.

"ONE THING IS NEEDFUL," and the bustling woman possesses it not. It is the habit of listening to the Saviour and taking in from Him that quiet, and strength, and help, which is a power in any life. A quiet spirit with a very simple dinner will cheer the spirits, and help the appetites of, all who are present. A quiet and cheerful spirit with ever so bare and badly furnished a house, will make the visitor feel at home.

"A heart at leisure from itself," like the heart of Jesus, brings the atmosphere of heaven wheresoever it is found. "One thing is needful,"—it is to be one with Jesus under all circumstances; nothing else is absolutely necessary. And this is gloriously, blessedly possible for any true believer who has accepted as a personal experience the great truth of "Christ in you the hope of glory." (Colossians 3:27.) Christ in any believer is a quiet still life which listens to and obeys our God.

44. The Sisters' Faith Tried - Joh_11:1-44

THE SISTERS' FAITH TRIED.

John 11:1-44.

Martha and Mary were highly privileged in having Jesus as their Guest, not once or twice, but probably many times. Bethany, in His eyes, was "the town of Mary and her sister Martha." The industry of Bethany, and the names of the residents, well-known in the world, were altogether ignored by Jesus, but the souls which He was conquering and bringing out of self to be temples of the Holy Ghost, gave the spot an historic interest to Him.

Mary had profited by her education at His feet, and as is the case with every soul that grows in grace, Mary was tried. Her brother Lazarus fell sick. It would be impossible for these Jewish sisters—disciples of the Lord Jesus—to give Lazarus any medicine, or to send for a doctor of the day. Jesus, in their eyes, was the only reliable Physician, and they sent to Him the simple message:

"Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick."

They urged no entreaty; asserted no claim; they knew it was enough to state their case, and they received an answer which, had it been fully understood, might have kept them from the smallest anxiety, even in the unexpected circumstances which followed:

"This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the son of God might be glorified thereby."

O how many there are who seek to trust the Lord for healing, and these words are suggested to them, and yet the stress is not laid on the latter part of the message: "That the Son of God might be glorified thereby," but upon the first part: "This sickness is not unto death." O how the natural heart sees things in relation to itself rather than in relation to Jesus!

What could the sisters expect but that Jesus would hurry to them in their unexpected trouble? Yet they were to learn that, in spite of His message to them, their expectation was to be disappointed. Jesus left them alone in their trouble, and Lazarus grew worse and died!

How could they reconcile this with His message to them? They had not only the bitter grief of their bereavement, but also the question which would arise in their hearts: "Can Jesus fail me? Can He exaggerate? Can He speak a word which is not exactly borne out by facts?" "This sickness is not unto death," and yet Lazarus lies dead? It was more than these women could understand. Their faith gave way; they yielded to the circumstances.

Lazarus must now be buried. It was the habit of the Jews to comfort mourners, and here were disciples of Jesus accepting comfort from the unbelieving Jews about a death which was contrary to the express word of Jesus! But the Lord's delay was not final. After Lazarus had lain dead four days, Jesus approached Bethany, and Martha, hearing of it, went out, and with her usual bustle,

said to Him, before He had a chance to speak to her:

Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." The same tone of reproach which characterised her when she was careful and burdened about many things was evident on this occasion. In her eyes, Jesus was to blame for the death of Lazarus, but she qualifies her word, and says:

"I know that, even now, whatsoever Thou shalt ask of God, God will give it Thee."

"Thy brother shall rise again" was a prophecy of that which was about to happen.

Martha, living as she did in the atmosphere of the present, occupied with things temporal, said"

"I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection, at the last day."

Martha did not know that Jesus was "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8). She was not deeply acquainted enough with Jesus to believe He was mightier than death, and so she put off the resurrection of her brother to the future. But Jesus said to her:

"I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" The dear woman did not know herself, and she did not know her Teacher. She said, as many a one has done since, "Yea, Lord," and yet she knew not the full meaning of her words:

"Yea, Lord, I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, who should come into the world."

Martha was clear about doctrine, but she failed in her faith in Jesus as a present Conqueror over death. She looked at the things which are seen and temporal, rather than the things unseen and eternal. (2 Chronicles 4:18.) But where was Mary? Not like her sister rising up in her restless energy to meet the Master uncalled for, "she sat still in the house." The iron had entered into her soul. She did not understand the dealings of Jesus with her. But Martha's word, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee," was an irresistible appeal. She "arose quickly and came unto Him." But even Mary uttered the same reproach as Martha when she saw Him, yet in saying it, she fell down at His feet, showing by the action that, however little she understood Him, yet she yielded without a question to His appointment.

O if she had credited the word of Jesus, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby," her question would have been, "What shall I do to glorify the Son of God? Is it glory to Him that I should weep for a dead brother in the light of His message: 'This sickness is not unto death?' Did not His word imply that death should not triumph?" Alas! Mary was not yet filled with the Holy Ghost; she was not yet established in "heavenly places in Christ Jesus." The measure of unbelief which she manifested broke down even Jesus, and He wept. The Jews, truly, believed that it was in mere human sympathy; but how could it be possible for Jesus to sorrow for a dead man whom He was then about to raise? He wept for the unbelief of those who had known Him, and yet failed to understand Him now.

He came to the grave and saw there another mark of unbelief. Between Him and the dead Lazarus, of whom He had twice prophesied that death should not conquer him, lay a stone, as though to make the sepulchre a permanent place for the body of Lazarus!

"Take ye away the stone," He said.

Martha's reliance on her strong common sense checked any little faith she might have had.

"Lord," she said, "by this time he stinketh, for he hath been dead four days." Could the body of Lazarus see corruption when Jesus, in whom is life (John 1:4) had said:

"This sickness is not unto death?"

"Said I not unto thee," He appealed to Martha, "that if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?"

Martha was conquered. They took away the stone. The voice of Him who brought all things into being by His own Word spoke out in its master tones:

"Lazarus, come forth." And the dead came forth, and the word of Jesus to the sisters was justified. Death had not triumphed; to the glory of God Lazarus had died—the Son of God was glorified thereby! But the sisters had failed to take God's side, and nothing remained for them now but in obedience to their Lord, to loose their brother from the grave-clothes, and let him go.

O how hard it is for human nature to see things in the light of God, and to measure His spoken Word against all circumstances, all possibilities, all sicknesses, all troubles! Whatsoever happens to a brother or a sister, happens that the Son of God should be glorified thereby. If we enter into His purpose, He is glorified, and the lesson of faith is not given in vain.

45. Mary Anointing Jesus - Joh_12:1-8

MARY ANOINTING JESUS.

John 12:1-8. The raising of Lazarus caused an immense stir in the city of Jerusalem. The Lord Himself loved Bethany where Lazarus had been dead, whom He raised from the dead; and six days before the Passover "there they made Him a supper; and Martha served;" the spirit of service was still strong upon her; but Jesus no more rebuked her, for Martha was no longer cumbered with her serving; and Lazarus, the raised one, was "one of them that sat at the table with Him."

Lazarus had become by this time one of the sights of Jerusalem (John 12:9; John 12:17), and, of all men living, his very existence was the greatest testimony to the power of Jesus over death.

Jesus was with this little family for the last time, and His disciples were now with Him. While the company were yet at meat, the quiet Mary "took a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly," but not too costly for one who appreciated her Saviour, "and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment."

Mary had understood what none of the disciples had fully taken in—that Jesus must die for our sins. None but Jesus Himself understood her action. He was the Representative of men as the Sin-Bearer, but Mary stood as the offerer of the offering, and, on the part of humanity, she anointed Him for His burial. The disciples did not understand her. Judas Iscariot, whose heart was after money, and who afterwards betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, remarked:

"Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?"

Jesus knew the motive which prompted her; and he knew Judas had taken care, even in such a company, to be the treasurer—that he might help himself when he would.

O how awful that in the immediate company of Jesus, under the sound of His teaching, within sight of all His mighty works, in the atmosphere of heaven that was about Him, this wretched man should carry on his unrighteous deeds! But so it was. Jesus said:

"LET HER ALONE: against the day of My burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but Me ye have not always."

What a contrast there is between the spirit of Martha and of Mary. The one makes the house uncomfortable with her bustling self-importance; the other fills the house with the odour of the ointment! The Mary spirit, which waits to do till she has learnt the will of her Master, is a blessed one in a house. There are some women's lives which have an atmosphere of heaven about them which everybody feels; unobtrusive, quiet, meek, no stir, seeming to do very little; and yet, some way, everything is done—there is nothing remarkable about their houses, yet everyone is at home there; there is nothing special about their conversation, but it helps those who hear it; it is the presence of the Master shining through them. No woman can make herself such as this! it is God only who can conform us to the image of His Son. But every Christian woman can yield herself to

Him that the house where she dwells may be filled with the odour of the ointment with which she is anointing Jesus all day long in her actions as her King and her Priest, the One to whom she refers, the One whom she obeys, the One whom she honours.

Most houses have the atmosphere either of Martha or of Mary; some are full of hurry, pressure, bustle, others full of rest and quiet power. The Lord raise up amongst us many a Mary who shall sit at His feet and be "unto God a sweet savour of Christ." (2 Chronicles 2:15.)

46. Sapphira - Act_5:1-10

SAPPHIRA.

Acts 5:1-10. In the days which immediately followed the pouring out of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, the tone of believers was very high, the standard of Christian life was formed on its true model, the life of Jesus, and these first converts learnt, from their very birth of the Spirit, not to live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again. (2Cr 5:15.)

Nothing earthly was to be gained, but everything to be lost, by their profession of faith in Jesus of Nazareth, who was known as an executed criminal; and thus it came to pass that a selfish life was almost unknown amongst them. "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul; neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common." (Acts 4:32.) O how it would startle these early Christians to know that great brewers and distillers, whose private houses are like palaces, are reckoned amongst the followers of Jesus in these days; how astonished they would be to know that grasping greediness and overreaching exists as much among some professing Christians as among worldlings! It was the common practice in those early days that "as many as were possessors of land or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold and laid them down at the Apostle's feet; and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need."

These disciples feared to possess earthly things: most Christians of the present day fear to lose them. These primitive Christians lived "in the power of an endless life" (Hebrews 7:16), they counted their earthly life as nothing but a preparation for that which is to come. In such an unearthly atmosphere, the carnal mind was very clearly discernible. "A certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession." Husband and wife had evidently taken counsel about the matter, and both were of accord concerning it. Ananias "kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it." Why should it be so distinctly stated that he sold a possession with Sapphira his wife, and that his wife was privy to it, if God did not count her responsible for participation in the sin? It is an easy thing for a wife to shirk all responsibility and throw all the blame of whatever happens upon her husband. There are some wives who knowingly enjoy ill-gotten gains, and soothe their consciences with the assurance that they themselves are not to blame. Ahab sought to go scot free when Jezebel was the instigator of Naboth's murder, but the stern prophet of the desert, inspired by his God, came to the participator in the crime, and fastening his penetrating eyes upon him, said: "Hast thou killed and also taken possession?" (1 Kings 21:9.) In this deception of Ananias, Sapphira was a partner. God gave woman to be her husband's helpmeet. It is an awful perversion of true union in marriage when a wife's complicity with her husband strengthens him in wrong doing. If Sapphira had run the risk of her husband's displeasure, and taken up her cross in refusing to be a party to the crime, she might have saved, not herself only, but her husband also; and the sin of their lie might never have been committed.

O Christian wife, are you with your husband in any deception? Are you with him in any untrue way of conducting business? How much are you privy to which you do not wish to be exposed or

known? "Nothing is secret that shall not be made manifest, neither anything hid that shall not be known and come abroad." (Luke 8:17.) It is, perhaps, one of the greatest crosses which a wife can take up to go counter to her husband, but if it is involved in the true following of her Master, she is bound to do it.

Probably Ananias was a weak man, weak in faith, weak in will, and if Sapphira had stood on the side of her God, the awful tragedy which ended the life of this couple might have been spared. Peter, whose inward eyes were opened by the Holy Ghost, and who was, therefore, "of quick scent in the fear of the Lord" (Isaiah 11:3, margin), distinguished something that was not right. More open to communications from God than to dealing with man, he received his intimation, and boldly said:

"Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whilst it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men but unto God."

Poor, miserable man! Ananias was seeking to deceive his God, the Church of Christ, and himself, and the only one to whom he opened his heart, his wife Sapphira, helped him in this plot of deceit! He wanted to take the position of one who was utterly disinterested, and acting in the fullest faith in God, who should supply all his need; but that part of the price which remained somewhere in his possession, belied his profession. God must drag the truth to light. The intensity of God's presence in these early days was such, that sin and death were almost inseparable. Ananias, hearing these few words, fell down, and gave up the ghost. Where every member of the Church was single-eyed, the slightest crookedness became a grave offence against the Body of Christ. "Great fear came upon all the Church, and upon as many as heard these things." They saw how a holy God could not tolerate sin. The corpse of the sinner was carried out and buried. Meanwhile, Sapphira, with the lie in her heart, utterly unconscious of what had taken place, came in. Peter turning to her, put the question:

"Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much?"

Sapphira kept her compact with her husband. She might even now have drawn back, but Sapphira was with Ananias in his sin: she was "privy to it." True to her husband and fellow-sinner, she said:

"Yea, for so much."

"How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out."

Without a moment to repent, or to take account of the august presence of the God whom she had dishonoured, Sapphira fell down straightway at Peter's feet and yielded up the ghost. She shared her husband's grave as well as her husband's sin!

Such was the fate of a believing woman who sinned against God with her eyes open in those days of primitive Christianity!

47. Dorcas - Act_9:36-43

DORCAS.

Acts 9:36-43.

It is a common idea in the present day that every true Christian must be a preacher, and often the spirituality of a Christian is measured by how fast he or she can talk. Thank God, such an idea does not come from His Word. It is the life which the Word of God aims at. Where one passage calls for Christians to testify by word, thousands of passages in the Word of God direct how His children should live. The Gospel had penetrated to Joppa, probably through those that were scattered abroad in the persecution which arose because of Stephen. (Acts 8:4.) At Joppa lived a certain disciple, whose name was Dorcas. This woman was no preacher, but she had a kind heart, and God laid hold of it and made it divinely kind, so that the description given of her in the Word was that she "was full of good works and alms-deeds which she did;"—so full that there was no room for self and self-interest. There are some women whose faces just shine out love, which encourages those who are in real need, in depression, in poverty, in perplexity, to ask their help. There is a look of welcome, a something which says there is room in their hearts for the needs of others.

TRUE HELPS.

Such women generally have a ready hand to help; they can think of a number of things which can be made almost out of nothing, they can make out of food which others throw away nice little dainties for the sick; they can make out of garments which others have done with, quite natty and new things for the children of poor families; and these are such as live the true life of Christ, "not unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again." These are quite as much a well of living water to those around them as any preacher can be. These have a way of bringing God near to those who most need Him, and many a time, in their simple ministry those who are helped by them will ask them questions which may lead in the end to their conversion. Such a woman was Dorcas. But she was taken sick and died. Everything was prepared for the funeral; the body was laid out just like every other corpse. But the disciples, under an impulse from the Spirit of God, sent to Peter, urging him to come to them without delay. Did the Spirit of God give them some intuitive sense that His power would conquer death? We are not told. We only know that "Peter arose and went with them;" and that they brought him into the chamber of death. There, around the corpse, were to be found more than the family; poor widows and needy ones were standing, weeping. They had lost a friend, and who could replace her? Every one of them had a testimony to the loving heart and ready hand which had toiled almost day and night, to help them. Coats, and garments, and soothed and strengthened hearts, were witnesses to the usefulness of her life.

Peter, who had learnt deep lessons since he denied his Lord, and since the Holy Ghost had taken possession of his penitent soul, knew how far he might go in prayer. He first discovered what was the will of his God, and then, "turning him to the body," said, with God-given authority:

"Tabitha, arise."

It was a chamber, not of death, but of resurrection. The dead woman opened her eyes, sat up, took the proffered hand of Peter, and arose, having, like Lazarus, passed through death. The saints and the widows were called in, and "Peter presented her alive." The story soon ran throughout Joppa, "and many believed in the Lord." Such a sign could not but bear its fruit; and yet, when others of the disciples died, neither Peter nor other of the disciples called them back again. How was this? In order to exercise such faith in God, these followers of Jesus must be quite of His mind. Elijah prayed, and the widow's son arose from the dead in answer to his prayer; but he did not therefore set up to be a man who habitually raised the dead. The lesson we have to learn is that such a life as that of Dorcas was precious to the Lord; He thought her worthy to be raised from the dead. The Lord values a self-sacrificing and ministering woman whose life quietly but surely brings God and heaven into the lives and hearts of many around her.

48. Lydia - Act_16:12-15; Act_16:40

LYDIA.

Acts 16:12-15; Acts 16:40. The Apostle Paul was too faithful and useful a servant of God to be left without trial, and his trials were of almost every imaginable kind. His own mention of them in 2 Chronicles 11:1-23 is witness of this. In his second missionary journey, his special trial was the lack of distinct guidance as to whither he should go. He and his companions "were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the Word in Asia." They "assayed to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit suffered them not," and time passed by before they knew exactly what the mind of God was as to their movements. But the Apostle Paul was too true to his Master to take an unguided step, and although he understood, as few others can understand, that souls were perishing, he would not take upon himself to run before the Lord in anything.

Like his Master, he waited until his hour was come. In our early spiritual life guidance is often as distinct as the father's command to a little child; but as we learn to know more of God, He calls for a closer attention, a more real and constant waiting upon Him. This seems to have been the case with Paul. At last, an indication of the mind of God was given him in a vision. "There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying: Come over into Macedonia, and help us." Once knowing the direction in which God pointed, he lost no time after he had seen the vision. "Immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the Gospel unto them." (Acts 16:10.) The first city in Macedonia where Paul made any attempt to preach the Gospel was Philippi, which was a colony. How should he now set about evangelising the people? His ordinary way of entering into the synagogue would not answer here, for there is no mention of the synagogue. But, guided undoubtedly by God, he and his companions went on the Sabbath day "by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made." Only women were gathered at this prayer meeting, but Paul found in it the clue to the thoughts of God, and, instead of disturbing or despising the women, he sat down in the midst of them, and spoke to them of the great subject with which God had charged him as his life's mission.

Great things come from little beginnings. This first Church formed in Europe began with a women's prayer-meeting. No doubt some of these women had heard of the true God through Jewish merchants who would bring their wares to Philippi, and their faith in their old idolatry was shaken. The eternal destiny of their husbands and children was a matter of moment to these women, and, in their darkness, and yet their earnestness, they prayed as best they could, to God for light; and in answer to these heathen enquirers, the great Apostle to the Gentiles was forbidden to preach the Word in Asia, because these seeking women needed his testimony in Europe!

One of these women, perhaps the leader of the prayer-meeting, "Lydia, a seller of purple," who had come from the city of Thyatira, probably to establish a business in Philippi, and who had made such progress in spiritual things that she had begun to worship the true God, was one of Paul and Silas' hearers. There and then, the Spirit of God broke into her heart, and opened it, "so that she attended to the things which were spoken of Paul." She was the first European convert, and the

first member of a European Church! "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty." (1 Chronicles 1:26-27.)

Lydia was willing to make profession of her faith by baptism, probably on the very same day. When the Holy Ghost is not resisted, He can work quickly. She was not alone in her faith, she had sought her household, and there, by the river side, husband, children, servants had heard for themselves, and learnt for themselves, the precious, inestimable truth of God; and having thus received more than any price on earth could buy, she made a petition to Paul and Silas:

"If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there."

Fearless woman! She was God's witness for His truth concerning Jesus, and not afraid of her heathen neighbours. She might lose caste, might injure her business, compromise her position and her reputation, but Lydia was true to her newly-found Saviour. Woman as she was, she could not but think of the temporal needs of these messengers of the Gospel, and she was the first of the company of women who communicated with Paul "concerning giving and receiving," and who did well to communicate with his affliction, for they "sent once and again unto my necessity" (Php 4:14-16), while the rich Corinthians seem never to have thought of helping him. Of course, persecution broke out. The casting out of a demon aroused the enmity of those who profited by the ravings of Satan's victim. God's witnesses were imprisoned. And after the wonderful miracle which delivered Paul and Silas from the Philippian prison, they paid their last visit in that house of Lydia, which had become the Christian Church of the place. "And when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed." (Acts 16:40.)

How many a woman has been really the first living stone of a Church or of a mission in the town in which she lived? God has many Lydias. May they be greatly multiplied—not preachers, so much as hearers; not talkers, so much as listeners, and yet they are those who facilitate the building up of the Church of Christ more than, perhaps, can ever be known by those around them.

49. Prophecy Women - Act_21:7-9

PROPHECYING WOMEN.

Acts 21:7-9.

"Philip, the evangelist, who was one of the seven...had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy." All the seven were "men of good report, full of the Spirit and of wisdom" (Acts 6:3), and yet Philip did not restrain his four daughters from prophesying! The wisdom of those days, when the language of the Holy Ghost was so fully understood, had not led men to quench the Spirit, or to despise prophesying (1 Thessalonians 5:19-20) because He might choose only a woman as His instrument! "It is so strange," said a truly spiritual Swiss lady, to whom God has given a precious gift for speaking, "that men speak of sex in souls!" The Lord Jesus, speaking of the age to come, and of the resurrection, says, "The children of this age marry and are given in marriage, but they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage, they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection. (Luke 20:34-36, R.V.) In things earthly, God has most truly given woman a second place. God has not created woman to rule, but to minister. But in eternal life, the life of Christ in us; in the indwelling of the Holy Ghost; in spiritual life and spiritual gifts; neither age nor sex, neither birth nor education, can make any difference. "Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's;" in earthly things make earthly distinctions, but in divine things, let divine laws prevail. The Levitical priesthood was established for a time, until a Priest should come "after the order of Melchisedec," even Christ, "not made after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life." (Hebrews 10:6.) No woman was called to the Levitical priesthood, which God made on human lines, but no truly believing woman is excluded from that royal priesthood to which Christ has called us in Him. (Revelation 1:6; 1 Peter 2:9.) In Christ Jesus "there can be no male and female." (Galatians 3:28, R.V.) Thus we see that in all which appertains to the Spirit of God, all temporal distinctions vanish, we are in another region, where time and sense have nothing to say. It is quite true that for the sake of order, "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." (1Cr 14:32.) And thus the Apostle Paul, who had already given direction to the Corinthians as to the modesty of attire which should distinguish women who prophesied or prayed (1 Chronicles 11:5-10), further directs that women shall not speak (something quite different from prophesy) in the Church. (1Cr 14:44.) "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." (Revelation 19:10.) "He that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation and comfort." (1 Chronicles 14:3.) Such prophesying was practised by both men and women in the Old Testament, who "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." (2 Peter 2:21.) All other speaking by women in the Church is unseemly, whether it be mere chatter, whether contention about doctrine, Church discipline, or whatsoever.

Miriam was a prophetess, just as Moses and Aaron were prophets (Exodus 15:20), and Miriam, as well as Moses and Aaron, was sent to lead the people. (Micah 6:4.) Hannah was a prophetess (1 Samuel 2:1-36), so was Deborah (Judges 5:1-31), and Huldah, to whom king Josiah sent, in

preference to the high priest, or any more recognised authority. (2 Chronicles 34:22-28.) Abigail, too, was a prophetess (1 Samuel 25:24-31), and Anna (Luke 2:36), as well as Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Elizabeth. When the Lord gave the word, great was company of women publishers. (Psalms 68:11) When the Holy Ghost came down on the disciples on the day of Pentecost, the women, who spake "as the Spirit gave them utterance" apparently outnumbered the men. There were the eleven, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brethren, "the number of the names being about one hundred and twenty." Peter explained the phenomenon, which had become a rare one in the dark, worldly atmosphere of the Jewish religion: "These are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy...on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out of My Spirit and they shall prophesy." Thus it came to pass that women laboured with Paul in the Gospel (Php 4:3) as well as men, and became servants of the Church (Romans 16:1), when the Holy Ghost endowed them with the power to speak unto men, to "edification, and exhortation, and comfort." Philip's four daughters were in order in their vocation, and neither their father nor Paul the Apostle attempted to hinder them. But while in the things of the Spirit of God there is an absolute equality between men and women, yet in all the order of earthly and transient things, in the government, both political and ecclesiastical, as far as office and position is concerned, in the family and in all else which is for a time, the old rule must be observed. "Adam was first formed, then Eve." (1 Timothy 2:13.) Any woman really led by the Spirit of God would be the last to take advantage of her gift to seek a position down here which is prominent or unwomanly.

Jesus was meek and lowly in heart, and Christ in a truly spiritual woman makes her shrink from a high place, and naturally seek the shade. We hear of no good or wonderful work done through Philip's daughters, but there must be a reason why God has let them be named in His Word. Let those of my sisters whom the Lord has gifted keep the place which God gave to His redeemed: "I have put My words in thy mouth and covered thee with the shadow of Mine hand." (Isaiah 51:16.) But let no woman take to herself the place of prophetess or seek to imitate, by carnal effort, the call of the Spirit of God, lest the reproof of Peter to Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:18-24) fall upon her.

50. Priscilla - Act_18:1-28.

PRISCILLA.

Acts 18:1-28.

We have already seen, in our notice of Lydia, how large a part women sometimes had in the origin of Churches formed by the Apostle Paul. Driven away from Thessalonica and Berea through persecution stirred up by the Jews, and from Athens by the rationalistic spirit which reigned in that cultured city, Paul departed to the mercantile city of Corinth. It was ever his habit to go "to the Jew first." He found at Corinth "a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome." There is a purpose in the mention of Priscilla by the side of her husband. No name in the word of God is introduced uselessly. There was a something about this Jewess which the Holy Spirit must take cognizance of.

Paul was no idler, and when he entered into a heathen city, his first idea was to prove that he earned his living by honest labour and made no gain of the Gospel. Understanding the business pursued by Aquila and Priscilla, that of tent-making or carpet-making, "he abode with them and wrought." How much of the blessed truth of God was told out by Paul to this godly couple as they worked side by side at their looms, we cannot tell. The week-day work was never neglected, but every Sabbath found them in the synagogue, where the concentrated message which God had given Paul in his still communing with Him over the loom, during the week, powerfully "persuaded the Jews and the Greeks."

After a time, reinforcements arrived in the coming of Silas and Timotheus. The pressure on Paul increased, and he "testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ." We may well believe that his host and hostess were intensely in prayer for him as he thus gave his testimony, and that in the quiet life in which they saw Christ shining out as he sat at his loom, and as he took his meals with them, in his conversation, and in all his spirit, he must have gone far to show them the reality of a life "hid with Christ in God." (Colossians 3:3.) Of course, persecution broke out, and the little company of believers adjourned from the synagogue to the house of Justus; the chief ruler of the synagogue, Crispus, being with them. But the persecuting Jews, after Paul had sojourned there a year and a half, would tolerate his presence no longer, and, at last, he "took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila." Why should Priscilla be named first? There is surely a purpose in this! In every other mention of this couple, the husband's name comes first. It may be that Priscilla was the first to understand the mind of God, and to be ready that they should abandon their business and worldly prospects that they might throw themselves into the work of the Lord at His distinct call.

Paul took them with him to Ephesus, and there left them, not Aquila only, in charge of the few believers who were gathered during the few days of his stay there, and God made use of them to lead a Jew, named Apollos, "an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures," to know "the way of

God more perfectly." There is little doubt that in the secular business, and in the work of the Lord, Priscilla was a true helpmeet to her husband. It is distinctly shown that, not only Aquila, but Priscilla, took Apollos and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.

How true it is that "two are better than one." (Ecclesiastes 4:9.) When a husband and wife mutually abandon a selfish life, and live really, not unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again (2Cr 5:15), it is almost impossible to estimate the power and efficiency of such lives for the kingdom of God. Aquila would not be jealous if Priscilla made more headway with the gifted Apollos than he did. Both understood the discipline of the Spirit. If He chose to employ the husband's words, He would at the same time make the wife a worker together in prayer. Both of them were yielded instruments, not using the Holy Ghost, but used by Him to do the will of God. How many couples there are, professedly converted, whose names could not have been thus placed side by side in the Word of God, because of their want of unity in the Spirit!

It is a precious grace when a godly woman is the true complement of her husband, just filling in every lack of his, and not making herself prominent. It is a blessed thing when a wife can do what comes to her hand in the work of the Lord. How many an eloquent Apollos, how many infant churches, like that at Ephesus, have been dependent in part upon a hidden, unknown woman? The Lord raise up many such, and perfect them for His work.

51. Euodias and Syntyche - Php_4:2-3

EUODIAS AND SYNTYCHE.

Php 4:2-3. In most of his epistles, Paul, like his master, taught much about unity. In the epistle to the Romans, he says: "We, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." (Romans 12:5.) In 1Cr 1:10, he says: "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." And he continues his exhortation both in this chapter and in the third. In the epistle to the Ephesians again (Ephesians 4:3) he teaches them "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." And to the Philippians, he speaks very strongly Php 2:1-2): "If there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." In this Church of Philippi, which commenced, as we have seen in our notice of Lydia, with a women's prayer-meeting, it is not surprising that we find women workers very specially named. But, alas! this exhortation to unity is addressed to them by name, "I exhort Euodias, and I exhort Syntyche, to be of the same mind in the Lord." And then, addressing himself to the bishops and deacons, and, probably, to the leader amongst them, he continues, "Yea, I beseech thee also, true yokefellow, HELP THESE WOMEN."

What! help these quarrelsome women-workers? Would it not be better to silence them and employ only men? No; the Apostle Paul says: "Help them, do not reproach them; they may bring scandal upon the Church, they may lower the tone of the Christians in Philippi by their unseemly strife, but a shepherd must look after his wounded sheep and not despise them." "I will seek that which was lost," says the Good Shepherd, "and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick." (Ezekiel 34:16.) "For they laboured with me in the Gospel." If thou, a leader, art a yokefellow, they are also yokefellows, fellow-labourers in the Gospel, "with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life." (R.V.)

How many a Sunday school teacher, how many a tract-distributor, how many a sick visitor, how many a leader of Bible-classes, has fomented strife by unguarded words! Shall they be condemned wholesale? O no; their names are in the Book of Life; and let those who are chief in the Church be the servants of all, that they may wash the feet of such disciples, and seek to win them to a more Christ-like way.

Every difficult member in a church is a provision of God for the trial of the patience of some other members and, very specially, of the leaders. There is no chance in any of the arrangements which God permits. If we look at the difficult members in their relation to us, we may well have ground for complaint; but if we see them all as instruments in the hand of God, we know that not one word or one action can take place except it be needed for the education of His own.

Let no Euodias and Syntyche be crossed off the books because of present inconsistency, but let them be written upon the hearts of all their fellow-labourers, that they may be won back, in answer to prayer, and become the more useful because of a failure which God has taught them to recognise, and which He has conquered.

52. Paul's Helpers - Rom_16:1-27.

PAUL'S HELPERS.

Romans 16:1-27.

While the Apostle Paul had many brethren who were helpers and co-labourers with him, such as Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Epaphras, etc., he had also sisters who laboured with him in the Lord. We find him commending to the Romans, "Phebe, our sister, who is a servant (or deaconess) of the Church which is at Cenchrea: that ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also."

Here is a woman worker, with a distinct office, recognised by the Apostle Paul, recommended just as fully to the Church as though she had been a pastor or a teacher. She is to be received "in the Lord;" and the Cenchrean Church is to receive her "as becometh saints." The introduction of the Apostle might have been a powerful recommendation to this woman evangelist in those early times, and it would never have been given except he knew that the coming of this woman meant some real blessing to the Church which was in Rome. O, how much may the presence of a man or woman filled with the Holy Ghost be to a little community of Christians, and how much we are taught in this verse to receive God's messengers in the Lord, not with the thought of refreshment to our own souls, not with the thought of the gain to the work, but as sent of God on a visit which is part of His purpose and His will! It is thus we can receive a worker "as becometh saints."

Paul exhorts that Phebe shall be assisted in whatsoever business she hath need, and gives as his strong and potent reason: "She hath been A SUCCOURER OF MANY, and of myself also." How far this succour was spiritual, and how far temporal, does not appear; probably, it was in both lines that Phebe was "a succourer of many." She may have had a quick eye to perceive the leadings of God, even as the Apostle had, and she may have given many a word of warning, in the spirit of humility, which may have helped even an Apostle Paul! No woman has lived in vain who has been a succourer of many. Such was Dorcas in things temporal. But how many an unknown and how many a well-known woman might have earned this testimony. How many souls have been led to the Lord by a woman! How many a young preacher owes his success to a faithful woman!

Next to Phebe, Paul mentions Priscilla and Aquila, the wife's name coming first, and he calls them "My helpers in Christ Jesus," not "My helper and his wife," "who have for my life laid down their own necks," and he claims for both of these the thanks of the Churches. Paul was peculiarly bound to these two, and the one is never mentioned without the other.

Again, he speaks of "Mary, who bestowed much labour on us." We are left in doubt as to the kind of labour; but O how much in the city of Rome, when Paul was a prisoner, the help of a devoted woman may have told both for his spiritual and physical comfort? It is no light honour that the name of this unknown Mary should be introduced into the Word of God as bestowing much labour upon the great Apostle of the Gentiles. This Mary did not spare herself: it was a WILLING AND

HONOURABLE SERVICE.

Then Paul salutes "Tryphena and Tryphosa," who labour in the Lord, and "the beloved Persis, who laboured much in the Lord." Three more women workers, not standing idle in the market-place, but yielding themselves to the very full as instruments for the spread of the precious Gospel. Paul does not flatter, he knew what labour was, and that it was no mere amateur work which was done by these godly women evangelists. And Paul salutes also Julia, who is supposed to have been a British lady, and a sister of Nereus, both of whom may also have been workers, although it is not mentioned. In any case, we learn that the women workers in the early church were as fully recognised, as truly valued by the Apostle as any of their brethren, and we little know how many of these patient women kept together the converts which had been made under the preaching of the brethren, as well as through their own testimony, and how much, in many ways, they strengthened the faith of the disciples. We little know how, in quiet acts of hospitality, they would make it easy for some half-awakened ones to decide for Christ. We little know how they would follow up any conversation which had been entered into by Paul and others, and so glean the ears of corn among the sheaves.

Let no woman worker be dissatisfied because her sphere is small. God may count that much help in the Lord which men can hardly recognise, and Paul would call his helpers in Christ Jesus those whom some church pastors would hardly know by name. Let every woman worker be contented with her sphere, and glorify God to the full, just in the place where He has called her to be.

53. The Elect Lady - 2 John

THE ELECT LADY.

2 John. The Apostle John, like his Master, came down to the weak and feeble. Jesus never despised the little children; He took them up in His arms and blessed them, saying, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." He never despised weak women, but allowed them to have their place amongst His followers. We find the Apostle John, in his later years, writing "unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth."

It is a family letter, written to the mother and the children, the head of this godly household having, probably, passed away; and "the elder" (John), whom this dear woman of God must have recognised as her "elder," writes to her "for the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever."

What a lesson on letter-writing! He does not write to her for her sake, nor for her children's sake; he does not write because it is pleasant to write a letter, but "for the truth's sake which dwelleth in us." With all the authority of one who was called to bless in the name of the Lord (Deuteronomy 10:8-9), he said: "Grace be with you, mercy and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love."

John's greeting was not formal; he gives it as a messenger in the Lord's message. And, doubtless, when the elect lady opened her letter she would be conscious that grace, mercy, and peace flowed in upon her soul. God teach us so to write that our letters may bring blessing with them, because they are written in the spirit of waiting upon God.

"I rejoice greatly," says the writer, "that I found of thy children walking in the truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father." Nothing could bring greater joy to a Christian mother's heart than this testimony from the aged Apostle. If her children had gained Government positions, had passed with honours in the Universities, or gained any advantage for this world, it could never have so thrilled her heart with joy as to know that such a judge as this Apostle could speak of her children as walking in the truth. And yet she needed to be taught, and her children also, and the same lesson which was the centre of all John's teaching was passed on by him to his correspondent. It was the new commandment "that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk after His commandments." None can over-learn this lesson; we have just as much of Christ in us as we have of love. The only allowable debt for a Christian is to love one another (Romans 13:8), and this debt is never fully paid. Just because this godly family walked in truth, they needed to be reminded to obey yet further. "For," says the Apostle, "many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh."

Love to the brethren and obedience to God are the safeguards from the deceiver and the Antichrist, and thus the Apostle bids her to abide in the doctrine of Christ, and to beware of those who bring not this doctrine. "Look to yourselves," he says, "that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward." What is a full reward if it is not the promise to the

overcomers in Laodices (Revelation 3:21)? "To him that overcometh will I give to sit down with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His Throne." There is a possibility even for the most faithful to come short of the reward. Paul said: "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." (1 Chronicles 9:27.) It is the most godly who need the most to take heed, because they are, more than others, the mark for the enemy. The old Apostle is hoping soon to visit the elect lady, and passes on a message of greeting from her elect sister's children. Probably he was known in both households as the beloved guest of the mothers and the children, and always left a blessing behind him for the household when he sojourned with them. This glimpse into the social life of the old Apostle shows us how fully his life was the Lord's, how his public and private life was all one, how he could have said with Paul, "To me to live is Christ." Php 1:21.) Who knows how soon after this he was called by persecution into the island of Patmos, there to abide in the purpose of God's will, that he might receive and write the Book of Revelation (Revelation 1:1-2; Revelation 1:9)? Who knows how much the prayers and the fellowship of this chosen woman, and others who were chosen in Christ, may have strengthened the faith of the blessed exile? And who knows how He, who is waiting until His Bride hath made herself ready (Revelation 19:7), is watching many a quiet woman who in her life as a true helpmeet is both a type and a chosen member of that Bride? Let us learn to say with Mary, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord."

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